

FALSE DAWN

BY

A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

A tale of very long ago, before men had descended (sic) from the "apes," and a time when the Moon was not an airless, scarred globe in the night skies.

Angam Matangu stood with his two mates on the flat roof of his house on the outskirts of Darnala. The summer air was heavy with the scent of the night-flowering shrubs that grew in profusion in the garden below, and flaunted their pallid, faintly luminous blossoms from the plot in the center of the wide expanse of roof. The stars hung low in the warm sky. To the east was a growing, spreading pallor—a light wan and ghostly in contrast to the live, pulsing stars, the sparse, ruddy-burning lamps irregularly spaced along the thoroughfares of the city.

"The dawn," said Evanee, the younger of the women.

Linith laughed shortly, scornfully. This was not the first time that she had arisen early with her mate, left her bed to stand here on the rooftop to await the rising of Loana. She knew that the eastern light would fade again, that with its passing what little remained of the dark night would be even darker. Then would come the real dawn—and Ramanu, Lord of Life, would flood the world with his golden light.

"The dawn," said Evanee again, a faint yet sharp edge of irritation in her voice.

"No, my dear." It was Angara who spoke, his voice gentle as always. "The false dawn. But Loana will not be long—"

The two women seated themselves upon a low seat running the inner perimeter of the parapet. Angam remained standing, statuesque in the darkness, bulking big in the robe he had donned against the slight morning chill. Watching him, Linith wondered what strange compulsion it was that brought him out on these mornings when Loana rose just a little before the sun, when the little sister world presented only a slim crescent to the eyes of her watchers. She pondered the essential un-wisdom of the male. She was moved to share her thoughts with the younger woman—then abruptly decided against it. She, Evanee, would learn. This now was very romantic. Linith had found it so the first few times. But when you had seen the young Loana, the ghost of the old Loana clasped in her arms, rise once before the dawn you had seen it for all time. She stifled a yawn. You could always see the same thing just after sunset at the beginning of the month—even though the hills inland did shut the sight from view all too soon.

"Loana!" said Angam suddenly, a note almost of reverence in his deep voice. "Loana!"

Evanee jumped to her feet and ran to his side. Linith rose slowly, not without dignity, her manner conveying just a hint of boredom. She was almost wishing that she had let Evanee come up here alone with Angam.

Almost— But even the sacrifice of a lazy morning was better than being relegated to the contemptible status of so many senior wives of her acquaintance.,

And even she had to admit to feeling a faint thrill as the slender crescent climbed out and up from the low, dark clouds along the sea's eastern rim, trailing in its wake the first flush of the true dawn. And even she wondered, for the thousandth time, what was the nature of the beings who lived in the cities whose twinkling lights were spread in clusters over the night hemisphere. And she wondered why those lights, year by year, month by month, were thinning as the leaves of a tree are thinned by the onset of autumn, the first, chill blasts heralding the coming of winter. From nowhere a sentence formed itself in her mind—The lights are going out one by one, "The lights are going out one by one," she said aloud. "Tell me, Angam, shall we see them relit in our time?"

From the direction of the airport came a certain noise of shouting, distinctly audible in the still air, the dawn hush. Presently the northbound mail soared overhead, its gas bag a huge shadow against the stars, the whine of its turbines, the throb of its propellers disturbing the birds in the trees below. With its passing they ceased their indignant outcry—but before Linith could ask her question again Evanee broke the fresh woven spell of silence.

"I read a story," she said, "about an airship that was filled with a gas many times lighter than helium, than hydrogen even. And it went up to Loana—"

Linith, although Angam's face was invisible to her, could almost see his tolerant smile as he replied to the feather-brained little fool.

"Just a story, Evanee. It couldn't be done. It will never be done. Even the heavier than air flying machine that Mang is working on now could never do it. You see, between ourselves and Loana there is no atmosphere, no air. And we must have air so that our balloons may float like corks in water, so that the wings of the new airships may have something against which to beat. The most we can hope for is that some day they will answer our light signals. I wonder," he said slowly, "what they are really like. Are they men and women like us? Or are they —things? But their life must be grim and hard. Loana has no air, and so they must live out their lives in their sealed cities under their air-tight domes." His sweeping gesture included all the world with its fields and seas, its snow-covered mountains and verdant valleys. "They haven't anything like this!"

"And their lights are going out one by one," said Linith.

As he drove to his place of work Angara found his vague forebodings of the dawn swiftly dispelled by the glory of the morning. He wondered why he should feel that the fate of his kind was linked up with that of the unknown, unguessable people of Loana. Their lights were going out one by one. He remembered the grave intonation of Linith's voice as she said it, and a shiver ran over his body, made every hair of the ruddy pelt covering his body stand briefly on end. Absentmindedly he returned the salutation of the driver of a car bound in the opposite direction, then bent all his attention to the business of nursing his power. He had let his reserve fall

perilously low.

Yet he could not prevent his attention from wandering to his surroundings. The wide, clean road, the low houses on either side, each standing within its own garden, each half hidden by and blending with the luxuriant trees and shrubs, told him that this was a good world to be alive in. The throngs of cheerful people, afoot and awheel, confirmed him in this belief. Ramanu gilded their warm-tinted pelts with his mellow rays, struck scintillant fire from the jeweled ornaments worn by men and women alike. Truly, thought Angam, this is a good world and we are a good people. We—fit. There is no strife among us as among the beasts. Each has ample. And yet— we are not too far removed from our four-footed brothers and sisters. Our feet are planted firm on the good earth. We are of the earth.

Round the bend of the road glowed the orange pillar of a power station. Angam glanced at his gauges, cut his engine and silently coasted the last few yards. The attendant, aproned, gauntleted, hurried out from his little hut at the musical summons of Angam's horn.

"Angam Matangu!" he said. "Salutation!"

"Salutation. Morrud. I have all but exhausted my power."

"Truly, Angam Matangu, none would guess that you stored power for the city. Many a time have I had to carry your cylinders a full ten yards from my hut to your car. Perhaps"—a sly smile flickered over the broad, pleasant countenance "you are too interested in the source of your power to care overmuch for the power itself."

"Perhaps you are right, Morrud."

Angam leaned back in his seat, took his ease whilst the other went to the back of the vehicle, took therefrom the four compressed air cylinders, three empty and one almost so, that powered the efficient little engine of his car. As he had done many a time before he wondered whether or not it might be better to utilize the steam turbine for intramural transport, as already it was used for vehicles outside the city limits. But perhaps the city fathers were right. The compressed air motors made up for their minor inconveniences by a complete absence of smoke, heat or fumes. He tried to imagine what Darnala would be like were each car a source of such irritations.

Morrud returned with the fresh cylinders. Deftly he stowed them in their positions, made the necessary connections.

"Warranted full pressure," he grinned. "After all, they bear your seal." Abruptly gravity fell on him like a cloak. "I watched Loana this morning. The lights are going out one by one. Tell me, Angam Matangu, what is it? Are they dying up there? Is their power failing fast so that they must economize? They say that there is no air, no water, that life is possible only in their sealed cities. And, city by city, the life is going out of Loana. Tell me. Angam Matangu, will the same fate overtake us in the end?"

"In the end, Morrud. But that will not be for millions of years. And perhaps we shall have learned some way of holding off the cold and the dark." He

drew a pencil from his pouch, initialed the slip of paper that the attendant presented to him, opened his valve and drove off. And it seemed to him that the death of Loana, whatever that death might be, was casting its shadow over all the city of Darnala, over all the kindly, happy land of Attrin.

It was not until he arrived at the power storage plant that Angam was able to shake off his pointless, uneasy foreboding. But here, surrounded by the familiar routine of his profession, the materials and tools of his trade, he was almost able to forget the beings who, unknown, unknowable close neighbors in space, were face to face with the doom that must some day overtake all the worlds. He wished briefly that there were scale way of sending the cylinders of compressed air filled by the slow, inexorable upthrust of the tide-actuated rams—then pushed the impossible desire out of his mind as he was called to deal with a blown valve at the head of one of the great cylinders.

