Dust of Destruction

By P. Schuyler Miller

(Illustrated by Paul)

The stair beneath melted and fell hissing! Intelligence directed those rays . . . the Intelligence that threatened the Earth!

THIS old Earth of ours has passed through some pretty severe crises in its long and fruitful career as a minor planet—afflicted with a variety of life—but never has its danger been so great as in the frantic weeks following the inverted cyclone of August 23, 1967. I was near Norfolk when it happened; I was one of the little group that saw the thing through to the end, and now that it is over I am attempting a narrative that will set forth in a fashion more readable than technical the story of the "death-dust" from the Moon—the green dust of destruction.

P. SCHUYLER MILLER

In 1967, Norfolk, Nebraska, was a city of perhaps twenty thousand people. No one knows why the Dust struck there first, but the fact remains that it did. The Things had probably been experimenting for some time with a sort of sliding-scale of frequencies before they hit on what they were looking for, and there is ample evidence of extreme auroral activity and atmospheric fluorescence for years back. The day before, Tuesday the 22nd, I had been motoring west on a canvassing trip, and I remember that the radios of eastern Nebraska were raising a brand of Cain that even my patent static eliminator could not iron out.

At 8:37 on that Wednesday morning I was burning up the road between Stanton and Norfolk and had stopped for gas about ten miles from the latter city, not far beyond Stanton, where I had miraculously filled my sales quota during a lull in the interference the day before. The Moon was well past full, hanging low in a cloudless sky. I remember talking with the proprietor of the gas station about the rocket that Norfolk's favorite son, my old pal, Dick Haverford, meant to aim at the Moon in a week or so, as soon as he gave it enough test-flights in the upper atmosphere. I jokingly said that I was willing to throw over my job if he would take me along, and the proprietor called me a fool and flooded the tank over, effectively transferring the compliment.

I was sunk to the back teeth in what is generally called a horse-laugh when out of the west came a flash of blinding light, followed by a shattering crash of sound that rattled my windshield and splintered the closed windows of the gas station. Then from the east came a wind—the wind—and like a man in a dream I watched my hat scale off down the road toward a murky pillar of smoke or dust that was vomiting into the sky over Norfolk. The station was sheltered by a low hill of sorts, but in front, at the side of the road, grew a real old New England elm, over a hundred feet tall, shading the station with its great green umbrella. Now, as I watched it, the green leaf surfaces turned to show their pale under sides with the coming breeze. Then the twigs began to bend and let their leafy ends stream out toward the west, not with the fitful tossing of a brewing storm, but slowly, steadily, as if a mounting force were drawing them out. And

now I saw that the great upper branches were twisting and bending, to give way to the wind. Slowly, like a weary laborer bending to his load, its mighty green crown drooped and the six-foot trunk took on a taut curve. And then it broke. With a white flare of splintered wood, it went bobbing off down the road like a giant stalked tumbleweed, while the shattered stump screamed aloud with vibration above the sullen roar of the rising wind. Sand and gravel splattered the back of the car, and I looked around to see that the top of the little cut that sheltered the station was being torn down by the wind. All manner of things were tearing past and overhead—roofs, uprooted or broken trees and bushes, the tops of autos—and still the wind mounted with its droning roar, a queer unreal quality of leisurely, sleepy growth in its tone. As the wall of the cut wore lower, great air currents ripped nearer my car, where I sat in a sort of daze. I could detect now an ugly whine lurking under the sullen roar. Everything happened at once. There was a new crash from beyond the edge of the cut and the fat proprietor fairly dove into my open car as a huge bushy maple popped over the rim and crashed full into our rear, driving me headlong into the open. In an instant the tempest caught us, the open top flapped forward and off with a snarl of ripping fabric, and I was bowling down the open road with the owner of the gas-station gripping my neck in a frantic stranglehold.

The wheel was no good for steering—it was of use only as a pillar, a post to which I could cling. The road ran straight for a mile or so, and for maybe a minute we swept smoothly between stripped fields where the grain clung in a mat to the ground. Then we struck a curve and the Buick took a wire fence below the level of the road like a racing greyhound, struck in a swampy meadow, and somersaulted end for end. I felt the garage man loosen his grip; then sensed a changing perspective of earth and sky, and my own grip loosened and I was being carried bodily by the wind.

The other man was now a blurred form in the air ahead.

OUR tattered clothes offered little gliding surface, and gravity very soon asserted itself. A second fence loomed, probably the other side of the field. The other fellow cleared it with a foot to spare and vanished in the dust beyond, but I met it fair and square, and with a crack of rotten posts and screech of freed wire was rolling head over heels through the water-stripped mire of a small pond. With an ominous buzz of splintered fibers another elm whipped past me, butt first, and struck the opposite bank of the pond, driving deep into the mud.

In the fraction of a second that its course was checked, I found myself firmly wired into the heart of the mass of stripped branches, and then my strange steed was up-ending it across the fields, filling me with a wholesome fear of death every time its mighty crown struck the ground and new splinters sang around my head. Then there would be a breathless, rising glide—a heart-shaking swoop—an instant of crashing limbs and flying branches—then on and up again.

I can’t even start to describe that race with the wind, straight across Nebraska for ten fearful miles to the devastated city of Norfolk. My tree was a big one, and for a large part of its trip it traveled crown foremost, dragging the heavy butt, but every now and then it would drop, up-end, and drive like a dart until it struck some obstruction with a shattering crash and spun end over end for a new start. I know that we drove clear through the walls of a farmhouse where people still clung for shelter, and that we hurtled through a brief grove of splintered tree-stubs that were screaming madly above the wind with shrill

vibration. I knew, too, that the wind was falling somewhat, for its throaty roar was growing deeper and lower. But when the trunk of my tree snapped off and we hit Norfolk I cannot tell. I was probably unconscious.

* * *

A rising sun found me plastered amid debris of tree and fence and city against the still-standing wall of a bank-vault, up to my neck in a fluffy green dust that was piled in great drifts and dunes all along the remaining walls of Norfolk. To a keener sense, it might have been gritty, for it seemed angular and crystalline, and on my tongue it felt granular, but to eyes and fingers it was merely a fluffy emerald powder that seeped and drifted through and into everything and everywhere. It was light enough to retain considerable air, except where it was packed in a thin crust along the walls, and when I felt something squirm against my feet I was able to burrow in and drag out the man still alive and kicking.

He was a physical Hercules, but the wind had stripped him clean; for, unlike me, he had had no buffer. It was a miracle that no bones were broken, though his mighty muscles were purple with the ruptured capillaries of great livid bruises. Around his waist still hung a cartridge belt and automatic, and in that instant I recognized the face behind the tawny uncut hair and stubble of beard. He was "Red" Brockton, tramp and bank-robber, whose pictures and finger-prints adorned the post-office wall in Sheldon. He showed signs of coming around, so my discretion prompted the transfer of his little arsenal, and my valor consequently survived a rather abrupt depression.

