CHAPTER I

Sarka

In his laboratory atop the highest peak in the venerable Himalayas, lived Sarka, conceded by the world to be its greatest scientist, despite his youth. His grandfather, who had watched the passing of eighteen centuries, had discovered the Secret of Life and thoughtlessly, in the light of later developments, broadcast his discovery to the world. The genius of this man, who was also called Sarka, had been passed on to his son, Sarka the Second, and by him in even greater degree to Sarka the Third ... called merely Sarka for the purposes of this history.

Had Sarka lived in the days before the discovery of the Secret of Life, people of that day would have judged him a young man of twenty. His real age was four centuries.

Behind him as he sat moodily staring at the gigantic Revolving Beryl stood a woman of most striking appearance. Her name was Jaska, and according to ideas of the Days Before the Discovery, she seemed a trifle younger than Sarka. Her hand, unadorned by jewelry of any kind, rested on Sarka's shoulder as he studied the Revolving Beryl, while her eyes, whose lashes, matching her raven hair, were like the wings of tiny blackbirds, noted afresh the wonder of this man.

"What is to be done?" she asked him at last, and her voice was like music there in the room where science performed its miracles for Sarka.

Wearily Sarka turned to face her, and she was struck anew, as she had been down the years since she had known this man, every time their glances met, at the mighty curve of his brow, which rendered insignificant his mouth, his delicate nose of the twitching nostrils, the well-deep eyes of him.

"Something must be done," he said gloomily, "and that soon! For, unless the children of men are provided with some manner of territorial expansion, they will destroy one another, only the strongest will survive, and we shall return to the days when the waters covered the earth, and monstrous creatures bellowed from the primeval slime!"

"You are working on something?" she asked softly.

For a moment he did not answer. While she waited, Jaska peered into the depths of the

Revolving Beryl, which represented the earth. It was fifty feet in diameter, and in its curved surface and entrancing depths was mirrored, in this latest development of televiewing, all the earth and the doings of its people. But Jaska scarcely saw the fleeting images, the men locked in conflict for the right to live, the screaming, terror-stricken women. This was now a century-old story, and the civilization of Earth had almost reached the breaking point.

No, she scarcely saw the things in the Beryl, for she had read the hint of a vast, awesome secret in the eyes of Sarka—and wondered if he dared even tell her.

"

If the people knew," he whispered, "they would do one of two things! They would tear me limb from limb, and hurl the parts of me outward into space forever—or they would demand that I move before I am ready—and cause a catastrophe which could never be rectified; and this grand old Earth of ours would be dead, indeed!"

"And this secret of yours?" Jaska now spoke in the sign language which only these two knew, for there were billions of other Revolving Beryls in the world, and words could be heard by universal radio by any who cared to listen. And always, they knew, the legions of enemies of Sarka kept their ears open for words of Sarka which could be twisted around to his undoing.

"I should not tell even you," he answered, his fingers working swiftly in their secret, silent language, which all the world could see, but which only these two understood. "For if my enemies knew that you possessed the information, there is nothing they would stop at to make you tell."

"But I would not tell, Sarka," she said softly. "You know that!"

He patted her hands, and the ghost of a smile touched his lips.

"No," he said, "you would not tell. Some day soon—and it must be soon if the children of men are not to destroy themselves, I will tell you! It is a secret that lies heavily on my heart. If I should make a mistake.... Chaos! Catastrophe! Eternal, perpetual dark, the children of men reduced to nothingness!"

A little gasp from Jaska, for it was plain that this thing Sarka hinted at was far and away beyond anything he had hitherto done—and Sarka had already performed miracles beyond any that had ever been done by his predecessors.

"When my grandfather," went on Sarka moodily, "perfected, in this self-same laboratory, the machinery by which the waters of the oceans could be disintegrated, our enemies called him mad, and fought their way up these mountain slopes to destroy

him! With the pack at his doors, he did as he had told them he would do. Though they hurried swiftly into the great valleys to colonize them—where oceans had been—they were like ravening beasts, and gave my grandfather no thanks. Our people have always fought against progress, have always been disparaging of its advocates! When the first Sarka discovered the Secret they would have destroyed him, though he made them immortal...."

"If only the Secret," interrupted Jaska, "could be returned to him who discovered it! That would solve our problem, for men then would die and be buried, leaving their places for others."

Again that weary smile on the face of Sarka.

"Take back the Secret which is known to-day to every son and daughter of woman? Impossible! More nearly impossible than the attainment of my most ambitious dream!"

"And that dream?" spoke Jaska with speeding fingers.

"I have wondered about you," said Sarka softly, while those eyes of his bored deeply into hers. "We have been the best of friends, the best of comrades; but there are times when it comes to me that I do not know you entirely! And I have many enemies!"

"You mean," gasped the woman, for the moment forgetting the secret sign manual, "you think it possible that I—I—might be one of your enemies, in secret?"

"Jaska, I do not know; but in this matter in my mind I trust no one. I am afraid even that people will read my very thoughts, though I have learned to so concentrate upon them that not the slightest hint of them shall go forth telepathically to my enemies! I do not mind death for myself; but our people must be saved! It is hideous to think that we have been given the Secret of Life, only to perish in the end because of it! I am sorry, Jaska, but I can tell no one!"

But Jaska, one of the most beautiful and intelligent of Earth's beautiful and intelligent women, seemed not to be listening to Sarka at all, and when he had finished, she shrugged her shoulders slightly and prepared to leave.

He followed her to the nearest Exit Dome, built solidly into the side of his laboratory, and watched her as she slipped swiftly into the white, skin-tight clothing—marked on breast and back with the Red Lily of the House of Cleric. His eyes still were deeply moody.

He helped her don the gleaming metal helmet in whose skull-pan was set the Anti-Gravitational Ovoid—invented by Sarka the Second, used now of necessity by every human creature—and strode with her to the Outer Exit, a door of ponderous

metal sufficiently strong to prevent the inner warmth of the laboratory getting out, or the biting cold of the heights to enter, and studied her still as she buckled about her hips her own personal Sarka-Belt, which automatically encased her, through contact with her tight clothing, with the warmth and balanced pressure of the laboratory, which would remain constant as long as she wore it.

With a nod and a brief smile, she stepped to the metal door and vanished through it. Sarka turned gloomily back to his laboratory. Looking into the depths of the Revolving Beryl and adjusting the enlarging device which brought back, life size, the infinitesmal individuals mirrored in the Beryl, he watched her go—a trim white figure which flashed across the void, from mountain-top to her valley home, like a very white projectile from another world. Very white, and very precious, but....

When she was home, and had waved to him that she had arrived safely, he forgot her for a time, and allowed his eyes to study the inner workings of this vast, crowded world whose on-rushing fate was so filling his brain with doubt, with fear—and something of horror!

CHAPTER II

The People of the Hives

Moodily Sarka stared into the depths of the Beryl, which represented the Earth, and in which he could see everything that earthlings did, after visually enlarging them, through use of a microscope that could be adjusted, with relation to the Beryl, to bring out in detail any section of the world he wished to study. His face was utterly sad. The people at last truly possessed the Earth—all of it that was, even with the aid of every miracle known to science, habitable.

The surface of the Earth was one vast building, like a hive, and to each human being was allotted by law a certain abiding place. But men no longer died, unless they desired to do so, and then only when the Spokesmen of the Gens saw fit to grant permission; and there soon would be no place for the newborn to live. Even now that point had practically been reached throughout the world, and in the greater portion it had been reached, and passed, and men knew that while men did not die, they could be killed!

The vast building, towering above what had once been the surface of the earth, to heights undreamed of before the discovery, was irregular on its top, to fit the contour of the earth, and its roof, constructed of materials raped from the earth's core, was so designed as to catch and concentrate the yearly more feeble rays of the sun, so that its life-giving warmth might continue to be the boon of living people.

It had been found as Earth cooled that life was possible to a depth of eight miles below

the one-time surface, so that the one huge building extended below the surface to this great depth, and was divided and re-divided to make homes for men, their wives, and their progeny. But even so, space was limited. Neighboring families outgrew their surroundings, overflowed into the habitations of their neighbors—and every family was at constant war against its neighbors.

Men did not die, but they could be slain, and there was scarcely a home, above or below, in all the vast building, which had not planned and executed murder, times and times—or which had not left its own blood in the dwelling places of neighbors.

No law could cope with this intolerable situation, for men, down the ages, had changed in their essential characteristics but little—and recognized one law only in their extremity, that of self-preservation.

So there was murder rampant, and mothers who wept for children, husbands, fathers or mothers, who would never return to their homes.

"My grandfather," whispered Sarka, his eyes peering deeply into a certain area beyond that assigned by law to the House of Cleric, where men of two neighboring families were locked in mortal, silent conflict, "should not have frustrated the mad scheme of Dalis! It was slaughter, wholesale and terrible, but it would have cleansed the souls of the survivors!"

Mentally Sarka was looking back now to that red day when Dalis, the closest scientific rival of Sarka the First, had come to Sarka the First with his proposal which at the time had seemed so hideous. Sarka remembered that interval in all its details, for he had heard it many times.

"Sarka," Dalis had said in his high-pitched voice, staring at Sarka the First out of red-rimmed, fiery eyes, "unless something is done the world will rush on to self-destruction! Men will slay one another! Fathers will kill their sons, and sons their fathers, if something is not done! For always there is marrying and giving in marriage, and each family is reaching out in all directions, seeking merely space in which to live. Formerly there were wars which automatically took thought of the overplus of men; but to-day the world is at peace, as men regard the term—and every man's hand is against his neighbor! There will be no more wars, when there should be! There is but one alternative!"

"And that?" Sarka the First had queried suspiciously.

"The segregation of the fittest! The destruction, swiftly, painlessly, of all the others! And when the survivors have again re-populated the earth to overflowing—a repetition of the same corrective! Men will die, yes, by millions; but those who are left will be a stronger, sturdier race, and by this process of elimination, century by century, men

will evolve and become super-men!"

"And this plan of yours?"

For a moment Dalis had paused, breathing heavily, as though almost afraid to continue. Then, while Sarka the First had listened in frozen terror, Dalis had explained his ghastly scheme.

