

CHAPTER I

Magna Charta 5000 A.D.

KNIGHT read the preamble, his voice vibrant: "To the People of Earth of 5000 A.D.! The Government of Mankind shall hereafter be known as the World-State Government. Its Congress of Delegates from every Tribal-state shall have sole power to make laws. Appended are all details of procedure and office. One cardinal rule must always be followed—that no man on Earth shall have absolute power over any other man, or over any Tribal-state, or over the World-State.

"I, Stuart Knight, First Lord of Earth, relinquish all claim to rule. It must never be given to one man again, or to any group not elected by the people. May Providence preserve the World-State for as long as humanity inhabits this World!"

THAT was all. Knight had reduced his preamble to its barest essentials. He had never believed in oratory. The simple words, he knew, would strike home in every heart.

Below the balcony, as his voice died, the delegates burst out in wild cheers, taken up by the whole crowd. The noise died. There was a pause. Then, spontaneously, another cheer arose. And Knight knew by its tone, if not its confused words, that it was for him. For what he had been to them for twenty-five years—a beneficent dictator. His thoughts flew back.

Twenty-five years had passed since Stuart Knight, scientist of the 20th century, had awakened in his time-crypt, from suspended animation, after 3000 years.

He had been revived, like a living fossil, by the future people of 4975 A.D. He had stepped out in eager awe, expecting to see a mighty, thronging civilization, as far ahead of 1940 as 1940 had been ahead of the Grecian Era. Instead had come a crushing revelation. After a long series of frightful wars, and a Second Dark Age, mankind had plunged back to the Stone Age!

With the collapse of the Machine had come social eruption, famine, anarchy, and barbarism. All the knowledge of a mechanical civilization had been lost. Tribal states had arisen, all over Earth, each a law unto itself. It was a reincarnated Stone Age, without metals, without machines, and as steeped in the primitive and unmechanical as 20,000 B.C. had been.

Into this strange world Stuart Knight had been cast.

And thereby history had pivoted, twenty-five years before. Staggered at first by the return to a Stone Age, a second revelation followed. Down in Antarctica, a bit of power-and-metals civilization had survived, based on ore and coal deposits there.

These favored Antarcticans—or *Narticans* in the clipped, modified English of the day—held sway over Stone Age earth, as if it were their feudal backyard. They took servants—almost slaves—and food tribute from those they called the *Tribers*. And for a thousand years they had slipped deeper into the mire of decadence and spiritual death.

Such was the world Stuart Knight had been dropped into, like a bit of driftwood in the currents of Time.

Nine-tenths of humanity in a Second Stone Age. The remainder in an isolated Babylon. The whole in a stalemate that throttled progress.

Stuart Knight had changed that. For a year he had preached, and the world had rallied behind him. First Lord of Earth he had been proclaimed, with destiny in his hands. Destiny to mold and shape the future of the entire human race. For twenty-five years he had tried to bring advancement, upliftment.

It was the crossroads of history. Fate willing, a new civilization would spring forth, Sphinxlike, from the ashes of the old. And now, today . . .

THERE was complete silence again, as the sea of faces watched him. Overhead was a cloudless blue sky. Underneath lay a hushed world. Perhaps as hushed as when a British king, four thousand years

before, had signed a parchment inscribed with words of freedom.

Stirnye, Lord of Earth, was signing a second Magna Charta.

The Magna Charta of humanity!

For the historic moment, he was on the outside balcony of his capital, at the center of Manhattan Island. Columbus Circle it had been, an age before. Beside him stood one Antarctic and one Triber, as witnesses. Back of him were his two sons, and their mother, of the blonde race of Nartica.

One other was there, old Aran Deen, his silver-white hair blowing in the breeze, erudite scholar and historian of Nartica.

Knight's hand trembled, as he gripped the writing pen. Benign ghosts from the past were leaning over his shoulder—Moses, Gautama, Christ, King John, Washington.

He signed: "Stuart Knight, 1940 A.D.—"

He started, at the mistake. In the back of his 20th century mind lurked that number, and it seemed much more real than the one he should have written. In that year, 1940, he had been interred in a record-crypt, to survive after an age.

At odd times, he forgot that he existed 3000 years and more beyond the time of his birth.

He had been daydreaming, thinking of the long dead and forgotten civilization he had known. The 20th century was as remotely historical now as the ancient days of Egypt and Babylon and Rome.

Memories, only memories remained—in his mind alone. And a few old records and relics, leaking through time.

There were no books in this Second Stone Age. No electric lights, radio, telephone, telegraph, movies, trains, trucks, drill-presses, or factories. There were no coal, oil, or mines bringing up metal ores. It was a primitive world, the 50th century. Stone, wood, hide and bone were again the staples of living, as in the original Stone Age.

Knight cleared his mind of the fleeting reflections. He scratched out the number "1940" and substituted "5000 A.D."

Then he arose from the desk, speaking again.

"People of Earth. The World-State Government will preserve liberty and justice, for all time. I withdraw, because no man has the right to rule. I am from the past. This is your world. Whatever I have been able to do, toward a higher civilization, is not because I am noble or kind. It is your rightful heritage of the best, from a past that destroyed itself."

His tone became more practical.

"Six months from today, the World Convention of delegates will meet again, to finally vote for or against the new government. It will not be forced on you, for that would make meaningless the very words of the Magna Charta. It must be ratified by a majority of the Tribal-states.

"Thus for six months, I am still Lord of Earth. I suggest only one thing, before my voice has no more authority—that my eldest son, Stuart, be elected the first president of the new government. I believe him suited to guide the World Congress in its first years."

Fleeting again, Knight's 20th century mind contrasted this with the vanished past. A man "stumping" for office, without one microphone before him. No journalists, cameramen, or publicity agents. No radio to fling his voice; no telegraph network to tap out his words to all corners of Earth. A tribal chief, exhorting his little flock, huddled around a campfire. Not quite that, but close to it.

Knight went on.

"Now, I have the privilege to announce a new invention—the steamship!"

He pointed out over their heads. On the broad Hudson, a mile away, sailed a ship. But it moved without sails, rapidly. And faintly could be heard the hissing *chug-chug* of its engine. Magic to the crowd, they stared in awe, those who could see down unimpeded avenues. The rest hardly believed, when told.

For the first time, Knight felt an uplift of spirit. Stone Age world, yes. But he had not been idle, in his twenty-five years of reincarnation. The rebirth of science! Such had been his striving since his advent. The steamship was the latest of a long list of resurrected things from olden days.

"It will replace all sail-driven craft, in time," Knight resumed. "It will cross the Atlantic Ocean in a week, without need of trade winds. The engine propelling it was developed by my second son, Perry."

KNIGHT looked at them proudly, his two sons, reaching for his wife's hand.

Stuart, child of two ages, combined the best of his parents: Knight's rugged physique, thoughtful brow and determined chin; his Nartican mother's finely-chiseled features, fair skin, and calm poise. Form-fitting garments and a silken shoulder cape set off his broad, well-proportioned figure. He was young, but already marked by circumstance for leadership.

Knight's eyes shifted to his second son.

Perry, a year younger, was darker. A mop of black hair overhung rough-cut features that had been Knight's own, in youth. He was slightly shorter, slimmer—and yes, boyish. But somehow, he was more of Knight himself. Knight had been boyish, too, when he emerged from his crypt, till the flint of events had brought out the steel in him.

Caught by the spirit of the moment, Knight spoke gravely.

"You are just twenty-four, Stuart. But I'm getting old. You must show this Second Stone Age the way toward civilization."

Knight faced his second son.

"You'll be Stuart's right hand. You will obey him and build as he directs."

He put his hands on their shoulders.

"Leader and builder," he said solemnly, "I place the world in your young hands."

The two sons of Knight looked at each other, and then out over the city and harbor, out over the world. They gripped hands silently. Below, gusts of cheers came from the crowd.

Knight thought of one thing more. It would lighten the moment.

"Stuart, why not announce your engagement to Leela now? Their soon-to-be president, son of a man from the past and a woman of Nartica, taking a Triber girl as his wife. It will please the people—"

Stuart turned to look at the girl, Leela, standing with his mother. Her eyes dropped before his, girlishly. They had grown up together. He flushed, with the great crowd looking on. Finally he took her hand and started to speak

But there was interruption.

CHAPTER II Two Out of Time

A DRONE had sounded from the sky. All eyes turned, for aircraft were not a commonplace in the 50th century. Off in the distance a silvery speck grew and became a metal bird, soaring down from the heights. It drummed low on hissing rocket jets and circled over the Capitol, as warning of landing.

"One of our ships from Europe," Perry said wonderingly. "What is it doing here?"

Knight watched curiously.

Its flight had been swift, no more than six hours from the shores of Europe to those of America, propelled by the rocket-jets of alcohol and liquid-air. In this one thing, the decadent science of isolated, buried Antarctica had contributed something—aircraft. Super-aircraft, in fact, by 20th century standards.

On the way, it had soared over countless sail-driven vessels on the broad Atlantic. Singular contrast! The mechanical eagle of advanced science, and the windjammers of a pre-steam era. They existed side by side in this queer interlude between the Stone Age and power-and-metals civilization.

Some day, Knight told himself often, there would be great fleets of the rocket ships, and fleets of the engine-driven sea vessels, to carry commerce. Some day—then there were enough factories.

The ship dropped downward in the hands of its Nartican navigators, along a concrete runway beside the Capitol. Its wheels touched and it roared to a stop as the front jets burst out. It must be something important, for the ship to come directly here.

Knight signified dismissal to the crowd, then led the way from the balcony, down through the building and out. A side lane gave directly on to the airfield, avoiding the dispersing people.

As Knight and his party strode toward the ship, its cabin hatch opened. A Nartican pilot stepped out,

followed by two figures—a man and a girl. They stood for a moment, peering about. The man was short and stocky, about fifty years in age. The girl was young. They were father and daughter, in similarity of features.

Knight stopped before them.

He was aware suddenly that there was something strange about the two. They wore tunics of glinting texture that could only be fine-spun glass. There was no spun-glass known in the 50th century. And they stared about with an air of complete bewilderment. Not only had they never seen this place before, but they had never heard of it. It was obvious in their attitude.

Knight felt growing wonder.

Where could they be from? From what unsuspected spot on Earth where the people used spun-glass clothing, and knew nothing of resurrected New York?

"Who are they?" Knight asked the Nartican pilot.

"I brought them from Vinna, in central Yorp," he answered. "A runner came from Hal Doth, Chief of Vinnastate, yesterday, to Lord Perry's laboratory. His message was that a buried stone vault had been uncovered, on the bank of the D'nube River. They opened it, then decided to inform you, since it was ancient. But not long after, these two stepped out. Chief Hal Doth could not understand their speech, nor I. I brought them directly here."

Knight had stiffened. Stone-vault—ancient—two people stepping out!

His own burial and resurrection he had thought unique. There were no records, no fables even, of any other human being passing from one age to another. The Egyptians had left their mummies, for a future time to see. And there was a record that the remarkably preserved body of Lenin had been on view as late as 2400 A.D. But never had there been a whisper of a *living* body revived after its natural period of time.

Still, why not? If a scientist of the 20th century had developed the electro-leptic* (* Electro-leptic suspension of life is an electrically induced catalepsy. The preservation of the body of Lenin is not such a process. Lenin died of a paralysis induced by arterio-sclerosis, and the process of embalming used on his body is perhaps the most perfect modern science has yet been able to produce. Thus, Knight is in error when he says Lenin was the object of a 20th century scientist's experiment on electro-lepsis. Theorists of today are certain that it can be done, and work is progressing along such lines. However, success has not yet been attained.—ED.) process of suspending life, why not a later one?

KNIGHT found himself trembling. Two other beings orphaned from the world he and they had known! He looked into their eyes, and already felt the kinship of their mutual misplacement in history.

They were still staring around, like two lost beings.

Knight spoke to them.

"You are from the past?" Then, on second thought: "Do you understand my words at all?" He had pronounced meticulously.

Old Aran Deen, the scholar, had shuffled forward eagerly. This was something in his line.

"Spun-glass costumes were in vogue in the 30th century," he stated. "If they are from that time, our present-day speech is mere gibberish."

"Try their language," Knight urged, impatient now.

"You speak," Aran Deen suggested to the two, pointing to their mouths and pantomiming speech. In an aside to the others he said: "There were many languages in their 30th century. But they should know English, an early form of it. If I hear their precise accent, I think I can converse with them."

The man spoke.

"Wir verstehen nicht. Sprecken Sie Deutsch?"

ARAN DEEN and Knight looked blankly at one another. The man waved for attention and spoke again, in a changed language.

"Do you happen to understand English?" He went on wearily, half to his companion. "Good Lord, what crazy kind of world is this? No one understands us. That primitive chief, or whatever he was, in

Europe. Now these people—"

Aran Deen had listened with his head cocked forward, but it was Perry who understood first.

"It's *your* language, dad!" he cried excitedly. "Your 20th century English as you taught it to me so I could read your science books!"

Knight started as though stung. He had listened blankly, unaware it was his own tongue, strange to his own ears. But Perry was right. Except for a queer twang of the vowels, and a glib sliding over the consonants, it was 20th century English! And he realized now that their first words had been 20th century German.

"Of course!" Knight exclaimed, and Aran Deen was also nodding. "Of course your language is like mine. I should have thought of it, when Aran Deen mentioned the 30th century."

Knight found himself speaking haltingly. His own birth-tongue, little used in 25 years, came out as though he quoted old stilted Latin or Greek. He went on, gaining fluency.

"Printing and radio kept English basically unchanged, all through the following thousand years, till the Second Dark Age. But I'm confusing you. My name is Stuart Knight."

Relief had swept over their faces. The man inclined his head, smiling.

"Thank Heaven some one finally understands us. We are from the year 2907. My name is Lar Tane. This is my daughter Elda."

He went on, as though eager to explain.

"Two days ago our vault was opened. At the first ray of light let in, an automatic pump drew air into our sealed glass chambers. Also its levers injected adrenalin below our hearts. Radium-motor, time lasting. We revived, from suspended animation. After two days hopelessly trying to talk with our rescuers, the plane came to take us here."

"I welcome you to this time, Lar Tane and Elda," Knight said quickly. The amenity seemed appropriate.

The two smiled, but a little in amazement.

"We understand you quite well," Lar Tane said. "But your accent is strange. Very strange. Because, instead of sounding as we expected English might sound, somewhat futurized, it sounds—archaic! Has English gone back to a stilted form in this future time?"

KNIGHT smiled strangely. This was a moment more unique than his own awakening. At his revival, coining from the 20th century, he had been greeted by the 50th century. But these two of the 30th century were being greeted by both the 20th and 50th! By people 2000 years in their "future," and by one 1000 years in their "past!"

It was a queer tableau. Knight answered.

"No. The reason I speak in archaic English is because I'm from the 20th century."

The two stared. For a moment an angry flush burned into the man's face, as if he had been made sport of.

"It's the truth, believe me," Knight said hastily. "Not these others, just myself. I was buried in a vault like yours, in electro-lepsis, in the year 1940."

Lar Tane waved helplessly.

"Then I must believe you. But it's amazing. You're from a thousand years before me.

1940—Himmel! The century of the first scientific war. You saw the first airplane, first radio, first World War!"

There was a little of awe in his voice, as if he looked at a being who had been present at Creation. An amused smile then creased his features.

"We awake from suspended animation, in our future, and the first person we talk to, with understanding, is from a remote past! The gods themselves could not have planned a neater trick."

He became serious.

"But now tell me. What year is this?"

He and his daughter tensed forward. "5000 A.D.," Knight answered.

Lar Tane and Elda started as though they were puppets on strings. Their eyes slowly widened in

disbelief.

"This time you must be lying," Lar Tane said dazedly. "I can't believe it!"

He stared searchingly at Knight, for a sign of mockery. He stared at all their faces, and a staggered look came into his own.

"So it's the truth!" he cried. "5000 A.D. The 50th century. 2000 years beyond our time. Even in our wildest imaginings—"

He composed himself suddenly, with a poise that seemed able to withstand any shock.

"You didn't expect to be buried that long?" Knight asked.

"Not more than a hundred years," Lar Tane said, shaking his head. "Oh, perhaps two or three centuries at the most. We had our vault buried—secretly—a certain distance from the city limits of Vinna. We assumed that within a century or two, the city would creep there, growing, and workmen would uncover it. And we would step out into 3000 or 3100. But the 50th century—"

His head was still shaking.

A brooding pain haunted his eyes.

"I saw Vinna as ruins that saw-toothed the horizon. Vinna was so magnificent, so bright and gay, in my time. Now it's a skeleton."

CHAPTER III

Our Civilization Died!

KNIGHT knew how it must have shaken him. So he had felt when he saw mighty New York laid low, at his awakening.

Lar Tane looked up, speaking sharply.

"What happened in central Europe?"

"We were taken in oxen-drawn carts from the vault to a primitive village of unlettered people. There was a backward aspect to everything. When the rocket plane came to take us away, I thought sure we would be taken to some center of civilization, wherever it is today. But when we looked down, before landing—"

He waved disdainfully.

Knight knew what he meant.

Soaring down over Manhattan Island, Lar Tane had seen a single power-plant and factory as signs of civilization. North of them, a city in the process of construction. Foundations going up. Open areas that would be the sites of future parks. One building completed, the Capitol, its white stone columns and dome gleaming in the sun. No skyscrapers.

The upper half of the island was just being cleared, emerging from an age-long state of ruin. Far to the north, the skeleton towers of a previous New York still reared, as at the site of ancient Vinna. This was not the great, bustling New York either Knight or Lar Tane had known. It was a ghost, a pitiful caricature.

Knight took a deep breath.

"This is the center of civilization today," he said.

Lar Tane's face was stunned. "This! A half-built city rising out of ruins?"

Knight nodded, knowing he could not stave off the denouement much longer. Twenty-five years before, Knight had gone through the same crescendo of wonder and stark mental shock. In sympathy, he hoped to soften the brutal blow as much as possible for them. Lead up to it gradually.

It was not easy to awaken from civilization and find the ghost of it. Not easy to find your world knocked out from under you. Not easy to come from a science age and find the Second Stave Age.

"You saw our power-plant," Knight said. "And the adjunct factory and alloy-industry, and the towers of a future radio station. Also my laboratory. The city will be a model one when it's done, without congestion or slums. We're proud of what we've done so far—"

Lar Tane burst in impatiently.

"One power-plant, one factory, one alloy industry, one radio station, one laboratory, one new

building. One of everything. And this is the center of civilization!"

His voice became harsh.

"What is the rest of the world like?"

Knight tried to say it, but Lar Tane had already come to his own conclusion.

"The second Dark Age!" he whispered. "You used the term before." He grinned mirthlessly, already gripping himself with a stoic control he seemed to have. "Or the second Stone Age! Isn't that closer to it, Stuart Knight?"

It was a statement, not a question. He went on broodingly.

"I remember now what old Jonz, my science collaborator, said in farewell. He declined interment with us, saying he did not wish to 'see the curtain fall'. I thought he was a senile croaker, but he was right."

He took his daughter's hand.

"Well, Elda. Now that we know, it isn't so bad, is it?"

"There are at least things to do in this kind of world," she responded.

It was an admirable spirit, in both father and daughter, though within must be a hollow ache.

THE girl had spoken her first words for the ears of history. This would all go down in the meticulous recordings of Aran Deen, as official historian. He grinned toothlessly as he noticed Stuart and Perry unconsciously straining forward to hear. Her voice had been low and melodious.

"She is beautiful!" the old seer said slyly.

It was no overstatement.

Her iridescent tunic outlined a tall, slender figure of graceful lines and softly-rounded breasts. The arms and legs were bare, molded of ivory. Her features were fine and patrician, framed by a cascade of coppery hair. She was more an exquisite statue, shaped by hands of genius, than human.

But the eyes were most striking. They were green—green as the sea on a misty day, as emerald as dew-dropped sward in quiet woodland.

She spoke again.

"What are the names of those two?" She pointed to the sons of Knight. "And of the others, of course. Introductions should be completed!"

Aran Deen did the honors, assuring himself a larger niche in this corner of history.

"I present to you," he said pompously, "Lady Silva, wife of First Lord Stirnye. Lady Leela of Norak. Lord Stuart, first son of Stirnye."

Purposely, he had left Perry, his protege, to the last. With a flourish of his arm: "And Lord Perry, second son of Stirnye, first scientist of Earth!"

Elda and her father acknowledged the introductions with courtly nods. The girl's eyes slumbrously rested on Stuart, then Perry, then back to Stuart. Momentarily, she darted a glance at Leela's frozen expression. Finally she turned back to the venerable Nartican.

"And you?"

Aran Deen grinned his pleasure, almost ready, grumblingly, to insert himself without the asking.

"Aran Deen, Lord Perry's tutor and assistant, and First Historian of Earth. And may I add, in your own tongue, that you are beautiful? We must give thanks, though uselessly, to the 30th century for bestowing our 50th century with such perfection. And—"

Knight cleared his throat, and Aran Deen reluctantly left another pretty turn of the phrase unsaid. He smiled to himself, however. Who would object, later, if he included it for history, said or unsaid?

Elda Tane smiled dazzlingly.

"You have a quaint manner of using titles," she said seriously, curiously. "You are all Lords and Ladies—but in what sense?"

"Yes," agreed her father. "Do you own, land, estates? Lords. How strange it sounds. Like an echo from feudal days of the Middle Ages."

"Own land?" Aran Deen shrilled. "This man, Stirnye, is First Lord of Earth. I think you would use the term king, or emperor. Stirnye is Emperor of all Earth."

"*Emperor of Earth!*" Lar Tane gasped. "A man from the 20th century absolute ruler of the 50th century world!"

HIS transfixed stare at Knight held more than surprise. Behind it, strangely, there was a stiffening, a subtle attitude of being on guard.

"Not absolute ruler," Knight explained. "But for the present, I'm the government-head of Earth, in an elastic sense. But all this can be explained at leisure, step by step. And also your reason for leaving your century."

"Lar Tane—Elda—" Aran Deen was muttering reflectively, half to himself. "Those names strike a chord—ancient records—" His voice trailed away in thought.

Lar Tane rubbed his forehead wearily. Beside him, Elda swayed suddenly. Her heavy-lidded eyes drooped.

Stuart made a step toward her, but stopped, staying beside Leela. Perry sprang forward instead, supporting her. Lar Tane had made an aimless gesture to help, himself apparently dizzy.

"It's the after-effects of the awakening," said Knight. "As with me. You need rest."

Neither had said a word of their weakness. Some code of breeding in them forbade any sign of it.

The girl even seemed stung at Perry's sympathetic manner, as he held her. She struggled back suddenly, stood free. She forced a smile to her lips, flinging her head up. She stood there, facing them, while the worst of the spell slowly eased.

The sons of Knight watched her, admiring her bravery.

And with admiration for more than that. In the shadowed light beside the Capitol, her beauty was extravagant. Every lissome curve was enhanced by her spun-glass costume, as clinging as the finest silk. But strength was there, as well as womanliness. She had never lolled daintily in scented boudoirs, living a life of indolence. The carriage of her body spoke of lithe and tigerish grace, as though, like Diana, she had indulged in manly sports.

It was apparent in her face. The exquisite sweetness of her features had changed to determination, as she fought off the spell of weakness. Her eyes glinted with purpose and courage and a complete rejection of their sympathy.

And then, suddenly, as renewed strength came to her, the features softened. In the space of an instant, the hard lines eased. She was again woman, alluring, feminine. The slumbrous eyes smiled, in company with the lips. Her hair sent out shafts of coppery-gold.

Stuart and Perry were staring almost rudely.

"Come," she said airily, tugging at her father's arm. "Let's see something of this strange, new world!"

Five minutes later they both collapsed, in the halls of the Capitol building. Knight put them in the hands of attendants. He was not alarmed. All they needed were rest and sleep.

CHAPTER IV

World on Assembly Block

TN THE following month, Knight spent as many hours as he could spare with his guest from the 30th century, reviewing the past, explaining the present, and discussing the future.

"Twenty-five years ago," he summarized, "I found the world in a state of oligarchy, under Nartica. Right or wrong, I broke that up when the Tribers acknowledged me Lord of Earth because of my science knowledge. My problem then was to put the pieces together again in a better pattern. First power-and-metals, the basis of science. All metal deposits, and coal and oil, had been cleaned out, through the wasteful era of a thousand years, including my time and yours. In your time, Lar Tane, as in mine, men must have warned of that eventual turning point. You were at the verge of the Second Dark Age."

Lar Tane nodded.

"But we were confident that science would find a way out."

"Science did find a way out—too late," Knight said. "An unknown scientist of your time, watching

civilization crack apart under the stress of war, preserved his secret for a future age, in a crypt. I found it. His discovery, a tremendously powerful radioactive wax, is the means of boiling away sea-water, leaving its residue of metal salts. Thus today, we extract metals from the limitless reservoir of the ocean."

He read from a chart.

"A cubic mile of ocean water holds a total mineral wealth of 73 million dollars, in my 20th century terms of money. Eighty-six pounds of gold, ton and a half of silver, and even four ounces of radium. But most important, the metals that build. Iron, copper, aluminum, magnesium. The latter three make an alloy together, superior to steel in all respects. From the sea now we get the foundations of a new civilization. The plant here on Manhattan has been in operation three years."

Knight conducted Lar Tane through it.

Great pumps sucked up sea-water, day and night, running it through a series of sealed vats. In these, the wonder-wax of radioactivity poured down a flood of heat-radiations, boiling away the water. By fractional crystallization, metal salts were extracted one by one, and later reduced to separate metals.*

(* Actually this is the way present-day engineers plan to remove the ocean's wealth from its suspension in the water. However, their methods are simpler; involving a boiling away of the water by heat, and a distillation of the steam, which carries away many elements in gaseous form, and a fractional distillation and separation of the remaining residue. The possibility of obtaining immense quantities of rubber from seaweed has been advanced, but it is also likely that rubber could be produced directly from sea water, from the minute algae that it contains in uncounted billions of pounds. The radioactive wax that is mentioned here is totally unknown today, although it is known that radium salts, mixed with wax, can be regulated as to degree of power and medicinal application to an amazing degree.—Ed.)

The by-product steam was led through turbines no different from those of the 20th century, spinning armatures and manufacturing electricity. The rumbling plant was thus the key to Knight's reinstatement of the civilization that had died almost 20 centuries before.

It produced power-and-metals, together. It replaced, singly, all the system of mines and electrical plants of the dead past.

"How is the radioactive wax produced?" Lar Tane queried, deeply impressed. "This unknown scientist's secret? A process of radium bombardment?"

"Yes, on silicon-dioxide—common sand. He left complete data." Knight's voice was practical. "Nartica had radium, all of it gleaned from city-ruins. Also, they had technicians and skilled workers. I use them both, in the tribal world."

Lar Tane was respectful of the plant, but a question lurked in his eyes.

"Only one plant in operation—after twenty-five years?"

KNIGHT was nettled at his tone. "You think it easy to build something out of nothing! Remember, I had to devise every part of every apparatus and machine. Nartican industry, though advanced, was based on a system of smelting ores, from their hoarded supplies. Yes, in your time and mine a new plant could be erected almost overnight. But only because of centuries of research and knowledge behind it. The task would have been impossible, in this Stone Age world, except for the initial aid of Nartican industry. And it took twenty-five years to learn how to handle something never before seen on Earth—the super-radioactive wax. How to make it in quantity, by radium bombardment, and then how to apply it.

"Similarly with all the things *we* took for granted in our day—telephone, telegraph, electric motor, etc. How would you begin, for instance, to construct the simple magnetic-vibrator that reproduces the human voice in a telephone? Tell me, Lar Tane, how would you begin?"

Lar Tane pondered a moment, then conceded the point with a smile.

"I see. It's like making bread when all you have to start with is one wheat-seed. But still, now that one plant is operating successfully, others should be quite easy."

Knight nodded.

"The ice has been broken. Two other plants have just opened. One on the Pacific coast of this continent. One at Gibraltar, in Europe. Another is under construction at the mouth of the Rhine. On the

Asiatic coast, a site is being prepared. Within another year, we'll clear a dozen more sites, some in Africa and South America. It's gathering momentum, this building of the sinews of civilization. When enough power-plants and alloy-mills are producing, we'll begin railroads, radio stations, dozens of new cities, and all the rest of it. My son, Stuart, will see something, before he dies, of a humming, busy, worldwide industry, like in your century and mine."

The glow in Knight's voice toned down as he went on.

"Thus with all lesser things resurrected from our lost age. There is one telephone exchange, just a few lines, here on Manhattan. Experimental. One radio station; one telegraph line to the Pacific. And one telegraph spanning Eurasia, powered by the Gibraltar plant. And one city, nearing completion, which will be the model for future cities to spring up all over Earth. Cities planned intelligently, for comfortable life, half arboreal."

A glow had come to Lar Tane's eyes.

"New York playing Athens to the world! It must be a glorious and magnificent feeling, Knight—building a new world!"

Knight smiled tiredly. He pointed to the grey hairs in his head.

"Sometimes it is just a burden," he murmured. "Sometimes I've wondered if I'd get anywhere. It takes so long. There are so many handicaps. What is the hardest thing to handle, in any civilization of any time, Tane?"

The answer came quickly. "People."

"Yes, people. This is still a stone age, for all I've done. History is made by people, not things. And history pivots around leaders of people. There are not many leaders in the 50th century—not enlightened ones. Gnawing in the back of my mind, from the first, has been the problem of government. Mechanical civilization overnight, perhaps. But the World-State? That can't be conjured out of a bag of scientific tricks."

LAR Tane's interest visibly deepened. "You are Lord of Earth. Emperor, I'd call it. How do you keep in power? What sort of policing system do you have?"

"None. Individual tribal law is still in force."

Lar Tane's eyes widened.

"But how do you enforce the laws you make?"

"I have made no laws, except one—that there must be no wars over tribal borders. And no metal weapons. They respect that because they know I could defeat any army of theirs."

"I see," nodded Lar Tane. "You rule by threat of force. You have an army ready at any moment to put down insurrection?"

Knight shook his head.

"I've had no organized army at all." "No weapons, even?"

"None. I've vowed there will never again be war. There is not a lethal weapon on Earth today, outside of spears and bows used in hunting."

Tane seemed aghast, uncomprehending.

"Without a weapon, without an army, police, or any means of enforcement, you rule Earth? I don't understand. Has no one risen to oppose you?"

"Not so far." Knight smiled strangely. "They look up to me as a half god. Or as a superior being from the fabled, mighty past. The world has been watching me, waiting to see if I would keep my promise of creating a wonderful new place to live in. I've cast a sort of spell over them, I suppose."

His tone changed.

"But it can't last forever. The loose world-federation, under my tacit leadership, must be knit into a strong, united World-State, ruled by itself."

"Ruled by itself?" Lar Tane pondered, as though searching his memory—memory that extended back before his era. "You mean—the principle of democracy?"

He was laughing suddenly. "The experiment that failed! In 2313, the democracy of America vanished, and was never seen again."

"Nevertheless," Knight cut in sharply, "it will be revived, here. Our civilization crashed into oblivion, like Rome, led by dictators into an orgy of war."

He suddenly caught Lar Tane's eye, and his tone became cold.

"There is no room in this world, Lar Tane, for personal ambitions!"

Lar Tane shrugged.

"This is your world, Stuart Knight," he said casually.

Knight put a hand on his shoulder.

"I hope you understand, Tane. We made a mess of civilization last time. Let's not repeat the same mistakes—"

THERE was interruption—a bell ringing.

Knight picked up the phone. It was a crude instrument, clumsy and heavy. It was not the finished, efficient hearing-device the 20th century had known, added to by hundreds of skilled inventors.

Neither Knight nor Alexander, Graham Bell had done more than fashion the basic principle, in ages 3000 years apart.

The voice that sounded was tinny and distorted, but understandable.

"Lord Stirnye, it is almost time. In an hour we will send the prearranged signal to Lord Perry, at Gibraltar. All the apparatus is working smoothly. Will you come right over?"

Knight hung up after an affirmative.

"Transatlantic radio signals," he explained briefly to Tane. "We've been trying for months. Maybe this time it'll work. Come along."

They walked through the bustle of city construction to the lower tip of the island, where the laboratory workshop jutted against the skyline of New York harbor. Not an inspiring-looking place, but the birthplace of invention supreme, like Edison's Menlo Park in an earlier age.

Knight's nostrils flared, his head high.

From here it was, for twenty-five years, that he had pulled the strings. The backstage of the new civilization, whose real-life scenes were flashing one by one across the footlights of history. Twenty-five years of dreams, and the results of dreams. An invisible network branched from here to all corners of Earth—lines of progress and rule.

No Nero or Alexander had enjoyed such absolute control over so gigantic an empire. No man in all human history had before him so wide an experimental proving ground. The Stone Age lay fallow, ready for the seeds of science, civilization, and a way of life infinitely glorious.

Sometimes it had frightened Knight. He felt like a juggler—one false move and the whole house of cards might tumble down. For more than any one, Knight realized how flimsy, how tenuous was his amorphous, imponderable "empire," not yet grounded in the elements of self-government.

TWO towers reared weirdly against a skyline of ocean and darkening sky, as the sun set. They were structures of interlaced metal, plained solidly on concrete bases at the southernmost tip of Manhattan Island, overlooking the Atlantic. Between the towers stretched a network of wire strands along which faint ripples of violet danced fitfully. Electricity pulsed through the wires, as once electricity had hummed through all the environs of dead New York.

Stuart Knight had again, after an age, put the electron to work.

"No radio yet!" Lar Tane murmured, as though first realizing that fact.

They looked at each other in a strange sympathy, the two men who had come from an age that knew radio stations all over Earth.

"Historic moment—if it works this time," Knight said phlegmatically. He looked around. "Stuart should be here soon. He's never missed our scheduled attempts."

CHAPTER V Things Twice Told

AT that moment, Stuart stood with Leela and Elda Tane, their riding clothes dusty.

They overlooked the broad blue Hudson from the upper Manhattan shore. Ruins as yet untouched by workmen bulked grotesquely behind them. Stuart stared moodily at the broken concrete pylon from which had once stretched a mighty bridge to the Jersey shore. The George Washington Bridge, his father had called it.

"A world in ruins," Stuart murmured. "I'm going to rebuild it, when I'm president."

"Still remaking the world?" Elda Tane said airily. "Is there something wrong with this one? There is still sunshine. And fresh air, and horses on which to gallop."

She was a picture of glowing health; her coppery hair wind blown, her eyes sparkling like emeralds against her sun-tinted ivory skin. She was alluring, exotic, patrician. Beside her, Leela seemed pale and fragile.

Standing between them, Stuart was a contrast of vigor and manhood, his keen blue eyes alight with the excitement of their recent ride. Leela was aware of the picture they made together—Stuart and Elda. Two statues of Grecian art come to life. Stiryne had suggested that Stuart and Leela conduct Elda around, in the past month. Leela wished at times he hadn't.

Elda was looking at Stuart. Her bell-voice continued, more seriously. In a month's time, she had easily learned the clipped English of the 50th century.

"But of course it must be done. I wish you could have lived in my time, Stuart. Magnificent cities, great industry, flourishing arts. All of Earth, in our 30th century, was civilized."

"But you had wars, my father says—"

"Oh, yes, wars. But there has to be wars."

"Has to be!" Stuart's voice was low, shocked. He shook his head firmly. "Not in this world. We are building the World-State slowly and carefully, against the need for senseless wars. Your civilization fell because of war-fever, my father says. This one won't." "Your father says," mimicked Elda.

A hidden gleam of mockery shone from her green eyes. "At least our world wasn't a dull one."

Stuart stared at the girl, puzzled. Hers was a complex personality. She said disturbing things like that at odd times. She was enigmatic, if only because she was a woman. And she was disturbing—in other ways.

"Why did you leave it, then?" he asked a little sharply. "Why did you and your father leave that wonderful time?"

He had thought to make her swallow her words. He was not prepared for her sudden, bitter outburst.