I do not know how or where he had gone to sleep, but he woke with the fine green dust in his hair and his ears, and the barrel of his own gun centered on his stomach. I had read somewhere that such a target often secures a moral hit long before physical contact would register. It seemed to work.

"What the hell?" he wanted to know.

I was noncommittal.

"Leggo that gun—you're pointin' at me!" he bellowed peevedly.

"Nix." I informed him. "I'm perfectly comfortable as is. You just lean back and contemplate Nature at her best—or worst, if you like it better."

"Funny guy, ain't you? Well, the lead's yours—I pass. What's your hand?"

"I have openers—or an opener."

"Yeah. I had it last deal."

"Sure, but this is now—and here. Feeling at all agreeable and open to suggestion?"

"That depends."

"Naturally. Listen here. I'm going to make you a proposition. Are you listening to it?"

"Shoot."

"It's this way. I don't have to tell you that something or other has raised particular hell right here where we're sitting, and for plenty of miles around. We're luckier than most, so it's our play. Well, let's play it, and play it straight!"

"Um. Go ahead with the spiel."

"I guess there are plenty of people around here who need help, and not too many to help 'em. The really lucky ones are dead. I'm pretty well, and you look as if you could still lift a safe or so, under the sore part. I know you, or I wouldn't have your gun, but my memory isn't so good after I've been working hard for a spell—say at relief work—and I have an idea there will be others around who have just about the same kind of memory. Of course, if I'm lifting houses off of people, I'm going to need both hands, but that's no drawback if you have everything straight. How about it?"

"Well, it's a proposition. Suppose I accepted, an' then plugged you?"

"You couldn't. I keep the gun."

"Hell! I thought there was a catch in it! How about afterward?"

"Afterward is none of my business, that I can see. I woke up sitting on you and I acted accordingly. If we gang up on this relief work, you're just a husky house-lifter so far as I'm concerned, and if any police turn up who have better memories than I have, then you're on your own, unless you want to take a chance on what pull I have here in town."

"Good with me, feller. I'm on. You know me. Well, who are you while we're teamed up?"

"Call me Hank, if you want to. It saves time, and it's been done plenty of times before. If you're in a hurry, you won't use a name anyway, so why worry?"

"Good with me. You can slow the gun, if you want to. My say-so is good."

The City of the Dead

TOGETHER we climbed up on the flat top of the wrecked vault and looked around. On every side the city lay in ruins, banked deep with the glittering green dust of destruction, like long drifts of powdered jade or emerald. And yet, the green wasn't quite so emerald or jade, either. It was more like some of the spectrum lines my old Physics Prof had showed me, from the light from some of the diffuse nebulae of the Milky Way. The wind had snuffed out any fire that had started, just as you would blow out a match. All around us was just a desert of green dunes and jutting ruins of cement and metal-work. Whatever had hit Norfolk had hit unmercifully hard! Our work would be all too easy.

For three hours we searched the ruins of Norfolk for living victims of the storm—all in vain. What we did find sickened us until we hated and feared to drag aside a timber or dig into a mound of the green dust. A few, like-ourselves, had been blown in from outlying districts, and were merely scratched or bruised—dead of shock, mostly—but of all the twenty thousand and more who had lived in Norfolk before the disaster, not one was alive or even recognizable when the dawn of August 24 broke. The dead reminded me horribly of the old, cruel experiment of the frog in the exhausted bell-jar, for the awful truth was that *every living thing within the grasp of that inverted cyclone had exploded!* Bloody ribbons of terribly torn flesh remained, clinging to raw bones—no more.

About noon of Thursday we ceased our dreadful search and hunted in the cellar of a ruined grocery store for food. Water there was in plenty, spouting from broken mains and piping, washing away the light green dust from the horrors that it hid.

Thanks to the incessant flow, a thin green mud was forming in all the depressions, mottled here and there by a hideous browning red that turned us weak and pale from memories of what it meant. No other relief workers appeared. They had enough to do in the territory where the real hurricane had laid the land waste for miles and miles. But with noon came a gleaming shape of metal and crystal dropping slowly from the clouds through the slow drizzle of rain, sending Red in a headlong dive for shelter. It was a giant stream-lined rocket, such as theoretical publications had so often shown, soft golden vapor drumming gently from three great jets as it eased to the clean-swept intersection of Norfolk's two largest streets.

Forgetting Red for a moment, I ran to where it had landed, banged with my grimy fists at the polished walls rising a hundred feet and more above me, kicked frantically at the unresponsive metal, clawed at the port whose outline I could see just above my head. I was mad with a mixture of relief and terror, joy and anger, and like a child I took it out in

petulant physical defiance of the great rocket.

From far above a voice shouted angrily. “Hey, you, cut that out! What do you think you’re doing anyway?”

That voice—Dick’s voice! I stared up, fifty feet, to an open port. A head was sticking out, a brandished fist threatened me—Dick’s fist! I let out one whoop of joy, jumped five feet in the air, danced from foot to foot in excited eagerness.

“Hey, Dick, it’s me! It’s me—Hank! Come on down here and get me before I go clean crazy!”

“Hank! Why, you old son-of-a-gun—what are you doing here? Where on earth did you spring from? Hey, Doc, for the love of Mike look who’s here!”

Another head popped out, above his, white-whiskered like an image of George Bernard Shaw in the old Thirties—by all the gods, Doc Jarvis—old Jarvis, our Physics Prof! What was going on here?

A ladder of flexible cable unrolled from the port, Dick scrambling down as fast as it fell. He dropped the last ten feet and began to hammer me on the shoulder, my sore shoulder. I hammered right back till he quit.

“Dick, what has happened here’ How did you escape and when did you finish the rocket? Where have you been? Where are you going? How—?”

“Wait a minute! What am I—a World Almanac? Give me time, for the love of Mike! And tell me how you get here and struck it out without exploding when the pressure went down.”

“Oh, I came in with the wind. But how did you know they exploded here? And—hey, where’s Red?”

“Red who?”

“Why, Red Brockton. He was with me a minute ago when you landed. I’ll bet he thought you were the police, and lit out! Hey, Red! Where are you? It’s all OK, come on out!”

“Police? What kind of company are you keeping, anyway? Who is this Red Brockton?”

“Never mind who he is, if you don’t know now—he is, and that’s enough. Maybe he is wanted by the police, but you’re no more of a preacher than I am, and what’s not my business is none of yours. *Sabe?*”

“Oh, sure. No offense. I just wondered.”

“OK. He’s a hard liver, but he worked here with me like a regular man today, and I’m for him! There he is—hey, Red! Come on over here and meet my friend.”