"If it were not for the mountains and the valleys," said Dalis, "and the world were perfectly round and smooth of surface, that surface would be covered by water to the depth of one mile! Is that not correct! The Earth, rotating on its axis, travels about the sun at the rate of something like nineteen miles per second, so perfectly balanced that the oceans remain almost quiescent in their beds! But, Sarka, mark me well! If we could, together, devise a way to halt this rotation for as much as a few seconds, what would happen?"

"What would happen?" repeated Sarka the First, dropping his own voice to a husky, frightened whisper. "Why, the oceans would be hurled out of their beds, and a wall of water a mile high or more—it is all guesswork!—would rush eastward around the world, bearing everything before it! It would uproot and destroy buildings, sweep the rocky covering of the earth free of soil; and humanity, caught on the earth below the highest level of the world's greatest tidal wave, would be engulfed!"

"Exactly!" Dalis had said with a grin. "Exactly! Only—the people we wish to survive could be warned, and these could either be aloft when the tidal wave swept the face of the earth, or could be safely out of reach of the waters on the sides of the highest mountains!"

Sarka the First, wanly smiling, catching his breath at last, now that he realized the utter impossibility of this mad scheme, had been minded to humor the fancies of a man whom he had believed not quite sane.

"Why not," he began, "take away from men the Secret of Life, so that they will die, as formerly, when the world was young?"

"When all the world knows the Secret, when even children learn it before they are capable of walking?" demanded Dalis sarcastically. "You could only remove knowledge of the Secret from the brains of men by removing those brains themselves! Your thought is more terrible even than mine, because it leads to this inescapable conclusion!"

"But supposing for a moment your mad scheme were possible, who should say whom, of all the earth's people, should be saved, whom sacrificed?"

"What better test could be given than that which I am proposing?" Dalis had snarled. "Those worthy of being saved would save themselves! Those who would perish would not be worth saving! As natural, as inescapable as the law of the survival of the fittest, which has been an axiom of life since men first crawled out of the slime and asked each other questions as they caught their first glimpses of the stars and pondered the reasons for them!"

"But where, then, was there any point in my giving to people the Secret of Life?"

"Had you paused to think," snapped Dalis, "you would never have done so! Your lust for power, and for fame, destroyed your foresight!"

"

And is it not, Dalis," replied Sarka the First, softly, "for this, really, that you have come to me? To berate me? To throw at my head mad schemes impossible of accomplishment? I have always known you for an enemy, Dalis, because you are envious of what I have accomplished, what you sense that I will accomplish as time passes!"

"I do not love you, Sarka!" retorted Dalis frankly. "I despise you! Hate you! But I need the aid of that keen brain of yours! You see, hate you though I may, I do you honor still. I have something up here," tapping the dome of his brow, only less lofty than that of Sarka, "which you lack. You have something I have not, never can attain! But together we are complements, each of the other, and to the two of us this scheme is possible!"

"I am very busy, Dalis," Sarka the First had replied coldly. "I must ask you to leave me! What you propose is impossible, unthinkable!"

"So," retorted Dalis, "you think me mad? You think me incapable of perfecting this plan about whose details you have not even yet been informed! You would show me the door as though you were a king and I a slave—when kings and slaves vanished from the earth millenniums ago! Then listen to me, Sarka! I know how to do this thing about which I have told you. I can halt, for a brief moment only, the whirl of the earth about its axis. And by so doing I can flood the earth with the waters of the oceans! If you will not listen to me, I shall do it myself! You shall have two days in which to give me an answer, for I admit that I need you, who would balance me, make sure I made no fatal mistakes! But if you do not, I will act ... along the lines I have hinted!"

Apparently as unconcerned as though he had not just listened to a scheme for almost total depopulation of the world, the destruction of millions upon millions of lives, Sarka the First had dismissed Dalis—who had straightway used all his offices to arouse the world of science against the first Sarka.

But, when the two days of grace given by Dalis had passed, there were no oceans—for Sarka the First had been planning for a century against the time when the earth must of necessity be over-populated, and had worked and slaved in his laboratory against the contingency which had developed.

He had smiled, though there was a trace of fear on his face after Dalis had left, for his scheme had been worked out—not to destroy, but to save!

And from this same laboratory in which Sarka now sat and pondered on the next step in man's expansion, Sarka the First had, in fear and trembling at first, but with his confidence growing by leaps and bounds, worked his own miracle. Untold millions and billions of rays, whose any portion of which, coming in contact with water, immediately separated its hydrogen and oxygen, thus disintegrating its molecules, were hurled forth from their store-houses beneath the laboratory, across the faces of the mighty oceans of Earth....

And when men saw the miracle, they rushed into the mighty valleys where the oceans had been, and began to build new homes!

That had been centuries ago—scores of centuries.

Now all the earth, all the livable part of the earth, above its surface—and below it to the depths of miles—was filled with people, like bees in a monster hive, like ants of antiquity in their warrened hills. And there was no place now that they could go.

So they fought among themselves for the right to live.

"But my grandfather was right!" Sarka almost screamed it, speaking aloud in the silence of his laboratory. "My grandfather was right! Dalis was wrong! Science should be the science of Life, not of Death! Yet whither shall we go! Where now shall we find places for our people who are daily being born in myriads, to live, and love and flourish?"

But there was no answer. Only the humming of the perpetually revolving Beryl, which showed to the sad eyes of Sarka that the people of his beloved earth were rushing onward to Chaos, unless....

"If only I could be sure about Jaska!" he moaned. "If only my courage were as great as that of which I stand in need! For if I fail, even Dalis, had he succeeded with that scheme of his in grandfather's time, would be less a monster, less a criminal!"

CHAPTER III

The Spokesmen of the Gens

For a long moment Sarka looked broodingly out across the world beyond the metalized glass which formed the curving dome of his laboratory roof. There was little that could be seen, for always the mighty, cold winds, ruffed with flurries of snow and particles of ice, swept over this artificial roof of the world. Here and there huge portions of the area within the range of his normal vision were swept clear and clean of snow and ice—and looked bluely, bitterly cold and hostile.

Without the Sarka-Belts, people who ventured forth from their hives would instantly freeze to the consistency of marble in those winds and storms. For the people of Earth had built their monster habitation toward the stars until they reached up into the altitude of perpetual cold.

Only under that gleaming roof was there warmth. Many of the men, and women, and children who had lost in the now century-old fight for survival had merely been tossed out of the hives. A painless, swift death—but each death, in a world so highly specialized that each grown person fitted into his niche naturally and easily, was a distinct loss, not much, perhaps, but enough for the loss to be felt.

Sarka, closing his eyes for a moment as though to shut out a horror which in his mind he could visualize, turned back to the Revolving Beryl, in which he kept in constant touch with all parts of the world at will.

"It must be done!" he muttered. "I must take action. It means the loss of thousands, perhaps millions of lives, in such a war as the mind of man has not hitherto conceived; but for a Cause greater than any which has ever hitherto been an excuse for armed conflict. But I must discuss it with the Spokesmen of the Gens!"

On the table before Sarka was a row of vari-colored lights, whose source was beneath the floor of the laboratory, out of the heart of the master-mountain, part of the intricate machinery of this laboratory which had been almost twenty centuries in the perfecting. In the dwelling place of each of the Spokesmen was a single light, colored like one of the lights on Sarka's table. To speak with any one of the Spokesmen Sarka had but to dim the properly colored light by covering it with the palm of his hand. The light in the home of the thus signalled Spokesman was dimmed, and the Spokesman would know that Sarka desired to converse with him.

Sarka noted the blue light, and shuddered. For if he covered it with his palm it would summon Dalis, a great scientist, but an erratic one, as Sarka the First had so clearly shown.

Sarka turned again to the Beryl. The area of which Dalis was Spokesman was, roughly speaking, that part of what had once been the Pacific Ocean, north of a line drawn

east and west through the southernmost of the Hawaiian Islands, northward to the Pole. The home of Dalis was in the heart of what had once been an island historians claimed had been called Oahu, now a mountain peak still retaining a hint of the pre-Discovery name: Ohi.

The total number of the Spokesmen, the oldest of earth's inhabitants, was twelve, and the remainder of the Earth not under the tutelary rule of Dalis was divided up among the other eleven Spokesmen. Cleric, for example, father of Jaska, was Spokesman of that area which men had once called Asia, the vast valleys of the once Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean; while the youngest of the Spokesmen, in a manner serving his apprenticeship, was tutelary head of the vast plateau once called Africa. The name of this man was Gerd.

"He, at least," thought Sarka, thinking of each Spokesman in turn and cataloguing each in his mind, "will be with me. I wonder about the others, and especially Dalis. He has always hated us!"

Then, with the air of a man who has made up his mind and crosses his particular Rubicon in a single step, Sarka rose to his feet and passed along the row of vari-colored lights, covering each one with his hand in rapid succession.

Then he sat down again, almost holding his breath, and waited. As he stared at the row of lights his eyes lingered longest on two which were almost golden in color—and his face was very gentle, almost reverent. For those two lights were signals to Sarka the First and Sarka the Second, his grandfather and his father!

It was Dalis, the irascible, the fiery tempered, the erratic, who first made answer.

"Yes! What is it now?"

Sarka smiled a trifle grimly as he spoke a single word.

"Wait!"

The voice of Dalis, which Sarka had good cause to remember, had sounded as loudly in the laboratory as though Dalis had been present there in person, for men had learned to communicate by voice almost without the aid of radio and its appurtenances though the principle upon which the first crude beginnings of radio were fashioned still applied. Each man's dwelling place was both a "sender" and a "receiver," and men could talk and be talked to no matter where they lived—individuals telepathically summoned at desire of anyone wishing verbal contact.

"Gerd is here!" came the voice of that Spokesman.

To him also Sarka spoke one word.

"Wait!"

"I am here, Sarka!" came a musical voice. "And Jaska is with me, listening!"

That would be Cleric, loyal friend, master scientist, but always shy of contact with people, though swift to anger and self-forgetfulness when he knew himself right and was opposed. Sarka darted a look back at the Revolving Beryl, adjusted swiftly the Beryl-microscope, and smiled into the faces of Jaska and Cleric, who looked enough alike that they might have been brother and sister, though Cleric had been born ten centuries before his daughter Jaska. They smiled back at him.

He shifted the Beryl-microscope and stared for a second at Dalis, there in the Beryl, and marked the antagonism Dalis was at no pains to hide.

One by one the Spokesmen reported.