But the thought refused to be disposed of so easily. All the time that Angam was working he was contrasting his lot, cast among a plenitude of air and water, with that of those who lived—and who were now dying—upon Loana. He wondered what conditions were like on that little, senile world, His imagination, vivid though it was, was unequal to the task.

He made the last connection.

“Shut her down, Carran,” he ordered his subordinate. The master valve atop the great cylinder head spun rapidly, the noise of escaping air rose octaves in pitch, from a low whistle to a barely audible hiss, then ceased. Through the smaller valves the compressed air poured into the bottles. Gauge needles flickered and crept to their maxima, valves were shut and metal flasks sent to join the long line of their identical twins on the chute to the warehouse. It was all part of a normal working day at the Darnala power storage plant. It was power, it was air compressed by the rising waters. And on the prime source of that power, on the world whose gravitational pull sent the tidal waves sweeping from ocean to ocean, the air and water were almost gone.

Angam dipped his hands into a container of alcohol, agitated them until every trace of grease was washed from the close, ruddy fur. He dried them upon a clean piece of fabric. Then, hands clasped behind his back, he padded on broad, bare feet through his domain. Save for the occasional hiss of escaping air, the occasional splash of agitated water, it was very quiet. The row of tall, black cylinders, inside which the rams were rising with the rising tide, dwarfed the workers around their bases. A man of another age, another species, would have compared the atmosphere with that of a cathedral—but such a concept would have been incomprehensible to Angam and his fellows. True—they worshiped Ramanu, Lord of Life, in their fashion, but it was a fashion that recognized the need for ritual whilst refusing any belief in the supernatural,

The big clock on the landward wall of the plant, its polished weights gleaming dully in the subdued light, marked the tenth hour. Somewhere, somebody pulled a lanyard. A deep, booming melodious whistle told all Darnala that the sun was at the meridian, that this was the hour of the midday meal. All but the few who would tend the simple machinery whilst

their workmates dined were streaming from the plant. Angam found Carran, assured himself that the other was conversant with all that was happening, then followed his underlings out into the blaze of noonday heat and light. He paused at the parking lot, undecided whether or not to take his car and run home, there to enjoy his midday meal with his two wives. He decided against it. They would not be expecting him. He should have dispatched a messenger earlier in the forenoon. Which reminded him—his messenger bill for the last month was far too high.

On foot he sauntered along the waterfront to the eating house kept by one Lagan,

He found Mollin Momberig, manager of the pottery, in Lagan's. It was often said that you would find there the executives of all the industries clustered around the harbor and the tidal power plants. The cooking was good and the prices were a little higher than those of the usual run of such places. High enough, in fact, to discourage those of the lower income levels. Equalitarian though society was it was recognized that equality of taste, behavior, conversational standards is impossible of attainment.

Momberig was seated in one of the little booths, a bowl of soup and a pitcher of light wine before him. He saw Angara enter, peer around in the rather dim lighting as he searched for a familiar face, Momberig raised his hand and called in his rather high pitched voice—"Angam! Angam Matangu! Will you honor me?"

"The honor is mine," replied Angara.

He took his seat opposite the other, looked with appreciation at the waitress as she brought the bill of fare. He wondered if that peculiar shade of gold were natural. Natural or not—its effect was striking. He watched the girl as she threaded her way among the tables, her muscles moving smoothly under the blond, silky pelt.

"I must come here more often, Mollin," he said.

Mollin laughed. "You might get away with it with Evanee—she doesn't know you yet. But Linith—

Oh, by the way, what does Evanee think of your Loana gazing?"

Angara grinned, showing his big, strong teeth.

"She thinks it very romantic," he said.

But his smile wasn't all good humor. There was bitterness there —the bitterness of a man when he finds that a loved one does not, cannot take seriously those things which to him are of the utmost importance.

"Of course, she's young—" he concluded.

Mollin pushed away his empty soup bowl, began vigorously to attack the crusty bread and strong cheese.

"I watched Loana this morning," he remarked in a sputter of crumbs. "The lights are going out, one by one."

"You know Tandrirf," said Angam pensively. "What does he make of it?"

"What could he make of it? All that he's concerned with is turning out ephemerae for the seamen. He wouldn't care if Loana were made of green cheese as long as she kept to her proper orbit, as long as the bold mariners were able to navigate their ships with her aid. Talking of mariners . . . ahoy, captain. Join us in a pitcher of Tironian wine!"

From out the adjoining booth a short, more than normally thickset figure was making his way to the door. He hesitated, then retraced his steps to where Angam and Mollin were sitting. Angara studied him with interest, decided that he liked the man. Two pale-gray eyes from beneath heavy brows regarded him steadily. The facial hair, and that of the body, was graying—yet there was an impression of youth. And the heavy gold bracelet on each wrist denoted the wearer's rank.

"Captain Noab," introduced Mollin. "Angam Matangu, manager of the power storage plant." The two men bowed. "You know what we were talking about, captain?" the master potter went on. "The city lights on Loana. What do you think is happening?"

The mariner waited until the blonde had brought him his pitcher of wine. He drank long and appreciatively. Then—

"I've watched Loana," he rumbled. "I've looked long at those city lights, wondered what it would be like if we had ships that could get up there. And when those lights started going out one by one—why, it was like losing old friends."

"But what is happening?"

"I don't know, gentlemen. But I have my own—theories. Perhaps the people of Loana are like some of the 'people' aboard our ships. They are not nice people to know. Now that the air is thin, now that the water can be counted by drops, they are fighting each other for what little remains."

"Fighting? But that's impossible! They must be at least as civilized as ourselves. And surely, under those conditions, they would band together and attempt to stave off doom by common effort."

"Yes. If they were like us. But are they? You landlubbers don't get to know rats as we seamen do. In spite of all we can do to exterminate them they still infest our ships. They are not unintelligent. If—Ramann forbid—they should ever band together it would go hard with us, the human crew. But they are incurably vicious. They fight among themselves. They live on a plane of sheer savagery undreamed of by us or, indeed, by the big majority of our four-footed brethren."

Mollin's face was incredulous. "You mean that the people of Loana are—rats?" he managed at last.

"No. But I do mean that most of us have been far too prone to think of them as people like ourselves. But it seems to me that those city lights are going out, one by one, because those living in the cities are grappled in a dreadful struggle for the last drop of water, the last lungful of air. Working

with one common end in view they might save themselves. But they are sealing the doom of themselves and their world."

Angam looked up at the clock. Its big hand marked one quarter of an hour to the eleventh hour. He rose to his feet.

"I must go," he said. "My assistant awaits his relief."

"I will come with you," said Moffitt. He signaled to the blond waitress, initialed with a pencil from his pouch the bill that she presented. Noah leading they emerged from the eating house into the early afternoon sunshine.

Angam had noted the captain's ship on his way to his meal. She could hardly escape notice. Perhaps to a seaman's practiced eye there were many details in which she differed from the smaller coastwise craft berthed all around her, but size alone made her stand out like a mastodon in a herd of bison. Her clean, russet painted hull and buff-colored upper-works were pleasing to the eye —yet she was so well designed that even had she been painted a drab, uniform gray her perfect lines would still have been a delight.

High above the covered-in bridge towered the tall funnel, dull crimson, and on it, in gold, a rampant lion. From the lofty masts depended the derricks, idle now during the meal hour, and piled high upon the quay, awaiting shipment, were cases and casks and bales of merchandise.

"You have a fine ship, Captain Noah," said Angara. "Tell me, when does Arrak sail?"

"It has not yet been decided. The stores and cargo should be aboard tomorrow. But I believe there is still some delay in the selection of the colonists."

"I should have liked to have come with you. They will need tidal engineers in this new land to the westward. But—"

"Angam is a much married man, captain," put in Mollin.

"Yes. You know what women are."