I INTRODUCED him to Dick, and to Doc, who had come down while we were talking. I told them what I had seen, and what had happened, and Red confirmed my description of the catastrophe with a rather guarded story similar to mine.

“And now, where do you come in?” I asked Dick.

“We were on our first trial trip—five hundred miles or so out of the atmosphere—and we saw the thing hit, and what happened, and we came in as fast as we could without heating up too much. What you have said confirms most of Doc’s ideas, and believe me, this thing is plenty big! The next time it happens, they’ll have it under control, and in quantity, and then—goodbye Earth! We’re done for—a race stamped out completely—unless the four of us can put a stop to whatever is brewing. I take you for granted, Hank, you’re one of us. How about you, Brockton?”

“Where you goin’, an’ how long?”

“It’s the Moon we’re aiming for, and we’ll hit it. We may not come back, but we’ll die fighting for this old Earth of ours! It will be a bigger lay than anything you’ve been in, Brockton, and you’re big if you join us. You

don't have to, if you don't want to, but I'd like you along. Coming?"

"Good with me. This state hasn't too much love to waste on me, and it won't put me out any to leave it, even for the Moon. I'm with you."

"Good. And listen here—I'm not asking who you are or what you are. If Hank knows, he'll keep his mouth shut. He knows how. I'm boss unless you all disagree with me or we're separated and thrown on our own. Are you still with us?"

"Oh, sure. Let's get goin', if it's like you said. It don't pay to stall any in a tight place."

"Right. Come on."

CHAPTER II
The Threat from Beyond

IN THE main chamber of the rocket, the port was carefully sealed and Doc raised us while Red and I stuck to the padded chairs. It was just like going up in an elevator, the floor pressing hard on our feet and our breath coming slowly to heavy lungs. For a moment, after we got higher, Doc threw in nearly full power and as the great rocket sped ahead in its course we were plastered into our air-cushions by the enormous acceleration, as if a giant were shoving us back. The cabin became a whirl of bursting color-bombs, and my blood pounded in my ears. But as our velocity became constant, or nearly so, conditions returned to normal and I felt able to look from a port at the Earth and to take notice of the rocket itself.

The clouds that the sudden storm had brought rolled in a great white sea far below us, veiling the surface of the Earth, which was already assuming the shape of a great bowl. To the west the mountains were jutting above the low-hanging clouds; to the east appeared the momentary glint of the Great Lakes and the deep green of the Appalachian forests. As details melted and faded one into the other, the deserts began to take on a reddish-yellow tint. They were at great variance with the mottled green of the Mississippi valley, bounded on the west by a chain of dazzling white. Dappled with clouds through which the great central rivers appeared in silver etching against the shadowed green—they were a sight that no man's experience had equaled.

The rocket itself was worthy of notice. The cabin where we were was roomy, about fifteen feet in diameter and of equal height, with heavily padded walls and ceiling. There was a broad seat running all round the room, padded with air-cushions of course, with straps set in the walls at shoulder level. Here and there were deeply sunk padded recesses like chairs, while other firmly fixed swivel seats were placed about the room. Large ports, at sixty-degree intervals, were sunk about five feet in the walls, while a bulging quartz bulls-eye, set in a metal frame, gave a clear if lens-like view of the outside world. There were cupboards set in the walls, with books, chemicals, and the like, and the space beneath the seats was utilized for other labeled cupboards for food, spare implements, and such accessories. Doors led into the hollow walls of the ship.

In the very center of the room was a great circular control table, with huge levers set about it and keyboards flush with the white-enameled metal surface. Beside the three control chairs, a master-control and two duplicates were set bakelite panels with a formidable array of meters and gauges, each with its dial and graphing stylus. And in the very center of the table, sunk a little below its surface, was a plate of frosted glass in which was mirrored a panorama of the outside heavens, divided into rectangular sections by a system of cross-hairs. Beside each control chair, a binocular eyepiece permitted a

reduced view of this same panorama, with a switch to permit an enlarged view of any section of the plate.

Now Doc had turned over the controls to Dick, and had settled down to give us an idea of what was happening. We had put on coats over what remained of our rags, and even Red was looking reasonably at his ease.

"In the first place," began Doc, "you probably want to know how this ship is propelled. In rockets of this type, fuel is always the big problem—maximum energy for minimum weight. The early experimenters and writers developed the other details—construction, materials, everything but the hull and the fuel. Up 'til now, liquid hydrogen was the best bet. With the discarded shell system and a small residual body, you could probably get to the Moon and back, if you were careful and ran on a mighty narrow margin. With refueling posts in space, you could get to anther planet. But nobody wanted to try it, and no government would risk the havoc caused by the falling of cast-off fuel-shells.

"We, Dick and I, used hydrogen to get clear of the Earth. Then, following Dick's idea, we built a laboratory out here between Earth and Moon—just as writer after writer worked it out nearly forty years ago. We used the heat of the sun and the cold of space to run our turbines. We maintained artificial gravity by centrifugal force. *But we did more.*

"DISINTEGRATION or else creation of matter alone can supply the limitless atomic energy that dreamers have wrote about. Science has found out that in the stars and in space these processes are going on. And so came Dick's idea.

"Here in the void, using the electrical energy of the solar turbines, we learned to build up the elements clear through to uranium, [footnote 1] just as Nature does. We could not control the energy produced, however, so disintegration alone was left to us. It was Dick's idea to build far beyond uranium, until we came to an element whose disintegration we could control at will, providing well-nigh unlimited power in small mass and bulk. We did it, and our synthetic element, astron, controlled by the apparatus here beneath our feet, is winging the ship on her way.

"Now for the catastrophe that is threatening Earth. Out here, we saw the great ray flash into the atmosphere and blot out Norfolk. Men, *that ray came from the Moon!* I know how it acts, and I know what will happen to our old planet if we do not kill this thing right at its source, and do it quickly!

"You, Hank, have seen Coolidge's cathode ray at work. Remember how it makes rock salt turn violet, and how acetylene gas falls in a dense yellow powder? There is your clue. This is a ray, a cathode ray generated on the-Moon, of such a frequency as will pump energy into the nitrogen of our atmosphere and cause it to fall in the fluffy green powder that you saw. The observatory, up above, was in the path of the ray, and I have studied what happens to the air.

"Four-fifths of the atmosphere—equal to twelve pounds of pressure out of the fifteen per square inch that exist on the Earth's surface in our neighborhood—fell in green dust. From what I have seen, Norfolk must have been buried thirty feet deep in the stuff. It was an inverted cyclone, pouring dust upon Earth just as a real tornado sucks it off. Norfolk was smothered in dust, though the oxygen remained, but there was one more fatal result. Suddenly the atmospheric pressure over Norfolk was dropped to a small fraction of its normal value, and, like a frog in an evacuated bell-jar, *every living creature exploded from his own internal pressure!* Then the rest of the surrounding atmosphere rushed to fill the breach, and the awful storm

came and spread dust and destruction far and wide.