Klaser, from the Americas; Durce from the valleys of the vanished Atlantic; Boler from that part of the Artic Circle not included in the wedge which the Gens of Dalis thrust northward to the Pole: Vardee; Prull; Yuta; Aal; Vance and Hime. Each from his appointed area, each from the official headquarters of his Gens, the name given to those people who acknowledged the tutelage of a Spokesman. Each Spokesman, therefore, was the mouthpiece of millions of men, women and children. And over the Spokesmen, and not themselves Spokesmen, were three scientists: The Sarkas, First, Second and Third.

When all twelve of the Spokesmen had reported and been bidden by Sarka to wait, a smile touched the face of Sarka for an instant as two other voices, so nearly alike they might have been the voice of a single person, reported themselves.

"I am here, son! What is it?"

Oddly enough, Sarka's father and grandfather reported with exactly the same words. Sarka smiled at a whimsical thought of his own. It had been some time since the three scientist Sarkas had been together, and despite the vast differences in their ages they might have been triplets!

The reports were in and the Spokesmen were waiting; but for almost a minute Sarka waited still. Then he spoke swiftly those words for which there could be no recall:

"Gentlemen, the time is come when we must go to war!"

For a long moment after he had spoken there was no answer. Then it came, in the

jeering laughter of the antagonistic Dalis.

"War? Against whom? The Sarkas are always dreaming!"

"And Dalis," continued Sarka, "shall be one of the leaders of Earthlings in this war which I am about to propose! You doubtless recall a proposal you once made to Sarka the First? Your proposal to halt for a few moments the headlong whirl of the earth about its axis, thus to flood—"

"Stop!" interrupted Dalis. "Stop! Immediately!"

And Sarka stopped. He had forgotten, in the excitement of his urge to explain his plans, that the millions of people who gave official allegiance to Dalis had never been informed of the hideous proposal he had made, back there centuries ago, as a corrective for a world rapidly approaching over-population. Had his people known, never again would the voice of Dalis be heard in life. The Spokesmen knew, and the Sarkas; but no others. Sarka understood the protest of Dalis; honored it.

"Dalis," he went on, more softly, "after I have explained what I wish to do, you will come to me here, prepared to explain to me exactly how you planned doing what you proposed to my grandfather—for your knowledge will be necessary to me...."

"Isn't it enough that your grandfather stole from me, and amplified, an idea that would have made me forever famous, without his grandson also stealing the fruit of my brains?"

"Your brains," said Sarka sharply, "belong to your people. What I plan is for their betterment. But it means war, war which may last a century, two centuries, in which lives of countless thousands may be lost."

Sarka's last words were almost drowned out by the humming sound that came out of the Revolving Beryl, that perfected device which was the ultimate in the evolution of television and vibration-transference. Sarka's heart sank, for he knew the meaning of that sound. So did the Spokesmen.

"You see?" came the rasping voice of Dalis. "You hear? Look into your Beryl! See the clenched fists of the earth's myriads being shaken at you! Listen to the protests of the millions who hear your every word! See what Earthlings think of the prospect of war!"

For a moment Sarka spoke directly to the people.

"Be silent and listen! It will be war, yes; but not such a skulking, hideous war as ye wage among yourselves for a place to live! You, fathers, are guilty of slaying your sons! You, sons, of slaying your fathers! Merely by thrusting them forth from the hives,

into the Outer Cold! This war I propose shall be a war that shall match your manhood, if ye indeed be men! Listen to me, and I will find for you new lands to conquer, new homes for your holding, if ye can take them!"

"But where," interrupted the sarcastic voice of Dalis, "are these new lands of which you speak? Inside the Earth? Already our hives reach into the Earth a distance of eight miles. Where else, then?"

"For shame, Dalis!" snapped Sarka, "and you a scientist! Every bit of habitable land on this globe is some man's dwelling place! Spokesmen of the Gens of Earth, look out your windows! Look out and upward—and read Dalis' answer in the stars!"

For a full minute there was silence throughout the earth, and Sarka saw that the Spokesmen were doing his bidding. He himself looked out, out through the swirling storm which tore at the crest of the Himalayas, a dark and forbidding Outside, in the starred dome of which rode the pale orbed moon!

"It is obvious, son," came the voice of Sarka the First, "what you mean. But how accomplish it?"

"Fifteen centuries ago, my father's father," cried Sarka, "Dalis told you that he possessed the power to halt for a moment the headlong whirl of the world on its axis about the sun! He could do it then—and no man, whatever he may think of Dalis as a man, has ever known him to lie! If, fifteen centuries ago, he could bring the whirling world to pause, why can we not, now...."

And, even though he had thought of this for years upon end, had spoken over and over to himself the words he was now using, rehearsing his proposed argument to the Spokesmen of the Gens, Sarka found himself for a moment almost afraid to continue and speak them.

"I understand, Sarka!" came the excited voice of Gerd, youngest of the Spokesmen. "And I follow wherever you think it best to lead! You mean ... you mean...."

"Exactly!" Sarka managed at last. "If the Earth can be stayed on its axis, it can be diverted from its orbit entirely! I know, for I have found the manner of its doing, though I need the genius of Dalis to check my work and my calculations! We have no new land on this Earth to conquer; but the Universe is filled with countless other worlds! What say ye, Spokesmen of the Gens? What say ye, Gens of Earth?"

But for the time of a thousand heartbeats neither the Spokesmen or the Gens made answer to Sarka, and all the world fell utterly silent, absorbing this unbelievable thing of which Sarka had hinted.

Over the metalized roof of the world the snows and storms, the winds and the wraiths of the long dead moaned and screamed as with an icy voice of abysmal warning.

And for the time of those thousand heartbeats, the world was pausing to listen.

When realization came, the answer would come from the Spokesmen and from the Gens; and here in the Sarka laboratory, his Rubicon crossed at last, sat Sarka, staring through the Beryl-microscope into the depths of the Revolving Beryl. His face was dead white, his eyes narrowed.

The first voice which came startled him.

"It is mad, Sarka! Mad! Mad! But I am with you, always!"

It was the voice of Jaska, daughter of Cleric!

CHAPTER IV

The Earthlings Make Ready

"

I too, am with you!" came the voice of Gerd.

"Spoken like a child!" snapped Dalis. "For you are as much a child as this third of the dreaming Sarkas! The scheme is mad, madder even than Jaska intimates! The scheme I once proposed, in which I was cheated by the grandfather of this madman, was times and times more feasible and practicable!"

"Suppose," came the soft voice of Sarka the First, interrupting Dalis, "that you put the matter up to your Gens, O wise and noble Dalis, and see which scheme they would endorse if given the choice in the matter—and were your scheme still possible!"

This quickly silenced the vituperation of Dalis, but in no wise prevented his continuance as a rather loud antagonist of the plan.

"How," he demanded, "can you return the Earth to its orbit, even granting you are able to take this initial step? How keep life on the Earth during its flight on this rainbow-chasing voyage you propose?"

"All these things have been taken into consideration, O Dalis!" retorted Sarka. "All of my scheme is practicable, as I think you will agree when I have told you its details. What think you of the plan, Klaser? And you, Durce? Boler? Vardee? Prull? Yuta? Aal? Vance? Hime?"

When the Spokesmen had answered, some of them hesitantly, for the people all this time had remained silent—and none of the Spokesmen could be sure how his own Gens would feel in the matter—it developed that seven of the Spokesmen were for the scheme, if it should prove to be possible.

"If this is the voice of the majority of the Gens," snapped Dalis, "given thus by their Spokesmen, then I vote with the majority! I shall call upon you immediately, Sarka, for a conference!"

"

I am glad," said Sarka softly, "that the majority of the Spokesmen are with me. Especially am I glad that Dalis and Cleric vote with me. For the others I have only this to say: I have thought this matter over for almost a century, and I know that the time has come when we must act, to save ourselves from self-destruction. Had you not decided with me, I should have acted alone!"

"Yes?" snapped Dalis. "How?"

"I have, here in my laboratory," replied Sarka, "the power whereby to accomplish the scheme of which I have told you! Had all the Gens defied me, I would have nevertheless sent the Earth outward on its voyage, bringing it within reach of the denizens, first of the Moon, second of Mars—and you people of little courage would have been compelled to fight to save yourselves!"

"You would have forced us into war?" came the quavering voice of Prull, the first Spokesman aside from Dalis to take active part in the discussion. "Then why, if you had the means in the beginning to enforce your will upon us, confer with us at all?"

Sarka thrilled with satisfaction, for this question gave him the excuse he sought. He had been wondering and scheming how to compel the Spokesmen of the Gens to obey his will.

"I wanted your opinions," he said shortly. "But I also wish you to know that I have the power to go on, whether you wish it or not—and you must obey me!"

How would the twelve Gens take this ultimatum of Sarka? For breathless moments after he had spoken he waited, and the Spokesmen with him. Then came the voice of Cleric, addressing his people, yet leaving the contacts open so that Sarka and the other Spokesmen might hear.

"What say you, O Gens of Cleric?" he cried, his voice an exultant, clarioning paean of rejoicing. "Do we follow this man who promises us life again? Do we follow this man

who promises us that once again we shall dwell in plenty, without the blood of relatives and neighbors on our hands? Answer this man, O Gens—for I say unto you that wheresoever he leads I would follow him!"

Silence for a heartbeat. Then a murmuring like the sound of the waves of the long-vanished seas sounded in the laboratory, wherein all things were seen, all sounds were heard. A monster voice, loud and savage, from the Gens of Cleric.

"We follow Cleric wherever he leads!" Finally the words became intelligible. "It matters not to us whom Cleric follows, so long as we may follow Cleric!"

"Well spoken, O Gens of Cleric!" snapped Sarka when the murmuring died down to a whisper, then faded out entirely. "Deck yourselves in the white garments of Cleric! Emblazon upon your backs and breast the Red Lily of his House! Prepare for war! These are your orders; the details I leave to Cleric!"

There came the voice Dalis.

"Give your orders to my Gens direct, O Sarka!" rasped Dalis. "For I leave this very moment to come to you!"

"Thank you," said Sarka, a great wave of exaltation sweeping over him. He had expected Dalis to be the last and most difficult to manage. Then to the Gens of Dalis, as the blue light on the table in the laboratory showed Sarka that Dalis was already winging toward him: "Deck yourselves in the green garments of Dalis! Wear as your insignia the yellow star of his House, and prepare for war! Make new and modern Ray Directors! Refurbish your rotting machines of destruction! Make ready, and make haste! For the Gens of Dalis will be the first of all the Gens to move in attack against the Dwellers Outside! When the time comes I shall tell you where you shall dwell—if you win the land I shall show you!"