"We were driven! We couldn't stay and be—"

Horror was in her eyes. Then abruptly, in a mercurial change, she was laughing.

"How dramatic I make it sound! It was nothing. I'll let my father explain."

Stuart knew she was hiding something. There was an aura of mystery about the two who had deserted one age for another. They had not left their times purely for scientific principles, as his father had left the 20th century. It was something deeper, more vital.

Elda broke into his thoughts.

"Look. See that leaning tower? I'll race you to it!"

She sprang lightly on her horse, grazing nearby. Her green eyes flashed challenge. Stuart helped Leela mount, then leaped on his own horse. With an exuberant shout, they were off.

Neck and neck the three horses thundered along, till heaps of broken masonry forced the headlong pace down. With daring skill, Elda urged her charger in a flying leap over a tumbled wall, gaining head position. Stuart grinned ruefully. He had thought he was a horseman.

She was an Amazon, her hair streaming out like metallic fluff. She glanced back at times, laughing, mocking, firing his blood. They flew along toward the tower goal, among the piled ruins, courting a broken neck.

Leela fell far behind.

LATER, panting and laughing, they entered the radio laboratory. They had waited for Leela. They

sobered at the tense atmosphere within.

It was the interior of a low brick hut nestled between the radio towers. Connecting wires led through the roof to the aerial outside. Harnessed to lead-in wires was a crammed jumble of generators, transformers, bus-bars, vacuum-tubes. All the paraphernalia of radio transmission, in crude form. A bit of 20th century transplanted.

Knight felt that, seated before a panel of switches. Almost like the control room of a broadcasting station of his time. Among the apparatus was his staff of helpers, watching dials and voltmeters with hawk eyes. An air of tense expectancy rode over the hum and drone of apparatus. Something from the dead past was being resurrected.

Would it work?

It was not so easy, as Knight had told Lar Tane, to re-invent the machine marvels of the science age, starting at zero.

A large clock hung on the wall, one of Knight's first productions. Its hands crept to the hour of six. Knight poised his fingers over the telegraphic key before him. His hand trembled a little.

AT the precise moment, he depressed the key, Three times he pressed down, in short "dots." He paused. Then three times again—a pause—three times—a pause. . . .

Outside, in obedience to his finger, the aerial crackled invisibly with triple-surges of energy. The three-dot signal hurled itself, by short-wave, out over the broad Atlantic.

After a minute of the signalling, Knight stopped, and fitted earphones to his head. He closed the receiver switch and turned up the power dial. Then he listened, pressing the earphones tightly against his ears. All he heard, for a minute, was the howling of static.

Then it came.

Three sharp dots, a pause—three dots—a pause. . . .

Clear as a bell it sounded. Knight removed the earphones and plugged in a horn-speaker.

Ping-ping-ping — ping-ping-ping — ping-ping-ping. . . .

It rang through the hum-filled room loudly.

Knight listened as if to some divine music. It was just the letter "S," in code, broadcast from Europe across the ocean. It faded at times, and at times the demon-howls of static obscured it. But Knight listened with a choked wonder.

Three thousand years before, a long-dead inventor had carried out this precise experiment. It was a reenactment of Marconi, listening to the letter "S" hurled from the far shores of another continent.

But Marconi had not realized, save dimly, that this whisper of man's voice across the ocean would grow to a shouting chorus, shrinking the world. Knight, reviving this feat, knew it as a milestone in the budding science of the 50th century.

He knew, standing and listening raptly, that it was another bond to unite mankind.

Back of him, the dozen technicians smiled tiredly but happily at one another. They had helped bring about the success of the project, through months of intensive labor. Yet they looked with awe at Knight. His brain and 20th century knowledge had been the prime factor. Without him, the 50th century wouldn't have this, or the long list of other inventions flowing from him in the past quarter-century.

"It is a stupendous achievement, Lord Stirnye!" said a blonde-skinned Nartican. "We had nothing like it in Nartica."

"Magic! It is near to that," murmured a darker Triber. "Lord Stirnye has the mind of a god!"

Knight thrilled. For twenty-five years he had been looked up to as almost a super-being. He turned back to the key, and began tapping in the international code of his century.

"Y-o-u-r 'S' s-i-g-n-a-l r-e-c-e-i-v-e-d c-l-e-a-r-l-y. C-o-n-t-a-c-t s-u-c-c-e-s-s-f-u-l. C-o-m-e b-a-c-k t-o-m-o-r-r-o-w t-o d-i-s-c-u-s-s a-p-p-a-r-a-t-u-s f-o-r v-o-c-a-l t-r-a-n-s-m-i-s-s-i-o-n. K-n-i-g-h-t."

Almost instantly the signal came back.

"O-K d-a-d."

"O.K."—Knight had revived that too, from the 20th century.

As he turned away, Lar Tane was the first to offer congratulations.

"Radio transmission will give the world a voice, like in our times. And before this, you invented the telegraph, telephone, X-ray, electric motor, electric light, and all the other things I saw. I realize now what a remarkable feat it is, condensing centuries of inventions into twenty-five years."

Knight shook his head.

"Not invented—re-invented. Better minds than mine devised these things. I'm just handing them on. I'm a super-Edison only by proxy.

"In time, all those things of our day will gradually spread out among mankind today. It's still a Stone Age. Twenty-five years is such a short time. I've only been able to devise the first of the inventions. We haven't the factories yet to spread them widely. But we're laying the foundations for a new and wonderful world."

Stuart looked at the visionary light in his father's eyes, this man who saw things in such great sweeps.

"But you've been driving yourself too much, father! Hardly sleeping or eating. You should take time to rest—"

"Time!"

Knight spoke the word as though it were a net cast about him. As though his every thought and impulse was a race against the clock.

"Time is infinitely precious, to me. So many things from my 20th century must be passed along. And I have only one lifetime. I'm all right—"

BUT even as he said it, Knight stiffened. His face paled. He clutched at the panel board for support, then collapsed on the floor. Stuart knelt beside him with a muffled cry of alarm.

A doctor was hurriedly summoned. A Nartican, he had been their family physician for a decade. One glance at the still face and he took out a hypodermic, injecting below the heart.

Knight came to, gasping. When he was breathing easily again, he smiled weakly, arising. He looked at the silent, anxious faces about him.

"Just a twinge of the heart," he said lightly. "After all, I'm three thousand years old!"

But Knight did not tell what the doctor had told him a year before. The electro-lepsia that had brought him through an age had left its mark. A heart that had stopped beating for 3000 years and then resumed, might at any moment stop again—forever.

But still, it had been a day of triumph.

THE next day, despite weakness, Knight insisted on going over plans for voice-radio. Perry and Aran Deen had returned from Gibraltar, by plane. When they reached a knotty problem, Lar Tane made a helpful suggestion.

Engrossed in the problem, they hardly noticed that Stuart and Elda had entered, with Leela.

Elda's green eyes flashed.

"You're remaking the world now, too?" she said half bantering to her father. "I've become interested myself. Stuart told me today of the Magna Charta, which was adopted last month. In fact, the day we arrived."

"Not adopted, but ratified for adoption," corrected Stuart, smiling.

"I don't understand these democratic methods." The girl was frankly puzzled, and somewhat amused. "Conventions, congress, debate, vote, ratification—it all seems slow and ponderous. In our time—"

She exchanged glances with her father. Lar Tane's eyes were reminiscent. He made an involuntary gesture, as though imitating a ruler of his time—to signify a new edict.

He faced Knight.

"Magna Charta?"

Knight nodded. He explained in brief phrases.

"It is a document," he concluded, "passing government into the hands of a World Congress."

Lar Tane was staring.

"And on the day it's finally ratified—"

"On that day, five months from now," Knight said, "I am no longer Lord of Earth. My title, and all it has meant, passes into history. But Stuart will be the first president of the World Congress. I requested that, and I know it will be granted as my final wish."

Elda's eyes were on Stuart.

"You will be ruler of Earth, then?"

"Only a constitutional ruler," Stuart responded quickly. "My father will still be my guide. Then, within my lifetime, all the legislative powers of the Congress will be defined. The World-State will gather momentum. A slow process, but a certain one. The final result—true democracy."

Stuart's calm, sure tones rang through the room. He added, as if in afterthought, "I shouldn't forget my brother. Perry will be my right-hand man, building and spreading science and industry through the world."

Perry flushed under the attention. Elda's lidded eyes flicked to him, then back to Stuart.

"But you," she murmured again, "will be ruler of Earth!"

"You are rebuilding civilization," Lar Tane said to Knight. "You and your two sons. In some way, Elda and I can help." He smiled curiously. "As a matter of fact, though we once had a secure place, we now have to earn a living!"

KNIGHT felt again his kinship with them. He, too, had awakened with a new life to begin.

"Why did you leave your time?" he asked. For a month, busy explaining the new world, he had not thought to ask. Lar Tane had volunteered nothing.

"There was a World State or World Empire in your time," piped the voice of Aran Deen. "I remember that, though I can't find the exact record. It cracked apart, in five years, through war. The year it ended, 2907, was the year you were interred. Is that right, Lar Tane?"

Tane nodded.

"Yes, I remember too," Knight mused. He had made it a point to read all the historical records in the libraries of Nartica. He knew the history between the 20th and 50th centuries in broad detail. "The third evanescent World State. Based on the principle of military power, like the others, it fell apart, rotten to the core."

"And were you a high government official?" pursued Aran Deen vaguely. "Lar Tane—the name sticks in my mind."

Tane's face was blank.

"No. Not a high official, though I was in the government. When the World-State of 2907 crashed, I took the door to the future, hoping to find it reformed in a better pattern. It was my sole reason for passing into suspended animation. I'm wholeheartedly with you in forming a World-State today."

His eyes were suddenly shining.

"A new world! Rebuilding civilization! I feel almost as though fate had planned this, Stuart Knight. How can I serve? I was a scientist as well as administrator. Tell me, how can I serve?"

His manner was suddenly impatient, hurried, as though his dynamic nature, shrugging off the last shreds of age-long sleep, demanded activity.

Knight's eyes were reflective. Lar Tane, despite his former life in a century where might was right, was a valuable man. One thing he had in common with Knight—a view of world affairs through a perspective of time. That alone was a priceless gift, second only to Knight's greater range.

"Yes, rebuilding civilization," Knight said slowly. "And the World-State. And in that, Lar Tane, your experience is invaluable." He came to a mental conclusion. "I hereby appoint you director of the Rhine powerplant, in Europe. I'm sure you'll prove your worth, and be elected to an important post in the new government."

Lar Tane bowed slightly, looking pleased.

CHAPTER VI

Listen, Stone Age!

A WEEK later, a sailing vessel denuded of its sails but with masts and ropes intact for emergency, fared from New York harbor under steam. The spectators at the dock hardly realized the significance of the name painted on the prow—*Dogstar II*.

An age before, in 1838, another *Dogstar* had made the first Atlantic crossing under steam, from England to America. And the *Dogstar* of 5000 A.D. would also stamp the sailing vessel with the word "obsolete." Mark the close of a sailing era, usher in a steamship age. Pump the blood of trade vigorously through the arteries of the world.

Knight blessed fate, that allowed him to witness these twice-told events.

Sometimes the wonder of it shook him. It was as though he had been plucked from tottering Earth entirely, in the 20th century, and placed by the gods in a new Earth, once again back in the Stone Age. It was as though the gods had said: "The first experiment failed. We will start all over, before civilization. You, Stuart Knight, guide this second one. With what you know of the past, you know the pitfalls. Do well!"

And then it was as though the gods laughed behind his back, and said among themselves: "He is such an optimistic, energetic little worm-that-dreams. He thinks he will succeed. He does not know the storm may break at any moment!"

Knight didn't know why he had that last thought. During the quiet, restful voyage across an ocean that seemed bent to please, he reviewed the past twenty-five years. It was the first time he had really stopped his bustle and drive, and sat down to think it over, with the perspective of those years. All had gone well.

Power-and-metals were once again at hand, to muscle the stricken body of civilization, give it vigor and life. Mechanical inventions, culminating in radio and this steam-driven vessel, were once more ready to form its arms and legs and voice. The Magna Charta would soon breathe into it 'a heart and soul.

Yes, all had gone well.

But—

And suddenly, Knight knew what ticked in his brain. It must have the latter, or the rest would mean nothing. Knight had dug into the grave of the past, patching the new world-body together. Without heart and soul—without the Magna Charta—the new civilization would be a Frankenstein monster, laying waste the world again in war and chaos.

Knight knew he would not feel at ease till the World-State was safely launched. Five months more and then the gods would nod their heads and stop laughing behind his back.

THE *Dogstar Second's* new engine worked like a clock. Shining alloy casings hid the great pistons that thrust powerfully, turning the four-bladed screw. Five years before Knight and his son Perry had started its construction. Effort well spent.

Knight was always a little amazed himself at the "fuel." It consisted simply of a few large lumps of the miraculous radioactive wax. Releasing infra-energy far out of proportion to its size, it churned an endless head of steam through the engine, as long as water was supplied. A few pounds of the wax were equal to hundreds of tons of coal. It was more than combustion that the wax underwent—it was disintegration. The 20th century would have called it radioactivity speeded up—or "Atomic Energy!"

"And the cost of producing this amount of wax," Knight told Lar Tane, "was less than a hundred dollars, in financial terms. Freighters crossing the Atlantic for less than what used to be a docking charge!"

Knight was almost childishly pleased at the wondering look on Lar Tane's face. It was the sign of a new and vaster science that the 50th century would inherit.

THE *Dogstar II* docked in the harbor of what had once been Gibraltar, beneath its frowning ramparts. It picked its way majestically among sail-driven craft. Sailors' faces stared in astonishment at the swift ship driven by hidden magic, not aware yet that their age-long craft were outmoded. In the

harbor town a crowd of Tribers quickly collected, staring in wonder.

Knight noticed they did not cheer. The news of both the Magna Charta and the steamship, though sped to Europe by the new radio, was yet too novel for them to accept unreservedly, as in America. The tribal-states of America, closer to the center of the new things, and better informed, were the only ones already in line, wholeheartedly.

"The first crossing of the Atlantic under steam, in this age," Knight said in commemoration. "They will accept it soon for the great event it is."

The party made its way to the radio station, beyond the town, where several aircraft lay ready for service.

Knight pointed to one.

"This will take you, Lar Tane and Elda, to Vinna. Chief Hal Doth, at my request, offers you the hospitality of his house. I thought you would prefer to live there, for the time being, at the site if not the city you once knew."

"It's thoughtful of you," Lar Tane returned sincerely. He added, in a reminiscent murmur: "Vinna!"

"The plane," Knight resumed, "is at your service. Refueling facilities at the Rhine. You can commute to the Rhine powerplant in an hour, from Vienna, and apportion your time there as you wish. In two months the plant should be completed. It will then need a capable director. I leave it to your judgment to build its productive capacity to a peak. We are ready to launch an industrial program."

Knight turned to his eldest son.

"As we've decided, Stuart, you'll stay here in Europe, perhaps for the five months. The tribal-states of America will ratify the Magna Charta without question. But many of the outlying states here in Europe are uncertain, suspicious. Circulate among them, explaining. At the same time"—he grinned briefly—"you'll be campaigning for yourself as president."

Stuart nodded seriously.

Knight faced his second son.

"Perry, you and Aran Deen will stay here and continue work on the radio. Also have your staff of technicians begin turning out rails for the railroad across Eurasia."

There was a vivid picture in Knight's mind of a day two years before. Gleaming rails from the east and west meeting, spanning the American continent once again. Union Pacific played for the 50th century. A rattly, clanking little train crossing in record time—at least for the second Stone Age.

Perry nodded.

Knight turned again to Lar Tane and Elda.

"I'm returning to New York, to prepare for inauguration of the World State. At any time you wish, visit me by plane—if you feel lonesome."

It was more than an amenity on Knight's part. He had felt lonesome in the new world for months, after his awakening, till events had swept him up.

Elda smiled.

"Perhaps we shall be lonesome. Will you visit us at times, Stuart?" She flashed her eyes on him questioningly.

"As often as I have time," Stuart's voice was low.

"You also, Perry," Elda said, with a code of courtesy of her time that made exception to no one. She glanced at him, smiling, "Or does science command complete devotion?"

"Too much so," old Aran Deen spoke up. "I have known him to work three days and nights running. He is a young fool." Shaking his head, the venerable seer subsided into a mumble.

Knight waved.

"When we all gather again in New York, it will be at the dawn of the World-State!"

A moment later, three planes rocketed into the air and soared off into the distance, One to America, one to ancient Vienna, and the last toward inner tribal regions along the Mediterranean.

Perry watched them vanish.

"What are you thinking of?" queried Aran Deen slyly. "Green eyes?"

Perry started, and turned away wordlessly.

The old seer glanced up in the sky. "Young fools," he mumbled.

IT TOOK the droning rocket plane no more than two hours to take Stuart a distance of 1000 miles. Three Narticans were with him, as pilot and mechanics. He was visiting a tribal- state in what had once been Italy. The pilot arrowed down over the main village. A collection of wooden and brick huts centered around a more imposing structure of rough-cut marble, graced with a crude steeple. The plane landed in the square before the chief's dwelling', its underjets cushioning it down lightly.

A crowd gathered swiftly, staring with curious eyes at the great metal bird. They had seen planes before, but only at rare intervals. Before his father's advent, the Nartican feudal lords had come at times for food and slaves.

Stuart and his men stepped out. The crowd stared in a mixture of awe and wonder. Second Stone Age people they were, hardened by outdoor labors, clothed in rough, baggy woolens. Yet here and there gleamed a metal belt-clasp, or a steel hunting knife, or a chain of iron-filigree around a girl's throat. Twenty-five years ago, Knight had smelted iron from the oxide-heaps of city ruins. The secret had gone around.

Pathetic bits of metal, but they marked the dawn of a metal age. From the steepled building came the chief and his chieftains. They wore silken sashes around their middles. There had been some trade with Nartica. The dawn, too, of world commerce.

Stopping before the visitors, they inclined their heads deferentially. "Welcome, Lord Stuart, first son of Lord Stirnye!"

Stuart had never been here before. By word of mouth alone, the "royal" family was known with almost the clarity of television, all over the world. And always the Tribers were respectful. They feared the man who had come from the mighty past.

Respect they had. But did they understand anything of the new civilization planned? The World-State?

Stuart nodded gravely, in turn.

"Chief Ral Harn, of Venz," he said.

He had records of all tribes and chiefs. It pleased them to know their names.

"My table and food are yours," invited the chief.

Stuart declined with thanks. Ceremony over, he launched into his mission.

"Tell me why your tribe, and those hereabouts, objected at first to sending delegates to a convention in America?"

The chief started a little.

"It was so far away," he replied hesitantly.

"But it was so important," Stuart pursued. "In the paper called the Magna Charta, my father, Lord Stirnye, gives up rule of Earth. Will your tribe vote for it?"

STUART watched the man closely. In his reaction might lie important considerations. The chief spoke after an evasive pause.

"Why is Lord Stirnye giving up his rule? We have never found fault with him."

"Because the government of mankind must pass into its own hands."

"But *who* will rule?" the chief asked bluntly. In his Stone Age psychology, there had to be single fountainhead of authority.

"You and all other chiefs," Stuart put it as simply as he could. "All the delegates from all the tribes will make laws together, by vote. If I am wanted and elected, I will be the president. Or chief."

Ral Harn nodded.

"That is good." Then he looked down at the ground. "But all the laws will come from America?"

That was the rub. Stuart couldn't blame him. Absentee government, from across an ocean, would instinctively be mistrusted. Nartica had held sway from a distance. Rome too, in the dim past. Stuart made a mental note to think over a yearly change of the government's seat. Perhaps there could be a dozen Capitols over Earth, each the meeting place of the Congress in turn.

"No," Stuart said. "They will come from the hearts of the men whom you tribal chiefs send to law-making."

Sheer rhetoric, but it pleased the chief. But still he gave no promise to vote for the new regime. Stuart opened his mouth, then thought better of it. Another form of persuasion remained. He signaled his men.

From the cabin of the plane they lugged several batteries, and two phones. Stuart handed one to the chief, with instructions how to hold it. A Nartican took the other instrument and walked a hundred feet away, uncoiling the connecting wire.

"Listen," Stuart told the chief, waving a signal to the Nartican to talk. Ral Ham listened in utter amazement.

"It talks!" he gasped.

The crowd around murmured in awe. "And you can talk to him," Stuart said. "Tell him to step to the right." "*Step to the right!*" the chief bellowed, loud enough to be heard without the phone. Stuart got him to speak in lower tones. In obedience to his commands, the Nartican beyond took three steps forward, waved his right arm, and stood on one leg.

"Magic!" whispered the chief.

"Not magic," Stuart said. "Science. There are many more things—"

The demonstrations went on. An electric-light bulb was lighted, dazzling even in the daylight. A small electric fan threw cooling gusts of air in the chief's face. Finally a scratchy phonograph record was played, one of those from Knight's crypt. The majestic tones of a 20th century symphony rolled over the crowd's head.

As his men packed the instruments back, Stuart faced the chief.

"These are the things of science. There are many more. They will be spread throughout the world. But first there must be the World-State. Will you vote for it now?"

Glimpse into another world. Had it impressed the chief? His eyes were shining.

But his reply was canny.

"My chieftains and I will give it deep thought. But I cannot understand why Lord Stirnye is giving up his rule!"

Stuart bit his lip. Back where he started from!

AT THE next tribal-state, his reception was less cordial. Chief Kor Lugi of Thoom was a loud-voiced ruffian with a defiant air. He came right to the point.

"No!" My tribe will not vote for the World-State." His voice was a bellow. "I would no longer be chief, then."

"But you would," Stuart returned patiently. "Your council of chieftains and yourself would still make your own tribal laws. Only certain edicts for the benefit of all Earth will come from the Congress. Like the edict, already proclaimed by Lord Stirnye, forbidding border war."

Stuart had touched a sore spot.

"No border wars!" roared the chief. "That is our business. The crafty Venz people graze their cattle in our fields, thus taking over some of our land. I should have the right to drive them off."

"Those things will be straightened out by the World Congress." Honesty forced Stuart to add, "In time."

"And I should wait, while my cattle grow thin." The chief shook his head like an angry bull. "The quicker way is to gather my young men and teach the sneaking Venz a lesson. A few burned villages would make them think."

"Well, why don't you?" Stuart challenged guardedly. And in curiosity.

"Because I respect Lord Stirnye." The burly chief's tone went down a peg. "He freed us from Nartica. And for fear of him, our bitterest enemies, to the north, have left our borders intact."

For *fear* of Lord Stirnye, magician from the mighty past! Stuart's own respect for his father went up, for silencing a world of quarrels just by the threat of hidden powers. But did they have no regard for the civilization he was bringing?

Chief Kor Lugi stared cynically as the mechanical gadgets were displayed.

"I will have nothing to do with them," he grunted. "Let Lord Stirnye rule, but let him not change our way of living."

Stuart fled from the sheer stupidity of it. The next tribal chief had a new and novel angle of objection.

"It is a plot to put Nartica in control again," he accused. "Lord Stirnye has surrounded himself with Narticans. He married one. And you, his son, come with Narticans. No, we will not vote for this World-State—or for slavery to Nartica!"

Stuart groaned and wondered what fantastic suspicion the next tribe would have. Surprisingly, they had none. They were enthusiastically in favor of the World-State. A cheering candle in the gloom of the second Stone Age.

But subsequent tribes were again intractable, obstinate. Stuart began to feel like a mad preacher. Was it too soon to bring the Tribers, steeped in their tribal traditions, a mode of self-government?

Was the Magna Charta a worthless scrap of paper?

CHAPTER VII In Olden Days

A MONTH passed.

Stuart returned periodically to the Gibraltar base for fuel, and continued his penetration of tribal-states inland. He reported to his father, by radio, when he felt he had something definite to say.

Perry tapped out the words for him.

"Visited most of the tribal-states in southern Europe." Stuart's voice was weary. "Some refuse outright to ratify, most are suspicious. Strangely, they see no reason why you shouldn't continue as Lord of Earth. They seem blind to the idea of a World Congress."

Knight's reply was practical.

"Stone Age psychology. One-man rule is the only form they've known. They forget how many times in the past their separate chiefs have been cruel, ruthless, rapacious."

Almost, the clicking code seemed to sigh.

"Perhaps it is still too early, though I've waited twenty-five years. But there must be a World-State before there is world science and industry. Two-thirds of the tribal-states are all we need for ratification. With all of America and Nartica, and half of Europe, we'll have it. You can swing half of Europe, Stuart."

Stuart turned away from the radio with set determination.

"It is not so easy, is it?" cackled old Aran Deen acidly. "I have often told Stirnye it wouldn't be. I've also often told him Perry—"

He stopped, peering at the two young men with searching eyes, then shrugged.

"I'd like to help," Perry said earnestly. "But I'd be no good. Crowds scare me."

Stuart smiled.

"You're lucky, Perry. You deal with tangible things. I'm working with the imponderables of human nature. But I'll swing half of Europe!"

"Sure you will. And look, Stu." Perry indicated his experimental apparatus. "Soon we'll have voice transmission across the Atlantic. When you're president, you'll speak to the world, after stations have been set up, without dashing around madly like now."

Stuart grasped his younger brother's hand, suddenly.

"We're building a whole new world," he said soberly. "Nothing must ever come between us."

"Nothing will," Perry agreed. Stuart's voice changed.

"Any news from Lar Tane and Elda?"

"None."

That wasn't surprising, in a Stone Age without telephone, telegraph or radio, except for experimental types.

"I'll visit them," Stuart decided, striding for his plane.

"Green eyes," mumbled old Aran Deen to himself.

Green eyes greeted Stuart as he stepped from the plane, three hours later.

"Stuart!" Elda held out her soft hand. "You have delayed your first visit."

Spun-copper hair, ivory skin, eyes that flashed like emeralds—she was outrageously lovely.

Stuart broke from a spell of staring, pulling his hand away.

"Not willingly," he said a little perfunctorily.

He stiffened in surprise, staring beyond her.

THERE was bustle and activity beyond the landing runway. A huge squat building at the mouth of the Rhine housed the new powerplant, as on Manhattan. It would feed metals and electricity to northern Europe, eventually. For a year, Nartican machine-parts and technicians had been shuttling from that distant land. But the plant was already in operation! The pumps sucked in sea-water. From within sounded the rumble of machinery. Clouds of steam hissed from vents. Metals and electrical power were being produced.

"The plant is under production?" Stuart gasped. "A month ahead of schedule?"

"It started yesterday. My father does not waste time."

"But how did he do it?"

"He'll tell you." Elda led the way within a trim brick cottage set off from the workmen's quarters. It was Lar Tane's office. With a terse word of greeting, he held up a bar of silvery alloy. One end had been ground to a cutting edge.

"Our first extraction from the sea," he said enthusiastically. "Iron is rare in the sea metals. But this alloy of copper, magnesium and aluminum is lighter and stronger than steel."

He crunched the cutting edge down on a block of hard wood on his desk. The block split in half.

"My father's formula," Stuart nodded. "He worked it out years ago. But Lar Tane"—he faced the short, stocky man—"how did you get the plant started so soon?"

"-Well, I conscripted mere laborers from the surrounding tribal-state. Nelland. I believe it's called, a curious contraction of the Netherland state of my time. I put them all on a longer shift, finishing the building. The Nartican technicians, too, with their assembling of machine-parts." His voice was casual. "I believe in getting things done."

"I guess you do," Stuart murmured. He did not quite know how to take it. "But we always found it hard to hustle the average Tribber worker."

"Simple enough. I promised them metal trinkets. Do you realize that metal is like rare diamonds to these Stone Age people?"

Stuart knew he was frowning a little. "We've had a certain policy, in drafting the Tribbers for our projects. Short hours, no driving, and payment only in useful manufactured goods from Nartica. This Stone Age has no money system—only barter and trade. My father says a money-system must not arise before the World Congress takes control. Those metal trinkets—"

Stuart remembered one of his father's comparisons, of a bygone era. White men trading beads with the Indians, and thereby throwing rocks into the future. Lar Tane and Elda had exchanged glances.

Lar Tane spoke calmly.

"I've heard something of your policy, in the past month, talking with Narticans. I wonder if your methods haven't been too slow? The telegraph line across Eurasia was once held up for five months, when the Tribbers refused to go on with it. You waited patiently till they stopped sulking—too patiently. How can industry be spread at that rate?"

STUART pondered. It was logic—or was it? Again he remembered one of his father's impassioned speeches. "I came from a time when all things were forced. A madness lay upon the world. Each nation, or community, or

business group madly attempted to outdo the other. Wolflike competition, in all phases of life. That spirit must never rise again. Never!"

Lar Tane was from a time like that. Stuart was suddenly angry.

"My father will be the judge of that," he snapped. "Hereafter, you will communicate with him on such

matters."

Lar Tane stiffened. For a moment a haughty, almost imperious expression came over his features. Elda put a hand on his arm, with a low murmur in the German tongue of their time.

Lar Tane relaxed.

"Yes. After all, Stuart Knight is Lord of Earth." There was a strange undertone in his voice. Then he smiled.

"*Ach!* We quarrel over nothing, my young friend. Come, we will leave. You will be my guest for a day or so, at Vinna. I want to hear of your campaigning."

"You look tired, Stuart," Elda said sympathetically, as though attributing his outburst to nerves. "Not physically—mentally. Will you join me in a boar-hunt tomorrow? It's great sport."

Stuart's anger dissolved. These at least were people he could reason with. And whose company he could enjoy.

A rocket plane took them toward central Europe.

Just before landing, they passed over the ruins of ancient Vinna. In the 30th century, records said, it had enjoyed another hey-day, as before 1914. For a while, it had been the cultural, scientific, and ruling center of a crawling empire. Then total eclipse, as the Second Dark Age fell. Now its once-mighty skyscrapers and magnificent architecture were like the bare bones of a desert skeleton. Here a leaning spire of rust-clothed but stubborn steel. There a heap of rotting marble. . .

"Vinna!" Lar Tane murmured reminiscently. Stuart could appreciate his nostalgia somewhat, from the times his father had sighed, haunted by the dead past.

Some three miles beyond the ruins, on the banks of the Danube, existed now the "capital" of a Second Stone Age tribal-state—Vinna. A miserable village it was, like the many Stuart had toured.

Or had been! Stuart saw it had a cleaned up aspect now. Bright red paint livened the usual dun huts. Lar Tane was watching him.

"My idea," he said. "Common red paint—from the iron-oxide of the ruins—but it touches things up nicely. Chief Hal Doth is pleased. He looks up to me, I think."

It was apparent when they landed. Chief Hal Doth almost fawned. He was proud of having been the one to resurrect this great "lord from the past." And it set him apart from the other Triber chiefs to have him as a permanent guest. Stuart reflected vaguely that in a short month Lar Tane had already worked out a niche for himself, in a new and bewildering world. He was a hustler.

THEY dined together and Lar Tane told of life in his century, in rich, colorful language. There was something magnetic, compelling, about Lar Tane. Or perhaps it was just his gifted tongue. It seemed almost like a spell, to Stuart. Later, Elda heightened the spell, by singing in a low, melodious voice. She accompanied herself on a three-stringed lyre of 50th century vintage. The effect was magical.

"I walk in the towers;
They call me the queen!
But what says my heart?
Of love does it keen!
I rule all the regions,
I bow down to none;
Yet triumph is empty
If love isn't won.
This crown and this sceptre,
I wear them and sigh;
My love I'll find somewhere
Before I must die!"

Stuart went to a bed of dreams about the incredible world of a vanished past. And dreams of a strange girl who sang plaintively under a sad moon.

CHAPTER VIII

Diana Reborn

IN the morning, more refreshed than he had been for weeks, Stuart accepted Elda's invitation to the boar hunt. They rode on two powerful chargers, at the head of six Tribesmen hunters.

It was an enchanted day. Stuart's eyes strayed often to the girl beside him, as they trotted along. Her brief costume of Nartican shorts and shirt of silk, which she had adopted, left her arms and legs bare. Across her shoulders were hung a bow and quiver of arrows. She held a flint-tipped spear with a practiced touch.

Yesterday singing an ancient love-song, like any girl. Today bound on the hunt, like any man. Hers was a complex personality!

"You miss the guns of your day?" Stuart queried.

He had unlimbered his bow, tested its string, and now sent an arrow toward a lone tree they were passing by a good margin. The shaft missed, but clipped off bark. He was a little out of practice from his younger days.

Elda shook the coppery flame of her head.

"I despised guns. I always used spear and bow, in hunting."

Calmly she fitted an arrow to her bow, raised herself in the saddle, and let fly. The arrow spanged into the center of the tree trunk.

"Good shot," Stuart said, avoiding the mockery in her eyes.

"I think you were about to tell me boar-hunting was dangerous," she laughed.

At the edge of a wild, somber woods they waited together while the six Tribesmen circled and rode in as beaters. They did not have long to wait. A wild boar nosed out of the woods, winded them, and scurried down the edge of the clearing. Their horses thundered after. The hunted animal scuttled back for the woods. Elda wheeled her horse quicker than Stuart, and was after it. She leaned over and plunged down her spear, before the trees became too thick.

She missed. She retrieved the spear and came back.

"My horse shied at the wrong time," she panted, dismounting. "I'll do better on foot."

"But that's—" began Stuart. "Dangerous?" Elda laughed.

Stuart dismounted, and stood beside her.

"These devils aren't tame," he said tersely. "Keep near a tree."

If he thought she would, for safety's sake, he was wrong. She was after the second boar that appeared, like the Diana of ancient Greek mythology. Stuart admired the lithe, easy grace of her flying limbs, then leaped after her. With a burst of speed he passed her and flung his spear first. It was a bad cast, nicking the boar's shoulder.

The animal turned on them with snarling grunts of rage. Tusks gleaming, it charged. Stuart knew the girl wouldn't go for a tree. And neither would he. He whipped out an arrow and let fly. It stuck upright in the flank, without effect on the boar save to drive it utterly berserk. Stuart had no more time except to sidestep swiftly.

The clumsy beast pounded on, straight for Elda!

She stood with feet planted solidly, half crouched forward, spear back for a cast. Stuart watched paralyzed. If she cast and missed, she would have no time to sidestep the enraged animal.

"Elda, run! You can't—"

Stuart thought of an arrow, but might hit her. There wasn't a thing he could do except watch, his nape crawling.

Elda's arm came forward, with all the impetus of her shoulders. Straight and true the spear went, impaling the boar's heart between its shoulders. It stumbled, staggered, and dropped three feet in front of the girl. She jerked the weapon out, calmly wiping its point on the grass.

But excitement flashed from her green eyes, as Stuart ran up.

"Your face says you expect me to faint," she said mockingly. She drew herself up. "Disappointed?"

I'm not your Leela, you know."

Stuart said nothing. He said nothing all the way back to the village. He shut out the confusion in his mind firmly. Wasn't there enough to think about, with his presidential campaign?

HE told Lar Tane of that, as they dined of fresh boar meat that evening.

"I'm beginning to wonder," he concluded moodily, "if I'll swing half of Europe."

"I think your method is wrong," Lar Tane said bluntly. "It's like coaxing children with a little candy. It should be done on a large scale, if at all. I mean a parade, for instance. A parade will sway the masses surprisingly."

Stuart frowned. A parade—echo from the 20th century and 30th! Hadn't his father once denounced it as a showy, emotional method of intriguing the masses? The masses! That was another word with a bad flavor.

"Lar Tane," Stuart bristled, "the people are not to be *tricked* into it. They must understand and believe."

"If they can," Tane said evenly. "You're an idealist, like your father." "My father was an idealist when he told Nartica their oligarchy must end. He convinced them!"

"Smashing things is easy. Putting the pieces together again is the hard part." Lar Tane arose. "You have four months, to put the pieces together —by *your* plan."

Stuart pondered that, as his plane took him to the southern states of Europe. Did Lar Tane have some other plan? A better one? Was it possible that Stirnye, whose name would ring down in history for rallying a world toward a new goal, did not know how to put the pieces together again? Was he *fumbling*, perhaps?