"One thing more. Whatever creatures inhabit the Moon are waging this war of death on our Earth. Perhaps they do not know that we live there, any more than we have been aware of their presence. Their science shows them an ideal planet within arm's reach—theirs for the taking. They need it, for some reason or other. But the pressure of the atmosphere may be many times too great for them to bear. I don't know. But if true, their science comes to their rescue with this cathode ray of just the proper frequency, and presto, the pressure drops to less than a fifth of its normal value wherever the ray strikes!

"Men, I believe that just as soon as they can assemble power enough, they are going to ray every bit of nitrogen out of our atmosphere! Every living thing on Earth will die, and then the Moon-creatures will come there and take over the Earth for their own! I think the destruction of Norfolk was more or less accidental—the end of a random range of frequencies. They will try once more, to make sure, while they are building up the necessary power, and then—poof—and we're out of the picture for all time! We've got to stop them, and do it quick!"

"If that's how it is, I'm all with you, to the limit!" put in Red. "I suppose you've got somethin' to keep us from blowin' up ourselves when we get there?"

"Yes, space suits for all of us. They have weighted shoes, to take care of the gravity, but we will have greater mobility if we do not use them. We can decide when we get there."

"Be sure Brockton gets everything straight, Doc," put in Dick. "If we're separated or killed he may have to know what to smash. There won't be much time to waste when the scrimmage starts."

"That's all right," said Red, "My business made it necessary for me to learn somethin' of science. I know what he means, an' what to smash when I get there, an' I think I'll leave off those lead shoes if I can. When I'm in a hurry I want to move fast. Another thing, do I get my gun back now? I have a hunch I'll need it before we get through."

"Sure, Red," I answered. "Here you are. You're one of us now. Dick, have you another one for me?"

"Right in the cupboard when you need it. Better put yours there, Brockton. You won't need it for a while yet."

"OK. But you can trust me, honest. And I wish you'd call me Red. That's my real name, no matter what else I call myself for a while."

"Come on, Dick," I said, "loosen up a bit. Don't be such a crab. Red's just as good as any of us here, and don't you forget it! Maybe he slipped up a few times— who hasn't? There aren't many ways you can get the thrill of adventure and fighting out of your blood, except by bucking up against authority of some kind. You did it plenty in college! I'm not forgetting some things. If you can't get it out of your head that you're the million-dollar citizen of Norfolk and the United States of America, why, I say you're no man to lead us!"

The Second Attack!

"DON'T take it that way, Hank! It's only that we three are old friends, and he's an outsider. I can't just take him as an old-timer right off the bat."

"Well, I can," said Doc. "My memory can lapse as well as the next man's if we get back, but just now I'm remembering a few things I've read in the papers and books. Mainly I'm remembering an old Englishman by the name of Robin Hood, and wondering if his hair was red. Shake, Red!"

"Thanks, Doctor. I sure appreciate it! It hurts always to be on the outside lookin' in—on the defensive against everyone. Maybe you think I came along just to get clear of the police, but I didn't. I liked the way Hank, here, put things up to me when he dragged me out of the dust-pile; and I liked your looks, yes, an' his too. I thought then you were men I could fight alongside of for a while—sort of gang up against the things from the Moon, an' whatever's makin' it! I'd still like to, if he'll let me in on it, all the way."

"Right, Red. Teamwork it is, from now on, and stop us who can, I'm Dick—don't forget that. Between us we'll have 'em licked, or I miss my guess. Here, Doc, for the love of Mike take these controls while I get some clothes on these birds! We've been talking so dead serious that we never realized that they look barer than Fijians in their bathing suits! Red may stick out of my clothes in places, but Hank is your size, near enough. We have to be dressed right up to the hour when we meet the Man-in-the-Moon's daughter!"

During the three days that we were in space on our way to the Moon, I explored the rocket until it was thoroughly familiar, and learned the technique of the control-board. Below the control-chamber were store rooms, packed for any emergency, and the mechanical maze of the discharge-room at the very bottom of the ship, with a confusion of orderly-disorderly machine-giants feeding *astron* to the jets. At the very top of the rocket was the great room where Red spent most of his time, a huge quartz-windowed observatory with metal shutters that could be opened from inside and a twelve-inch refracting telescope with all the attendant instruments of modern astronomy—spectroscope, micrometers, bolometers, and all the rest.

The view was wonderful—of stars and nebulae and planets, with the Milky Way strung in a great necklace of suns across the black throat of space, and the pock-marked white desert of the Moon dead ahead. We had flexibility enough to maneuver the sun to our rear, where its blinding light would not interfere with our view of the heavens. The little laboratory in space showed too, for a while, a faint speck of light against the dappled Earth. Doc was busy most of the time making observations, and Red, who never tired of the view, helped him more than any of us would have suspected.

As we neared and passed the neutral point of attraction between Moon and Earth, we took advantage of the lack of gravitational pull to put on the heavy space-suits and practice maneuvering in them. A constant tension of every muscle was necessary to prevent any sudden motion that might wreck us and the ship alike by dashing us into the midst of the controls. But before it became necessary to decelerate the ship for the landing, we were reasonably adept at the art of walking in a field of reduced gravity.

Red and Doc were by far the best. Red's uncanny control of his every muscle was simply amazing. He was one of those rare individuals who can twitch parts of their skin, like a horse, and practically every part of his body obeyed his mental control. A few times only did he experience the sensation of utter helplessness that comes from moving too suddenly, with the accompanying suspension in emptiness, like Mahomet's coffin.

With Doc it was not the control that was so perfect, but a knowledge of exactly what motions were or were not safe. Still, he took a few pretty tumbles, and once Red had to drag him out of the very top of the observatory, after he had been thrown off his seat by the lurch of dodging a meteor swarm. Meteors, incidentally, bothered us very little and, as we traveled well below our top speed, we were able to avoid the big swarms with little or no damage to the ship.

We were about an hour from the Moon, decelerating continually, when the great ray stabbed again, straight from the mighty crater of Tycho. We were watching the image of the Moon in the ground-glass, and as a pale shaft of light darted from the heart of the giant crater, Dick rocked the ship with the laterals, to get a view of the Earth from the side ports. Almost instantly the center of the darkened disc of Earth was marked by a stab of brilliant white light, a pin-prick against the red-rimmed black. The Moon-creatures had struck again, for certainty, and now we had barely time enough to make Tycho before they should loose their ray for the final time. We must stop them, before they began their last awful barrage of death, and we must stop them for good!

