

Microcosmic Buccaneers



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Harl Vincent

"Microcosmic Buccaneers" is the third story by Harl Vincent that the Johnny Pez blog will be re"print"ing.

Like the rest of the early work of this pioneer of magazine science fiction, "Microcosmic Buccaneers" has long since passed into the public domain. And like the previous stories that have appeared here, this is its first "publication" since its initial appearance in the pulp magazines.

"Microcosmic Buccaneers" appeared in the November 1929 issue of *Amazing Stories*, about eight months after *Amazing's* founder, Hugo Gernsback, lost control of it and his various other business concerns in a forced bankruptcy. Although Gernsback quickly established another set of science fiction magazines, the new publishers of *Amazing* had a more enlightened payment policy than its founder (which is to say, they actually did so), so Vincent preferred submitting his stories to them. The post-Gernsback *Amazing* eventually published twenty-eight of Vincent's stories from 1929 to 1942.

As I've [noted before, Harl Vincent was the pen name of Harold Vincent Schoepflin, a mechanical](#)

engineer employed by Westinghouse. When *Amazing Stories* first came out, Vincent, like many of the new magazine's readers, felt compelled to write his own science fiction stories. Unlike most of the others, he proved to have a talent for writing, and his stories began seeing print, starting with "The Golden Girl of Munan" in the June 1928 issue. "Microcosmic Buccaneers" was his tenth published story.

As with Vincent's previous stories, I'll be publishing "Microcosmic Buccaneers" in a blog-friendly multipart format. Here, then, is part 1:

Microcosmic Buccaneers

by Harl Vincent

An Astounding Discovery

It was utterly incomprehensible, yet it was true. They had seen it with their own eyes. Young Grayson R36B stared at his father's friend with amazement written large on his lean, bronze countenance. Minott V8CA, Director of Physical Research of the eighth Terrestrial district, returned the stare with something of awe in his tired gray eyes.

"Grayson, my boy" he said, "we have succeeded beyond my most optimistic hopes. We have delved into the secrets of the microcosmos. We have located one of the innumerable universes and have there found an inconceivably minute world with its own sun, moon and stars, and peopled by living, thinking creatures who resemble the white race of our earth in physical appearance. It is quite unthinkable, but here in the evidence."

He glanced again into the eyepiece of the massive instrument before which they stood.

"I still can not understand it," remarked the younger man, slowly and with a perplexed frown. "Of course I am as yet ignorant of all excepting the mere rudiments of science. But it seems to me I have read, or perhaps you have told me, that these electrons, of which our infinitesimal world is one, are traveling at great speed even in matter of considerable density. How, then, can your super-microscope view these objects as if they were stationary?"

"That is a feature I neglected to mention. The initial magnification, as I believe I told you, is accomplished by a powerful ray of vibrations. This ray impinges on the object to be viewed and is the first stage of magnification in the system which gives us such enormous powers. The ray, in addition to giving us the first ten thousand diameters, has the property of following the motions of which you speak. Its far end

oscillates in exact harmony with the motions of the molecule or atom or electron as the case may be, while the source of the ray remains stationary and thus impresses a stationary image on the object reflector to the second stage of the instrument."

Grayson R36B nodded in comprehension, though he was unable to picture in his mind's eye such movements of a ray so small as to be unmeasurable and, in fact, invisible in a high power microscope of standard type. This was but one of the many things he had yet to learn. But he found the mysteries of science intensely interesting as propounded by his mentor, and he looked forward happily to many years of such association with the great man into whose care he had been legally placed at the death of his father, two years ago.

"What is the next step?" he asked.

Minott V8CA pondered the question. He had been wondering over the same subject. He was not satisfied with knowing as little as they had been able to see of the inhabitants of the tiny world now visible in the eyepiece of his instrument. He wanted to view them from still closer, to learn more of their lives and of their history. He replied, half jesting, "I should like to pay them a visit."

"Pay them a visit? But that is impossible."

"Nothing is impossible. We are living in the thirty-third century, my boy. Fifteen centuries ago it was thought impossible that man would ever fly -- mind you, fly in the atmosphere like a bird. Ten centuries ago it was thought that gravity could never be counteracted or overcome. And less than five centuries ago a trip to one of the planets was held to be the height of ridiculous imagination. Yet all of these things have been accomplished, and much more. No, I would not say the trip is impossible."

"But it is hardly probable, is it?"

"Hardly. Though the thing merits consideration."

The great scientist mused further. His young protege let his mind dwell upon the bizarre possibility suggested by the older man. There was no more adventure in the world, he ruminated. Some of the ancient sound films, that had been used as a part of his education, portrayed stirring events of the distant past. Adventures had been commonplace in those heroic days -- ocean flights in tiny, wind-buffed vessels that looked as though they would never weather the storms -- struggles of man against the wilderness, building huge dams across turbulent rivers or erecting strange steel towers that carried power lines through well-nigh impenetrable jungles. Wars and rebellions in remote provinces had likewise appealed to him. But in his own day there was none of that, none of the excitement that had been the lot of adventurous youth in the dark ages. There were no storms now to buffet the gigantic air liners crossing the oceans, for science had conquered the weather. There was no wilderness nor jungle. Nor were their remote provinces, where battles might be fought and deeds of valor might be performed. The world was entirely civilized and overpopulated. Several generations back it had been considered somewhat of an adventure to make a trip to Mars or to Venus, but even this no longer provided excitement, for these planets were now but a few hours away and were so like earth in civilization and appearance as to present no novelty for a visiting terrestrial. Now here was a new possibility in the microcosmos -- and who knew how many more of the tiny worlds might be inhabited? But he could not bring himself to seriously consider the probability of ever reaching one of them.

"Grayson," spoke the older man, interrupting his line of thought, "I intend to do some heavy thinking over this thing. You know the control of our physical size is a comparatively simple matter now, within

limits.

Of course we have standardized six feet three inches as a man's stature and five feet eleven as a woman's, but there is no reason this might not be altered greatly if desired. By the use of one of the hormones of the pituitary gland we might grow giants of eight feet stature and by causing certain endocrine deficiencies it is possible to dwarf a man to a fourth of normal height. By similar processes it might be that we could contrive to reduce ourselves to the dimensions necessary for life on our newly found electron world."

"You really think something might be done?"

"Might be is the proper term. It is far from being a simple matter. But, as I said before, I shall think about it seriously."

"Supposing it were possible to reduce our bodies to the proper size. We should then be the distance of many universes from that grain of sand which contains our Lilliputian world. We might as well be at the edge of our own galactic universe. How would we ever reach it?"

"That is probably the most difficult part of the problem, and the one requiring the most thought. But it must be susceptible to solution, if not in our lifetime at least at some future date."

Grayson's delight at the words of his guardian was evident in his eyes and it abated but little at the further warning that all this talk of visiting the populated electron was extremely fanciful. And that night he dreamed of green forests and of running streams and of all those things that had existed for him only in history and in carefully preserved picturings. For Grayson R36B was not yet twenty-five years of age.

This is the second installment of Harl Vincent's "Microcosmic Buccaneers", a science fiction story that has never appeared anywhere beyond its original publication in the November 1929 issue of *Amazing Stories* magazine. Part 1 can be found [here](#). And now, on [to the story...](#)

By Means of the Fourth Dimension

With the passing of four months the scientist found himself little closer to the solution of the problem than when it was first presented. Experiments with white mice as subjects had progressed to the point where these lively creatures had been reduced to the size of blood corpuscles, a dozen or more of them scampering about in an opening the size of a pin point indented in a thin paraffin coating on a microscope slide. They were still far from their goal and the young man, who had assisted with all the work, was on the point of despairing entirely.

Then there came a day when Grayson R36B was startled from his observation of the electron world through the super-microscope, by an ecstatic shout from his guardian.

"What is it?" he asked excitedly.

"We've been working on an entirely wrong basis, Grayson. But now I see the light. The fourth dimension!"

"Fourth dimension," repeated his ward, blankly.

"Certainly. I don't know why I haven't thought of it before. We'll visit the tiny planet by its agency."

"But -- but I thought the fourth dimension was only a mathematical conception -- that there was no real knowledge of it."

"You are quite right, my boy, as far as any published data is concerned. But there have been experiments

-- successful ones, too -- that were apparently of no practical use. Now we have the practical use. You understand, of course, that even though you do not perceive a fourth dimension, all objects in our universe must be possessed of this abstruse quality in order to exist. We live and breathe in a four-dimensional world that is part of a four-dimensional universe. The so-called dimension has been variously explained but for our purpose we need not enter into any of the various arguments which have been brought up. It is not time in the strict sense that we are interested in, but the time-space relationship, and it is that relationship I intend to employ in entering that little world at which you have been gazing."

"You mean, if the time-space relationship as applied to our physical existence is altered, we shall then have no difficulty in making the journey?"

"That is it exactly, my boy. We as human beings are four-dimensional entities peculiarly adapted to life in our own environment. These entities occupy space in a definite volume we are pleased to designate by three dimensions. But the interval, the time-space relationship, is what makes us as we are. Size is only relative and if everything in the universe were suddenly to become a million times larger or a million times smaller, we should not be aware of the difference for our standards of measurement would also have altered in like proportion."

"But how to effect such a change?"

"I'm coming to that. There is a plane which in 3281 was designated by Rollin D4Y as the hyperphysical plane. And Rollin experimented at considerable length in rotating objects in and out of this plane by

various methods. In the most successful of the methods used, a purely mechanical means, he found it possible to rotate living creatures instantaneously into and out of the hyperphysical existence without harm. By instantaneous, I mean that the transition must take place within the period of not more than two or three heart-beats of the subject. We shall go further than did Rollin. We shall not only enter the hyperphysical plane, but shall project ourselves into the delectable world of the microcosmos and there emerge as entities adaptable to the greatly different existence."

Grayson's eyes popped. "You think it can be done?" he gasped.

"I'm sure of it. And quite simply too."

Minott hurried to a large cupboard at the side of the laboratory and there brought to view a dust-covered apparatus that Grayson had never seen. This was provided with a box-like base set on four casters and it was trundled forth by the excited scientist.

"A duplicate of Rollin's apparatus," he explained, busying himself with a duster.

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Grayson watched in intense interest as the older man uncovered the upper portion of the mechanism.

There was a huge vacuum tube, one of the largest he had ever seen, and about this there clustered a maze of helices of tiny silver ribbon. Two arms swung out from the side of the box, and each of these carried what appeared to be a parabolic reflector, also of silver. These was a heavy cable to which a wall plug was attached, and Minott connected this with a base receptacle nearby. He withdrew a slide from the side of the box and arranged the two reflectors to focus

on the slide. Then he reached for one of the small cages containing a normal white mouse and this he placed on the slide. With all arranged to his satisfaction, he pulled a switch at the side of the mechanism. There came a roar from within and the great vacuum tube lighted to a dull red glow. The mouse scampered unconcerned in its cage.