Stuart cursed the sudden doubts in his mind. Confusion! It did not help to think of emerald-eyed Elda, and how she had mocked him. And made his blood boil. In rage, of course.

Another month entered the maw of Time.

Back in New York, Stirnye, Lord of Earth, began to count off the days and months. Three more months and the World-State would be born. The oppressive burden on his weary shoulders would lift. And the gods would stop mocking.

STUART'S regular report came by code over the radio, from the Gibraltar station.

"A bloc of states along the Mediterranean are assured. They've had trade with Nartica, and have a world outlook.

But inland states, quite isolated, are suspicious. It's ironic!

"They can't seem to grasp the fundamentals of democracy. They hint that tribal independence is most desired. They may riot, against the edicts of a World Congress. Or even secede! Only your name, when mentioned, commands respect. They remember vividly the threats you made—to gather an army and with mighty powers of the 20th century crush all opposition. I begin to wonder, father. What troubles will the World-State face, when it is formed, pledged to never use force?"

Knight replied carefully.

"As president, Stuart, you will be commander-in-chief of a world policing system. Riots must be put down firmly. Deep-seated tribal dissatisfactions must be taken before a Council of Tribal Adjustment. Once a precedent has been established, justly, they will see that force need never be used to settle things."

"Yes, but shouldn't we organize the policing system now? On election day, the rioting may spread like a flame."

Knight pondered.

"Yes, perhaps. I'll have the Narticans ready. You continue as you have, Stuart."

Knight turned from the radio, and patted Leela's hand, seeing the hurt she bravely tried to hide in her eyes. No word for her from Stuart.

"His head is full of his mission," Knight said. "He will come to you, free and eager, when it is done."

Leela searched his face.

"You are worried about him yourself, Lord Stirnye!"

"He is passing through a test of fire," Knight said slowly. "But he will be stronger for it."

Test of fire!

Knight might have gone to Europe himself, dropping his multitudinous executive duties, save that now was the time for Stuart to stand on his own feet. Now was the time for twenty-four years of invested fatherly training to prove its worth.

Fatherly training? It was more than that. No conscientious king, or wise patriarch, had trained his son more thoroughly for a life of leadership. A training that straddled two ages, and took account of a lost civilization.

Stuart must fight his own fight. Grimly, Knight stuck to that.

STUART drummed north, leaving Gibraltar. He was somehow eager to visit Lar Tane and Elda, after another month. Passing over, he saw workmen busy in the ruins of old Vinna. Lar Tane's handiwork, of course. Rescuing his home-city from utter oblivion. But Stuart was a little startled as he looked down on the square before Chief Hal Doth's steepled house.

The large square was filled with youths stripped to the waist. In orderly rows, hundreds of them, they were swinging their arms, lunging, twisting their bodies in callisthenics. The commands came from a short, sturdy man on the balcony—Lar Tane.

But now the plane had been spied. The square cleared, yet the youths did not scatter as a crowd would have. In single file, with efficient discipline, they marched away.

Stuart's surprise was still on his face, when Lar Tane strode to meet him stepping from the plane.

Tane smiled briefly.

"I've been doing my part for the World-State. The youth are always the hope of any new order, *nicht water?* They are strong young men, the Tribers, but they need discipline. Organized, they can be useful. As, for instance, a policing system."

Stuart started.

"Policing system! How did you—"

"I thought of it from the first." Lar Tane's tone was caustic. "Without it, the World-State would fall apart the day it's born. I have the interests of the World-State at heart, Stuart."

Stuart was faintly uneasy. Regimentation! The thought sprang into his mind—another of his father's warnings. Molding and shaping of youth groups for unscrupulous ends.

"These youths—what do you tell them?"

Tane motioned toward his plane, wheeling around for take-off.

"Come along. I'm scheduled today to address the neighboring state, Bvera. I've been circulating from tribe to tribe hereabouts, speaking for the World-State."

The pilot of the plane startled Stuart. It was Elda. She sat coolly in the driver's seat, copper-gold hair peeping from beneath a helmet. Each time he saw her Stuart was more amazed: She had a spirit of daring stronger than most men's. Stuart hesitated. The great machine was not easy to handle.

Lar Tane smiled, pushing him forward.

"She has a steadier hand than most men. She has been practicing for a month."

Stuart's trepidation vanished, as the plane lifted smoothly into the air. He could not do better himself. Her green eyes twinkled at his, as the plane settled to a steady pace.

"Brave of you to take a chance!" Mockery in her voice then changed to exuberance. "I love flying. These Nartican ships are almost as good as those of our time."

THE flight was short, to the landing square of a nearby tribal-state. A crowd gathered around the landed

plane, and milled below the chief's balcony as they were led there. In a world without radio or printing-presses, oratory held first place. But the audience seemed hostile, on guard. The issue of the World-State had stirred fierce controversy everywhere, as Stuart knew too well.

Lar Tane smiled, bowed slightly to the chief, and faced the audience. He spoke with the ease of one who had often addressed huge assemblages in his time, perhaps through a radio and television network

reaching millions.

"People of Earth! The World-State is the ideal form of government for humanity. I am from the past, from a dead civilization. My civilization earned oblivion because our people were divided. We must all work and sacrifice, and perish if need be, for the state. Nothing counts but the state!" His voice had risen to a vibrant crescendo. Head lifted, face almost imperious, he was an inspiring speaker. Stuart sensed the subtle magnetism that flowed from him, infusing the crowd. Here was a man who, in a vital position, could do much good—or much harm. Stuart banished the last thought as quickly as it formed.

Lar Tane went on in the same vein. The World-State! A cause to fight for—die for! Stuart himself felt a wild enthusiasm that he'd never had before. And then suddenly—a wild horror. Fight for, die for! What did Lar Tane mean? What inflammatory principle lay like a crouched beast behind his eloquence?

The last thought was like a lightning blast. Stuart knew that Elda's eyes were on him, hawk-like. She touched her father's arm. Lar Tane started, as if from a trance. In lower tones, he concluded:

"Let us do everything possible toward our goal—the World Empire!"

THE audience burst out in ringing cheers. Lar Tane stalked from the balcony to the plane. The square cleared, as he waved. When they were in the air, he spoke.

"They've been won," he said decisively. "Tomorrow I'll go back and organize a youth group."

Stuart spoke tautly.

"Your speech was strong, Lar Tane. You talked of fighting and dying for the World-State. There is to be no fighting or dying—"

Lar Tane smiled patronizingly.

"Mere words. You must stir the people, make their blood sing. What's the harm of it?"

"My father wouldn't like it—"

Stuart wished he hadn't said it. Elda's eyes gave a sidelong glint of mockery. He could almost hear her thoughts—"Your father says. Your father says!"

Tane's voice was mild.

"How many tribal-states have you swung in the past month, Stuart?"

"Five." Five out of twenty-five he had visited.

"I've swung nine," Lar Tane said casually. "Nine who swear by the World-State. A solid bloc in central Europe."

Stuart flushed angrily.

"By what authority?" he snapped.

"My father gave you no orders—"

"Nine of them," Tane repeated imperturbably. "For the World-State."

"But your methods—"

"*Ach!* Results are what count. Can you deny that?"

Suddenly anger and all dissolved, in Stuart. Yes, results counted.

"Lar Tane," he said eagerly, "between us we *can* swing Europe. You in the north, I in the south."

Strangely, Lar Tane hesitated.

"We could. But for what *kind* of World-State? Your father's kind? Its troubles would only begin, when it is formed. Riots, endless bickering, hamstrung progress. Is that the right way to put the pieces of civilization together?"

Stuart went a little cold. What lurked in Lar Tane's mind?

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

The man from the past eyed him narrowly, then shrugged. "Nothing—for the present."

CHAPTER IX

Amazon

THE plane was just landing, at Vinna, with a swoop under Elda's hands that was sheer skill. She touched Stuart's arm, as he was about to follow Lar Tane out of the cabin.

"Do you want some real flying?" Challenge was in her green eyes.

"Go with her," urged Tane. "I'll await you at dinner."

He was already striding away.

For a fleeting moment, Stuart had a baffled feeling. A sensation of being a pawn, tossed between Lar Tane and his daughter. Then he laughed. Clear air and the heady heights of the sky would wipe his mind free of such fantastic thoughts.

"Let's go!" he said. "And make it good."

Elda did make it good. The plane taxied off with a roar. Stuart clung to his seat-arms as the floor pitched at a steep angle. She motioned for him to strap himself securely. Up and up the ship drilled at full rocket blast. At ten miles the stars came out in the thin air, defying the sun's radiance.

Elda's green eyes flashed.

"Look at the moon," she murmured. "I've often wanted to go to the moon." Stuart was aghast. Was she mad? Was she thinking of blasting out into space, where no ship had ever gone—and come back?

Her eyes were on him mockingly. "Would you be afraid?"

"Yes." He ground out the word savagely. "And so would you."

"Perhaps." She shrugged daintily. Calmly she leveled off at fifteen miles, the plane's normal ceiling, and thundered forward. The velocimeter crept to 800 miles an hour. Within the sealed, warmed cabin, they felt little of the prodigious pace. Outside, the scant air shrieked like a thousand demons.

"Afraid?" she challenged again. "The Narticans tell me it isn't safe past 750. Rocket tubes explode at times."

Stuart's nerves crackled.

"Fool stunt, flirting with death. You need—taming!"

He spat out the last word.

"Taming?" Again challenge in her slumbrous green eyes. "Does the man exist—"

She was defiance, and flaming courage—and desire.

Stuart leaned toward her. She did not draw away. Her lips were an invitation. . . .

BUT he suddenly stiffened. His eyes went wide. Past her shoulder, through the cabin's side port of clear quartz, he had seen a brilliant flash from a dark valley, fifteen miles below. A flash of new metal, in a Stone Age world.

"Cut your speed and circle," he commanded, explaining briefly.

Fleeting, he felt relief that the spell had been broken. He tried to read Elda's reaction, but failed. Without a word, she obediently circled and dived down from the stratosphere.

At a mile's height, they both saw the flash again. Across the valley it came, from where two lines of men stretched—locked in battle!

"Border war!" Stuart grunted. "And one side is using metal weapons. The edict of my father broken. I'll have to stop them."

Elda saw his hesitant glance at her. "Stop them? Watch!"

The plane dipped down sickeningly. At a hundred feet Elda leveled out and raced into one end of the valley. Straight for the line of battle she sped, parallel with it. Then, nearing the first of the fighters, she daringly glided down still more, barely fifty feet off the ground.

Stuart's throat was dry, his tongue stuck. He had told her once of their method of stopping sporadic border wars. But it took almost a miraculous balance between underjets and driving rockets to keep from crashing into the ground—and into a wall of human flesh.

The plane skimmed over the heads of the battlers. The underjets threw blasts of furnace-heat at them. Behind the streaking ship, some of the horses stampeded. Men with scorched skins stumbled away. But the momentum of the battle carried on. In the fierce lust of fighting, the plane was disregarded.

Elda clucked her teeth.

Banking at the end of the valley, she repeated the maneuver, drenching the battle-ground with withering heat. Five more times the plane raced back and forth, like an angry hornet, till the savage lust of war below yielded. In disorderly retreat, both sides withdrew, leaving the slain and wounded. Over their

shoulders they looked up at the stinging plane that had so effectively brought truce.

Elda was laughing, when it was done.

"Look at the rabble run! It's so comical. In my time, war was *war!*"

"No laughing matter," Stuart muttered. "It shows a will to war. Land in the middle of the valley. I'll speak to the commanders, forbid them to go on."

A body of horsemen rode up from the side, presently, to the landed plane. The commander who dismounted and strode up was a dark, wiry man, descendant of 20th century Hungarians whose racial stock still clung to these rich plains along the Danube.

He bowed.

"Lord Stuart. I am war-chief Czocky, of Garia. I am glad you are here. This war is not of our making. The Huuns attacked a few days ago, violating our borders. We could only fight back. I sent three runners to Gibraltar, to report, but none got through. Your coming is a miracle. Tell Chief Goro of the Huuns to stop his attacks."

Stuart nodded.

CHIEF GORO rode up a moment later, at the head of a body of his horsemen. He was a giant of a man, with a red beard and ruddy skin, part of some Teutonic stock in that region. He and his men carried great iron swords, clumsy and crude, but giving them a decided advantage against their enemies' wooden clubs and spears and stone-headed maces. The Stone Age, utilizing the magic of metal.

Chief Goro dismounted and stood with straddled legs, point of his sword on the ground. Defiance radiated from him. Stuart drew himself up. Intimidation was fatal before a tribal chief.

"You are the aggressor in this border war, Chief Goro," he said sternly. "You have disobeyed Lord Stirnye's edict against border-war and metal weapons both. You may remain chief only if you swear to instantly stop your campaign."

Chief Goro spat.

"My campaign goes on!" he rumbled. "I do not fear Lord Stirnye. And I will have nothing to do with his World-State."

Stuart started. It was outright defiance, the first in twenty-five years. Other border-battles had started here and there, only to stop with one application of the blasting underjets of a plane or two.

"A fleet of ships will come, and patrol your state," Stuart threatened. "And you will be deposed as chief."

"They will get tired of patrolling. And they won't find me!"

Stuart argued no more.

"Lord Stirnye will hear of this and—"

Chief Goro roared out in harsh laughter suddenly.

"Will he?"

The atmosphere was instantly ugly. Stuart was suddenly aware that Chief Goro's men were closing in. Outnumbered, the Garian soldiers could only fall back. No weapon had been used as yet.

"Leave with your men, Czocky," Chief Goro bellowed. "I'll finish with you on the battlefield."

He turned to Stuart and Elda, now surrounded by his men.

"You will be my hostage, Lord Stuart. And the girl—"

His eyes were on her brazenly.

Stuart stood stunned. Chief Goro was a maniac, but a cunning one. No atrocity would be beneath him. Then Stuart gasped, in greater surprise.

Elda Tane had stepped forward. Her lissome body swayed and the full power of her eyes were on Chief Goro. Fascinated, he was watching her, caught in her spell. She smiled, as though attracted to this giant of a man who wanted her. She finally stood directly before him, as if about to throw herself into his arms.

Instead, her arm came out and she slapped the bearded chief stingingly.

"Beast!" she snapped. The smile had vanished from her face, replaced by livid fury.

One hand went to the chief's face, in amazed but not unpleased surprise.

"The woman has spirit," he chuckled. "I like that—"

WITH a quickness and strength that took him by surprise again, Elda snatched the sword-handle from his other hand. It was a heavy sword. Yet she swung it up deftly, placing the point against his chest.

"Move and you die!" Her voice was in deadly earnest.

Only a second had passed. The chief's men strained forward.

Elda tossed her coppery head warningly.

"Back! Or you will need a new chief."

Chief Goro himself signaled them back. Her blazing eyes spoke one word—death. He was pale now, trembling.

"Tell your men to go," Elda commanded.

For emphasis, she pressed against the sword, nicking into the hide covering his chest. He gave the order, with the fear of death in his voice.

When the troop had ridden a hundred yards off, Elda pulled back the sword. But only to raise it over the defenseless chief's head, ominously.

"Swine!" she hissed. "If you had dared touch me, my father, Lar Tane, would have burned down your villages, hunted down your people to the last child. He would have caught you and cut out your eyes and heart."

The sword quivered above the quaking chief's head. She was like a queen, imperious and cold, about to chop off the head of a disgraced subject. Stuart leaped to grab the sword away. But she lowered it of her own accord.

"Go with your life, Redbeard," she said contemptuously. "Go on with your little border-war, if you wish. Lord Stuart neglected to tell you something. My father, Lar Tane, is from the past, as is Lord Stirnye. He brought with him a mighty weapon. One that can burn whole villages. Do you understand? Now go!"

The cowed chief nodded soberly and loped off to his men.

INSIDE the ship, safe behind metal walls, Elda's green eyes glazed a trifle. For a moment she trembled in Stuart's arms, weak, frightened, feminine. Stuart was more amazed at this than anything. But only for a moment. Then she drew away, face composed.

"Well, that's that," she laughed.

"What if he had moved, before?" Stuart felt he had to know. "Would you have—"

"Killed him? Yes." She shrugged.

Stuart shuddered. Then he asked, "That weapon. Your father really has it?"

She studied him for a moment.

"Of course not. But I don't think Chief Redbeard will call that bluff either."

Stuart shook his head.

"You know, you shouldn't have used such brutal threat—"

There was sudden fury in her eyes. Fury directed at him.

"Don't you see how these people must be handled? Not gently—but with a heavy hand. It's the only thing they understand. They're Stone Age barbarians. They were ready to harm us. How can you handle a world of them except by threat—as your father does subtly? And the feudal Narticans before him, for hundreds of years. World-State democracy! A pitiful dream in your father's mind!"

Stuart thought of defending his father. But sharply in his mind was the picture of Chief Goro, eyes inflamed, ready to kill—or worse. There were hundreds of Chief Goros, throughout Earth, and the people who produced them. Could they understand anything but the sword, any more than Goro?

Fury was replaced by mockery, in her voice.

"Your father says—"

Stuart flushed. She was prompting him, expecting him to say something trite. But there was another picture in his mind. Elda, like an outraged queen, sparing her subject's life. She had been wonderful, glorious.

"Elda!" His voice was low.

She was in his arms, then. Her lips burned against his. He was dimly aware of her murmur, a moment later.

"We'll rule Earth together, you and I."

He drew away, looking at her. Then he turned and piloted the ship himself. The pace of the plane was not more headlong than the new drive in his heart and mind. He realized that for better or worse something had changed within him.

Back in Vinna, Lar Tane laughed when he heard the story.

"Well done, Elda." He faced Stuart seriously. "In the light of an experience like that, is World-State democracy the answer? Chief Redbeard and all the other chiefs from Stone Age stupidity up will block the way. They must be lined up—by force!"

"No, not yet," Stuart groaned. "I want to think—think!"

"But think for yourself," Tane admonished. "Not as your father has thought for you, all your life. You are fit to rule, Stuart—rule a world empire. You and Elda. One that will grow great and strong and lasting."

He and Elda! Stuart thrilled to that, as his plane soared away. But not yet. He had made no decision, He must think carefully, he told himself, and continue plodding among the tribes. He did, for another month, preaching democracy with words that seemed to have lost all meaning.

CHAPTER X

Voice from the Past

IN THE radio station at Gibraltar, Perry Knight and Aran Deen prepared to send voice signals across the Atlantic. Their staff of helpers were at the various dials. Electricity leaped and surged through coils and tubes.

Perry stepped before the microphone, as the prearranged time arrived. His eyes glistened in scientific zeal. Like the telephones in use, the instrument was crude, undeveloped, but serviceable. It would hurl his voice across what was yet a Stone Age world, and the wonder would not be less than if it were 5000 B.C. instead of 5000 A.D.

"Hello, America!" he began, enunciating clearly. "Hello, America! Can you hear me, Dad? If you can, call back immediately."

For a moment there was only the crackle of static from the receiving horn. Perry fidgeted.

Had his voice been lost somewhere, over the ocean, too weak to reach its goal? The dot-and-dash signals had been comparatively easy to achieve. Voice was another matter, taking more power, more delicacy of attunement.

Would there have to be weeks and months more of laboring, improving, experimentation? The simpler things of the 20th century had been resurrected only by heartbreaking toil. Was transatlantic radio—projection of actual voice—a little beyond their present powers?

Perry had gone through the same breathless suspense many times, awaiting the debut of a new-old invention. He remembered now how tricky the telegraph had been to produce, before they had joyfully tapped out the message—"What hath God wrought!"—for the second time in history.

Perry started violently as a voice sounded behind the static. It was a weird, howling voice, but understandable.

"Hello, Europe! Hello, Europe! I heard you clearly, Perry. Am I coming over?"

"Yes, Dad! And congratulations! What a great thing you've given the world again, with your 20th century knowledge!"

"How about your tantalum-grid tube?" came Knight's voice quickly. "It gave us the high-power range we needed. I didn't get that from my memory, or the crypt-records. I'm proud of you, Perry!"

At the side, old Aran Deen grinned, half indignantly.

"What about me? History will credit all three of us, in this revival of science."

"Thanks, Dad," Perry returned.

And then, because the moment was so unique, he went on with a rush of enthusiasm.

"Transatlantic speech, by radio! Instant linkage of thought across Earth's face. I'm going to build many more stations, everywhere. Human thought will be unified, in the new World-State. It didn't work that way in your time, dad, because radio came after scientific war. Now it comes before. There isn't a gun on Earth, and already we have the means of yelling friendly greetings from continent to continent. This age won't follow Greece and Rome and your time to self-inflicted oblivion!"

Aran Deen listened with something of wonder.

Almost, this keen-minded son of Stirnye knew more of past history than Stirnye or Aran Deen! Even as a boy he had buried his nose in all the preserved books of the crypt, and the libraries of Nartica. And he had plagued his father ceaselessly with questions about his 20th century. He had turned to science quite naturally, later. He was the first of a race of scientists springing forth from the Second Stone Age.

Aran Deen always thought in sweeps of history. And history was studded with little moments like this.

And moments like the one that followed.

PERRY turned away from the microphone, to look directly into the eyes of Elda Tane. He was startled. He hadn't heard her plane arrive, in the crackling of electrical apparatus.

She stood in the doorway, a vision of beauty. Beauty that would stir the hearts of most men. Light rippled from her copper-gold hair as though it were blown by a stealthy breeze. Her green eyes sparkled enigmatically.

"A pretty little speech," she said, gliding forward. Her red lips pouted a little. "You didn't visit us, so I've come to visit you. Is your science work so vital?"

"I believe it is," Perry said simply. He added, lamely, "I've always sent my respects with Stuart." The girl laughed.

"Don't you ever relax? World-building must be tedious at times."

"Never. It's my life work. I believe in it."

She sobered suddenly, peering into his grey eyes.

"You really do, don't you?" Her tone became musing. "I wonder what you would have been in my world, where all science had reached a peak. Striven for higher peaks, I suppose."

Perry laughed this time.

"No. I would have been a revolutionist — against dictatorship. Your century was at a blind alley."

Elda stiffened, emerald eyes snapping as though at a personal affront. "We had a World-State—"

"For five short years. It was tyranny. It cracked apart. Like Rome, it went under into a Dark Age. It was built on sand."

The girl bit her lip.

"You and Stuart are building on rock, of course!"

"The rock of democracy," Perry nodded, without self-consciousness.

"Rocks split at times—" At Perry's stare, she tossed her coppery locks, on which the light glinted metallically. "For a scientific mind, you're quite a philosopher. But still, behind it all, you must be human."

Perry suddenly lost his tongue, at the note of mockery in her voice. Human, yes, or he wouldn't be admiring her. She was ivory and gold, and intangible charm, woven into sheer perfection along with the twin emeralds of her eyes. More, behind the outer things were fire, courage, daring—and intelligence.

Perry started. Intelligence! Why had she come here? Hardly as a woman. She was deeper than that. Those questions—had she been testing him, sounding him out? But why?

Perry's analytical thoughts went that far before a drone sounded from the sky.

The plane landed, and Stuart strode in.

He glanced hesitantly at Elda, but without surprise. His direction had been north, from Lar Tane. She had preceded him. Then, with a bare word of greeting to Perry, he asked for radio contact with

America.

Even the chance to use words instead of code failed to surprise him. After a greeting to the elder Knight in New York, Stuart spoke swiftly.

"We'll swing Europe, at the best, by a narrow margin. But suppose we don't, father? Suppose the World-State is voted down?"

The voice of Stirnye, Lord of Earth, came back calmly.

"Then we'll try again, when the time is riper. Nothing is lost."

"SOMETHING will be lost," Stuart returned, with a savage undertone. "My faith in humanity! The tides of ignorance and stubbornness I've fought against! Each little hide-bound state clamoring for more rights than the next. Even if the World-State is formed, the battle goes on."

"Of course!" Knight spared no punches. "A lifetime of work lies ahead of you, Stuart. I've warned you often, groomed you for it. From the tribal rule of the Stone Age to World-State democracy is a big jump. Bigger than history ever tried."

"But there is a simpler way at first." Stuart's voice became tense. "A logical extension of your rule, as Lord of Earth. Instead of Lord of Earth, a premier or chancellor, with a handpicked cabinet. The best minds to guide and advise. And a parliament of delegates from the tribal-states."

Voice from the past, pouring poison into the ears of the future! Perry listened, stunned.

"Stuart!" snapped the voice from America. "Do you know what the name of that is —*dictatorship!*"

"Lar Tane calls it World Empire Socialism."

A groan came from Knight.

"What has he been telling you? Lar Tane is from an age that destroyed itself."

"Lar Tane—"

Stuart paused. Then his youthful but flint-hard voice went on.

"Lar Tane is a man I admire!"

A gasp came from the radio speaker, and then the bark of Knight's voice.

"Stuart, you're mad! I'm coming to Europe. I'll meet you in eight hours."

Stuart turned away from the microphone. He trembled a little. He was thinner, older looking. There was a brooding look about him, as of a mind that had suffered reversals of conception.

Perry grasped his shoulder.

"You can't mean you're throwing over all our plans, Stuart! The Magna Charta and all it means. Think of the future, not the present—"

"The future takes care of itself." It was Elda's voice. She stood beside Stuart, her green eyes narrowed. "Come with me, Stuart. We'll meet your father at Vinna."

"Stuart—"

But Perry's call was lost. Stuart strode away with her, face set. She glanced once over her shoulder—triumphantly. And Perry knew now why she had come. To wield her spell and make sure of Stuart.

Aran Deen was staring at the radio, shaking his head.

"True irony. The first achievement of radio voice, after an age, and the first words it transmits are those of trouble."

Perry nodded bleakly. What staggering twist of fate had come about?

Eight hours later a plane landed, and Knight stepped out. When he learned of Stuart returning to Vinna, he winced.

"Lar Tane is playing some game, with Stuart as a pawn," he said grimly. "I didn't realize his magnetic power."

"Or the power of green eyes," mumbled old Aran Deen. "Perry and I are going along, Stirnye. This is history!"

THEIR plane rocketed down a while later, over the ruins of ancient Vinna. And there, in the heart of it, reared a shining tower of new metal. Beside it, they recognized Stuart's grounded plane.

"Look!" Aran Deen pointed.

The top of the tower was encircled by an open balcony. They made out the figure standing there—Lar Tane. He looked up, with arms folded, as though awaiting their arrival. Then he vanished within.

"Strange, that tower in the center of the ruins," Aran Deen muttered. "Perhaps a ruling palace stood there in the 30th century!"

The subtle innuendo of it struck Knight's mind. A breath out of the past, dark and sinister, seemed to envelop the scene. Among the surrounding ruins, gangs of Triber workmen were clearing away debris. There was a regimented air about them. Overseers stood at strategic spots, seeing that the work progressed. They carried clubs.

Rage and dread both welled in Knight. What had been going on here, all this time? What did it mean?

The plane landed before the gleaming tower. As they stepped out, a dozen men in dull blue shirts marched forward. In their belts hung bright new swords of metal. Knight's face darkened.

One of the men saluted stiffly, his whole bearing a token of months of rigorous training and discipline. Breath of the past again—a police force with military training.

"Lord Stirnye. You and the others will follow us, to the presence of Lord Tane."

Lord Tane! It was that now.

The troop double-filed forward, with the visitors between. They were ushered down a curving hall, prim and unadorned, into a central chamber with a lofty arched ceiling.

Lar Tane sat in a raised chair at the head of a long table. Stuart stood at his right, Elda at his left. The escort left and the door closed. Knight sensed that they stood outside, on guard.

CHAPTER XI Men Who Rule

LAR TANE was staring at them with a faint smile of greeting. "My temporary home and headquarters, Stuart Knight," he said. "The metal from the Rhine plant. Built by Triber labor. But mere patchwork, really. I had it built here, where a palace used to stand, out of sheer sentiment. This table is a replica of a council table. Two thousand years ago, this was the center of rule, not New York."

Aran Deen was staring, wonderingly.

Knight conquered the violence that strove to burst from his throat. He spoke quietly.

"I appointed you administrator of the Rhine powerplant, Lar Tane. But with no other authority. From Stuart's reports, you applied regimentary methods at the plant, and extended them here."

"I've organized the Vinna tribe, and others, if that's what you mean," Lar Tane retorted easily. "Chief Hal Doth is convinced I've done good among his people. There is a more vigorous spirit."

"You've regimented the young men," accused Knight. "Trained them in military fashion."

"As a nucleus policing force for the World-State, *ja*."

"You've made metal weapons—swords. My edict against border warfare forbade that."

"They are a symbol, mainly. There must be *some* show of force to the people."

Knight realized this was a different Lar Tane from the one who had left him five months before. A Lar Tane who even in that short time had entrenched himself in the 50th century. But what, precisely, were his aims?

Knight continued the mental duel, drawing his adversary out. The atmosphere was charging with the electricity of tenseness.

"Stuart has seen much of you. You've made suggestions different from mine for the World-State."

"Valuable suggestions, I believe. We both agree, you and I, that there should be a World-State. The question is—what *kind*?"

"My kind," Knight asserted flatly. "The only enduring kind."

"Democracy! The experiment that failed." Lar Tane's tone was biting. His mask of suavity vanished suddenly. "It won't work, Knight. It's clumsy, slow, ponderous. It will stumble over its own feet."

"Yes, but it will never run blindly over a precipice."

Lar Tane snorted.

"Pretty words. There must be a central ruling body, subject to no dragging ties. A parliament of tribal delegates, for voicing opinion, but no more. The actual law-making invested in a cabinet of acknowledged leaders, and their executive chancellor. That is the kind of government that will lead this backward world to greater things."

"To chaos!" Knight snapped. "Doesn't the lesson of the past warn you at all? A dictator, with a puppet cabinet and parliament of trained seals. At first progress, vigor, advancement. Then the dictator begins to play god. A brute heritage, older than man, crops out. Chaos, I tell you."

"You belie your own words. You've been a dictator—a beneficent one."

"The illusion of a dictator," Knight countered. "I built up no power-system. The past is buried. Force as a ruling method in human affairs must not be born again."

Aran Deen had been straining forward, like a hound on a scent.

"Chancellor—" he said reflectively. He looked at Lar Tane and Elda, recognition at last in his eyes. "It has come to me. Your names are historical, in ancient records. Lar Tane, Elda! But you were known as *Chancellor* Lar Tane: You were the head of the government that ruled the short-lived World Empire, from 2902 to 2907. You were, in effect, the Emperor of Earth for five years!"

LAR TANE had arisen, his short figure stiff. His head was lifted, imperiously. For a moment, his eyes faraway and reminiscent, he stood before them as a king might before his subjects. His thoughts seemed to survey an empire that had been his. An empire stretching from pole to pole.

Abruptly, he unbent. A slow, ironic smile came to his lips as he faced Knight.

"The ruler of a world that once was pays homage to the ruler of Earth to-day!"

He went on, after a pause.

"Revolutionists captured Vinna in 2907. Sacked the city, destroyed my work. *Shrecklich!* The rabble were after our lives, Elda and I. A year before I'd had the vault built secretly—in case. We exiled ourselves from our time."

He shrugged, and the bitterness of that past episode faded from his eyes. A burning fire leaped into them.

"I'm glad, now. My World Empire of the 30th century had no chance, with weapons a commonplace. But here in the 50th century—the world lies ready for empire."

Knight was staring, thunderstruck.

Slowly he turned to his eldest son. "Did you know of this, Stuart?" Stuart nodded, and spoke for the first time.

"I was told this morning. It gave me my final decision." His voice was low but firm. "Lar Tane has plans that will launch an industrial program with a minimum of delay. With his 30th century experience, he can rebuild civilization rapidly, as First Chancellor. I will be his successor!"

Stuart paused, then flung up his head.

"One other thing. I'm sorry for Leela, but she must forget me."

He had stepped to Elda's side and taken her hand. She gazed up at him softly, her green eyes lustrous as emeralds. They were a striking couple:— two young eagles ready to soar.

Knight's universe staggered.

And suddenly, it was like a lightning flash in the dark. The full cheapness of Lar Tane's plan lay exposed. Hopping from one age to the next, he was taking up where he had left off. His wolf's soul was bare now, lusting for power. He had weakened Stuart with his verbal poison, and ensnared him completely with Elda.

"Green eyes," Aran Deen hissed. "The green eyes of a witch! They have made fools of us all."

"Stuart!" Knight half groaned, taking a step toward his son. "You can't mean it, Stuart. Don't you see how you've been betrayed? You're lost—lost!"

Stuart shook a little. He took a step forward also, but Elda's hand gently pulled him back. He stiffened. His voice was adamant.

"You've never let me think for myself, father. I do now. I'm sorry."

Lar Tane spoke in cold triumph.

"You'd better capitulate, Stirnye, Lord of Earth. Without Stuart, your World-State falls."

Knight gripped himself. "Capitulate—to treason? I'll have you arrested—"

Tane jerked a bell-cord. Instantly, the doors flung open and Chief Hal Doth marched in, at the head of a dozen blue-shirted men with swords.

"Tell Chief Hal Doth to arrest me," Lar Tane drawled.

Knight stared. The chief stared back, at first guiltily, then drawing himself up.

"Stirnye, you are no longer my lord!" "Go on," prompted Tane. "Tell him why you accept me as your lord." Chief Hal Doth wetted his lips and went on.

"Lar Tane is my lord. I am his vassal, for he ruled these same lands and waters 2000 years ago. And in a few months he has done more than you, Stirnye, did in twenty-five years. My people have cleaner villages, and metal hunting weapons. There is a more vigorous spirit. My young men are trained. Lord Tane will lead the way to great things quickly. *Heil!*"

Quickly, like mushrooms. Civilization overnight. Stone Age society in 20th century surroundings. Square peg in a round hole.

Knight's shoulders sagged. No use to argue. Chief Hal Doth was blinded in the light of Lar Tane. Tane dismissed the chief.

KNIGHT drew himself up. "I'm still Lord of Earth. I declare your activities outlaw. Your rebellion will be put down."

"By force?" mocked Lar Tane. "But that is a thing you renounced."

"It is necessary."

Lar Tane's face hardened. Suavity was gone.

"It's more than rebellion, Knight. I control all the chiefs of northern and middle Europe. And I have a hundred thousand young men trained, ready for my bidding."

"Then I declare you an enemy state!" Knight went on coldly. "I'm returning to New York. I give you twenty-four hours to renounce your opposition. Tell me of your decision by radio."

The eyes of Stuart Knight and Lar Tane locked. Two men who had ruled separate worlds, and now battled for a third.

Knight's glare dared the other to hold him. Tane shook his head.

"You're free to go, Knight," he said shrewdly. "I won't make you a martyr and bring the world about my ears."

Knight swept his eyes over the three of them, impersonally. For just a moment he met Stuart's eyes. They stared at one another across a gulf of misunderstanding.

Knight's voice was low, harsh.

"You know what this means, Lar Tane, if you go on—"

Knight said the appalling word, though it was like tearing his soul up by the roots.

"*War!*"

CHAPTER XII Man of Two Ages

TWENTY-FOUR hours later, in the radio station at New York, the group huddled before the radio speaker waited silently, tensely.

Perry listened to the crackle of static, and told himself he would some day eliminate it. Old Aran Deen nodded to himself, mumbling the word "history" at times. Leela sat pale and wooden, like any girl of any age struck by the blow of lost love.

Knight's blonde Nartican wife kept anxious eyes on him. He had returned from Europe in a state of near-collapse.

Knight was haggard. His heart pounded, measuring off time, his enemy.

It leaped, sickeningly, as a voice sounded through the howls of static.

"Lar Tane is here," announced the head of the staff at the Gibraltar station.

"Can you hear me clearly, Knight?" came Tane's rich-toned voice. "This apparatus seems crude."

"Yes, clearly." Knight drew a breath. "Well, Lar Tane. Have you thought better of it?"

Prosaic words. Yet hanging from every one were the hooks of destiny.

"Have *you?*?" countered the voice from Europe. "I made my stand quite clear."

"That's your final word, Tane?" "Final. This, to me, is Der Tag!" Pulses thundering, Knight spoke the words.