WE dropped slowly into a great crater at the southern apex of the Mare Nubium—the Sea of Clouds, as the old astronomers called it. The region near Tycho was a blistered wilderness of craters and ring-plains, great and small, but in that desolate labyrinth of crevice and crater it would have been next to impossible to find the rocket again. Hence we chose a prominent spot and dropped the rocket well under the eastern wall, where the shadow of the great cliffs would hide its polished brilliance from hostile observers.

By common consent, Doc was the first through the air-lock. Scrambling awkwardly through its rather narrow port, he jumped and dropped with uncanny slowness to the ground, throwing up a thick spray of pumice from the foot-thick layer that covered the crater floor. Indeed, this fine pumice covers most of the Moon, deepest in those great rolling plains known to men as Seas, where it often buries entire craters; and but a fine dust on the lofty tops of the crater-rings and mountain-ridges. The rest of us followed him as fast as we could, and we raced across the crater floor for the southern rim, shooting high with every leap and despite our recent practice, sprawling awkwardly to the ground again on landing.

Red forged ahead rapidly, with Doc not far behind him, and when we reached the foot of the cliffs they were clambering from crag to crag high above us. I at least, knew how to fall, having had considerable practice, so I threw caution to whatever winds the Moon might have and went up the first almost perpendicular slope in three great bounds. Then I dived for a higher pinnacle, jumped from there to a knife-edge of lava that ran up at a sixty-degree angle, scrambled along this for about half a mile, and then tackled the last up-grade in a series of flying leaps that took me past the scrambling forms of Doc and Red, who had not my momentum. I popped like a released cork over the final ridge, and started headlong down the other side in a growing avalanche of bleached and weathered pumice.

When the others reached the summit, I was perched on a spire a quarter of the way down the outer side of the ridge, ten or twelve feet above the level of the rim itself. The panorama was certainly magnificent. About one hundred and seventy miles to the south rose the great rampart of Tycho, jutting mile on mile into sheer emptiness. Between it and our crater lay a jagged maze of craters, great and small, through which threaded the dazzling white streaks of Tycho's mighty ray-system, streamers of white spreading in a huge network across the entire surface of the Moon. From the rim of the crater they looked like cracks that had been filled with a dull white enamel.

Behind, beyond our crater, lay the great dark plain of the Sea of Clouds, while a narrow streak of dark stuff lay off to the right, running straight for Tycho, like a somewhat broader crevice that had not been filled with the white stuff of the ray-system. A bay of the Sea of Clouds ran up on the left, the lunar

west, as it is reckoned from the point-of-view of Earthly directions. And everywhere, rising in a wonderful chaos of sun-bleached rock with here and there a streak of delicate color, were the southern craters of the Moon.

I could have stayed there for hours, just looking out over that wonderful panorama of planetary wreckage, but we had no time to waste. We were all connected by radio, in addition to having microphones to pick up sounds from the outside, so I threw in my switch and caught Doc in the midst of an excited lecture to the effect that there could be life of sorts here after all, as he had seen a very, very faint flicker of convection currents rising from the hot rock of a small craterlet in the wall.

Dick reminded him that we already knew perfectly well that there was life here. We had come, he said, to find and wipe it out if we could, or make terms if it was necessary. There was no time to listen to lectures if we were going to have a stab at saving life on our planet from utter destruction. And so, perched there on our pinnacles at the crater's rim, we planned our campaign of attack.

CHAPTER III
The Army Moves Up

FIRST of all, we would proceed separately, and as secretly as possible, in order to keep all our eggs from being smashed together. We would go straight to Tycho, unless we discovered anything to change our plans, in which case we were entirely on our own. We would scout out the situation, reach the ray or the power source if possible, and put a spoke in the lunar wheel in any way we could. If we couldn't carry on alone, we would hunt for the rest of the gang and wade through in a body. After we left the crater, and until we grouped again, we were our own masters, proceeding as we saw fit, but wasting no time in gaping at the lunar landscape.

Red, as the best walker of the bunch, was to advance through the-maze of craters to the left; Doc would go straight through for Tycho; I would cut in from the right, along the dark ray that came up from the north; and Dick, as Napoleon of the expedition, would do as he pleased—all perfectly clear, and all too simple!

We already had concentrated food in our belts, enough for a week's ration, and had strapped on our weapons—an automatic and a sort of short-sword or bayonet. Red and I, as best shots, were given two rifles. And so, with waves of the hand, we set out.

As I leaped awkwardly off to the southeast, I saw Doc slipping down the crater-wall in a cloud of pumice, Red striding like a bulbous Colossus through a minor inferno of small pits and craterlets, and Dick standing alone on the rim, staring off toward Tycho, and I wondered what his plan could be—a plan that only Doc and he knew.

It was about thirty miles to the dark strip. I made it in about an hour, threading an erratic way through the jumble of crags and craters with more than usual care. As half of the rifle-squad, it behooved me to move quickly. Then, for very nearly fifty miles, I hopped and floundered through a two-foot layer of dark pumice and ash, along the course of the black streak. It wasn't really black, but more of a dark grey, from the quantity of powdered lava and ash that was mixed with the white pumice.

The streak itself was a great, low-walled crevice that had been widened by erosion and volcanic action, through which black lava had welled up. Here and there were little pits or blow-holes in the lava, and I thought I could detect billows of vapor in their depths—moisture of some sort. Now and then I had to rest for ten or fifteen minutes, and ate a capsule of the concentrated food from the

container in the cheek of the helmet, for the going was hard and I overexerted shamefully most of the time. All in all, it was about ten hours before I reached Tycho, and plenty had happened in the meantime.

As I advanced to the south, the walls narrowed and the left-hand ridge became a more or less continuous dyke, so that I climbed up to its top in order to make better time and get an idea of the country I was headed into. There wasn't much new in it—a few pretty big craters and a flock of smaller ones between me and Tycho, a few short rays of the white stuff running out and sinking into the surface here and there, cracks, ridges, deep pits with their sides and bottoms in shadow—just another lunar landscape. It was going to be the easiest going off toward the southeast, where a bigger ray than usual cut off straight for the horizon like a polished white rib among the bleached rocks. I crossed the crevice, and struck off in its direction.

All this time I had seen no signs of the life that we knew must be here. In the deeper pits and the bottoms of some of the crevices I saw vapor that might well have been water, and there were faint convection currents above the heated rocks that told of an atmosphere of sorts. But the sun shone down with such fury that the rock must have been at a blistering temperature. My suit kept out most of the heat pretty well, but the sun's glare on the white rock hurt my eyes even through darkened lenses.

Not much life *could,* live here—the Moon-creatures must be underground or in the larger craters like Tycho and Copernicus. And then, in the shade of a small, deep, crater, I found what would have set Doc off in a whirl of excitement—lichens!