The humming of myriad voices inside the laboratory was now almost continuous, but ever the words of Sarka went out to the Spokesmen and to the Gens, though, save in the case of Cleric and of Dalis, he did not speak to the Gens direct, because he did not wish in one iota to usurp the authority of the Spokesmen themselves.

But when less than an hour had passed, he realized that the first step had been successfully taken, and that from now on the success or failure of the scheme rested in his own hands. Perspiration bedewed his forehead, and for a second he prayed.

"God of our fathers! Grant that we be not mistaken! Grant that we be right in what we plan! Grant that success attend our arms! Grant that this scheme of mine lead us not to catastrophe—for if this should develop, only I am guilty, and only I should be punished!"

"Amen!"

As one voice, the Spokesmen of the Gens spoke the word, and Sarka heard it. He had forgotten for the moment that the Spokesmen still could hear him.

"That is all," he said huskily. "Prepare your Gens, each of you, for such battle as even our histories never have recorded! For we go against foemen whose strength we do not know, whose manner of life we do not know, and we must not fail! Make haste with your preparations! Your time is short! And Spokesmen, counsel your Gens that they put aside at once all personal differences, all family quarrels, all quarrels with their neighbors! That each adult individual, each unmarried woman, and such married woman as have all their children grown, and who no longer need them, prepare to go forth to battle! From this laboratory, within a brief space, Dalis and the Sarkas will give you further word!"

Then he dimmed the lights, and severed contact with the Spokesmen of the Gens. Only two lights he did not dim, at the moment, and to two men he spoke softly.

"My father and my father's father! Come to me at once! For there shall be need of the combined genius of the Sarkas if my scheme is to succeed!"

From both Sarkas, as though they had rehearsed the words against this need of them, came answer:

"Aye, son, we come!"

From that moment on until Dalis and the Sarkas were ready to take the most momentous step ever taken in the history of the world, the humming within the laboratory did not cease. For the people, the millions and billions of people of the hives, were busy, eagerly and feverishly busy, preparing new armament, new engines of destruction, against the time when there should be need of them. And for perhaps the first time in centuries, the people were happy.

For not even the passage of a thousand centuries, or a thousand thousand centuries, could flush from the warm hearts of men the love of conflict!

Sarka smiled wanly, his face very pale. He had spoken, his people were busy with preparations, and now there could be no turning back. The world, when he spoke the word, would rush outward to glorious conflict—or to destruction!

A buzzer sounded near the Exit Dome. Sarka raced to give the "Enter" Signal—and Dalis, he of the hawk-eyes, the sharp nose and sharper tongue, entered the presence of the man who, in a twinkling, had made himself master of the world.

"Well," he said harshly, "I am here! What do you wish of me?"

"We Sarkas," said Sarka easily, "wish to assure ourselves that you will do nothing to obstruct our plans! Dalis, of the Gens of Dalis, you are prisoner of the Sarkas until you have passed your word!"

"That I will never do!" said Dalis calmly. "I have passed my word to go forward with you; but I meant, and you knew I meant, to go forward only as far as to me seemed right and reasonable!"

CHAPTER V

The Betrayal of Dalis

And until the arrival of the other two Sarkas, Dalis said nothing. His face flushed an angry red as Sarka the First received the "Enter" Signal and stepped into the laboratory which had once been his—which he had delivered into the capable hands of Sarka the Second, in order to find new channels for his genius, as a worker for the betterment of the world's people. This he had found in organization, so that the people worked and labored, despite their personal quarrels, in closer harmony than they ever had before. But now Sarka the Third had called, and the two Sarkas responded. Dalis snarled at his ancient enemy, who looked to be the image of Sarka the Third and not one whit older, though one had preceded the other into the world by many centuries.

"Still the pleasant, congenial Dalis, I see!" smiled Sarka the First.

For the moment it seemed that Dalis would die there of his seething anger; but he answered no word for all of a minute. Then:

"This mad grandson of yours has made me a prisoner, until such time as I concur in all his plans!"

"If he says you are a prisoner, that you are!" snapped the elder Sarka angrily. "Son, what is this thing you plan?"

"For almost a century," replied Sarka, "I have been planning this. I knew, when father told me that Dalis had sworn he was able to halt for a moment the headlong flight of the Earth in its orbit, that Dalis did not lie or bluff! In your day, even, that was possible, and I continued with the knotty problem until I deduced the manner of its doing. I, too, can halt the Earth's rotation, or throw it out of its orbit! I took your idea, Dalis, independently of you, knowing you would never reveal your secret to a Sarka, and amplified it until I can not only halt the Earth in its orbit, but throw it out of its orbit entirely!"

For a moment Sarka studied the angry face of Dalis, and his own was very thoughtful.

"Dalis," he said at last, "I wish you were not our enemy! For you are a genius, and the world has need of all the knowledge of such genius as it possesses. Why do you oppose us?"

"Because," snarled Dalis, "I guessed something of your plan that I do not like! I do not like the Sarkas, never have; but neither have the Sarkas any love for me! When you spoke to us all, I knew that somehow you had discovered the secret! You spoke, when you delivered your ultimatum, of attacking the Moon, and after it Mars! You also granted to my Gens what would have seemed a great honor—to anyone who did not fathom the tricky scheming of the Sarkas!—that of being the first into the fray! If we are to be first, and the Moon is to be the first attacked, then you plan to relieve the world forever of me, your arch-enemy, by exiling me and all my Gens upon the Moon! A dead world, covered with ashes, whose people dwell in dank caverns, like gnomes of the underworld...."

"

Stay!" snapped Sarka. "But I granted you a greater honor even than that, Dalis! I planned on your Gens, led by you, making a successful conquest of the Moon—because only such a genius as Dalis could force from this dead world a living for his Gens! Because you are the wisest of the Spokesmen, I planned for you the greatest task! Because I need you ... I do not slay you!"

"I thank you," bowing low, with the deepest sarcasm, "but you honor me too much! And tell me, pray, if it is not true that you plan for the Sarkas their choice of the best and newest worlds of the Universe?"

Sarka did not answer for a second, while his sensitive nostrils quivered with fury. The Sarkas had not noticed, but Jaska, daughter of Cleric, had admitted herself through the Exit Dome, in a way known only to Sarka and to herself, as she had entered many times before so as not to disturb Sarka at his labors. She now stood silently there, divesting herself of her Belt and outer clothing, beneath which was the golden toga worn by all the women of the earth. Dalis, however, had seen her, and his eyes narrowed craftily as he awaited the answer of Sarka.

"Dalis," said Sarka softly, "it is not for you to question me, but to obey me! I have not undertaken this step without mastering all its details, and I refuse to allow you to swerve me in a single one of them from my plan."

Dalis straightened, standing stiffly at savage attention, and met the angry eyes of Sarka without flinching. There was no fear in Dalis, as all the world knew. But he was

a schemer, and selfish.

"After all," he said, "I have known Sarkas to make promises they could not keep! How do I know, how does the world know, that you can do what you say you can do?"

"If," said Sarka, "I close all contact of this laboratory with the world outside, so that none may hear what I say save we four, and I then whisper here the secret you never told, Dalis, when my father's father refused to help you—will you then believe?"

The face of Dalis went suddenly white, but he nodded, his eyes burning redly. Jaska moved closer to the men, who stood near the table of the vari-colored lights.

"You needed my father's father," said Sarka softly, "because the secret of your scheme rested here in this laboratory, which is the highest point in the world! You pretended to need him in your scheme; but you did not need my father's father, though you did need his laboratory, and some of the facts of science that he discovered. So you came to him with your scheme, discovered that he believed, though he denied it, your scheme was possible—because he refused to aid you in it! Then, as an excuse to re-enter this laboratory, you told him you would return within two days! Now, shall I tell you your secret?"

The lips of Dalis were moving soundlessly. His right hand started to rise, as though he would make it signal the negative he was unable for a moment to speak. But even as he stood there, swaying slightly on his feet, Sarka dashed to the lights on the table, disconnecting them one by one; to the Revolving Beryl, which then ceased to revolve for the first time in centuries—whirled when he had finished, and stepped to the very center of the room.

"Now," he whispered, "your secret, Dalis!"

Still the hand upraised, still Dalis tried to speak, and could not.

Sarka spoke, in a hoarse, almost terrified whisper, four words:

"The Beryl! The Ovoids!"

Gasps of surprise from the other two Sarkas, whose eyes for a second flashed to the huge Beryl, which now was still, silent—and blind. Dawning comprehension was evident in their faces.

"The success of the Revolving Beryl," whispered Sarka, "which sees all that transpires in this world, depends on one fact: that its revolving is proportionately timed to infinite exactness with the revolution of the Earth about its axis! This Beryl is the Master Beryl of the Earth, which was why Dalis needed this Beryl, and could use no other!"

"

Suppose that for a period of two days, uniformly progressive, this Beryl were forced to revolve in sharp jerks at an increasing rate of speed! With all connections in place, and all the world's Beryls attuned to the speed of this one—what would happen? What would happen if a single Gens were marshalled in warlike array atop the area of the Gens, and kept up a steady, rhythmic march for a period of hours?"

"In a few hours," whispered Sarka the First, "the roof of the Gens area would begin to vibrate, to vibrate throughout all the area, and even into all surrounding Gens areas—and in time the roof would collapse!"

"Exactly!" said Sarka, breathing heavily. "This Beryl, when attuned to all other Beryls in the world, would have this vibratory effect, not only on a certain area of the world—but upon the entire world!—Force the speed of the Beryls to the uttermost limit, and you sway the world to your will! As a marching horde would sway the roof of a vast section of the world if the horde's commander willed!

"But that is not enough! The world would tremble, but nothing more! The Earth's store of Ovidum, which is Anti-Gravitational, and used in minute quantities in our Anti-Gravitational Ovoids, is evenly distributed throughout the world. By vibration of the Beryls I can control it, scatter it or gather it all together wherever I will! By shifting through vibration this Anti-Gravitational material, I can disrupt, make uneven, or nullify the pull of gravity on the Earth!"

"That would do it," said Dalis, finding his voice at last; "but how would you control the course the Earth would take, thus thrown out of its orbit?"