"Then, as Lord of Earth, I hereby declare war on you, Lar Tane!"

The radio-speaker was silent for a long moment.

"No!" The word came like a pistol shot, in Stuart's voice. "Father, you can't go that far in your stubbornness!"

Knight gripped a table for support. Within him, it seemed his heart would burst. Hurriedly, he made a last appeal.

"I must, Stuart. But you—leave Lar Tane I Come back to us—" He was panting.

Again silence. Then:

"No, father. I didn't think it would come to this. But I believe in Lar Tane's world. I'm on his side, since there must be sides now."

"Or the side of a green-eyed witch," Aran Deen hissed.

Lar Tane's voice burst from the speaker.

"War! All right, Knight." His voice was deadly. "Attack me. I'm strong. And I'll be stronger. I'll sweep your armies back, conquer Europe, then the world. You can't stop me."

Knight made no answer. Drunkenly, he staggered from the radio, collapsed. When the Nartican doctor had injected, his eyes opened wearily. They all saw the shadow in them.

"No, can't stop him," Knight whispered. "I'm going. There is no one left to lead." He groaned from the bottom of his soul. "No one left to lead."

"No one left?" Old Aran Deen's voice was shrill. "Stirnye, there is your son Perry."

"Perry? But he isn't a leader."

Aran Deen slowly shook his head.

"How blind you've been, Stirnye! Perry *is* the leader. Stuart never was. Leaders are born, not made. Look at Perry. Look at him, Stirnye. He is *you!*"

Knight looked, and was startled.

It was himself, of twenty-five years ago. The same rugged face, and level grey eyes that could dream or turn flint-hard. They reflected a mind both visionary and scientific. And something more. An indefinable quality lurked somewhere in him, a hidden strength that had not yet been put to test. But would now.

Knight's dying spirit rallied. He clutched his son's hand.

"Yes, I see it now. Listen to me, Perry. Gather an army. Smash Lar Tane flat, before he is too strong. If you must, smash Stuart with him. What they represent must be stamped out ruthlessly. You're the hope of the future, Perry—of an age to come. Do you hear me, Perry?"

Perry nodded, silently.

Knight made a gesture.

"I proclaim you, Perry Knight, my second son—the Lord of Earth!"

His arm fell back, as though the effort had drained his ebbing strength. Once more his dry lips moved, almost soundlessly.

"Dearest—where are you—?"

His wife was holding his other hand. The dimming eyes saw her, and saw something else.

"Silva, you would have loved Central Park in the spring.

The voice trailed to nothingness. The features relaxed. He had known birth in the 20th century—and death there too.

Stuart Knight, man of two ages, had passed into all the ages.

PERRY arose, staring down at the body. He hardly heard the sobbing of his mother and Leela. He heard only the reverberating words—"I proclaim you Lord of Earth!"

An invisible burden leaped from the still form to his young shoulders. The mantle of leadership. And the baton of war.

For a moment Perry trembled, weak, afraid, appalled. He was a scientist, a student, not a leader and war-chief. He felt like running away, back to his quiet laboratory, where he had dreamed of a new world. But dreams were dreams, unless they were made to come true.

And abruptly, Perry straightened, squared his shoulders.

He stepped before the microphone, calling the Gibraltar station. Only a minute had passed. The heart-stroke had been deadly swift. Stuart answered. "Father is dead," Perry said softly. "His heart."

"I—I thought so," Stuart's voice was hollowly quiet, but edged as though he controlled himself by will alone. "I heard a few words. Perry, do you believe I—killed him? Perry, I—"

Hysteria trembled in his tone.

"No. It was inevitable. But you robbed him of a peaceful death." Appeal crept into Perry's voice. "Let's stop all this madness. Come back, Stuart!"

Perry sensed that at that moment his brother was close to remorse for what he had done. Perhaps close to seeing the light.

"No." The word came back firmly, and Perry knew that the magic spell of Elda still held him.

Lar Tane's voice sounded.

"Yes, let's stop this madness. Your father meant well, but now he's dead. You can have a place in my government, Herr Perry. A high place!"

Perry smiled grimly.

"The Lord of Earth declared war on you, Lar Tane. I'm Lord of Earth now."

"I see." Tane's tone was a shrug. "It will be a game. What do you know of war? But we will have to leave now. Your staff of men here are muttering, eyeing my guard. I go back to Vinna, future capital of Earth!"

PERRY turned away from the radio, face drawn. Yes, what did he know of war? Again, an appalling fear and sense of helplessness struck him.

"Aran Deen, it's a mistake. I can't do it. I'm only 23—"

Panic-stricken words.

"Your father was only 23 when he went to Nartica, to end their oligarchy —by threat of war if necessary," grunted the old seer. "There was one pitched battle, you remember. Several thousands killed. Stirnye won—won the world."

Stirnye, leader, war-lord, conqueror, at 23!

Perry's last moment of doubt vanished. Lord of Earth—he was that now. Faintly, he heard the tramp, tramp, tramp of marching feet, and the clarion bugles of war.

The spark had been lighted, to the seething fires of war. Where and when would it stop?

A WEEK later, the funeral of Stirnye was a grand and yet simple affair. The news had flown around Earth, by word of mouth, by the single telegraph line across Eurasia, and by plane. The death of Stirnye, and the war. Two such stupendous events had not happened for twenty-five years.

His body was laid to rest in the crypt north of New York. In the stone vault in which he had survived, a living fossil, for thirty centuries. One by one people filed past the bier, gazing at the face of the man who had changed history. Though stolid by tradition, many of the Tribers hung their heads in genuine sorrow. Women wept.

Most of the native population were there, in the valley on the Hudson, and many from outlying American tribes. A contingent of Narticans stood together, having flown from that distant land. A delegation from Europe had come, and one from eastern Asia, from Africa and South America, wherever powerplant sites had been cleared and Nartican planes were available.

Aran Deen delivered the funeral address.

"The whole world mourns. Stirnye, Lord of the Past, sojourned among us all too briefly. Champion of humanity, he struck free the chains of our Dark Age heritage. He dragged my home land of Nartica from decadence. He taught the vast Triber world to think in terms of brotherhood. Like a harbinger of glory, he pointed the way to a new and higher civilization."

Aran Deen's voice changed.

"But his task is not done. He had only one lifetime. Today, a sinister cloud lies over Earth. In Europe another survivor from the past has arisen, like a Sphinx of evil. His doctrines are blind, selfish, ruthless. We need our champion, Stirnye, as never before. And he is with us, reborn! The body of Stirnye lies dead, but not his spirit. It lives again.

"Here is our new Stirnye, Lord of Earth, even though his name is Perry, not Stuart!"

Perry flinched, before the wild cheers of the crowd. As on the day of the Magna Charta, his tongue stuck. He had never addressed a crowd in his life. He was panic-stricken, horribly frightened. He was ready to run—for a moment.

Then, with the dead face of his father before him, courage oozed back. His voice rang over the clear air.

"People of Earth! My father preached a warless world. I will have the same goal. This is not a war against Lar Tane, but a crusade against the evil he brought with him. It must be crushed relentlessly. After that, I promise you peace and civilization."

That was all. The simple text struck home. The crowd's ovation showed their ready acceptance of the term crusade.

"Hail, Perry, new Lord of Earth!"

The cry arose spontaneously. Here and there a voice yelled "Stirnnye" instead of "Perry." But the crowd did not take it up. That was something to be earned, that near-sacred name, bestowed on his father as a contraction of "Stuart Knight," and since come to be almost a new title engraved in 50th century language.

One by one the various contingents strode up, in simple ceremony, pledging allegiance to Perry as their new First Lord. The European contingent showed its embarrassment.

"We cannot speak for all of Europe. But we speak for all the western and southern tribes. We offer our fealty to you, Lord Perry. We will do all we can to defeat our enemy, Lar Tane."

Perry felt an uplift of spirit. The whole world was back of him, except for the territory within the sphere of Lar Tane's personal magnetism. The war would be short, if terrific. Perry made a grim vow. He would smash at Lar Tane with all he had. Blitzkrieg—his father had told of that.

Perry did not think of Stuart. It was not pleasant to think of brother against brother.

PERRY had a war plan within a week, while the news was still penetrating, by the grapevine of gossip, to remote corners of Earth that war had been declared.

His problem was simply stated—to storm through central Europe. Capture Vinna, tribal-seat of Lar Tane's embryo empire.

But first, capture of the Rhine powerplant. It was Tane's only source of metal, for arming a growing legion. Gibraltar was in Perry's hands. All the European tribes below the Rhine and around to the end of the Mediterranean were loyal to him, as they had been to his father. They had helped make up, twenty-five years ago, a fleet that sailed for Nartica.

They helped make up an armada now. From fishing boats to large vessels that had sailed the seven seas in trade. They gathered in the harbor of what had been ancient Spain. Aboard, sailors and recruits tested bows and spears and stone-axes. Standard hunting weapons in the Second Stone Age, all Tribers knew their use from boyhood on.

Perry did not take time to train for maneuvers. The motley horde of a thousand ships straggled out in long lines, sailing for the mouth of the Rhine, like an armada of old Spain.

"We must strike, and strike fast," Perry told Aran Deen. "Before Lar Tane builds up his defenses. Time works for him and against us."

The old seer had insisted on being his aide, even in action, despite his years. He nodded.

"You have an analytical mind, Perry. But I'm afraid Lar Tane has, too."

A sign of it appeared. A plane droned over the armada the second day out. It circled, as though counting the ships. Finally it dipped over Perry's flagship, in the van. Daringly, it skimmed past the mainmast, almost touching a sail. There was nothing to fear from it, for bombs were unknown.

But Perry received a shock. He saw the flash of a coppery head through the pilot windshield. Elda Tane's head of hair! The undersurfaces of the wing were painted with an imperial emblem of the 30th century—the swastika.

Then the plane raced back toward Vinna. And when they came to the Dover Straits, a line of ships eased over the horizon, blocking the way. Hundreds of them, in a phalanx.

"I thought so," grunted Aran Deen. "The plane was a scout. Lar Tane is a move ahead. He conscripted those ships from the coast tribes of all the north. If we sail around the British Isles, his armada will meet us there. Well, Perry?"

Perry drew a breath of salt air. "We attack!" he said.

The first battle signal of the war was given. From crow's nest to crow's nest flew the signal, by waving of a banner. Ships tacked into the Straits, toward the line of waiting ships.

Perry's flagship was still in the lead. Straddling his legs against the roll of the deck, he bent his longbow. In his boyhood, he and Stuart had been deft in the hunt with that weapon. The arrow arced across the water and pierced the sail of the nearest ship.

The first shot of the war!

Perry was struck by the wonder of it. Yesterday a peaceful builder. Today, a warrior. Fate had made a tremendous switch in his life. It seemed unreal.

Suddenly, like a thunderclap, the real battle began. Perry's ships closed in and arrows flew with a whine. Above the whine sounded the hoarse shouts of men, with the spirit of battle awakened. And above the shouts began to sound the screams and groans of wounded and dying.

Perry was suddenly sick, appalled. He had hoped the defenders wouldn't actually fight. That this was all some monstrous joke. But obviously the magnetic power of Lar Tane had inspired them in his cause.

The war was on!

CHAPTER XIII Marching Men

THE unreality faded. This was real; terribly real. Blood was spilling; men were dying. And for what? For a mad moment, Perry wanted to shout and scream for them to stop. For his ships to leave. Was anything worth this brutal orgy of death?

The dead face of his father appeared in his mind. The eyes opened and the lips moved.

"I had to do the same, my son. I had to drench my soul with blood though I had never before seen a human being killed. Bring peace through the paradox of war, or threat of war. You are fighting a real war. And you are fighting evil. It is a good fight."

An arrow went by his ear with a deadly *whing*, to bury itself in the throat of a man at the back. In a deadly rage, Perry notched an arrow and let fly at the enemy ship, no more than a hundred feet off. Again and again he shot. He saw a man fall, on that other ship, with his arrow in his chest.

This was war! At last he realized it.

From that moment on, Perry dropped entirely his hesitancy, vacillation. The old Perry of the quiet laboratory was gone, at least temporarily. He took up the role of warlord wholeheartedly. Yes, it was a good fight.

Aran Deen pulled him back from the exposed deck, where the archers sent out and received death.

"Fool," the old scholar muttered. "You're needed to direct and lead, not take an arrow in your vitals. Battles are won by strategy, not just brute force."

Perry grinned.

"You're right, old man. I have much to learn about warfare."

For an hour Perry watched, and thought. With a pair of binoculars—one of the first things his father had reinvented—he surveyed the far-flung sea battle. It was a disorganized melee. There had been no large-scale war, whether on sea or land, for centuries. Both sides were experimenting, learning.

Perry suddenly gave orders to be wagged from his crow's nest. His ships began to tack back and forth, across the phalanx of defenders, raking them with arrow-fire. His ships, a moving target, had the advantage.

But the enemy quickly took up the maneuver, weaving back and forth, destroying the strategy.

In quick succession, Perry thought of ramming, then grappling and boarding. His front line of ships, under orders, rammed a dozen of the enemy amidships, overturning them. His second line caught and grappled others, and boarding parties leaped across, in hand-to-hand battle.

But almost instantly, the enemy reciprocated. The battle area became a confusion of rammed, sinking ships, and ships lashed together with blood spilling over decks as spears and stone-axes were wielded. Trading ship for ship, man for man, Perry could not win. Lar Tane had gathered as many as he.

Suddenly a line of enemy ships leaped out, circled the battle area, and came at Perry's side, to drive his fleet to shore. Perry divined the strategy in time to send counter-attack. But some guiding intelligence had sent that attack. Was it Lar Tane himself?

THEN Perry caught the glint of coppery hair, on the deck of a large enemy ship back of their lines. Elda Tane! Perry steadied his glasses. No one beside her. Evidently Stuart and Lar Tane were back in Vinna. Did they think the war so unimportant that they left it in a woman's hands?

"You tremble, Perry," observed Aran Deen. When he was told, he cackled, "So, the green-eyed witch is commander? Do not underestimate her, woman though she is. The ancient records tell a strange story. Women had taken up the profession of war, in the 30th century, alongside men. Elda Tane was commander of her father's airfleets, in that dim past, winning for him his empire!"

"What?" gasped Perry. "I don't believe it. It's a fable. You can't trust some of those old records." He laughed wildly. "She thinks it's a game. I'll show her!"

Night fell, bringing armistice.

At dawn, Perry was tense. He had his front line of ships, the biggest and heaviest, ready for a daring leap ahead. A spearhead to plow and grind its way through the central part of the phalanx.

"I'll crack that line," he said grimly. He gave the orders. "Full speed ahead. Ram through. Don't stop for anything!"

The wind was favorable. Sails bellying, the spearhead sprang forward, in a great V. But even as they neared, Perry groaned. A waiting V from the enemy came from the side. The two spearheads met, with a crash and grind that resounded horribly over the still waters. Broken apart, Perry's V lost all its momentum. The enemy phalanx was unbroken.

Elda Tane had anticipated the move. And following came a move of her own—a startling one.

Five planes droned down from the sky, wings labeled with the swastika. Lar Tane had obviously conscripted them—seized them—at the outbreak of the war, from the traffic that weaved between Nartica and the Rhine power-plant. Perry wondered what they could mean, heading down over his fleet. He soon found out.

Bundles of burning rags dropped from the planes, plopping with showers of sparks on ships' decks. Fierce flames sprang over several of the wooden vessels. Perry groaned as a dozen burned to the water's edge.

One plane swooped down over his ship. Perry cursed as he caught the glint of coppery hair again. During the night Elda had transferred from ship to plane, to lead this attack from the sky. She flew so close that he could see the mocking smile on her face, as a flame-clothed bundle of rags caught in the sails. They burst into eager flame. Fire spread swiftly, whipped to a fury by a breeze.

Perry bitterly stepped in the lifeboat that took him to another ship. A few poor devils had been burned by fiery droppings from the sails. The planes roared away, for more of their incendiary cargo. Perry thought longingly of past-age machine-guns and anti-aircraft, to hammer the insolent, low-flying planes from the sky. There were no guns in the 50th century. It was a queer war.

When he stepped on the deck of another ship, he sent orders around to keep all decks swabbed with water. No more ships would burn. But the air-raid had done incalculable harm—to morale.

As though fully aware of it, the enemy leaped to attack.

The phalanx swept forward, among his disorganized formation. Perry's men could not fight and swab decks both. When the planes reappeared, within an hour, burning rags dropped and again ships burned.

The final blow came, unawares, through the pall of smoke that swirled over the waters. A fleet of ships appeared around the headland of the British Isle. Attack from the rear! Elda Tane had sent them around.

Perry's fleet, crushed in the middle, driven inshore among shoals, threatened to become completely haphazard prey.

"Perry, there is only one thing to do—" Aran Deen was shaking his head sadly.

"I know—"

Perry called retreat.

Ingloriously, what was left of his grand armada fled from the Dover Straits for open water. Perry swallowed the bitter pill of defeat. He had lost 200 ships.

The first engagement of the war was history.

"I TOLD you, Perry," piped Aran Deen, on the way back to harbor. "She is a green-eyed Amazon."

Perry rebelled at the thought. A woman as beautiful as she, hurling the thunderbolts of war. Amazon—and Delilah. Perry pitied his brother, caught in the web of that dual nature.

Perry shook himself. He must not underestimate her any longer. There was intelligence behind her beauty—incredible daring. She must know many tricks of war, from her warlike time.

"What's next, Perry?" Arau Deen asked. "Capture of the Rhine plant by sea is out of the question. She can hold us off at the Straits indefinitely."

But Perry was suddenly sick. Excitement over, he remembered now the men falling with arrows in their hearts, men drowning, men burning, men crushed as masts fell. The reek of blood, the horrible cries, the rustle of the wings of Death. His soul shrieked against the brutal episode, his first baptism of blood.

And how many more would follow? How long would the Frankenstein monster of war stalk the world?

A plane drummed down from the clouds, circling over the limping armada. It singled out the flagship ensign and darted low. Coppery flash again! Another bomb of fire? Perry eased as only a stone bounced to the deck, wrapped in white rag-paper. The plane droned away.

Perry read the note, in a bold, angular script.

"To Perry, Lord of Earth, pro-tem: I hate a dull world. Try again. But I warn you, you won't succeed. My father's offer is still open."

It was signed: "Elda, Commander of World Empire Military."

Perry knew then, how long the war would last. Till she, and the power behind her, had been annihilated.

"I'll gather an army," he told Aran Deen grimly. "I'll attack by land. This world isn't her playground."

PERRY sat at the telegraph key, at Gibraltar, a day later. "Attention, all tribal-states!" he tapped out. "Send your able-bodied men to the Free region. Mobilization orders from Perry Knight, Lord of Earth."

Near the ruins of what had been gay Paris in another day, Perry gathered his army. They flocked in from all the southern tribes, through which his telegraph crackled the call to arms. Messenger horsemen penetrated to outlying tribal-states. From them all came the pick of their huntsmen, strong and sturdy men, skilled with weapons.

The excitement of M-day lay in the air.

Perry was a little amazed at the readiness with which the Tribers came to join the army. Hardly antipathy toward Lar Tane, who had done them no actual harm. Hardly because Perry was Lord of Earth, for they could easily have hung back.

Perry was dismayed. Was it sheer love of fighting, war?

But then he knew the true answer. These were the adventurous, restless and reckless strata of any society. The kind who, in civilization, would make good pilots, racers, and football players. His father had often said that in his 20th century, America had let off steam in competitive sports and activities, where the nations of Europe had had boys and men marching and training for battle.

Perry armed them with metal swords. At his order, the Gibraltar plant had turned these out. Perry hated to give the order. It countermanded his father's edict of twenty-five years—no metal weapons.

Instead of rails for a future railroad, and metal girders for radio towers, the presses stamped out weapons of war. Instead of the things that built, the things that destroyed. A bit of 20th century industry arming the Stone Age with new and murderous tools of battle. Grinding irony.

But Perry had to. Lar Tane had metal weapons. His Rhine plant was probably whining day and night, fashioning metal into the instruments of death.

IN SIX weeks, Perry's army was on the march. Hurry! Hurry!

The refrain beat in his mind. Lar Tane had no more than a toehold. Only a hundred tribes in central and northern Europe, who had succumbed to his spell of voice and personal magnetism, offering him their men and will to begin building an empire. Smash him, crush him, before he crept out like an octopus, to trample all the world under his military heel.

A hundred thousand men followed Perry, from a hundred different tribes. They fraternized, in the comradeship of war. Apart, by tribal traditions, they might have fought over respective tribal borders. Together, the spirit of the crusade filled them, as it had filled the diversity of crusaders in the Middle Ages.

Their war-cry, suggested by the canny Aran Deen, was
"Down with Lar Tane, tyrant of the past!"

But mostly, Perry realized they were spirited men ready for a fight. At night, around campfires, they practiced delightedly with the new swords. The clang of metal violated the vast hush of the Stone Age world.

Wagon trains of supplies rumbled behind the army. Fresh food supplies came from tribal-states they passed through, grumbling. But victimized tribal chiefs knew hungry men would be worse than men fed. Perry promised them pay, eventually, in goods from Nartica.

Hurry! Hurry!

Trivial details did not matter. While on the march he organized a skeleton staff of officers, parceling out authority. He was amazed at his own forethought, whipping the disjointed horde into the semblance of an organized fighting force.

"You have an analytical mind," Aran Deen explained it. "Scientists are soldiers without a cause. Soldiers are scientists without patience."

Perry led the way north to the Rhine powerplant. He had tried by sea. He would try by land. After that, a direct campaign to Vinna.

The first sign of the enemy appeared. Again a plane scouted over them, as over the armada, counting them. Perry cursed, having hoped to make it a total surprise. One of his own scouting planes reported at the next village. There was no sign of an enemy force protecting the Rhine plant!

"The way is open!" cried Perry, driving his army faster.

"I wonder," returned Aran Deen dubiously. "The green-eyed witch has some plan up her sleeve."

They drew close. Perry noticed one day a line of broken concrete pillars, hoary with age. Beyond, dotting the landscape, here and there, were broken piles of concrete that had once domed underground shelters.

"The old-time Maginot line," muttered Aran Deen. "Tank-traps, pillboxes, rows of forts. Further on, the great underground line itself. Relic of a folly of your father's time. He found parts of the chambers still intact. Perry—"

But Perry had let out a shout. "Look—the Rhine plant!"

It jutted over the skyline.

"We're that close—"

CHAPTER XIV

Maginot Line

THE whine of arrows sounded, suddenly. Men fell, in first columns of Perry's army. Instantly the men were alert for battle. But there was nothing to shoot at. Only cracked domes.

"They're in those!" screeched Aran Deen. "Elda is using the old Maginot Line!"

And so it proved. Perry called for battle array, and the army lumbered forward. Arrows rained from concealed vantages ahead, taking a steady toll. When they reached the first line of concrete, figures scurried back—to the next line. Again a shower of arrows. Again the stealthy enemy retreated to the next line of emplacements.

Perry was appalled, as his men's ranks were eaten into by the well-protected enemy. How deep were these ancient lines?

"Miles and miles of this!" asserted Aran Deen.

There were ten miles of it. Perry crunched through, with the Rhine plant uppermost in his mind, trying not to see how many of his men fell. Then suddenly before them were the formidable ramparts of the main line. From it came such a blast of arrows that Perry was forced to call retreat.

They were not allowed to stand.

Snipers drove them back mercilessly, till they had retreated the full ten miles again. There had been no chance to come to grips with the enemy, with swords. It had been Indian fighting, ambush, ideal from behind the widespread pill-boxes and emplacements of a forgotten war-age.

"We'll try another point," Perry decided.

Overhead droned two of the enemy planes, following and observing. When they next drove in, the same showers of arrows greeted them with singing death. Enraged, Perry led his army almost to the coast. The ubiquitous enemy was there, behind concrete domes and ruins, skipping back from line to line. Perry had already lost hundreds of men, the enemy hardly any.

"No use, Perry," Aran Deen muttered. "The lines start at the coast and follow the river, between us and the Rhine plant. I've seen the 28th century plans. We might storm through at one point, but only a remnant of our men would be left. These would be slaughtered by Elda's fresh, full troops."

Perry had to try once more. The Rhine plant, no more than twelve miles distant, shouldered against the horizon enticingly. Once he took it, half the war was won.

But could he take it?

Perry let his men rest three days. With his officers he planned an organized assault. His first line of archers spread in a long line, advancing slowly from clump to bush, with a minimum loss of men. The enemy retreated stubbornly. Within a mile of the main line of domes, the archers crept within atrow-shot and waited.

So far so good. Perry caught his breath and called for the charge.

Back of the archers came the spear-men, in two separate tides, attacking at two points. When the defenders massed at those two points, with fusillades of arrows, Perry's archers raked them with feathery death. The odds were somewhat evened.

And now was the time!

Perry gave the signal. With a thunder of hooves, his cavalry, unused till now, surged between his charging footmen, straight for the gap in the enemy line of defense. The domes were not a continuous structure. If once his cavalry horde stormed through, the enemy would be split in half.

Perry held his breath, as his cavalry swirled forward. They were close now —almost through. The enemy had had no chance to close in, to stopper the gap.

And then, magically, the enemy arose, in that apparent gap.

Like warriors sown by Jason's teeth, they sprouted from the ground. Or so it seemed. They came from underground. Two thousand and more years before, in grander wars, waiting fresh troops had thus sprang up from their bomb-proof shelters, to hurl back troops already worn out by fighting. It was the whole underlying purpose of the ancient Maginot Line.

Perry's cavalry ran into a snowstorm of arrows and spears. Men toppled like tenpins. Riderless horses wheeled, screaming and snorting, breaking the charge.

Perry screamed, too, in sheer agony of defeat.

HIS eyes caught a hated flash of copper. Elda stood there, back of her men, fearlessly. Her tall, graceful figure was limned against the distant bulk of the Rhine powerplant, like a symbol against its capture. She had a longbow in her hands and was sending out arrow after arrow herself.

She seemed to be laughing, exulting, enjoying this game of war, playing with men and lives as if they were pawns.

"The green-eyed witch," guessed Aran Deen, watching Perry's face. "She is there, exposed! If only a kind arrow would seek her out. But she would likely survive the kiss of Death himself, with her hellish charms."

Raging, Perry dropped his binoculars and snapped up his longbow. He pulled back of his ear, muscles cracking. The arrow arced up and up, high over the battleground. It struck her shoulder. Spent, it did no harm. It had been a childish gesture.

She had seen the high-flying arrow. Binoculars to her eyes, she seemed to spy Perry on top the concrete dome from which he watched the battle. Her white arms flashed and back from her came an arrow, thudding into the ground ten feet before Perry's feet.

"She is not a woman," gasped Aran Deen. "Few men could send an arrow that distance. But Perry, this is slaughter—"

PERRY started, looking back over the battle.

The enemy was now a solid line, bristling with arrow-fire that thinned his ranks of wavering footmen. The cavalry was huddled in a mass, ready to bolt.

Perry accepted defeat. Retreat was called. Ten miles back, safe from pillbox snipers, camp was pitched. Night fell, and to Perry it was like a night of future despair.

The second major campaign of the war was over. Perry had lost 4,000 men. Lar Tane had won again. Lar Tane? Elda! Perry began to think of it as almost a personal war between himself and the emerald-eyed Amazon from a past age.

"But she didn't defeat me!" Perry stormed, pacing up and down beside a camp-fire in a frenzy of concern and impatience. "It was the Maginot Line. Without that, I'd have crushed her, in open battle. I had no chance to come to grips with her!"

Aran Deen nodded.

"She reached into the past to defeat you. After your father's time, alternately, two traditional powers tried for decades to smash that line, failing. The Rhine plant is impregnable behind it."

Perry bit his lip.

"Yes," he admitted bitterly, "I see that now. All right, that's that. The first part of my war plan is canceled. The second becomes necessary—striking for Vinna itself. Taking over Lar Tane's self-styled ruling center. A knife in his empire's heart. Tomorrow we'll march east—toward Vinna. In open battle, it's just a matter of grinding through—"

Aran Deen broke in.

"Have you forgotten how far the ancient Maginot Line runs?" he asked quietly.

Perry started.

"How far?"

"All the way from here along the Rhine to the mountains of Swizlan, for 600 miles. We're completely blocked off from the west!"

Perry pondered that, appalled. Hurry! Hurry! The drive of time still beat in his brain. Where could he crunch through? How? By what strategy?

By dawn he had devised a plan, before the dying embers of the fire. He called his council of officers.

"Twenty thousand men will remain here, keeping the enemy occupied," he told them. "The rest will march, as secretly as possible, to where the Rhine bends deep into enemy territory. There we'll strike."

"We'll march at night, through woods. Surprise attack. The enemy can't be in force all along the Maginot Line, for hundreds of miles."

TEN days later, Perry's main army of seventy thousand reached the bend of the Rhine. Once through the Line, there would be open plains for a drive on Vinna.

At dawn, sure that he had stolen a march on Elda, Perry turned into the Line.

Like a clap of thunder, there was battle.

Arrows whistled from pill-boxes and the ramparts of saw-toothed tank-trap ruins. Perry smiled uncertainly. A few thousand men, perhaps, a sort of sentry line at this strategic bend of the Rhine. The main enemy army must still be at the mouth of the river, engaging his decoy troops.

But the resistance increased. Perry's grin became an empty grimace.

Desperately, he plowed five miles into the hail of arrows before he realized a full army faced him. Stunned, he retreated. Fully manned, the Line could not be stormed, from bitter experience.

"In the name of Heaven, how could she do it?" Perry groaned. "How could Elda know I'd strike here? None of her planes spotted our night marches."

"Spies, of course," Aran Deen shrugged. "Simple for her to slip some of her men into our ranks. We have no regulation uniform, no roll-call, no way of checking spy from soldier. Her army marched with ours, like a shadow across the river. Ah, Perry, the green-eyed witch is no fool!"

Perry knew that he was temporarily berserk, in the following days.

Under forced march, he led his army south, and rammed against the Line three more times. Elda and her army were always there. If he marched by day, her scouting planes easily followed, circling like mechanical eyes. If he marched by night, spies leaked across the river. There was no way of checking spies. A strict sentry system meant nothing, when the sentry himself might be a spy. To institute roll-call would take weeks—months!

No time for that. Three more men-draining, futile thrusts against the adamant Line, and Perry gave up. It was like trying to crack a nut with a rubber nutcracker. Mightier armies of the past had been hurled back. It was like a spring-cushion—the farther the advance, the more devastating the back-push.

PERRY came out of a daze to realize the war had assumed proportions beyond first expectations. It was not just a matter of gathering an army and smashing forward. Geography had thrust its leering face into the picture.

"I see it all now," he murmured, poring over a map of Europe. A plane had brought the Atlas, from America. Printed in the 20th century, it was still the most reliable mapping of the world of the 50th century.

Perry handled the brittle yellow pages with a sensation of awe. On page 60, Perry brocked in the Maginot Line, shaded in the Swiss Alps, and drew a line around to the head of the Adriatic Sea. It would be his line of March.

"Lar Tane is impregnable at the west," Perry summed it up. "The north is out of the question, by sea. But he is open at the east and south—"

"Not at the east," denied Aran Deen. "This 20th century map does not show it, but another 'Maginot Line' runs from the—what is it called?—Baltic Sea to the Danube."

"Yes, I remember," Perry nodded gloomily. "The great Russo-German struggle of the next century."

He blocked in a line down across the plains of long-ago Poland, to the Danube at Budapest. Then a sharp turn, and a line to the Adriatic Sea. For in the 22nd century, the Slav-Balkan Federation had dug in against invasion from the north.

"What a mad world it was," reflected Aran Deen. "Your father saw the beginning of scientific war, Lar Tane the end of it. For a thousand years, the European wolves ran each other down. And America too. Then the lights of civilization blinked out altogether. Now, at the dawn after the Dark Age, Lar Tane is once more fighting the old war!"

Perry shrugged that away.

His eyes stared at the blocked-in map.

"Lar Tane has us cut off from the Rhine to the Adriatic, and then up to the Baltic. But one spot is open. The south, between the Tyrolean Alps and the Adriatic—"

He clutched the old man's arm suddenly.

"Or was a line built there too!"

Aran Deen grinned toothlessly, at the younger man's sharp dread.

"No, not there—luckily."

Perry straightened.

"Then we attack there, for a drive on Vinna."

A plane droned down from the clouds, soon after. Again a stone bounced down at Perry's feet, wrapped in paper. He knew it was from Elda, for again he saw the coppery flash of her hair.

"To Perry, Lord of Earth, pro-tem. You have made it interesting. If I must tell you, your only chance is from the south. Your *last* chance ! Make it good. Elda."

PERRY crumpled the paper in his hand, knuckles white. "I'll make it good!" he hissed. "I'll take the mockery out of her green eyes. We'll see if she's so high and mighty when my army marches into Vinna. We'll find out if she can smile when she's a prisoner of war!"

"You hate her, don't you, Perry?" Aran Deen cackled.

"Of course I hate her," Perry snapped. "What makes you think I don't?"

"She will have to be sentenced to death, along with Lar Tane. Remember that!"

Perry started. He hadn't thought that far.

"And Stuart?" he whispered. A world divided, brother against brother. That thought struck again, like a sledge-blow.

Aran Deen shook his head.

"I cannot say. But the green-eyed witch must go. Remember that." Perry nodded grimly. If he had hesitated at all in the thought, he told himself, it was only because she was a woman. War was terrible. But the aftermath of war was worse. Those grim, necessary purges. Perry knew he aged, in that moment.

After the tragedy of war—what? An age-old problem.

Chapter XV **Swords Aloft**

AN ARMY of 200,000 marched where millions had marched in a bygone era.

Perry knew it was a small army, in 20th century terms, and poorly equipped. Only half had metal weapons. But it was unlikely that Lar Tane had been able to conscript more, or produce more weapons. The battle would not be less significant than a thunderous, shell-torn battle of ancient days. More significant. The whole world was at stake.

Perry had conscripted the larger army hastily, by messenger and telegraph. He must hurtle through to Vinna, at any cost. Delay meant a chance for Lar Tane to organize, build, fortify. To add fuel to the seething fire under a continent.

When the snow-capped Tyrols loomed to the west, and the flat plains of the Danubian region stretched to the north, Perry expected the enemy. Elda could choose her battlefield wherever she liked. It was all the same here. No rows of concrete dugouts to sneak behind.

At last arrow-fire announced the enemy, from the opposite slope of a wide valley.

Perry called a halt on the near side, and went up in a plane for observation. Drumming over the slope and the brushland beyond, Perry looked down and made out the enemy clusters of men. By rough estimate, about 150, 000. Despite his personal magnetism, Lar Tane had evidently had some trouble raising an army. He had had only six months, in the 50th century. For twenty-five years before, the world had acknowledged. Stirnye the Lord of Earth. It was remarkable that Lar Tane had whipped up that much of a following.

And what war-aim could Lar Tane hold up, palatable to the Tribers? What war cry?

Not "defense" of their homes and lands. For Perry had been shrewd enough, at the start, to announce he was fighting a crusade against Lar Tane alone. No reprisals against the rebellious tribal-states. The Stone Age grapevine of rumor must already have circulated that undermining whisper.

Perry was sure his men had more morale, more reason and spirit to fight. That was important, in any war of any age.

Perry's eyes gleamed. Not far to the north, from his plane's vantage, he caught the glint of blue water. The Danube. On its shores, the smudge that marked the ruins of olden Vienna. He'd smash this army, march there, drive Lar Tane to hiding. It would be over soon.

Perry almost catapulted out of his seat, suddenly, as his pilot slewed sharply.

Perry heard the crescendo and then fading of thundering rockets. He caught the metallic glint of the enemy plane that had nearly rammed them, sweeping by. And the glint of copper-gold hair!

The other plane circled, came roaring back, straight for them. Perry's pilot was already turning tail. With an explosive curse, Perry grabbed the dual controls and took over with a jerk of his head to the pilot.

