

AMAZING STORIES

A stylized illustration of a red, cylindrical tower with a spiral ramp and a man sitting on a ledge. The tower has several windows and a balcony. The background is a mix of yellow and blue, with a grid-like pattern. The overall style is reminiscent of mid-20th-century pulp magazine covers.

JANUARY
25 Cents

POWER

by
John Wyndham

Power

Other Scientific fiction by:

Paul H. Lovering

Charles R. Tanner

Power

by Harl Vincent

Harl Vincent (1893 - 1968) was the pen name of Harold Vincent Schoepflin, a mechanical engineer who wrote science fiction as a hobby. Vincent was one of the pioneers of the Gernsback Era of science fiction, publishing his first story in the June 1928 issue of *Amazing Stories*, the world's first (and at the time, only) science fiction magazine. Vincent went on to publish over seventy stories between 1928 and 1942, only to set aside his writing hobby when America entered World War II.

Most of Vincent's early stories have never appeared outside of the original magazines, and now that they have entered the public domain, we here at the Johnny Pez blog have chosen to post them here in a blog-friendly multi-part format. We now turn to our twelfth story, "Power", which first appeared in the January 1932 issue of *Amazing*, and until now has never appeared anywhere else. "Power" is the second story in a trilogy; the first, "Gray Denim", appeared in the December 1930 issue of *Astounding Stories*, and was posted online at Project Gutenberg in December 2009; while the third, "Master Control", appeared in the April 1940 issue of *Astonishing Stories*, and was posted at this blog last month.

And now, without further ado, we present the first installment of:

Power

part 1

Chapter I: The Darkness Before

Night, whose magic was unknown in the levels below, was a thing of wondrous beauty when viewed from the continuous rooftops of twenty-third century New York. To the wearers of the gray, in the lowest levels of all, it was only a word, a vaguely disturbing term for one of the strange moods of nature that brought darkness and terror to the mysterious wilderness and jungles of the uninhabitable territory that lay between the great cities of United North America.

They shivered in dread of the darkness, that multitude in gray denim, for daylight was always with them; the artificial daylight of the Power Syndicate that came to them as unfailingly as did the humidified and iodized air they breathed. Of the same intensity and blue-white color throughout each twenty-four hours, it searched out every nook and cranny of the maze of passages and shaftways that separated as well as connected their living and working quarters. It was with them even as they slept; for them there was neither night nor day, only the passing of time.

But the wearers of the purple were more fortunate; for those so wealthy or favored as to reside in the topmost levels there was the opportunity of faring forth on the vast roof surface, where they might feast their eyes on the beauties of the heavens by night, if they so desired. A view of the moon and stars, or the grandeur of a storm-tossed sky shot with luminous streaks, that were the night-flying ships of the government lines, was theirs for the asking. But there were few who availed themselves of the privilege; the rigors of nature were not to be braved with impunity by those whose bodies were accustomed to the uniform temperature and humidity of the interior, whose eyes were unused to the darkness and ears to the murmuring silence of

the outside world.

Scott Terris, that virile and brilliant young physicist, who was chief of the Science Research Bureau, had long made a habit of taking nightly walks along the railed footpath that skirted the edge of the fifteen hundred foot precipice that was the west wall of windowless, steel-cased New York. Here it was that his mind worked at its best; away from the muffled roar and the carefully regulated synthetic existence of the interior, his vast accumulation of scientific deductions of the day's research could be marshalled in orderly array to form the basis of some new theory or discovery that would startle the Americas on the following morning.

Tonight was an exception. The moonlit ripples of the Hudson River, and the sweet-scented breeze that drifted over from the forest lands which extended to the very edge of the Palisades on the Jersey side, had none of their usual soothing effect. A solitary muffled figure, he dallied near the trapdoor that opened into his private laboratory below, his thoughts in an unwonted turmoil of vague unrest.

The pulsating life of the great city made itself felt in the metal plates beneath his feet. Fifty million souls there were, down in that seething hive of industry and idle folly, of hopeless ignorance and scintillating genius, of monotonous routine existence and pleasure-mad lives. Sixty-five levels crammed with those of the gray denim, thirty levels of the soulless mechanicals, and five where the wearers of the purple dwelt in the utmost prodigality of freedom and spaciousness. And everywhere there were the red police. One city of the eight of equal size now housed the entire population of United North America. It was an artificial life; concentration of the inhabitants to the nth degree, and utter waste of the land that lay between.

He was startled from his reverie by a sharp detonation somewhere below--in his laboratory, it seemed. But the place was deserted; it

had been for hours. In the next instant he was at the trapdoor, his eyes straining in the effort to pierce the gloom of the huge workroom.

A sudden blinding light-shaft sprang into being as the door of one of his electric furnaces was opened. There was the momentary glimpse of a muscular arm and a hand that gripped a slender pair of tongs in calloused fingers. There was the withdrawal of a tiny crucible from the white heat of the furnace, and the sliding back of the door, and then the crucible was a dazzling light fleck that danced through the blackness toward one of the workbenches.

Scott slipped down the iron ladder and fumbled for the light button, flooding the laboratory with its normal sun-glow illumination. He could scarcely believe his eyes when they rested on the figure that bent over the sizzling crucible. A powerfully built young fellow, in the gray denim of fifty levels below, straightened up quickly at the coming of the light and faced him, surprised but unafraid.

"What are you doing here?" Terris snapped, his amazement overcome by a rising flood of indignation.

The intruder lay aside his tongs with calm deliberation, grinning suddenly in disarming fashion. "Oh," he said softly, "just working on a little idea of my own. I didn't expect you back for an hour."

"Didn't expect me back!" Scott exploded. "You have your nerve breaking into my place and--"

He was advancing toward the astonishing young fellow in gray, his emotions alternating between deep curiosity as to the meaning of the intrusion and grim determination to deal summarily with the sneaking workman--to turn him over to the red police. But there was something in the intruder's level gaze that gave him pause.

Remarkably keen gray eyes regarded him from underneath a tousled thatch of flaming red hair. And in those eyes there lurked a fixity of purpose that was overwhelming in its intensity, a hint of the indomitable will of the possessor and of almost fanatical devotion to some great impelling ambition that was the primal urge of his being. Stern eyes, and knowing, yet they smiled into his own. Scott's wrath evaporated.

"Sorry you caught me," his visitor said in even tones, "I had hoped to accomplish something before that happened. And I might tell you that I have done no harm here, nor have I taken anything from the laboratory at any time."

"At any time!" Scott exclaimed blankly. "Then you have been here before--often perhaps?"

"Oh, yes." He was a strange anomaly, this wearer of the gray, and obviously had risen far above his station. He studied Scott's expression carefully for a moment; then, "I'm Gail Destinn," he said. "Perhaps I'd better explain."

"I think you had," Scott returned, forcing the assumption of what he considered a tone of severity. In spite of himself he was enjoying the encounter; this Destinn was a likable chap, and his self-assurance and poise were so serenely unaffected as to compel respect. It was incredible that one who wore the gray should have developed these qualities; that he should display the scientific knowledge and aptitude evidenced by his nocturnal activities.

"Yes," Destinn was saying thoughtfully, "I owe you an explanation and an apology as well." He hesitated, and his eyes strayed to a corner of the room where a hidden panel was open, revealing the cage of a gravity-control lift. "Mr. Terris," he blurted out, "you look to be a good scout. I wonder if you'd consent to taking a trip down below with me;

let me show you something of the life of my kind and of what is going on down there in the lower levels. I can explain much better then, and I'm sure you'll not think the time wasted."

Scott stared in amazement at the open panel in the wall of his supposedly secret retreat. A concealed shaftway connected his laboratory with the lower levels! He saw that his uninvited guest awaited his reply with poorly concealed eagerness. And there was sincerity of purpose and a longing for friendly understanding in his anxious gaze.

"All right, Destinn," he decided, "I'll go with you. And I know I'll enjoy the visit."

* * *

Scott Terris was a man who had given little thought to those who inhabited the lower levels; he had never been below the levels of the mechanicals and had had little contact with those of the gray denim, with the exception of a few menials in his own household and those who tended the mechanicals of the intermediate sections. He knew there was poverty and ignorance among them, of course, and knew of the troubles of the red police when they became unruly down there. But his science was an exacting taskmaster, crowding from his waking thoughts all alien considerations. True, he loved humanity--collectively--and strove for its betterment in all things that science could provide. But, as an individual, man had taken little place in his interest.

As the cage of the lift dropped swiftly into the depths of its shaft, he appraised the straight youthful figure of Gail Destinn with something of envy in his heart. Suddenly it came to him that there was much in life that he had missed; much that he was missing. Apparently the gray-clad workers felt less of the monotony of existence than did he;

perhaps even his pleasure-mad fellows of the purple were wiser in their pursuits than he had suspected. Certainly, he was thrilling to the novelty of this situation and to the sense of adventure that came with the swift descent into regions unknown.

They stepped out into a narrow corridor, when the lift came to rest, and Scott followed mechanically when his host led the way to a tiny cubicle which proved to be his sleeping quarters. Scott marveled that a human being could live and think sanely in the crowded space.

"Not much of a place, Mr. Terris," Gail Destinn apologized, "but it serves its purpose. Here, sir, you'd better put these on before we go out in the Square."

He grinned engagingly as he tossed a suit of the despised gray denim on the cot; then sat cross-legged on the floor as Scott nodded his understanding.

"You see," he explained, "I want you to observe things as they are, and everyone would shut up like government witnesses if they saw you out there in the purple. I'd like you to listen to some of the conversation in the ways and other public places before I tell you of the experiment I'm working on."

Scott Terris struggled with the buttonless gray shirt, emerging with a grunt of relief when he finally conquered the thing. "Experiment?" he asked. "You were using my laboratory in some research work of your own?" Strange that he could feel no animosity toward this smiling youth who had so calmly invaded his sanctum and then inveigled him into this visit.

"Why yes, of course. That furnace, you see, is the only one in existence that is capable of producing the extreme temperature I need. I simply had to have access to it, and I knew the only way of

getting it, was to take it. The forgotten shaftway made it easy."

"I see." Scott frowned in perplexity; he didn't see. That particular furnace was used only for involved research into the structure of the atom. This Destinn couldn't possibly...

"What the devil are you up to, Gail?" a gruff voice broke in from the doorway. "I thought you were at work up top."

"I was," Destinn replied suavely, his hand moving to Scott's arm with swift warning pressure. "Had to quit early to meet my friend."

"Oh yeah! And who's he?"

Scott turned to look at the stocky, blue-jowled man who regarded him with suspicion, if not open antagonism. Gail, with a quick movement, had hidden the discarded purple raiment and now faced the newcomer with easy confidence.

"Firmin--Bill Firmin, from the forty-ninth level," he said evenly. "You've heard me speak of him, Tom. Shake hands, you two. Bill, I want you to know Tom Prouty, our ward leader here."

A flabby hand was stretched there before him, and, as Scott hesitated, he saw Gail Destinn's jaw muscles tense spasmodically. There must be a hidden danger here; this Prouty had a sinister look about him, that was not at all in keeping with the direct frankness of young Destinn. But the younger fellow was afraid of Prouty for some reason; Scott saw those taut jaw muscles relax in a relieved smile when he took the cold limp hand of the politician in his own.

"Glad to know you, Bill," said Prouty. "If you're a friend of Gail's, I suppose you're all right. And, take it from me, big boy, you'd better be right; things are popping pretty soon and you guys in the forties better be with us."

"Bill's the best there is, Tom," Destinn interposed hastily. "I'm taking him over to the Square with me."

"Well, make it snappy," Prouty growled. "May do him some good. Meeting's on, you know, and Sarovin is talking tonight. Afterwards I want to see you in my office alone--don't bring this guy along."

For a moment Scott thought his young host was about to explode. But Prouty scowled him down; then turned on his heel and was gone.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Terris," Destinn whispered. "I've let you in for something, I'm afraid. Tom's a bad actor, and he's suspicious of you. Guess we'd better get you back up top where you belong."

"You mean I'm to run away?" Scott's blood boiled at the idea of sneaking off in fear of this ignorant bully. "Not on your life!" he grated. "I'm here now, and here I stay until I learn what it's all about. Let's go to this Square of yours."

Young Destinn grinned anew and his fine eyes twinkled. "You are a good scout," he breathed delightedly. "Come on--Bill."

Responding somehow to the savage call of the danger he saw ahead, Scott Terris followed eagerly when his new friend dashed off down the corridor toward the moving way.

part 2

Chapter II: The Storm

They found a sizable gathering of the gray-clad workers in one corner of the Square whose massive columns extended from the fiftieth to the sixtieth levels in the Food Company section. A fiery little hunchback with abnormally large head and long arms that waved in wild gestures as he talked, was addressing them from a platform near one of the public newscasting stations. His voice was raised in harsh competition with the announcer's, and the attention of his audience strayed ever and anon to the changing views on the bright screen.

"Sarovin," Gail Destinn whispered hoarsely, "the most dangerous agitator we have down here. Notice how the police watch him?"

Scott saw that half a dozen of the red-coated guards were close by, far more alert in their interest than was usual. These meetings of the workers, which were numerous, were smiled upon by the authorities and rarely occasioned them serious concern. But this Savarin, one knew instinctively, was a personage, a power; there was an ominous note in his voice, a ring of insolent defiance, that carried with it the assurance that comes only with the certainty of powerful backing and political protection.

"Comrades," he was shouting, "I call upon you now to give up this milk-and-water plan of the Council of Five and their scientists. As things are going, it will be years before results are obtained—if they ever are. Forget it, I say; let us rise in our might and take what is ours. We have earned it by the sweat of our brows, this vast wealth that is in the hands of the few who wear the purple. We, who toil for a pittance that they may live their lives of luxury and ease; we, whom

they consider as inferior to the mechanicals and as dust beneath their feet--we have made of this so-called republic a power so great that the entire world is prostrate before us. And they have taken it from us, these bloated plutocrats of the upper levels. It is high time we asserted ourselves, comrades, and there is only one way of regaining what is rightfully ours--by force. I am here to tell you that force is to be used; blood must be spilled in the cause. Blood, I tell you! It is only with their lives that they can pay for what they have done. And the time is at hand."

"Easy there, Sarovin," a lieutenant of the red police called out good-naturedly, "that's becoming a bit strong."

Gail Destinn gripped Scott's arm with fingers that trembled, and his face was flushed to match the hue of his tousled thatch. There were rumblings of approval from the audience, and eyes no longer were turned to the screen of the newscasts. Sarovin had struck answering chords in the breasts of his hearers.

"To hell with the police!" a voice thundered. "Go on, Sarovin."

"There spoke a man," the hunchback gloated. "If the rest of you had half his guts there'd be nothing to it. Why listen, comrades, the red police can't stop us; neither can those of the purple. Think of our many millions, aroused, and of the handful with whom we have to deal. After all, there are only a score or so we must get out of the way--the President and his cabinet, who are but tools of the Power Syndicate--Matt Crawford, the real Dictator, and--"

"Sarovin! Wait--you're crazy!" Young Destinn was ploughing his way through the milling crowd toward the platform, despite hands that clutched and voices that screeched in protest.

The lieutenant of red police yelled an order to his men and they

bored into the crowd with maces swinging. Instant uproar echoed in the Square as the shriek of a siren rang out in frantic call for police reserves. A swelling cadence of angry voices came booming from the balconies surrounding the enclosure at the levels above.