They were real honest-to-goodness lichens, sun-bleached to a yellowish white, with huge, bulbous spore-cases of bright crimson. How they could live on this volcanic desert I do not know, but there they were, just as if this were a mountainside at home. I went on with a distinct thrill at this first life on our supposedly dead satellite.

By this time I could regulate my leaps better, and so make far better time; and as the rib or ray of white stuff drew nearer I put on full speed and reached it in a helter-skelter flurry of dust and rock chips.

AS I had guessed, it was a low rib of some white, porcelain-like material, running out from Tycho to parts unknown. The top was only about ten feet above the mean level of the surface, and its section was decidedly oval rather than circular. As far as I could see from my vantage on a pinnacle, there was no opening in it anywhere—just a long flat tube of dusty white porcelain or enamel threading its way among the craters, straight for its goal.

It would be easier going on top, so I launched myself from my pinnacle in a great flying-leap for its top. I must have been traveling pretty fast, for when I hit there was an instant's checking and then I shot on through and fell thirty or forty feet to the floor of the crevice that it roofed. The stuff was very thin and let quite a bit of light through, so that I could take stock of my surroundings with success. At last I had ample evidence of intelligent life *on the Moon!*

Here was a natural crevice that had been roofed and floored with white, heat-insulating porcelain, with metal ribs shoring up the sides. Sunk in the smooth floor were little parallel metal grooves, running the length of the tunnel, some six or eight feet apart. Down the crevice a hundred feet or so, another tunnel ran at a steep angle down into the rock, and in the darkness below I could hear thinly the roar and grind of machinery and the gurgle of water.

Even as I was crouching at its mouth, trying vainly to pierce the darkness, my

microphone registered a swift whirr and click from the direction of Tycho, and I pressed back into the tunnel-mouth as a great fifteen-foot wheel swept past along the farther groove. At its center was a little cube of perhaps two feet on a side, with a round crystal port in the front. No sooner had it passed than its sound died—it stopped. I was discovered!

There was no time for hesitation. Instantly I stepped back into the dark of the passage, felt its steep slope drop beneath my heels, and slipped swiftly back into the dark. For half a minute or less I shot between crowding walls, then a bright light burst on me and I fell with a great splash into a deep, eddying pool, the deafening throb and beat of machinery dinning on all sides. For one breathless instant I seized the impression of huge polished metal forms and whirling wheels, of globes of white light set in a low ceiling, then the vortex sucked me down and into a great conduit through which the water raced toward distant Tycho.

For maybe ten minutes I was swept along in the rushing torrent, buoyed up by my space-suit. I could tell that I was being borne deeper than ever into the bowels of the Moon, down God knows where, into the heart of the realm of these Moon-things. Would I escape? Would Earth be saved? Or would we die horribly, all four of us, and Earth become the plaything of creatures such as no man had seen or imagined?

Again light burst upon me, and I fell for hundreds of feet through space to bring up with a breath-taking spat on the surface of a great body of water. Enveloped as I was in a buoyant space-suit, it was hard to see much, especially as I was lying face down in the water. By dint of much writhing and kicking, I managed to assume an erect position and look around me.

I floated in a huge metal reservoir, hundreds of feet in diameter, into which poured great jets of water from far above, where the walls of a cavern closed into a narrow cone from which flooded the blinding white light. Up from the hidden region beneath the tank wound a spiral stairway, to an opening in the cave-roof above. It was of metal, with two-foot treads and no rail to speak of—merely a strip of metal on either side. Opening out of the great reservoir were myriad open channels into which the water poured, and toward which I was drifting helpless in the grip of a strong current. I felt for my rifle—battered, water-soaked and useless. My automatic was in a sealed belt-pouch, safe.

Just as the current sucked me into the nearest channel my roving eyes caught a weird shape toiling up the metal stair—a glistening biped-thing with globular cranium and goggling, glassy eyes, neckless, with short, thick arms and stubby legs and hands like metal claws—some strange monster of the Moon. Then I recognized it, even as a blaze of flame burst from the dome above us and the metal stair crackled with blue fire, hurtling the long thing headlong into emptiness—*the figure of a human being in a space-suit!*

The Great Deluge!

THE lunar water-system was a gravity, flow, with all the dips and thrills of the wildest Earthly roller-coaster. I was whipped through great caverns of roaring machinery, through narrow, dark tunnels bitten into the rock, across great chasms opening to the outer air. Then came a last mighty upward swoop, and the stream slowed and dropped into a pool that lay open to the heavens at the bottom of a huge cylindrical pit. All around me in the half-dark bulked towering shapes of glittering metal, half alien, half familiar. My eyes strained into the darkness and the truth leapt to

my mind. Here were the rockets of the lunar races—waiting to leap out into space at the signal of the success of the destruction of the earth's atmosphere.

I scrambled out of the shallow pool, ran to the nearest rocket. There were no ports—merely ten-inch openings with curved, tight-fitting caps, little loading ports of some sort. How could the Moon-things enter—or were they even now sealed snugly within these metal walls, waiting to drive forth to the conquest of the planet they had killed? I stared around me. This was the floor of a small, deep crater, smoothed and altered for its single purpose. No doors opened into it, but in the walls close to the floor were sealed, circular holes, the mouths of some sort of tube.

Now my microphone caught a whine and whirr as something hurtled by beyond the wall, bound for the great crater of Tycho, the lunar metropolis through whose heart I had rushed in the grip of the flowing waters. And now I knew—they were pneumatic tubes for communication between the cities of the Moon! Where lay my duty—here, helpless, with the ships, or there, where the ray still burned? Or was it even now too late? Which must it be? I turned to the tube, jerked open the scuttle of the air-lock, crammed myself inside. There was a dim glow of light, and a little trigger of sorts. Edging forward, I jammed against it. It gave way. With a mighty rush of pent gases I was hurtling toward Tycho and the ray!

* * *

And now, for a moment, I must digress to make clear the movements of the others, as I later learned them. Doc took the shortest course, straight across a fairly open terrain to the looming rampart of the great crater. It had taken him perhaps six hours—uneventful hours—to gain the rim. He had not even seen lichens such as I had discovered. From the summit of the ring-mountain he looked out over the barren waste of the crater, nearly sixty miles across, with a giant central cone of ragged rock. Otherwise it was utterly bare—no cities, no life—only rough rock and pumice and a scattering of small crevices and craters. It was more than an hour later when he had worked through the thick dust to the central peak, and here he found the evidence he sought—a narrow black tunnel, leading down into the core of the mountain.

His subsequent trip was short. The tunnel opened directly into a great arching hall of many metal levels, where huge, strange machines pounded, unguided—an automatic metal world. Into one end of the great series poured molten metal, vanishing into metal maws. From the other rose huge polished hulks, rocket-ships, to drop into a tunnel and disappear. Like those I saw, there were only little hooded holes in their sides, like oil-cups on terrestrial machines.