"I do," replied Noab. "That is why I have never married. But call aboard, Mollin Momberig, some time when you are free. And you too, Angam Matangu. We will drink a pitcher of wine together!"

It was barely four weeks later. Angam Matangu stood with his two mates on the flat roof of his house on the outskirts of Darnala. The summer air was heavy with the scent of the night-flowering shrubs that grew in profusion in the garden below, that flaunted their pallid, faintly luminous blossoms from the plot in the center of the wide expanse of roof. The stars hung low in the warm sky. To the east was a growing, spreading pallor—a light wan and ghostly in contrast to the live, pulsing stars, the sparse, ruddy-burning lamps irregularly spaced along the thoroughfares of the city.

Yet, in spite of the warmth, there was more than a suggestion of autumn in the air. Mixed with the scent of the flowers was a subtle hint of

overripeness, of sweet decay. There was the dim foreknowledge that soon would come the cold gales from the north, that soon the trees and the flowering shrubs would stand stripped to the cold rains, that the lesser plants would be beaten down to the earth from which they had sprung.

But, this morning the air was calm.

From the rooftops of adjoining houses came a whispering, a murmuring. Once, almost alone in Darnala, Angam had kept his vigil. Now it seemed that all the city had arisen early to await the rising of Loana.

For the lights of the little sister world were now almost all gone. But one city remained—and all along its outskirts flashed and blazed other lights—evanescent, briefly flaring, somehow menacing.

Angam thought of Captain Noab and his rats. Once he had visualized the people of Loana as beings not unlike himself—now he saw them as things small and active and evil with sharp teeth and rending claws.

But those lights—

The idea of a weapon was foreign to Angam's people. True —their cattle herders in remote districts carried spears as a protection for themselves and their charges against the great cats—but beyond that they had not gone. Vegetarians as they were they were never hunters. Their herds supplied them with milk and cheese —but meat was an unknown diet to them.

But those lights—

Could it be, thought Angam, that they were using some kind of blasting powder against their fellows? Once he had seen the results of a premature burst in a quarry—even now, the memory brought nausea. But his engineer's mind could conceive how —if it were imperative to kill one's fellows—explosives could be utilized. A metal tube, for example, sealed at one end and with a little ball or rod working within it like a piston, expelled by the force of the explosion. Or a metal ball filled with blasting powder and with a slow-burning fuse. It could be thrown at one's enemies. . . .

Linith rose from her seat on the parapet and walked to his side.

She slipped her arm inside his, said nothing. She was very comforting.

Evanee got up, too. She hurried across to where her husband and his first wife were standing, made haste to possess herself of his free arm.

"Why do you worry about Loana?" she pouted. "It's miles away. Nothing that happens there can possibly affect us."

"Yes, but—"

"What was it that Captain Loab was saying the night we had dinner aboard Arrak?" interrupted Linith. "Wasn't it that this was like being aboard a big, well-found ship, standing by some smaller vessel foundering in a storm and being unable to raise a finger to help?"

"Yes," replied Angam. "That's just what it is like, Linith. Can't you see, Evanee? There are people there. They may be like us—they most probably are not. They have hopes and fears like us. And loves—"

"And hates," said Linith somberly.

"So you believe in old Noab's wild theory."

"Don't you?"

From the airport came a flashing of lights, a shouting, an orderly confusion. Released from its moorings the northbound mail floated up, a vast, black bulk against the stars. But there was no whine of turbines, no threshing of screws. The airship rose almost vertically, a distant splashing noise telling of the jettison of water ballast. It seemed that her pilots, too, had sensed that this rising of Loana would be momentous, were determined that neither they nor their passengers would miss whatever spectacle was to be unfolded before their wondering and horrified eyes. The people of Attrin could do nothing to help their close, unknown neighbors in space—but the mere fact that they would be silent, helpless witnesses of the death of a world gave them the sense of an obligation fulfilled.

Along the eastern horizon were low, dense clouds. A slight paling of the blackness above them gave brief warning of the rising of Loana. The silver crescent showed first the merest tip of one of its horns, just a single point of light over the dark sea. The point became a triangle, the triangle a scimitar. Then Loana in her entirety ruled briefly the eastern heavens. The ghost of the new Loana shone wanly within the half encircling rim of brilliance. And this pale, reflected light on the dark side was almost the only illumination. Just one little cluster of pin points of radiance remained, lost and lonely in the expanse of darkness.

"The last city," said Linith. "The last bastions against the everlasting night."

Last bastion it may have been—and even to these distant watchers it was obvious that it was suffering assault. Around its perimeter could be seen a continual flickering, briefly flaring flames that, even at this extreme range, seemed to sear the retina. Abruptly fully half of the remaining city lights went out.

Then it happened.

The tiny luminosities seemed to fuze, to coalesce. For an infinitesimal fraction of a moment there was complete darkness—and then the whole of Loana spouted flame. An intolerable radiance swept over the little world. Not one of those watching saw the last act of the distant tragedy played out to its conclusion. The light was of a brightness too intense to be borne, brighter than the torrents of fire sweeping down the sky during a summer thunderstorm, brighter than Ramanu at the meridian. Every detail of Darnada was thrown into sharp relief. The startled birds in the trees set up a fear-crazed chattering. And the sea to the east threw back the light from the sky so that all must either close their eyes or turn their faces inland.

Evanee uttered a low cry, a little scream. She fell to the rooftop, heavily.

Angam bent over her, all anxious solicitude. But it was Linith who took charge.

"Can't you see?" she said. "It was the shock, look after her. Hurry and get the doctor!"

Angam straightened. Even now he could not resist the urge to take one last look at the sky. But there was nothing to be seen. A warm, gusty wind had arisen and was blustering through the widely spaced houses. The sky was overcast. And from the southward came a continual flickering of lightning and dull grumbling of thunder. And it was very hot. His pelt was damp with perspiration, and beneath it his skin prickled with an almost unendurable irritation.

"Shall I help you down with her?" he asked.

"No. I'll manage. But you might put the lights on and start some water heating on your way to the street."

In Evanee's bedroom Angam flicked with his thumb the lever of her table lamp. The spark caught at once, there were a few seconds of hissing and spluttering and then the incandescent mantle passed swiftly from red heat to a soft, white light. In the kitchen the boiler gave no trouble. Nevertheless he assured himself, before going out, that the oil-reservoir was full. He felt rather proud of his level-headedness.

Outside his street door he seized the clapper of the bell that would summon the messenger for this locality. For a few seconds the deep note reverberated, then he stopped ringing and waited for the almost silent approach of the motorcycle, the bright beam of the headlamp sweeping up the pathway to his door.

Again he rang, and yet again. But for all the effect his summons had he might just as well have been upon one of the uninhabited islands to the far east. He guessed what was wrong. All the messenger boys would be gathered in some quiet corner, out of the wind, discussing eagerly the signs and wonders that had blazed so terrify-ingly in the dawn sky.

Grumbling a little he went to the outhouse in which he kept his car. As he backed out he saw that, in spite of the heavy overcast and the rain that was beginning to fall, it was almost light. As he drove down to the road the rain started to come down in earnest. Even in the gray light it seemed almost luminous, and as it fell there was a hissing and a crackling and a running of little blue sparks along the ground.

But Angani was in no mood to notice these things. He drove as fast as he dared, peering stolidly ahead through the almost solid sheets of water, his wheels casting a continuous fountain of spray on either side. At last he found that for which he was seeking—a column on which was mounted a curiously conventionalized little piece of statuary depicting a man holding in his hands a great flask. He turned sharp right, splattered up the drive to the house among its wet, weatherbeaten trees.

At his pull of the lanyard at the door he heard a gong somewhere within boom sonorously. Impatiently he waited, shifting from one foot to the other

whilst the torrential rain made rivulets down through the close, thick fur of his body.

It was a woman who answered.

"The doctor," he said, before she could speak. "It's my wife, Evanee Matangu, it's her first child. It shouldn't have come for another month. It was the shock of—"

"It was a shock for all of us."