"That, my dear Dalis, is for the moment my secret!"

"But is it?" Dalis suddenly shouted.

Before the three Sarkas could recover from their surprise at the man's sudden vehemence, he made a swift, terrifying move. He leaped away from them to stand beside Jaska, daughter of Cleric.

"Sarka," he shrieked, "I know you love this woman! Note this little tube I hold against her side. With it I can cause her to vanish for all time, merely by a slight pressure of the fingers! And that will I do, unless you immediately open all contacts with the world and remain silent while I tell the people of Earth how you would betray them!"

The three Sarkas were petrified with amazement and horror, for they recognized the slender tube in the hand of Dalis as a Ray Director, the world's greatest engine of

destruction, and knew that it would do exactly as Dalis had said it would.

Automatically, because they were brave men, they had stepped a trifle closer to Jaska and Dalis. Perspiration poured from their cheeks as they stared at this rebel. But their fears were for Jaska, who now spoke for the first time.

"Let him do as he wills," she said smilingly, "since for the good of the world I do not fear to die! Refuse him, Sarka, and know that I go into Death's Darkness loving you always, and knowing that you will succeed in the end, in spite of the opposition of men like Dalis!"

A man of unexpected actions, this Dalis, for while the attentions of the Sarkas were on the little tableau he had staged, his eyes had darted to the Beryl, to the control which Sarka had touched to still its revolving. Now he sprang away from Jaska, was free of her and the Sarkas before any could move to intercept him.

He dashed to the Beryl. Instantly it swept into motion, while Dalis whirled to face the Sarkas, and from his lips came a burst of triumphant laughter. One hand was on the Beryl Control, the other still held the Ray Director.

"Fools!" he cried. "Fools! Duped like children! And now it is Dalis who is master of the world! Move closer to me, and I will turn my Ray Director upon this Beryl, which you have so kindly informed me is master of all the Beryls and of all Ovidum deposits! Be glad that I do not turn it upon you; but for you I have a kinder, more honorable fate! I now am master, and will direct the destiny of the world! But I will never leave it, because I suspect that it is the most pleasant of all the worlds! I will, however, choose for the Sarkas a world that shall be the dreariest in all the Universe!"

The Sarkas whirled as soft laughter came from Jaska, daughter of Cleric. Strange, lilting laughter. They turned in time to see her vanish through the Exit Dome; but for a long moment her jeering laughter seemed to sound in the laboratory she had left-and, to judge by her laughter, had betrayed! For Dalis, arch-traitor, echoed her laughter!

CHAPTER VI

The Beryls in Tune

"

Remember," said Dalis, as the Beryl began to revolve and its humming mounted moment by moment to normal, "that you must concur in whatever I say to the people of the Earth—for if you do not, I swear that I will destroy this Master Beryl! Then what happens to your scheme, Sarka the Third? You see, there is no change in the plans, save one: I am the master, not you!"

Dalis was not a madman, for the world conceded him place in its list of geniuses next below the three Sarkas, which was high honor indeed; but Dalis possessed in abundance that most universal of all human emotions—jealousy. For centuries he had been nursing it, watching the Sarkas always in the niches just above him, yet never being able to attain to their eminence. Now....

He had outwitted them. It might be for a moment only, but while his mastery lasted he would drink deeply of personal satisfaction. Now, however, there was no gloating in his face, for he realized, as Sarka had realized, the infinite gravity of the whole situation. If a mistake were made, the world would plunge to destruction—or go cooling forever in a headlong race through space.

"I keep the Ray Director hidden," he whispered, while the murmuring of the Master Beryl mounted as it gained speed again, "but know you, Sarkas, that its muzzle points at the Master Beryl, always!"

Now the forms of Earth were appearing on the Beryl. Men in countless hordes were maneuvering in myriads, legions and armies, across the face of the globe. There was no marching, but an effortless, swift as light almost, aerial maneuvering. For each human being possessed the tight-fitting metalized cloth, with the gleaming helmet in whose skull-pan was the Anti-Gravitational Ovoid, which was the "outside" garment of earthlings. With the Ovoid sitting exactly against the skull, man had but to will himself in any direction, at any livable height, and the action took place. In the same way, one man, to whom others in an organization gave allegiance by appointment, could will all his underlings into whatever formation he desired.

As beautiful and effortless at the flight of those birds which had vanished from the earth centuries before.

"Remember, Dalis," said Sarka, "that while the speed of the Earth in its orbit is between eighteen and nineteen miles per second, once thrown out of its orbit, and forced to follow a straight or nearly straight line, the speed may be many times that-or much less!"

"The simplest facts of science," snarled Dalis, "were known to me a thousand years before you were born! Now I shall tell the Spokesmen of the Gens, and be sure that you second what I say!"

He paused. Then, raising his voice impressively, he spoke.

"O Spokesmen of the Gens, O Gens of Earth, hark ye to the words of Dalis and of Sarka! The time has come to try the experiment of which Sarka told you, and which I, Dalis, of the Gens of Dalis, have found good, and hereby certify! See that all your

Beryls are mathematically tuned to catch every sound, every vibration, every picture, from this Beryl of Sarka, henceforth to be known as the Master Beryl!

"

No matter what happens, no matter what changes take place in the temperature of your homes, no matter what storms may come, touch not your Beryls until instructed from this laboratory! Tune your Beryls, then leave them, and hasten faster with your preparations for war! Each Spokesman of a Gens will at once instruct the members of his Gens that all partitions between families shall immediately be removed, outward from a common center in each case, until one hundred families occupy a single dwelling place. Materials from destroyed partitions shall be carefully hoarded, and the newer and bigger areas shall become maneuvering places for the hundred families which will occupy each given area!

"Facing a crisis as we are, no thought can be given to privacy, and neighborly quarrels must be forgotten! This move is necessary because no single dwelling place is large enough to be used as a place of maneuver—and from now on until the command is given, maneuvers must not be held Outside! For hark ye, O Spokesmen, O Gens of Earth, we are about to start upon our voyage into outer space! Spokesmen, call in your maneuvering myriads! You have five minutes!"

In five minutes not a flying man could be seen in all the cold, stormy outside. Dalis spoke again.

"Tune your Beryls and remove partitions, taking care that in reducing partitions you so estimate your stresses and strains that the roof of the world be not endangered by weight that is unsupported, or improperly supported!

"Food Conservers, redouble your production and rush your transportation of Food Capsules!

"Mothers of men, take over the labors of your sons and your husbands! Sisters and sweethearts of men, join the myriads in maneuvers, for you, too, may require knowledge of fighting!"

In spite of himself, an ejaculation of admiration escaped the lips of Sarka. Hearing it, Dalis turned to him, and a flush of pleasure tinged his cheeks as Sarka shaped one word with his lips:

"Excellent!"

Then, after a pause, Sarka spoke directly to the Gens of Earth.

"Take heed of the words of Dalis, for they are also the words of the Sarkas!"

Then an expression of surprise flashed across the face of Sarka as Dalis' fingers began to move in a swift sort of pantomime—for the sign manual he used was the secret manual of Jaska and Sarka! His heart cold within him at this new proof of her betrayal, Sarka nevertheless noted the words which dropped silently off the fingers of this enemy of the Sarkas.

"You are wise to resist no further! Together we can do much, and if you give your word not to oppose me, we can work together; but I will be the master!"

"But, if we grant you the mastery, will you heed our advice if it is good?"

"I will, but I alone will be the judge of its worth!"

"Then we work together henceforth. Let us begin! In the time required to move from here to the Moon, our people will have ample opportunity to perfect themselves in maneuvers! Are you ready, O my father, and father's father?"

"Ready!" they said together.

But for a moment Dalis hesitated. "Your word!" he snapped, looking at each Sarka in turn, and each in his turn nodded. They had given their word, but not their love, to Dalis. Dalis bowed low to Sarka the Youngest, who darted to the onyx base in which revolved the Master Beryl, and pressed a small lever of metalized jade, set in a slot on the southern side of the base of onyx. The humming sound within the Beryl became perceptibly louder, and as the minutes passed, and Sarka stood, arms folded, watching the Revolving Beryl, it continued to increase.

Here was the crisis, and as they watched its sure, certain approach, they forgot their enmities, Dalis and the Sarkas, and watched the whirling Beryl. Minute by minute its humming increased. The figures still were plain to be seen within the Beryl, but were becoming blurred of outline. Partitions had been removed all over the earth, increasing the size of rooms a hundredfold, reducing their number a hundredfold. The Gens of Earth, by hundred-families, were maneuvering under the Heads of Hundreds. The depths of the Master Beryl, therefore, was a maze of flying men, with their extremities slightly blurred, and becoming more so as the Master Beryl increased its speed.

Here now was shown the value of the organization fostered by Sarka the First—for in all the world there was no single Beryl out of tune with the Master Beryl; and as the Master Beryl increased the speed of its revolving, so increased at the same time the speed of all the other Beryls. Minute by minute the humming of the Master, and with it the others, increased in volume.

"Father!" spoke Sarka. "To the Observatory, behind the Beryl, please, to watch the stars, and from them to note the direction we take when the combined vibrations of the Beryls have affected the quiescence of Earth's deposits of Ovidum and, through its shifting, disturbed the flight of the Earth in its orbit!"

With a brief nod Sarka's father hurried around the Master Beryl to the tiny Observatory beyond, from which, through the Micro-Telescopes, those who knew could read the secrets of the planets, the stars—the Universe. Sarka watched him go, wondering if Dalis might not forbid him. But Dalis merely watched him go and said nothing.

Now that the time of Change was upon the world, Dalis realized his responsibility. It was little wonder that he began to be for the first time a little bit afraid.

"Note, Dalis!" snapped Sarka, and Dalis started nervously as his name was spoken. "Feel the trembling of the laboratory, just as the same trembling affects all the other buildings in the world in which Beryls are located. As the minutes pass the trembling will go deeper and deeper, and by to-morrow the first tremors will be reaching into the Earth to several miles below the last habitable Inner Level! And then....

"Then," repeated Sarka tersely, "my father will know by his study of the stars in which new direction we are traveling! For within twenty-four hours the Earth will have started on its voyage of conquest!"

"Is there no way, Sarka," queried Dalis, "by which we can control the direction of our flight!"

"There is a way, O wise and gallant Dalis! But since you do not know it, who now is master?"