He found a plunging stream of water, dropping out of the upper heights of the mountain, followed it, and came at length upon the great cavern of the reservoir, where a narrow spiral stair rose, to the far distant roof. Halfway to the top there came a flash of blinding light, a numbing thrill of electric energy, and he toppled from the stair, missing the tank entirely, bounding from girder to girder until he struck the floor and lapsed into unconsciousness.

* * *

Red saw much more. Far to the west, he had, like me, burst into one of the porcelain runways. But when a great wheel swept past him, bound for Tycho, he was able to grasp its protruding axle, just above his head, and draw himself up. The speed must have been dreadful, and even his great strength was nearly broken, but he managed to cling unnoticed to the end.

The runway dipped under the crater's rim and opened into a spacious hall under the

central cone, a hall into which other tunnels converged and pneumatic tubes opened. It was huge beyond all words, soaring clear up into the summit of the mountain, and wonderfully carved with strange geometric grotesqueries and laced with metal spans above his head. But he noticed only its filth, for the place was literally crawling with vermin—with great, disgusting shaped insects! They were all of a foot long, crusty green things with many-branched wiry antennae.

Their feet were broad and flat, like green snow-shoes, and had suction disks on the bottoms, with which they clung to walls and floor. The things swarmed over him in great wave-like clouds, over his arms and helmet, clogging his motions and sucking at the joints of his armor with a sort of sac that was slung under their bodies. As they crept over his helmet and peered evilly into its interior with many-faceted eyes that were filmed with playing color, he noted other strange organs clustered on their undersides—suckers, and toothed cups, and more—perhaps adapted for sucking food from the rock itself. On their rough green backs were the remains of rudimentary wings, and also round prismatic structures that seemed to glow in the light and fluctuate with its shading.

THEY were everywhere, all over everything, crawling with a rasp and pop of suction-disks that his microphone brought clearly to his ears. Evidently the air was much denser here. Shuddering, he swept them from him. These were the things that were driving the lunar peoples from their planet to ours! These were responsible for the doom of Earth! He strode angrily across the floor, crushing them beneath his lead-shod feet with vicious satisfaction. Where a pneumatic tube entered the hall, a buzzer was sounding shrilly. He yanked viciously at the scuttle. As it burst open, a flood of insects broke over him from the tube within, and he wheeled in disgust and horror and rushed madly across the room and through an open archway, mashing the things in scores beneath his feet!

They were everywhere in here too, but not so bad as in the great hall. Here were the huge metal girders that supported some sort of tank, and a spiral stair of many steps, winding up and up through a maze of beams and girders to a distant roof, whence a Bright light was pouring. On the floor beneath the stair lay a queer, crumpled form, over which the insects were swarming, striving to tear at its joints with their devilish suckers. They were prying at every crevice, a huge filthy wave of disgusting life that rasped and creaked like rusty machines in their eager hunger. It was a globe-headed thing, with queer, short arms and legs, heaving slowly with its heavy, intermittent breathing. God, it was one of the other guys!

He leaped forward, and even as he drew Doc's unconscious form from beneath the sea of clinging bugs, a great wave of rasping and a shrill, ear-splitting whine rose in the first hall, while a mighty torrent of the insects poured through the arch and over him, piling up a yard deep on the lower part of the stair. They were coming then, attacking at last, the lunar people, driving these vermin before them! Snatching out his automatic, he fired point-blank at the thing that loomed in the archway!

* * *

With the glancing blow of the slug on my helmet, I stumbled and fell, grabbing at my gun, then saw who had fired and yelled frantically into my transmitter. Here I was back again in the room I had left—returning here still in search of the ray! Lowering his gun, Red stepped back against the base of one of the great props that held the tank, resting Doc against it, and calling to me to come. I came. Back to back, Doc and the girder

behind us, we fought the advancing horde. I mowed savagely into the crusty sea of green life with my clubbed rifle, smashing them in great swaths that oozed thick yellow slime and were swallowed by the thousands that poured over them to do us battle! God! No wonder these things had driven the lunar people to contemplation of the destruction of a planet! And with all their teeming millions and billions, it could not be long before they too would clamor for escape from this dead hulk in space!

Doc had come to, now, and was leaning weakly against the girder, fumbling at his belt. His hand came away with an oval metal canister—a hand grenade. It flashed at the low arch, struck just above its summit, and in an awful blast of shattering sound the wall before us collapsed, shutting off the outer hall. Again, again, and mangled insects were writhing in their death-throes in the two great pits he had blasted in the cavern floor. But still they came, seeping through the crannies of the wreckage, worming out of narrow slits and crevices in the masonry of the walls, rising high about us and flooding over us in a rasping tide of green horror that crept and clung and dragged us down.

The foot of the stair had been blown clean away by Doc's second bomb, but the free end hung loose ten feet above our heads. There was no escape that way! And my rifle swung and Red's great boots kicked and trampled, and Doc beat and slashed with the flat of his bayonet-blade. And still the tide of green rose about us and bore us down.

CHAPTER IV
Toward the Tube!

"HEY!" bellowed Red above the din, his voice thin and resentful in the microphone. "Where's your loud-mouthed friend, Haverford, now? Is he still cuddlin' his precious hide back at the ship, or has he got some slinky plan to sneak in and get all the glory while we do the dirty work?"

"He had a plan," gasped Doc. "He was coming here by air, in a little one-man rocket plane we had stowed away for exploring... He figured the ray would be in the top of the cone...that he might be able to get at it with grenades, after we got here. But he hasn't come—he hasn't tried. Maybe they got him, damn them!"

"Who got him? The Moon things?"

"Yes, these insects. I—I think these are really the creatures that are attacking Earth. I have seen no other form of life as advanced as they are—they have a language, use the pneumatic tubes and the machinery, seem to have a definite purpose in their attack."

"But it can't be these! Maybe the real things are besieged up there in the peak, like us."

"I hope so. These are too hard to kill, for us to ever be really safe. And, I think they can live in the open, when the sun is up. Maybe there are other things that we have not seen, but these insects are intelligent—they have the ability to survive. Perhaps we may never see those others, if they exist."

"Well," gasped Red, "you two settle it out of court. As for me, I'm goin' up—an' that now!"

With the words, he kicked free of the crawling sea of life and jumped for the end of the stair, caught it fairly, hung dangling by one arm. Slowly he pulled his body up, flung a leg over the lowest step, and was up. He lay a moment, panting, then wound his legs around a metal rod and reached down for Doc. With my gun, I cleared a small space, and he jumped, fell short by inches, tried again, and catching Red's outstretched arm was up! And then, after a moment's wild slaughter, I followed, felt Red's hand on my arm, and

scrambled to safety, just as a newer, greater wave of the insects broke over the place where we had been!