There was the popping of riot pistols in the hands of the red police, and the gurgling bursts of their rubbery missiles, as twining tentacles spurted forth to imprison the flailing arms of the workers and bring them helpless to the pavement. From the vaulted reaches overhead, cable cars of the police swooped down as the wearers of the gray streamed into the Square in ever-increasing number.

"Comrades!" Destinn was shouting from the platform, where he held Sarovin squirming in his long arms, "Don't listen to this fool. It'll mean war if you do; murder and destruction--rapine--"

"Let it be war!" Sarovin screamed, and Gail clamped a huge hand over his mouth.

"No!" he bellowed. "There's a better way. And it won't take years, either. We're almost ready now to lick the Power Syndicate at their own game. This cosmic energy of theirs will be supplanted by a source we will control. Their sting will be gone then, and we'll have the situation in hand--peaceably."

His words fell on unheeding ears or were drowned out by the cries of the angry mob. Scott forced his way closer to the platform and saw that others were climbing over its edge. Tom Prouty, red of face and spouting profanity, was the first to reach young Destinn. Something flashed bright in his hand, crackling spitefully. A needle-gun!--one of those dread weapons of the war of 2212.

And then Gail Destinn was swaying there, clawing at the slender dart that had pierced his shoulder. Prouty, clubbing his pistol, was

hammering away at him as his hands worked frantically to free the thing that even now glowed to its destroying incandescence and brought wisps of smoke curling from the flesh it scorched. But the ward leader's blows rained on him unnoticed; with a mighty wrench he tore the dart free and dashed it to the platform, where it sang its shrill song of death in the furious and murderous discharge of atomic energy.

Screeching in mortal terror as a dazzling spray of hissing metal cascaded from the platform, Tom Prouty flung himself into the mass of humanity that fell back in sudden blind panic. Fighting madly among themselves and against the cordon of red police which hemmed them in; trampling those of their number who were borne down by the crush, they retreated before the roaring inferno the energy needle had created by expending its mighty forces in the steel floorplates instead of in the human flesh for which it was intended.

Scott found himself alone, close by the consuming blast of molten particles. Destinn was dragging himself painfully away from the searing flame, his features contorted in agony and his right side useless in the paralysis that had gripped him.

"Look!" he gasped, when Scott reached him. "Up there--Sarovin! It got him." Then Gail Destinn collapsed and lay still.

The platform was sagging in blobs of flowing metal. And, standing erect in the white heat of the atomic blast that spouted there, was the thing which had been Sarovin. Like a flaming, bloated statue it stood there with arms outstretched as if to ward off the fires of hell that encompassed it. Pinpoints of flashing brilliance exploded rapidly in the distorted mass, and then, in a puff of swirling gases, it was gone.

There swelled a mighty roar from the throats of the thousands of

gray-clad observers in the balconies. Voices, terrified and unintelligible at first, then coming in unison like a practised and prearranged chorus of long-suppressed hatred.

"Down with those of the purple! Down with the government! It is Sarovin they've killed. Sarovin! Death to the President and to Crawford. Death in the upper levels!"

Dazed by the vast tumult of sound and awed by the tremor that assailed the huge structure of the city under the measured stamping of thousands of feet, Scott Terris gazed out over the scene with eyes that saw only its wider significance. Here was a tremendous force unleashed, a savage fury that would spread to every city in the country through the mysterious communication channels of the gray-clad multitude. A reign of terror in the making; civil war that would threaten the very foundations of the nation--of civilization itself.

* * *

From out of the press of the howling mob there dashed a slim figure, a girl-figure in gray, that sped to kneel at Gail Destinn's side. Her swift white fingers explored his wounds and then she looked up with startled wide eyes to regard the tall stranger who stood there as if rooted to the spot. Rendered speechless by the quick revelation of the girl's fresh beauty, Scott was able only so smile in sickly fashion at her suddenly contemptuous stare.

"Are you a friend of his?" she asked.

"Why--why yes," he stammered.

"Then why don't you do something? He's terribly hurt--dying. Here, help me with him--if you can come out of the trance."

Suddenly Scott wanted more than anything else in the world to see

young Destinn recover and to know more of this lovely bit of femininity in the gray of the sub-levels. Gail was conscious, he saw quickly, but was unable to move a muscle. The pain-glazed eyes regarded him with something of the beseeching look of a helpless dumb creature about to be used in a laboratory experiment.

With a swift return of his ordinary alertness, he lifted the limp form in his arms and straightened with a jerk. "All right," he growled in the girl's ear, "Where'll I take him?"

"This way--hurry." The girl's voice was a bare whisper above the din of the Square. She pointed into the shadows of the great pillars where it seemed to be deserted of human presence.

The battle raged furiously behind them as they made their way in the direction she indicated. The roaring destruction of the energy needle had spent itself and only a gaping opening, its edges cooled already to dull red heat, showed where it had fused its way through the floorplates into the level below. Fresh detachments of the red police were arriving continuously and it seemed that they were getting the situation in hand--temporarily at least.

"Here, to the westbound way," the girl was saying. "A dispensary is close by."

They were on the swiftly moving platform then, and Scott shifted his burden so that the wobbling head rested on his shoulder. Gail Destinn moaned feebly and mumbled words came from his lips.

"No, no," he objected. "Not to the dispensary. Take me--up top. To your laboratory, Terris. There is work--must be done."

The girl heard and understood. "You are Scott Terris," she exclaimed angrily, "down here, wearing the gray and misleading poor Gail.

Getting him into this terrible trouble. Well, you can just put him down, Mr. Terris. I'll see him to the dispensary myself."

"Terris, don't do it," Destinn begged. "Tell her it's all right. I must go on."

"Put him down at once," the girl snapped.

"Did you hear his last words?" Scott bridled.

"No," coldly aloof, "I didn't. But I know what for his good."

Scott had little knowledge of the ways of the fair sex. Perhaps he would not have dared lose his temper as he did now, had he been more experienced. But he had made up his mind about Destinn and no mere woman could change it.

"Look here, young lady," he rasped, "I'm taking charge of this man. He's going up top as he desires, and my own physician will attend him. Get that?"

The girl faced him, white and speechless with indignation, as the moving platform sped on its smooth way to the west side. He thought he heard the injured man chuckle, but decided it was a cough.

"Thanks," Destinn whispered weakly. "Stay on this Way until you reach the turn. Norine will show you the entrance... to secret lift... she's a good sport... underneath...." A gasp of pain cut short his words and he lapsed into unconsciousness.

Across the corridor the eastbound way was suddenly jammed with vociferous crowds of the gray-clad workers. They had heard of the affair in the Square and were on their way to join forces with their fellows. A few there were who shouted over the intervening space, but for the most part they paid no attention to the little group on the

westbound platform.

The girl Norine huddled closely to his side as if she feared she would be recognized. She stroked Destinn's limp hand now, but kept her eyes averted from his face.

In the next instant her slight body was racked with dry sobs.

part 3

Chapter III: Judgment

Doctor Mowry shook his head gravely. "Your friend will live, Scott," he said, "but as a hopeless paralytic. He'll never walk again, nor will he be able to lift a finger to the simplest task. Normal nerve currents, you see, were blocked by the energy--permanently."

"You're sure there's no chance, Doc?" Sick at heart, Scott was grasping at straws. He had waited many hours in fearful anticipation of this verdict, but now he was unwilling to abide by it.

"Not a chance," the doctor asserted. "The usual experience in 2212, you'll recall. Even when they escaped the extreme penalty of the vicious needle energy, slightly wounded combatants were doomed to this living death of inactivity and impotence."

"God! No wonder we abolished war and jettisoned all stocks of the needle guns." Scott sat thinking bitterly for a long time after the doctor left. He'd like to lay hands on this Prouty--a cowardly blackguard who would use one of the forbidden weapons on a man like Gail Destinn! Probably stole the thing from a museum and...

The voice of the newscast announcer droned from the sound mechanism of his private visiphone. Colby, another of the cabinet members, had been assassinated. President Owens closely guarded in fresh outbreaks from sub-levels of Washington. Matt Crawford fleeing in a rocket car to one of his cosmic energy globes out there in the stratosphere. Another coward!

Snorting his disgust with conditions in general, Scott arose from his easy chair and made his way to the room where Destinn lay.

The girl Norine started noticeably at his entrance and moved from the bedside. Her eyes were red with weeping, but she tossed her head and averted her gaze when Scott addressed her.

"Has Gail been told?" he asked her gently.

A nod of grim assent was the girl's only reply, but the sick man answered in a tense whisper through lips that were white and pinched, "Yes, Terris, they told me."

He was silent then, but his eyes shone bright with that same indomitable spirit they had held when Scott first encountered him as an intruder in the laboratory.

"It's a tough break for me," he continued, "but my work isn't finished yet. Terris, I'd like you to help me."

"I'll do anything I can," Scott assured him, shakily.

"Norine, will you please leave us alone?" came from the pinched lips as the bright eyes caressed the drooping girl.

She left silently and the sick man looked long and earnestly at the famous scientist of the upper levels. "You've done much for me, Terris," he said then, "More than I can tell you. And, somehow, I feel that you'll do more--for the real Cause."

"You mean that of the gray multitude?"

"I mean the cause of true Democracy; not what you saw exemplified last night. You know now that the workers are a class gone crazy under the oppression of the purple-clad minority--or rather I should say, of the capitalistic system. Yet they are fools, Terris, and so easily swayed as to make their foolishness dangerous. But I need

not tell you of that; you saw for yourself. Already their mistaken and misled zeal is manifest in the carnage which has started and which may end in widespread disaster. It is to prevent such disaster that I am asking for your assistance."

"You speak of the alternative you mentioned when you shut off Sarovin down there."

"Yes. And to explain further I will tell you what you must recognize of your own knowledge. Terris, our country is at the mercy of the Power Syndicate; Matt Crawford is the man who runs it to suit himself and his greedy associates. There is no true representation of the people in the government; even you who wear the purple must perforce do as Crawford dictates. And it pleases him to favor you who live up top; it adds to his own personal glory. But he and his 'yes-men' have nothing but contempt for those of the sub-levels; that and starvation wages, and the persecution of the red police is their lot. Am I right?"

"I hadn't thought much about it, Gail," Scott returned. "That is, not until last night. My interest, as you know, is wrapped up in science, but I'm beginning to see certain things in a new light. Go on with your story--if you can stand it."

"Oh, I'm all right; for talking, at least." The courageous lips actually twisted themselves into a smile. "The whole thing is wrong in principle, Terris. It goes back to the dark ages when first the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few became evident. We are not socialistic in these days; we know of the failure of the Soviets in the twentieth century, and we know why they failed. Men are not created equal, and to those of superior aggression and mentality there must come superior reward. But not to the extent that now exists; and a disproportionate reward must not come to the undeserving through the efforts of others who are starved into submission. Do you follow me?"

"Sure." Scott was deeply interested; he never had approved of the grasping methods of the Power Syndicate. "Forget the preliminaries," he said. "Let's come to this plan for a peaceable solution of the problem."

"Attaboy!" Destinn approved. "Since you put it that way, the idea is this: Crawford controls the power supply of United North America today. With the passing of the use of natural fuels, we were forced to turn to the cosmic rays of outer space for our power. Our very existence depends on this vast industry which Crawford acquired by inheritance and later financial manipulation. Were he to cut off the energy supply radiated to our cities from his globes that float out there in the stratosphere, we should perish. Our synthetic foods could not be produced, our artificial sunlight would die out; our heat, the essential labors of the mechanicals--all would stop. Everything we wear and use in this life to which we have become accustomed would automatically cease to exist for us as replaceable and renewable necessities. We should revert to a savage state and be compelled to venture out into the wilderness where most of us would perish. It is our vital need for power that gives Crawford the whip hand over us all."

"And to remedy that you propose--"

"Another and simpler source of power. Cheap and unlimited energy as the emancipator of our modern slaves. The death of this tyranny, and the return to a true republican form of government." The stricken idealist closed his lids and a blissful expression spread over his features.

Scott's interest as a scientist overcame any possible exception he might otherwise have taken. "This new energy," he suggested, "is to be obtained from the atom?"

"Yes, but not by its disruption. All we have ever accomplished by destroying the atom is further destruction--of life or of other matter. Witness the subatomic energy of the needle gun."

Scott looked hastily away from the pain that came to replace the enthusiasm which had radiated from those fine eyes. But Destinn shook off the black mood instantly and continued:

"Terris, I can produce usable energy in inconceivable amounts by a building-up of atoms rather than by their disintegration. The method provides a virtual reproduction of cosmic ray energy. The birth of atoms radiates a tremendous force that we have learned how to use and control. Think of it! By building up only four grams of helium--about a seventh of an ounce--from hydrogen atoms, we release nuclear energy equivalent to a million horsepower for an hour. Duplicate the natural processes of outer space that give rise to the birth of atoms; force the hydrogen nuclei to combine with electrons to form helium nuclei and the vast energy release is effected. We manufacture our own cosmic rays, and our own energy, from practically nothing!"

"Yes, but try and do it." Scott was frankly skeptical.

"Terris, I can do it; I have done it! Listen!"

And Scott Terris listened while the sick man, in enthusiastic if somewhat weakening voice, expounded his theories and told of his hopes; explained the plans of the Council of Five, and detailed the results of the experiments already conducted.

* * *

An hour later, convinced and marveling, he stepped forth into the corridor to come face to face with Norine Rosov.

In his excitement he failed to notice that the girl's finely chiseled features had regained their normal composure and that her color had returned. He did observe that the close-cropped golden hair gleamed with the lustre imparted by a recent smoothing; that there was something less strained in her attitude. She was more at ease in his presence than she had been since their first meeting.

"He has talked with you of his plans?" she inquired.

"Indeed he has, Miss Norine. And, since you are so deeply concerned in the important matter, I feel we should have an understanding without delay. Will you come into my library?"

There was no hesitation on the girl's part when she preceded him into the spacious and luxurious room, where it was his wont to retire in privacy for his studies. But there was a haunting something in her wide stare when she seated herself across from him, a hint of some fear of himself or of the surroundings, that she could not quiet down. Her slim, white fingers trembled noticeably as she lighted a cigarette.

"Gail has asked that you be permitted to help me," he said in a strained voice he could not have accounted for. "He tells me that you have helped him in the work and that you know a great deal about what he has done. Of course, you know that he wants me to go ahead with the experiments?"

"Yes; he told me. And you consented?"

"I did. I likewise agreed to use your knowledge and assistance in the work, providing, of course, this is satisfactory to you."

The girl frowned. "You are doing this," she asked, "for what purpose? Surely you have not espoused the cause of the gray-clad workers?"

"I'm doing it in the interest of science," he returned stiffly, "and of the general good to humanity that is involved. You need have no fear that it will work to the disadvantage of your comrades."

"You'll not betray us--betray Gail, I mean--to the Power Syndicate?" The girl's expression was dubious.

"Certainly not!" Scott flushed uncomfortably. It was impossible that he come out flatly in support of the gray multitude; too many of them were of the type of Tom Prouty or the one who had been known as Savorin. Nor could he fully approve of the opposite side--his own fellows of the upper levels. There was justice and injustice, both up top and down below, with the wearers of the gray getting somewhat the worse of existing conditions. But how to explain this attitude of mind to this beauteous and imperious girl who regarded him with such open suspicion if not with actual dislike. How to...