She turned, called into the house —"Handrin! Another maternity case!"

"Coming! Has he got a car?"

"Yes. You won't need yours."

Little remained for the doctor to do when, finally, Angam succeeded in navigating the flooded streets to his home. Evanee was in bed and with her, a tiny morsel of yellow furred humanity, was her first son. All that remained for Handrin to do was to enter the date and time of the birth in his book, to act as witness when Angara formally named the child.

Linith brought wine, poured a flagon for herself, Evanee and each of the men. Mother and father dipped fingers into each other's flagons, then each, with wine moistened index finger, touched the forehead of the infant.

"I name you Abrel," said Angam.

"I name you Abrel," said Evanee.

Then all raised their flagons.

"To the new life," they said. "May it be as fair and as good as ours has been!"

"I would sleep," said Evanee.

"Then sleep," said the doctor. "And you need have no worry about Abrel. Perhaps he was a little premature—but that I doubt. As far as I can judge he is quite normal. Feed him as you would any other child. Sleep well."

They adjourned to the living room. Here Linith had spread a simple meal of bread and wine. The doctor needed no urging to stay and break his fast—outside the wind was howling and driving the rain in streaming sheets against wall and window.

Normally, on these occasions, conversation would inevitably have been about the new life that had come into the world. But on this morning there was only one possible topic—Loana and the dramatically tragic fate that had overtaken her.

Angam mentioned the strange prickling he had felt on his skin just after the disaster.

"Yes," said Handrin, "I felt it too. And I have felt it before—"

"Where?"

"You know the country around Boondrom?"

"No. I have often meant to spend a vacation there—although, they tell me, there is little to see these days. Boondrom is almost extinct."

"The volcano is the least interesting thing. A few miles to the west there is a rocky plain. It is barren, and at night shines with a strange luminescence. Around its outskirts are stunted, misshapen plants and shrubs. They are pallid, unhealthy, and it is hard to determine their species. And there is always heat there—a dry, scorching heat. Although this may be volcanic.

"But if you venture over this plain you feel the same unpleasant prickling as we all felt when Loaria went up in flames. If you stay there too long it is literally unendurable—and persists. I have treated too daring, or foolhardy, explorers of this region. Their fur has fallen out all over their bodies. Their skin has—rotted. They have become blind."

"And what could you do for them?"

"What could I do for them? The sleep of peace—that is all."

"So you think—?"

"I don't know what to think. But it seems to me that there must be power there—power of some kind. Perhaps power such as Lingrud, with his zinc plates and jars of acid has discovered—the power of the lightning. Or perhaps it has other applications. There is heat there—if that could be harnessed and used to drive a steam turbine, what need for elaborate oil furnaces? It would put Mang's heavier than air flying machine into the realm of practical politics."

"But Loana—"

"I'm coming to that. Suppose the Loanans—whoever or whatever they were—had this power. Suppose, in their final struggle for the last air and water, they used this power for weapons to destroy each other. And suppose, at the finish, it got out of hand—what then?"

"But such power is inconceivable, doctor!"

"So was the power that wiped Loana clean of life—that, for all we know, blew her to fragments."

"Blew her to fragments? But —the tides!"

Angani looked at the clock—then remembered that he had forgotten to wind its weights up the previous night. But, time or no time, his place was at his power storage plant when anything threatened his source of power. Linith and the doctor heard the door slam as he hastened out into the storm; faintly, above the wind and the rain, heard his splashing progress down the pathway to the road.

"I hope that Loana is still with us," said the doctor. "Otherwise Lingrud will have to get ahead fast with his experiments—or we shall have to move

Darnala to Boondrom!”

At Boondrom was a small settlement, taking its name from the volcano. Guides lived there, and a few scientists, and those who maintained the hostels for tourists. There was railway communication with Darnala and with Tirona, although most visitors preferred to come by air. The last few miles of the rail journey were both hazardous and uncomfortable—the still frequent earth tremors did no good to the permanent way.

But Boondrom's days of glory were over. The crater was crusted thick with drab slag, only an occasional wisp of steam from an infrequent crack told of the fires slumbering quiescent in the depths.

The sleeping giant no longer attracted the casual sightseer. The arid, sterile plains to the westward had even less to recommend them to the holiday maker—yet the hostels of Boondrom were full. Lingrud was there, seeking some connection between the strange powers, sensed rather than measured, and the half-understood powers he was finding in his jars of acid with their zinc and carbon plates. Talang, the biologist, was there. It was he who conceived the idea of inducing a cow and a bull to mate in the middle of that unhealthy, uncanny expanse of bare rock. The result was even more grotesque than the examples of plant teratology surrounding the area. And Talang's fur turned snow white. His assistant was not so lucky. For him—the sleep of peace.

The scientists were watching on the summit of Boondrom when the last of Loana's city lights went out in a blaze of hell fire. Some there were who looked down to that plain to the westward, saw it flicker with answering, sympathetic light. Others forced themselves to keep their regard on the eastern heavens, saw, when the first thin veils of cirrus made vision possible, that the white-hot sphere was horribly scarred and pitted.

Then, with the first waves of heat striking the upper atmosphere, the clouds had swiftly arisen, the winds had striven to duplicate the turbulence of the end of Loana, and rain and lightning had hidden the sky, with its signs and portents, from human view.

Long and loud were the conferences held by the scientists in their hostel on the lower slopes of Boondrom. Long and loud were their arguments concerning the power that had devastated the sister world. That this power was man-made—or the work of beings with intelligence approximating that of humanity—they did not doubt. And the evidence they had seen of this same power unleashed opened vistas at once exhilarating and terrifying. The stars were now within reach—unless the world, man's footstool, were blasted into oblivion.

Power. Power. Power.

What was the power derived from the rise and fall of the tides, from the burning of mineral or vegetable oil, from little glass jars full of acid and zinc and carbon plates, besides this power that could lick the surface of a world clean of life?

They did not know the nature of this power. But they had seen it used—and they knew that what had been done by the ruling species of one world

could be done again by that of another. And with less risk. It seemed obvious that the Loanans had destroyed themselves by desperate, savage warfare. With the people of Attrin this could never happen. The race was too kindly, too sane. The only danger would be unwise, rash experimentation. And surely safeguards could be devised. In any case it might well be centuries, generations, before the secret of the Loanans' power was stumbled upon. But it would be a goal to strive for.

It was on the fifth day after the trans-spacial disaster that the ship came down from Loana.

The sky was still overcast, although the wind had dropped a little and the rain had ceased. Observers around Mount Boondrom saw a bright light at their zenith—a light that, although it was high noon, was almost intolerable to the unshielded eye.

As it dropped lower it was intolerable. It so happened, however, that in the village of Boondrom was a fairly large supply of dark spectacles. Those who investigated the sterile plains to the westward were liable to suffer from optic disorders—and so it was logical that the local shopkeepers should keep in stock aids to impaired vision.

The light drifted down very slowly.

The watchers on the slopes of the slumbering volcano could, at last, see that it was under a spindle-shaped structure, metallic, with huge vanes at its lower end. It was no flying machine such as they had ever seen before. It was no flying machine such as had ever taken off from the land of Attrin—and to the north were only the icy, polar wastes, and to the south and west and east were wild lands peopled only by wild beasts.

This construction, this ship, could be only one thing.

A means of escape for some few survivors from Loana, a frail ark in which they had dared the deeps of space, in which they had defied and conquered the eternal darkness, escaped the fires of hell that had ravaged their own world.

How it could be done the watchers had no idea. Of one thing only were they certain—that it would require Power. And that Loana had possessed such power had been conclusively demonstrated.

Lower and lower drifted the strange construction, the alien ship. Brighter and brighter flared the incandescence at its base. Avidly, eagerly, the scientists scanned the details of its construction, hastily they held the object glasses of binoculars and telescopes over smoky oil flames, improvised filters that would enable them to see more than they could hope to see with the naked eye.