"Now, observe closely," said Minott, placing his finger on a small button that Grayson had not noticed.

He pressed the button and the universe seemed to totter. The very space about them seemed to warp and twist. The lively creature in the little cage vanished as suddenly and utterly as if a genie had whisked it away. Grayson stared dumbfounded. A second passed. Two seconds. Then, in a puff of blue haze, the mouse once more nosed about in its coop. The accompanying wrench of the space in which they stood left Grayson trembling and aghast.

"Good grief!" he exclaimed. "There's strong medicine in that box all right! So that's the way we are going?"

"Yes. Excepting we must combine Rollin's apparatus with my super-microscope."

"Combine it?"

"Of course. Otherwise we should not reach our destination; we would merely return to our normal existence, as did our little subject. With our existence transferred to the hyperphysical plane, we'll be whisked along the minute ray of the super-microscope, which is now trained on the place we are to visit.

In reentering the purely physical plane, our time-space relationship must necessarily alter in exact accordance with the requirements of the microcosmos."

"And the return? Getting back to our own world, I mean."

Minott was already busy with the connections between the two mechanisms. He did not look up from his work as he replied, "Oh, for the initial visit I shall set a time switch to control our apparatus here. We'll stay but two minutes and then return in the same manner. After the first trip, a better method can be worked out. But in any event it is merely a reversal of the original process. Are you ready?"

He looked at the younger man with a twinkle in his eye.

"Now? Right away, you mean?"

"Yes. All is prepared."

"Why, sure, I'm ready if you are."

"Very well, then. We'll be off at once."

He made the final adjustments to the apparatus, directing the reflectors of the Rollin mechanism to include a tiny disc he had attached to the super-microscope. Grayson was somewhat apprehensive as he watched the attaching and setting of the time switch, but he had no thought of reconsidering or of objecting.

"All right, Gray," came in measured tones, as the scientist straightened from the completion of his task.

He drew the younger man into the proper position before the apparatus and threw an arm affectionately over his shoulder as he reached forth with his free hand to close the main switch and press the button.

This time it seemed to Grayson that the very fibres of his being were wrenched asunder. There was a terrific flash of blinding light, an

inconceivably violent explosion, and then a momentary impression of being hurled through the vastness of space. He opened his eyes to the glare of sunlight and instinctively ducked his head at the sight of a heavy object rushing to meet him. There was a sickening thud and his senses left him completely.

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We now present the third installment of "Microcosmic Buccaneers" by Harl Vincent, published here for the first time since its initial appearance in the November 1929 issue of *Amazing Stories* magazine. The first two installments can be found [here and here](#). [And now, on to the story . . .](#)

A Fatal Error

When Grayson R36B recovered consciousness it was slowly and with tortuous, futile attempts at raising himself to a seated position. He lay prone in some feathery, aromatic substance that was soft as down, but of so great a depth as to almost bury his body. His head ached abominably and his lids refused to open at first. Then suddenly he remembered, and he sat up quickly. He drew his hand across his forehead and brought it away covered with blood. Something had gone amiss with their experiment.

A feeble moan at his side caused him to search through the fuzzy substance that carpeted this strange realm and he came across the figure of his friend, Minott V8CA. He had been injured likewise, but they soon discovered that nothing more serious than broken scalps and minor bruises had been sustained by either. Then they arose and had their first sight of the new surroundings.

It was a brown and green landscape that met their view -- not greatly unlike the countryside of their own world as it had existed many centuries previously when it was thinly populated. The sward beneath their feet was of great depth and it was fine-stranded and soft like a woman's hair. But it was green -- a warm yellow green that was pleasing to the eyes of these city-bred mortals. At the edge of the clearing in which they stood there was a fringe of tall plant life closely akin to the trees of their own world. These had smooth trunks of a reddish brown hue and rose for a considerable distance before branching into foliage.

The foliage itself was of the same warm green as the grass and massed about the tops of the trunks in round, symmetric clusters. The air was balmy and warm -- a gentle breeze stirred the soft carpet of the clearing into rippling waves that lapped at the shadows of the

forest like the swells of a calm sea.

"What a beautiful place!" exclaimed Grayson, "But how is it that we were thrown here so heavily and that we did not arrive at the point on which the ray was focussed? There was a lake at that point, with a sandy beach and with habitations visible in the near distance."

Minott rubbed his bruises ruefully. "I see it all now," he exclaimed. "When we combined the Rollin apparatus with the super-microscope, the ray was deflected an infinitesimal amount by the introduction of our hyper-physical entities. We are probably quite some distance from the point of original focus and at quite a different elevation on the miniature world. That is why our landing was not so gentle."

Grayson had glanced at the sky and he gasped in utter amaze: "Why, there are three suns in the heavens!"

he cried.

* * *

And such was the case. One shone hotly red and was exactly overhead. The other two, of smaller size, shone paler and with a colder light. These two were close together but fully fifteen degrees from the first and the net result in lighting their surroundings was a brilliance seemingly even greater than that of their own sun and of similar quality as regards color of the light. The multiple shadows lent a strange triple complement to their movements.

"Yes, I expected that," replied Minott. "This atom, which is now our universe, contains quite a number of protons of which these three are self luminous. If it were an atom of gold, whose atomic number is 79 and the atomic weight 179, there would be 79 protons in the nucleus.

In addition there would be 118

neutrons to make up its weight. About the nucleus there would be 79 electrons to neutralize the 79

protons comprising the atomic number. Of course this universe is a much less complex one than an atom of gold, but it is far more complex than an atom of hydrogen, which consists of but one proton with a single electron to neutralize it."

"Then we must expect many things to be different than those existing at home?"

"Yes indeed, and interestingly so. And do you know, Grayson, we must make up our minds to remain in this place for we shall never be able to return to earth."

"What? We can not return?"

"No. I was far too optimistic in my setting of the time switch. According to my watch we have been here nearly thirty minutes already. We were probably unconscious for a third of that. The apparatus has long since functioned and we are still here. Of course the ray of the super-microscope having been deflected from its true course by our advent, we were lost to it on its focus, which point we missed. We are doomed to remain."

Grayson gazed gloomily at his mentor. "Fine fix we are in," he commented.

"Yes. And it's all my fault for being too precipitate and not taking time to prepare more carefully."

The great scientist was so crestfallen that the young man burst into laughter. He threw an arm about the older man.

"After all," he said, "what does it matter? We have but little at home that we may not have here. Since both mother and father are gone I have no one but you -- and I still have you. There is your home and your position, of course, but insofar as family ties are concerned you are similarly situated. And we can make a place our ourselves right here. Probably we shall be better off."

"Bravely spoken, my boy," said Minott, with an answering hug. "And now suppose we explore a bit and orientate ourselves."

Undismayed, they set forth toward the forest.

For two hours they tramped through the unfamiliar multi-shadowed depths of the wood, stopping often to examine some new growth that was discovered. It appeared to be a trackless jungle, peopled only by furred and feathered creatures of small size and timid nature. Then suddenly they came out upon a road, a smooth highway of glistening metal that wound its way through the forest.

"Well, this is encouraging," said Minott. "All roads lead somewhere -- in both directions. Which shall we try?"

"The forest looks thinner to the right. Why not that way?"

"All right. Let's go."

With little thought to the future they trod the silvery road for several miles, as they would judge distance on earth. They were nearing the edge of the wood and were suddenly in the open.

The three suns had sunk so low that the two smaller ones were close to the horizon. The period of the first twilight was about to set in, but ahead of them in the slanting rays, there gleamed a magnificent city, a city of towering walls and great spires and domes, all constructed of

the silvery metal on which they walked.

They stood spellbound for a moment before advancing further. Each was so impressed with the grandeur of the sight that neither spoke a word. Then there came a ringing command. Each was sure that no sound had broken the stillness, yet that command was heard as surely and clearly as if shouted in their ears.

"What was that?" asked Grayson in astonishment.

"You heard it too? It was a distinct command to stop, though I am sure there was no speaker."

"Exactly as it seemed to me."

Undecided they remained rooted to the spot for a space. Then Grayson took an experimental step.

Again came that insistent demand and he withdrew the foot he had thrust forward.

Then there came a roar from the skies and a huge cylindrical vessel swooped directly before them, alighting on the metal surface of the road as lightly as a bird. The voice that was not a voice spoke to them once more.

"Approach closely," it commanded.

They obeyed in some little trepidation, drawing near to the strange conveyance and stopping as a small square opening appeared in the side nearest them.

"Enter," came the insistent, unspoken command.

They stepped through the opening into the cylinder.

This is the fourth installment of "Microcosmic Buccaneers", an early story by pioneering science fiction writer Harl Vincent. The first three installments can be found [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#). [As we join our story,](#)

thirty-third century scientist Minott V8CA and his youthful ward Grayson R36B find themselves trapped on the world-that-is-actually-an-electron to which they transported themselves. They have been telepathically ordered to enter a cylindrical flying ship . . .

In a New World

The darkness sprang into intense light as the door closed behind them. Blinded to the point of hypnosis, they saw nothing but eyes -- eyes that glared and stared; inspected them as if they were laboratory specimens of an infinitely inferior sort.

Then the blinding light was gone -- gone so suddenly that the darkness seemed terrifying. But it was not for long. The unspoken voice came once more. "They are different!" it said.

Soft hands laid hold of them, flabby fingers pawed their bodies.

"Ugh!" protested Grayson.

Then they were in a room of comfortable brightness and warmth. Six pairs of the eyes regarded them, and for the first time they were aware of the features in which those all-seeing, all-knowing optics were set. These were not the creatures they had viewed through the super-microscope. Far from human was their appearance. But there was more of intelligence -- of sinister cunning and evil intent in those blue-rimmed eyes than in the most despicable and villainous of mortals. The heads were hairless and globular, the parchment-like skin drawn tight over the ugly skulls. Ears they had none -- nor mouths --nor chins. Nothing there was that marked them as human, save those eyes -- and these were superhuman in their penetrating quality and discernment.

Again their came the voice that sounded not: "Creatures of exceptional knowledge," it said, "whence came ye? Surely not from the savage tribes of Els, nor from Pra or its satellites. In our solar system there are no other inhabited planets. Then, whence came ye?"

Grayson and Minott stared at one another without making reply. Each had understood the question propounded, yet neither comprehended fully, nor had they heard an uttered sound.