"Gail trusts you," she broke in then, with a quick half-smile. "And, that being the case, I suppose I can. We start work at once?"

Surprised, Scott jumped to his feet with alacrity. It would be great to have the girl around, at that. "Right away!" he exclaimed. "And you'll make your home here?" Then, aghast at his own temerity, "To be near Gail, of course," he finished lamely.

"Yes--to be near Gail." The girl rose unsteadily and swift tears came trembling on her long lashes. An hysterical sob caught in her throat. "Poor, poor Gail," she moaned.

And Scott, moving with soft steps in deference to her feeling, made his way toward the laboratory.

part 4

Chapter IV: Accomplishment

Vaguely disturbed by a realization of his growing concern over this girl who had come into his life under such trying circumstances, Scott set himself half-heartedly to the task of arranging his apparatus for the work that he must do. She was the companionate mate of Gail Destinn, the paralyzed man had admitted, but it seemed apparent that the relationship was a one-sided arrangement. Certainly Destinn had not exhibited the depth of emotion one would have expected in the fortunate possessor of so beautiful and talented a companion.

Norine, on the other hand, was deeply and madly in love. That was quite evident from her bearing. She'd fight for her man like a tigress, if occasion demanded, and stick to him through thick and thin. To her it would not matter that he was no longer able to protect her; that his marvelous vitality of body had been taken from him in that horrible instant when the needle-energy struck him down. To a girl like that, the union was a permanent and sacred thing; a responsibility not to be cast aside. And yet she was, above all, a woman... primitive in her emotions and a creature of strange caprice. Intoxicating the senses in her exotic allure... chilling them to sub-zero frigidity in the next instant with her aloof disapproval...

Scott shook his head angrily and turned his eyes to the fluorescent screen of the radio-microscope. He'd have to keep his mind free of such thoughts. There was work to be done, important work, and he needed his every faculty under control.

The laboratory visiphone buzzed an insistent call and he flipped the lever that illuminated its disc. An anxious face appeared there, the face of his first assistant at the Research Bureau.

"When will you be at the Bureau offices?" the white lips asked.

"Not today, Warren," Scott returned impatiently. "I've something to do here. May shut myself in for a week."

"But--but say! President Owens has called a conference. The devil's to pay, Terris. You'll have to come down."

"Can't. Tell 'em I'm sick; dead, if you want to--anything."

His eyes had strayed to the green-lit screen of the super-microscope, where a dazzling light-burst showed for an instant in the path of the theta rays, and then was gone. A single atom of helium created! The process was successful in its initial stage.

"But, Terris," the visiphone was pleading, "Crawford has returned. He's fighting mad, and he wants you to--"

"Oh, damn Crawford! Tell him I refuse!" The visiphone disc went dark and the panicky voice broke off as he slammed the lever back.

So Matt Crawford was taking up the challenge of the gray-clad multitude--and wanting him to do some of his dirty work of reprisal, Scott thought grimly. This was to be war all right; the civil war Destinn had predicted, with bloodshed and misery--the Lord only knew what might happen with Crawford's diabolical mind at work. And Scott was in the middle, he knew; he'd be cast off by his fellows of the purple for his defection, and scorned by those of the gray on account of his wealth and position.

A second flash of light showed there before him and all else was forgotten as he saw that it persisted in its uncanny swelling brilliance. He increased the generation of theta rays and watched breathlessly as a twin star was formed there in the microcosmos that whirled on

the screen. They fused together then, those two newly born atoms, joining forces in a violent accession of energy.

"The theta ray should be further concentrated," a cool, crisp voice spoke at his elbow.

He had not noticed the girl's presence in the laboratory, so engrossed was he in the miracle that was taking place within the tiny capsule of hydrogen.

"Yes, close to iota intensity," he replied in professional tones. "I believe that is what Gail said."

"That's right." The girl refocused the view on the screen as he adjusted the ray generator. She was an ideal assistant.

The magnification now was less than a million diameters, and still the man-made energy center was brilliantly visible and growing larger. It was taking on mass with the capture of new electrons.

"You have the primary screen?" the girl asked.

"Over there, with the small crucible he left here last night." Scott drew a quick breath as the energy burst forth with trebled vigor, and his fingers trembled on the control of the ray generator.

"We'll need it shortly," the girl said, returning with a shiny cylinder which she placed beside him.

"And the secondary screens? They are in the laboratory of the fifty-third level?" he asked.

"Yes. In the keeping of the Council of Five. I'll go for them whenever you are ready."

"You have notified the Council, I presume. Gail said you were to do so." Scott slipped the primary screen in over his hydrogen capsule, and the radiation of the energy center was dimmed momentarily to a dull, sputtering red.

"I have, and they approve of what we are doing," the girl replied. She was busy with the calculating machine, determining the rate of mass increase of the energy center.

"Then why can't they send those secondary screens up here?" Scott asked gruffly.

"Sarovin's crowd has spies watching them. It would be too risky."

"How about the risk to yourself in going down there?"

"No risk at all," the girl sniffed. "I can twist them around my finger, any of them."

Scott was not so sure; they were a desperate bunch, these who had been followers of the defunct agitator, and would stop at nothing now. Especially if Crawford had started something.

A rapid flare-up of the energy center made haste imperative. He cut back slightly into the theta ray band. "Can't be helped, I guess," he growled. "You'd better go now, Miss Rosov. Be careful, though."

"Of course." She slipped a sheet of calculations into his hand and was gone by way of the secret lift.

Remarkable girl, that. Scott checked her figures rapidly and found they were correct. It was incredible that the rate of energy increase should have reached so enormous a value. Why, in less than an hour they'd be radiating sufficient power to operate the entire pneumatic tube system of the city!... If it could be used.

The energy center was visible now with not more than a thousand diameters of magnification. He slipped the cylindrical screen and its precious contents out of the microscope and transferred it to the wave reflector of his spectrometer.

For the first time he gave attention to the imperative call of the visiphone. Its buzzer had shrilled for many minutes unnoticed. Matt Crawford probably--in person. He reached for the activating lever, then changed his mind and rang for the head caretaker instead.

"Wilson," he said when the man came in, "take this call on the library extension, and, if it's Matt Crawford, tell him I can't be interrupted. I'll not talk to him."

"Yes, sir, very well, sir." Wilson backed out with horrified amazement written large on his wrinkled countenance. The master must be out of his mind, snubbing the kilowatt king; bringing the crippled radical from the fighting in the sub-levels. And the girl! But he hastened to do as he was bidden.

* * *

The spectrometer readings showed that the radiations of the energy center held steady within a fraction of one per cent of the frequency selected from the cosmic rays by the globes of the Power Syndicate.

He returned the screened capsule to the stream of exciting rays and saw immediately that the energy center was now visible without the aid of the super-microscope. It was a pulsating pinpoint of light, the germ of a latent energy that would become so enormous in potentiality that cold calculation of the values was staggering to contemplate.

The open panel of the secret lift reminded him that the girl had been

away for a much longer time than the trip should have required. A cold fear gripped him as the vibrating energy within that tiny screen sent forth an audible note. If those devils down there had harmed a hair of her head, he'd rend the sub-levels asunder with an atomic blast that would be heard around the world!

"Mr. Terris, sir, I beg pardon." Wilson stood there, pale and shaken--apologizing.

"What is it, man? Have it out."

"It--it was Mr. Crawford, sir, and he was furious. He said he was coming here at once, sir."

"You'll not admit him, Wilson. You understand?"

"Yes, sir. That is, no sir, I'll not." The old fellow turned, trembling, to leave. But he straightened his shoulders as he passed through the door and Scott knew that the main entrance to the apartment would remain bolted.

The hydrogen capsule had vanished utterly and the energy center now hung suspended and enormously enlarged in the hollow cylindrical screen. A sputtering light-ball of the size of a food pellet, it cast a circle of such intense brilliance on the metal ceiling that the sunglow illumination was dim by comparison. Alternately expanding and contracting like a living breathing thing, it was radiating thousands of horsepower of energy into space even now.

And still Norine had not returned. Scott cut back still further on the theta rays and strode to the open panel of the secret shaft, where he listened anxiously for the lift. But all was silence in the blackness down there. He dashed from the laboratory and into the room where Destinn lay.

"Norine went for the secondary screens," he groaned, "and she's been gone for more than an hour. Tell me where to find her, Gail."

The nurse remonstrated with him for exciting her patient, but he waved her away.

"She'll be all right, Terris," the sick man said calmly. "Never fear for that girl's safety."

"But if she isn't--if something has happened to her!" Beads of perspiration glistened on Scott's brow.

But Destinn coolly ignored his excitement. "Nothing will happen," he whispered confidently. "How far have you progressed?"

"A stable energy center now glows in the primary screen. Radiations are increasing as the ninety-first power every ten seconds."

"Good Lord, Terris!" Destinn's weak voice betrayed excitement now and the nurse tried frantically to silence him. "She must return soon," he moaned, despite the woman's efforts, "else it will get beyond control. The primary screen... Terris... "

And then Gail Destinn fainted.

part 5

Chapter V: Awakening

Instantly sensing the tremendous importance of the thing Destinn had been trying to tell him, Scott made desperate efforts to revive him. If only he had told him the definite composition of the metal used in those protective secondary screens; if only he could get him to speak the few necessary words!

But it was useless. Gail Destinn had slipped into a coma from which he might not awaken for many hours, the nurse told him sternly. And, if Mr. Terris had any sense of human kindness; if he had any consideration at all for a man who was desperately ill, he would leave the sick room at once.

Scott left. He dashed into the laboratory and listened once more at the panel of the secret shaftway. But, if there was any sound of the lift rising he could not have heard it for the intense note of the raging fury within that primary screen. The thing nearly filled the tiny cylinder now, and it was bouncing about at a terrific rate.

He shut off the theta rays without result. The thing seemed to take on new energy with their cessation. Of course! Excitation had been completed; the madly whirling thing would continue now in its acquisition of mass unaided. And, if not properly screened and its vast potentiality directed into the intended channels, it would go on and on until it had destroyed New York and all of its millions--until it had destroyed the earth itself; the solar system, perhaps.

He searched through his crucibles in a frenzy. Selecting one of pure tungsten, he placed it gingerly over the small cylinder. There was a tremendous thump that seemed to wrench the very space about him,

and the crucible vanished in a puff of light that left him blinking and blinded.

"Scott--Scott Terris!" a voice sobbed then in his consciousness. "Am I too late?"

It was Norine. His vision was clearing and he saw her swaying before him, her face marble-white and her eyes staring at some nameless horror they still beheld. In her arms was a shimmering metallic object, a hollow cone with a hinged lid on the flaring end.

"Oh, oh!" she moaned, letting the cone clatter to the floor. "It's dark down there in the sub-levels--dark. They've shut off the power, Scott, and the Ways are stopped. There's terror down there and vile murdering of innocent people. The Council; I found them wallowing in their own blood, all five. And Prouty--I killed him with my bare hands!"

She swayed toward him, and somehow Scott found her in his arms. The white gleam of her body through rents in her clothing set his blood afire and he crushed her to him. For a moment she yielded, sighing. Soft, moist lips met his own and clung passionately.

Then she had pushed him away. Her eyes blazed scornfully and the white of her neck and cheeks flared a sudden angry red.

"I'm sorry, Norine, sorry," he mumbled, reaching for the all-important secondary screen. "I was mad, I guess."

In another moment he'd have the terrific thing they had created safely controlled; the energy center, at least. The other--the feeling she had created in him--could never be quenched. He wasn't sorry; he was a man insane with the new flame that burned within him.

* * *

Wilson was there, sputtering, "Crawford, sir, Crawford--the big boy himself is at the entrance. Th-three of the red police are with him, sir. They're cutting down the door with acetylene torches."

Norine screamed, "Gail, Gail! They'll get him, Scott."

She ran from the room as Scott advanced hastily to where the ball of raw energy spun crazily within the tottering primary screen. In a daze, he fumbled with the lid of the cone.

The crash of the massive steel door out there falling inward gave him warning that the time was short. Damn that lid! He couldn't open the thing. The primary screen had careered violently and threatened to spew forth its fearful content.

And then they were in the laboratory; a lieutenant of the red police with two of his men. Crawford bringing up the rear; dragging Norine back into the room, the swine!

"You're under arrest, Terris!" the lieutenant snapped.

"Arrest, hell!" The lid of the cone swung back and Scott had the mighty energy center under control.

In after years, when he thought back on that scene, he realized he must have lost his senses completely after that. Norine, when they had released her and closed the door, stood there in a cold fury. He had taken advantage of the legalized companion of another man, her eyes accused him--a man who lay helpless but a few steps away. And in that maddening gaze of hers there was unforgiving antipathy--abhorrence.

What mattered it to him now that terror stalked down there in the sub-levels? What mattered the class distinctions of modern life; the injustice? All that mattered was power--power to take and to smash;

to bring the highest and the lowliest to their knees. And he, Scott Terris, was master of that power. In spun there, waiting to be used, in that unassuming cone of metal that reposed on his workbench.

"Arrest!" His maniacal laugh set the lieutenant back on his heels. Terris, the mild-mannered scientist, had gone crazy!

"Drop it!" Scott yelled, as the officer reached for his riot pistol. "Drop it, I say!" He grabbed the cone, and the angry hum that arose from within silenced even the babblings of Crawford.

He snapped back the lid and withdrew the cone with a flipping motion, leaving the mysterious roaring thing it had contained to spin there in mid-air a blinding ball of fire. Fully an inch in diameter now, its note rose to a scream as it took on additional mass by the acquisition of new electrons from the disintegrated components of the surrounding atmosphere. The metal walls, the floor and ceiling of the great room emitted fearful sounds of harmonic vibration that added to the din.

Crawford, his flabby jowls sagging, opened his thick lips to cry out, but no sound came from the vocal chords that were paralyzed with fear. The lieutenant struck out at the whirling thing with the butt of his pistol. There was a thumping wrench of surrounding space and the weapon was dissolved in one of those blinding light flashes, only to add further to the mass of the dancing horror that spun so swiftly before him. Screaming, he fell back waving the cauterized stump of his forearm, from which hand and wrist had vanished.

"Power! Power!" Scott yelled, advancing on Crawford. "I'll show you what power is. Arrest me, will you? Crawford, you're through; your reign is over. I shall be Dictator in United North America. Come here!"

"You--you can't do this, Terris," the man faltered, extending a pudgy hand before his face in a feeble attempt to shield it from the searing radiations of that incredible whirling thing which had struck terror to his craven soul.

"Can't I? You haven't seen half of what I can do. Call off your men, Crawford.... You withdraw your charges, don't you?"

"W-what do you intend to do?"

"All in good time. Call them off, I say!" Scott brought the open end of the cone close to the screaming energy center and the thing drifted several feet nearer the erstwhile king of the kilowatts.

Dripping agonized perspiration, the terrified financier waved the police away. Only too glad to escape the awful menace of the thing that danced there blinding them and causing their very blood to boil in their veins, they slunk off, supporting the collapsed and moaning lieutenant between them.

Scott brought the insulating cone down over the energy center and returned it to the workbench. "That, Crawford," he said grimly, in the deathly silence that followed, "is the secret of your downfall. A man-made thing that will revolutionize the production of power and render useless all of your vast plant units out there in the stratosphere."