Dalis' face became as pale as chalk, and Sarka smiled a little as he watched him. Then, wondering what new resolve stirred the depths of this master egotist of the earth, he watched emotions flash to and fro across the face of Dalis, watched the color return to his cheeks. The cold of death gripped at his heart when Dalis spoke.

"I do not fear death, O wise and gallant Sarka!" he mocked. "For I have lived fully and well, and for many, many centuries! You know that I do not fear to slay people of the Earth, for did I not propose to your father's father that a flood would be beneficial to unfit earthlings? Hear, then! Keep your secret, and I shall allow the Earth to go outward into space, out of control, in whatever direction it will. If any other worlds happen to lie in our pathway...."

Dalis shrugged indifferently, turning his back on Sarka, to peer again into the depths

of the Master Beryl, whose voice had risen to a vaster murmur, whose pictures were becoming moment by moment more blurred as time fled irrevocably into eternity.

Sarka the First took advantage of his opportunity, and leaped at the back of Dalis, hands extended to fasten them in the throat of his ancient enemy. Dalis whirled, with a burst of laughter, and the muzzle of his Ray Director covered the person of the First Sarka. In a flash the spot where Sarka the First had been was vacant, and there was no single sign to show that he had ever stood there!

Silence then in the laboratory, save for the mounting murmur of the Master Beryl!

CHAPTER VII

Outer Space

"

He only proved a belief I have entertained for centuries!" snarled Dalis. "That all the male Sarkas are fools—and the females for bearing them!"

Sarka said nothing, but within his breast a deep hatred was forming for Dalis. He had disliked him before, and had been amused by him; but in the busy life of Sarka there had been no time for hatred of anyone. Busy people had no time for hatreds.

"You should be torn to pieces for that, Dalis!" was all he said. "We needed my father's father in our efforts! But the loss to the world of one super-genius cannot be balanced by slaying another—so you are safe!

"What he could do, I can do!" snapped Dalis.

Sarka turned away from him, seating himself beside the table of the vari-colored lights, and his heart was heavy as lead in his breast. He blamed Jaska for much of this, and his heart was burdened, despite her treachery, by the fact that he loved her, always would love her. Love was the one possession which made centuries of life desirable to men of the Earth. For men could spend centuries in seeking a true mate, knowing that there were other centuries still in which to enjoy her. Woman was man's greatest boon, his excuse for living, as was man excuse for woman. Through the centuries, when humankind remained forever young, the joy in each other of those truly mated grew as their knowledge grew....

And now Jaska had failed Sarka, when for half a century they had loved each other! Why had she done it? He had given her no reason to do so. Had there been some other reason? Why had she laughed, and left them, after the betrayal of the Master Beryl into the hands of Dalis?

"Before God," whispered Sarka, "I believe that you, Jaska, were playing a game to dupe Dalis, as he played a game to dupe us!"

Down in his heart he was not sure. But somehow, just to whisper to himself his faith in Jaska, gave it back to him in some measure, and by so much lightened the weight upon his heart. For now his responsibilities were greater than they had ever been before, and he had need of all his faculties.

"She'll come back, or somehow communicate with me, and explain everything," he told himself. But he refused to ponder on how Dalis the betrayer had gained possession of the secret sign manual he had believed known only to Jaska and himself. That, too, might be explained satisfactorily, for Dalis was cunning.

From the side of the laboratory opposite the Revolving Beryl came a soft tinkling sound, like the striking of a musical bell. Sarka rose wearily, strode to the wall, where a narrow aperture opened, in which rested Food Capsules sufficient for one meal for three men. He smiled wryly. They knew then, the Food Conservers deep in the earth as they were, that Sarka the First was no more—and sent food for three men! All the world knew, perhaps, yet no single person had raised voice in protest—or if any had, the mounting murmur of the Beryls had drowned it out.

"

Sarka!" spoke Dalis suddenly. "At what time do you estimate that the flight of the Earth in its orbit will be materially affected?"

"It is being affected this moment, Dalis, shifting the Ovidum store!" said Sarka shortly. "Within twelve hours we will be in readiness to start our journey!"

Remaining absolutely motionless within the domed laboratory, it was now possible to feel the ever so slight motion, not only of the laboratory, but of the mountain crest upon which it rested. Not so much a to-and-fro motion as a round-about motion.

Just as the slightest sound flies outward through space endlessly, and the slightest vibration moves outward until the end of time and of space, Sarka knew that the vibration set up by the Beryl, slight though it was, was already being felt at the Poles of the Earth. Not enough to be noticed there, but existant, just the same.

"In twelve hours the world will be fighting against this combined vibration and Anti-Gravitational Force we are starting, and second by second accelerating," Sarka explained to Dalis: "fighting to remain on its pathway about the Sun! But we will win against it, and with each new vibration, each succeeding one being more strongly felt, we will force the Earth that much more against the pull which holds it in its orbit!"

The laboratory was trembling. The mountain beneath it was trembling. Both in accordance with scientific design. There was no element of chance in it, for the mountain moved, and the laboratory on its crest moved, as science willed. It was now difficult for Sarka to remain still where he sat, for the trembling was exciting his heart action, and causing the blood to rush to his cheeks, making him feverish. He rose to his feet and began pacing the floor.

He strode to the jade lever, moved it ahead a fraction of a fraction of an inch, and perceptibly the murmuring of the Beryl increased, as did the trembling of the laboratory and of the mountain.

Twelve hours later exactly, Sarka shouted a single word to Dalis.

"Now!"

The laboratory was swinging about in a sort of circle in a way that made one dizzy if one remained still for the merest second. Sarka, glancing out into the Outside, across which blew the storms of the heights, and noting that no cracks appeared in the surface of the world's vast roof, knew that this swaying motion had been transmitted evenly to all the Earth, and that, so far at least, his calculations had been correct.

But Dalis was in a cold sweat of fear, and deathly sick. The motion of the laboratory, like the inside of a whirling top, made him ill, though Sarka could tell that he fought against it with all his great will.

Sarka strode to him, looked him in the eyes for a moment. Dalis looked back, glaring defiance.

"Are you afraid, Dalis?" he shouted, to be heard above the screaming of the Master Beryl.

"I am not afraid," croaked Dalis. "Has the time arrived?"

Sarka paused, as though for dramatic effect, and raised his right hand high, while his left hand dropped to the metalized jade lever. There still was room in the slot in the onyx base for the lever to move forward ever so little.

"

We have reached the exact place," cried Sarka, "where the Earth can, by pressure upon this lever, be continued on in its orbit—or forced out of it—out into space! Which shall it be, Dalis? If I move the lever forward we start our voyage, and may not be able to return!"

For a moment the nostrils of Dalis quivered as though with fear. His face was white with his illness; but out of his eyes peered the fanatic self-confidence of the man.

"Push it forward, O Sarka!" he managed.

Sarka, smiling slightly, pushed the lever to its uttermost limit, still with his right arm upraised. For full five minutes he stood thus, and then....

"Now!" he shouted, bringing down his arm. "We have begun our journey into space! Come, let us look Outside, and await the first reports from my father!"

The two men, forgetting again for a moment the fact of their enmity, strode to the southern wall of the laboratory and looked out across the roof of the world.

"You will note, Dalis," said Sarka conversationally, "that in a matter of hours, the roaring of the Etheric winds will possess everything! We will have passed into the infinite reaches of Outer Space, where, if I may make so bold as to say so, it were better if Dalis, self-named master of the world, knew whither he was going!"

CHAPTER VIII

Moon Minions Prepare

"

It is time," said Sarka softly, "that we who have urged the world to forget its quarrels should forget our own. What difference who is master, so long as success attend our efforts?"

"Then tell me your secret of control of our flight!" snapped Dalis.

Before Sarka could answer, however, Sarka the Second entered the laboratory area before the Master Beryl. He looked a question at his son, and Sarka knew that his father was asking what had become of Sarka the First. He shrugged his shoulders, and nodded his head toward Dalis. Sarka the Second gave no more sign of perturbation than had his son, but deep within his eyes were signal fires of fury which centuries of penance on the part of Dalis would not erase. But now, with Sarka the First gone, Dalis must live.

"We are headed," said Sarka's father softly, "in the general direction of the Moon! If we could travel toward it in a straight line, we would reach it, if we kept our pace of about eighteen miles per second, in approximately four hours! But since we are out of control, I fear we will pass it too far away for our fighters to fly across the intervening

space! Or we may be drawn against it, in planetary collision, which of course means annihilation. We are traveling noticeably faster than while in the earth's orbit. I am able to see something of the preparation of Moon-men to receive us!"

Dalis turned to Sarka, and the perspiration bedewed his forehead. In order to make this mad mission successful, he must know Sarka's secret of control. Had he been in Sarka's place, he would have kept his secret, no matter what happened, and he believed in his heart that Sarka would do the same. It never occurred to him that Sarka, no matter who the master, would divulge his secret in order to save humanity from destruction.

"We have approximately four hours, Dalis!" Sarka prompted the betrayer. "I need at least an hour for my experiments! Do you, knowing as you do that I have planned all this out, know exactly what course our voyage should take, still insist on holding the reins yourself?"

"I agree, for this time, to listen to your advice, as I promised you!"

"Then let me suggest that you do some of the work which I had planned should be done by my father's father! It is time that the world's Induction Conduits be placed in operation, in order that our people be supplied with equable temperature from the Earth's Core, as our temperature changes due to our position with relation to the sun! Stand back and give me the controls!"

For a moment Dalis stared at the two Sarkas. Would they seize power the moment he moved away from the Beryl Control? In their places he knew he would have done it. In their places he knew he would never have submerged self in the good of the people. But, somewhat diffidently, he moved away. Sarka the Second returned to the Observatory, behind the Beryl, while Sarka stopped before the table where the lights were.

After a moment of thought-conversation with Sarka the Second in the Observatory, he dimmed the light which connected his laboratory with the headquarters of Klaser, in the Americas.

"Klaser," he barked, "for the period of one second cut the speed of every Beryl within your Gens to half its present speed!"

"I obey, O Sarka!" came the voice of Klaser.

"Have we changed direction?" Sarka mentally questioned his father.

"Slightly, but we are curving away, instead of toward the Moon! Try again!"

Sarka dimmed the light of Cleric, who instantly made answer.

"I am here, Sarka!"

"Stop the Beryls of your Gens for two seconds, but be prepared to speed them up immediately afterward, if ordered, to the speed at which they are now revolving! Klaser, hold the speed of your Beryls as they are!"