"Reply!" came the command. "Full well we know that thy lesser intelligences are incapable of communicating with such as we, on the terms of equality. Yet, from the impulses that come to us, we are aware how ye communicate one with the other. Ye are possessed of antiquated organs, ears, lips, bronchial tubes, like the Elsians. Speak then, that we may read thy thoughts."

The older man was struck dumb, but Grayson's youthful vigor asserted itself in rising anger.

"We are from Earth," he said, "on a friendly mission. And we are astonished at the unfriendly reception we have been accorded."

"Earth?" came the voice that was unhearable, "Why speakest thou that which is untrue? Thy words, though we hear them not, convey to our superior minds meanings that are false."

* * *

Minott nudged his impetuous partner into sullen silence.

"Earth, as we call it," he repeated in a conciliatory voice, "is a planet of another and faraway system. My friend speaks the truth. We are from Earth, and we have no enmity against the peoples of your system."

"Thou liest as well! There is but one other system -- the system of Oc, and that is so far distant as to be unreachable."

Grayson and Minott felt themselves seized by forces of great power and of unknown source and nature.

They struggled to no avail. There was a quick jerk that threw them to the hard floor, and they knew the ship was in motion. The light and the penetrating eyes were gone and they felt about in the darkness until they found each other.

"Well, this is a fine welcome!" exclaimed Grayson.

"Yes, and the worst of it is that these beings are not even the inhabitants of the world we came to visit.

What they are doing here I do not know, but they are not the people we saw through the super-microscope and it seems they are unfriendly to them as they are to us. What the object of the enmity is, is another thing."

There was a sudden swift descent of the vessel, a crash, and it came to rest. Windows opened on two sides of the room they occupied and through the thick glass, or whatever transparent medium it was, they saw that the ship had descended in the city of gleaming metal. They became aware of great activity within and of much clamor without. A cloud of dense vapor obscured their vision for a time, during which period the activity within increased and they could hear heavy footsteps and the moving about of bulky objects. The mist cleared and they saw a mass of red-gowned humans -- humans like themselves, with perfectly formed features. But this mass of beings lay in pitiful heaps in the center of a great square where there was no other living thing save three of the earless, mouthless, large-eyed creatures who poked about among the bodies. They were removing the valuables from the persons of those unfortunate victims of the deadly gas.

The blinding light from within assailed them suddenly and, blinking dazedly in its glare, they saw five of the red-gowned humans thrust

into their own cell and thrown to the floor. The artificial light vanished as suddenly as it had come -- then the daylight as well, for slides of some sort were drawn across the transparent windows.

"Wonder if we can make ourselves understood to these other prisoners," said Grayson.

There was a reply, another wordless communication, a mental impression transmitted from the mind of one of these beings.

"We understand," it conveyed. "You have but to speak for a few minutes and we shall be able to converse with you in your own tongue. Proceed."

Minott spoke slowly and distinctly. "Grayson," he said, "this is a remarkable demonstration of telepathy.

Those of the great eyes possess the same power, but something tells me these Elsians, as I presume our fellow prisoners are called, have the keener intelligence though they are apparently at the mercy of the great-eyes. The ship is moving once more and I suppose we are being conveyed as captives of war along with these five who have just been incarcerated with us."

He spoke for perhaps five minutes along the same lines. Then he was interrupted by a gentle voice, a voice of singing quality that pronounced his own uncouth English in accents that made of it a language of smooth beauty.

"You have spoken truly," came the voice from out of the stygian darkness, "and sufficiently to enable us to converse with you. We have learned mental communication of the Prags, the great-eyes as you humorously termed them. But such communication is forbidden in all Els. We prefer the spoken word as we do not wish to evolve as

have the Prags -- the pirates who prey on the entire universe and who have become hideous in appearance. From where do you come -- one of the satellites of Pra?"

"No," Minott responded. "We come from another solar system -- from a planet called Earth."

"From the system of Oc?" asked the gentle voice.

"No, from still further."

"Further than Oc?" The voice was frankly astonished now, but not incredulous.

"Yes, much further than Oc. As we measure distance in our land, it is but a fraction of an inch to our own home, but in your terms, which we know not, it is an unthinkable distance."

There was puzzlement in the reply and Grayson nudged his friend into silence. At that moment the blue glare of the lights dazzled them once more, and one of the Prags entered the narrow chamber. Then there was a gradual softening of the brilliancy until the earth visitors were able to make out clearly the ugly form of the Prag.

The short body, surmounted by the immense bulbous head that seemed to be all eyes, was clothed in a single baggy garment of leather through which the emaciated arms and legs projected. At the waist, the garment was drawn together by a broad sash, from which depended a wickedly curved knife and a glittering mechanism that appeared to be a hand weapon of some sort. The lidless eyes with their strange blue rims and bloodshot intensity peered through and through the prisoners from earth.

"You are to appear before the Kama," they were commanded by the thoughts of this creature.

Minott and Grayson, without volition and propelled by a power from without their consciousness, rose meekly and followed the Prag from the room, leaving behind them the softly muttering Elsians.

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This is the fifth installment of "Microcosmic Buccaneers", an early story by pioneering science fiction writer Harl Vincent. The first four installments can be found [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#). [As we join our](#)

story, thirty-third century scientist Minott V8CA and his youthful ward Grayson R36B have shrunk themselves down to subatomic size. Having been captured by subatomic alien pirates, they are being taken to see the pirate leader . . .

Silent Commands

The Kama proved to be the commander of the swiftly moving ship and he faced them in a forward compartment whose transparent sides revealed to them the glories of the sub-universe through which they were traveling. From the mind of this officer there came the command to observe the heavens, and he watched them narrowly as they gazed through the windows.

Far below them was a swiftly receding orb that they knew was the planet Els from which they had been abducted. The super-microscope had shown them a similar view of the sphere. But there all familiarity ceased, for they had not shifted the focus of their instrument after discovering the one inhabited electron.

To the left there shone the three suns, the red one displaying a magnificent corona of flaming streamers that dazzled them with its glory. The two smaller suns, those of the cold light, had no coronas but shone with the wavering radiance of enormous mercury vapor lights. The firmament was of ebon blackness and was dotted with no less than fifteen major bodies and countless more distant stars and nebulae. Ahead of them there loomed a rapidly nearing body that shone with a yellow light and about which revolved two smaller bodies, one of a greenish hue and the other the same tint as the parent body. The speed of the pirate vessel must have been terrific, for the shifting of size and position of the visible bodies was inconceivably rapid. They would arrive at their destination very soon indeed.

"It is as I thought," the mental message of the Kama interrupted their thoughts. "My Prags were mistaken.

Thou hast told them truth. Thy thoughts are entirely unfamiliar with this

system as well as with Oc, the island universe out beyond the twenty-seven planets. For this thou shalt be saved and shall commune with the scientists of Pra. Long have they theorized on the possible existence of universes within universes, of matter divided and subdivided to the point where little exists save empty space. Thou comest from a vaster universe wherein our system is but an infinitely small particle. Is it not so?"

Minott stared agape. "It is true, Kama," he said, "but little did we think to find theories similar to our own in this realm, nor to find a combination of savagery and enlightenment such as the inhabitants of Pra seem to have. What is the meaning of it all?"

"It is an inheritance from the distant past," came the unspoken reply. "Not all inhabitants of Pra are Prags, as we are termed by the Elsians, but the Prags are the rightful rulers of our universe. It has been thus from time immemorial. But ruling the universe in peace is an impossible accomplishment. Therefore we, the chosen few, dominate by force the remote provinces of Pra itself and the entire universe of which it is part. This we do by swooping down on the provinces regularly, levying tribute in the form of manpower and of wealth. It is divine inheritance, a prerogative none can gainsay. By the outlanders we are cursed and feared, are termed buccaneers, pirates, freebooters. Yet it is our right. The Prags must exist not by labor but by their superior mentality. The inferior races of our system must pay constant homage and provide us with the living and luxuries that are ours by divine right."

"You meet with no resistance?" asked Minott.

"Occasionally. But it is futile. The outlanders are not sufficiently clever to outwit the omnipotent, omniscient Prags."

Grayson sputtered his wrath. "Of all the conceited, vicious tommy-rot I

ever listened to, this is the vilest.

The Prags are nothing but drones -- drones that sting however, and that live by the labors and sufferings of the less fortunate. Possibly those ugly skulls of yours contain more gray matter, but the Elsians have the better qualities. They have kindness, love, and tolerance in their make-up, whereas the Prag is utterly devoid of the finer feelings. It is a disgusting exhibition of evolution as a coldly scientific proposition --without pity, without tenderness, without love. Instead of the gods you have set yourselves up to be, you are monsters that should be destroyed. Would that some power could blast you from the universe; destroy your ugly bodies and minds -- not your souls, for you have none."

Grayson breathed hard as he concluded. Minott feared mightily for the result of this bitter speech. But the unspoken reply was without rancor.

"Thou hadst't done better to save thy breath," it came through to their minds. "Thy feelings are known.

The mental attitude registers with us far more easily than useless speech which we cannot hear. But it is pardoned; it is expected; it is merely the hatred of the slave for its master. However, you two will prove interesting and valuable to our Great Ones, whom you shall soon visit. From them you can hide nothing."

There was no adequate reply, so the two earth men remained mute, staring moodily at the great shining sphere that now loomed so large in the heavens. The Kama nodded and the Prag who had brought them to his presence came in and led them back to their cell.

A voice greeted them from the darkness as the door clanged to behind them, the soft voice that now spoke their language.

"What is to be your fate?" it inquired solicitously.

"We are to meet the Great Ones, whosoever they may be," replied Grayson. "We are to tell them of the world from which we come and to discuss science with them."

"That is a far happier fate than ours," came the gentle voice. "You should be thankful that your lives are not to be sacrificed in the mines and workshops of the Prags, as are ours. We have no hope."

"Is that what becomes of the captives from your land?" asked Minott. "Surely the few of you who are with us in this cell would not be sufficient excuse for the raiding trip of this immense ship."

"We are doomed to hard labor under conditions of such grueling severity that our lives are shortened to less than half their normal span," spoke the voice. "And as to the number of the captives, we five are but a small proportion. There are four great prison cells in these vessels. Each contains one hundred Elsians.

We five are merely an overflow and were thrown in this small cell with you two because there was not room. They have also brought large quantities of precious metals from our city."

"What rotten scoundrels they are!" exclaimed Grayson. "So such raids occur often?"

"Only often enough to replenish their stores and to replace the workers who have died off in their misery.

But there is also the raid, or rather the expected visit, when they compel us to give up three hundred of our fairest maidens. This occurs once each revolution of Els."