"You're bluffing," with a trace of his usual courage returning. "It's a laboratory trick of yours, designed to frighten us." Crawford mopped his brow nervously and straightened his slumped shoulders.

"Frightened you, too, didn't it?" Scott grinned. "No, it's not a bluff; it's the real thing. Observe the readings of the spectrometer, Crawford, and the radiation meter. Here, make it snappy!"

Cowed anew and paling visibly when Scott's fingers strayed toward the cone, he bent over the instruments indicated. The sheaf of calculations fluttered in his nerveless grip as he examined the figures that spelled the ruin of his vast enterprises, the collapse of the mighty organization he had built up.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked abjectly.

"First of all, you will obtain a visiphone connection with the executive chambers in Washington--using my instrument here. You will present me to the President as your successor. Following that, you will call together the dummies who are supposed to be the directors of the Power Syndicate. You will resign as President and Chairman of the Board, appointing me to succeed you in those positions.

"But my stock, Terris--I own controlling interest."

"Bah! It'll not be worth the paper it's engraved on when I've finished. After you have done the things I've mentioned, you will establish connections with your representatives in each of the cities of our country; you will resign from each and every industrial board of which you are a member; you will transfer your proxies to me. And you will notify your spies and your undercover men in the various departments of the government of the new order of things. Get busy now, Crawford."

"Terris, the thing's impossible," the broken man pleaded. "I just can't do it--I can't!"

Scott looked at his pocket chronometer. "Crawford," he said in brittle tones, "if you're not at the visiphone in sixty seconds, making that first call, your worthless carcass will go to swell the mass of the energy center. I mean it. This power is mine; I'm taking it, and a piffling thing

like the life of a man like you will not stand in my way. Step now!"

Matt Crawford moved with ludicrous haste. His fat fingers fumbled with the visiphone lever and he put in the call for President Owens.

Scott turned slowly to face Norine Rosov. The girl had stood there a rigid and scornful figure throughout the proceedings; now her pale lips moved in low, tense monosyllables.

"Thief! Cad!" she whispered huskily. "Oh, you--you--"

"Norine," he interrupted her, and his voice was silky and even. "I don't expect that you'll understand. Women never do. But this thing I'm doing is the only thing possible under the circumstances. And don't think I'll weaken in my purpose. I shall do exactly as I have said, and tomorrow the cities of United North America will have their first taste of the medicine I shall prescribe."

His jaw set in taut lines as the girl flushed in swift anger. She crouched there, braced against the wall as if about to spring upon him clawing and tearing like some wild creature of the jungle.

His next words were clipped off in steely determination. "But one thing I ask--no, I command it. You will leave Gail with me so that he can be properly treated. I give you my word he will be provided with all the attention that money can buy--the finest medical care--everything."

The fierce look of a beautiful animal went suddenly from her face and her lips trembled. "You--you promise?" she faltered.

"Solemnly."

"Yes... yes, it is better so. I couldn't provide for him," she agreed, her voice choking. "And, Scott, may I... visit him?"

"Certainly."

Crawford was talking rapidly before the disc of the visiphone where President Owens regarded him with open-mouthed astonishment.

Deliberately cruel, Scott snarled at the girl, "Go, now! Go, I say! Can't you see that you're in the way? Go!"

And Norine Rosov, beaten and sobbing, made her uncertain way to the secret lift.

part 6

Chapter VI: The Old Order Changes

Within two hours Scott Terris sat facing the President in the secret room of the executive chambers in Washington. He had laid down the law in no uncertain words and was regarding through eyes that were narrowed to slits, the vacillating politician who had been the catspaw of the old money-oiled machine.

Matt Crawford had departed without baggage on an extended tour of the pleasure cities of southern Europe. His letter of credit, though more limited than he would have wished, bore the official seal of the government of United North America. It was his decree of banishment.

"But, Terris," the President remonstrated mildly, "what you are doing is the acme of high-handedness. This is a republic; the people will not stand for it."

"Tommyrot! We haven't been a republic, excepting in name, for more than a century, and you know it. The people will stand for anything, provided they are moderately prosperous. They believe they would like to rule themselves, but they're incapable--they've proved it time and again all through our history and the history of the rest of the world. The best form of government for them is an absolute monarchy, and that is what we will now become. I am the absolute monarch, though I shall assume no title as such, and my word is to be the law of the land as truly as was that of the czars and emperors of old. You understand?"

President Owens dropped his tired old eyes before the flinty orbs that bored into his very soul. "You'll do nothing rash, I hope?" he

quavered, glad in his heart that a strong man was taking the reins.

"Nothing at all; excepting to turn the entire country topsy-turvy and reorganize society and industry. Nothing rash, I assure you."

"Good Lord!" the President gasped.

"You haven't heard anything yet," Scott grinned. "Listen--"

He talked for more than an hour, rapidly and forcefully, and when he finished, it seemed that the President had shed twenty years of his age. There was a healthier color in his gaunt cheeks and smile wrinkles appeared at the corners of his eyes.

"Terris," he beamed, "the thing will work. I know it will work. And, six months hence, our country will be envied by the entire world. I'll call the special session of Congress immediately."

"Oh, that formality," Scott sniffed. "After the newscast speech, Mr. President, after that has had time to sink in."

"Yes, yes." President Owens fluttered about, adjusting his cravat and smoothing his hair, for all the world like a little old lady preening and primping for a Sunday stroll in the ozone promenade.

For the first time during his two terms of office he was about to make a speech that would add to his self-respect. Under the magic of Scott's persuasion he had completely forgotten that he was still no more than the mouthpiece of another and greater man.

* * *

After giving his orders to the Newscasting Corporation heads, Scott Terris retired to the room he had chosen for his own in the huge executive suite. The ether would be entirely cleared of traffic on the

newscast wave band so that all public and private visiphones must respond to the special message of the President.

He then cut his own instrument in on the private hand of the police network, calling an immediate visiphone conference of the Chiefs of Police in all cities. There were other and less public instructions to be given, and these he would take care of personally.

One by one the department heads reported in until all eight faced him in the bright disc. Merkel, of New York, he knew personally, but all of the others were strangers to him. He had greeted each in turn with a curt nod, noting with satisfaction that their bearing was subservient and respectful. The word had gone out through the secret agents of the machine and they had accepted the new Dictator without cavil. Power! He knew the secret of it, at last.

"Men," he said, "you know who I am and what has happened, so I will eliminate all preliminaries. It is sufficient for the present that you understand that all orders as to the policies and activities of the red police will come from me. I am open to suggestion, but when I have made a decision it is final--there is no appeal. Is this clear to all of you?"

He watched them keenly as they replied in the affirmative, some with quick eagerness as welcoming the change, others dubious and hesitant, yet not daring to dissent.

"Fine," he went on. "And now for the first general order. You will immediately re-allocate your men so that the upper levels are as fully patrolled in accordance with the density of population as the sub-levels. From this time forth, you are not to discriminate one whit between those of the purple and those who wear the gray. One is as liable to arrest and punishment as the other, for the slightest infraction of the law. Starting at once, and during the next twenty-four

hours, all furloughs are cancelled. Reserves are to be concentrated in all public squares and along the Ways to break up any and all disturbances that may follow the President's speech. And--get this--you are to arrest all agitators and objectors, regardless of class, and mobilize them on the roof surfaces for immediate transportation to the space globes of the Power Syndicate, where they will be sentenced to labor for an indefinite period of time--without bail. That is all for the present; good day, gentlemen."

"But, Mr. Terris," expostulated Shapley of San Francisco, "there will be trouble."

"Hm, a police chief worried about trouble! Of course there'll be trouble--and plenty of it. That's your job, Shapley, to face trouble and fight it."

He flicked the lever and the disc went blank. That preliminary was over, and Scott had not the slightest doubt that his orders would be carried out.

* * *

A special frequency band was assigned to him by the Radio Bureau in order to avoid interference on the newscast wave. He glanced at his watch--Owens' speech would be on the air in ten minutes.

In quick succession he obtained connections with headquarters offices of the Power Syndicate, the Food Company, and the Air Conditioning Bureau, snapping out orders that left their officials aghast and palpitating but submissive withal. The under-cover men must have done their work well, spreading the reputation of this new Dictator as a hell-raiser. Scott permitted himself a sardonic smile.

He had his first assistant, Warren, on the air then and promoted that

amazed individual to his old position as chief of the Research Bureau. Before the man could stammer his thanks, he was instructing him minutely in the matter of the energy center, which was to be duplicated in huge quantities at once, including spectroscopic analyses of the primary and secondary screens so that their materials might be reproduced, and plans for the projectors in which the new energy source was to be used. Power! His very words vibrated with it. Warren, a clever lad and ambitious, was quick to absorb the astounding knowledge that was imparted so unexpectedly and swiftly by his superior. Again Scott was confident of the results—they would be more than satisfactory. Warren was one chap who would get ahead.

Biting the end from his first cigar that day, he settled back comfortably to listen to the message that would create such turmoil that the customary labor troubles, even the more serious recent ones, would pale into insignificance in the annals of the country.

He observed that the President was speaking with confidence and that his entire bearing was that of a man who believed in his subject. Power! Something of its meaning had taken hold of the little man. He positively radiated it.

The "Ladies and Gentlemen" part was over with and Owens' eyes sparkled as he got at the meat of the thing. "We are about to embark on an experiment, a most noble one," he stated crisply; "an experiment that will not meet with approval on all sides. Yet it has become a thing of grave necessity and I ask the United Americas to support the administration as it has never done before. A new era will result, an era of happiness and prosperity, I promise you, such as the world has never known."

Scott grunted. That old political ballyhoo, it would persist!

But the next was good: "We are changing our entire social and economic structure, let the axe fall where it may. For centuries we have functioned on a basis that was entirely wrong, a basis where wealth and influence determined a man's status regardless of his real worth as a member of society. All that is to be changed; beginning this day, the government will confiscate all wealth, all individual and corporate holdings, this wealth to be controlled and redistributed by a new Department of Finance that will be headed by Scott Terris, former chief of the Science Research Bureau. All wage scales are to be readjusted in accordance with the real value of the individual in the economic scheme, the individual ratings to be determined by the Boards of Education and Industrial Training in the various centers. No man or woman, from this day on, will receive more or less compensation than his or her ability merits. This will result in advancement to the ambitious and able; conversely, in demotion for the indolent and inept. A grading process, as it were, that will give every individual an opportunity as great as that of his neighbor. He will have free admission to the educational and vocational institutions, and any mental or bodily deficiency that might handicap him will be cured by our great medical and surgical men, who, in these times, are balked by nothing."

The President hesitated, wetting his lips. Scott thought with a sudden pang of Gail Destinn. But he threw off the feeling; it was not to be allowed that sentiment creep in now to interfere with straight thinking. Besides, Owens was carrying on with his message:

"Every man will have his chance; no man the advantage. The day of unemployment and economic depression is past. With the elimination of concentrated wealth and the institution of the twenty-hour working week which is likewise a part of the plan, such situations, as that now existing, will become impossible. There will be work for everyone, and all must work in order to live. The fluctuations in supply and demand will be met by reducing or

increasing the labor turnout of the mechanicals, who require no compensation or food, only power to keep them alive. And power, incidentally, is to be plentiful and cheap. This, our most vital commodity, is the crux of the situation and is to undergo a radical change in its manner and cost of production. A new process, that produces energy directly from minute and inexpensive quantities of matter, has been developed by Scott Terris, who, in addition to his other duties, has taken over the leadership of the Power Syndicate from Matt Crawford, who has resigned."

Scott grinned appreciatively. Owens was doing the thing to a turn; he hadn't thought it was in the old man, after some of his weak parrot-like speeches that Crawford had inspired.

More was to follow, but the main facts had been covered. The rest was mere detail. Scott cut back to his private frequency band and requested a sound-vision flash of the Food Company Square in level fifty, New York. About time for the fireworks to begin, and somehow he felt an especial interest in the reactions of the workers in that particular gathering place.

The sound mechanism burst forth in a terrific din when the connection was established. The remainder of the President's message would go unheard by that frantic mob. In the great central rotunda, a howling, singing group milled about and voiced their jubilation with irrepressible ardor. At other points there were gatherings of angry and disgruntled workers who formed little circles around long-haired agitators who spouted invective against the government. But the red police were on the job. They swiftly broke up such crowds, making free use of mace and riot pistol.

He looked for the place where Sarovin had died and saw that a makeshift platform had been erected over the gaping opening in the floorplates. Here centered the most violent demonstration he had

observed, hemmed in by the red police and fighting desperately against their rushing tactics. And, on that platform stood Norine Rosov--aflame with passion and shouting her defiance over the heads of her listeners.

A fervent prayer that he might not be too late escaped his lips as he cut back to the police wave band. He must get Merkel instant. Oh God--Norine! He'd never forgive himself if they harmed her.

part 7

Chapter VII: Progress

In New York City, where the concentration of wealth was greatest, the President's message was at first received by the pleasure-seekers and idlers of the upper levels with languid amusement. This was only another of Crawford's clever moves to still the clamor of the gray-clad multitude and to further enrich the coffers of those of the purple, a holding out to the workers of the bait of increased compensation for increased industry and ability, when all knew that he would only squeeze and bleed them the harder under the guise of this new scheme that was designed only to deceive them into superhuman effort in his behalf. For themselves, stockholders and directors of the many corporations he controlled, there was not the slightest cause for anxiety.

But, when they discovered that their corporation credits were no longer honored in payment for commodities or service, when they learned of the issuance of new paper by the government that was known as labor credit and could only be obtained in exchange for useful productive or directive effort, such a howl was raised as to put to shame the feeble demonstrations of the sub-levels. Suddenly it was brought home to them that this thing was no joke; they were virtual paupers, and might actually starve if drastic action were not taken.

In Central Square, the huge crystal-domed recreation center of the upper levels, there gathered as choice as assemblage of the ultra-elite as had ever congregated in a public place. In the great amphitheatre, where nightly they were accustomed to parade their finery in attendance upon the performances of the opera, they collected in angry sputtering groups in the case of the younger set

and in pompous sneering aloofness where those of great power and influence met.

What was particularly amazing and abhorrent to their sensibilities was the presence of the red police in unprecedented force--an unwarranted and inexcusable invasion of their privileged immunity from such interference. It was incredible that Crawford would permit this indignity to come to them. Where was Crawford, anyway? President Owens had said he resigned from the Power Syndicate in favor of this scientist, Scott Terris. Was this, after all, the truth and not a blind? What right had Terris, who had never strayed into the realm of politics and industry from his commendable research work, to take upon himself this position of authority he seemed to have usurped? They must communicate with Crawford immediately.

Someone ferreted out Arthur Mason, Crawford's close confidant and nominal President of the Water Supply Syndicate, and was forcing a way to the stage, where gray-clad employees of the Newscasting Corporation were completing the erection of one of the raucous-throated and flickering-screened apparatuses of the public information system. Another high-handed invasion of their rights!

Mason, his massive features apoplectic in hue, and his vast bulk aquiver with righteous indignation, raised a shrill voice to address them. A semblance of quiet came then in the huge gathering-place and the red police could be observed drawing in their lines. Incredible that they should be watched like the common herd in the sub-levels! But Mason would be worth listening to; he would surely know something of what had really transpired--at least he might be expected to have knowledge of the whereabouts of Matt Crawford.