Chasing him away, was she? Probably with that mocking smile on her face. Perry swung his ship around, straight for the other. He gunned the drive rockets to whistling speed. In seconds the two ships would smash head-on.

THE pilot clawed at Perry's arm, with a shriek of fear. Perry shook him off with a wild laugh. Chase him away, would she? She'd have to chase him through hell to do it.

He could see her face now, straight before him through the other ship's windshield. Ivory oval face, coppery helmet of hair, emerald eyes. The features ballooned in his vision.

Mocking smile—no, there was no mocking smile. A horrified look had leaped into it. No wonder. She was looking into the face of a maniac—Perry's face. And at Death's grinning skull over his shoulder.

Perry waited for the crash that would snuff out his life, and the life of the green-eyed girl who had made him a maniac.

There was no crash.

At the last split-second, the other plane slewed sharply upward. What slim margin they missed by, Perry never knew. Perhaps a foot.

Perry eased his throttle and looked around. The other plane wobbled erratically, as though out of control. It righted finally, swooped, and made a very bad landing in an open field. Perry soared down, as a slim figure stepped out and leaned against the cabin.

Perry wanted to see her expression, but couldn't. Tears blinded him. He left. He was still laughing wildly, maniacally, when he landed beyond his army, and dragged out the pilot, who had fainted. But he stopped laughing suddenly, and was sick.

"I saw it," cried Aran Deen, hobbling up, waving his thin arms. "Young fool, suppose you'd been killed?"

Perry shrugged, feeling better.

"I called her bluff, that's all. Now I'll smash her army. We attack at dawn."

THE snow-capped Tyrols looked down on the sprawling battle that was fought for three days in the wide plains beyond the foothills. The weather, as though not to interfere, was balmy. The age-lasting mountains had seen countless other battles, through history, some that rocked their foundations. But none so strange, so vital, though not a single gun cracked through the Stone Age air.

Stone Age battle it was. Medieval butchery, men against men: Charges of cavalry against cavalry, footmen against footmen. Arrows, spears and stone-axes against the same.

But a new element had been introduced, from the previous battles along the Maginot Line. Swords.

In hand-to-hand battle, spears and arrows exhausted, swords came into play. Perry exulted, at first. At last he had actually come to grips with the enemy forces. No longer were his men falling like leaves, charging against a concealed enemy in pill-boxes and underground warrens.

But his men were still falling, more rapidly than he liked.

Through the first day, he saw why. Lar Tane had trained fifty thousand of his men in the art of sword-play. They wore blue shirts, as distinguishing insignia. They had been divided into units of cavalry who had curved sabers, attack troops who had long double-edged swords, and shock troops with murderous short swords, to stem any attack quickly.

Perry's swordsmen had only one kind —straight long swords.

Time and again, his attacks were stopped, by the shock troops with their light slashing weapons. Then would come counter-attack, at the center, long swords in the hands of fresh men. Finally cavalry charges at his right and left wings, with their wicked sabers cutting down his footmen methodically.

Perry watched with pursed lips. "Our numerical advantage is fast disappearing," Aran Deen mumbled that first day. "Lar Tane developed a trained fighting force. Perry, it is slowly going against us."

"We'll smash through tomorrow," Perry said grimly. "We must!"

He didn't sleep that night. . He directed the wagon trains that took the dead and wounded away, and brought food supplies from the rear. At times he shuddered, sick at the blood spilled. Blitzkrieg, as his father had admonished. A sheer, brutal hammering against Lar Tane, at any cost. Quick victory.

And if he failed?

Perry was aghast at the thought. If he were thrown back, Lar Tane would have a breathing spell, gain in strength. Already he had organized a formidable trained corps. Given more time, his military power would rise astronomically.

AT DAWN, Perry called the charge with set lips.

"Down with Lar Tane, tyrant of the past!" yelled the troops, marching forward. Their morale was still intact, but a few more days of slow decimation and it might crack.

Perry threw all he had into the second day's attack, recklessly saving a bare minimum for relief, reinforcement, and emergency.

Perry noticed with what efficiency the enemy repulsed the attack. Unit by unit they marched to the front line. Unit by unit they fell back for relief. It was admirable, sheerly artistic. And maddening.

Perry stood at the crest of his side of the valley. He saw her finally at the crest of the other side. Even in the glasses she was a small figure, but her coppery flame of hair flashed like a mirror in the bright sun.

Between them they surveyed the lower valley, and its wide-strung battlefield. Horsemen carries messages back and forth down the slopes to their respective field generals.

Perry and Elda were the guiding forces. It reduced to that, as though it were a complicated chess game they played, with human lives as pawns, the world as a prize. He was pitted against a woman. But more than a woman. An Amazon, and a 30th century mind that had seen much more of war than he.

Perry realized the odds against him. She was probably standing there with her mocking smile, scorning his clumsy frontal attack. Perry looked down. Step by step his attack had been broken. His army's advance ground to a standstill. The struggle settled down to hours of slow, grim butchery again.

And Perry lost more men than she, with her clever swordsmen.

Night brought temporary armistice, but no peace to Perry, again sleepless. "Tomorrow," said Aran Deen, shaking his silvery head, "tomorrow may tell the story."

"Tomorrow we attack in one mass," Perry decided. "Every man."

AT DAWN, Perry watched from his vantage. Elda was in her place, a glint of copper across the valley. This day would tell the tale.

Perry's swordsmen advanced toward Elda's swordsmen, two grim lines of men. The secondary lines of archers cast solid sheets of arrows back and forth. Cavalry troops thundered toward cavalry troops, ready for the shock of meeting.

All hell would break loose in a minute, under the morning sun.

It broke loose sooner than expected. Down from the north drummed twelve rocket planes, probably the total number Lar Tane had been able to confiscate. They swooped down over Perry's forces, vultuously. Back and forth they raced, raking his men with heat-blasts from their underjets.

Perry stared, thunderstruck.

His advancing men wavered. The threat from the sky took them completely by surprise, spreading the germ of demoralization. When the enemy forces struck, Perry's men fell back. Like a resistless tide, the enemy pushed forward. Their triumphant yells carried through the clashing of metal swords.

Morale shattered, Perry's army was beaten back, slowly and then with rising speed. The tide of battle had taken a definite turn.

Perry's soul writhed. Defeat! It was plainly before him. Elda had planned this with diabolic cunning.

Aran Deen was shaking his head. "Call retreat, before it becomes a rout, Perry!"

"No!" Perry bellowed the word. "I'm going down there myself!"

The old seer's bony hand clutched his arm.

"Don't be a fool. You can take a defeat now, without harm."

"I'll win now!" Perry cried.

He pulled an aide off his horse, leaped astride, and thundered wildly down the slope.

Aran Deen looked for the coppery flash of hair across the valley.

"The green-eyed witch makes fools of us all!" he muttered. Then he started.

The coppery flash wasn't there. Had Elda, too, joined the battle?

CHAPTER XVI

Capture

PERRY stopped, back of the battle line, to pick up a blood-stained sword from a fallen soldier. He caught a riderless charger, for a better mount, and rode yelling into the melee, swinging the shiny weapon.

He knew he wasn't quite sane. Something had gone blank in his mind. To call retreat, bow before a woman, would have torn his pride to shreds. Only one thing beat in his mind—fight, fight!

The peaceful young student was utterly gone. He was completely a warrior, riding to battle.

His wild yells pierced the din of battle, furious though it was. Men turned, wonderingly, and were instantly inspired. A cluster of his cavalry rallied back of him as the blazing-eyed, roaring demon dashed into the enemy. His sword beat around him like a magic wand that thrust the enemy back.

All the pent-up suspense and energy and rage in Perry went into his sword.

He beat down the saber of a blueshirted horseman and saw him fall with a gashed shoulder. Another and another. A footman slashed at his legs. Perry met the sword half-way, swept it into the air, stabbed the man through the throat. Another horseman, sword-less, swung a huge stone-headed mace at his head. Perry sheared the wooden handle cleanly, stabbed the man's ribs.

All the while he yelled and thrust forward. A hundred fighters had rallied behind him, forming a spearhead that crunched through the enemy ranks.

"Come on, men!" Perry exhorted. "Follow me. Fall on their rear. Down with Lar Tane, tyrant of the—past!" The last word was a gasp.

A body of horse thundered down on them, blue shirts billowing, sabers swinging. At their head rode Elda Tane! She spied him, urged her horse forward.

It was incredible. Elda riding to battle, a woman, a girl—like Semiramis, the battle-queen. Coppery locks streaming in the wind, emerald eyes snapping, she seemed perfectly at home in the atmosphere of death and destruction. Certainly there was no fear in her eyes, only the light of daring and challenge.

Perry slowed his horse. Enemy horsemen swept by, to attack his men. They made no move against him. Had Elda given orders to that effect? Why?

Perry saw why. She reined before him, tossed her head in greeting, and raised a gleaming saber.

"Submit—or fight!"

Her clarion voice came clearly through the noise.

Perry grinned suddenly, thinking of the plane episode.

"Bluffing again?" he jeered. "I don't fight women!"

Furthermore, he was in a dangerous position. Elda's fresh cavalry had driven his back. Perry wheeled his horse, to enter the fray and stay with his men. It wouldn't do to be cut off entirely, back of the enemy lines.

But before he had gone half-way, Elda's horse pulled up beside him. Her saber swung down. There was a grim look in her green eyes, now cold as ice. Back of it danced rage, at his biting words. And perhaps at memory of the planes nearly crashing.

PERRY instinctively defended himself, parrying her cut. Again and again she swung, forcing him to rein up and concentrate on saving his skin. She was an attacking fury. Her strong blows clanged on his sword ringingly.

At first grimly amused, Perry quickly found himself using every skill of his own. Her blows were not clumsy. She had at some time learned the use of the saber thoroughly. Perry's own youthful fencing experience was necessary to ward off the attack.

Perry could not bring himself to make an offensive move, at first. But desperation of time forced him. And her mocking smile.

His blood suddenly boiled. This was the one, girl or not, who mocked him with notes, outwitted him on the battlefield, and now actually threatened his life.

"O. K." he panted. "You want it this way—"

He thrust and cut back at her. She laughed, parrying his strokes. For a while they dueled, their swords sparkling in the sun. Humiliation stung Perry, beset and held off by a mere girl.

He rose in his stirrups, pounding viciously. She fell back a little. Perry watched his chance, caught his point in her hand-guard and flipped the weapon out of her hands.

She stared at her empty hand, startled. Then at Perry.

Her face lifted, and the glorious eyes told him he had the right to kill her, as with any man on the battlefield.

Perry raised his sword, cold and appalled at his own resolve.

Kill her? Of course! Why not? She was an enemy, a rebel, herself merciless. With her out of the way, the enemy forces would lack an inspiring leader. She had been ready to kill him a moment before. Every practical consideration in Perry shrieked for the act—and yet he hesitated.

Why? He was staring at her proud, queenly head thrown high, again like the battle-queen Semiramis who knew nothing of the word fear. Her tossed hair was a helmet of copper glory against the ivory of her face, her eyes like twin emeralds. Yet why should he hesitate to destroy such beauty—it was only a mask over a cruel, sinister being who did not even expect mercy!

Her eyes were on him, wide and wondering at his delay.

Perry's upraised weapon was knocked stingingly out of his hand, in the next second. His vision became aware of other things. Some of the blue-shirted horsemen had returned to protect their girl-commander.

"Surround him!" Elda's voice belled out. "Do not harm him. He is my prisoner."

Perry looked for escape too late. He was unarmed, and within a ring of enemy horsemen. He called down the curse of all the gods on himself. If he had not shrunk from duty, Elda would now be dead, and himself free to gallop for safety.

Now—trapped!

His eyes went beyond the watchful horsemen. The battle line had receded rapidly. His forces, demoralized by the plane strategy and the enemy's swift power-drive were turning into a running rabble. A rout.

Perry stifled the groan that rocked his being. His army beaten, himself a prisoner of war. How miserably he had failed!

ELDA'S commands rang out, to her aides. "Chase the rebels to the hills. Break them up. Capture as

many prisoners as you can. Likely most will join our forces, later. I am returning to Vinna, with my personal prisoner of war."

Her tone became a jeer.

"This, you know, is Perry Knight, who calls himself Lord of Earth!"

She stared around at the men's silent faces.

"Laugh!" she demanded, half furiously.

"We do not laugh at the son of Stirnye," muttered one of the Tribers. It was Chief Hal Doth of Vinna. "He is a brave man."

Perry thrilled. They still respected him, even the enemy! Then he saw their admiring glances at the girl. Chief Doth made a little bow to her.

"And you are brave, Lady Elda. You have broken all attack against us.

We will follow wherever you lead."

"I'll lead you to conquest of the world," Elda promised. "Even Nartica. Vinna will be the heart of our World Empire!"

She led Perry toward her plane, with golden swastikas painted under the wings. Perry followed silently, guarded by two men with short swords.

AN HOUR later their plane drummed down over the ruins of ancient Vinna.

Ruins? Perry was startled. Since he had last been here, months before, most of the debris of centuries had been cleared away. Skeleton eyesore towers had been melted down. Several stone structures, still magnificent through time, were obviously to be preserved in memorium, like the Coliseum of more ancient Rome.

But elsewhere new buildings were already going up. It was a beehive of activity, renaissance, reconstruction of olden glory.

Vinna was rising out of the ashes, like New York.

And in its heart, Lar Tane stood again at the top of his tower. His short, stocky figure was straight, head high, as if surveying his soon-to-be empire.

Napoleon! That name flashed out of history, to Perry. Lar Tane was Napoleon reincarnated.

Beside him stood Stuart's tall figure. In a flood, the recent events overwhelmed Perry. Three months before their father alive, the Magna Charta foremost in their thoughts, civilization rumbling to new life. Now Stirnye dead, a world divided, brother against brother, tyranny spawning. And himself prisoner of war!

What would be his fate?

Lar Tane met them in his vaulted chamber, with its significant council table, Stuart beside him. When the guards left, there were only the four facing one another.

"Victory!" Elda said jubilantly. She brought the first news of the recent battle. "We routed the rebels completely." She gave brief details, then tugged at Perry's sleeve. "And I've brought back a little prisoner of war!"

Stuart had stared with shock at Perry's presence, Lar Tane with pleased surprise.

"You have done well, Commander Elda," Tane said with formality that was ridiculous, and yet not ridiculous. They were not father and daughter, but emperor and military commander. "We will decorate you later with the World Empire Cross. Heil!"

The royal "we."

He inclined his head stiffly toward Perry.

"We greet you, Lord Perry, Chief of the Rebels, as prisoner of war—"

"Rebels!" Perry's tense nerves balked at the term. "You're the rebels!"

Lar Tane spoke imperiously.

"In 2907, the Rebels revolted against my World Empire. Alive in 5000 A.D., by the will of the gods, my World Empire continues. It was the last official government in the 30th century, the first official government in the 50th, with my reincarnation. The Rebel elements wallowed in the Dark Age between. Now they must be put down."

PERRY gasped. Megalomania, this condensed viewpoint of history through his own eyes. Napoleon, Hitler, and 30th century iron rule combined!

"Words, phrases!" Perry charged. He turned to his brother. "Stuart, can you swallow all this claptrap?"

"Lar Tane is right," Stuart returned coldly. "His World Empire was the crowning peak of civilization. The Rebels smashed it, brought down the Dark Age. That's the plain fact of history. Our father couldn't see it, because he was a thousand years behind, at the mere start of scientific civilization."

"Good God!" Perry groaned. The gulf between this Stuart and the Stuart he had known was bottomless.

Stuart's tones became more practical.

"But most important, Lar Tane knows how to rebuild civilization rapidly and efficiently. Our father puttered for twenty-five years, worrying about self-rule for the Tribers. You and I would have puttered, too, with a slipshod Congress tying our hands. Lar Tane, and after him, will spread science and industry over the world in the *next* twenty-five years."

"Puttering!" echoed Perry, shocked. "You call it puttering. Our father reinvented a hundred things from his 20th century. He devised the sea-extraction of metals, never known before. Lar Tane and you have all that to start with now."

Tane nodded.

"Of course your father is to be given credit for that," he acknowledged. "But he had come to the crossroads. How to introduce scientific civilization to a Stone Age world? His way was 20th century, obsolete."

"And your way is 30th century—tyrannical!" shot back Perry. "Yes, you will rebuild rapidly, by regimentation. But you leave the clamp of dictatorship. After Stuart—what? A long line of other dictators, good and bad. The bad ones tear down what the good ones build. Then, like Rome, the foundations crack. Another Dark Age."

He appealed to his brother.

"Can't you see, Stuart? It's the future we must think of. We must build not for one age, but all to come. How many times our father said that. Have you forgotten, Stuart? Have you forgotten it all?"

Stuart was staring, a little startled. Elda stepped to his side, taking his hand.

Perry ground his teeth. The spell of her green eyes—she was using that. Perry whirled on Lar Tane.

"Words, words!" he snapped. "Strip them all away, reduce everything to its bare essential. Behind all that camouflage, Lar Tane, you want only one thing—power! Power to rule over a world of humans. You've duped my brother, you and Elda, but you can't blind me. Power! That's all you want. Deny that if you can."

Tane made an airy gesture.

"*Ach!* I had power—world power—in 2907. It is ashes. You wrong me, Perry. I wish to do the world good, in my own way."

A LAUGH rang from Perry, harsh and cynical. "Like when, in 2903, you purged central China because they resisted a tax increase!"

Lar Tane glared. His mask of pious suavity dropped.

"All right. I'm after world power, personal power, because it's within my grasp."

The words, slow and measured, startled even Perry. He saw the open gleam in Tane's eye. The gleam of a human wolf who would sit on a throne and play god to a world.

"I can't be stopped now," he went on in cold, dry tones. "You were the only worthy opponent I had, Perry. You're my prisoner now. Still, if you wish, I offer you a place at my council table, along with certain Tribers and Narticans whom I will invite. Well?"

There was no waste of words now.

This was sheer plain realism. Lar Tane had come out in the open.

"No," Perry snapped briefly. "I don't want it."

"I sentence you to death," Lar Tane said quietly, indifferently.

He strode to the table and picked up an instrument of shiny metal. It was a rifle-like, a model of the extinct weapons of the past.

"I devised it," Tane said, stroking it. "A gun. It shoots bullets by steam. My Rhine plant is already turning them out in quantity. Our victories over you, Perry, have solidified my tribes behind me. Armed with this gun, my army will now take the offensive. Europe will be mine first.. Then Asia, Africa, swiftly. Finally America and Nartica."

He pointed the instrument at Perry, fingering the trigger. Suddenly he laughed and put the gun down.

"Ack! It's beneath me. My official executioners will take care of you—in three days. I give you three days of life, Perry. You might change your mind."

Perry didn't answer. He was staring pityingly at his brother.

"I'm more sorry for you than myself, Stuart. Now you see—"

"It doesn't matter if he does," Lar Tane shrugged. "Not now." He addressed Stuart. "'Well, which do *you* choose?'"

Strangely, Stuart laughed.

"Choose? I made my choice long ago. I am to be your successor!" Even Lar Tane and Elda were startled.

Perry gasped.

"Stuart, you mean—" He stopped, choking, for the same gleam was in his eye that Tane had.

"Behind it all, I knew what I was after," Stuart said in flat tones. "I haven't been duped. I want power, too.

You won't live long, Lar Tane. As with my father, your heart will stop suddenly, after its journey through time. After that, I rule. Elda and I."

Perry reeled and the universe reeled with him. This Stuart was not even remotely the Stuart of old. What had changed him?

Perry's eyes went toward the girl beside him.

"Green-eyed witch of hell!" he hissed.

Guards came to take Perry away, at Lar Tane's order. He was led down steps to a cold, dank chamber below Tane's tower of rule. Perry was the first of a long line of prisoners who would sit here and await execution.

CHAPTER XVII

You Die at Dawn!

PERRY sat alone, in candle-lit gloom. It was silent as a tomb. Scurrying rats made the only sounds, outside of his own breathing. A jailer came with food and water twice a day. The rest of the time, Perry staggered through the hell of his mind.

Three figures swirled endlessly through his brain. Lar Tane, power-mad Frankenstein from the past. Stuart, betrayer of a world. And Elda, green-eyed witch who had stolen his brother's soul.

And a fourth vision danced in his mind. Himself, blindfolded, against a wall, slumping to the ground as bullets took his life. Lar Tane would undoubtedly have it done that way, with his new gun.

The door opened suddenly, after what seemed an eternity. Lar Tane strode in, dismissing the guards with him. He looked at Perry's haggard face for a long moment.

"Changed your mind, *mein herr*? You have a scientific brain. Pity to destroy it. I'll make you chief of science and industry, as with your father. What would you lose?"

"My self-respect," Perry retorted. "Will you have it—dead?" Lar Tane visibly sneered. "Knowing your cause is lost?"

"You haven't won yet, Tane!" Perry shouted. "America and Nartica still oppose you, even without me. If I joined you, they would capitulate, making things easy for you. I see that. Without me, you still have a fight ahead of you."

"But certain victory," Lar Tane said easily. "You saw the gun I quickly devised. It was modeled after

a relic preserved with me in my vault, from my time. I have another interesting model. A heat-ray projector, standard weapon of my day. With the radioactive wax your father developed, ten times more powerful than radium, I can make heat-ray projectors.* (* Obviously the wax mentioned here has a property of breaking down radium and a greatly accelerated pace, thus producing enormous amounts of energy. If this is possible, it is true that a heat ray could be produced from radium energy.—Ed.)

How long do you think America and Nartica will stand against super-science?"

"Bluff!" snapped Perry. "Like your daughter, you bluff."

"You think so?" Tane grinned. Suddenly his voice crackled. "One more chance, Perry. My council table or execution?"

Perry's answer was written on his face, sneeringly.

Tane shrugged and stalked out. Alone, Perry's shoulders sagged. Bluff? Perhaps not. Bullets, heat-rays, appalling weapons of a war age. Lar Tane digging them up, conquering a world. After that a Pax Romana, enforced peace. All the mistakes of the past rising like gibbering ghosts.

And he, Perry, with Hobson's choice. With no choice at all!

Alive or dead, Lar Tane was benefitted. Better dead, then.

A night of sleep came, filled with horrifying visions,. Battlefields in which men waded knee-deep in blood. His army fleeing before one-eyed giants. Perry, alone, surrounded by a forest of steel swords ...

THE next day, the door opened again, in the dank chamber. Stuart entered. Brother stared at brother. Neither spoke a greeting. Stuart broke the strained silence finally.

"Perry, listen to me," he said firmly. "After Lar Tane is gone, I'll rule justly, I swear it. You'll be at my side, as our father wished. The only difference is that we'll be without handicap. Father didn't reason it out. The world has to be whipped from behind, not led by the nose. At least this Stone Age world."

Perry's voice was dry, biting. "Words. Why not be honest? You simply want power. And Elda." Stuart's face hardened.

"Yes, both. And you, you poor little fool, throw what you could have aside. Power! Power to build and mold—"

His eyes gleamed.

"And destroy," Perry was shaking his head pityingly. "Remember when we were youths, Stuart? How often we told ourselves history had been a repetition of jungle law? And told ourselves we would bring a new order, a new faith. Remember when we shook hands, after the Magna Charta—"

His voice died. The silent room seemed filled with apparitions from their youth, faces glowing and alight, looking out over the world that lay ready for a new faith, a new way.

Stuart started from reminiscence.

"Dreams! Young, foolish dreams, that's all." His voice was hard. "What's your answer, Perry?"

"Lar Tane sent you down." Perry's voice was equally hard. "He knows my answer."

Stuart left wordlessly.

Perry released the groan he had held. Nothing would ever come between them, they had pledged.

Again tortured dreams. A green-eyed Amazon, tall as Colossus, towered over him with a sword dripping scarlet. Perry woke in a cold sweat. It was the morning of the third day.

ELDA entered, suddenly, as though she had sent the dream of her as warning. She leaned against the door, indolently, watching him.

"You're suffering," she said mockingly. "Needlessly," she added. "Your execution is today. You'll break down."

"Will I?" Perry grinned mirthlessly at her. "Did I—when your plane came at mine that time?"

She bit her lip, nettled.

"No, perhaps you wouldn't," she said soberly. "But you're a fool. An idealist, dreamer, altruist, and all the rest of it. You're that quaint character from ancient literature—what is it? —Don Quixote, chasing down windmills. You're going to be a haloed martyr, is that it?"

Perry set his lips, wordlessly. The sting of her words was like acid under his skin.

She was staring at him mockingly—and wonderingly. Suddenly she changed.

"What do you think of me, Perry?" He started, almost convulsively. A woman's question. He laughed silently within himself. Behind all her hard composure was that.

"What do you expect me to think of you?" he retorted. "You and your father have plunged the world into war. Human wolves from the past, I'd call you. Seeking power, to lord it over all other human beings. Satisfying petty vanity. Glorifying in the thoughts that your slightest whim will be law—"

"No, no," she interrupted. "What do you think of *me*?"

"You asked for it." He grinned evilly and went on. "I think you're depraved, rotten to the core, behind your mask of beauty. You're the end-product of a ruined, decadent civilization. You're human in name only. Behind that you're a monster, a blacksouled demon, a—"

She cut off his torrential denunciation.

"Taking it out on me now? You couldn't on the battlefield." Again her tone changed. "But you *do* think I'm beautiful!"

Perry gritted his teeth helplessly.

"Your mirror tells you that," he snapped. "But it doesn't show what's underneath—corruption."

Strong words, but she deserved them. Her eyes flashed emerald fire. "How righteous! It would defile you to touch me, wouldn't it?"

Smiling maliciously, she threw her arms around him, kissed him clingingly.

Perry hesitated, before he pushed her away. He hesitated as he had there on the battlefield, with her life in his hands. She was at once hateful and desirable. He couldn't hate her wholeheartedly, as he should. When he did push her away, she laughed triumphantly.

"You love me!" she said. "You burn for me! I wasn't sure till now."

"You?" Perry's voice dripped with infinite scorn. "Green-eyed witch of hell! You can't make me your slave, like Stuart. Your father sent you down. Tell him you failed."

Deliberately, he looked her up and down.

"Your price is too low."

Flaming indignation shot from her emerald eyes. She clutched at her side as though for a sword that wasn't there. Then, with silent ferocity, she leaped at him. One hand clawed across his face, fingernails drawing blood.

Perry caught her two wrists, laughing.

She struggled wildly. She did not call the guards. It wasn't in her nature to call for help. She simply fought for freedom, to scratch him again. She had amazing strength, but Perry's fingers tightened. The past months of open air, activity, and rough life had hardened his muscles.

With an easy surge of strength, he twisted till a silent scream came into the green eyes. Then he flung her away, again with a laugh.

"Your price," he repeated, "is too low. Get out."

She glared at him, rubbing her wrists. Abruptly, she shrugged.

"Yes, my father sent me down. But only to talk reason with you. Since you won't, I'll go. You're still a fool. And when you die, your last thought will be of me—me!"

When she was gone, Perry forbade her in his thoughts. He wanted a last hour of peace. But she was there—entrancingly lovely. Mocking. No, not mocking. He always saw her as in the plane, roaring at his—just a frightened girl. A headstrong, queenly, daring girl, but human behind it all, despite his bitter words. Perhaps if a man tamed her—

Where were his thoughts leading him? Perry clipped them off. What did it all matter now? Death today. He awaited the guards who would take him before a firing squad.

BUT there was a sound opposite the barred door, instead. A digging sound through the dirt wall that made up one side of the prison space. It became louder and finally the digger broke through. A spade rapidly cleared a four-foot circle. A figure stooped through and straightened—Stuart!

Perry stared incredulously.

Stuart tip-toed to the door, listened for a moment, then pulled Perry aside. He waved toward the

hole.

"Subway tunnel of ancient Vinna runs by here. This is only a temporary tower. Lar Tane is having a bigger one built. He didn't bother to wall off the tunnel with concrete. You can escape, when it's dark. The execution isn't scheduled till dawn."

Perry was almost giddy at the hope of escape, and Stuart's act.

"You saw the light, Stuart?" he murmured eagerly. "You're coming with me! Together we'll lead a great army against Lar Tane—"

Stuart interrupted harshly.

"No, I'm staying. But I couldn't let you die. You're my brother. I tried to change Lar Tane's sentence, but he refused. I thought of this."

Perry stiffened, and brother stared at brother.

"You're staying." Perry curled his lip. "You want power. And Elda. You've sold your soul for that!"

Stuart recoiled as if struck. For a moment, his face was stricken. Then anger swept over it.

"No more nursemaid lectures from you!" he hissed. "This is a man's world. Man's job. Get out—get out!"

Anger dissolved, abruptly. Stuart's face went haggard.

"I don't want power. Perry, you must believe me! I just told Lar Tane that, to keep in his favor. You see, it's the only way I can have Elda. When I rule, I'll do the world good. I swear it!" Perry shook his head.

"A taste of power will call for more. Don't you see, Stuart? You know it's against your better judgment. Only Elda holds you—"

"Yes, Elda!" Stuart half moaned. "Perry, you don't know the witchery of her. The unearthly spell she weaves over a man. The flaming challenge and desire and wonder of her. You don't know—"

"I do know!" Perry's murmur changed to harshness. "But behind that, she's unworthy—venomous, cruel, utterly vain."

"No, you're wrong!" Stuart muttered. "She's not cruel, or bad. She's just a product of her former time and life. She believes in what she's doing. And underneath her mockery she's good and sweet and wonderful. I'm going to tame her—"

"INDEED!"

Both men whirled as if shot. Elda Tane stood erect before the hole in the wall, through which she had just stepped silently. Tall and regal, silken-robed, she came forward slowly. She glanced amusedly at Stuart.

"A woman is tamed only by love," she mocked.

The blood slowly drained from Stuart's face.

"But you love me! You told me—"

"Did I?" she said cruelly.

Stuart grabbed her by the shoulders. "You mean all the while, from the first, you deceived me, lied to me—" Staggered shock was in his eyes. For a moment the girl softened. "No, not from the first. For a while I thought—" She shrugged indifferently. "I've wondered if I'd ever find a man I could look up to, and love. I think not, 30th century or 50th. I'd throw aside an empire for him!"

She was wistful suddenly, in a mercurial change that seemed part of her complex nature. In the candle-light, her ivory and copper beauty shone softly, like Diana the moon-goddess, in a quiet moment from her tempestuous life. The emerald eyes gleamed sincerely now, not mocking.

The two men stared. She was not the battle-queen Semiramis now, or an Amazon. She was a young girl, feminine and alluring, seeking her love. Seeking a man who would melt her vibrant heart, bend her strong will, match her daring with greater courage.

Perry almost pitied her, at that moment. Endowed by nature with extraordinary qualities, she was forced to seek vainly for her master. What man could bring murmurs of endearment from those perfect lips?

She laughed wildly, in a lightning change.

"But he doesn't exist! So, instead, I'll have a man who can give me an empire!"

"I'll give you an empire!" Stuart whispered. He was over his first shock. Perhaps he had known, subtly, that he hadn't won her heart. He remembered now the plaintive song she had sung, once. The song had been of herself.

She flashed him a smile, then glanced at Perry.

"And you, Herr Perry? Wouldn't you give me an empire—if you could?"

"Women have sold themselves all through history," Perry said bitingly. "Your stakes are only higher."

Her composure was unbroken, this time, though for a moment tawny rage flicked from her eyes. She laughed away the insult, turning to Stuart.

"You wanted to help Perry escape? I happened to see you going out, furtively. I followed you, came this way.

My father won't like to hear that you did this."

"You'll tell on him, of course," Perry grunted.

Suddenly, the reminder of escape struck Perry. Elda saw his glance at the hole. Her hand dropped warningly to her side. There was the hilt of a short sword this time, whose scabbard was almost hidden in the folds of her silken gown. She stood nearest the hole.

Perry relaxed, hopelessly. Any other woman and he would have leaped for it. But Elda—she would have that sword out in a flash. And use it.

"No," she said. "I won't tell. But escape is out of the question. You'd better leave now, Stuart. My father may wonder, with both of us gone. I'll follow later, so we aren't seen coming out of the tunnel together. Then I'll station guards at the hole."

Stuart left with averted eyes. He turned back once as though to say something, but went on. Perry could sense the torment in his heart. Elda had knocked the last prop out from under him. Stuart was dangling over a pit of remorse.

CHAPTER XVIII **Green-eyed Mystery**

STUART gone, Elda turned back to Perry, her green eyes narrowing. "I give you one more chance. Join my father's council table."

She went on at the stony resolve in his face.

"You really choose death? You must be mad. But listen. You both love me. I have made no binding promise to Stuart. You would have as much chance as he of becoming my father's successor. And giving me an empire! My father didn't tell me to say that."

"Then why are you saying it?" Perry shrugged. "I don't take dares—as you know."

Her eyes were on him wonderingly.

"You'll go to your death—as a martyr—when you could have me. And you want me!"

"Do I!?" Perry turned from the glare of her unearthly beauty, stonily. "I think you're mistaken—"

The rest was cut off as her lips pressed against his. She had thrown her arms around him in a flurry of silk. A breath of perfume from her coppery tresses stung his blood. Her features, soft and tender, were an unvoiced promise. She was a young, loving girl, shorn of pride and haughtiness. So it seemed.

For a mad moment Perry made no move, either to break away or respond. Then, with a curse, he shoved her away. He had seen the gleam of mockery in her eyes.

"You won on the battlefield," he grated. "You lose here."

"But you burn for me!" she breathed. "I'm sure of it now. Why didn't you grab my sword, Perry? You had the chance. Because, in my arms, you forget all else! Yes, it's the truth. But still—"

Her voice went to sheer wonder.

"But still you take death! Strange." She looked at him as if he were someone she had never seen before. "You place your ideals above me, above every instinct you have."

She shrugged, faintly annoyed.

"Yes, I lose this time. You fight better with your heart than with your army, Perry."

She peered at him steadily. Perry said nothing. He could feel her thoughts spinning, whirring, looking for another vulnerable spot in his armor. She seemed to give up, with a nettled sigh.

Perry grinned. How it must hurt her fantastic pride that her full feminine powers had met defeat, though she had beaten him in war. To Perry, it almost made up for all previous humiliation. She had beaten him in a man's game, war. But in her own woman's game, she had lost.

She fingered her sword, as though contemplating making him cringe at instant death.

"Try it," he challenged, laughing at her swift frown.

"Come," she said suddenly, turning. "It's dark outside now."

"WHAT—" Perry *was* stunned. "Escape, of course," she snapped. "Follow me."

Perry followed, grunting. Outside somewhere, with the wine of hope on his lips, she would call the guards, then laugh hellishly as he was dragged back. That was her idea—in revenge. But if she was a little careless, just a little! Perry smiled grimly.

Beyond the hole stretched black nothingness. Not quite black. Far ahead, moonlight shafted down from open air. Perry followed her gliding white figure. At times his feet stumbled against rust-eaten ties and ancient tracks of this one-time subway. Once a pile of something rattled. He shuddered.

"Bones," Elda murmured. "At the fall of Vinna, 2000 years ago, the rebels filled the city with poison gas. Sometimes it all seems like a dream to me, that past I used to live in—" Her voice trailed away.

They reached the slope that led to upper ground, through a narrow cave-in. The girl scrambled up, raised her head cautiously.

"All clear. But be quiet."

He climbed after her, and stood looking around. Lar Tane's tower was a hundred yards off. In the vicinity were the foundations of new buildings going up, deserted now of workmen. In the opposite direction loomed the less cleared portions of the Vinna ruins. Toward these Elda led the way, striding swiftly, keeping within shadow.

Perry kept tense watch. Elda touched his hand, stopping him, and pointed ahead. A guard, or policeman, paced ahead, patrolling this section of grounds. Elda led the way around a bulking stone wall.

Perry held his breath. Any moment now she would suddenly call, and laugh to watch the chase as the guards ran him down. But she didn't call. Safely past, Perry clutched her arm.

"What are you doing?" he demanded. "What trick is this?"

She seemed surprised.