"Once a year!" exclaimed Grayson. "Good grief, do they take your

women for mating purposes?"

"No. Merely for their amusement -- to grace their debauches and orgies, and to die, before their time, of shame and of physical decay brought about by the life they are forced to lead. No, the Prags do not mate with our women. That would pollute the strain they have so carefully evolved through eons of time."

"Horrible!" exploded Grayson. "Can nothing be done to forestall them? Have you not retaliated? Can you not organize manpower and materials to destroy these beasts?"

"Hush!" replied the Elsian. "We must not speak of such things. Our every word may even now be going on record and be used against us. There are plans, but we must not speak of them."

Grayson and Minott shivered with horror at the tale of the Elsian. Neither replied. And then they felt a retardation of the speed of the vessel. It came to a sudden stop.

"We are about to land," spoke the invisible Elsian.

"Yes, in the land of the Prags," said Grayson, with loathing in his voice.

This is the sixth installment of "Microcosmic Buccaneers", an early story by pioneering science fiction writer Harl Vincent which appeared in the November 1929 issue of *Amazing Stories* magazine. The first five installments can be found [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#). As we join our story, thirty-third century scientist Minott V8CA and his youthful ward Grayson R36B have shrunk themselves down to subatomic size. Having been captured by the Prags, subatomic alien pirates, they are being taken to their home planet along with several hundred captives . . .

The City of the Prags

The scene on the landing stage of the city of the Prags would remain forever impressed on the minds of the two earth men. A vast, mirror-like surface it presented and there were gathered thousands of the misshapen creatures to welcome the return of the raiding vessel with its load of treasure and prisoners.

The sea of pink, upturned expanses of flesh that were the containers merely for the huge brains and the staring optics overcame them with nausea. To think that these monstrosities were in the ascendancy over the handsome and kindly Elsians!

They were sickened at the brutal handling of their more than four hundred fellow prisoners and Grayson cried his rage aloud at the sight of a number of aggravated cases in the prodding and beating of stragglers and rebellious captives. The three suns shone on the scene with even greater brilliance than they had in Els -- evidently Pra was considerably closer. The atmosphere was heavy and foul as opposed to the sweet-scented, invigorating air of Els. There was a haze over everything and the humidity was such as to bring beads of perspiration to the brows of the earth men. In perfect uniformity on all sides of the great landing stage, there rose towering buildings of ebon blackness -- not the glossy black of jet, but a dead, lifeless charcoal that reflected so little light as to cast a pall of gloom about them.

In the confusion attendant upon the landing and the disposal of the Elsian prisoners, Grayson and Minott had drawn aside unhindered and apparently unnoticed. They were now approached by the Kama and , by exercise of his will, he compelled them to follow him. They walked through the staring crowds of the detestable Prags and entered one of the gloomy buildings at the edge of the landing stage.

No hand was laid on them, yet they were forced to proceed in the desired direction as inexorably as if they had been bound and carried. They were taken into a lift which soon bore them to the uppermost portion of the structure. There, on the top level under a vast expanse of the transparent material used in the windows of the ship, they were brought to the Great Ones. The huge compartment was a veritable conservatory. It bloomed with strange and rank vegetation. Tall, serpentine growths of ghastly gray hue spread sickly fronds to the uppermost heights under the transparent covering overhead. The earth men wrinkled their nostrils in revulsion at the offensive odors of the plant life that was evidently admired by the Prags. They moved slowly through a passageway between the growths and soon reached a sort of dais on which there were three cushioned divans set in triangular formation in the full glare of the Pragian suns.

On these reposed the Great Ones.

Mere brains were the Great Ones. Their bodies were shrunken beyond all belief and the huge, semi-transparent heads lay helpless amongst the cushions, the immense eyes presenting the only evidence of life in the weird beings.

The Kama bowed low and Grayson and Minott perforce followed suit, though they raged inwardly. In stupefied silence they peered into the eyes of the Great Ones, and, for the first time, Grayson observed the nature of the blue rims about the unblinking orbs of these, the highest type of Prags. They were porous areas, and the minute pores opened and closed rhythmically! They were the breathing organs of the uncouth things! But the discovery detracted not one whit from the hypnotic effect of the bloodshot eyes.

"Beings from the great outside universe," came the thoughts of one of the Great Ones, they knew not which, "you come at an opportune

time. We have but recently discovered the existence of your universe and would learn more of its extent and peculiarities from recent dwellers therein. We would likewise know how your advent into our system was accomplished. Speak."

Minott replied, "Our universe is to yours as yours is to a grain of sand by the seashore. We entered by means of an extremely powerful microscope and the fourth dimension."

"Thy first statement is understood and conceded. But as to the second, there is some doubt. Concentrate on this instrument of which thou speakest, that we may read of its construction and operation."

Grayson exploded, "Don't do it, Minott. The beasts will try to reverse the process and enter our own system."

"Objections are useless," replied Minott to his hot-headed ward. Then he continued in an elaborate description of the super-microscope while Grayson fumed and fretted at the seemingly indiscreet speech of the scientist.

"It is well," came the approving thoughts of the Great Ones. "Thou hast the intelligence to know that the information should have been purloined from thy very brain hadst thou not given it willingly. But it is enough for the present. We shall commune further at a later time. Meanwhile thy friend is condemned to the mines. He is of inferior intellect."

Minott protested sorrowingly. Grayson endeavored to attack the monstrosities that lay so smugly among their cushions, but the mysterious power once more gripped him and he was led helpless from the presence of the Great Ones. Minott's eyes followed sadly.

The treatment accorded the scientist was greatly different. At a command from the Great Ones, two slaves entered their presence and were ordered to convey him to certain living quarters. To Minott's delight, these slaves were Elsians who had kindly human countenances, and seemed overjoyed at being permitted to serve a creature so like their own kind.

He was conveyed to rooms that, but for the difference in colors and kinds of materials used, might have been in his own land. But he walked the floor with his mind constantly on Grayson. The two Elsians stood aside patiently, as they observed the dejection of their new master.

Clearly to him came the mental message, "You are worried about a friend?"

Minott peered startled at the nearest of the Elsians, who was smiling commiseratingly. "Er -- yes," he said hesitatingly. "My friend from another world, who has been condemned to the mines."

"Speak further," came the encouraging message. And Minott poured out his heart to the gravely listening Elsians. He told of Grayson's childhood, of his later life, of the experiment that had brought them to Els and resulted in their capture by the Prags. He concluded with a hopeless note, as he told of the scene in the place of the Great Ones.

"Fear not," came in perfect English when he had finished, "the time is close at hand. Grayson will be rescued, as will all of our people when the great day comes. You have but to be patient and obey all commands of the Great Ones. Through our secret system of communication, we shall learn of the whereabouts of your friend and arrange for the interchange of messages between you and him."

Minott was astounded at the facility with which this Elsian had learned

his own tongue -- more easily than had the first in the space ship. But he was elated at the hope held forth and was about to make eager reply when there came an insistent buzz from close by.

One of the Elsians left the room hurriedly and the other -- he who had spoken -- laid a warning finger to his lips and busied himself with the appurtenances of a dressing table. Minott knew not what to expect.

There was complete silence for a moment. Then two Prags entered the room, bearing between them a golden sphere of the diameter of a large pumpkin. With a curt nod from one of them, the Elsian servant was dismissed and they set the shimmering globe on a table.

Drawn to the beautiful polished object by an irresistible force, the scientist found himself gazing into depths of wavering brightness that soon resolved into scenes on the other electron planet, Els. With great rapidity the scenes shifted, outlining in rapid succession an entire continent and picturing city after city similar to the one they had first seen. Rural districts were also covered, particular attention being paid to the vicinities of small bodies of water. then suddenly he recognized the locality they had been observing through the super-microscope. His start of recollection brought about the immediate cessation of the action of the sphere and a mental message came at once from one of the Prags:

"It is well. The location of the ray is determined."

They marched solemnly from the room without further ado, taking the golden sphere with them. The clang of the door as they left brought a sense of dire foreboding to Minott and he stared helplessly about the lonely rooms.

This is the seventh installment of "Microcosmic Buccaneers", an early story by pioneering science fiction writer Harl Vincent which appeared in the November 1929 issue of *Amazing Stories* magazine. The first six installments can be found [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#). [As we join our story, thirty-third](#)

century scientist Minott V8CA and his youthful ward Grayson R36B have shrunk themselves down to subatomic size and been captured by subatomic alien pirates called the Prags. Grayson has been condemned to slave in the Prags' mines, and Minott fears his captors have discovered a way to follow their trail back to Earth . . .

Among the Elsians

For several days Grayson labored with pick and shovel in an underground passage that was so narrow and stifling that he was too exhausted each night to even think of the fate that had befallen him. The material he was wresting from narrow veins in the damp wall of rock was radioactive -- no light was needed in these workings -- and he knew that his life would be short indeed if he were forced to continue in this place. He had been put into the most dangerous of all the mines. But the physical presence of the Prags was escaped during the long hours of labor, and this was a relief of a sort, though the force of distant wills kept him doggedly at his task. The Prags never entered the diggings where the mineral that supplied them with their main source of energy was obtained.

Then came a day when the Elsian who worked next to him spoke to him in his own tongue. A message had come from above -- a message from Minott! It was wonderful!

The scientist was well, it seemed, and wished to inform his friend that powerful forces were at work which would eventually bring about their release from Pra and their return to Els. He was bidden to keep courage.

"But," asked Grayson, "how has this message been relayed to you?"

"By word of mouth entirely. It has passed on from an Elsian servant of your friend and has undoubtedly been repeated a score of times on its way to this remote working. We have perfected among the captives a secret system of communication that serves the purpose admirably, though it is somewhat slow."

"The message gives word of help to come," said Grayson. "What

does this mean?"

"It means this," replied Oril, for that was the cognomen of his new friend. "The prisoners on this accursed island have formed plans that will eventually result in the destruction of the Prags and in the liberation of themselves. They will result in the halting of the age-long piracy to which our worlds have been subjected, and in the salvation of the civilizations that have for so long a time been under the lash."

"By what means is this to be done?"

"I cannot divulge the secret until you have been admitted to our council. But this will be soon, and I can tell you that the vulnerability of the Prags has been discovered, and that Els and the two satellites of Pra, as well as the outlying provinces of Pra itself, are banded together to end the dominance of these creatures for once and all."

"You spoke of an island," said Grayson. "Do you mean that the Prags inhabit no part of this planet except a single island?"