"Folks!" he shouted, "this is an outrage! Why--why, do you know they have actually refused to recognize my enormous credit. My very household has deserted me--the servants will not accept corporation

credit in payment for their service. There is not sufficient food, even, in the larders of Arthur Mason. Imagine it! Something must be done."

"Yah!" a disrespectful voice sang out from the crowd. "You're not the only one, Mason. Tell us what to do if you're so smart. What about Crawford?"

"Crawford!" the great man yelled. "He's out, just as Owens said; deserted us--gone! This young whelp, Terris, has taken things in his own hands. And the government backs him up. It's a gigantic steal--robbery! We must organize and fight him in Congress."

"Congress, hell!" the same scornful voice retorted. "They passed the necessary legislation this morning. You should know how those things are forced through, Mason--you've done it enough times."

There was instant commotion in the section from which that voice had come. An exchange of quick blows of wrathful bellowings as the man was attacked by the aroused mob. A police whistle shrilled and a dozen of the red-coated minions of the law were on the spot. Maces fell resounding on unprotected skulls and the disturbers were dragged off amid the swelling protest of the astounded audience.

Mason paled visibly. This was the real thing; this Terris had laid his plans well. From some mysterious source he had support that was making him a power in the land. Raising his voice anew, Mason yelled hoarsely in a futile attempt to shout down the rising din of the chattering, milling crowd. Like animals, they were, each intent on his own problem, each fighting for his own real or fancied wrongs and jabbering of his troubles to his neighbor. A siren shrieked and the reserves rushed into the Square to quell the incipient riot. Exactly like the rabble of the sub-levels, it was! In disgust he turned from the sight and found himself staring at a grinning workman of the Newscast crew.

"Boo!" yelled the fellow in gray, wriggling his fingers derisively at his nose. "How do you like it, you fat slob?"

Arthur Mason had never been so addressed in his life. Shaking his fists and screeching impotent rage, he advanced on the laughing workman. The screams of women and the hoarse shouts of men battling for their lost lives of luxury rose in a monstrous unthinkable babble in his ears. His world of affluence and ease was toppling there before him.

And still that workman grinned. He'd have the satisfaction, at least, of trouncing the fellow soundly. Swinging awkwardly and with stiff joints, he drove a blubbery fist into the pit of the man's stomach. That would put him in his place. But, quick as light, the slim youngster struck out, still smiling, and hard knuckles crashed home to the point of Arthur Mason's jaw.

After that there was confusion. Somehow he had slumped to the floor and an infernal hubbub surged there around him, whirling madly and interspersed with bright specks that floated and danced in the haze. A friend bent over him--Warner Merkel in the full regalia of his office.

"Help me out of this, Merks," he whined.

But the grim face drifting there was unsympathetic. "Sorry, old man," its lips seemed to whisper, "It's no go. I have to place you under arrest."

Truly, the world had gone topsy-turvy.

* * *

Eight levels below, a little knot of young men and women worked swiftly at the master controls of a humming foundry section of the

mechanicals. Some of them there were who wore the purple and some the gray, but they thought and planned and labored together as a unit with no hint of the old class distinction or the turmoil in the public places of the city. These workers were in harmony, believing in the ultimate success of the change that was creating such a disturbance both above and below, accepting as their due the new independence which had come to them as individuals with their classification as capable, intelligent operatives.

All around them were the soulless, brainless mechanicals, busily engaged in the tasks to which they were assigned by the operatives. Massive man-made creatures of copper and steel, which labored at furnace and forge, at press and rolling mill in fabricating the conical secondary screens for this new energy, which the Power Syndicate was to adopt.

"They're tearing things apart down in the thirties, I heard," a bright-eyed lass in gray denim remarked to the serious youth in purple, who worked at the adjoining control board. Her nimble fingers flashed over the buttons as she spoke and the quick lightning of return signals apprised her of the proper performance of the duties of the eighty mechanicals she supervised.

"Yes, and in Central Square up top," her neighbor replied. "They arrested Mason himself when he got up to speak. Crawford's old buddy, can you beat it? And a hundred others of the fools were shipped off with him to globe 819. They'll work there."

"He's a terror, this Scott Terris," said the girl in an awed voice. "Did you know him?"

"Only by sight. I worked under Warren in the Research Bureau, a political appointment, you know. Got my goat, that job--nothing to do and nobody caring." The lad puckered his brow in a puzzled frown.

"Funny thing, too," he said. "I used to see Terris around. He wasn't that kind. A hard worker himself, but easy on his force. Not at all the fire-eater he has turned out to be lately."

"Bet there's a woman behind it, somewhere."

"Lord no! He wouldn't look at a woman."

"Oh yeah? Neither did Napoleon."

"Anyway," the lad in purple maintained stoutly, "I'm for him. He may be tough and hard-boiled, but the way things are going now, we'll be better off. Why can't the others see it?"

"They'll come around--when they're hungry. I've been hungry and I know."

"You have? Good Lord!" The boy was silent after that.

He stole a furtive look at the girl after a while and marveled at the flush of excitement that mantled her pretty cheeks at each new move of the huge creatures she controlled. Power! That was it; she was thrilling to the sense of it that surged through her new being.

* * *

Over across the Hudson River a gang of laborers worked swiftly with power-saw and block and tackle, clearing away a section of woodland on the Palisades to make way for one of the new projector towers of the Power Syndicate. Many of them were breathing the outside air for the first time; some had never viewed the sun save in the travelogues of the visiphone programs. All of them worked with a will.

Only one wore the purple, a man of middle age, stoop-shouldered

and hollow of eye. The others had given him a wide berth from the beginning; he seemed so out of place, resentful, rather, in the aloof manner he maintained. But, as time went on, the foreman took notice of number 91. he was a conscientious worker and minded his business, which some of the others didn't. And now he was taking on new color; his back was straightening, and the furtive look of him was leaving. Already his first sullen manner was brightening. Once he burst forth in song, a swift snatch of sonorous baritone that rose with thrilling power and clarity, then broke off short--abashed.

Tom Carey, the foreman, walked over to where number 91 was working and consulted his payroll list before addressing him.

"Your name's Cabane, isn't it?" he inquired gruffly.

Number 91 did not look up. "Yes," he replied mumbling.

"Mine's Carey."

"I know."

Tom Carey scratched his head. Queer bird, this one. And then he remembered. "Used to sing in the opera, didn't you?" he blurted out, and then was sorry.

The man drew himself suddenly erect and fire flashed from his eye. "I was Manuel Cabane," he said proudly. And then his eyes dropped and his shoulders sagged.

"Booze, wasn't it?" Carey asked softly. He expected number 91 to turn on him then, but the man only nodded.

A moment Tom Cary stood thinking. Then, "Like your job?" he inquired. He was curious about this fellow who had been somebody.

"I love it!" Manuel Cabane threw his head back and stared out over the river at the great steel wall that gleamed over there, hiding its millions from view. "It provides an outlet for Cabane, an outlet for those feeling that smoulder here!" He thumped his chest. "I had too much money," he continued, "and was a great fool. Now that this wealth I did not know how to use has been taken from me, I shall become a new man. I shall return once more to the opera, and this time I shall have wisdom. This devil of a Terris is an angel in disguise. They are dying over there in the city, some of them, and they say he is killing them. If so, it is for the best. Iron Terris, they are calling him--the fools. He has restored the mind of Cabane, as well as of others." And then number 91 raised his voice in all its richness and power.

Power! Hand in hand with beauty and art. Regeneration.

part 8

Chapter VIII: Two Months Have Passed

"There's a thousand labor credits in it for you, Conrad."

"Yuh got the needle gun?"

"Yes--here." Peter McKay shoved the wicked little weapon over the table-top to the low-browed individual who faced him.

"Gimme the thousand."

"When you've finished the job."

"Nothin' doin'. Pay now, or there ain't no job." Con Burdig, once a mighty power in New York's fast dwindling underworld, was not taking any chances. These guys up top were crooks, especially those who lost a couple of million and had to work for a living.

"All right." McKay counted out the paper and handed it over. "There'll be no slips, Conrad?"

"Naw. I get 'em when I go after 'em, Mac." Burdig rose leering exultantly as he stuffed the credits in his pocket and patted the shiny pistol affectionately. "Don't worry about me not gettin' Terris," he grinned. "I'd kill the damn slave driver just to own this gun. I'd kill him for nothin' almost--he's busted my racket wide open, the lousy robber!"

Peter McKay mused grimly when the man had gone. Set a thief to catch a thief; that was the way to rid the country of this tyrant who had risen up overnight to tear down financial structures that had been centuries in the building and to set up a new structure of his own.

Lord, how he had put it over the rabble! And, strangely, on the great majority of his own kind. Fools! Why, there were some of them who'd never done a tap and whose top-level establishments numbered a hundred or more rooms, living in one room now, and working hard. Plugging away at trades; keeping late hours in night school—doing anything to curry favor with the Classification Bureau.

Not for Peter McKay. He had managed to scrape together a few thousand labor credits by sacrificing his air-yacht and the art objects he had collected for their value but secretly snickered over. Weird things of the past centuries and ugly, he thought them.

Nina, his companion, had gotten a severance decree and tied herself to that opera singer. Good riddance! She'd always been a poor sport anyway. Always wanting to do things that were not being done by the old clique; slumming in the sub-levels, and spending his money on a gang of bums who hung around the charity centers. The oily baritone was welcome to her!

No, he was too wise to fall for this Utopia stuff; he had his few thousand and was biding his time. With Terris out of the way, other lines he had laid could be picked up. What a bombshell he had planted! Terris, the hypocrite, was the wealthiest man in the world for all his smooth talk of equitable distribution. Well, those vast holdings would be redivided in accordance with the man's own laws after that energy needle had gotten in its work.

The schemer leaned back in his chair and a satisfied smile spread over his face as he puffed luxuriously on his cigar. He, Peter McKay, would become a power in the land after that. He was as clever as the next one, and he had friends; influence. His plans could not fail. Perhaps even, he might aspire to the position of Dictator and take to himself all of the things that great power brought. Power—and greed.

Attired in the serviceable khaki of a convict laborer, a heavy-set man worked perspiringly diligent with cloth and metal polish on the brass rail that enclosed the high tension switching mechanisms of globe 819. His flesh hung in loose folds about the chin, due to the loss of the obesity he once had carried. He whistled as he worked, and would permit his eyes to wander occasionally to the viewing port where the earth was visible as an enormous ball of mottled green filling the sky in its nearby majestic immensity. He sighed after each such lapse, and the cheerful whistle was stilled for a space.

One would not have recognized in this lowliest of workers the man who had been Arthur Mason but two months ago. Out here, a hundred miles from the surface, where the great sphere drifted under gravity control that kept it at a constant distance and angle over New York, things were vastly different. One did as he was told, and there was no shirking of duty nor talking back to superiors. But one lived; the food was the best synthetic product and was amply supplied. There was every convenience; crude and elemental, of course, where cosmetics and the luxuries of the bath were concerned, but one kept clean and comfortable, and surprisingly fit.

There had been much time in which to think, and Mason had done his share of thinking. It had brought him nowhere, it was true, but he found that he no longer thrilled to certain desires that had flamed in his spirit at first, nor was he as irked over the situation as he had been in the beginning. As a matter of fact, though he would not have admitted it, there was a satisfaction in the convict life aboard the huge transforming and radiating station of the Power Syndicate he had never before experienced. Since the first week or so, when there had been much trouble and a number of casualties in rioting of the prisoners, the life had been singularly peaceful and enlightening. Some of his fellow prisoners were mighty good company, and there

were hours of recreation and amusement; opportunities for study--all one could wish for but freedom.

Most of all he missed contact with the world. There was only one viphone on board and this was in the Chief Engineer's office, inaccessible to the prisoners. Posted bulletins were few and far between; their information meagre and carefully censored. But it was generally known that conditions were improving back home. Iron Terris was running things to suit himself and with a grip that never loosened. He was relentless and cold; a man who smashed down the old and built up the new. But it seemed that his dictatorship was meeting with growing approval.

An unusual excitement was in the conditioned air of the globe today, for a rocket ship was expected from home. Officers and engineers conversed in low tones not intended for the ears of the prisoners, but news had leaked out that globe 819 was to be relieved of its load by fifty percent and that some of the convicts would be released and returned. Speculation was rife as to who the lucky ones might be.

The call bell rang out, summoning the prisoners to the central assembly hall. Mason saw the blaze of gases as the rocket ship circled the globe, slowing down for a landing in their airlock. A flutter of anxiety came over him; it just might be that he would be one of the releases--if only he were, he'd get into things back home and use some sense about it. No reason he couldn't rate a fair classification and at least be able to get along.

Special engineers of the Power Syndicate came with their test apparatus, and a detail of the red police. They had a prisoner, a ferret-eyed, dapper youth who looked out at them and at his jailers with assumed jauntiness. They'd soon take that out of him here.

And then the warden was addressing them. He called a number--

108--Mason's. The trembling man stepped forward.

"You are hereby appointed trusty, 108," the warden was saying. "This prisoner, 243, is remanded to your care. Take him and see that he is bathed and uniformed."

Mason's heart sank as he led number 243 away. No release this time! But to be made a trusty; that was something. He straightened unconsciously and his chest swelled.

"What are you in for?" he asked, when the man was dressing after his shower.

"Felonious assault, they called it."

"You tried to kill someone?"

"Yeah--Terris!"

"The Dictator--good Lord!"

The new prisoner became voluble; almost it seemed he was glad to be here. "Queer fish, this Terris," he volunteered, "I coulda got him if I half tried. Had him covered with a needle gun and damn if he didn't talk me out of it. Made me lay down the gun--with those eyes of his. He's a tough guy, all right. Then told me there was a gang of cops watching. Showed me too. There was a dozen of 'em, spread around his apartment. Gets me why he didn't let 'em bump me off."

"Good Lord! Why did you want to kill him?"

"Guy by the name of McKay hired me."

"Peter McKay?"

"Yeah, that's him. Know what that nut done? I squealed when they got me up and that bum took cyanide when they come for him."

"No! McKay killed himself!"

"Sure. No guts; they never have any, these guys that used to be rich. No guts to face the music."

"Lord!" Arthur Mason was only able to stare at the youth, who so calmly told of his crime and so discerningly judged the man who had hired him for his dirty work.

Guts! That was what they had lacked, he and his fellows of the purple.

* * *

Food Company Square in level fifty faced its visitors with a new air of prosperity. Gone were the long lines of gray-clad mendicants who awaited the daily ration of the charity center. And gone were the thousands of loiterers and the little gathering knots where red-faced agitators had been wont to air their views. But a single guard of the red police was in sight.

Over in a corner of the vast enclosure a young man and a girl sat hand in hand on one of the benches. Dressed in the smartly tailored khaki worn now by everyone who was anyone, they were a handsome couple and obviously very much in love. That they were newly mated was evidenced no more by the slender bracelet of the legalized companion that encircled the girl's firm rounded arm than by the adoration with which the lad at her side regarded her.

"Happy, kid?" he might have been heard to ask.

"You bet."

"Not sorry--for anything?"

"I should say not. Mother was furious at first. She had the old-fashioned idea that every man who wore the purple ever in his life was a scoundrel and a deceiver of women. But she knows better now. I'm afraid she's a little in love with you herself."