"No trick. I'm leading you to escape. To the river."

They passed five other patrolling guards, penetrating finally into the wilder, untouched ruins. Perry heard the gurgle of water before they eventually came to the shore. The Danube stretched dark and mysterious into the night.

Elda pointed to a little skiff tied to a post.

"My own. I sometimes rowed on the river, before the war. You have ten hours of darkness, to go downstream. If you get past the Maginot Line at Budapest before dawn, you're safe."

"But why are you doing this?" Perry gasped.

"You saved my life once, or spared it, on the battlefield. I'm paying off the debt."

Perry shook his head, baffled, staring at her. Despite his present position, he sought to view her objectively.

In the moonlight, her beauty was extravagant. Burnished sheen of copper hair, glowing ivory face, emerald eyes muted to sea-green. This seemed a different Elda from all the others. An

Elda who for once was not mocking. The conspiracy of moon and night reached inside Perry and left him trembling, stricken. He battled a war of senses, more desperately than on the battlefield.

SHE was lovely, desirable, sincere, behind the mask she had worn. She was woman now—all woman. This was the Elda Stuart loved. Perry's pulses thundered, and he knew in another moment no power on Earth could help him. He fought against it.

"Elda," he said slowly, "this is your own idea. Not one word from me caused you to do this. Of your

own free will you brought me here, to escape—"

"Yes," she agreed, in a low voice. Perry trembled. How long could he stand it? It seemed that something pushed him resistlessly, inexorably. "Then I say it now—I love you!" He crushed her in his arms, bruising his lips against hers. She yielded. He drew back finally, searching her eyes eagerly. "Elda, is it possible that you—" She made no denial. She clung to him a little.

"I'll give you an empire," he panted. "But my kind. Come with me! I'll defeat your father, since I must. Then you and I will guide the world to great things, glorious things. The things you know are right, deep down inside. Elda, Elda! Come with me—"

Perry stopped. His blood froze. Elda was laughing. Very quietly, very softly, but with a world of derision in it. Perry stared stupidly, while his mind flopped around like a bewildered thing. And then he knew.

Tricked! He had been tricked into succumbing to her, confessing that which she wanted to hear, as a woman. Did she have guards concealed about, ready to call them, and complete his humiliation?

Wildly, Perry turned for the skiff.

"Wait!" She clutched his arm. "There are no guards here. Before you go, listen. I know you'll continue the war, I know you'll fight to the end. Perhaps you'll win, who knows? But all the while you're fighting against me, you'll be fighting *for me!* I meant every word—that the man who gives me an empire wins me."

She laughed.

"Go out and fight for your World-State, Perry. Go out and fight to win *me!* Do you see, you great fool? You cast me aside, before. Now you have to fight for me, and against me. But always for *me!*"

She laughed again, ringingly.

"You didn't think for a minute, did you, that you were the man who doesn't exist—"

PERRY fled. Fled from that hellishly mocking laugh. He untied the skiff, shoved off. He bent to the paddle, heading for mid-stream. He looked back once.

She still stood on the bank, a white vision of loveliness. Her coppery hair was like a burning flame that drove him frantically away. It was not till an hour later, as the strong current swept him steadily southeast, that he was able to keep from ripping the air with a curse, every moment he thought of her.

What had he done? What mad thing had he said to her Mad thing? No, why try to conceal it from himself? She had burned her way into him. From that first moment, in New York, she had lodged unshakably in his innermost thoughts. Those quiet moments in the laboratory, before the war, thinking of her. Yes, he burned for her. Let the universe stare in horror, but it was so.

And then he cursed again, for ever having let her know.

But gradually, his thoughts grew composed. He forgot the green-eyed girl and the incredible game it delighted her to play. Escape lay ahead, if he slipped beyond enemy territory before dawn. And after that, a chance again to fight Lar Tane.

Life and hope once more were his. Perry paddled desperately, steadily, not satisfied with the current. Muscles aching, he passed the Maginot fortifications at ancient Budapest, as the first rosy gleams of dawn warmed the air. He had a bad moment as a yawning guard, easily within arrow-shot, stretched and looked out over the water. But the guard didn't notice the skiff, in the early mist. He was there more to watch against invasion inward, than escaping prisoners outward.

Perry paddled till noon, safely beyond the nearer tribal-states that might happen to be loyal to Lar Tane, and stepped to shore. Staggered, rather, into a shore village.

"Your best horse," he demanded hoarsely, of the first man. Taken before the chief, Perry croaked again: "Your best horse!"

"I give commands, not hear them," rumbled the chief. "What wandering madman are you—"

"It's Perry, Lord of Earth!" gasped one of his men, penetrating the grime and haggardness that rode the stranger. "He escaped from captivity by Lar Tane!"

Perry cut off the exclamation of awe and excitement.

"Yes. Now tell me, is any of my army—left?"

The chief nodded.

"We heard that most of it rebanded in the hills preparing to attack again. Aran Deen leads them."

"Defense, not attack!" Perry groaned. "Where's that horse?"

"But Lord Perry, you're worn out—" Perry refused to believe it till he leaped astride, and collapsed in the saddle. He hadn't slept, except for nightmarish snatches in prison, for four nights. After sleeping half the clock around, at the chief's house, he was off.

He passed through three tribal-states, killing two horses, and changing five times before he reached his army, already on the march.

ARAN DEEN'S rheumy old eyes blinked as Perry galloped up. "Perry!" he shrilled out. "It can't be you!"

He shrugged his bony shoulders. "Well, it is you. I reformed the army. Told them we must rescue you. They are ready to fight, as never before, with that spirit to drive them."

He looked around, half whimsically. "Perhaps we should keep you hidden!"

But already the news was sweeping the ranks that Perry, their leader, had returned. Cheers arose. Perry's heart leaped. It was good to know that despite the series of losses, his men were still behind him. Lar Tane had not yet won his world.

Perry noticed fleetingly that here and there a "Hail, Stirnye!" sounded, without being taken up. He had done nothing to win that "title" of his father's yet.

"I'm glad you're back," Aran Deen said suddenly, grasping Perry's hand and pressing it fervently. "When you were a little boy, you often drove me distracted like this, wandering somewhere alone—"

He glared belligerently, at Perry's smile, and again became phlegmatic.

"Glad for the simple reason that leading an army is not to my taste. With you to lead again, we'll smash through—"

"No!" Perry shook his head violently. "Not attack. Defense is what we need now!"

"Defense!" Aran Deen screeched. "Perry, has that green-eyed witch taken all the spirit out of you?"

At that moment a drone sounded from the sky.

Perry glanced anxiously to the north. Lar Tane's twelve planes zoomed down like mechanical eagles. In a wide line, they swept over the stalled army. But not to rake it with heat-blasts. Instead, as though struck by invisible lightning, men dropped here and there. No arrow, no spear—nothing visible leaped from the ships. But men dropped.

"Bullets!" groaned Perry. "Bullets from the steam-guns."

Whirling, he shouted orders for the army to break for cover, every man for himself. As the army straggled in all directions, toward the nearest clumps of trees and bushes, the planes looped and executed their maneuver a dozen more times. More men fell, though less as they scattered.

Perry saw the shining snouts attached to the planes' noses. Listening intently, he made out the hissing barks of the weapons. They were not rapid-fire machine-guns. Merely mounted rifles. Only a few dozen men fell, altogether. A first field test of the guns, nothing more.

But the moral effect on the Stone Age army was all out of proportion. Many shrieked in superstitious fear, as they ran. Invisible death—magic! An arrow, spear or sword was something you could see, fend off. This hurling down of silent lightning struck dumb fear in Stone Age breasts.

Perry cursed lividly.

When the men had run to cover, finally, one of the planes left formation, darted toward him. He was still in the open. Coppery flash of hair! He saw it before he saw the kicks of dust around him.

"Perry, we must run—"

The plane was past, the danger over, before Aran Deen finished the words.

THE gunner had not been able to aim. Gun-fire from fast aircraft could only be effective against masses of men. Perry knew it had been a mocking gesture on Elda's part. A threat of the future.

He picked up the note, wrapped around a stone, that had also dropped, a hundred feet ahead.

"To Perry, Lord of Earth, pro-tem. I am on the march. This is Der Tag. We have guns. Win your

empire if you can—and me! Fight as you've never fought before—for me! Defeat me, if you can—and still I'll win! Elda."

"What does it mean?" mumbled Aran Deen. "What nonsense does the green-eyed witch write?" His canny old eyes searched Perry's face suddenly. "Or does it mean, my son—"

"It means," broke in Perry harshly, "that you're an old fool. We have to go on the defensive. Dig trenches, as in the long-ago wars."

And it meant, too, that the war had passed into a new and terrible phase. That the thunder of guns would once more wake to ravening life, devouring its cannon-fodder food.

Perry looked at the still forms shot down, out in the open. He was appalled.

In the name of the universe, when and where would all this end?

CHAPTER XIX

Mannerheim Line

PERRY hastily reformed the army and marched it back—back.

Consulting the Atlas, he picked the narrowest strip between the impassable Alps and the Adriatic Sea. Here, they dug in. Laborers and additional fighters were recruited.

In a week's time a series of trenches lay athwart the open drive to the Mediterranean. A little Maginot Line. The weapons of the past called for the defenses of the past.

Scouting in a plane over enemy territory, Perry found Elda's army on the march, as she had said. A formidable force now of 25,000. Lar Tane's tribal-states were now solidly back of him. Perry made out the units equipped with the new, shiny guns. He breathed easier. Only some ten thousand. With just one metal-producing plant, and a limited staff of technicians, Lar Tane had not been able to turn out more, for the present.

Elda's army arrived, and attacked immediately.

Little sorties of gun troops rushed toward the first line of trenches, dropped on their stomachs, and began firing.

Perry felt cold, shaken. Guns again! Their deadly bark ripped apart the Stone Age air, in chorus, for the first time in an age. His father had told him of the frightful wars of the 20th century, when guns snuffed out lives in unthinkable numbers.

"Lar Tane has this day turned history into bloodier channels," Aran Deen murmured.

Men dropped here and there in the long trenches. Perry groaned. What chance did he have? Bullets outclassed spears and arrows by a tremendous margin. Morale dropped. Again his men were grunting in fear and dread at this magic death-dealing.

Perry's heart stopped. Had all been lost? Had the first roar of guns already won for Elda? White-faced Tribers, frightened to the roots of their being, seemed ready to bolt. Ready to scurry from the trenches like rabbits.

Perhaps at that moment, the fate of the war hung by a thin thread.

Perry ran down the trench, shouting.

"Keep your heads low! The weapon is not magic. If you run, death will strike at your backs. Here, you are safe. Fire back at the enemy. But keep your heads low!"

Some of the men took heart. Longbows twanged and arrows sped out toward the enemy. Some of the men with guns, insolently running close, fell dead. A cheer welled from the trench. And that strange, intangible thing called morale revived.

The acid test had been passed. Perry, panting, exhausted, realized he still had a chance.

And more of a chance, he began to see, than he had thought possible.

A WAVE of enemy swordsmen came. Perry's men, in the protective trenches, stopped them with arrow fusillades.

"The green-eyed witch is getting a taste of her own medicine," Aran Deen chortled. "Now *her* men fall like leaves before our Maginot Line."

But Perry was still not too optimistic. The first day was experimental. Elda's scouting planes told her the defenders were solidly entrenched.

On the second day, the bark of guns became a steady hissing roar. Planes periodically raided the first line trenches, doing little damage—except to morale. That was what Elda counted on, Perry could see. A steady hammering with the "artillery" till the time was ripe.

Still awed by the fearful magic of guns, Perry's men could not outface that hail of death forever. Men dropped steadily, despite his cautions. These were not seasoned troops of yore, used to the invisible death that struck at the mere lifting of a forehead to fire an arrow.

Perry wondered how it would come out. This was war such as the ancients fought. The kind of war Elda knew from A to Z. Did he stand any chance of holding her off? For a while, perhaps—and then?

Guns! He must have them himself! In the back of his mind, that thought had constantly lurked. Fight fire with fire. Ultimately, it would be the only hope.

His eye went out beyond the trenches. Here and there a rifleman dropped, struck by an arrow. He noticed with what promptness crawling men retrieved the weapons. They were precious, those few guns. And Elda did not want one in his hands.

"I've got to have one of those guns," Perry told Aran Deen. "A suicide squad has to rush out there."

"In that leaden hail? You won't find a man to go."

"They'll go if I lead them." Perry shook off Aran Deen's hand, eyes burning. "It's the only way, old man. I must have a gun—to duplicate. Without guns, we're sure to lose the war. If I'm killed, it's the chance I take of winning all or losing all."

Grimly, a hundred volunteers squirmed on their stomachs after Perry, beyond their trench. Perhaps the hundred bravest men in all his army. It took a new kind of courage to defy the new kind of death. They crawled fifty feet before the enemy noticed. Then concentrated rifle fire drummed into them. Figures went limp.

Perry shouted to his remaining men and went on. A rifle lay only a hundred feet further, beside a dead man. An enemy force suddenly charged down. But from back of Perry came covering arrow-fire. Perry and thirty men, scuttling low, reached the rifle.

Perry grabbed it first.

Some of the enemy arrived. Swords leaped into play. Perry cut down two men. A third came at his side, sword already slashing viciously.

INSTINCTIVELY, Perry jerked the gun around, pulling the trigger. The man stopped as though he had struck a stone wall, his sword's unfinished swing gashing Perry's leg lightly.

For a second Perry stood still. He had fired a gun for the first time in his life. He would never forget, to his dying day, that vicious little kick of the gun, the way the man stopped, and the feeling of immense death-dealing power of that moment.

Then he was scuttling back for his trench, yelling to his remaining men. More than one bullet whined past his ear, singing of death. He and eleven men reached safety, out of the hundred.

"Here's the gun!" Perry examined it, hardly waiting for his leg-wound to be dressed. "Clever of Lar Tane," he told Aran Deen an hour later. "Water-breech. Radioactive flint. Bullets of soft alloy, driven out by bursts of steam. Simple enough. Our Gibraltar plant can turn these out within a month."

"If we can hold Elda off for a month," Aran Deen croaked. "Tomorrow, a real attack—"

On the third day, the guns rose to a thunderous crescendo, raking the trenches mercilessly. Suddenly their bull-roar ceased. Hun-like tides of the enemy raided the first-line trench with swords. At the end of a bloody day, Perry retreated to his second line.

"It goes bad for us," Aran Deen observed.

"Yes." Perry set his jaw. "But I think our army can hold out. As fast as they gain a line of trenches, we dig another line in back. They'll have to fight inch by inch. This is not a three-day battle, as in the open. It might take Elda a month to smash through.

In that time, we'll make guns. You and I are going to Gibraltar."

Calling his officers together, Perry gave them an impassioned exhortation.

"Hold off the enemy at all costs. Dig trenches behind as fast as the front lines are taken. Hold them off for a month. And then I promise you guns, like theirs. If they break through, all Europe is lost!"
A month to stem the invasion. Was there time?

CHAPTER XX **Thunder of Old**

BACK in his Gibraltar workshop, Perry felt as though he had returned from some shrieking purgatory.

It was quiet here, peaceful. He looked around at the implements of science, touching them. Had he once worked here, a young eager scientist? Or had it been a poignant dream? It seemed he had been fighting, seeing men die, all his life.

It suddenly overwhelmed him.

Yes, he had once labored here, in monastic devotion to science. He had been happy, soul-satisfied, sure of his mission. Now he was back. But not to resume his constructive tasks. To make weapons of war! To make the power and engines at his command grind out guns, horrible guns. Like Archimedes and his burning lens, Perry had to help prolong the blood-bath into which the world was being dipped.

For worse than even years of war would be years of domination under Lar Tane's mailed fist, followed by years of rule by Elda, and her love-slave Stuart. The fight against that was a good fight.

Renewed in his resolve, Perry switched to his new role of scientist swiftly. Time still snapped savagely at his heels. He took Lar Tane's gun apart, piece by piece, and made blueprints. These he passed out to his staff of technicians, with orders to drop the manufacture of swords.

Overnight, swords had fallen from first place, as major weapons of the war. As, a few months before, Stone Age spears and arrows had been demoted before swords. Swift change. The war, with each passing day, pyramided toward higher destruction. Like a film of past history run at super-speed, the war had already skipped insanely through three stages, each a former age of slow advance.

Perry was appalled. The next skip would be to Lar Tane's century—and horrors beyond telling.

Within a week, the first model had been put together. Perry tested it himself. The trigger struck the radioactive flint, releasing infra-red energy, like a touch of dynamite. A coincident spray of water changed instantly to live, bursting steam, in the stout water-breech. The alloy bullet was propelled out of the barrel at violent speed.

The 20th century might have made such steam-guns, if they had had the radioactive flint unknown at that time.

Perry's quick mind made one improvement in the gun—rifling in the barrel. Lar Tane had apparently turned his out too hurriedly to bother. Perry was able to hit a foot-high target hung on a tree, at a hundred paces, five shots out of ten.

It was not the finely-made precision instrument of the 20th or 30th centuries. That would take years of development. It was little more than a crude, improved blow-gun, shooting metal pellets instead of darts. But it could kill.

On the eleventh shot, the breech exploded.

Luckily, in forethought, Perry had protected his face with a light metal shield. Pieces of flying metal drummed against it harmlessly. One piece tore a gash in his arm, to replace the sword-gash in his leg, now nearly healed.

"Make the breech stronger," Perry said to his watching technicians. "Outside of that, it's what we want."

The real job started, turning out the guns in quantity.

Presses, stamping machines and lathes had to be readjusted to the new requirements. Days flew. A plane shuttled back and forth from the northern battle-front to Gibraltar, bringing spot-news of the struggle there.

Perry held his breath each time the messenger came, dreading to hear that Elda had stormed through his little Maginot Line. But his army held. The enemy had taken ten lines of trenches, in three weeks, but

the defenders had kept pace with their digging in at the rear. More cheering, his army had become trench-wise, veterans against the new guns. The enemy was losing heavily.

"Mannerheim Line," mused Aran Deen, searching misty memories he had of accounts of long-ago historical battles. "In your father's century, a little nation called, I think, Finland held out for months against the gigantic military machine of China. Or was it Russia?"

IN ANOTHER week, just under his self-imposed deadline of a month, Perry had whipped his staff, on day and night shift, to turn out five thousand of the new guns. His twenty Nartican planes droned back and forth to the battle-ground, delivering them and their ammunition.

Perry went with the first shipment. Passing out the guns to a corps of men at the rear, they were given rifle practice. Amazed and awed, the men quickly became delighted, learning fast to sight along the barrel—there were no sights—and slip bullets into the breech rapidly.

They were single-shot guns, as with Lar Tane's. A far cry from the automatic rifles and machine-guns of lost antiquity, but incalculably more effective in range and death-dealing than arrows or swords.

"Now," exulted Perry, "we'll fight them to a standstill!"

His trained corps of five thousand were in the front-line trenches. At dawn, enemy "artillery" began its preparatory raking, prior to attack. No shot came from Perry's men, at his orders. Not even when waves of swordsmen charged.

"Wait till you see the whites of their eyes!"

Perry's command rang down the line, a phrase borrowed from the past. Perry rested his own rifle on a sand bag, sighting along the barrel. He fired the first shot. At the signal, a volley thundered from the trench. The enemy fell as though mown down by an invisible scythe. A second and third volley thinned the attack to a straggly line. At the fourth volley, the enemy stopped, dumfounded at the sudden decimation. At the fifth volley, the survivors turned and ran in utter panic.

A tremendous cheer welled from the trenches. Perry joined with a shout of triumph. No more attack came that day. The lion was licking its wounds. In the lull, Perry wrote a note.

"TO Elda, Commander of World Empire Military. Burned your fingers, didn't you? You won't break through now. I have superior manpower to draw from, over Earth. If I need them, the factories of Nartica can turn out limitless guns, much faster than your single Rhine plant. I am ready at any time to hold an armistice conference. Perry Knight, Lord of Earth."

He dropped the note, weighted with a stone, at the enemy's back lines, from a plane. It would be delivered to Elda. Perry could picture the flushed vexation that would come over her satanically beautiful face. What would she do, in the face of stalemate?

In the next week, enemy activity ceased utterly. Perry toyed with the idea of a surprise counter-attack, but thought better of it. Why waste men? If Elda stubbornly continued, then would be the time to gather masses of men and, guns and crush her once and for all. Perhaps she would see her predicament.

"The green-eyed witch will not arbitrate," old Aran Deen predicted. He lifted his head, as though sniffing for trouble. "She has some new trick up her sleeve."

Perry's elation died.

He could feel it too, a brooding air of impending something. The quiet before the storm. Would she make one last, desperate assault, with her full army? He scouted in a plane and saw, along their supply route, huge wagons drawn by twenty horses. Nameless objects of ominous size, covered with canvas, were being dragged up to the front lines.

Perry had no chance to see more.

Three planes droned up to meet him. Their mounted guns peppered at him. When a bullet drilled through his windshield, past his ear, Perry boiled. He had seen the coppery flash of Elda's hair again, in

one of the planes.

"Get on the tail of one of those ships," Perry barked to his co-pilot. He stuck his gun, taken along for emergency, through the cracked windshield grimly.

Chasing him away again, was she? Perry knew he was being mad, reckless, inviting an aerial battle—one against three. But the vision of her mocking smile in his mind had the same power to make him almost a maniac, as twice before.

Hounding the tail of one ship, Perry shot steadily. A bullet struck somewhere in the left wing motor. Smoke poured from it, then flame, and the plane dove down as a blazing firebrand.

One gone!

Shot at by the second plane, Perry himself slewed his ship away with a wrench that threatened to tear the wings off. Circling, he angled back, let the co-pilot take over, and aimed for the other ship's windshield. The gods again leaned his way, as a bullet sped through glass. The pilot killed or wounded, the plane flopped crazily. Half-way down it righted, perhaps under the hand of a co-pilot, and managed to land safely.

The second out of action!

Panting, Perry looked for the third ship—Elda's. It had hovered off, as though indolently watching. Perry roared at it, aiming with his gun. He had a perfect shot, at either the windshield or right wing motor.

His finger hesitated at the trigger. He groaned, involuntary thoughts booming in his mind. Starkly, he saw a vision of Elda's lithe body crumpling at the impact of a bullet. Or her ship crashing to flames out of which no living thing could emerge.

Twice before, with her death at his fingertips, he had felt this same stab within him, without quite knowing what it meant. Now he knew.

GRIMLY he shot, reviling the fate that had combined his most dangerous enemy with the thing he loved, against all rhyme or reason.

But too late.

In the split-second of his hesitation, Elda's plane slewed upward. Gracefully, it made a figure eight and came at Perry's tail. Perry gasped. It had been a sheerly artistic maneuver, product of skilled 30th century flying. Elda had been a supreme aviatrix, in her former life.

Perry winced, waiting for the burst of flame from his rocket engine, as her bullets found their mark. But the burst of bullets only ripped into his fuselage tanks, emptying them rapidly. Perry turned for his own lines, expecting to be hounded, shot down. But Elda's plane soared high, dipped in a little mocking gesture, and turned away.

He could almost hear her say: "Finish defeating me. And winning me. You fight only for me!"

Perry landed with the last of his leaking fuel. He trembled now, in reaction to what had been his, and the world's, first dogfight in the air since a vanished time.

But he trembled for another reason. He was suddenly aware, belatedly, that the burst of bullets from her plane had been a drumming rat-tat-tat.

Like a machine-gun!

ATTACK came the next day. Attack out of a nightmare. In stunning sequence, the ominous foreboding of the past week materialized. First came an air-raid. The planes roared up and down the first-line trenches, spraying metal death. Perry listened to the sound, and it was the same as from Elda's plane.

Machine-guns, they had those! Lar Tane was a step ahead. Perhaps for months back, even before the use of rifles, he had worked on the machine-gun, finally perfecting a useable one.

Before Perry could send up his planes, the enemy flight withdrew, having done significant damage. There was a slight lull, then a throaty thump that brought a dazed look to Perry's face.

It could only be the voice of a weapon absent from Earth for 2,000 years—a *cannon!*

Lar Tane was two steps ahead!

The first few charges furrowed into the ground ahead. The following arced into the trench, in blasts of flying metal pieces. Each took five or ten men, and caved in yards of trench. The cannon were obviously loaded with sharp grapeshot, blown out by steam. Not the mighty exploding shells of scientific war, but frightful enough in 50th century terms.

Perry saw decimation stalk his trenches. The men stuck to their posts bravely, inured now to long-range death, but replacements had to be rushed up constantly. And there was no enemy within range to shoot at, not even with the rifles. For hours the big guns bombarded, making a shambles of the front-line trench.

At noon, the enemy advanced, waves of rifle and sword corps.

Perry gasped again.

An apparition led the way across no-man's-land. A huge, shiny, rumbling machine, spitting machine-gun fire from its turret. A dozen of them were the spearheads of attack.

Tanks!

That was the word, from the dim past. They were steam-driven tanks, plucked from the annals of ancient war.

Perry's riflemen took what toll they could, and then the enemy swarmed into the trenches. More than swords flashed in the sunlight. Bayonets, too, at the ends of rifles. Perry's forces were driven from the front-line trench, after a last stand of furious hand-to-hand struggle.

Night brought its lull.

Aran Deen spoke with shock behind his phlegmatic tones.

"Machine-guns, cannon, bayonets, tanks! Lar Tane has truly introduced scientific war. History has been given a huge jolt. What can we do now, Perry?"

"I don't know—I don't know!" Perry was sunk in a toneless lethargy. "Fight, I guess, to the last."

IN THE following week, Perry was hurled back daily from trench line to trench line. He could not stem the tide. With merciless precision, Elda, high priestess of war, used her new tools. The raiding planes sprayed machine-gun hail. The cannon bombarded viciously, cutting his lines to pieces. The tanks, like roaring demons, cleared the way for attack-troops.

Perry felt as though he had been switched to the past, to a raging war of the 20th century that his father had told of. His pitiful few guns and swords, arrows and spears were useless. He was a knight in armor before bullets—grim pun! Lar Tane was a science warlord raiding the helpless Stone Age world.

The handwriting was on the wall.

At the tenth day, unable to even dig trenches fast enough to keep up with those captured, Perry was driven into the open. His Mannerheim Line had been broken. He tried one desperate stand in the open. It was havoc, with the cannon, planes and tanks grinding forward inexorably.

In effect, Elda had a mechanized unit, deadly for blitzkrieg purposes. Her cannon were crude, her tanks small and undeveloped, her machine-guns quick to jam, but Perry had none. He could only retreat, almost at a run. Elda followed relentlessly.

Hounded to the Mediterranean, in the next two weeks, Perry dispersed his army. Europe was lost! He fled on a sailing vessel to Gibraltar, with his seasoned officers and Aran Deen. Here, in the next few days, he sabotaged the Gibraltar plant. Lar Tane would not be able to use it. He left the radio station intact. No need to wreck that.

Elda came with part of her army by sea, as Perry knew she would, rather than over the Pyrenees. She was determined to drive him off the continent. Perry sailed the day before her victorious troops reached Gibraltar, in the *Dogstar II*.

A scouting plane saw the ship, swooped, and sprayed the deck with machine-gun fire. In anticipation, Perry had called all men below. The plane gone, he came up to find a note that had bounced to the deck.

"To Perry, Lord of America, pro-tern. Eurasia is ours! You can't stop us in Africa. Nartica to the side, you're Lord now only of the Americas. I've taken more than half your world away. I'll take the rest too. I'm afraid you won't have an empire to win me with—unless you capitulate to my father before it's

too late. Elda."

Perry slowly tore the paper to shreds and let them swirl down to the water. He looked back. Gibraltar was sinking below the horizon. Europe, Asia and Africa lost, yes. But it hurt him most to see the ruins of the Gibraltar plant, at his own hand. It was an ominous omen of the greater destruction settling over the world like a smothering cloak.

The ship plowed toward America, into a sunset that spread a blood-red glow over the bowl of sea and sky.

Another omen.

For now it was World War—

CHAPTER XXI Threat of Science

WHEN Perry docked at New York City, he found America seething—and divided.

The American tribal-states, united behind Stirnye to bring a new social order, had remained a closely knit group, loyal to the idea of a democratic World-State—up till now.

Now, half the tribes cried against Perry. He had lost the European campaign, ignominiously. Gone down in their estimation. He was nothing of the leader Stirnye, his father, had been.

Perhaps Lar Tane, *was* the man to lead the world! The cry ran the length and breadth of the land.

It was a dangerous moment. Perry pondered the dark situation. He was still on the defensive. If Lar Tane struck soon, an invasion of American might succeed overnight, for lack of opposition.

On the third day of his return, a radio call came from the Gibraltar station. Lar Tane's voice rolled from the loudspeaker.

"We brought our own generator down from the Rhine plant, for power here at Gibraltar. Clever of you to sabotage the Gibraltar plant. But I've tripled the capacity of the Rhine plant. It will equip my army of conquest. I'm going to invade America!"

"If you expect me to capitulate—" began Perry fiercely.

"No, I suppose not." Tane seemed to sigh falsely. "My daughter, Elda, rather strangely helped you escape, to prolong the war. Perhaps she is right—that it's better to conquer all Earth by force of arms. A conquered people is easier to handle."

Perry writhed. So that had been her reasoning, behind all the fanciful talk of giving herself to a man who won her an empire. She had been coldly calculating all the while. Was she more of a monster than her father? Perry ground the image of her out of his mind. He must learn to hate her—hate her for what she was. A scheming woman who pursued her own ends, first, last and always.

"*If* you conquer them!" Perry shot back to Lar Tane.

"Still skeptical?" drawled Tane's voice. "You've had a taste of our 30th century methods. More will come." His voice turned ugly. "I warn you, Perry. I will strike—soon!"

HE DID. The next day, ten rocket planes swooped like striking eagles from the stratosphere, down over New York. They circled, dropping black objects. Hurling down, these landed to explode with deafening reports.

Aerial bombing of cities! Lar Tane was reviving that frightful war method from the archives of past holocaust.

In the city, panic stalked the streets. Women and children screamed, running blindly about. Men shouted hoarsely, and shook their fists futilely in the sky. The bombers obviously had two objectives—the Capitol dome and the beehive of industry at the southern tip of Manhattan Island. But unskilled their lethal cargo dropped haphazardly.

One bomb did explode near the Capitol dome. The ship that dropped it had zoomed daringly low. Perry knew he would see the flash of coppery hair. Elda again! Raging, Perry ran for the airfield. But before he was half there, the enemy squadron left, their bombs gone.

It had been a quick, stunning blow, literally out of clear blue sky. Perry sniffed at the sulfurous fumes

that wafted through the city. Simple potash and sulfur bombs. Not powerful, but easy to make, where guncotton or TNT would require elaborate chemical manipulation.

Later, the results of the bombing were checked. Three buildings shattered. A factory plant slightly damaged. Five people killed, twenty wounded. That was all.

"A significant result!" Aran Deen muttered.

"Significant? Hardly anything." Perry went on broodingly. "But worse will come. Bigger bombs, better aim. With New York smashed, the center of civilization today, Lar Tane will easily sweep through an America that's divided against me."

Bitter despair clutched Perry. Strangely, Aran Deen's old eyes glowed.

"A significant result, I say! I think Lar Tane made a mistake, this time. Divided America? Watch, Perry, as news of this spreads."

Perry saw what he meant.

The news of defenseless women and children bombed wailed across America. The wildfire of indignation swept back in a tidal wave. Overnight, almost, the atmosphere changed. Delegations began to come from all the inner tribes, from the Arctic to the Gulf, and from South America, pledging their continued fealty and aid to Perry, against the usurper Lar Tane. Against the cruel bomber of innocent women and children.

"He did make a mistake," Aran Deen chortled. "He should have remembered how many times in the past people solidified to bitter enmity when their cities were bombed."

PERRY took a deep breath, with vital support once more behind him. He pondered what was still a dark situation.

World War!

It was that now. With the manpower of Europe, Asia and Africa to draw from, Lar Tane had ballooned into a formidable power. The campaigns in Europe seemed almost like little skirmishes now, to Perry. Future battles would be stupendously greater, with much of the hell of scientific warfare unloosed.

And who would be able to strike a heavy blow first—Lar Tane at Perry, or Perry at Lar Tane?

Perry determined it must be himself. He must take the offensive again, invade Europe somehow.

His call to arms in America brought enthusiastic response now. Men marched from their homes and fields in droves, reporting at a recruiting center-set up north of New York. Within a month, a million men had congregated, with more arriving daily. The seasoned officers from the European campaign organized and began training them.

Perry became a dynamo of activity, in his Manhattan laboratory.

With Aran Deen, and utilizing certain data in preserved records, he quickly devised a machine-gun, cannon, and tank. It was to be a war of science now, and large-scale destruction. Lar Tane had asked for it.

The completed model of the machine-gun was crude and clumsy, but fired twenty rounds a minute. Lar Tane's could not be much better. The cannon, like Lar Tane's, was really a mortar that shot forth heavy charges of grapeshot. The tank rattled and clanked as though ready to fall apart any moment, but its tough alloy parts held under any punishment of rough terrain. The steam-engine to drive it was modeled after the steam-turbine they already knew. Its "fuel," as with the *Dogstar II's* great engine, was simply a few lumps of the radioactive-wax releasing its stored atom-energies.

Perry was not amazed at his ability to devise these engines of warfare so swiftly. They were comparatively simple. For many years, with his father, he had thought in terms of new invention. It had taken much more ingenuity to achieve radio transmission. But he was dismayed. With his father, he had devised useful, worthy things. Now his skill and mind fashioned these shuddery tools of Mars.

What horrors lay ahead?

IN THE meantime, Perry had gathered twenty-five planes for the defense of New York against the enemy sky raiders. But strangely, no second bombing raid came. Had the first been just a test, like the test of the first guns, in Europe? Was Lar Tane rapidly piling up a vast arsenal of bombs? Preparing for

another Der Tag?

The suspense tore at Perry's nerves. One surprise after another. What ominous things was Lar Tane scheming, while two continents girded themselves for war?

He sent scouting planes to Europe. They reported vast activity at the Rhine plant, and at Vinna. Day and night shifts building, constructing. Wagon trains rattling back and forth across his territory. But nothing definite could be learned. It was all mysterious, sinister.

"Lar Tane is building up armament," Aran Deen summarized. "Preparing for a final showdown. When he attacks, it will be with the fury of seven hells."

"Yes, but I think we'll beat him to it," Perry allowed himself a calculated optimism. "We have two plants to his one, turning out armament. And we have Nartica. I haven't touched Nartican resources yet. Now I will. I'm sending down duplicates of our weapons. In a few months Nartica will turn out ten times what Lar Tane can produce. This is World War! I'll smash Lar Tane if it takes all the resources of America and Nartica!"

The plane left that would start the industrial machines of Nartica whining to turn out armament.

SOON after, the unexpected happened. A second air-raid.

Perry promptly led his planes up. Twenty-five against the enemy's ten. Machine-guns against machine-guns this time. He smiled grimly. If they refused to leave, he could lose two to their one and still bring them all down. They would leave. Lar Tane had no more replacements for his ten confiscated planes.

But they didn't leave. Instead they spread, inviting a dogfight.

"Let 'em have it!" Perry shrieked, darting his ship forward.

His partner ship followed. Perry had given previous instructions for his ships to work in pairs, singling out an enemy. He swerved. He spied Elda's ship, with its large imperial emblem of golden swastikas.

A hollow, implacable voice said, within him: "This time, if you have the chance, do not fail!"

When Elda's ship looped upward, for position, Perry's partner ship looped with her. Perry barreled with a furious burst of his wing rockets and gained rearward vantage. Giving over to the co-pilot, he clutched the trigger of his machine-gun, ready to obey the demon voice whipping his mind.

But he never shot.

Something hellish happened.

He heard nothing, felt nothing, saw nothing. But he knew that *something* had leaped from the nose of Elda's ship. From a device with a strange flashing mirror. The mirror swung, as though focusing for Perry's partner ship.