"That is correct. The island is known to us as Capis and it comprises less than one tenth of the total habitable surface of Pra. The outlying provinces are populated sparsely and by a miserable race of downtrodden creatures, who were subject to the banditry of the Prags for ages, before they discovered the means of traversing space and transferred their major activities to the other inhabited bodies of our system. The provinces have been bled dry and the peoples are hopelessly retarded in their civilization.

They resemble us in appearance, though their skin is of much darker hue, and in some sections they have almost reverted to savagery. But all of that is to be changed also."

"This council of which you spoke. When and where does it meet?"

"At present there is a meeting every night in one of the deepest levels of the mines. But each night these present are a different group and word of the proceedings is carried over to the next night by a single member who thus attends two meetings in succession. This is necessary in order that the Prags shall not suspect us of such activities as they surely would, if any considerable number of us were absent from our quarters on a single evening. Of course we are aided in this by the fact that they feel absolutely secure in their diabolic tyranny over us, and so do not anticipate a rebellion of serious nature. They underestimate the courage and mentality of the long-suffering outlanders, and are thus thrown more or less off guard by their own colossal conceit."

The conversation was interrupted by the shrill siren that called the workers to the evening meal -- the siren that told them of the completion of the long day of labor. The two were soon in the great bucket that carried them to the surface, along with some fifty more of their fellow prisoners.

* * *

Grayson pondered over the things he had heard all through the nightly inspection and during the meal that was presided over so strictly by a number of lower class Prags. These were not of the type that possessed the intense power of will over the prisoners, but enforced their dicta by free use of the lash and in aggravated cases of insubordination, by the use of the ray pistols they carried at their belts.

Grayson had once seen one of these weapons used and he carried horrified remembrance of its action in his mind. The unfortunate victim of the crackling blue flare that greeted a minor insolence, had crumpled before his eyes into a heap of putrefaction that rapidly shrank to complete and terrible dissolution. He shuddered anew at the thought and was unable to finish his food.

But the words of Oril had cheered him, though he was doubtful of the ability of the Elsians and other outlanders to conquer these monstrosities, who were possessed of such marvelous mental powers and had evidently been lords of the tiny universe for ages of time.

Later in the evening, when the three suns had set and the prisoners were herded into their underground quarters, he received word from Oril that he was expected to attend the meeting of the council to be held late that night. He was elated over the news and could scarcely remain quietly in his bunk until the time set for his adventuring forth from the huge bunk room into the dark passages where he was to be led to the meeting place of the conspirators. Oril had given him explicit directions and he knew that he would have no trouble in joining the guide who was to await him. His neighbors were asleep on the low cots that were provided by the Prags in all the bunk rooms, and the lone guard was nodding in the dim-lit corner of the long hall. The faint whimpers of a sick prisoner, a few cots from his own, had ceased and Grayson hoped that the poor devil had found relief from his sufferings in the mercy of death.

Then there was the padding of soft footsteps and in the dim light he saw that two of the upper class Prags had entered and were conferring with the guard, who had started guiltily from his nap at their approach.

The newcomers were led through the long aisle and Grayson's heart missed a beat as they neared him where he lay. He feigned sleep and when the brilliant beams of a hand torch were turned on him he opened blinking eyes to their glare. He was discovered as a conspirator, and would never know the plans of the brave band which was setting out to free the worlds they knew from the iron hand of the oppressor!

There was the single command to follow, so he arose from his hard couch and obeyed the order in silence. There was nothing else he could do.

He was conducted to the surface and taken to a small, brightly lighted landing stage where one of the tiny, bird-like air vehicles of Capis awaited. In a moment they had winged their way aloft and were headed for the lights of the city of the Great Ones. What was to be his fate Grayson did not know, nor did he much care -- now. He had scented adventure and it was to be denied him. He had hoped to engage in the battle for freedom that Oril had hinted was coming. But he was quite evidently doomed to disappointment and worse.

The drone of the motor and the swish of the flapping wings of the vessel that carried them swiftly toward the city were the only sounds to disturb his train of gloomy thought. The Prags, mute always, did not explain by mental message the reason for his move from the mines back to the city. But he suspected that his and Oril's conversation was known to the Great Ones and that he was to answer to them for his part in it.

Beneath them circled the lights of the great city as the ship swung around to effect a landing. The motor had stopped and they swooped with a rush toward a black square that was outlined by a fringe of orange light. It rushed upward to meet them and it seemed they would surely crash. Then there was a single powerful beat of the broad wings and the little craft alighted without a jar. Below them was the transparent roof of the headquarters of the Great Ones.

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magazine. The first seven installments can be found [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#). [As we join our story.](#)

thirty-third century scientist Minott V8CA and his youthful ward Grayson R36B have shrunk themselves down to subatomic size and been captured by subatomic alien pirates called the Prags. Minott fears his captors have discovered a way to follow their trail back to Earth. Meanwhile, Grayson has been recruited into a resistance movement and is being taken to the leaders of the Prags, the Great Ones . . .

Grayson Comes Back

Grayson, with rebellion and fury in his heart, neared the throne where lay the three arch-pirates of the atom universe. He longed to lay hands on one of the vile creatures and tear him limb from limb. And when he saw the haggard face of his friend Minott, who sat at a small table adjacent to the dais, he clenched his fists, as if about to carry out his rash desire. Quick as a flash there came the paralyzing of the muscles that was produced so easily by some mental process of the ghastly creatures, and a single unspoken warning that seemed to come from within his own consciousness.

"Cease thy futile ragings," came the adjuration. "The plans of the Great Ones have altered to thy good.

No longer shalt thou labor in the mines. This night thou shalt depart for Els in one of our space ships and in the company of thy friend. Minott has been of much assistance to us and, in gratitude, we have granted his wish that thou mayst be permitted to join him in the expedition of our scientists. That is all."

Grayson's tense muscles relaxed. Then they did not know of his talk with Oril! But he cast the thought from his mind at once, fearing to betray himself to their uncanny faculties. Minott smiled wanly and greeted him with open arms. Evidently he too had suffered and continued to suffer.

They were dismissed immediately by the Great Ones and repaired to Minott's quarters to prepare for the journey.

"What is it all about?" asked Grayson, when their affectionate greetings were over.

"It is a plan to attack our own world," came the hopeless reply, "and we are to assist them and act as their guides when they reach there -- if they do. I was compelled to give them all of my data regarding the super-microscope and the four-dimensional means used by us in reaching this system. They learned from me the location of the ray of my super-microscope where it still impinges on the planet Els at the edge of the lake. Their scientists have calculated that the process can be reversed, and they have constructed a duplicate of the Rollin apparatus in accordance with my description of the mechanism. They reason that they can utilize the ray that still connects the point we were watching in Els with my laboratory at home, and they plan to send one of their space ships, manned and armed, to our world along this beam."

"Is such a thing possible?" gasped Grayson.

"I fear that it is, my boy. You see the time-space relationship can as well be altered in one direction as in the other. By the same means that we adapted ourselves to conditions on this plane, they should be able to adapt themselves to conditions on our own. I can pick no flaw in their calculations, and I am mortally afraid that this unspeakable banditry of theirs is to be extended to our own country. The worst of it is, we are helpless to prevent them."

"But -- but," objected the younger man, "if one of these space ships of the Prags is rotated into the hyperphysical plane and then emerges in your laboratory, it will be of enormous size. It can not occupy the available space, if it is of the same proportion there as it is here."

"It will burst the walls of the laboratory like a chicken breaking forth from an egg and will lie exposed to the sky amid the débris of a great section that will have been torn from the upper surface of our own New York. You forget that my laboratory is in the extreme upper level and that the walls and floors of our city structure will crumple like glass

against the sides of a vessel of more than 1000 feet in length and with walls as hard as steel and of more than five feet thickness -- suddenly thrust in their midst as it will be."

Grayson groaned. He was heart-sick over the change that had come to the beloved features of his foster-father. Minott had aged then years, it seemed, during the few days they had been in this awful realm. He thought too of the terrible engine of destruction to be let loose on an unsuspecting world -- and of others to follow, for the Prags would not stop at one if the initial venture proved to be a success.

"Is there no way of stopping the brutes?" he asked.

"None that I can think of. Of course we must do everything we can to upset their plans, but I am afraid we are helpless."

There came the sound of the buzzer and Minott paled to a still more ghastly color. "It is the signal," he said. "They are ready."

The two earth men hurried to the great landing stage in the heart of the city and there entered one of the shiny cylindrical vessels, of which Minott had learned there were seven in existence. This time they were not carried as prisoners but as more or less unwelcome, but tolerated guests. They were quartered on the same deck with the nine scientists sent by the Great Ones to complete the plans for sending an expedition into the "Outside Universe." Before they had even settled themselves in their cabins, the ship had taken off and they were on their way to Els. When the Great Ones determined that a thing was to be done, little delay was brooked.

All through the remainder of the night the two men talked, when they should have been resting in their beds. They had been separated for more than a week and each had much to tell the other. It was a matter

of great speculation between them as to what the plans of the "outlanders" were for the overthrowing of the power of the Great Ones and the destruction of the entire breed of Prags. The slight information given to Grayson by Oril was supplemented by but little more that Minott had learned from his Elsian servants. But it was certain that the outlanders were confident of ultimately ridding themselves of their ancient enemy and that the day for the culmination of their plans was close at hand. Whether it was to come quickly enough to forestall the Prags in this new venture they did not know. And they discussed matters until the Prag vessel slipped into the dawn-brightened atmosphere of Els.

The vessel was soon close to the surface and the earth men joined the Prags, who had assembled in the forward compartment, where the transparent floors gave them a full view of the scene beneath and where the rising of the first sun could be seen through the transparent side walls. The first dawn of Els reminded them of moonrise on their own world, for the quality of light was similar, though of greater intensity. It would be several minutes before the second of the cold suns rose and one twelfth of an Elsian day before the red glare of the third sun greeted them. The ship was skimming the surface rapidly at an altitude comparable to about one thousand feet above the surface as measured on earth, and the peaceful countryside below showed signs of the early activities of the day. Here and there a farmer with his flock of quadrupeds strangely resembling sheep was thrown into a panic at the passage of the pirate vessel, and at several points early travelers in high speed vehicles that traversed the shining roads deserted their cars and fled into adjacent forests in fright at the same vision. But the ship from Pra kept steadily on, and within a short time they saw far ahead a scene that seemed vaguely familiar. Closer they drew and, as the vessel slowed down, they saw they were nearing the lake they had seen through the super-microscope in Minott's laboratory. They were overhead of it in a trice and the great ship

circled about to make a landing. Several Elsians who walked by the shore of the lake ran in affright for their homes -- mere huts and cabins that were set back a little distance from the shore.

"The point of focus of the super-microscope!" exclaimed Minott.