The boy laughed and squeezed her arm. "Honestly?" he asked. "Was that the opinion down here--before? Were we painted as black as all that?"

"Blacker. Why, a girl of the gray who would associate with one of the purple was done for; thrown out of home and ostracized by her friends. She'd have to go bad after that, or become a servant."

"Gosh!" The boy was silent for a time. "Then I sure was in luck," he whispered then.

"Silly! I'm the lucky one."

More silence, broken only by the gentle throb of the city's life and the occasional swishing rush of a pneumatic tube car beneath their feet. An incongruous figure came into view, an uncommonly beautiful girl whose close-cropped golden hair attracted instant attention as did the rather shabby gray denim in which she had clothed her magnificent figure. She walked directly to the small platform alongside the now silent newscast station and mounted it with slow steps.

"Look!" said the man. "There's that girl again."

"Yes. She comes here every night at this time. Funny about her too, Fred. I heard she has a fine position in the Air Conditioning Service, classified high in science. She's a research engineer."

"I know it. Warren told me. And yet she dresses up in the old gray every evening and comes down here to try and get an audience who will listen to her ravings against Terris."

"Wonder why she's so rabid. She's better off than she ever was; and who cares whether he stole this energy idea of his? Fellow by the name of Destinn, isn't it, she says he robbed?"

"Yes. I never heard of him."

"Neither did I. Probably an assistant in the Research Bureau when Terris was chief. But, what's the diff? They always took the credit for inventions of their men in those days."

"Why not? Nobody recognized what a man was really worth then. It would be another matter now."

The slender figure on the platform stood there uncertainly as if waiting. Now and again the girl made as if to raise her voice, but each time thought better of it. There was no one to listen. The only ones within earshot were the young couple on the bench and they were too obviously engrossed in each other to pay attention if she spoke.

"It's odd the police never bother her," whispered the girl on the bench. "Even in the beginning, before the rioting was over, they let her talk as much as she pleased."

"Probably someone higher up is protecting her. She's harmless, anyway. What do you say, honey, we go home?"

"Let's do. I want to hear Cabane; he's on the vid tonight for the first time since his come-back."

Like two happy children they rose and scampered off along the path to the moving ways.

Norine Rosov stood proudly erect on the platform. With the running off of the young lovers went her last hope. What a fool she had been! Suddenly her cheeks flared an angry red.

Alone and unheeded she had fought for Gail. Battling a power that was impregnable and invincible. And to what end? Nothing she could do or that anyone else could do would make Gail happier, and no power on earth was able to do more for him than was being done.

That much she conceded to Scott Terris; he had kept his word with regard to the care of the helpless man who had discovered the energy center. But the fame and the power were Scott's, while Gail lay there unheralded and unknown. It wasn't fair!

She had kept things from the sick man on her frequent visits; told him only that which she thought would not upset him. She'd go--now--and tell him everything; how Terris had robbed him... how...

Swift feet and a turmoil of emotions carried her on the way to the secret lift.

part 9

Chapter IX: Changeover

On the seventy-fifth day following the President's message the new energy projectors of the Power Syndicate were pronounced ready for the change-over from cosmic ray power. Twelve steel towers with their titanic energy charges surrounded each of the eight great cities, ready to radiate power that would replace that of the twelve hundred globes out there in the stratosphere.

The entire cost of the project was scarcely greater than that of one of the huge globes, and, there being no necessity for attendance at the projectors, one hundred and twenty thousand men and women were to be released from their duties aloft to more pleasant tasks at home. Electric power, the most essential of all the requirements of modern civilization, was to be produced henceforth for less than five per cent of its former cost. Due to the savings effected in reorganization of the industry, the cost to the consumer was to be reduced in still greater proportion.

And the vast investment in the globes was not to be wasted, for they were to be returned to earth and their materials and machinery used in the construction of the ninth city already being planned to relieve congestion, which, even with the subdividing of the large apartments of the former wearers of the purple, was acute.

A new era was about to be ushered into being and Scott Terris was at the main control switchboard in Washington in person. His hand was to throw the lever that would set into motion the automatic switches and relays which would provide for the progressive withdrawing of the secondary screens that surrounded the new energy centers. And with him were the President, the members of

the new Cabinet, and many prominent personages of the new regime. It was a momentous occasion.

At the main control panel of the vast system of receiving screens that spread over the roof surface of New York in a network of gleaming metallic filaments, sat Ralph Warren, chief of the Science Research Bureau. Members of his staff and heads of the several departments of the city administration were grouped around him before the disc of the visiphone where was pictured the scene in Washington.

"Terris looks tired," whispered Warner Merkel, who stood at his elbow. "The job is telling on him."

"It isn't the job, Merks," Warren returned gravely. "Something else is eating him. He's been up to some secret experimenting with a new air yacht he had constructed. Been coming over to New York every night and hiding himself in his hanger on the west roof stage; working all night sometimes. And he's been asking me for the craziest things. He has installed a small energy projector on the ship, I am certain, and a lot of experimental apparatus. Something has gone wrong there quite recently and he's been uncommunicative as the devil."

"Hm-m." Chief Merkel had some ideas of his own on the subject but dared not voice them. He thought he knew more about what was wrong with Iron Terris than did Warren, but he wasn't certain at all. Some hidden weakness of the Dictator would crop out sooner or later, perhaps. It hadn't been evidenced as yet, that was sure.

"Look!" Warren exclaimed. "He has thrown the switch." All eyes turned to the huge panel, when one hundred fifty small indicating lamps glowed brightly, each showing that one of New York's power supply globes was in operation.

A group of lamps dimmed slowly and flickered out. The master

wattmeter showed no change in the total city load. But more than ten million kilowatts had been transferred from the old supply source to the new. They saw Terris smile as the frequency meter showed not a flicker of variation.

All over the country the same thing was happening; without a hitch or a single interruption of the flow of power the great change-over went forward. Within the hour more than two billion kilowatts, roughly three billion horsepower, would have been transferred to the new system.

"817, 818, 819, 820," an assistant intoned as others of the lamps flickered out on the New York panel.

"Arthur Mason is on globe 819," Merkel remarked. "I got his release order from Washington only this morning."

"Is he classified?" young Warren asked, his eyes glued to the face of the master wattmeter.

"No, but there have been good reports on him from out there. He is to report personally to Terris."

Ralph Warren whistled. "That's unusual, isn't it, Merks?"

"First time it's happened."

There was silence then in the control room, save for the clicking of relays and the calling off of globe numbers by the assistant.

"Say!" Merkel hissed, as the thought struck him. "I wonder what's become of Matt Crawford. There hasn't been a word about him since he left. And Matt wasn't one to give up without a struggle."

Warren stared. That was an idea. He'd like to mention it to Terris

when next he saw him. But he'd not dare; no one dared approach him these days--on a subject like that.

Later that same day, Iron Terris made his first appearance before the public, speaking briefly over the newscast system. And, all over the land, the people in their homes and at their tasks, in the public squares and ways, turned eyes and ears to the visiphone. Not one who had reached the age of reason would have missed the event; they waited with bated breath for the stern lips to open.

When he spoke it was with a smile, and it was afterwards said by many that the smile came as a benediction, by others that it was a satiric and sneering thing which belied the worded intent of the speech. But all were in agreement as to the greatness of the man. In more than two centuries, the students of history said, there had not been a greater in American public life and politics.

They had not expected him to speak as he did, simply and humbly in his sincerity, yet with a hint of the inward strength which had given him the mighty power he wielded.

"Citizens," he had said, "I come before you to tell you of what is unquestionably the greatest accomplishment of modern times. We have succeeded in harnessing some of the energy of the atom to turn the wheels of industry, to light our cities and purify the water we drink and the air we breathe. Many changes have preceded the accomplishment between the time of its inception and of its completion; more will follow. And you will agree, I am sure, that the trend of these changes has been and is toward the greatest betterment of the lives of the greatest number of our people. This new power, which will come to you plentifully and cheaply, is the thing which has brought about all of these changes, and it is a thing for which we are indebted to a man of whom little or nothing is known. The man of whom I speak discovered the basic principle that has

been used in the development, and in his efforts was so unfortunate as to meet with an accident which has made of him a life-long invalid--helpless and uncomplaining.

"This man's name is Gail Destinn. Probably not a hundred of you are living today know who this man is, or care. Nevertheless, he is our greatest benefactor and we are honoring him by christening the new energy with his name. No longer will you hear of the Power Syndicate, but of Destinn Power, as the cooperative organization which has risen from the ashes of the old syndicate will be known by that name in the future. In addition to this, the Department of Finance had today conferred upon the inventor a life income of ten thousand credits a month. My only wish otherwise in furtherance of his welfare is that his lost health might be restored, so that he might take over the position now held by me as head of the great industry that will bear his name.

"That wish being impossible of fulfillment, I must carry on in the work. However--and I leave you with this thought--Gail Destinn must receive his full measure of reward, either in this world or elsewhere. Many of us in these days give little thought to the personal Deity whose name we take in vain, or to the after life that was so real an expectation to our remote ancestors. But, as surely as I stand here facing you, there is a Higher Power we do not understand and can never hope to approach. Whatever that Power is, it is something that takes the souls of men and lifts them to the heights or lets go and allows them to fall to the depths. And, it is to such a Power that I ask you to send prayers for the soul of Gail Destinn. Farewell, citizens, and may you prosper and gain happiness in the new order of things."

That was all, yet it left the hearers prey to emotions they had not experienced in their lifetimes--and uncertainties that confused them and left them to wonder as to the manner of man who had spoken.

When darkness had come to the east coast cities, Scott Terris arrived in New York on one of the fast intercity liners. Several of the "800" globes already had drifted in from the positions they had maintained in the stratosphere for periods of time up to a half century. They lay, great dark mounds over against the skyline in the forests on the Jersey side, their outlines vast blurs in the hazy night and the many lighted ports gleaming tiny blue-white dots in the gloom.

But Scott gave little thought to the unusual beauty of the sight, nor heeded the spell of the night. His mind was too filled, and his heart, with memories of that moment of tempestuous passion when Norine Rosov had melted into his embrace as if she belonged there and would forever remain. The lawful companion of another man, yet belonging to him in that swift yielding as surely as was he certain that the flame had burned itself out in that one mad instant of hers and left her despising him and herself for the lapse.

He had power that would enable him to take anything save the one thing he wanted most of all. He had ridden roughshod and unfeeling over others who had stood in his way, but to do the one thing that might enable him to take her was impossible--unthinkable.

Possessed of the opportunity to make happiness possible for others, he was utterly helpless to provide it for himself.

But he would visit Destinn this very night; advise him in person of the success of the new energy and of the recognition he had been given. That much he could do for the poor devil, at least. He had not seen him in weeks and rather looked forward to the meeting, hoping yet fearing he might find Norine at the bedside. The sight of the girl, hating him as she did, would bring intense pain, but there would be pleasure in that pain... the chance to drink in her unattainable

loveliness and to think... of what might have been...

Wilson beamed when he admitted him to the apartment that now was maintained solely for the comfort of Gail Destinn. The old fellow had become the proudest servitor of the upper level since his master came to be so eminent a personage.

"H'lo Wilson," Scott greeted him brusquely. "How's the patient?"

The old man's face fell. "Not so well, sir, I fear," he said.

"What! Why, Mowry has been reporting satisfactory progress."

"Yes sir, begging your pardon, sir," Wilson quavered. "But Miss Norine was here about two weeks ago and it seems she excited him unduly. He has been sinking ever since, the nurse tells me."

"Norine has not seen him in two weeks?"

"No sir. And it's odd, sir; she came frequently before."

"I know." Scott was filled with strange foreboding; come to think of it, he had had no reports from his agents on the girl in about that length of time. He stepped into the sickroom.

Gail lay there immobile and with eyes closed as when he had last seen him. Almost one would have thought that life had left the stricken body, so white was the man and so utterly inert.

The nurse warned him with a quick gesture. "He's sleeping, Mr. Terris," she said, "and must not be awakened. The least excitement would be certain to cause his death."

Scott looked down at the man whose once virile features were so pinched and still. Certainly his life hung by a thread. What if he were

to awaken him and shout out his love for Norine? The nurse had said that any excitement.... And with the power that now was his no man would be the wiser... she could be silenced--the nurse... and there would be Norine. He'd take her, whether or no.

Great beads of cold perspiration stood out on his brow as the battle raged furiously within. The man was completely in his power--and the girl who had been his mate. So simple, the thing would be. He groaned in agony of spirit and breathed a silent plea for strength to that Power he had spoken of in the afternoon.

Turning then with sudden decision he beckoned the nurse into the corridor. "What's all this?" he hissed. "Tell me what's wrong." He trembled as with the ague from the stress of emotion that had torn him. But he had himself under control; his senses had returned.

The nurse paled. "It is not for me to say, sir," she whispered nervously.

"You know?" he snapped, eyeing her keenly.

"Y-yes, but I dare not tell. Please don't ask me to, sir."

"I command it!" Afraid of her job, just as in the old days, he realized. These damned ethics of the medical profession, how they did hold on in spite of everything.

"You--you'll protect me with the registrar?"

"Of course," impatiently. "Out with it, nurse."

"It--it's Doctor Mowry. Oh, I shouldn't be telling you, but he is not all that he has been considered. In fact, he's been derated by the Medical Classification Board. And, his treatment has been all wrong. Oh, it's terrible, Mr. Terris--Destinn is dying, when he might well have

been saved." The woman wrung her hands in agitation.

What was this? The great Mowry not what he had been cracked up to be! And here Scott had thought Gail was getting the best there was in attention, when actually he was being neglected. The devil take Mowry! Perhaps wrong in his first diagnosis; poor old Destinn might have been made well and strong--in proper hands.

He rushed to the library and bellowed hoarsely into the visiphone for the wave channel of the Medical Center. Doctor Travis and young Bedworth--the best there were--he'd have them all in consultation. Right here, in his own apartment, without delay!

A half hour later he hunched nerveless in his chair from the reaction. Yes, Travis would operate. It was a delicate adjustment, but there was every chance that Destinn would be restored to normal health and strength. A miracle, almost!

And to think he had been on the point of causing Gail's death! To have considered it even for a moment was horrible--horrible.

Scott shuddered.

part 10

Chapter X: Ultimatum

The visiphone broke in on his thoughts with its shrill clamor. It was Warner Merkel. What could he be wanting at this hour?

"Sorry to bother you," the Police Chief apologized, "but you asked me to notify you immediately when Arthur Mason reported with his release. Mason is here, Mr. Terris."

Might as well see Mason at once. It would be something to occupy his mind while he awaited the report from Travis on the operation.

"Good," he returned. "Bring him right over, Merkel."

Excellent reports he had had on Mason. Most surprising of any of the cases of individual adaptation to extreme reverses which had come to his attention. A model prisoner, he had applied himself to his duties and to self-imposed studies with the enthusiasm of a schoolboy. Worked himself to the position of trusty; then covered himself with glory by saving the warden's life from that same young maniac whom McKay had hired to assassinate Scott. Actually broke the fellow's neck with his hands when he dragged him from the strangle hold he had on the warden. Stout fellow, Mason! He'd have to do something for him; perhaps he might give him a little the better in classification by attending to it personally.

Thirty pounds lighter and looking fifteen years younger, Arthur Mason came to him as a distinct surprise even when he fully considered his record. It was an astounding transformation.