Here was the power of which they had dreamed, drifting down from the storm rent skies. Here was the power that would give into the hands of their race the keys to knowledge unguessed, undreamed. Here was the first contact with an alien folk from an alien world—a contact that could bring nothing good in its wake.

It seemed at first that the ship from Loana would fall upon the village of Boondrom—and then that it would fall in the cold crater of Boondrom itself. But the wind was blowing strong from the eastward, and it seemed that the strange vessel was making considerable westerly drift. It may have been that the pilot was avoiding a landing on what, even from the air, could be identified as the habitation of intelligent beings. And it is almost certain that he would try to avoid a landing on a mountain peak.

So it was that the alien ship with its tail of fire dipped behind the shoulder of Boondrom—and with its vanishing it seemed very dark. And with the abrupt cutting off of the thunder of its passage an ominous hush fell upon the world.

Some few observers, on the very summit of the mountain, saw the ship land. They saw the roaring, intolerable flames from its tail lick the surface of that dead, evil plain—and that is the last that they ever saw. The instantaneous, searing flare that followed was of too great an intensity for their minds to register, as was the crash of supernal thunder. But before the sound waves of the atomic explosion burst their eardrums all life had been scorched from them.

There were a few survivors in Boondrom itself. The village collapsed like a pack of cards—those people who were out of doors were incinerated—those between four walls were crushed by those same walls. But one or two, those who were under staircases or within doorways, escaped immediate death. Among these was a pilot of the regular air service to Darnala. He crawled out of the wreckage almost unhurt. For awhile he searched for others who were still living, tore his hands and broke his nails burrowing among the wreckage. Those whom he did find—

All that he could do was administer the sleep of peace.

Increasingly violent earth tremors were completing the destruction caused by the explosion. From the summit of Boondrom came a growing, expanding pillar of steam, of smoke, of fire. Then it burst into a shower of debris, a huge mushroom of black and white and brown vapor that ballooned up to mingle with that of the first cataclysm. It was then that the pilot realized that he was deaf. He could see—hazily—but for him the volcano's rebellion and defiance was enacted in dumb show.

Reeling like one drunken, whimpering a little, although he did not know it, he made his way to the airport. Most of the mooring masts were down—and the ships which had swung to them were fast drifting west, unmanned derelicts destined to fall at last in the sea to the brief wonder of the shark and whale.

One mast remained standing, and to it lay a little four-passenger ship. The pilot clambered up the ladder to the head of the mast, swung himself hand over hand to the gondola. He checked his water, his oil. He worked the lever that would ignite the furnace, looked anxiously at the gauge that would tell him when he had enough power to get under way.

Already volcanic debris was falling from the sky. Some of it fell with dull thuds on to the fabric of the balloon—although the noise he never heard.

But he felt the vibration that trembled through the structure of the ship with every impact. He thought of cutting adrift—then realized that should he do so the wind would carry him right over the crater of the furiously erupting Boondrom. And beyond the volcano—should he survive the passage. The sky was alight with the flaring incandescence that made the volcanic fires a negation of light by contrast.

The needle of the gauge quivered, crept with agonizing slowness to the red line. The pilot pulled out the toggle from the eye of his mooring rope, opened his throttle and fed the steam from his water tube boiler into the turbines. The screws spun until they became shimmering, transparent circles. With helm hard over the little airship circled, steadied on a southeasterly course for Darnala.

When the man from Boondrom, nursing his battered little ship through the wind, the lightning and the torrential rain, reached Darnala he found the city in flames. He was too dazed, too mentally shattered by what he had already experienced to feel more than a mild surprise. And a dull resentment was there too, a feeling that it was essentially unfair that he should be the bearer of unappreciated, almost ignored evil tidings.

When a full twenty miles from the coast he had become aware that something was wrong. Down the wind came a haze of smoke, an acrid smell of burning. Sparks glinted and briefly glowed in the gale-driven murk like evil fireflies. And in the hills to the west of the town a new volcano spouted lava and boiling mud, so that he was obliged to make a wide detour to escape being wrecked in the violent updraught.

So it was that he approached the city from the south. He noted, almost without interest, the devastation in the harbor. The shipping was lying on its beam ends, sunk at its moorings with only masts and funnels showing above the heavy swell that was sweeping in over the breakwater. And surely the breakwater was gone— Certain it was that the watery hosts were marching in from the east to hurl themselves with unbroken fury upon the quays and wharves of the port. Only the great Arrak seemed undamaged, seaworthy. But she was berthed on the western side of the Dirnig Mole, partially protected from wind and sea by the low, strong warehouse running along its length. He could see the little figures of men busy about her decks, and from her tall smokestack a thin stream of black smoke poured down wind to mingle with the funeral pall of the doomed city.

Rollers creaked and the ship from Boondrom lost altitude as the tightening nets compressed the gas in the balloon. The airport was very close now, and its mooring masts loomed lofty through the acrid mist. But from each of them swayed and lurched a vast, billowing shape. Stray mooring lines, flying loose in the gale, coiled and snapped like whips. On the ground was a crowd of people—dumb, patient, resigned. At a signal from some official they began to move towards one of the masts. The man from Boondrom saw the leading trickle of refugees moving up inside the latticework structure with the slow deliberation of a column of ants on the march.

The little ship circled lower, and still lower.

At last one of the airport officials looked up from his work of supervising

the evacuation, raised his megaphone and shouted something. Even if the man from-Boondrom had not been deafened he would never have heard—the shrieking gale, the whine of giant turbines and the throb of innumerable propellers would have drowned any sound so puny as that of the human voice.

The official realized this, and gestured. The meaning of the sweeping motion of his arm was unmistakable. The incoming ship could not be berthed, would have to shift for herself as well as she might. The pilot raised his arm in a gesture of acceptance and farewell. He released the tension on his compressor nets. He rose swiftly, and the gale took hold of him, drove him down upon the unwieldy bulk of a ship already more than half loaded with refugees. Putting his helm hard over, opening the throttle of his starboard engine to its fullest extent, he strove desperately to avoid collision. He was almost successful, but, as he swept past and under the big ship's port after power unit, the tips of the idling propeller blades barely touched the taut upper surface of his gas bag.

He did not fall at once. Even when the gas was almost gone from the balloon the wind caught him and held him, drove him parachute-wise over the burning ruins of the city. And it was on one of the few houses—spared by some freak of blast—still standing that he finally crashed. His gondola failed to clear the parapet of the roof, the force of the impact pitched him out and clear. Had it not been for the plot of soft earth, the roof garden into which he was thrown, he would have died there and then. As it was, he lay there, dazed, while above him flapped and crackled the torn rags of silk that had once been his balloon, while the blazing oil from his engine poured down the side of the house and was driven by the screaming wind through the already broken windows.

“He will live, Angara.”

The aviator could not hear the words, but he looked up through his haze of pain, saw the bearded lips move, dimly guessed what they were saying. The earth beneath him shook violently—and the stabbing pain from his broken legs and arm, bound and splinted as they were, made him cry out. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the shower of sparks as the last ruins of the gutted house collapsed.

“But to what purpose, Handrin demanded the other man. “Attrin is dying. Those of us still sound may drag out miserable lives for a few more years—or days. But for him—better the sleep of peace, I say.”

“Angara is right,” said Linith.

Magra, the doctor's wife, said nothing. And Evanee watched out of wide, fear-crazed eyes, clutching the infant Abrel to her breast ever more tightly.

“Perhaps you are right,” said Handrin. He fumbled in his pouch, brought out the little phial in which was the sleep of peace. He withdrew the stopper. His hand went out, reaching for the aviator's mouth. But the pilot put out a feeble arm, warded off the merciful oblivion.

“No,” he gasped, “not yet. I must tell my story. You must know what happened—”

And so, slowly, painfully, he told his tale of the disaster at Boondrom. Told of the alien ship riding down on its wings of fire and thunder, of the fire and thunder that had attended its coming to that evil plain to the west of the volcano. And as he talked, gaspingly, brokenly, the earth tremors grew even more frequent, the earth tremors and the sensation that the whole world was tilting beneath them like the deck of a floundering ship.