He looked at Grayson with blanched features and their hearts sank at the realization that they were about to land in this spot, where they would be compelled to assist their captors in preparing for a piratical raid on their own world.

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thirty-third century scientist Minott V8CA and his youthful ward Grayson R36B have shrunk themselves down to subatomic size and been captured by subatomic alien pirates called the Prags. Minott and Grayson have been brought to the Prags' subject planet Els, where they will be forced to watch the Prags launch an invasion of their home universe . . .

Preparations in Els

With the coming of the pirate vessel to the shore of their lake, the neighboring villagers expected the worst. Knowing there was no escaping the gases and the paralyzing forces of the enemy, they did not attempt to flee the vicinity, but they retreated within doors to postpone their certain doom for as long a time as possible. And when, on the second day, they observed that they were not to be molested, but that the Prags were erecting strange mechanisms in the open outside the space ship and covering these over with rude shelters, a few of the bolder ones ventured forth from the homes to learn what it was all about. They were still unmolested and they gazed in open-mouthed wonder at the sight of a considerable number of Prags actually at work, laboring with their hands with feverish haste. They were still more astonished to see that the earth-men, of whom they had heard through the medium of their local news broadcast, were aiding the hated Prags. It seemed that there was some difficulty with the apparatus being erected and they saw that the higher class Prags were greatly perturbed over some unforeseen trouble.

As the days passed and nothing happened beyond occasional relocating of the odd contrivances and further adjustments of their parts, some of the natives went so far as to gather around the scene of activity and watch the proceedings with bold curiosity. Upon seeing that the Elsians were given little attention by the busy Prags, Grayson made it a point to wander away from the work several times and mingle with the watchers. In this manner he struck up an acquaintance with one Atar, who seemed to be an Elsian of some standing in the community and who mastered Grayson's speech in a very short time as had been done by others of his countrymen. He made friends quickly with the villagers and advised them as to the meaning of the strange proceedings in the open space at the shore of the lake. In turn

he was told much of the plans of the outlanders for conquering the Prags and he learned that the day of reckoning was not far off, though it was more than thirty days in the future, and he felt certain that the experiment with the Rollin apparatus and the focus ray of the super-microscope would be successful long before that time.

He told Minott of these things in the privacy of their cabin aboard the space ship and the scientist was deeply concerned over this fraternizing with the Elsians.

"Grayson," he warned, "these Prags are possessed of uncanny faculties and, though they are now so deeply engrossed in the work at hand as to pay little attention, one of the lower class is apt to surprise you in treacherous conversation one of these fine days and you will pay the penalty at the receiving end of one of their horrible dissolution rays."

"I'll be careful. And besides, I like these people and wish to be friends with them. Our case looks hopeless anyway and if I can do nothing to prevent the atrocities of these monsters, I can at least show that my heart is in the right place, until such time as the fate overtakes me that is bound to come sooner or later in any event. How is the work progressing?"

"Well, as you know, the reflectors were reset today and the apparatus readjusted. The energy was tried on a test specimen, one of the small rodents they brought with them, and the result left them more worried than ever. The rodent passed into the hyperphysical plane all right, but was returned fearfully distorted and in a dying condition. This has given them pause."

"You old fox," chuckled Grayson, "I'll bet you threw a monkey wrench in the gears somewhere."

"No," was the solemn reply, "I did nothing of the sort. I must admit, however, that I see a fault in the apparatus about which I have not advised them. Fortunate it is that the Great Ones are not here, for they would have read it out of my mind. These Prags have not the mind-reading faculty to so great a degree as have the Great Ones, and I find that I can hide my thoughts from them fairly well."

"Then you think the ultimate success of the project may be delayed for a considerable time?"

"Possibly. But not for long, my boy. These arch-fiends are devilishly clever and they will stumble on to the difficulty in short order -- at least within the next ten days, I should say."

"Is it absolutely certain that the ray of the super-microscope is still in operation?"

"Absolutely. By means of the balvanometers, we have located the exact center of the impingement and have mapped the entire circle of its influence, which extends well past the village and outlines the view just as we witnessed it back home. There is no question of the workability of their plan, once the Rollin apparatus is in perfect working condition."

Grayson looked moodily from the open window toward the lights of the village. The sweet breath of the Elsian countryside was wafted to his grateful nostrils. How he wished that conditions were different -that he might be free to roam about as he pleased and explore this inviting planet they had so rashly visited. But the arm of the Prag was long, and he knew he could not get far away if he attempted to escape. Besides there was Minott -- and the threatened expedition against his own land.

Through the stillness of th Elsian night there came a faint wavering

trémelo -- a feminine cry that rose in crescendo to a wailing scream. The two earth men were electrified to tense expectancy but the cry was not repeated.

"By George!" exclaimed Grayson. "That cry came from the village and I'm going to find out what it is all about!"

"Steady now," admonished Minott. "How do you expect to pass the guard at the door of the vessel?"

Grayson was busy pulling the bedclothes from their bunks. "Not going to," he grunted, "I'm going out the window."

And, all protests of his friend notwithstanding, he made good his statement. Quickly he knotted the sheets and coverlets into a rope of considerable length and this he let out through the open window. Bidding Minott a hasty farewell after tying the makeshift line to the ring used for fastening the window, he let himself down to the ground and made off through the darkness in the direction of the village.

Reaching the fenced-in grass plot that was the gathering place of the small town, he found that considerable excitement centered about the loud speakers of the local news broadcast receiver. A crowd had collected and angry shouts and protests came from every side. A little group in the center of the square was huddled about a prone figure and Grayson pushed his way through until he saw that an extremely beautiful Elisian maiden lay stretched on the grass in a faint. Over her bent Atar, his friend of the past few days.

"What is it, Atar?" he asked, when close enough to get the ear of the obviously agitated Elisian.

"Lola -- my daughter Lola," groaned the stricken man. "She has been chosen for the next lot of three hundred. In six days she will be torn

from her home and taken to Capis -- a slave to the beasts we hate.

And in so short a time we should have prevented it!"

Grayson observed the smooth pallor of the girl's skin, her perfect features, the glossy sheen of her hair as it spread over her shoulders where she lay. Then her breast rose and, with a deep sigh, she turned her head in his direction and slowly opened the most wondrous pair of violet eyes he had ever seen. Atar clasped her in his arms and sobbed like a child.

"By God!" swore Grayson, "they'll not get her!"

10

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Minott and Grayson have been brought to the Prags' subject planet Els, where they will be forced to watch the Prags launch an invasion of their home universe. Grayson has befriended the local group of Elsians, and has become smitten with a young Elsian woman named

...

Lola

Late that night Grayson returned to his cabin in the same way he had left. Minott was sleeping the sleep of exhaustion, so he had no one in whom he could confide. But he did not awaken his friend, preferring to fret and toss in his own bunk rather than disturb him. Finally he drifted into a troubled slumber, into dreams of the beautiful Lola who had looked at him so pleadingly, dreams of the Prags and of frightful battles with them, in which he fought to protect the lovely daughter of Atar. His tortured mind was not resting for a moment, even in sleep. He dreamed of Minott -- dear old Minott -- and the scientist seemed to be delivering one of his early talks to the younger man. He told of the composition of matter, of molecules and atoms and electrons -- of the universe of the atom where the electrons were the bodies that revolved about the central sun or nucleus. It came to him that an atom was so small, that if magnified as much as ten billion times -- the second stage power of the super-microscope -- the outer electrons would appear to be as much as three feet from the nucleus, yet the nucleus itself was still no larger than a pin point. It was all a muddle, yet in his slumbers he knew that all these things were actually transpiring on a minute world that was nothing more than an electron in an atom of unidentified matter contained in a grain of sand that lay on the slide of Minott's super-microscope in the New York laboratory.

In the morning he awoke unrefreshed and the first thing he did was advise Minott of the happenings of the night.

"Worse and more of it," groaned the scientist. "I thought the annual tribute of three hundred girls was not due for forty-five days."

"So did I. That is what I was told, and the day of reckoning was purposely set for a few days before that time to prevent this very occurrence."

"Well, my boy, we are between the devil and the deep blue sea. Here we are helping the brutes in their attempt to raid our own world and at the same time you have gone to work and fallen in love with this Elisian damsel who is about to be abducted. Meanwhile the decent folks of this little universe are about to make a break for freedom and the break will be too late to save your new girl."

Minott's eyes twinkled despite the hopelessness of the situation and Grayson could not repress the flush that mantled his features.

"But what can we do?" he countered. "I'll admit that this Lola has made a great impression on me and by George they are not going to get her if I can prevent it. But what can we do?"

Minott spoke solemnly now. "Don't do anything rash, Grayson," he advised. "Keep your eyes open and use your best judgment, but do not forget that we have a powerful enemy to deal with. Our first duty is to our own world, but of course we can do very little to prevent the Prags from carrying out their present plans. Probably the best thing is to submit to things as they are and trust that not too great damage will be accomplished on this initial venture into our universe. Then, when they return from the trip, it will be about time for the action planned by the outlanders and further trouble will thus be averted."

"But dammit, Minott, that doesn't save Lola. And she must be saved. I -- I want her."

"You poor boy! Is it as bad as that?"

"Yes." Grayson kicked savagely at the towel he had just dropped.

"Well, run along to the village then and see what you can learn. I'll hold the fort here and -- who knows?"

Grayson needed not to be told a second time and the older man watched him with misty eyes as he rushed from the compartment in his haste to be gone.

It was very early and the Prags were late risers, so Grayson did not anticipate any interference with his leaving the vessel. But when he came to the entrance, he found some little difficulty in convincing the guard that he was merely going for a morning stroll. The guard was one of the lower class of Prag and could not understand the earthman's thoughts unless he was actually speaking. It seemed that the spoken words, though the Prags heard them not, were a medium that facilitated the telepathic process. And when Grayson turned the latch of the door, this low-class Prag laid violent hands on him. Quick as a flash the earth man had him by the throat and was battering the huge head against the metal partition. The Prag fell unconscious and Grayson, stopping only to take the ray pistol from his belt, rushed from the ship and made for the village.

* * *

He had crossed the Rubicon! He knew his life was now forfeit but he was armed. And he was on his way to Lola, come what might.

Atar met him at the cottage door with a smile on his face and Lola's greeting was such as to cause him to flush with pleasure. The girl was radiant and the father hardly less so, for during the night there had come a message from Arun, capital city of the province, calling all of the three hundred maidens to the city with their parents. It was stated in the message that action was to be taken to prevent the turning over of the annual tribute to the Prags, and this statement accounted for the happiness of father and daughter.