"Any hard feelings, Mason?" he asked, when Merkel brought him in.

"None." The man faced him with sparkling eyes. "I have only thanks to give you, Terris, for what this thing has done for me and mine--and for millions of others."

"Your son, too?"

"Surest thing, you know. Fred wasn't worth a whoop in the job I wangled out of you for him in the Research Bureau. They classified him in the mechanical controls and he's making good; a foreman already. And, would you believe it, he has mated up with a wonderful girl and settled down. A little black-eyed thing who thinks he's a god and is as clever and pretty as she can be. They met me at headquarters when I came in. Imagine this, Terris; her father was a worthless scamp, one of those who never would work and always yelled his head off about conditions. A professional dissenter. Got mauled fierce in the early uprisings and finally went to work in the pneumatic tube service--best he could do. But the girl worked herself up out of it to the same sort of job Fred's first classification set him at. She came up and he down--to meet. And now they're working up together."

This was the sort of thing that renewed Scott's belief in the thing he had done. Sometimes he was aghast at the bloodshed and the privation of those first mad days, but a case like this brought new faith and a warm glow of satisfaction.

"That's great, Mason," he grinned. "And now, how about yourself? Where would you like to be classified?"

The man drew himself up proudly. "I'm willing to take my chances with the others," he averred. "Whatever classification the Board sees fit to give me is the one I want. And I'll make good, Terris."

Merkel smiled broadly and winked at Scott. Here was something

with which to silence the objectors, and a man who could do it, if given the chance.

"We'll see, Arthur, we'll see," Scott said absently. The call of the visiphone had rung out and he reached quickly for the lever. Must be Travis, to tell him of Gail's chances.

But the face that appeared in the disc was not the doctor's. It came as a shock, that countenance imaged there a distorted and fear-ridden thing. Carpenter, President Owens' private secretary, it was.

"You!" Scott gasped. "Speak up, man, what is it?"

"The President, Mr. Terris! He's been killed, and the executive chambers are in ruins. Bombs, sir, from the air."

A brilliant flash then and a deafening roar as Carpenter's agonized face was blasted from the disc. The visiphone went dead.

* * *

"I knew it!" Scott shouted. "Bound to happen, sooner or later. Get me some volunteers, Merkel--quick! Crew for my yacht." He was half out of his robe and reaching for his khaki coat in quick energy.

"Right!" Chief Merkel put in an emergency call for headquarters. "But, Terris, good Lord! This is impossible--what the devil is it?"

"Crawford, as sure as you were born. My men lost track of him two months ago in Cannes. I've been suspicious ever since. But I hardly expected it this soon."

"But he had little means. What could he do?"

"Pirates, man. Plenty of them in the mountain fastnesses of Asia.

Don't you see? He promised them the privilege of looting our cities if they'd help him take his old place here. Hell, it's as plain as day to me--but the President! I hadn't counted on that... somehow."

Merkel was speaking rapidly to his local captain, who nodded in quick understanding. "Need a pilot?" he asked, turning to Scott.

"Yes. I'll have other duties," grimly. "A good one, Merks, and three engineers."

"I can pilot your yacht," Mason broke in eagerly.

"You!" Scott saw he was white with excitement.

"Sure, I had my own license as a private owner. And, Terris, I hate to think of Matt getting away with this."

"Good stuff! Let's go."

"Only the engineers, then?" Merkel asked, holding his connection.

"Yes. Have 'em on the west landing stage, midtown, in fifteen minutes," Terris flung back from the doorway.

And then he was gone, Mason following on his heels. Warner Merkel stared after them, thinking of his conversation with Ralph Warren that afternoon. It all fitted in to perfection--excepting the girl of the lower levels. The weakness of Iron Terris had not yet come to light; perhaps it never would.

The calamitous tidings were already on the newscasts when the two reached the pneumatic tube and were whirled rapidly downtown. Every tongue babbled of the incredible thing Crawford had done. Aligned himself with the cutthroats of the Himalayas, he had; bringing them to prey upon the defenseless cities of America. And murdered

Owens in his bed first thing. Destroyed three of the new energy towers, leaving Washington short of power; then shot skyward in the pirate vessel and calmly cut in on the visiphone system, laying down the law to the people of United North America.

Mason turned meaning eyes to Scott as a girl in the aisle of the car repeated the story of the ultimatum issued by Crawford. Good thing the Dictator was unrecognized by his fellow-passengers. There would have been a delay--possibly worse.

Crawford demanded that Terris be given up to him as the price of immunity from further attacks, the girl said. He was giving to the American people exactly one hour in which to comply with his demand and was awaiting official visiphone reply. Failing in this, they were to be subjected to a murderous bombardment of all eastern cities. The destruction of the new energy towers would leave them in utter darkness and without means of transportation while the slaughter went on. He was certain, however, that the American people were far too intelligent to refuse his demand. He fully expected them to have this tyrant Terris under guard on the roof surface of Washington well within the prescribed time. And he, Crawford, would then return to the position from which he had been ousted and they, the people, would benefit by his restoration of conditions to their former desirable state.

"Nice program," Scott muttered, "for him. If he were able to carry it out."

But the crowded car was in an uproar when they alighted at the station beneath the midtown stage. Opinion was divided and feelings ran high. Where was Terris, anyway? He would be able to do something. Wasn't it better to give him up and return to the old ways than be murdered in their beds and in darkness? Mighty tough though to give up what some of them had gained. Terris was a

wizard; he had the right idea of the way to run things. But he was a hard master. Enriched himself, too, while he was about this reorganization of the country. Vehemently, the lie was given to that last remark and a fight had started when the car doors were opened.

They were out then, on the great stage, he and Mason. Scott ran swiftly to where the slim tapered cylinder which was his yacht rested in its cradle.

"I'll see him in an hour, all right," he grated, jerking open the steel door, "But he'll not see me, Arthur. Give him a chance to let loose those devils in our cities, and to upset the work of the past eleven weeks? I guess not!"

"You have weapons?" Mason inquired, when they were in the control room. "Weapons of sufficient power?"

"And then some. Look here!"

Scott uncovered a gleaming cylinder that poked its nose through the vessel's bow after the fashion of one of the ancient needle guns of the largest calibre.

The engineers trooped in then, interrupting, and Scott directed them aft. Immediately the rising whine of the main motors apprised him of their activity in the engine room. Destinn Power, radiated to the sky lanes for regular traffic requirements, was being converted to their own uses aboard. In a moment the anit-gravity force lightened the vessel and she rocked gently as she drifted from her berth. Mason grinned delightedly as he turned her nose skyward.

* * *

The metamorphosed financier proved himself an excellent pilot and a cheerful shipmate. He pushed the vessel to her utmost in following

the radio beacon lane to Washington, while Scott busied himself with the ray projector he had developed during his mysterious visits to New York. The reaction tubes astern throbbed steadily under the continuous emission of their repelling rays.

"How does that weapon work?" Mason asked.

"It's the most amazing thing, Arthur, and I discovered it quite by accident. Curiously, it utilizes the new energy, though the radiations have no power in themselves of destroying matter at any distance. The frequency is too great, and must be converted before we can even use it for power. But I stumbled on a principle that derives from it a most destructive force. It's simple, too. An energy center is at work in the tube, and its radiations are projected along a carrier beam that is of ultra-violet frequency and so adjusted as to heterodyne the Destinn wave. A harmonic of the resulting heat frequency is in the infra-red range at the most intense peak, and we thus have the heat ray; a tremendous blast that will fuse the hardest metals instantly."

"Oh, I see." Arthur Mason laughed. "For all the camouflage of big words," he said, "I take it the thing is a heat ray. That ought to be enough for me to absorb at one sitting."

"There'll be plenty for the fellow at the business end of the ray to absorb, you can bet." Scott opened the breech of the weapon and withdrew the secondary screen from a fully developed energy center, slamming the block home vigorously to confine it.

He saw Mason pale at the sight of the weirdly roaring thing whose emanations set every metallic object in the control room in shrieking vibration in the brief instant of exposure. But his hands were as steady at their tasks as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred.

Scott marveled anew at the change in the man, and at his composure in the face of the thing they had set out to do.

"You realize what this trip means, don't you, Mason?" he said, after regarding him for a moment. "You know we are going out to kill your old buddy--unless he should get us first."

"Sure, I know." Mason stared out through the forward port into the blackness. "It doesn't bother me, either, Scott. Strange thing about it is that I've practically no feeling in the matter personally. I used to eat out of his hand--before. Thought he was my best friend and I his. But something has come over me to change all that; it is as if he were a total stranger, an enemy. He is an enemy, Scott--the worst the country has ever had. And if he gets us before we get him (which he won't) it will be an unthinkable disaster. Not for ourselves; we'd be out of it, but think what would happen down there. We've got to get him, Terris."

"Glad you feel that way."

From the tone of Mason's voice and the glitter in his eye, Scott knew well that he had a pilot in whom he could trust.

part 11

Chapter XI: Nemesis

"It beats me how he got them to come over here, at that," Mason remarked, when they were within a few miles of their goal.

"Yes, though undoubtedly he promised them the world with a fence around it. And fuel for their return. They'll be heavily armed, too. These pirates have been the terror of the sky lanes over there ever since the war and have taken billions in loot from the trade vessels. Thousands of lives have been lost in the many attempts to wipe out their strongholds. Their ships, you know, are converted cruisers of 2212 and they have plenty of the old armament."

"Yes. Pity our cities haven't some sort of protection."

"Oh, it was never necessary over here. The disarmament league would have allowed us such defenses as they did overseas, if we needed them. But, depending on rocket propulsion as they must, none of these pirate ships would dare make the crossing with no hope of refueling; that's why we've always been safe. But with Crawford promising them a free hand, it's different."

"Promises he couldn't keep if they did succeed," Mason grunted. "The people would never give you up to him, and, even without this ship you've armed, we would drive them out eventually."

"Eventually is right. They'd smear several of our cities over the map in the meantime, though. We mustn't let them do it, Arthur."

Lightning flashes ahead revealed suddenly a bank of low-flung storm clouds and the wind-whipped waters of the Potomac below. Mason

turned the vessel's nose sharply upward. "We won't let 'em, Scott," he grated. "You do the shooting and I'll run circles around 'em with this ship." He signalled the engine room for full speed ahead.

Scott glanced at the chronometer. It lacked but seven minutes of Crawford's hour. He cut the visiphone in on the open wave band.

The storm raged furiously beneath them as they climbed higher, and the yacht bumped heavily in air-pockets created by the disturbance below. It was a wild night Crawford had chosen for the attack.

Five minutes! Scott pressed the release of the heat ray to try out his weapon. The projector tube sang spitefully clamorous and he saw the swift stabbing pencil of green that marked the path of the ray out there in the night. A harmonic in that portion of the spectrum made the beam visible. Satisfied, he peered through the gloom in the direction of the capital city.

And then the visiphone spoke. No image was pictured in the disc but a familiar voice snarled from the sound mechanism. Crawford! He was using only the voice transmitter on the pirate ship.

* * *

"Three minutes left!" the voice snarled. "Only three minutes in which to save yourselves. I am directly above the northeast landing stage, awaiting the appearance of the upstart Terris. If he's not there on the minute, I keep my word."

"He's down there already," Scott shouted. "Hop to it, Arthur!"

The altimeter showed twelve thousand feet, and the light spot on the chart indicated their position as directly over the city. But the tossing storm clouds hid its vast area from view. There was nothing for it but to make the dive and have it out with the pirate vessel in the midst of

the tempest.

"Right-o," Mason sang out cheerily. And he put down the nose of the little ship in a power dive that carried them earthward at terrific speed.

They were in the thick of it then, flying utterly blind, the yacht buffeted and tossed so violently that the great motors aft groaned in lurching waves of sound from the gyroscopic effect. A tremendous flash lighted the control room in a glare that left them blinking and sightless as the very universe crashed in a maelstrom of ear-splitting sound. It was as if they were caught helpless in the very maw of a titanic disrupting force that caved in the sides of the vessel upon them and drove their breath from their lungs in explosive blasts. The air in the control room was charged to such intensity that miniature repetitions of the lightning flash chased from deck to deck and died sputtering in the steel framework of the hull.

And then they were through; the great roof surface of the capital city lay beneath them, the edges of its towering cliffs and the landing stages lighted with the neon glow that marked them for the ships of the air. Hovering over there above the northeast stage was a huge bellied monster with a multitude of topside ports brightly lighted. It was the pirate vessel, as large as one of the transoceanic trade ships, and capable of carrying no less than three thousand fighters.

Mason pulled the little yacht out of the dive with consummate skill, his eyes popping and the veins in his temples swelled to bursting with the effort it cost him. They skimmed the roof surface and zoomed up once more in the pelting rain to get the advantage of altitude.

They had not been observed and Mason nosed the ship down to give Scott the opportunity of getting the pirate vessel on his sights.

Crawford's voice snarled once more in the visiphone. "Time's up!" it announced.

On the second word a vast explosion tore away the great landing stage underneath and left a gaping opening that extended down through at least five of the upper levels. Huge girders and twisted sections of steel plate crashed down again to add to the destruction, and Scott had a momentary glimpse of bodies, ant-like and still, huddled in grotesque piles where the sun-glow of the interior filtered through the wreckage.

He pressed the release of the ray and a furrow of dazzling white cut across the stern of the pirate ship. Huge blobs of molten steel sloughed away and fell sputtering to the roof surface, which sagged and caved in under the incandescent masses.

"Hey!" Scott yelled, "this won't do. We'll have to get 'em out from over the city or we'll do as much damage down there as to them."

His words were drowned out by a terrific thunderclap that came simultaneously with a lightning flash which struck the roof and spread weblike over the surface in tiny rivulets of light that died out as they were grounded in the steel structure.

The pirate vessel lurched heavily from the sudden loss of weight astern. She canted nose down, then leveled off and sped across the city to drop a second bomb.

"Probably mistook your first shot for lightning," Mason gloated. "They haven't sighted us."

"Looks that way. But how the devil will we get them out in the open?" Scott's finger tensed on the trigger of his projector, yet he dared not pull it again. The weight of that enormous vessel crashing below

would take a more terrible toll than a dozen of their bombs.

And then the pirate ship turned sharply upward and hurtled off into the night. A sustained lightning flash revealed her dark bulk speeding off over the river where a second large ship drifted lazily toward the city.

"Good Lord!" Mason gasped. "The night liner from Moscow. They'll get her sure."

Quick as a flash he was after them, and Scott sent forth the heat ray in repeated spurts that showed dazzling and dripping punctures of the pirate's hull where they contacted. But he had not reached a vital spot, for the ship of death sped on toward the ill-fated liner. Her nose spouted fire, again and again, and swift-flying light-pencils darted forth to bury themselves in the curving bow of the unarmed and unprotected vessel.

"What needle guns!" Scott groaned. "Must be three inch tubes, at least. They're done for, poor devils."

The bow of the liner mushroomed in brilliant pyrotechnics now, lighting the scene with the intensity of a huge magnesium flare. A moment the great hulk hesitated, staggering, then commenced her swift wabbling dive to the river. Disintegrating before their eyes, her interior a roaring furnace, she spewed forth her passengers and crew in masses of struggling and screaming humans who hurled themselves to their death in the dark waters a half mile below rather than face the more horrible destruction of the searing energy.