When he had finished he took the deadly draught gladly. His duty was done. He had told his story, given his unnecessary warning. And it is doubtful if he would have survived long had he not been given the sleep of peace. But it made his passing easier.

"So," said Handrin, "I think I see. Suppose that there was another deposit of those same minerals that make the Boondrom plain under the hills to the west of Darnala— And suppose that by some subterranean vein, the two were connected—Don't you see? There is power there—the power that the Loanans used to drive their ship. And when their ship touched down the fire from the exhausts, the fire from some strange machine burning that mineral as fuel, touched off the tons of fuel lying idle at Boondrom. And the spark flashed along the underground vein, like the little spark along the fuse of a blasting charge. And the charge was under the hills just inland from the city—"

"But what is happening now?"

"You should know better than I, Angam. You are an engineer."

"Yes. Perhaps I should. I know that all Attrin is balanced on the edge of the western deep like houses on a cliff edge. And I know that there is a line of weakness in the earth's crust running through Boondrom— And what I know frightens me. Handrin! Attrin is sinking like a great ship!"

"Look !" cried Linith.

Overhead, rising and falling in their passage, their line ragged yet, considering the adverse weather conditions, surprisingly well kept, came a fleet of great ships. The big passenger liners were there, and the little freighters, each towing astern its string of motorless cargo balloons. But the cargo carried on this last occasion was human lives. Around the fringes of the squadron soared and hovered the tiny pleasure craft, some so heavily laden as to have the utmost difficulty in maintaining altitude.

The leading ship swung as she passed over the center of the city, bore down for the airport. One by one, sagging to leeward, clawing up into the wind in an attempt to maintain their line, the rest followed. The throbbing of their propellers was loud and insistent above the howling of the gale.

"From Tirona," said Handrin. "Tirona is gone," replied Angam. "And they will find no refuge here."

They were still sitting in the garden, finding a little shelter in the lee of the ruins of the house, when the messenger from the City Fathers found them. His hair was plastered flat against his body and he was bleeding from a deep cut over his right eye. He accepted gratefully the flagon of wine passed to him by Linith—she had salvaged some scraps of food and drink

from the wreckage of her home. He drank deeply. Then—

“You are Angam Matangu?”

“Yes.”

“The City Fathers send you this, Angam Matangu.”

Angam drew the roll of fabric from its cylinder. He read it slowly, his lips unconsciously shaping the words as his eye ran down the lines of script.

“I am ordered aboard Arrak,” he said at last. “I and my family.”

To the messenger— “Is there any word concerning my friend Dr. Handrin?”

“I fear not, Angam Matangu. The City Fathers have drawn up a list—they desire to save as many representative technicians as possible so that a new civilization may be set up in the new lands to the east. The quota of physicians and surgeons is already filled.”

“It is as well,” said Handrin. “With Attrin gone—what remains? Magra and I will sit here among the ruins with our wine and our memories of happiness. And will you share them?” he asked the messenger.

“It would be an honor—but I would not intrude.”

“Then one last flagon of wine before we part.”

And when Angara and his family trudged down the long driveway to the road to the port they did not know whether to pity or envy Handrin and Magra.

Angam was glad that he had not attempted to make the journey by car. The roads were blocked by piles of wreckage, by fallen trees. And great crevasses had opened here and there, deep chasms from which came a sullen rumbling, the acrid fumes of the pit beneath. In one place a great, roaring geyser was throwing its column of steam and spray high into the air. Down wind its condensation fell as a scalding rain.

Through the still smoldering ruins slunk lean, tawny shapes—the beasts from the wild country driven to the coast by unknown, half-guessed cataclysms inland. They saw the half-eaten body of a woman with a lioness crouched over it. The great cat lifted its head and snarled as they passed. And when they had left the grisly sight behind they heard a great yelping and snarling—and turned to see a pack of wolves disputing for the bodies of both hunter and victim.

Evanee was stumbling and whimpering so, without a word. Angam lifted Abrel from her grasp. The child set up a thin, dismal howling. “Let me,” said Linith. In her arms the infant was quiet.

Long before they got to the port the water was over their ankles. As they came down the broad road to the quays it was knee deep. Some of the smaller craft had been righted, had been brought far inland. It was fantastic and terrifying to see ships among what was left of the houses.

But Angam had no eyes for any of these things. He was trying to follow the once familiar road to the Dirnig Mole—a road now feet deep beneath the swirling waters. Ahead, her tall funnel a beacon through the spray and driving rain, lay Arrak. Her derricks had been lowered, as far as the inexperienced Angam could see at this distance she was ready for sea. A plume of white steam grew suddenly from her funnel, but the deep booming note of her whistle was lost in the clamor of wind and water.

Angam realized that he wanted to be saved. The drive, the savage will to live, was singularly absent from the make-up of his race—but now, to him, Arrak was Attrin. She was all that remained of the fair civilization that had stood on the threshold of maturity. She was that civilization—and would carry its seeds to whatever strange land chance and storm might bring her.

Putting his head down he waded on stolidly. Behind him came Evanee, and behind her Linith, the child still in her arms. He no longer troubled to feel his way with caution—Captain Noab could not afford to hang on much longer. He had already stayed at his berth far longer than was prudent, and far more was at stake than his ship, the lives of his passengers and crew.

Neck high the water swirled around Angam as he reached for the ropes at the foot of the gangway. Holding on with his left hand he helped Evanee on to the platform. Linith handed Abrel up to Evanee, then hoisted herself tip after the child. She and the sailor on duty seized Angam—pulled him up to the grating where he lay gasping like a landed fish.

An officer came down, consulted a list.

“Twenty more to come,” he said, “but we can't delay much longer.”

Together with his women Angam clambered to the upper deck. The wide expanse was crammed with refugees. Scorning the warmth and the dryness below they were here to see the last of their home, their world. The wind buffeted them and the rain stung and bruised them with its countless driving arrows—yet they could not bring themselves to seek shelter below decks.

To the west, beyond the gutted city, the low line of hills spouted flame and smoke. It seemed that those hills were lower than of old, that they were sinking, slowly but surely as the land of Attrin foundered and tilted, heeled to the west as it sank into the unplumbed depths of the western ocean. The hills were lower—soon the flaring volcanoes were only a low line of fire along the horizon—red and menacing below the black pall of smoke.

Some of the smaller ships, their decks packed tight, cast loose from their improvised moorings and nosed out to the sea. They passed over the place where the breakwater had been, turned their blunt noses to meet the steep, vicious waves. Doggedly they plunged into the weather, spray and green water sweeping over their superstructures until only their flaring funnels were visible. The refugees aboard Arrak watched them go—and watched with horror the great wall of water that came roaring in from the east.

Steep it was, and towering high beyond any seaman's experience. The line of foam along its crest was like the snow along the peaks of some

mountain range. The little ships reared to meet it with the gallantry of the very small—reared and slid their sterns under.

From the bridge came a deep and urgent bellowing as Noab shouted orders to his officers on stations. The wind took his words, shredded them and tossed them wide in useless, unintelligible fragments. But the crew at bow and stern had anticipated such an emergency, knew as well as their captain what they must do. Axes gleamed dully in the lurid light, fell upon the bar-taut mooring lines. Arrak shuddered and stirred, heaved and lifted to the smaller seas that were running before the monster sea like foothills before a mountain range.

Now only one hawser remained, a rope running aft from the forecastle head, its eye over a deep submerged bollard on the invisible quay. Noab came ahead on his engine. Slowly at first, then with increasing speed, the stern came away from the wharf. Now the onrushing wall of water was broad on the starboard bow—now it was coming ahead. More orders from the bridge—and again the axes gleamed. The last rope parted with an explosive crack, the ends sprang back and cut him who had wielded the a) almost in two. But Arrak was free. Using his stern power Noab swung her to meet the seismic wave.