Grayson told of his skirmish with the guard of the vessel and offered to accompany them on their visit to Arun, since it was now necessary

for him to leave the vicinity in any event, and he felt that he might be of some service in their company. Atar welcomed the offer and Lola's downcast eyes told of her surprise and pleasure. The earth man's heart sang, though full well he knew that the shadow of death hung over them all. And he fondly patted the ray pistol where it lay hidden in his pocket. He did not worry about Minott, for he knew that the Great Ones considered him too valuable to allow him to be harmed as long as there was still information to be obtained from him regarding the outer universe.

The government ronsal, or road vehicle, that was to call for Lola and her father, arrived in a very short time. It was a car of considerable length, mounted on two wheels of a diameter the height of a man, and completely enclosed in transparent material of crystal clearness. From within there came a musical note that told of the high speed of the gyroscope used for balancing the machine. There were four other girls already on board with their families and with the entrance of Lola and the two men all available space was filled. The ronsal started smoothly and was soon rolling over the surface of the metal road with terrific velocity. Grayson learned that it was but a short run to Arun — less than one ul, the unit of time that was the twentieth of an Elsian day.

The ribbon of gleaming metal, over which they sped, wound through a beautiful country, but Grayson saw very little of it. He was too busy gazing into those violet eyes and watching the lips of the beautiful girl at his side, as they formed the unfamiliar, yet rapidly learned syllables of his own tongue. So it was that, by the time they had reached the walls of Arun, he and Lola were conversing fluently in English, and he had even picked up a number of words and phrases of the Elsian language. Atar observed these things with approval.

Once within the portals of the huge gate that raised at their approach, they were escorted immediately to a great council chamber where sat

the provincial governor and his deputies. A great assemblage of Elsians was there and Grayson thought that almost all of the three hundred chosen beauties had preceeded them. But he failed to see a single maiden that could compare with Lola, though all of them were undoubtedly charming.

There was a short wait for a few more arrivals, after which a secretary called the roll. The Governor then arose and spoke rapidly and forcefully in the Elsian tongue, becoming much excited and red-faced during the speech. At its conclusion there came a great cheer from the assemblage and Grayson noticed that tears of joy coursed down the cheeks of Atar. Lola translated to him quickly:

"He says that the government has decided not to let us be sacrificed!" she said happily. "The day of reckoning with the Prags is set ahead and is to be tomorrow, instead of as planned. We girls are to be kept in Arun under government protection and our families as well, while the fighting is going on. The prisoners on Pra have been notified, as well as the inhabitants of the two satellites and those of the outlying provinces of Pra itself."

"Hooray!" exclaimed Grayson. And he grasped Atar by the hand and hurried him to the rostrum, where he requested him to translate his offer of enlistment in the forces of Arun.

There was some staccato questioning by the Governor -- equally rapid-fire replies from Atar -- and Grayson was accepted.

11

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Minott and Grayson have been brought to the Prags' subject planet Els, where they are being forced to help the Prags launch an invasion of their home universe. Grayson has escaped with a young Elsian woman named Lola and has joined the Elsian defense forces . . .

Grayson Joins Forces

Next morning Grayson was outfitted with the uniform and equipment of an Elsian soldier. He was permitted to retain the ray pistol he had taken from the Prag guard and considerable envy was displayed by his fellows over its possession. He requested that he be allowed to bid farewell to Lola and Atar and this too was granted.

Lola gurgled with delight when she saw him and a big thrill came to him as she hugged his arm in her glee and admiration. Atar bid him an affectionate adieu and thanked him profusely for his help and for the courage his presence and support had lent. When Lola accompanied him to the door of their quarters his cup was full, and he bent suddenly down and kissed her upturned lips. Then, in a sudden panic over his temerity, he raced for the square of Arun where the soldiery was assembling. Had he looked back, he would have known that his caress was not unwelcome.

There was a great [hullabaloo in the square, and it seemed that all of the population of the city had turned](#)

out to witness the departure of the expedition. For the first time Grayson knew what it was all about.

In the center of the square there were two circular pits and into the mouths of these the soldiers were descending. Each of the pits contained a space flyer that had been built secretly during the preceding two years and there were two others of the same type to set forth from another city of Els. The Prags were to be taken by complete surprise.

Grayson joined his unit and was soon within one of the great spheres, that were so different from the projectile-shaped vessels of the Prags.

The number carried by each vessel was in excess of five hundred, including crew and soldiery. He was extremely interested in the equipment of the vessel and in the activities of his new comrades. So, when the confusion had subsided and the hatches were battened down, he struck up a conversation with his commanding officer, using his few words of Elsian as an entering wedge. He was much pleased to find that the captain, Erne by name, was able to pick up his own language almost at once as had been done by the others with whom he had come in contact.

The ship was under way in a surprisingly short time, shooting forth from the mouth of the pit like a ball from the bore of an old-fashioned cannon. They were on their way to Pra and Grayson was bursting with curiosity as he questioned the indulgent Erne.

"What is the plan of campaign?" he asked.

"There are four ships leaving Els, two more from Aun and one from Rad. These are the satellites of Pra.

It is known that all of the fliers of the Prags are in their own cradles excepting two, one of which is at the shore of Lake Ilo in Els and the other in the province of Trasa in Pra. We will leave our own people at home to deal with the one at Lake Ilo and the outlanders will deal with the one at Trasa. But the nine vessels will attack Capis directly and will be assisted by the prisoners there who are apprised of our coming and of the change in plans."

"But, what weapons will be used against the Prags?"

"Didn't you know?" asked Erne in surprise.

"No. I had heard vague hints of a recent discovery that was expected to prove effective, but I have no knowledge of its nature."

Erne withdrew from Grayson's belt the cylindrical object which had been given to him with the rest of his equipment.

"You have not been instructed in the use of the trinator?"

"I have not had the opportunity as yet."

The cylinder was of blued metal and by earthly standards Grayson would have judged it to be eighteen inches in length and three in diameter. There was a small catch at one end and Erne pressed this to demonstrate the operation of the weapon. There was a shrill sound from within that rose rapidly in pitch until it was a thin scream. Then it vanished entirely but the weapon still vibrated smoothly to the impulses of some mechanism within.

"The trinator," said Erne, "sets up sound waves or vibrations in the atmosphere. As you noticed, the original sound was audible but gradually rose in pitch until it passed beyond the normal response of your auditory organs. But the trinator is still sending forth powerful waves that disturb the air at the rate of twenty-five cycles per second. These are the waves that will destroy the enemy."

"But how?" asked Grayson. "The Prags can hear no sounds of any frequency."

"True. But you must remember that the Prag was originally equipped with ears and auditory nerves the same as you and I. In the course of his evolution through the ages he learned thought transference and the ears were no longer necessary. After many generations of disuse they atrophied and all outer portions disappeared entirely. But there still remained certain of the inner parts and these are still in existence. Two years ago we had three of the enemies in Arun whom we had taken prisoner during one of their raids and our scientists experimented with them until they learned of their susceptibility to the

high frequency air waves. You see it happens that certain tiny bones that are all that remain of the Prag's inner ear lie very close to the great vein that supplies the brain with blood. By subjecting the Prag's body to air waves of the high frequency I mentioned, these bones are set in vibration and, due to their contact with the artery against which they lie, a clot is formed which is carried to the brain and causes almost instant death --apoplexy."

"Capital!" exclaimed Grayson. "But are these small hand weapons the only thing to be used against them?"

"No indeed. Among the prisoners in Capis there are sufficient of the trinors hidden to account for the guards below the surface. These are to be used as soon as our space-fliers reach the island. Then each of the vessels will swoop down upon the city, emitting the waves from great generators that are set in the outer hulls. These will cover considerable areas and will account for many more of the Prags. The prisoners will then rush to the city and the vessels will land at the same time, sending forth their fighting men into the streets. The generators aboard our ships will keep up constant emission of the powerful vibrations and the rest will have to be done by hand to hand fighting. Not a Prag must be allowed to escape."

Grayson thrilled to the call of battle. The closer they drew to the planet of the Prags the more bloodthirsty he became.

"What is our protection against the gase and the ray pistols of the Prags?" he inquired.

"Against the gases we have newly perfected masks which will be supplied before we land. Against the ray pistol there is nothing. But we hope there will be few left to use such weapons by the time our large generators have gotten in their deadly work."

"What are the odds against us -- in numbers I mean?"

"About nine to one including the prisoners. On the ships there are forty-five hundred fighters and there are about twice this number of prisoners in Capis. There are one hundred and twenty thousand Prags, so the ratio I mentioned is approximately correct."

"Thank you, Captain," said Grayson.

A lieutenant was distributing the gas masks and this brought their conversation to an end. The captain busied himself with the radiophone instrument through which his orders were to come, and the soldiers gathered about the windows where they were able to see the island of Capis with its black central city.

The ship was crossing the end of the island and several others of the great spheres could be seen converging on the same point -- the city.

There was a sudden vibration accompanying a tremendous, high-pitched scream from somewhere in the ship's vitals. Like the scream of the tritor this rose and vanished, but the vibration persisted. The fight was about to begin!

12

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the Prags. Minott and Grayson have been brought to the Prags' subject planet Els, where they are being forced to help the Prags launch an invasion of their home universe. Grayson has escaped and joined the Elsian defense forces, which are launching an attack on the Prags . . .

The End of the Great Ones

Grayson felt one of the gas masks thrust into his hand but he was too excited to pay much attention. His face was pressed to the window and he saw that several of the flapping-winged craft of the Prags were approaching their own vessel. So close did they come, that he was able to see the ghastly bulbous heads of the two Prags who occupied the nearest. Then he saw one of them go limp and slump forward in his seat. The second followed suit and the wings flapped crazily, out of control. The bird-like mechanism flew drunkenly and then dashed headlong to earth sending up a cloud of dust as it crashed. The others of the curious squadron quickly joined it and he knew that the wave generators of their vessels were a success.

Along the several roads that entered the city could be seen scurrying groups of Elsians and kindred beings from Rad and Aun. These were the prisoners, rushing from the mines and workshops in accordance with the plan.

Then they were over the city and the nine spheres circled and swooped, their wave generators operating at full capacity. From the square there rose one of the cylindrical Prag fliers and it headed directly toward Grayson's vessel. With a quick spurt the great sphere rose and allowed the pointed metal cylinder to whiz harmlessly past beneath them. It passed so closely that they could hear the rush of its slip-stream through the walls of the ship. Then it too went drunkenly reeling, shooting skyward and circling and diving, completely out of control. Again the wave generators had proved their worth. The huge

cylinder went down in the midst of the tall ebon buildings, tearing away walls and roof structures and carrying hundreds of Prags to their deaths in the falling débris. Another of the Prag fliers met a similar fate in an attempted attack on another of the spheres of the outlanders. There were cheers from Grayson's companions and one and all they itched to be outside and in the confusion that reigned in the streets of the city.