None too soon had we made the trial, for now bright bursts of light stabbed from high on the walls of the cavern, white flames of heat that fused the support against which we had leaned and sliced it through in a shower of flaming metal. Slowly it buckled, dropped, and then, as the enormous weight of the water above surged across the mighty reservoir, the huge tank sagged and toppled, crashing into the wall, deluging the floor with thousands and thousands of tons of foaming water. A hundred feet from the swinging lower end, Doc fainted, and we paused in our mad scramble up the metal thread of the stair. Again the rays stabbed at us. The stair beneath melted and fell hissing into the flood. Intelligence directed those rays—*the intelligence that threatened the Earth!*

We had marked the places of attack, niches in the walls of the great hall, with crystal ray-tubes set behind stone barricades in the mouth of tunnels from which the insects were pouring to join the swarm below. Quickly Red unstrapped his rifle, took careful aim, fired at a moving bulk in a tunnel mouth. The thing went still. I grabbed Doc by the shoulder and began to drag him up the stair, while Red crouched at the end, sniping at the things in the dark niches. A hundred feet below, huge waves were surging about a tangled metal wreck, alive with green things that fought vainly for life, all attack forgotten.

Ten huge torrents dropped thundering from the shadows above, smashing at crumpled metal and crushed insect, beating the welter into foam. Red had scored another hit, a ray-tube burst in a flare of blue light. They had stopped raying us now, afraid for their lives as the walls crumbled into muck beneath them. Wherever a form moved, there a bullet spat evilly against the rock and there was no more motion.

Slowly we toiled up the wisp of metal that wound up and up into the hollow heart of the peak—up to the great cathode ray and the unseen things that guarded it. Slowly Red followed, covering our retreat. A sudden ray blazed, searing the stair between us. As the lower steps sagged, he launched upward in a mighty leap, wormed to safety, and fired at the niche from which the ray had come. A dim, half-seen shape squirmed erect with a queer, chirping cry—a thing seemingly unlike the things below, larger, differently shaped, more—human! Or was it a shadow-distorted insect, some larger, more advanced form, like the rulers of the termitary, that rose and toppled into the seething cauldron beneath?

The light of the place was fading, and our minds strained by fear and peril. Which did we see—master insect, different from his fellows as in the breeds of the termites and ants of Earth, or—something else—something far more terrible? We never knew.

UP, inch by inch, clutching wearily, weakly at the narrow railing, stumbling with heavy feet over too-low steps, with Doc half-creeping, half-carried at my side. Up endless feet, twenty, a hundred—toward the narrowing cone. Where the stair disappeared into the rock, I saw a great diaphragm like the iris of a camera stopping the opening to the summit of the peak. The stair vanished through a tiny hole in the rock beside it, disappeared into a pocket of black dark, where something stirred—new danger.

I screamed hoarsely to Red, the rifle barked, and a tube burst, fusing half the upper stair with its furious heat. As the stair sagged, I saw the freed diaphragm snap open with a mighty clang. Beyond lay the chamber of the ray!

For an instant, clinging to the tilted stair, we saw it, lit by the blinding glare of the

great tube that perched high on jetty insulators. Into its base ran huge twisted cables, through it coursed a mighty, awful flame of loosed energy, dazzling electric blue and blinding white. Driving out from its blazing target of the grey metal poured a great shaft of shimmering luminescence—-out into space—out to a dying Earth.

But in the wall of that little chamber in the peak was a great gap through which the sun poured its brilliance, revealing that which lay in the shadow of the tube. We say a tiny form—a human being—battling bravely, fiercely for its life and the life of its race, struggling against things that numbed our comprehension—Moon-things of horrid leaping shadow—or were they insects, fearfully altered by a sportive evolution from the pattern of the hordes below?

For a single second of time the form ripped free, hurled off the figures vainly clamoring at him, and raced up the side of that gigantic pyramid of black that held the ray—up, up to the shimmering shaft that beat out into emptiness, to another world. For an instant it hung poised, weaponless, silhouetted against the mighty crystal sphere of leaping flame, then hurled itself straight as a dart for that fiery chaos. There came a roar of unleashed lightnings, a blaze as of the fires of Creation, a beating tempest of thin wind that strove to rip us from our narrow perch, and the summit of the mountain crumpled and fell, shattered, into the deathly silence that followed.

We found an exit, a tortuous hole through the wreckage that led us down again through those great rooms where once mighty mechanical giants had thundered the energy of death to Man. They bulked silent in the darkness, their driving power gone. No water flowed, no globes of light lit the cavern, no thin air circulated through the swiftly fouling corridors.

Somewhere, the insect-things gasped in death, or crept torpidly about using again the strange organs of life that evolution had given them in adaptation for the conditions of this barren waste. Somewhere, perhaps, those other, half-seen things lay still at last, masters or robots—God alone knows which. And not Tycho alone had died, but Copernicus, and Ptolemy, and those other great crater-cities that Man has never seen. For all the Moon fed its power, its very life, into the giant tube—that would strip a planet of its life in preparation for a new era of weird horrors.

In a way, I hope that life is not entirely gone from the Moon, for that would be a terrible price to pay, even though that selfsame doom must otherwise have come to Earth. Dick would not have wished it, Dick who somehow came too late, or perhaps too early, to his destination. We who live can plan otherwise, now the deed is done and over, but its doing was none the less magnificent and worthy of a man of Earth—Richard Haverford, a Titan! We did not wholly prevent the horror of the green death-dust on Earth. In a broad swath the ray had cut across Asia and half of Europe, slaughtering millions outright and rendering millions more homeless in the storms that followed in its wake. The air of the world is rarer, noticeably so, and its pressure less, much as on a mountain-top; but many of the diseases of the lowlands are passing before the elixir of the rare, clean air.

The green dust of death remains, spread by the tempests over all the face of the globe, from Pole to Pole. No chemical has yet altered it, nor any of the weapons of physics, but men have much to learn, and when it is at last disrupted it may provide a source of the great energy poured into its making, so that the Moon will at last prolong life where it had once dealt death.

We may return to the Moon, or adventure to another planet—Doc, Red, and I.

Others surely will. The rockets of the lunar faces are there, and their great cities of machines and mighty underground system of communication raying out from their greatest cities. Man will certainly acquire their secrets, the secrets of a race that no man but one has truly seen, and that man dead. I think that we will again follow the call of space and lead the way for science. Dick would have done so.

Footnote 1: Uranium is one of the radio-active metals, which disintegrates into lead, giving off energy at the same time. The point is that this disintegration is terribly slow and can neither be accelerated nor slowed up. It has been felt that if it could be accelerated then man would have limitless energy at his command. [as given in the magazine. Actually bombarding uranium with neutrons can increase the rate of disintegration...-BeBrown]