Abruptly, with a soundless puff, the partner ship was a mass of fire. All its alcohol fuel sheeted out in one tremendous flame. A second later its liquid-air supply exploded, blowing the burning ship to blazing debris.

No bullet, or even explosive shell, could have achieved that monstrous annihilation. And there had been no bullet or shell. It had been a silent, invisible force, projected by the queer mirror.

Perry knew the stunning answer. *The heat-ray!*

Lar Tane had not been bluffing.

WITH a savage snarl, Perry went after Elda's plane. His bursts of machine-gun fire missed, as she maneuvered with swift, deadly grace. Suddenly she was after him, at his tail. Her mirror-device flashed.

Perry's scalp rose, as the air outside his cabin shimmered with heat-waves. He swerved, desperately. Three more times he poured bullets at her, always a split-second too late. And three more times she outmaneuvered him, and shot that diabolic heat-beam past him.

He had the feeling that she was playing with him, taunting him, trying to make him die a thousand deaths.

With swift glances around, Perry saw seven more of his planes burst into flaming fragments, raining below. All the enemy planes were equipped with the unbeatable heat-beam. The sky became a corner of hell. It was slaughter. Only one of Elda's planes plummeted below, from a lucky bullet.

Half sobbing in helpless rage, Perry dove, as the signal to leave. His squadron left the skies to the victors. Aran Deen hobbled up as Perry staggered from his cabin.

"The heat-ray!" the old seer shrilled. "In the 30th century, Lar Tane often sent squadrons to burn cities to ashes." They watched. The city watched, awed, paralyzed, as the weapon that seemed truly magic was wielded. Even to Perry it was almost magic. His father's 20th century had known the heat-ray only as a wild dream.

Elda's planes spread in a line, slowing to their minimum cruising speed, under-jets drumming steadily. Lowering to 500 feet, their mirrors flashed downward, sweeping the invisible infra-red rays along streets, buildings, people.

Perry shuddered. Towers melting, steel running like water, humans falling as blackened corpses, a whole city in instant flame. Was that what would happen?

CHAPTER XXII

Divided World

HE took a deep breath of relief. Little was actually happening. Here and there a glass window cracked, overheated. A bit of dry debris smoked in a gutter. A rag smoldered. A puddle from recent rain steamed slightly. Steel and stone and solid wood remained adamant.

Where the scorching beams touched people, their clothing steamed, protecting them. Screams arose, more in fear than harm. It was like a withering blast, but not strong enough to more than flush the skin and bring sweat.

Perry gasped in relief again, as the last of the alcohol fuel in his planes drained out and they were hurriedly trundled away. When the heat-beams swept over the airfield, the puddles of fuel burned swiftly, harmlessly. The metal of the planes withstood easily.

After a few minutes of the aerial scourging, the enemy flight droned away, out over the ocean to Europe.

Aran Deen and Perry looked at one another, appalled at this threat of the future. A promised unleashing of hell-borne forces that in the 30th century had set a world afire.

"Just a test," Aran Deen said. "Lar Tane's heat-ray isn't a city-burner yet. It's only good against ignitable fuels, like alcohol in the planes. But give him another few months to develop it—"

His old frame shuddered.

"We won't give him the chance—we can't!" Perry drew himself up. "We haven't the heat-ray, but he has only ten planes. Nartica is now turning out our armament, for attack on Europe. Also, Nartica has hundreds of planes. With those we'll down his ten, by sheer weight of numbers. Then we'll bomb and machine-gun his troops and blast him wide open. I should have done this from the first—cracked down on him with all I had. Still, it's not too late. With Nartican resources, I've got the definite advantage—"

HE looked up, at a drone in the sky. Attack again? But it was a single ship and it came from the south, from distant Antarctica. It landed, and six blond Narticans strode forward from the cabin.

"Lord Plaronne!" Aran Deen said, surprised, greeting the governor of Nartica and his staff.

Tall and white-bearded, Lord Plaronne bowed stiffly.

"Lord Perry," he spoke in formal tones. "Yesterday your plane arrived in Nartica, with plans of weapons to be manufactured in quantity. Unfortunately, we cannot comply."

"What?" Perry was puzzled. "But you have machines, factories, skilled technicians—"

The Nartican shook his head.

"It's not that. Nartica declares neutrality!"

It was like a bomb bursting, with more shattering force than any of Lar Tane's.

"Neutrality!" gasped Perry. His voice rose sharply. "But how can you? Nartica is not a separate nation. I'm Lord of Earth—of all Earth except the present rebel territory. You have to help me put down the rebellion."

Lord Plaronne smiled faintly.

"Rebellion? Nartica considers them a rival state, since your defeat in Europe. Nartica declares its independence. We can have nothing to do with what is now World War."

Perry swayed, almost as though the world was cracking apart beneath his feet. And it was. Thunderstruck at this bewildering, ominous turn of events, he was hardly aware of Aran Deen screeching, waving his arms for emphasis.

"You declare independence! How long do you think you'll keep it? Without your help, America will fall before Lar Tane. Lar Tane will then conquer Nartica. He is seeking world rule. Twenty-five years ago, Stirnye sailed for Nartica and rescued it from decadence. Lar Tane's legions and fleets will come only to hammer you into submission. Think well, Lord Plaronne, before you invite utter subjugation."

Lord Plaronne's face was flint hard.

"Nartica can take care of itself. Besides, he—"

The Nartican stopped, as if having said too much.

Aran Deen peered cannily into his face.

"He—who? Did Lar Tane promise you safety? Through whom? Whom did he send down there? Tell me!"

"Lord Stuart," the Nartican said, reluctantly.

Aran Deen nodded.

"I thought so. Tell us one more thing, Lord Plaronne. Did Lar Tane ask for your help, perhaps at an attractive price?"

Lord Plaronne started, and flushed.

"Nartica declares strict neutrality," he said firmly. "We have decided that neither rule under a constitutional World-State, or under Lar Tane, is desirable. Fight out your war as you wish. Nartica will pursue its own destiny."

With that the delegation turned and left. Their plane droned off to the south.

"MY own people!" Aran Deen groaned. "My own people shirking their duty. Perry, this is serious. Lar Tane has opened a diplomatic front. And introduced his deadliest weapon — Machiavellian treaty-making. If Nartica swings toward him—"

Perry could already picture the great air fleet of Nartica, equipped with heat-rays, sweeping across helpless America. Her humming machines churning out armament for Lar Tane. It was starkly clear and simple now. Around Nartica —remnant of the science age—pivoted the outcome of this war of budding science.

"I'm going to Nartica," Perry said bleakly. "The war will be won or lost down there."

Aran Deen nodded soberly.

"I'm coming along. I have some influence yet, though I've lived in America for twenty-five years."

An hour later, leaving all affairs in the hands of trusted officers, they stepped to their plane. Perry was startled to find Leela following Aran Deen.

"Stuart is down there," the old seer said cryptically. "Lar Tane uses all weapons—including womanhood. We will, too."

It was not startling to Perry, as to his 20th century father, to find Anliarctica as a bare, brown continent, with only a ring of ice around the actual South Pole.

By the 50th century, Earth had shaken itself entirely free of the last great Ice-Age. The Antarctic and Arctic both were not the forbidding, bitter wastes of snow and eternal ice of 3000 years before. Their average climate was no worse than Alaska had been.

Snugly underground were the ten great cities of Nartica, and its ten million blonde inhabitants. Feudal lords of Stone Age Earth they had been, foraging for slaves and food among the Tribers.

Stirnye had changed that. So decadent was Nartica that it offered no resistance, beyond one brief battle, to Stirnye's small force of "invasion." He had then preached world-wide brotherhood, true civilization. Now Nartica was shrinking back from that task, like a turtle ducking into its shell.

Their plane landed on the metal cap of Limerka—language relic of long-gone Little America. Home-city of Aran Deen, and Silva, Perry's mother. She had been queen here, once.

Perry drew a long breath, as an elevator took them below the metal roof into the warmed city. He had been here before. But each time he came, he felt the whispers of hoary history in his ears. Little America, holding of Stirnye's ancient United States. Limerka, city Silva, his mother, had ruled.

He, Perry, son of Stirnye and Silva, had by birth the right of rule here, a right stretching back across an age.

He shrugged these fancies out of his mind. More practically, he breathed the tangy air of bustle and activity. Machines hummed below. Coal and metals spun the things of civilization. So could all the outer world be, in time.

And greater. For Nartican industry and science were restricted, bound by their four walls. They had no railroads, radio, or even electricity. It was Persia, sunk into slothful indolence. Only the younger generation, helping in the Tribber world, had the new spirit of progress.

Queer interlude, in history. Civilization ready to spring forth, all over Earth, under the aegis of a central ruling power. Nartican youth and knowledge ready to spread. 20th century reinvention ready to add full momentum. The Magna Charta ready to pave the way sanely, peacefully.

And now, instead—war!

AS THEY stepped away from the elevator, a second cage came down from the landing roof. Perry started violently.

Elda Tane stepped out!

She started, too. They stared at each other. Involuntarily, Perry tensed, as though expecting a sword or gun to leap into her hand. She smiled mockingly, then.

"This is not the battle-field, Perry," she said easily. "This is *neutral* territory."

She had stressed the "neutral" maliciously.

"Yes—" Lord Plaronne's voice sounded behind them, as he hurried up. He seemed flustered, at this meeting of the two belligerent commanders. "While here in Nartica, please observe all ethics of neutrality. You are both unarmed?" He turned to the girl. "What is it you wish, Lady Elda?"

"I want to see Lord Stuart."

"We want to see him too," Aran Deen said quickly.

Elda flashed them a guarded look. She seemed to notice Leela for the first time, and the slumbrous green eyes narrowed.

"I see," she breathed. "This is to be a battle of wits."

Suddenly she laughed and took Leela's arm.

"Come, my dear! We'll see him together."

Pale and trembling, Leela drew back from the green-eyed goddess who had invaded her universe. Aran Deen seemed to make some secret sign to Leela. Stiffening, bringing a brave smile to her lips, she let Elda take her arm.

"You will all see him together," Lord Plaronne said diplomatically, leading the way to his first-level palace. He was a bit nervous over the delicate situation.

In an ornate chamber, they were ushered into the presence of Stuart. His eyes widened as he saw the four figures approaching.

Perry wondered what drama was about to be played at this pole of Earth. Battle of wits, yes, as Elda had said. And battle of human wills, emotions, souls. For somehow, Perry sensed, the threads of their lives and of a larger destiny were inextricably tangled together.

Out in the world cannon might roar, bombs burst. Down here, human wills would clash, tongues cut sharply, with results more far-reaching.

Elda pulled Leela directly before Stuart. He stared from the satanic beauty of Elda to the simple loveliness of the girl he had left a year before. For a moment naked remorse leaped into his eyes. Then his eyes turned, as to a magnet, back to the patrician features of Elda. He composed himself and greeted them all formally.

Elda smiled, as though having won an intangible victory. Then, like a general marshalling her attack with military precision, she pointed to Perry.

"I think your brother is here to give his usual plea—that you return to the fold."

Stuart avoided Perry's eyes.

"I don't think we have anything to discuss," Stuart said coldly.

NO, THEY hadn't. Perry could see that. Stuart was here as Lar Tane's representative, to solicit Nartican aid. Or at least to keep her neutral. For Stuart wanted his empire, with which to buy Elda. She still had him duped in that naive belief.

Perry said nothing.

Elda turned to Aran Deen.

"And you, old man. What have you to say to Stuart?"

One against three. Elda was flaunting her power over Stuart. Stuart could see it himself, and winced. But he had long ago given up fighting it.

Aran Deen's rheumy old eyes fastened on the sultry beauty speculatively.

"Nothing, nothing," he mumbled. "Except to ask him, and Lord Plaronne, one thing. Do they know of the armed fleet of sailing vessels now approaching Nartica, ready to force her to aid Lar Tane, if she chooses otherwise?"

Everyone gasped.

Elda shot the old seer a startled glance, then turned to Lord Plaronne's stunned face.

"Of course, it isn't true! Ask Aran Deen if he has proof of such a wild conjecture."

"No, it was just a shot in the dark," Aran Deen admitted, guilelessly. "I thought you might try 30th century tactics."

Elda shot him another measured, almost worried glance, then spoke again to the Nartican governor.

"Now, to business. I'm here to make another offer, from my father, Lar Tane. If Lord Perry is here for similar reasons, I challenge him to make his offer openly."

Lord Plaronne made a shocked gesture.

"Nartica, remains strictly neutral. I will listen to no so-called offers—" Elda broke in blandly.

"Nonsense. Why hide behind a screen of false virtue? Our offer is this. Give us your aid to defeat America. Then, when my father forms his World Cabinet, and World Parliament, five members out of ten will be Narticans! Now ask Perry what his offer is."

"I have no offer," Perry said quietly. "Except as before. In my World-State, under the Magna Charta, Nartica will have just and proportional representation in the World Congress. Nothing more, nothing less."

"And freedom of thought," Aran Deen added pointedly, glancing at Elda. "In 2904, Lar Tane forbade the printing of books in the province of Scandia, a hotbed of liberalism."

Elda waved an airy hand.

"The masses must be held in hand by responsible leaders. You, Lord Plaronne, realize that. You're a levelheaded man. Your Nartica held sway over the Tribers for centuries, before Stirnye interfered. Nartica, with my father, will rule again. It reduces to that."

Perry gasped.

It was sheer appeal to power-lust. No camouflage, no pulling of punches. He gasped again, at the expression in Lord Plaronne's face. Cupidity, avarice, and a haughty belief in Nartican superiority, and right to rule. She had spoken his language.

The Nartican governor glanced around guiltily, then stiffened. He spoke slowly.

"Our High Council will be in session for three days. We have not yet passed finally on Nartica's position. You will be my guests, for that time. You have the freedom of the city, but please refrain from trying to contact anyone in authority. We will make our own decision, as seems best to serve the interests of the world, and Nartica."

He signified dismissal.

Attendants came to lead them to separate quarters. In the hall, Elda's parting smile to Perry was taunting, self-assured.

CHAPTER XXIII

Battle Within

ARAN DEEN'S room adjoined Perry's. They ate together, in the former, from trays of food brought by silent servants.

The food choked Perry.

"It looks bad, old man. Nartica enjoyed world hegemony, and oligarchy, for a thousand years. My father broke it up. But now, after a brief twenty-five years, Nartica is ready to jump to its old position. Or at least co-rule with Lar Tane. Half a loaf is better than none."

"My own people," the old scholar muttered. "If only Lord Plaronne would send out scouting planes. I think my stab in the dark struck something. Lar Tane may have sent such a fleet. The green-eyed witch looked guilty, for an instant."

Perry hardly heard. Searching for a needle in a haystack, if the fleet existed, somewhere out in the broad oceans that lapped the shores of Antarctica from every direction. It was a hopeless hope.

Perry groaned, mentally oppressed. He had the feeling of a rat in a trap. Elda weaving a spell of evil, driving him into a corner.

"A stab in the dark!" Aran Deen suddenly hissed. "I have friends here. If the green-eyed witch were out of the way—"

Perry blinked. "What—"

"Assassination," the old seer said calmly.

"No!" Horror leaped into Perry's eyes. "Not that. Good God, not that.

Old man, if you try it—"

He had clutched Aran Deen's bony arm fiercely. He relaxed, flushing.

The old eyes looked into his, accusingly.

"It has come to that, Perry! I merely tested you. But I can't blame you. Once, when I was young—" He shook his head. "You war on two fronts, poor lad."

"Yes, but she'll never win on that one," Perry snapped. "Old man, don't ever think she'll win that way."

Something else leaped into Aran Deen's eyes.

"War on two fronts! If she lost—"

PERRY was hardly aware that he was alone, then.

He flogged his mind to think—think some way out of the trap. See Stuart? Tell him how Elda was ready to cast him aside, for any other man with an "empire"? No, what good would that do? Stuart knew. He wanted to be the man. He was carrying on his fight solely for her, not for power or any belief in Lar Tane's ruthless principles.

Perry was suddenly aghast.

And what was he himself fighting for? Could he point a finger at Stuart—now? War on two fronts, yes. And on how many fronts could a man fight a battle? Could he fight within as well as without? Could he fight the battle for the world without first winning the one raging within him?

And yet—how could he win the one within? How, in the name of the universe! The roots of his inner war stretched back to mighty forces from the dawn of time. A man could as easily shoulder aside a world as steel himself against what Elda represented—as a woman.

The third knock penetrated his laboring mind. He opened the door, staring dumbly.

Elda Tane stood there.

"It is boring to sit, waiting, doing nothing," she smiled. "Will you join me, Herr Perry? Perhaps we can tour the city together. I am interested. You know more of it than I."

Her casual tone broke into a trilling laugh.

"Or would you consider it treason to your cause, to give me your company? I might win military secrets from you."

Perry glared at the challenge in her eyes.

"Come on," he said gruffly.

He could not let her think he quailed before her. He could not win the inner fight by hiding in the dark.

THE underground city was built around a huge central well that dropped sheerly. An elevator took them down a giddy mile, to the bedrock foundation. Level by level, they toured upward, through the beehive city and all its intricate ramifications.

An admiring wonder came over Elda's face, as though blown there by a breath from the past.

"This is almost like civilization of my time," she murmured. "Activity, industry, science in the service of man. Ah, Perry, you would have liked my times—"

"No," he said sullenly. "You had tyranny. Science prostituted in the enslavement of mankind. First there must be freedom, democracy, then the civilization of science, People, and human thought, are the important things. They must be free. Better a world of free people without science, than your kind with slaves."

"Your father said," she laughed.

"Yes, my father said," he snapped back. He went on, words tumbling out.

"My father saw the uprise of science war, and dictators, and oppression. It grew, for a thousand years. It fell apart, like a rotten apple, in your time. When my father awakened, after the Dark Age that resulted, he knew it must never happen again. Knew that civilization—his kind and your kind—had failed. Knew that—"

He broke off, bitterly.

"But of course you don't understand," he told her. "You were born, bred, and poured into a mold 2000 years ago. You just don't—can't, I guess—understand."

"Defending me, in your own thoughts?" Elda gave a rippling laugh, then sobered.

"But maybe I do understand. More than you think. After my father, I rule. I hate a dull world. I love excitement. And there is excitement in building, creating, fashioning a new world—"

"You?" Perry laughed scornfully. "You love war, and killing, and destruction. That's your man who doesn't exist—Death!"

"No, Perry." Her tones were strangely quiet, sincere. "You wrong me. I don't love death, nor do I hate it. One doesn't hate unless one fears. I accept the death I've wielded as a means to an end. I want you to understand that."

"Why?"

"Because I believe in what I'm doing. Because, no matter what you think of me, I've had my own convictions. I've been sorry for the lives sacrificed. Believe me. Even, at times, I've wondered—"

He waited, but she had fallen to silence. Her face was wistful, almost sad.

For the first time, Perry had a glimpse into her soul. Into a strange soul that was both dark and bright, compounded of things of the mind and things of the heart that were at variance. She was baffling, at times hateful. But always fascinating in a deadly way, and yet—somehow almost pitifully wistful. Is was as though behind a mask of superficial things she was fearfully earnest.

Perry held his breath, gazing into her soul. He wanted to see more. See what lay glinting softly at the very bottom.

"Elda, what do you mean?"

She turned the glory of her emerald eyes on him.

"I mean—"

HER voice ended in a sharp gasp. Abruptly, in a deserted passage they were traversing, a masked man leaped out silently. A knife glinted in his upraised hand. It swept down toward the throat of Elda Tane.

To Perry, the tableau seemed to freeze.

Aran Deen had done this, after all. Sent an assassin for Elda. Fleetingly, he noticed her face. There was no trace of fear there, only surprise. She had lived in a time of rampant death, all dread of it bred

out. She stood like some tragic goddess, calmly accepting fate.

All this lanced through Perry's mind in split-seconds. He had leaped almost instantly to intercept the knife. But hopelessly.

The knife slashed at her slim white throat—and missed!

With a sob of relief, Perry caught the wrist, on its second deadly swing. He twisted viciously. The knife dropped. The masked assassin moaned, jerked free, and sped away like a ghoul. Perry sprang after him, but Elda clutched his arm.

"Never mind," she said briefly, her voice a trifle tight. "Let him go. I'll not be taken by surprise a second time. Aran Deen sent him. I see it now. He was the one who suggested I accompany you around the city!"

Perry cursed.

"I didn't think he would try it—"

Her green eyes smoldered on his, suspicion flaming. Then she shook her coppery tresses.

"You're not acting. You had nothing to do with it. Well"—she smiled faintly—"you saved my life. I was paralyzed. The second time he would have succeeded."

"Forget it," Perry grunted, conquering the sick horror within him. Unbidden, the picture came into his mind of Elda lying with blood flowing. He strode on, as though nothing had happened.

Following his cue, she spoke.

"Where was I? I was telling you that I believed in what I was doing—"

She broke off. The spell of that had been broken. She had closed her soul. Her voice changed.

"Perry, why did you save me—your worst enemy? In my time, men—well, gallantry was a lost thing. This kind. Why did you do it, Perry?"

He looked stonily ahead, refusing to say what she wanted him to. Refusing the bait of mockery.

"Gallantry, and other things," she mused, at his side, as they took an elevator up to the first level. "Honor, integrity, loyalty—but what am I saying? Those are the catch-words of a dream-world, which doesn't exist. *Your* kind of world. The kind of empire you'd give me, if you won. But it doesn't exist—couldn't. No more than the man exists who—"

SHE was peering at him, Perry knew. He steeled himself. She was using deliberate sincerity and earnestness as weapons. Luckily, he saw that now. He wouldn't yield a second time, as on the night of the escape at Vinna. She was whiling away time, enjoying the battle on that hidden front between them.

"Where—"

He had suddenly noticed, in the hall of the palace, that she had taken his hand and was leading him to her rooms.

She urged him into a private lift.

"These were once the rooms of the Queen of Limerka, Lord Plaronne told me. Your mother. She liked to look out at the stars."

They stepped out in a hemispherical dome on the surface of the city's metal cap. A wide skylight let in the clear cold starlight of the polar firmament. Perry bit his lips. Was this sacrilege? Twenty-five years ago, in this same hushed chamber, his father and mother had pledged their love. Did she know?

She saw the question in his eyes.

"Yes, I know." Her voice was soft. "Look at me, Perry!"

In the star-glow, she was Diana, the moon goddess again. Coppery hair glinting like rare old patina, ivory skin aglow, emerald eyes sparkling—she was inhumanly, achingly lovely.

The battle began again, within.

Perry fought desperately, as guns pounded in tune with his pulse. She touched his hand and liquid fire raced through him.

The perfect lips formed words.

"Perry, tell me. Am I wrong? Is my father wrong? Is your kind of world the right kind? Is the kind of empire you would lay at my feet the one I really yearn for, deep inside?"

The questions were like a muted machine-gun.

He couldn't let her batter down his defenses again. Mockery! It must be there—but it wasn't.

"Elda!" His voice was hoarse, strained. "Elda, don't. It isn't fair."

"Are you the man who doesn't exist?" she said slowly, deliberately.

He shrugged, by sheer will-power. "Why ask me? I—"

"You *are* the man who doesn't exist! Perry, come to me—"

He swayed, as an invisible wind beat down his last resistance. Eagerness flamed in his eyes.

"This time you mean it, Elda!" he croaked. "This time—"

Her lips were hot fire against his. Her lithe body yielded, and the flaming desire and wonder and sweetness of her blazed like a comet across Perry's universe. . . .

And then burst!

For the green eyes laughed—laughed into his.

He thrust her away, brutally. "Witch of hell!" he moaned.

"That for casting me aside, once," she exulted. "Twice I've made you pay. And that, too, to keep you fighting—for me. I'll take your kind of empire, if you win. You still fight against me—and for me!"

Perry fled, as the other time. Fled from her trilling laugh of womanly triumph. Twice she had made a fool of him.

ARAN DEEN waited in his room. He looked up searchingly, wincing a little at the rage in Perry's face.

"You sent that assassin, old man? You utter, stupid, meddling old fool!"

"Assassin?" Aran Deen chuckled a little. "The man had his orders, to make it look good. Counter-attack, in your little private war with the green-eyed witch. Women often see men in a new light, when they 'save' their lives. Didn't it work, Perry?"

"Work! Work!" Perry groaned in utter misery. He ground the episode from his mind. "Any news from the council?"

The old seer shook his head, worriedly.

"Nothing official. Through friends, however, I hear they are debating furiously. And Perry—the *best* we can hope for is Nartican neutrality!"

CHAPTER XXIV

Lost Cause

PERRY was not too surprised, the next morning, when Elda again appeared at his door.

"Let's look over Nartican machinery and factories," she said blandly. "Estimate how fast they can turn out armament. Whichever way Nartica goes, we both need to know. Coming?"

She might be a family friend, suggesting a little outing in the country, by her casual tone. She made no mention of the previous day.

Perry nodded grimly.

Spending long hours in the levels that hummed with machines and spinning lathes, they both saw how rapidly the weapons of science warfare could be churned out.

"With Nartica lies the balance of power," Perry said frankly, since the girl must know too.

Elda shook her coppery head.

"Not quite—"

She went on, after a thoughtful pause. "I'll tell you something, Perry. Nartica neutral, or on our side, means quick victory for us. We have the heat-ray. But even with Nartica behind you—if that happened—you wouldn't win!"

"Wishful-thinking," Perry snorted. "Bluff."

"No." The girl was earnest. "Against Nartica turning your way, my father is turning out thousands of heat-ray guns. Improved ones. They are being installed along every mile of our Maginot frontier. The beams will cover every inch, with a mile range to each. Your troops could never break through. Not in years and years. And when the heat-ray is further developed, we'll sweep out, conquering."

She grinned in his face, like a lovely evil flower.

"You can't win the war. Or me!" Perry shrugged.

"Wars are won by fighting, not talking."

But within, he was appalled. The damnable heat-beams encircling Lar Tane, protecting him in a ring of fire. Vinna protected similarly, against air-raids. Not all the armies of Earth would break through. Somehow, Perry believed her. But why had she told him? Out of sheer, malicious spite! To make his unrestful nights still more hideous.

LATER, wandering, they viewed ancient relics in Limerka's museums. Pottery from 4000 A.D., made by backward folk of the Second Dark Age. Instruments of torture from barbaric 3400 A.D., when mankind had reached an ebb close to utter savagery, after civilization's collapse.

Wheeled sky-cars from Elda's time, in a sudden plunge back to the science age.

"Combination plane and auto," she murmured reminiscently. "Once, in one of those, I set a round-the-world record of 23 hours, broken a year later. Ah, Perry, my times were great—"

She peered into his stony face.

"Don't say it," she mocked softly. "My times were a veneer of civilization over jungle law. Mechanical Elysium around a framework of social purgatory. You see, Perry, I know, too. When I rule, I'll do better."

"Power is your god," Perry snapped shortly.

She seemed about to answer, but sighed and turned away.

They passed glass cases filled with resurrected relics of the long science age from 1800 to 3000. Parts of huge machines, labeled vaguely, for records of their use were lost. Metal-paged books from 2500, when they had been introduced. Half-smashed delicate microscopes that had peered into the heart of matter. A cracked telescope mirror, fifty feet across, reputed to have observed planets around the star Sirius. Slabs of transparent steel, a secret lost in antiquity.

Pathetic fossils of the supreme period when the human mind had searched for all the universe's secret. By 2800, man had understood most manifestations of the cosmos—excepting himself.

But mainly, the relics of 2800 to 3000 were the engines of war. Little hand-guns that shot poisoned needles. Cracked bombs once containing deadly germs. A giant, rust-eaten cannon barrel from 2600, whose legend claimed that the mammoth gun had shot ten-ton shells five hundred miles. It had been used to bombard half of Europe from the north coast of Africa, across the Mediterranean. A stratosphere torpedo, which in 2300 had rocketed from Asia to America, landed precisely in the heart of a city, and would have blown down a square mile of buildings, like its mates, if it hadn't been a dud.

Perry shuddered.

Mad orgy of scientific death-dealing. In comparison, the present war with its little guns faded to little more than a Stone Age battle touched up slightly.

"You think our trifling scuffle a war?" laughed Elda, sensing his thoughts. "You should have seen the drive on New York, in 2904. Two million bombers attacking daily for six weeks!"

She shuddered herself.

"Even the heat-ray we have is a toy. But it represents the most powerful weapon today. It will win for us. And—"

SHE stopped, stiffening. Perry stared at the largest thing they had seen yet. It filled one end of the huge museum, on a pedestal of stone. The legend said:

"Fighting boat of the 20th century, destroyer class, 2500 tons, twelve six-inch guns. Found remarkably preserved, frozen solid in an iceberg. Was undoubtedly sole survivor of Antarctica Naval Battle of 1986, between fleets of Pan-Europe and Pan-America. Engines disabled, the crew died, and the winter freeze caked the ship in ice that remained for almost 3000 years."

A torn yellow piece of paper, pasted carefully on glass, was still legible, from the original log. It read, in 20th century script that Perry knew:

"Destroyer *Chicago*. January 1, 1986, New Year's. Enemy action disabled engines. Drifting south.

Weather freezing. Food supplies low. No hope for us."

The log-writer had gone on, breaking from formal recording:

"But our fleet fights on. If it wins, Pan-America wins, and there will be no more war—ever! Pray God the New Year brings that!"

"He couldn't know," Elda murmured, herself subdued, "that there would follow a thousand years of war, off and on." She shook herself free from the incubus of that lost wail out of the past. "Remarkably well-preserved, isn't it?"

Locked away from corroding air and water within dry, sub-zero ice, time had passed the ship by. Its armored sides and deck were almost shiny. The guns were unruined, seemingly ready to belch flame as of yore. At the rear an enemy shell had cracked through the deck, exploded below, wrecking the engine.

"It is," agreed Perry. "My father took me through the ship once. It has an arsenal of unused shells. If its engine were replaced—"

He started, realizing to whom he was talking. Their eyes locked a moment.

Perry turned on his heel.

"Let's go. Time for dinner."

They separated at the palace. Aran Deen met Perry with a worried face.

"The Council will vote tomorrow," the old seer mumbled.

"How much chance have we?" Perry demanded.

"For Nartican help?" Aran Deen shook his head. "None. Just a chance for neutrality. Slim chance."

Perry groaned. The suspense of it was driving him mad. And had Elda guessed what he had thought, looking at the great fighting ship of ancient days?

Aran Deen touched his arm.

"I spoke to Stuart today, bringing Leela along. Stuart lives in hell. I did not say much. He is beyond the appeal of words. But tomorrow—" His old eyes narrowed. "Something may yet be done."

"You can't break her spell," Perry ground out. "You simply can't."

THE next day, Aran Deen, mysteriously evasive, led Perry and Leela from their palace rooms to the elevators. Perry's eyes widened, as he saw Stuart and Elda awaiting them.

Aran Deen addressed them collectively.

"Lord Plaronne has graciously invited us to attend a play. I think it will ease all our nerves."

He looked around, as if for assent. Elda Tane shrugged.

"Why not? Come, my dear."

Linking her arm in Leela's again, she entered the cage. Staring coolly at each other, Perry and Stuart followed. Aran Deen came last, with a studied air of nonchalance.

His plan was utterly transparent. Perry silently cursed him for a fool, playing a game that Elda was past-master in. Perry's mind translated it into war terms. Aran Deen battering away at Stuart's defenses with Leela. Elda standing between like a Maginot Line. And like a witch who had cast an evil spell over the heart and soul of Stuart. And Perry!

And what if Stuart turned from Elda now? What good was that, at this late hour? The Nartican war-council dealt with the realities of world diplomacy, not the personal undercurrents of four humans.

Descending to the fifth level, the playground of the city, they were ushered into an open amphitheatre. There was no rain in sealed-off Limerka. A crowd of five thousand Narticans stared at them curiously, whispering among themselves. It was strange to see the leaders of a world war sitting together. Not less strange than Alexander with Xerxes. Or Hitler with Churchill.

The play was frothy, typical of a decadent culture. Overly gallant men and faithless women pursuing desire in a squirrel-cage of intrigue. One of the songs was queerly in contrast with the shoddiness of it, sung by a troubadour to a lady-love on a balcony. Romeo and Juliet, flinging back the curtain of time.

"I walk in the towers,
They call me the King!
But what says my heart?"

Of love does it sing!
I rule all the regions,
I bow down to none;
Yet triumph is empty,
If love isn't won.
This crown and this sceptre,
I wear them and sigh;
My love I'll find somewhere
Before I must die!"

"How strange!" Elda murmured, at Perry's side. "That song is from my time—" Her whisper trailed off into a sigh.

The play went on. Perry sat woodenly. This was all meaningless, farcical. Stuart and Leela sat stiffly, eyes straight ahead. Elda flicked her eyes amusedly from one to the other. Then at Perry, mockingly.

Aran Deen sat with fading expectancy. When the play finally wore to a falsely tragic conclusion, he shrugged.

"The green-eyed witch's spell holds," he whispered to Perry. "Well, nothing has been lost."

THEY filed silently to the elevator, taking a cage upward. They stepped out on the metal bridge over the, elevator-well, separated from giddy depths by a low rail. Perry shuddered. The Narticans were used to this immense pit, but it always struck him with an icy chill.

"Enough of this!" Elda snapped suddenly, facing them on the metal ramp. "I like my battles in the open, Aran Deen!"

She turned to Stuart.

"Whom do you want, Stuart. Leela or me? Tell them!"

Stuart's drawn face paled. His eyes went to Leela, then like a magnet to the green-eyed girl, in answer.

"You see?" Elda breathed triumphantly. "I win, in that. I win Nartica, too. Isn't that, true, Aran Deen? I don't fear you and all your underhand doings—Oh!"

She gasped sharply and clutched with her hands in the same instant.

Standing nearest to her, Leela had fainted, swaying over the rail, over the teetering edge of the metal ramp. Elda's hand caught the sleeve of Leela's gown. It ripped. Leela's limp figure toppled into the yawning chasm that dropped for a mile.

Horror-struck, the group stood frozen, not daring to look below. No one had had a chance to save the girl. Elda's face was shocked, for her bland, cruel words had caused Leela to faint.

Perry broke from their trance and leaped to the edge.

"She's still there!" his voice burst out.

Leela's flowing gown had miraculously caught against a cage-stay of one of the long steel cables, twenty feet down. She hung there like a rag doll, dangling. Her gown ripped slightly, and further threads slowly parted under the strain of her weight.

"Perry!" It was almost a scream from Elda. "Perry—no—"

Perry felt the tug of Elda's hand on his arm, but finished his leap over the low rail and out. His body flew through the air. Ten feet beyond the ramp he caught the cable with his hands.

Arms nearly jerked from their sockets, he clung for an instant, then lowered hand over hand. He reached under Leela's right arm just as the cloth of her gown ripped completely. The sudden load came close to tearing him away. But he held her, grimly.

Resting a moment, Perry tightened his legs around the cable till his calf muscles cracked. He grabbed Leela with both arms and raised her to his chest. The effort tore a sob from his throat. He held her.

It was not so bad then—for a while.

One arm around the girl, one hand clutching the cable, he felt himself slowly slipping. The wire-twists of the cable burned his palm. His legs turned to numb lengths of rubber.. He hung there while eternities

clicked by.

Fleetingly, he estimated how long it would take their two bodies to plummet down a mile. Why didn't help come? He tried to look around, but everything was obscured in a red haze that hung before his tortured mind and body.

HANDS were suddenly touching him. Leela was lifted away. It was like the release of a world he had supported on his aching shoulders since time began. He was dimly aware of men shouting, telling him to unwind his legs. That he wouldn't fall; they had him.

Perry's mind snapped out of its fog. His body one throbbing ache, his abraded palms bloody, his legs trembling, he was in a cage-lift. It had come up below them, taken them through a roof trap-door. Several Narticans carried Leela out, and supported Perry as he stepped back on the metal bridge.

"Are you all right?" Aran Deen was gripping his arm.

Perry nodded, then started.

Stuart knelt beside Leela, rubbing her wrists. The look on his face was little short of frantic.