As had done her sisters—Arrak reared to meet the monster. Her bows lifted, steeper and ever steeper. On deck was a scene of terrible confusion as that tightly packed mass of people fought to keep their footing, slithered helplessly aft on the wet, slippery planking. Stout rails—designed to stand under almost any weight but this, snapped under the strain, bodies fell into the sea or tumbled from the upper deck to crash, maimed and broken, on to the after hatches.

From below came the fear-crazed bellowing of the cattle.

But Arrak fought like a thing alive, her screws bit deep and strong, held the enormous weight of the ship against that fatal, sternward plunge. On her bridge Noab himself had the wheel, conscious that should he allow Arrak to sag to port or starboard she would be doomed. As she would be doomed if one of the two thin pipes running from wheelhouse to steering engine, the hydraulic system by which the motion of his wheel was imparted to his rudder, should break or burst.

Over the bow loomed a watery cliff. It broke and tumbled, surged aft along the foredeck in a boiling cascade. It hit the bridge structure like something solid—and Noah found himself sprawled, with his officers and quartermasters, against the after bulkhead of the wheelhouse. The broken wheel was still in his hands. Before he could regain his feet Arrak's bow clipped, sickeningly, dreadfully. Thirty thousand tons deadweight — she slid down the seaward slope of the ocean mountain with uncontrolled, uncontrollable acceleration. When she reached the trough it was as though she had been driven ashore at full speed. Pipes burst, rivets rattled around her decks and compartments like machine gun fire. To the general tumult was added the hissing roar of escaping steam.

Only a few of those aft saw the end of Attrin. The hills to the west of Darnala subsided, and over them poured the full weight of the western

ocean. Seismic wave from the east met seismic wave from the west—and the pillar of water and steam and wreckage surged bellowing to the low clouds, licking down such few airships as still hovered over the scene of the tragedy, as had not been blown west to perish in the hell of steam and whirlwind and atomic fire over Boondrom.

And like a crippled beast Arrak moved over the face of the waters—aimless, riding out the storm, a ship without a haven.

In his plain, solidly furnished stateroom Noab sat at the head of his table. Around him were his officers—reflecting their master's mood of grave concern. At the lower end of the table were the representatives of the refugees.

“But where are we, Noab?” It was Angam who spoke, an Angam much older than the man who had boarded Arrak on the Day of the Ending. His pelt was liberally sprinkled with silver—and yet a bare thirty days had passed since he had come aboard the ship.

“I wish that I knew, Angam Matangu. Since the sky cleared we have obtained accurate latitudes. As you know—longitude cannot, unless we can devise a clock that is a perfect timekeeper, be determined. And it has been impossible to estimate what easting we have made since The End. It is possible that the indraught into the gulf where Attrin once was has more than canceled the distance steamed from Attrin.

“But I intend to steer east. We cannot steer west for obvious reasons—it would mean passing over the grave of our homeland and, for all we know, the volcanoes are still active. On this course we must find land sooner or later.

“Now— Food and water. Regarding these the situation is good. So great has been our death roll that we have now a bare half of the two thousand originally provisioned for.

“Fuel— That is the problem. We have enough for about ten days steaming at reduced speed. I need hardly tell you gentlemen—most of you are engineers—that the consumption varies, roughly, as the cube of the speed. To put it crudely I intend to go a long way in a long time.

“Starting from tomorrow we shall send the small aircraft we carry on reconnaissance flights.

“And more than that we cannot do.”

“You have done more than any other man could have done, Noab.” There was a general murmur of approbation from the foot of the table. “You have snatched some faint memory of the happiness that was Attrin from the burning, and you will see the seeds of the new Attrin planted in the islands of the east!”

Noab rose to his feet. He seemed to be deeply moved. He signaled to a girl who was standing by a locker against the after bulkhead. From it she took jars and flagons, handed wine to the captain and to each of his guests.

"To the new Attrin," toasted Angam. "To the new dawn of civilization besides which this that has just perished will be the false dawn!"

"To the true dawn!"

Solitary, a ship by herself, Arrak moved over the face of the waters. Her once clean hull was streaked with rust, the crimson funnel with its golden lion was salt-caked and dingy. To the west the afterglow painted the sky with pale fire. Eastward, among the first, faint stars, was a little light that bobbed and dipped, that wove among the fixed constellations, that steadily waxed in brightness.

The whine of an aircraft turbine was heard, the throbbing of aerial propellers. The little airship circled the surface vessel. It came in from astern, hovered above the after deck, matched course and speed with its mother ship. From it snaked down a plummet weighted line. The sailors caught it, took it to a winch. Swaying on the end of its tether like a child's toy balloon the little airship was drawn down to the deck. Willing hands seized the lines pendant from its gondola, threw hasty turns around cleats and bollards. When his craft was securely moored the pilot clambered down to the gently rising and falling planking. His keen eyes distinguished in the dusk the one he was looking for. "Captain Noab! Sir! Land!"

The cry went round the ship like wildfire. Long before Noah and his aviator in the chartroom had determined such matters as course and speed every man, woman and child in the vessel knew that their voyaging was almost ended. Even the livestock below decks seemed to sense it—there arose a clamorous bellowing from their stalls that had nothing in it of fear or apprehension.

On his bridge Noab walked to the binnacle, peered into its dimly lighted bowl. "Steer South Ninety-Five East," he ordered the quartermaster. One of the officers was speaking into a voice pipe. "Revolutions for five knots, please," he said.

In his cramped quarters Angam sat with Evanee and Linith.

"Land," he said. In his voice was wonder that there should be any solidity left in the world.

"And about time," grumbled Evanee. "I don't believe that that old man Noab ever knew where we were!"

"But what sort of land?" Linith, as always, was practical.

"The airman said that there were hills, and forests, and streams. But to the west it was bare and glistening, like the ooze of the ocean bed. It seemed that it was still rising from the sea."

"Something must rise, I suppose, to balance Attrin."

"What does it matter? We have found a new home."

"And when do we get there?"

"The captain has reduced speed" —at this there was a cry of indignation

from Evanee—"he does not want to arrive before dawn."

It was not only Evanee who was incensed by Noab's caution. Throughout the ship ran the impatient murmuring, the indignant whispers. The rails were lined by people peering ahead into the darkness. Overhead rode Loana, not far from the full, her once smooth face scarred and pitted. On any other night the spectacle of the seared sister world, still dreadfully novel, would have held the eye of every observer. But not on this night. Every low dark cloud along the eastern horizon was hailed as the long desired and anticipated landfall—and every low dark cloud that lifted from the rim of the world made all beholders prey to the uneasy suspicion that the pilot of the little airship had been the victim of an hallucination.

But, recking little of the hopes and fears of her living freight, the ship ploughed steadily on. From aft, at regular intervals, came the whine of the little steam winch as the questing plummet, having failed in its search for bottom, was hauled once more to the taffrail. From the bridge, deep, sonorous, came the sound of the gong as the last watches of the voyage tolled each its own requiem.

At about an hour before dawn Arrak struck. It was not a violent jar—as strandings go it was very gentle. The ship slid forward slowly, then stopped. The great screws threshed in reverse—but Arrak did not move. From the stern a depth of ninety fathoms was obtained—but along the sides, from forward to as far aft as the mainmast, there was a bare thirty-five feet. And this was Arrak's draught.

On the bridge the tired old man who wore on his wrists the gold bracelets of authority heard the latest reports, then said—"There is nothing more for me to do. I have found land for them. The ship is safe. Today, or tomorrow, or the day after, the land will have risen still further—and they will be able to walk ashore. And I have thrown away my ship."

One of his officers suggested laying out an anchor astern, the jettison of stores and ballast, but the captain refused to listen.

"No," he said. "The purpose of this, our last voyage, has been fulfilled. This is our last port. And nowhere, in all the world, is there another haven for us."