"I obey, O Sarka!" came the musical tones of Cleric.

"I hear, O Sarka!" replied Klaser.

"Now, my father," queried Sarka again, telepathically, "what direction do we travel?"

"We are heading in a direction which will cause us to pass the Moon at a distance of approximately fifty thousand miles!"

"From which point our fighters can reach the Moon in exactly two hours, after they have passed through our atmosphere!" cried Sarka exultantly, aloud.

"True, son!" replied Sarka the Second, mentally. "I suggest you hold our course steady as it is!"

The motion of the earth now was as that of a steadily falling body, and the shifting of the Ovidum store caused by vibrations set up by the Beryls had set the Earth on its course toward the Moon. Sarka now gave instructions to Klaser and to Cleric to return the speed of the Beryls to that which they had attained at the moment the journey of the Earth had begun—thus bringing them once more into harmony with the Master Beryl, and rendering the Ovidum static.

Dalis re-entered the laboratory from the Wall Tube, near the Dome Exit, by which he had passed down to the lowest Inner Level, and stared suspiciously at the two Sarkas. He found them half-smiling their satisfaction.

"We pass the Moon within fifty thousand miles!" exulted Sarka. "A flight of two hours for the Gens which attacks the Moon! Do you refuse, O Dalis, to send your Gens against the Moon?"

"Why not send the Gens of Gerd!" demanded Dalis. "He is the youngest of the Spokesmen, and what better test is there for him than this?"

"It is because he is so young that we do not wish to send him," replied Sarka coldly. "The colonization of the Moon by Earthlings requires the guiding genius of a Spokesman who has the experience of a Dalis—or a Sarka, else you would now be

dead!"

"Then let it be a Sarka!" barked Dalis.

"Who, then, will control the further flight of the Earth?"

"You! Let your father lead my Gens against the Moon!"

"What will your Gens say, O Dalis? That their revered Spokesman feared to lead them in person?"

"Enough of this squabbling," snapped Sarka the Second. "Do you not realize that within a matter of hours, some Gens must be sent into battle? Come with me to the Observatory, where you will be given something beside squabbling with which to occupy your minds!"

Leaving the earth on its lonely flight through space, the three men hurried to the Observatory, where they seated themselves before the eye-pieces of the Micro-Telescopes, whose outer circles had been aimed at the Moon.

For a moment the three stared breathlessly at the surface of this dead sister of the Earth. They noted her valleys, her craters which seemed bottomless, and saw that even as they watched, valleys and craters became sharper of outline, proving that they were approaching the Moon at a tremendous speed. It seemed, too, as though they were heading toward sure collision, though Sarka the Second had said that they would pass the Moon at a distance of fifty thousand miles.

"You will note activity at the very rims of the craters!" said the Elder Sarka easily. "The craters are man-made, not volcanic, as some scientists believe, and are shaped to converge the rays of the sun, as our roof is created for the same purpose. But note the activity at the rims of the craters!"

Closer the men peered, studying the rims as instructed by Sarka the Second. All about them—and as they watched, activity became apparent on the inner slopes of the craters—winged creatures seemed to be flying. They looked like tiny oblate spheroids, and they were in swift action, darting to and fro like bees which have been disturbed in their hives.

"Those spheres are of metal," said Sarka the Second, "and they are the fighting Aircars of the Moon-men!"

Neither Dalis nor Sarka denied this statement, for they knew it to be fact. It became apparent that the movement of the Aircars was not a movement of chance, but as skillfully ordered as any maneuvers which had, during the last few hours, been

executed by any of the Gens of Earth. That they were of metal became apparent when, through the Micro-Telescopes, the watchers caught the glint of the sun on the surfaces of the cars.

Sarka did a swift mental calculation, and announced the result.

"Those Aircars average something like four hundred feet in length, and are doubtless filled with fighting Moon-men!"

"That's right," said Dalis, who also had been calculating this very thing, "but our Ray Directors will disintegrate the Aircars as easily as my Ray Director disintegrated Sarka the First!"

"

The remaining Sarkas received this statement in silence, for Dalis' choice of a comparison had been an unhappy one, to say the least.

"I am wondering," said Sarka, "if you, my father, and you Dalis, have noted the peculiar appendages of the Aircars?"

"I saw them some minutes ago," said his father moodily, "and I am almost afraid to guess their use! If they are what I fear they are, then the Moon-men have been expecting this attack of ours for years and years, and have been preparing for it! If they have known, and have been preparing, then we are facing a race of super-Beings indeed—for we have known but little of their activities!"

"What, then," said Dalis, "do you think is the purpose of those appendages?"

"Those appendages, cilia, flagella, call them whatever you wish, are man-made tentacles, created for the purpose of seizing, crushing and destroying—then discarding...."

For a full two minutes the three men sat there, and horrible doubts flooded their brains. For the conclusion was obvious. The Gens of Earth would go into action flying, not as organizations, inside an Aircar, but as individuals, in swarms, myriads, legions and hordes. In order to do the utmost damage with their Ray Directors and Atom Disintegrators, they must approach within a reasonable distance—and the picture of those mighty tentacles, hurled like leashed lightning bolts into the midst of the attackers, folding in individuals by scores and hundreds, crushing them and dropping them contemptuously, was horrible in the extreme to contemplate!

It was difficult to estimate the possible speed of the Aircars of the Moon-men, at least at this distance. Besides, perhaps not a single one of them was traveling at top speed,

because of the fact of their crowded traffic.

This thought passed through the minds of the three men.

"But we'll know," said Sarka dully, "when they get into action. For if I am not mistaken, those Aircars are being mustered on the rims of those craters to await orders, not to resist our attack, but to launch their own attack before we are ready! Dalis, are you going to allow your Gens to go into action against these Outsiders, without the inspiration of your personal leadership?"

The nostrils of Dalis were quivering with the intensity of his emotion. His vast egotism told him that he, Dalis, could successfully combat these Aircars of the Moon-men, and he wished with all his heart to issue the orders to his Gens. But, vain as he was, he did not even wish to have the appearance of acceding to the original plan of Sarka! Sarka had planned for Dalis to attack the dwellers of the Moon, and Dalis had refused. Now, when this challenge of the Aircars was a direct challenge to his genius as a potential warlord of earth and he wished to accept the challenge, he was torn two ways.

Should he go ahead under the common leadership of the Sarkas? Or should he still refuse battle—and perhaps see some lesser Spokesman go forth to win glory and imperishable renown to himself?

A thought message, a command almost, impinged on the brains of the three.

"I wish to speak with you aloud!" The message was from Jaska!

The three men rose and darted into the room of the Master Beryl. They had no sooner entered than the clear voice of Jaska sounded in the laboratory.

"Sarka, I am no traitor! I am Jaska, who loves you! I am in the headquarters of Dalis at Ohi, and the Gens of Dalis has indicated its allegiance to me, having been informed by me that it is the wish of Dalis, whose presence is needed at the place of the Master Beryl! Command us, O Sarka, for we are ready to attack!"

There the voice ended, while the two Sarkas turned again to face Dalis.

Sarka now was glad that Dalis knew the secret sign manual, and his fingers worked swiftly as he spoke to the rebel.

"Will you, then, Dalis, allow your Gens to be led to glory by a woman? A woman, moreover, who has duped you?"

"The woman is a fool!" said Dalis. "She will lead the Gens to destruction!"

"Who, then, will be blamed if she does? Your Gens believe she is their new Spokesman at your wish! If they are told otherwise, they will think that Dalis himself is afraid to lead them!"

"We shall see," said Dalis, "if I could win honor by leading my Gens in a successful attack against the Moon-men, how much greater will be my glory if Jaska attacks, is repulsed—and I go in to turn defeat into victory!"

Thus spake the colossal selfishness of Dalis, who took no thought of the possible, nay, certain, loss of countless lives because of his obstinancy.

"I suggest," he said, "that you instruct your beloved Jaska to make ready; for if I am not mistaken, when we return to the Observatory we will discover that the Aircars of the Moon-men have left their craters and are racing outward from the Moon to meet us! Or perhaps you would lead my Gens, to safeguard Jaska!"

CHAPTER IX

The Attack of the Yellow Stars

"

Why should I safeguard Jaska?" asked Sarka quietly. "She is a true daughter of Cleric! If Cleric does not fear for her to be Spokesman of a Gens, why should I? He is her father. If she wins, the more glory will be hers! If she loses, she will at least have tried!"

"Meaning," snarled Dalis, "that I have refused even to try!"

Sarka shrugged expressively, and the three stepped once more into the Observatory, took their places before the Micro-Telescopes. For a moment they could not see the outline of the Moon, for during their brief sojourn in the laboratory the Moon seemed to have disintegrated, flying into countless spheroidal pieces.

"You see?" said Dalis. "The Moon-men do not wait for us! They attack!"

It was all too true that the Aircars which had been mustered at the rims of the Moon's craters had been hurled outward into space, outward toward the on-rushing Earth, and the myriad numbers of them for a time shut out all view of the surface of the Moon.

"God!" spoke Sarka, and it was like a prayer. His cheeks were pale as death, for in a moment he would speak the word which would send the Gens of Dalis, under the leadership of Jaska, out against these formidable Aircars of the Moon-men, and the

appearance of the on-rushing cars was terrifying. That their flying radius, outward, was a great one, was manifest by the fact that the Earth would not for another hour reach its closest estimated point with the Moon.

Sarka, exchanging glances with his father, rose and stepped again into the laboratory. Even as he entered the room of the Master Beryl, Jaska's broken signal came through.

"I am ready, Sarka!" came her soft voice, vibrant with confidence. "The Gens is ready, and the Gens believes in me!"

For a moment Sarka hesitated before taking the plunge. Then he spoke the fatal words.

"Go, Jaska, and my love goes with you!"

As the Earth approached closer to the Moon, the revolving of the Beryls had been decreased, so that the motion of the Master Beryl was almost normal—normal being that speed with which it revolved when it was necessary to use it for visual contact with the people of the Earth.

Out of the area of the Gens of Dalis darted the green specks which were the flying people of Dalis! Sarka, staring in among them, focussing the Beryl-microscope, sought for some way of identifying Jaska, who led them. A thrill coursed through him when he made her out, unmistakably—dressed still in the tight white clothing of her own Gens, with the Red Lily of the house of Cleric on her breast and on her back! The daughter of Cleric was leading the Gens of Dalis into combat under her own colors and her father's insignia!