Perry glanced at Elda. How would she take that? Elda's face was pale, her green eyes dulled. Her slim hands clutched one another as though she had stood that way, frozen, all through the episode. It was the first time her composure had been so utterly shattered.

But why? Perry's mind staggered a little. Why was she looking at *him!* And looking at him as though seeing a ghost? Had the thought of one or two mere deaths so shaken her? Could this be the same Elda who, on the battlefield, watched men die indifferently?

Then Perry understood. She knew what it meant. She knew that an accident had done what Aran Deen's elaborate planning had failed against. That Stuart and Leela—

Leela's eyes opened, at last. Swift terror faded to relief as she saw Stuart's face, not a bottomless cavern.

With a little sob, she flung her arms around him.

Stuart responded. Then he picked her up in his arm. His face turned slowly toward Elda, with a cold glance that spoke volumes.

Perry caught his breath. What fulminations, compounded by fate, were about to explode?

It was curiously undramatic.

About to speak, Stuart stopped as Leela's fingers touched his lips. Her eyes were shining. She turned to Elda.

"I don't blame Stuart—or you. It's over, now. You can't be bad, as I wanted to believe. There must be something in you he loved for a while—something fine."

Then, flushing girlishly, she nestled in Stuart's arms. He strode swiftly away, to put her in the hands of doctors.

Elda stared after them, her emerald eyes wide. Her face was a study of almost stupid incredulity. The words—"something in you he loved, some thing fine"—seemed to reverberate in the air. A scarlet flush washed beneath her ivory skin.

Then she straightened, almost with an audible snap of her spine. Her composure came back, as though she had whipped it about her like a cloak. She shrugged.

"So I've lost, in that," she said coolly. "No matter. I still win Nartica. You can have your Stuart. In an hour the war-council will announce that Nartica joins Lar Tane against America."

With a haughty smile, she left.

"I'm afraid she's right," Aran Deen muttered, as he and Perry went to their rooms. His eyes lighted. "Unless Stuart—"

He darted away.

"Get out!" Perry yelled at the Nartican doctor who came to treat his hands.

He wanted to be alone. All the previous episode faded from his mind. Stuart had at last broken from Elda's evil spell. Brother once again united with brother, in aim. But at this eleventh hour, what did it matter?

In a little while Nartica would announce itself an ally to Lar Tane. Soon after, the thunders of war

would come to life, engulfing a world. Lar Tane would win. The last flickering hope went out. Perry held his head as though he had been pounding it against a stone wall.

CHAPTER XXV Won or Lost?

HE SNARLED suddenly, and ran from his room. Grinning evilly, he sought Elda in her rooms. He would have a last moment of revenge, taunt her as she had taunted him. Remind her that all her hellish charms and wiles had finally lost, against Stuart and , the love she had torn him from for a while.

Elda wasn't in her rooms. Raging, Perry took the private lift to the star-chamber above. She would be there, plotting and scheming the future hell-war about to be launched.

He flung open the door.

Elda stood with head lifted, looking up at the blazing polar firmament. She whirled, gasping, as though caught off guard. For a wink of time again, face flushed, hands squeezed together helplessly, her composure *was* gone.

Then, instantly, she smiled calmly. "I thought you might come," she said mockingly. The moth to the flame." "But one moth got away!"

Her hands went daintily to her ears.

"Don't shout. I hear you. Yes, Stuart did. But you, Perry—can't resist the flame. You burn for me!"

Perry stood dumbly.

What had he meant to say? What torrid words that would shame her, make her cringe, gasp, fly at him while he would laugh? They were gone now, the words. His mind was blank. He only knew that she was beauty incarnate, and flaming desire.

He stood dumbly,

"Listen to me, Perry." She was suddenly serious, earnest again. "My father will win, with Nartica. Why carry on a bitter war, needlessly? I've had enough of it. Too much of it in my time. Join us now, before it's too late. Come to me! After my father is gone, we rule together, you and I—"

"No." Perry was suddenly quiet, too. "Listen, Elda. There *is* only one way—my way. That's the only one thing I'm sure of. You must see it yourself. The Magna Charta adopted, forbidding rule by one person, or one group, through might. I wouldn't trust myself to rule. With you or without you. Don't you see—can't you see?"

"I see!" she breathed suddenly. "I see that you are human—and a man!"

She took a step forward, face oddly alight.

"But what if I told you I loved you? What if I told you that!"

"No tricks," Perry said wearily.

"Trick? What if I *meant* it, just realized it! Standing there on the metal ramp, watching you dangle, slip—"

She was advancing slowly.

Perry wanted to back away, flee. He had been burned twice, listening to the worthless words with which she played her woman's game. He tried to grip himself, lest he play the fool for the third time.

But his mind was a burning blank. And in another moment, he had taken her in his arms, babbling. And in the next moment had ended up with the swordcut of mockery. For there it gleamed from her eyes.

"Again!" Elda shrugged wildly. "You're my slave. This makes up for Stuart—"

THE door swung open abruptly. Aran Deen entered. He stared from one to the other. His old frame was strangely upright. He fastened his canny eyes on Elda, and slowly she paled. Perry's pulses thundered, more violently than a moment before, when he had thought of striking the girl.

Aran Deen came with the council's decision!

The world seemed to hold its breath.

"The council has voted," the old seer said. "Nartica declares war on Lar Tane!"

Each word burst like a bomb in the still room.

"You lie," Elda panted. "You lie, old man!"

He glared at her, and grinned toothlessly. Craftily.

"Listen. I saw Stuart, after he had brought Leela to a doctor. He told me of the war-fleet hidden in a harbor, as I once guessed—"

"What!" Elda half shrieked. "But he didn't know of it—"

Instantly, she caught her breath, paling again. Her eyes wished that she could bite her tongue out.

Aran Deen yelped in pure joy.

"Do you hear?" he screamed to three Nartican men who now appeared beside the door. "Do you hear?"

They nodded soberly. By their uniforms, they were officials of Limerka.

Aran Deen turned back to the thunderstruck girl.

"We'll report now—to the Council! They have not made their final vote!" He prodded the men away.

Perry and Elda were alone again. "Tricked!" Gaspd Elda, sinking into a cushioned chair. "Tricked like a little child."

Perry stood stunned. He heard the sudden drone of planes taking off, outside. Dozens of them. If the secret fleet were found

He looked at Elda, and almost pitied her. She sat in a blind misery, hardly aware of his presence. He said nothing. Overhead, the polar stars blinked down, as though bewildered themselves at the swift turn of events.

Aran. Deen was back again, in an hour.

This time his wild joy was genuine. "We went to Lord Plaronne," he recited in bubbling delight. "He sent out a fleet of scout planes. They found your war fleet, in the harbor within thrust of Limerka. The council, at that news, instantly voted for us. All Nartica is aroused, crying against Lar Tane, realizing that after America he would conquer Nartica, not give it co-rule. These are my people. I've saved them. I used trickery, as you would have. And you lose, green-eyed witch!"

"We win, anyway," Elda contradicted. She had somehow pulled herself together. "There are a thousand ships, a million men. Nartica is unarmed. We'll conquer Nartica now, America after. Merely a change of plan."

"*Less* than a thousand ships now, Elda," shot back Aran Deen. "And less each minute. The Nartican planes are dropping bombs. It seems that Nartica secretly made them in the last few months, alarmed over the world situation, trusting no one. Two hundred Nartican planes are even now bombarding. Your fleet will burn to the water's edge in twenty-four hours!"

"Nartica already armed!" gasped Elda, utterly shocked this time.

Aran Deen gloated for a moment, then turned for the door.

"In accordance with neutrality ethics, Lord Plaronne gives you one hour to leave Nartica. If you are found here after that time, you are a prisoner of war."

PERRY stood dizzied from the leap out of black despair to the heights of hope. Striving to leave all triumphant inflection from his voice, he motioned toward the seal-door that let out on the city's metal cap.

"Your plane is out there," he said.

Shock changed to satanic rage, in Elda's face. She reached within the folds of her gown. A short sword leaped into her hands from a hidden scabbard.

"I carried this after the assassination attempt." She brought the sharp point up. Her voice was deadly.

"I'm going to kill you, Perry; Without you, the attack against us in Europe will be leaderless. Besides, that destroyer. I know what went on in your mind. You would use it. Without that against us, we'll hold off attack, as I told you."

Perry's scalp prickled, as she came forward with the deadly blade. No use to call for help. The walls were thick. No use to leap at her—not Elda. She was as quick as any man. In her coldly analytical mind,

it was necessary to kill him.

There was no escape.

"Three times before I had the chance to kill you, and didn't," she said swiftly. "At Vinna, when you were prisoner. In the first aerial dogfight. And with the heatbeam over New York. I spared you each time, as a gamble, and whim. Now I can't gamble. This time you die!"

Her arm brought up the sword, for a quick thrust at his heart. Face flint-hard, eyes smoldering green, she was ready to kill as cold-bloodedly as though he were a wild animal.

But she hesitated.

"Why don't you say something?" she cried.

Cold and sick, Perry shook his head wordlessly. What was there to say?

Her fingers tightened on the hilt. Her body tensed again for the thrust.

Again it did not come.

Her eyes were wide.

And the sword suddenly slipped from nerveless fingers. The green eyes widened still more. For a long moment she stared at him, as though she had never seen him before.

"I can't," she whispered. "Do you hear, Perry? I can't! What does it mean? *What does it mean!*"

She was like a little, puzzled child, asking a question. Her voice seemed to rustle through every atom around them, and out through the universe, asking that question. And as if some inner lightning had struck from the unknown, Elda trembled—reeled.

Her awed whisper filled the starlit chamber.

"It means — it means — *you're the man who doesn't exist!*"

WITH two little, stumbling steps she threw her arms around Perry. She clung to him, burning him with the fire of her lips. She wasn't Elda, battle-queen, green-eyed witch who mocked. She was a girl, a woman, trembling against him.

"Dearest!" she murmured, babbled. "I should have known, today, at the elevator. It wasn't because of Stuart turning to Leela that I was pale, shaken. But because of you, and your danger! All the while that you hung there, slipping, slipping—oh, it was horrible! I nearly died. I burn for you, Perry!"

Her voice trailed away. Startled, she peered at him. He hadn't responded.

"You must believe me," she cried. "I swear it, this time. Look into my eyes. Can't you see? This time I mean it, Perry. This time it's I who come to you—"

Wild elation rocked Perry, filled him with a towering joy. The glowing light in her lustrous green eyes was meant for him. And there was no mockery, no trace of it.

She was his—his!

He caught her in his arms. Time ceased.

Then, with a groan, he pushed her away.

She fought to stay.

"You don't believe me? I swear it, I swear it. You must believe me—" She was near to babbling.

"I believe you," Perry said in a strained, hollow voice.

"Then—"

She drew back, falteringly.

"I believe in your world, Perry—if that's what you want. I swear that too. I lay awake nights, thinking, wondering. But always stubborn. Now I know your way is the right way. Perry, dearest—"

But he stood silent, stricken. The foundations of the universe slowly cracked beneath them.

"I think I know!" Elda's voice was low, defeated. "What have I done? What horrible things? Plunged the world into war. Killed, lied, cheated, schemed. All because the world didn't give me a man I could love. Now—is it too late, Perry?"

He nodded haggardly.

"If you stay, as a prisoner of war, you'll be executed. If you go, and I win later—the same. God, it's too late, Elda. You've earned your death a thousand times."

She stared at him wordlessly, and the witchery of her in the starglow drove him mad. She was his, as

a woman.

But as Elda, enemy commander, he had only one duty, in the eyes of all Earth and all history. He had won--and lost.

The maddening paradox of it ground his nerves to shreds. He laughed wildly, half a madman.

"Go and finish your fight, as you told me so often! That's all that's left for 'us. Now it's you who will fight against me—and for me! Your every thought will be of me, as mine was of you. Take your own medicine, Elda. Get out—get out."

His savage shouts died away.

Elda's green eyes glistened. Tears in her eyes, the first he had seen—or thought possible. She was the true Elda standing there, a young tender girl, stripped of all the mask of her tumultuous 30th century start in life. The Elda that Stuart must have loved hopelessly.

But abruptly, she changed.

The head lifted, imperiously. The eyes green fire. The perfect lips thinned and formed words. She was Elda, battle-queen again. She spoke in tones bitter cold.

"All right, Perry. I'll go. I'll finish the fight. And I promise you it will be a good fight. I'll smash the world if I can I'll kill, kill—"

Green hell glittered in her eyes.

She jerked open the outer door, flashed him one look of fury, and left. Perry watched her reach her plane. The Nartican guards waved her on. Her ship rocketed up and vanished among the stars.

She was gone. Gone forever.

Perry reviled the fate that kept them apart. He turned away, haunted by her vision. The vision of her tear-wet face, as he had last seen it. The Elda he loved, but who didn't exist, except as one of a hundred poses behind a lovely mask.

She would continue the war, fight to the last. That was the real Elda.

CHAPTER XXVI

Blitzkrieg

PERRY listened, as a thunderous drone filled the air. A hundred Nartican planes, hastily loaded with bombs, soared up to join the battle against Lar Tane's secret sea fleet.

Perry took a deep breath, sweeping Elda from his mind.

The roaring eagles meant victory in the war. They and the destroyer. He must work thoroughly this time, not hastily. His next attack on Lar Tane's stronghold must be with full, devastating preparation for a world-shaking blow.

With the drums of war in his pulse, he raced below.

He found Aran Deen with Lord Plaronne and the councillors.

"Elda is gone," Perry announced briefly. "Now, begin turning out guns, tanks, bombs, bayonets. Every machine in Nartica must be used, an army raised. We'll arm five million men before we attack."

Aran Deen spoke gravely.

"We've been discussing the situation. Frankly, we need a new war plan. Some of those sea-vessels have the heat-ray, and already they've brought down dozens of our planes. We'll down the fleet, since they left Europe a month ago, before the heat-ray was well-developed. But cracking the Maginot Line in Europe, studded with powerful heat-ray guns, is going to be another story."

"Yes, we need another war plan. And I have it." Perry went on eagerly. "That ancient fighting boat, in your museum, Lord Plaronne. I conscript it in the war."

"But it has no engine," Aran Deen cried. "It is a bigger, heavier boat than any known today. There is no engine in the world big enough to drive it."

"You forget the engine in the *Dog-star II*," Perry reminded. "I'm sending for it immediately. When we're ready, the destroyer *Chicago* will lead our fleet to attack. That, in conjunction with our air-fleet—"

Stuart stood at the side, trembling, eager. Perry looked at him.

"I appoint you commander of the air-fleet, Stuart," he said "O.K.?" "O.K.!" Stuart cried back. They smiled at each other. As boys, they had used that 20th century term, learned from their father.

SIX months later, the skies looked down on what was yet a Stone Age world, and saw an amazing thing.

Long, sleek and deadly, a strange craft led the way from Antarctica. An armored fighting ship of yore, whose like had not sailed the seas for 20 centuries. It was one of the smallest of ancient warships. It would have been a cockleshell beside one of the colossal dreadnaughts of the 30th century.

But in the 50th century, it loomed as the mightiest and deadliest war-machine in existence.

Like a ghost from the past, the destroyer *Chicago* led the way for a fleet of windjammers, its engine idling, cutting the waves with its sharp steel prow.

Perry stood at the bridge of the *USS Chicago*, exulting in the feel of power. Beneath the deck sounded the rumble of his Dogstar engine, whirling a huge four-bladed propeller. Nartican technicians had installed the engine. They had also refilled the ancient shells with fresh explosive, to replace powder deteriorated through 3000 years. Leaving Nartica, a test salvo from the guns had ripped apart the Stone Age air.

The *Chicago*—named after a city that had long ago ceased to exist—was ready after 30 centuries to resume its deathdealing work.

"Strange," Aran Deen mused, as though he stood in some higher dimension and looked down over two ages. "In 1986 this ship and its fleet lost against European forces. Today, in 5000, destiny resurrects it for a second try. Forty - five super-dreadnaughts failed in that past war. Will one little destroyer win, this time?"

There was reason for doubt.

"Elda knows, of course," Perry said soberly. "If she's thought of some defense—mines, steel nets—it won't. Then the war will grind on, maybe for years, till we crack through by sheer force—if we do."

"The green-eyed witch—" Aran Deen began, and then coughed at the pain in Perry's eyes. "I mean Eldashe will fight to the last."

"So will I," Perry said, with another meaning.

PERRY had organized his tremendous assault on Europe carefully. The Nartican fleet waited at the Azores. A week later it was joined by the American fleet. Altogether 5,000 ships, five million men. A million were armed with steam-rifles. Scores of tanks and cannon lay in the holds. A total armament that in the 20th or 30th centuries would have been laughed at. But in the 50th, it rated as a formidable war-machine.

When all was ready, the armada sailed en masse for the coast of ancient France. As Perry expected, no resistance met them here. Lar Tane had strategically withdrawn into his Maginot shell. One-third of Perry's troops disembarked in France, ready to march.

A plane launched to America brought back five hundred Nartican eagles, based there, led by Stuart. They landed at the coastal region, to await the zero hour.

Drive by land, sea, and air. That was the plan.

Yet it would not be easy.

Scouting planes, roaming completely around his borders, found Tar Tane apparently impregnable. From the Rhine mouth to the Alps, the ancient Maginot Line was fully manned, and studded unbrokenly with heat-ray guns. He had mobilized perhaps five million men himself.

From the Alps to the Adriatic, Lar Tane had closed the gap, digging in where Perry had dug in for reverse reasons. From the Adriatic to Budapest, and from Budapest to the Baltic Sea, the other old-time Maginot Line was fully manned. And all the northern sea-coast was studded with heat-ray guns, against invasion by sea.

Curious parallel.

It was ancient Greater Germany again, hotbed of world ambitions, surrounded by enemies, holding off till the attack had drained itself, and then sweeping out. Lar Tane had won his World Empire that way

in 2902. Would he succeed again?

Perry set his jaw grimly. Not if he could help it.

Drive by land, sea, and air.

The universe seemed to peer down, watching.

In the *Chicago*, Perry steamed slowly north, leading two-thirds of his fleet. At the Dover Straits, the expected enemy phalanx of ships blocked the way. Perry could picture coppery-haired Elda aboard her flagship, mocking, taunting: He could almost hear her voice:

"Trying it again? I'll throw you back, like the other time. This is 30th century war, the kind I know."

Perry felt cold and uncertain, as he gave the battle signal.

Would his mailed fist, in the first test, smash futilely against a stone wall? Battle began. Hell moved in.

FROM Elda's phalanx swept a storm of heat-beams. The sails of Perry's front line of ships caught fire. Men in the focus of the beam screamed horribly and turned lobster-red, slowly cooking alive. This heat-beam was far more powerful than the one tested on New York.

Realizing that, Perry recalled his ragged front line, out of range, which seemed to be a mile. Waiting, there finally came a multiplied drone, and 200 Nartican bombing planes soared from their base in France, as prearranged. Perry had worked out a complete blitzkrieg time-table.

Perry shouted in his speaking tube, to the engine room of the *Chicago*.

"Full speed ahead! Man the guns!"

The *Chicago* leaped out, like a bulldog. Its guns thundered. Six-inch shells screamed across to the phalanx, in broadsides that needed no skilled aiming. Enemy ships shuddered and sank.

Back came the hellish heat-rays. But they met only metal. Thick armor plate that did not burn, as sails and wood did. And now the circling bombers dived, dropping their cargoes of death. Heat-rays stabbed up at them, here and there bringing a plane down, but there were many more.

Perry and his ghost-ship from the past swung back and forth across the phalanx, raking them mercilessly. Gaps appeared in the enemy line. Into these swarmed Perry's waiting attack ships. At close quarters, the deck mortars belched grapeshot at the enemy, wiping out heat-beam crews.

Before sundown, the phalanx broke, fled. Perry's victorious fleet sailed into the Straits and anchored.

"I thought you'd do better than that,

Elda," Perry said to her image, triumphantly.

Triumphantly? The first step in victory. At the last step, Elda would be a prisoner of war, sentenced to die.

AT dawn, Perry's fleet approached its second objective—the Rhine plant.

Here, no ships opposed them. But when Perry tentatively sent a flight forward, invisible fire leaped from the ramparts of the huge plant, and from the beginning of the Maginot Line at the river's mouth. Long-range heat-rays that fired a ship's sails at better than two miles.

Perry recalled his ships and once again bellowed into his speaking tube. Going out alone, the *Chicago's* guns thundered. Shells whistled toward the plant. Salvos that sent showers of concrete, brick and steel flying. Again Stuart's eagles descended, raining down bombs. The Rhine plant slowly began to crumble, under the hammering.

But it took three days.

The Rhine plant had been protected with hundreds of heat-ray guns. Their upward stabbing beams brought down the air-fleet so rapidly that they no longer power-dived. Instead, they dropped their bombs haphazardly from a mile high. Many splashed harmlessly in the river, or in surrounding territory.

And the enemy, divining the formidable threat of the *Chicago*, concentrated a flood of heat-beams toward it. When the metal armor began slowly to heat up, endangering their arsenal, Perry slipped back. Elevating their guns, the crews found the new range by trial and error, and the bombardment kept up.

Three days later, the plant was a shambles. The last heat-beam flicked out, as its crew fled.

"Lar Tane and Elda may not know it, but they're done for," Aran Deen chortled. "With the Rhine plant gone,

Lar Tane's only metal source, it's just a question of time. He's like a Cyclops now, with the eye knocked out."

Perry nodded.

"Elda can't stop me now. I thought she'd put up a stiffer fight than this. Why didn't she think of mines, to stop the *Chicago*?"

The next step was simple. Moving to position, Perry shelled the first three miles of the Maginot Line, in conjunction with Stuart's bombers. Heat-beams blasted back furiously at first, then blinked out, one by one. A hole had been knocked in the Line!

A week later, half the fleet had disembarked and set up camp in the gap.

"Hold out, if the enemy attacks," Perry commanded. "When the order comes, march on Vinna!"

With the remaining third of his original fleet and men, Perry steamed back through the Dover Straits, toward Gibraltar, and beyond. Two weeks later he separated from the fleet, sending them up the Adriatic Sea, to land within marching distance of Budapest.

The *Chicago*, alone now, for the first time utilized its full speed. Like a greyhound of the seas it passed Crete, steamed through the Dardanelles, and turned north into the Black Sea. In three days it was turning into the Danube, and heading for Budapest.

At dawn of the fourth day, the *Chicago's* guns raked up and down the Maginot fortifications at Budapest, laughing at the heat-beams, blowing them out of existence. A five-mile gap in the Line allowed the Adriatic army, as soon as it arrived, to swarm in.

"Now we're ready," Aran Deen said, rubbing his hands.

Perry nodded, and sent the final signal, by plane.

THE *Chicago* had opened two holes in the impregnable Maginot Line.

Into these poured his troops, at the Rhine and at Budapest. And at the south, where his Mannerheim Line had been, a third of his huge army, from France, crushed against that one weak link.

In the following month, Perry felt like some Alexander or Napoleon.

His planes reported steadily.

Pushing in at the Rhine gap, his army there had met enemy resistance, finally. Superior in rifles, cannon and attack tanks, Perry's forces broke through the enemy in three weeks. They were now steam-rolling toward Vinna.

At Budapest, the same had happened, Perry's army grinding forward inexorably. At the Mannerheim Line, it took the full month for Perry's forces to smash through, but now they, too, were marching on Vinna.

Blitzkrieg!

All Lar Tane's elaborate Maginot siege strategy was for nothing. The *Chicago*, war-engine of the 20th century, had cracked the nut wide open. The three-headed Juggernaut swept down on Vinna, heart of Lar Tane's crumbling empire—from the west, the east and the south.

Victory! He had it. Perry laughed at the image of emerald-eyed Elda in his mind. She had met her match on the battlefield at last, as well as on an inner front.

But the laugh was a grinding, sick one. The image he saw of her was with glorious eyes tear-wet, face sweet, tender. His armies tramped toward Vinna, to deliver her in his hands—for execution.

Unless something happened. Why had nothing happened to stop him? Was something *about* to happen? Perry was uneasy, with those submerged thoughts plaguing him constantly. Did Elda have some new trick up her sleeve, as the times before?

CHAPTER XXVII

Last Victory

THE *Chicago* weighed anchor and steamed up toward Vinna itself. The time had come for the last

act.

Lar Tane had surrounded his capital city with almost a continuous ring of heat-ray guns. They held off the three armies, Stuart's diving planes, and even kept the *Chicago* far down the river.

Perry first had a message dropped within the city, to be delivered to Lar Tane.

"To Lar Tane and Elda. You've been defeated. You must know it yourselves. Surrender Vinna, and your persons. If you agree, fly a white flag from your central tower, at noon. If I don't see the flag, I attack. Perry, Lord of Earth."

At noon, Perry put down his binoculars with a curse.

"They refuse?" Aran Deen surmised. "I told you, Perry. The green-eyed wi—Elda will fight to the last. Neither of them is quite human."

Perry gave the attack signal, and all the elemental fury of war tore loose. Stuart's total fleet of warplanes droned two miles above, over the heat-rays, pouring down lethal cargo. The three armies sniped and bombarded with their mortars. The *Chicago* meticulously gunned all the heat-ray emplacements within range, and was then forced to wait, with ammunition low.

Yet, in a week, there was no sign of surrender.

"A city is not easy to reduce," Aran Deen stated. "They might hold out for months."

"They're mad!" Perry groaned, sick of the senseless carnage.

A plane swooped and a message bounced to the deck. Perry opened it with trembling fingers, hoping it was surrender. But it was from Stuart, not Elda.

"Perry. I flew low over the city, through a gap where the heat-rays were blasted out, to look over the situation. Going past Lar Tane's tower, I saw him standing there on the balcony. Apparently he watches every day, with arms folded. Perhaps he's mad, to let the hopeless fight go on. But suppose you aim for the tower with your ship's guns. I tried to bomb it, but missed. If you blast it, and him, I think the fight will be over. He has a magnetic hold on his troops that will inspire them to fight to the end. If he's gone, the spell is over. Blast that tower! Stuart."

"That will do it!" Aran Deen agreed fiercely. "Perry, can we hit the tower? It's twelve miles."

"I think we can," Perry groaned.

Aran Deen looked at him, startled. Then he knew. Elda Tane might be in that tower too, directing the battle from that central point. Aran Deen squinted his eyes toward the city.

"No," he said. "It would take many shells. Most would hit nearby houses, killing innocent women and children. We'll go on as we have, wearing down his military forces—"

"Don't make excuses for me," Perry blazed. "I'll blast that tower, and Lar Tane and Elda, and to hell with it all."

He leaped to a gun turret himself, and applied his eye to the ancient sights, with their accuracy unimpaired.

The tower was a barely visible sliver of shiny metal, even in the binocular sights, rearing among the structures of half-resurrected Vinna. Lar Tane's figure was a black dot on the crow's nest balcony. Perry could picture him with arms folded, surveying the battle-ground.

Napoleon at Waterloo.

And was Elda beside him at times, or below issuing swift orders to a streaming staff of officers?

"FIRE!" Perry yelled, setting the aim.

He watched in the glasses, as shell after shell arced over the city toward that small target. Puffs of exploding debris dotted the vicinity around the tower. Houses shattering. Innocent women and children killed perhaps. But it would be swiftly over, if Lar Tane went. Otherwise it might go on for bloody weeks, with thousands of men sacrificed.

Always, in the past, key cities, had held out insanely, magnificently, like Madrid and Warsaw, in the days his father told of. The people, besieged, fired by a mad courage. Perhaps believing, by some twisted psychology of Lar Tane's that they were in the right, against a world of barbarian invaders.

Why didn't Elda stop it? Was she as mad as her father? Had she hardened her heart against the lives thrown to the winds? That was the true Elda, letting this go on. More than ever, it beat in Perry's mind

that there was only one way she could pay.

With her own life.

It must be ended. This was the way.

Shell after shell. And with each one, Perry winced. One hit and the tower would go. And Lar Tane. And Elda. And Elda. And Elda. Each shell screamed that, as it belched from the guns.

Suddenly it happened.

A puff of white smoke at the base of the tower. With the range at last, Perry drove a dozen more shells across. The tower rocked. Crazyly it swayed, leaned, prepared to crash.

"Cease firing!" Perry shrieked.

All over the ship, the guns stopped. And minute by minute, as though a blanket of silence had dropped from a pitying sky, the dull roar of battle stopped everywhere. The heat-beams winked out. Stuart's planes buzzed high overhead, then left, their work over. The rattle of guns and cannon thumps died into the background of silence.

Stone Age quiet smothered all the frightful din of war.

Faintly, in his mind, Perry heard the echoing crash of a colossus, in that aching surcease of sound. A colossus that had begun its fall in the 30th century, and completed it now, after an age. Lar Tane's toppled empire.

It was over.

PERRY left the *Chicago* and marched his troops of occupation into the city. Detachments branched away, to disarm the surrendered troops. Perry went on, toward the tower. Each step jarred through his brain like a sledge-blow.

Aran Deen, hobbling at his side, slowly shook his head.

"You saved weeks of slaughter, Perry," he mumbled. "But at a terrific cost—to you."

Perry's stony face gave no sign of hearing.

A plane dropped from above and landed daringly in the torn air-field before the tower. Stuart stepped out and ran forward.

"Perry—"

Whatever words of triumph Stuart had been about to shout he left unsaid. With a look at his younger brother's face, he fell in step beside him, silently.

The base of the tower was a smoking ruin. But the tower itself, by a miracle, still stood upright, leaning at a crazy angle. They stopped before it, looking up. Lar Tane's body lay crumpled on the balcony. A flying piece from the shells had struck him, perhaps.

A gasp went up.

The figure stirred, staggered to its feet. Clutching the balcony rail, Lar Tane looked around, swaying. Blood dripped from a deep wound in his chest. He looked down, at the watching figures below.

He saluted Perry, and there was defiant mockery in the gesture. Whatever else Lar Tane had been, he was not a weakling. He took defeat, in that one magnificent gesture, like a proud and unhumbled monarch.

He stiffened, lifting his head arrogantly. Folding his arms, he looked out over the city, out over the world, taking one last look at the empire that might have been his. Then, with a little leap, he threw himself over the balcony rail. His figure hurtled down into the jagged debris below.

Perry looked at the body, lying broken and sprawled on the ruins. He suppressed the moan on his lips. Somewhere within, another body lay, crushed more horribly.

He stood rigidly, while searching parties scabbled within, for any that might be alive. Would he have one more glimpse of the emerald glory of her eyes, before they faded in death? He trembled, afraid to face the next moment.

Ten crushed bodies were brought out. Six more were reported pinned hopelessly under fallen walls. All men, Elda's staff of aides and generals.

Where was Elda's body?

"We can't find it," was the report. "One room is completely caved in."

She must be in there, ground to pulp. Perry's shoulders sagged. It was best that way, after all.
He turned away, brokenly.
Aran Deen squeezed his arm. "Look—"
Perry looked, vacantly.
Then a cry rasped from his throat.

STUART had been gone for some minutes. He reappeared now, a hundred yards away, from beyond the tower ruins. With him was Elda, leaning on his arm. A trickle of blood ran from a slight cut in her smooth temple. She walked slowly, as though not sure of herself. But otherwise she was unharmed.

Elda was alive—alive!

"Not alive!" his thoughts groaned. "Anything but that."

For now, the war over, came the implacable aftermath — her execution. The world would cry for it. In an earlier time, she might have fled to a neutral country, in exile. There was no such spot on Earth, now.

She stood before him.

The impact of her beauty, first seen after six months, was like a blow to Perry. Coppery cascade of hair, shining in the sun. Ivory face of cameo-cut features. Green eyes that stared haughtily around, unyielding as ever. Whatever her fate, she would accept it unflinchingly.

She saw her father's body. Only a slight quiver of her lips, a momentary flash of tender pain, showed what she felt. Then she turned back to Perry, head high.

Green eyes met grey eyes, wordlessly.

They stood as in a painted picture. The commander who had lost, and the commander who had won. No, there was no commander who had won.

They had both lost.

The crowd about murmured. Muttered against her, lovely demon who had led legions of death. And the people of the city, the worn, defeated troops, muttered loudest, as though awakening rudely from the evil spell she and her father had cast, leading them to catastrophe.

"Elda—"

Perry went on with his eyes, trying to tell her that what was to come was forced from him. She made no response, no sign of understanding. The emerald eyes were cold, even mocking. She was the Elda of the mask, asking no mercy.

Perry straightened.

The crowd was watching. There could be no unbending, no compromise, with what she represented. The world must realize, with her going, that there would be a new world, a new way.

Elda, symbol of war and merciless ways of might, had to be sacrificed on this altar of a new faith.

Perry spoke ringingly, for all to hear. The world was listening. And perhaps somewhere in a higher realm, higher beings who shook their heads pityingly.

"Lar Tane is dead! The creed of rule by force dies with him. The Magna Charta of humanity will be adopted. For your part in the attempt to smash that course, I sentence you, Elda Tane—"

"WAIT!"

Stuart's voice had burst in. He took a step forward.

"Perry, listen. I found Elda in the prison room, under the tower. She was imprisoned there, by Lar Tane! She wasn't the commander of his forces, in this last campaign. She hasn't been, for six months!"

Perry struggled up from dark depths. "Elda, is it true?"

His voice was a ragged whisper. She spoke without appeal.

"Yes. When I returned from Nartica, I told my father he was wrong. For six months, I told him that. When you attacked, I refused to lead our forces. He imprisoned me below the tower."

Was she lying, to save her skin? Hoping to arouse the sympathy of the crowd? And of him? Had Stuart and she devised this cheap scheme?

Stuart had dragged a captured officer forward, questioning him.

"Elda was not our commander," he vouched. "On the day of the attack, at the Rhine, she came and screamed that we must not fight. It was then Lar Tane had her imprisoned."

Aran Deen was peering at the girl. There was something soft in his wrinkled old face as he peered from her to Perry.

"And you didn't tell of the destroyer, Elda?" Aran Deen queried. "Else your father would have made mines, or slung steel nets before the Rhine and Budapest. You didn't tell, did you, Elda?"

She shook her head.

"If she had, the war would still be going on—for years!" the old seer said loudly, for the benefit of the crowd. "She brought it to a quick close!"

The audience murmured, and suddenly burst out into cheers. In one instant, Elda Tane had become almost a heroine, in that act of omission. In the glaring light of peace, all things were bright.

Aran Deen smiled and mumbled to himself.

"Human nature is a queer thing. Elda Tane will be remembered in history more for this than all before. And rightly so. The courage to change convictions is greater than any other, in this strange groping called life."

Aran Deen raised his arm again to speak, seeing that Perry had apparently fallen into a stupefied trance.

"In behalf of Stirnye, Lord of Earth, I grant full pardon to Elda Tane, as to all who took part in the rebellion. It is past and forgotten!"

And now the assemblage, soldiers of Lar Tane and Perry alike, burst out in full-throated acclaim.

"Hail, Stirnye, Lord of Earth!" Stirnye! Stirnye! They had called him that. Perry choked, as the spirit of his father seemed to look down on the scene.

ARAN DEEN smiled and pushed Perry forward, toward Elda. "Give the crowd something to really cheer about, you young fool."

"Elda—"

It was a hoarse croak from Perry as he stumbled toward her.

She flew in his arms, weeping against his shoulder unashamedly. She was the true Elda again, soft, tender, feminine.

"Dearest!" she whispered. "This was the empire I wanted, without knowing it. The empire of love. Don't let me go—ever!"

She wiped away her tears happily after a moment.

"We'll build our home here, in Vinna.

I don't like New York. We'll raise our sons here."

"Tamed?" Aran Deen asked himself. "I wonder. Perry will find out his job has just begun, with the green-eyed witch."

But the old seer grinned like a monkey, thinking it.

The crowd's cheer, at sight of the couple together, was whole-hearted. The way of a man and girl, changing little with the passing of time and circumstance, was a fitting climax to the dark days past.

Like the glory of a summer dawn, it spread a glow that seemed to light a new world to come.