With the first flush of dawn the water fell still further, and as the wan light increased so did the depth of water around the ship decrease. From aft came ominous creakings as the stern hanging clear of the ledge with no support, began to sag and buckle. But only the seamen were concerned with this. The refugees crowded the decks, staring ahead to the promised land. They saw the green hills and the trees, the river that poured itself over the golden sand of the beach and then spread itself over the gray slime of what had been the ocean bed.

Some were already over the side, clambering down the hastily improvised ladders, floundering waist deep in the stinking ooze. Overhead the little airship circled, its balloon glowing golden in the first rays of Ramanu. And the ship that had served them so faithfully was no more than a prison from which they proposed to escape with the utmost possible speed.

Angam Matangu sat outside his hut on the westward slopes of Mount Arrak. The ship after which the hill was named, the mountain that had been upthrust from the ocean depths silently and smoothly, was now little more than a mound of rusted girders and ruined, useless machinery—standing silent among the rank grasses, a mute witness to the high estate from which Man had fallen.

Yet Angam was content. Blue in the evening air rose the thin smoke of the cooking fires where the women of the tribe prepared the evening meal. Around him were his fields—the ground from which he had wrested, by the sweat of his brow throughout the long, hard years, sustenance for his family and himself. Linith was gone—but it was pleasant to sit here and remember her. He wrinkled his hairy brows—gray now—in an effort to recall how many winters ago that had been.

She had been too civilized for this life, had Linith. But Evanee —it was surprising how she had hardened. Yes—a wry smile flickered over his broad mouth—and coarsened. But she had the qualities that made for survival until the race should recover from the shock of its near extinction, should begin once more the long climb upwards to mechanized civilization.

Abrel appeared on the slope of the hill, climbed upwards to his father with long, easy strides. He sat down beside the older man, pulled a generous bunch off the spray of berries that he was carrying and gave them to him.

"Thank you, Abrel. These are good."

"Yes. I was thinking that we might take cuttings and try to cultivate the bushes in our own garden."

"By all means, son."

For a while the two sat in silence. Then—

"What is the trouble between you and Carran?"

"Trouble? Why, there is no trouble, Father."

"Evanee told me that you had been interfering with him, would not let him live his life his own way."

"Suppose that way is altogether alien from what we consider right?"

"Oh. So there has been trouble between you and your brother. Just what was it?"

"It would have come to the ears of the Village Fathers sooner or later. It is all these people who were born after the Day of the Ending. You must know that they are different."

"Physically, yes. They are smooth and hairless. Their bodies are frail. And they move around so quickly that they will be worn out before they reach maturity."

"But it's more than physical, father. It's here!" The young man tapped his head. "Do you know what I found them doing? Carran and Dorilee and

Turbal? They had taken a cow from the herd of Drinrud, and they had slit its throat with a sharp instrument they had made from the metal of the Arrak. And they were cutting off great pieces of the bleeding flesh—and they were eating it!”

“Abrel!”

“But it's true, Father. And when I stopped them they were ashamed—but I saw a look in their eyes that wasn't human. Have you ever looked into the eyes of a trapped rat? And seen the dreadful, sickening hate there? It was like that.”

“Hate,” muttered the old man. “We do not hate. We cannot. Yet—” His mind winged back to the evil plain west of Boondrom, to the plant monsters encircling it, to the power of the plain and the power that had blasted Loana and that had sunk Attrin. He thought of the new hairless folk that had been born since the Day of the Ending—of them and of the other children scarce more intelligent than the beasts. He thought of the arrogance of these new hairless folk, of their drive and ambition, of the unhuman intensity of their emotions. Yet, one of them was his son—and was beloved by Evanee.

“I must think this over,” he muttered. “Tomorrow I will call a meeting of the Village Fathers.”

But the next day was too late.

Late that night he was awakened by Evanee. She bent over his bed, the bed in which he was sunk deep in a nostalgic dream of Attrin. She shook him, gently at first, then roughly. “Linith,” he said, half awake. “Linith.”

“It's me, you old fool. It is long past the tenth hour, and neither Abrel nor Carran are in.”

“What of it? They are old enough to look after themselves.”

“Yes. But you don't know all of it. Abrel has been interfering with Carran and his friends. I am afraid that he may have done them some hurt.”

And Angam was afraid, but not for Carran. He arose hastily, cast around him a robe against the night chill. Swiftly for one of his bulk he padded to the doorway of the hut, bent his head under the low lintel and passed outside.

The sky was clear and Loana was at the full. The ghastly silver face shone with a hard radiance, casting black shadows from huts and trees and rocks. It was very quiet.

The old man paused, listening intently. It seemed to him that from a black copse on the upper slopes of the hill came the noise of chanting. There was some quality about it, evil, alien, that made every hair of his body stand erect. He hesitated—then reached inside his doorway for the metal-tipped sapling that served both as spear and staff. The feel of the rough haft of his weapon in his hand was comforting.

Swiftly, silently, he climbed the hill. More slowly, but still silently, he crept

through the undergrowth of the coppice. A lane of trees had been cut down in a north-south direction, and at the northern end was a stone slab. There was something tied on the slab, something dark. It lay in the shadows cast by the hairless folk around the sitar.

One of them was Carran.

Held high in his right hand was something that glinted. He faced away from the slab, faced south so that the rays of Loana shone full in his face.

"Mother Loana, behold us, thy children," he cried.

"Mother Loana, behold us, thy children,

"Spawned of the thunder, the flame and the flood—

"Lift us to sit with thee,

"Smite thou our enemy—

"Let the sins of our fathers be washed out in blood!"

The group before the altar parted. Behind it was revealed the girl Dorilee. In the masses of her black hair was bound a crescent of shining silver. And in the light of Loana her body shone as silvery bright as Loana herself.

In her right hand was a long knife.

And the thing on the altar trussed and gagged, was Abrel.

Angam moved fast—but not fast enough. The knife had buried itself in Abrel's heart before he had broken through the undergrowth. At first those around the sacrifice did not notice him—then Carran turned. His right hand, that held a knife like that used by Dorilee, swept forward. Angam parried with his spear, caught his son a resounding blow on the right temple. The young man staggered and fell to the ground.

Immediately the hairless folk were all around the old man. They were weak—but they were many. They pinioned his arms to his sides, one of them grasped the hair of his head and pulled it back to stretch his neck for the eager knife.

But Carran, raising himself on one elbow, called to his followers to stop.

"It is my father," he said. "Do not harm him."

"But Abrel was your brother."

"No matter. Him I hated."

He took the old man's spear, leaned upon it like a staff. In spite of his youth an almost visible mantle of authority seemed to descend upon him.

"I am sorry, father," he said, "but it is best that we—I and my people—go. We are too like—and too unlike—to live in peace. Besides—we know that you and your fellows, by your neglect of Loana, who craves worship, brought upon yourselves the fire and the flood. We can live no longer with

unbelievers.”

“Then go,” said Angam.

There was nothing more to be said, Carran and his people trooped silently from the clearing. Angam watched them go, their pale forms flitting down the hillside. He wondered dimly what they would make of it all—whether they would, in the fullness of time, attain the heights of lost Attriu. He could not say—balanced against their undoubted drive was their emotional instability, their queer, unbalanced beliefs, the savagery that might as easily cast them into the depths as force them, fighting tooth and nail, to the peaks.

Angam sat by the altar and the dead body of his son Abrel—an old man and tired. The night was chill and he drew his robe ever closer about him. The stars shone scintillant in the clear sky. Loana slowly slipped from the meridian and dipped, lower and lower, to the western horizon. In the east fresh constellations rose and wheeled in slow processional towards the zenith. A wan light, ghostly, seemingly darker than the starry darkness, waxed slowly. And as the old man rose stiffly to his feet it was already fading.

“The false dawn,” he muttered into his beard. “The false dawn—

Were Carran and his kind, then, the true dawn?

Or would they play out, here on Earth, the tragic drama that had made the Moon a scarred and pitted horror—unleash powers that would send the world reeling forever through time and space, a seared and sterile mausoleum of the hopes and fears of the ages?

THE END.