Still the great spheres circled the city, spreading destruction beneath them. Two more of the Prag fliers rose to the attack and one of the spheres went down at the successful rush of the first of the pointed vessels. But the cylinder was carried to its doom along with the victim for the swift rush had carried the pointed end through and through the sphere where it stuck, the sphere impaled like an apple on a spike.

The second cylinder was dodged by its intended prey and soon went down to join its fellows. There remained but one of the ships in the square and the watchers could see that its crew was deserting and making for the buildings on the edge of the square. Grayson's sphere hovered a moment over the square, then settled gracefully to a landing. The order came to don gas masks and the hatches were opened.

Out into the open filed the Elsian infantry, triners in hand and looking fearfully inhuman with their eyes hidden behind the huge goggles of their masks. Dead and dying Prags lay in heaps about the square and they had to climb over piles of them in places in order to make their way to the streets. A cloud of the white gas descended on them and they fought their way blindly in the direction of the tall building for which they had started. Grayson stumbled over a body and fell heavily. When he arose, he found that he was alone but he staggered his way through the murk until he reached a wall. He felt along this and fell through an opening which proved to be the entrance of a building. Pushing open the door, he rushed into the corridor, and here there

was none of the gas, and the lights were burning brightly. He removed his mask and looked around.

* * *

Neither Prag nor outlander was in sight and he immediately recognized this as the building that housed the Great Ones. He heard a commotion nearby and walked down the corridor to investigate. In a narrow hall that branched from the corridor he found three of the Elsian prisoners struggling with one of the lower class Prags. As he reached them, there came the crackling blue flare of the ray pistol and one of the Elsians suddenly melted into horrid nothingness. With a cry of rage he drew his own ray pistol, forgetting the trimor, and the Prag turned wide eyes in his direction as the blue flame struck him full in the chest. The two remaining Elsian prisoners were saved and they spurned the shrinking mass of putrefaction that had been their enemy as they rushed to thank their rescuer.

With the assistance of these two slaves he located the lift and the three ascended to the uppermost floor.

They emerged under the transparent roof and Trayson grimly set forth to beard the Great Ones in their den, the two Elsians protesting in fear. He paid no heed to their earnest warnings but proceeded steadily along the aisle between the rank growths that had disgusted him so when they first reached the place.

When he had reached a point about fifty feet from the dais where he was still hidden from the cushions of the Great Ones by foliage, there came a mental command to stop. But instead of retreating at this evidence that the fearsome rulers of the Prags were in their accustomed places, he pressed the catch of his trinor and waited until the whine of its mechanism had risen to the vanishing point. The Elsian slaves retreated precipitately, but Grayson advanced slowly

and cautiously in the direction of the dais.

Slowly he felt the paralyzing force creeping over him but he pressed doggedly forward, using every ounce of strength in his body to drag his benumbed limbs into movement. Then he fell heavily to the floor and had to pull himself along by grasping the vines and tree trunks along the path with his stiffening fingers. He was in view of the dais now and he saw that two of the Great Ones had fallen victims to the air vibrations, their colossal, hairless heads having dropped to the cushions on which they rested. But the third, though weakening, was still alive and it was this one that was exerting his will power on the hapless earth man. With a final desperate effort Grayson twisted that rigid member that was his right arm until he was able to reach the ray pistol in his belt. But he could not aim it in the direction of the remaining Great One. He struggled and fought, but that arm would not move. Then he concentrated with closed eyes. He spoke aloud.

"Grayson R36B," he growled through clamped jaws, "you're not going to let this devil of a Prag get the better of you -- you're not. You must lift that arm and blast him from existence -- you must -- you must!"

Then, miraculously, he found he could move his fingers -- a bit at a time he edged his right arm forward, talking and grunting and berating himself aloud. Then the ray pistol was levelled at the monstrosity that glared at him among the cushions. Came the blue flare and he was released. His own will power had saved him and he sprang to his feet with a cry of victory. The Elsian slaves came running and they capered in glee at the sight that greeted them from the dais. The power of the Great Ones was no more!

When eventually they reached the square, all of the spherical vessels were landed and the fighting had spread to the side streets. There was not a living Prag in sight and Grayson made his way to his own vessel to report to Erne. He found him at the radiophone and greeted

The Administration Building Gone

For three days they remained on the planet Pra, exploring every nook and cranny that might hold a skulking Prag. Communications from Trasa told of victory over the Prag vessel that was quartered there.

The golden sphere told them that the vessel at the shore of Lake Ilo had not been molested, as the Elsians desired to learn more concerning the experiments that were being conducted.

When Erne told him of this, Grayson groaned. "Captain," he said, "I can tell them all they wish to know of those experiments. And my friend Minott can tell them more. Tell them to destroy the Prags at once by means of the air vibrations. I fear for Minott's safety and I fear for my own world."

"But it is impossible for me to give orders to my superiors," Erne objected.

"Then send one of our ships back. Send me with it and I'll lay the case before the authorities. I tell you, Captain, there is much at stake -- much."

Grayson was pleading now. He knew that it would be necessary for the greater part of the force to remain in Capis for several more days to make sure the job had been well done. But he pleaded for Minott, for his own peoples. And eventually Erne took it up with the commander of the expedition. After much explaining on Grayson's part, it was finally arranged that one of the spheres was to return him to Arun, and that he was to be allowed to tell his story to the Governor there. He expressed his gratitude in no uncertain terms and hastened to board the vessel that was assigned to carry him back.

During the short voyage he worried constantly. Grayson was in the control room, talking with the pilot.

Suddenly he gasped in alarm. The great pointed cylinder that was the Prags' vessel lay crushed in the ruins of what had once been the Administration Building! A vicious curl of white told of the Prag gas cloud that was not yet fully cleared from the streets!

"We are too late!" he moaned. "The three hundred maidens were quartered in that building!"

The pilot looked at him commiseratingly. "You had a sweetheart among them?"

"Yes," Grayson replied. He choked and paled and the pilot maneuvered the ship to as quick a landing as possible.

No sooner were they on solid ground when the earth man donned his gas mask and demanded that he be allowed to leave the vessel. Upon the pilot's explaining of matters to the captain this was allowed and Grayson rushed into the ruins of the building, crawling under the great metal hull of the Prag vessel to get into the débris. He thought he could locate the chambers where Lola and her father had been quartered and he risked his life in worming his way through caved-in corridors and broken-walled rooms until he reached this point. He found the body of Atar and mourned over it, as if the Elisian had been a life-long friend instead of a recent acquaintance. But, try as he would he could find no trace of Lola. He found many other bodies, a few of them of the young girls who were thought so safely housed, but there was no evidence of either the death or the saving of the girl he had loved so quickly and deeply. He crawled from the débris and rushed frantically to the ship which had brought him.

The last vestige of the gas was now cleared away and he found a

crowd collected about the entrance of the massive sphere. Among them was the Governor, and Grayson elbowed his way to his side. The pilot of the vessel was there and he acted as the earth man's interpreter.

"Were many of the three hundred saved?" he first asked.

Patiently he waited for the translations. This Governor was not as adept at picking up his language as had been some of the others.

"Yes," the pilot translated back. "More than two hundred were rescued."

The Governor had a list and he looked through it carefully for the name of Lola. It was not there!

The raid had come unexpectedly, it seemed. Out of a clear sky the enemy had appeared and had laid down gas clouds in several sections of the city. A portable wave generator was finally brought into action and the ship was sent down out of control -- unfortunately directly atop the Administration Building.

There were thousands of casualties throughout Arun. But the High Command had not suspected that such a thing would transpire.

"Damn the High Command!" said Grayson. "They were wrong, and I have lost Lola -- probably Minott too."

He remained in the city, sick at heart. For three days the wrecking crews searched the demolished building, bringing many bodies for identification. But Lola was not among them. When the casualty lists were complete and neither she nor Minott were accounted for, Grayson had an inspiration. Maybe Minott had been left behind! Maybe he was still at Lake Ilo! He would go and find out.

Attempts to communicate with the village were futile, so the Governor provided a ronsal to carry the earth man to the village. Before he left, there came the general broadcast advising that the remaining three Elsian spheres had left Pra and were on their way home. The celebration over the complete victory was starting as he ronsal left the city limits, but there was no jubilation in Grayson's heart. He was bitter; broken-hearted.

When the ronsal reached the site of the vilalge they found it in complete ruin. The Prags had destroyed it before they left for Arun! But, looking out toward the lake, it was seen that the huts that covered the experimental mechanism were still standing. Grayson made all haste to reach them and he searched first one and then the others of the rude shelters.

"Grayson!" came a familiar and beloved voice.

Minott stood before him and the younger man fell to his knees and thanked God that the Prags had left him behind. Minott raised him gently to his feet and led him to the largest of the shelters, thrusting him through the door without a word. There in a chair that they had built when they first came, sat Lola!

The young man stopped in his tracks and gazed at her with unbelieving eyes. Then they embraced.

Minott gave them plenty of time; then he stepped through the open door and coughed gently. His face beamed and explanations came fast and furiously.

Half crazed at the death of her father, Lola had made her way to the village only to find it in ruins. She collapsed, but by good fortune

Minott found her and nursed her back to health. It was a happy reunion and the three embraced in a huddle from sheer joy.

There came a tremendous wrench, a twisting and warping of the universe, and they stood in Minott's laboratory -- three where there had been but two before. Lola still clung to her lover but Minott sprang to the super-microscope and shut off the power.

"What on earth?" gasped Grayson.

Minott glanced at the clock and laughed. "My boy," he said, "our two minutes have expired. Our own apparatus brought us back, thanks to the time switch."

"You mean to say that all of that grief took place during two minutes of our time?"

"Absolutely. The time-space relationship, you see. Those long days in the atom universe were but fractions of a second here. The Elsians and the Prags and all of them lived out their lifetimes in less than one of our days. I had forgotten that point while we were there. Which reminds me that I must investigate fully the qualities of our focussing ray. It must have the property of altering the time-space relationship optically, for when we observed the Elsians through the super-microscope their terrific pace of living was not apparent."

"But Lola," objected Grayson, "will she live a normal span of years here?" He drew her still more closely in awful fear.

"Of course. The time-space relationship has been altered with her as well as with us. You may live happily ever after, my children."

Minott's face was wreathed in smiles and Lola, comprehending that she was in a new and strange land, but not understanding how, was glad. She had found her happiness, and, but for the ache that

remained in her heart for her father, was content.

THE END