Cursing, Mason drove in toward the pirate, and the heat ray traced a wandering, deep-boring pattern on her side as Scott searched for her vitals.

A flashing shape rose up from the plunging liner, darting straight for the nose of the pirate.

"The captain's yacht!" Scott exclaimed. "Can he be armed?" He withheld his fire as the slim shape whizzed across his sights.

"Armed? It isn't permitted," Mason grunted sarcastically. "Watch him, Scott! What in the--"

There were flashes of the pirate's big needle guns, but that tiny flitting yacht drove in unmindful of their thunderous crackling. One of the energy needles, driving down from above, carried away a section of the hull amidships and the gnat-like attacker reeled drunkenly from its course. But, doggedly persistent in his mad purpose, the captain wrenched his little vessel into the line of fire once more and flung it headlong at his monstrous enemy.

Driven nose on at full speed, the slender steel yacht buried half its length in the control room of the pirate, smashing observation ports and tearing hull plates in the magnificent attempt of the captain to wreak some measure of vengeance for the thing that had been done.

"There's a man!" Scott yelled. "Killed himself trying to cripple them. Probably did it, too."

"No--look! They're under control." Mason swung the yacht over and into a swift spiral as the pirate turned with suddenly flaring searchlights.

In the dark waters below, the liner was settling to her last berth, a plunging mutilated monster that vanished in the steaming geyser which rose to mark the spot. And, above them in the wreckage of the tiny whip which clung welded to the pirate, her captain lay a formless

pulp, his gallant life crushed out in that vain attempt to get at the murderers of those who had trusted their lives to him.

A roaring light-pencil flashed by and Mason was flung forward as the vessel careened violently into the air-pocket that followed in its wake. But he clung to the controls and brought the ship over in a loop to swing in toward the monster once more.

"Not too close," Scott warned him. "I'm trying for the magazine."

The pirate had located them now and was maneuvering to get them in range of her needle guns. As if in shame before the demonstration of man-made power and ferocity below, the storm was scudding off before the wind. The lightning flashes at the horizon seemed but weak imitation of the stabbing flares that spurred from the great ship where Matt Crawford was making his last stand.

But Mason was quick as thought at the controls and the little ship fluttered and dodged in the storm of energy like a thing alive. Clinging to the projector pedestal, Scott kept his finger on the ray release as he bored relentlessly into the pirate.

A huge splash of molten metal came slithering down from the belly of the big ship and washed across the ports before his eyes, sending glass splinters flying, as the windows burst in under the intense heat. A river of the stuff washed in and spattered, the odor of scorched flesh rising in the suddenly stifling air of the control room as both Mason and he were seared.

But ever the green ray bored deeper into the vast circling bulk above them, and Arthur Mason maneuvered the little ship like a veteran dog-fighter of the old days.

Scott yelled as a shining cylinder dropped from a knob-like

protuberance on the under-side of the pirate vessel. Mason saw it in the same instant and yanked the yacht out from underneath as the bomb screamed past to burst in the river far beneath them and send a flaming waterspout reaching skyward.

But the green ray was bright on that protuberance now and Scott twisted rapidly at the sighting controls as he strove to hold it there. The knob glowed swiftly white and there came an explosion that lifted the great vessel like a toy and sent forth an eruption of liquid fire and hurtling wreckage that battered them down in its iron hail.

The universe was ablaze in a frightful blast that hammered at their eardrums like the crack of doom. A terrific jolt sent them reeling and clinging to the stanchions for support.

"We're hit, Scott!" Mason gasped. "Two of the motors are dead."

He was tugging at the controls then, pulling up the nose to gain altitude. The little vessel responded feebly with one third of normal power, groaning and shuddering as she climbed slowly to where the pirate hovered foundering. The great searchlights had flickered out and the needle guns ceased firing; the pirate, suddenly without power and with her midsection blown away, was poised for her last dive.

Scott switched on their own lights and they circled to the nose of the stricken vessel. Under the intense glare they could see a mass of men that huddled in the battered control room as the big ship went down by the stern.

"See if Crawford is there!" Mason hissed, following them down.

They drifted in closer until their ports were but a few feet from where those panic-stricken yellow devils crawled around and fought and

scrambled to climb through to the outer surface of the hull in the forlorn hope that they might swim away from the wreck when she hit the water.

His finger tensed on the ray release, Scott looked for Crawford. Faster and faster the big ship slipped down into the blackness. Some of those who had crawled out followed the example of the victims on the liner and cast themselves from the doomed ship. Others clung to the projecting girders and flapping sections of the torn hull, fighting off those of their fellows who coveted the points of vantage.

And then Scott saw Crawford; terrified, trembling, and with great beads of perspiration glistening on his forehead, the man stared directly at him. Seeing Terris, he fell to his knees and stretched forth his hands with palms outspread as if to ward off the ray he expected would come. But that avenging beam of green light was not forthcoming; Scott could not find it within himself to press the trigger.

Suddenly the black waters were very near and Mason leveled off to turn upward. But not before they had seen an evil yellow face that grinned horribly as it was pressed close to Crawford's. The flash of a small needle gun, and a flare within the wreck that was quenched in bright bubbles as the waters closed in over all and it was over.

part 12

Chapter XII: Revelation

In solemn ceremony Washington buried its dead while the whole world buzzed of this battle in the clouds and of the triumph of Iron Terris. That Arthur Mason had piloted the tiny ship, whose mysterious ray had shot the pirate down, was a nine-day wonder. And in many sections of Asia and Central Europe officialdom breathed easier in the knowledge that the most dangerous of the several pirate bands had been exterminated. Perhaps even they might expect aid from America's Dictator in making a similar end to those who still infested the mountains.

Vice-President Peterson had taken the oath of office and now was recognized as President. His succession to the title in replacement of the murdered Owens was hailed with scarcely a flutter of excitement, for the world knew that Iron Terris remained at the helm and in that knowledge was serenely confident of what the immediate future held. Terris was a young man--not yet thirty-five--and many years of his firm and sagacious guidance might be expected to work miracles for United North America and the world at large.

But Scott would have none of the adulation they tried to force upon him, for well he remembered those first frenzied weeks so short a while back, when, in open rebellion and in secret plittings, in rioting mobs and in the more sinister attempts of the would-be assassins, they had worked against him. And only too well did he know that his power over them would wane with the first sign of softening or relaxation of his iron grip. He was worn and tired and most gladly would have welcomed a release and rest, but, knowing that he must carry on in order to prevent a return to the old ways, he held himself sternly aloof and unapproachable, a mysteriously inflexible

personage that was the more strongly entrenched in the popular fancy.

Confidential advice had come to him from the Medical Center in New York that Gail Destinn was fully restored to his normal capabilities by the operation Travis had performed, and was now recuperating in Scott's own apartments. Forgetting all else, he hastened to the great city which sprawled in its steel-cased irregularity of outline along the Hudson River.

For some reason he could not have explained, he had kept Arthur Mason with him. There was a quality in the man's new character he could not define; a quality that adapted him to some particular niche where he would be most valuable to society. He had not been able to determine the location of that niche as yet and was waiting for the inspiration that would come sooner or later. Together, they made the trip on one of the fast intercity liners.

* * *

Gail Destinn rose from his wheel-chair with alacrity when they were admitted to the sick room. He was thin and somewhat pale as yet, but the sparkle had returned to his eyes with the ability to use his body once more. The nurse, radiantly respectful, bowed herself from the room.

"Terris," Gail said, "this is a strange reunion--for me. In the past few days I have learned the news. All of it, I think. And I don't know what to say to you; how to express my gratitude."

"There's nothing to say, Destinn," Scott returned gruffly.

"Oh, yes there is--plenty. But I can't say it properly, except this: what you've done for the country speaks for itself; what you've done for me

is a debt I may never repay. And the thing you accomplished with my discovery is a miracle far beyond the wildest dreams I entertained. No one but yourself could have put the thing across--I see it now. With my lack of prestige and influence, I was helpless. And the plans of the Council of Five would have gone for naught, even had they succeeded. Only in the way it was done and by the man who did it, could things have turned out as they have. I'm amazed, and--and humble, Terris. I--I--"

"That's enough, Gail. You're lying like a gentleman and entirely forgetting your part in the matter; the hard work and the vision in the research which made the whole thing possible." Scott gripped his hand in sudden appreciation of the friendship that showed there in the fine eyes under that flaming thatch. He needed friends now, friends who would stick close and who would understand. "And you'll be able to take over your new duties when?" he asked.

"You mean at the head of the Power Syndicate? I listened to the recordings of your speech, Terris. I--I can't do it. It's too big a thing."

"Nonsense! You can do anything you set out to do. And this job is yours, Gail; you are the one man for it. Not as head of the Power Syndicate--forget that old designation--but of Destinn Power."

Gail Destinn looked long and earnestly at the man they called Iron Terris. Perhaps what he said was true; perhaps he could hold down the responsible position at the head of the reorganized industry that bore his own name. One felt impelled to almost any impossible task and to its accomplishment by the determined look of that lean jaw and by the knowledge of the powerful backing his approval and support provided.

"Where's Norine?" Scott asked irrelevantly.

Destinn flushed hotly. "I--I don't know," he stammered.

"What! She hasn't come to you?"

"No."

There was a curiously sheepish look about young Destinn. Chagrin, that was it. He was abashed that his companion's loyalty and concern seemed to be under question. A prey to sudden fierce emotion, Scott rushed to the library and called for a visiphone connection with Police Headquarters.

"Merkel," he snapped, when the face of the Chief stared out in astonishment from the disc, "I want the girl Norine at once."

"But Terris, you said not to molest her or--"

"Never mind what I said--get her! I want her at my place here inside of fifteen minutes, or there'll be hell to pay."

"Yes sir. As you say."

Scott swore as he broke the connection. What in the devil was wrong with things anyway? Three weeks and more, it was now, since the girl had visited her stricken mate. What had happened at that time; had they quarreled? No, that couldn't be; she wouldn't desert a sick man, a man who had been part of her life--whom she had loved with all her intense nature. What then? His throat tightened in awful fear at the swift thought that harm might have come to her; she rose up before him in her vivid beauty, a vision to haunt him... memories came, that blasted and seared....

* * *

Norine arrived, cool and collected, with two of the red guards. Scott

felt the hot blood pounding at his temples as his eyes drank in her loveliness, and his heart leaped as his fears for her safety were dispelled.

"You sent for me?" she asked without emotion.

"Yes, Norine, it's Gail. He's well again--completely cured."

"No!" Her lips whispered the word and her eyes widened with a sudden glad light that brought in its wake a radiant smile and a flush of happiness. "Oh, Scott, where is he? I can't believe it. He--he can walk again? And use those strong capable hands--everything?"

"Yes, yes--come and see." Forgetting his own pain in her joy, Scott led her to the room where Gail and Arthur Mason waited unknowing.

"Norine!"

"Gail!"

The girl stood staring as the man advanced a step, stretching his hands toward her. Then she was across the room in a single bound, clinging to his fingers, laughing and sobbing in the same breath.

"Oh, Gail, Gail. I'm so glad--and so sorry."

"Sorry?" Destinn's eyes misted.

"Yes--about my last visit."

"Oh, that was nothing. You see, I knew the reason."

"Gail!"

Scott and Mason were tiptoeing to the door.

"Wait!" Destinn called out. "Wait, Scott. I think Norine owes you an explanation."

"No, no." The girl was pleading, obviously distraught.

"Yes." Gail was sternly insistent.

"All right then." Norine drew herself erect, flushing painfully as she faced Scott. "I'll explain. I'm not Gail's companion, nor the companion of any other man. I've never mated, legally or otherwise. I'm free as the air, Scott Terris, and intend to remain so. I made Gail tell you what he did because I hated those of the purple and was afraid; afraid of you and of myself. I've always hated those of the upper levels and their memory will forever remain a festering sore in my breast. The unsavory reputation of your men amongst the women of the sub-levels must have been known even to you, Scott. And there was my mother." She hesitated.

"Your mother!" Scott caught his breath. Angry, she was positively the most enticing....

"Yes, my mother. Twenty-five years ago a man who wore the purple broke her heart. The old, old story of a woman very much in love and a man who was too far above her station to marry. I am the natural child of this man. I don't know who he was, but I've hated him with every fibre of my being--I hate him now, and all his kind--"

"Norine!" Mason was advancing upon the girl, devouring her with eyes that held something of recognition, something of fear, and much of regret. "What was your mother's name, girl?"

"Rosov--I took it!" Norine stared wondering; her red lips trembling and her breast heaving with the stress of emotion.

"Norine Rosov!" Mason paled and his step faltered. "Norine! Great God, girl, I'm your father."

"You!" The girl recoiled, then flung herself sobbing into the nearest chair.

Scott made his way swiftly and silently from the room.

* * *

His mind awhirl, Scott wandered through the laboratory and climbed to his old haunt on the rooftop. A cool sweet breeze from the river fanned his heated brow and the faint throb of the city's activity beneath lulled his turbulent senses as it always had done. He could think clearly here--and reason.

Arthur Mason's daughter! The thing was horrible to contemplate, in the thought of the wrecked life of the girl's mother and the undying hatred which had been implanted in Norine's heart. And yet, somehow, there had been an undertone of longing in her voice when she spoke so bitterly of the man who had loved and gone away; a hint of softening when the tremendous truth was brought home to her by Mason's admission. And Mason, he knew, was a changed man; he'd do everything in his power to make things up to the girl now. If only she would accept him.

And to think how she had fooled him about Gail and herself. In her hatred and mistrust of the men of the upper levels she had made Destinn a party to her little scheme, believing that Scott would not dare to take advantage in a situation of the kind that was pictured. And then he had taken that very advantage in a moment of madness and desire. No wonder she had turned from him in loathing and disgust!

They had quarreled about it too, she and Gail. Quite likely he had disapproved of her continued rebellion and had tried to argue her into a more charitable attitude. Good old Destinn; he had wanted to smooth things over and had failed.

It was no use. Norine was the high-spirited sort who would never unbend. She'd never forgive him for that moment of weakness--nor herself. With an infinite capacity for loving, she would steel herself against the possibility of again yielding to that power he knew had gripped her in that unforgettable moment in the laboratory.

And yet....

"Scott!" a soft voice whispered out of the shadows.

His heart missed a beat--two beats. Norine's fragrant nearness set it pounding madly once more.

"Oh Scott," she said hurriedly, and the white oval of her face looked up at him from its frame of golden hair made more glorious by the moonlight, "I couldn't hold out down there; there were two of them you know. And Arthur Mason is a wonderful man; he has driven all the bitterness away and--and things are different."

"Norine--you've forgiven him after all these years of hating?" Scott marveled. Anything might happen if this were true.

"Yes," in an agitated whisper. "And Scott, I want you to know about Gail. I've loved him--as a sister. But never... you must understand that I was afraid..."

"I know." Scott roused suddenly from his wondering daze.

She was in his arms then, miraculously, and the power of a great love swept down over them to carry them away from the world and

from all thought of the past in its overwhelming might.

No words were spoken; none was necessary in that merging of two souls whom the vagaries of life had kept too long apart. Understanding came, and peace--the peace of that mighty yet tender passion that was to hold with them an undying force to the end of time.

Power! And love.

THE END

(borrowed from Johnny Pez blog <http://johnnypez9.blogspot.com/>)