Sarka raced back to the Observatory, seated himself again to watch the attack, which must of necessity be joined within a matter almost of minutes. Those myriads of Aircars flying outward from the Moon, had seemed invincible; but up until now he had never seen an entire Gens mustered at one time. His whole being thrilled with the awesome grandeur of the spectacle; it seemed that not an able-bodied individual of the Gens of Dalis had failed to answer the muster of the Gens.

Millions upon millions of people, taking off the icy roof of that part of the Earth lying between Ohi and the North Pole, from the heart of what had once been part of the Pacific Ocean.

So many of them were there that when they were free of the Earth, flashing outward at two thousand miles an hour, it was impossible to see the Moon or those formidable Aircars—and still, out of the heart of the area of the Gens of Dalis, came other myriads, each flight waiting only for the preceding flight to clear!

The green, tight fitting clothing of the Gens of Dalis, each individual wearing the yellow star of the Spokesman of the Gens! A marvelous, awe-inspiring sight!

And this was but a single area, and the earth was divided into twelve such areas, some smaller, none larger, which showed Sarka for the first time a hint of the mighty man-power, and fighting woman-power which he controlled. However, once free of the Earth, conduct of the fight would be in the hands of the Spokesman—Jaska, acting for Dalis.

Sarka turned to Dalis, his eyes flashing.

"Does it not thrill you, O Dalis?" he demanded. "Do you not wish now that you had gone out with your people as their leader?"

"They follow Jaska like sheep," he stated with a snort. "But wait! My Gens seem invincible, because it bulks between us and the Aircars of the Moon-Dwellers! Wait, see how the battle goes! The Gens may yet have need of Dalis!"

Sarka studied those outgoing hosts, which were dwindling away to mere specks with vast speed, for through the cordons and cordons of them he could now see the Aircars more plainly. It was still possible, when one looked through the Micro-Telescopes, to see the slim figure of Jaska leading the attack. She was in the vanguard of the Gens of Dalis leading her people onward as though she had been born to command—utterly fearless.

"And I was small enough," whispered Sarka, "to doubt you! I even told you that I doubted you! Forgive me, Jaska! Forgive me!"

And still, as Level after Level gave up its myriads, the Gens of Dalis shot forth from the Gens area, and winged away, following the lead of Jaska. Millions of people, armed with Ray Directors and Atom Disintegrators. How tiny the individuals seemed, against the mighty bulk of those Aircars of the Moon!

But Sarka did not fear, save for the safety of Jaska, as he was realizing anew that he had scarcely skimmed the surface of the man-might of the Earth.

Now, seen through the myriads of the Dalis Gens, he could see again the on-rushing Aircars, and his heart misgave him for a moment as he could tell, by estimation, that at least a hundred families were outlined against each individual car, which moment by moment grew larger.

Those tentacles were now much in evidence, rising and falling under and around the racing Aircars like serpents, or dragging ropes; but seeming like living things in the sentient manner of their moving—eager to come in contact with the first of the

earthlings, and to wrap those tentacles about them, crush them, hurl them into space.

Sarka went back into the laboratory only long enough to attune the Beryls of the Earth to a point where the Earth would remain almost stationary, comparatively speaking, taking a curving course about the surface of the Moon, as it had for countless millions of years coursed about the Sun.

Then, back to the Observatory, to see how went the battle. Through the Micro-Telescopes the first meeting was plain to be seen. The Gens of Dalis rushed headlong to meet the Aircars and many of them rushed headlong to their destruction.

Sarka noted a group of perhaps a hundred people break forth from the vanguard of the attackers, and mount to a safe height above the Aircars against which the Gens were hurling themselves. A sigh of relief escaped him, and he wished there were some way in which he could learn the individual identities of the ninety and nine who had taken Jaska forcibly out of danger! For her white clothing, and her Red Lily of Cleric were plainly visible and recognizable! The men of the Gens of Dalis might permit the leadership of a woman, but they would not permit her to be needlessly endangered.

Sarka turned to Dalis, and noted that the face of the master egotist was pale and drawn, his nostrils quivering with emotion, as he watched his Gens go into battle, and a feeling of satisfaction coursed through Sarka like a little white flame. Dalis was proud of his Gens, and now was wishing that he, and not Jaska, were leading them onward.

"I would wager something," whispered Sarka to himself, "that Dalis will not be able to stand it! That before battle has been joined for ten minutes, he will have gone out to take over the leadership of the Gens! Jaska must have guessed that, too! Wise, clever Jaska!"

With a fearless massing of forces, the people of the yellow stars joined battle with the Aircars! The manner of men who flew the Aircars was still unknown to the people of Earth.

But in a trice they would know.

In a matter of minutes Earth would realize the horror of what faced the Gens of Dalis, whom Jaska led!

For with the sending out of their Aircars the Moon-men had given but the merest hint of their ponderous, devastating might!

CHAPTER X

Tentacles of Terror

Dalis had always been a stormy petrel, but as he sat before his Micro-Telescope, watching his Gens go into battle against the Moon-men, not even Sarka the Second guessed the depth of infamy of which Dalis was capable.

Dalis had given a hint, but Sarka had, in his sudden realization of the fact that Jaska really loved him, and was no traitor, forgotten that hint. How had Dalis learned the secret sign-manual of Jaska and Sarka? Therein lay the hint.

Dalis, in common with all other Earth's scientists, possessed the ability to think deeply, yet to so mask his thoughts that no one else could grasp them telepathically—and it was well for the peace of mind of the Sarkas that they could not read the black thought of the man, or look into the future, even so far as a dozen years.

The Gens of the yellow stars moved into contact with the Aircars of the Moon. Earth and Moon were gripped in the horror of war, the war between worlds, where no quarter might be asked or given, because fought between alien peoples who did not so much as comprehend each other's languages, or even their signals.

The people of the Gens swarmed about the Aircars like myriad swarms of angry bees, but it was only to Dalis that this simile came, for only Dalis, of these three, had ever seen a swarm of bees.

Sweeping in closely, the Gens brought forth from their resting places in their Sarka-Belts their Ray Directors and their Atom-Disintegrators, and turned the blighting rays of them against the gleaming, ice-colored sides of the aerial monsters.

But even as the Gens brought their instruments of destruction into play, the mighty tentacles of the first hundred Aircars had got into action. Down they whirled to catch at the flying bodies of the pigmylike individuals of the Gens, and hundreds of Earthlings were caught in those tentacles in the first moment of conflict.

Sarka studied the reaction of the people, thus captured. He could see the expressions of unutterable agony on their faces, could see their cheeks turn black with—what? There was no way of knowing; but all sorts of guesses were possible. Those tentacles, from their action upon the human beings which they encompassed, might be charged with electricity. For the people they captured turned black, then shriveled slowly—and were released by the tentacles....

They fell sluggishly away, through the great space which yet separated the Earth and the Moon. But the people who fell, fell aimlessly, going neither toward the Earth or the Moon, like black feathers in a vagrant breeze.

"Great God, do you see father?" cried Sarka. "The—whatever it is—that turns our people into cinders and drops them, has no effect on the Anti-Gravitational Ovoids in the skull-pans of the helmets, and without mental direction, the Ovoids neither rise nor fall but wander aimlessly!

"See? As the fight continues, those who still live, as they dart here and there through the battle area, will be confronted continually by the blackened faces and shriveled figures of their departed friends, relatives and neighbors, and will see at first hand what will happen to themselves if they are caught by the tentacles!"

From the lips of Dalis came one single burst of laughter, filled with bitterness. No other word came from his lips, no other sign. He merely sat and stared, and masked his hell-black thoughts so that neither of the Sarkas might read them. But in the fertile mind of Dalis a plan was being born—a plan that, he knew, had always been growing back in his mental depths, somewhere, down the centuries, since first he had become an enemy of the Sarkas. The Sarkas ruled the Earth, and....

But he would spring his surprise when he believed the time right, for Dalis possessed a faculty which neither of the Sarkas possessed—an example of it being his incomprehensible knowledge of the secret code of moving fingers used by Sarka and Jaska.

The Gens of Dalis drew back in consternation at this wholesale taking off of the first line of attack. Out of that first line, comprising perhaps a thousand families, scarcely a hundred had escaped the groping of those mighty tentacles of the Aircars—and the black, shriveled things which had been men floated all about the Aircars which had destroyed them, warnings to those who followed them into the fray. Those who had somehow escaped the wrath of the tentacles in the first engagement fled back into the heart of the next line of sky-skirmishers, fear and horror in their faces.

Here, answering to the will of Jaska, a mile or so above the heart of the conflict, they reformed with their people, and prepared again to attack. But how to attack these formidable Aircars successfully?

That was the question. Ray Directors had been turned against them, but something was decidedly wrong. The first car to feel the blast of even one of those Ray Directors should have vanished, become as nothing, as had the body of Sarka the First before the Ray Director of Dalis.

But apparently nothing had happened. Why?

Grimly Dalis and the two remaining Sarkas pondered the problem, wondering at the same time what Jaska would now do, how reform her Gens, how send it again to an attack that seemed hopeless.

"There they go again!" whispered Sarka.

The first two myriads of the Gens of Dalis had now crowded together until they formed a veritable cloud which masked, for a moment, the Aircars of the Moon. Then, as one person, answering to the will of Jaska, they swept in to the attack again.

But as they approached the Aircars, they divided four ways—up, down, to right and to left, and smashed into the Aircars from four directions at once. Jaska, knowing that countless lives must be lost to destroy these monsters of the Moon, was trying to down them by mass attack, hoping that, while the inner groups gave their lives, those who followed after them would get in close enough to use their Ray Directors and Atom Disintegrators.

"She is wasting lives to no avail!" cried Dalis. "There is a way to beat these people!"

"It is really your responsibility, O Dalis!" snapped Sarka. "Why do you not go out and lead your Gens? If you know, why remain here and watch the destruction of all the people of your Gens?"

"You know why our Ray Directors and Atom Disintegrators do not work, or work but poorly? Because our fighters are within the gravitational pull of the Moon, instead of the Earth, and machines which work perfectly on Earth are thrown out of balance when under the influence of the Moon!"

"Then," cried Sarka, "we must sweep in close enough to our people...."

Without waiting to say another word, for thousands of men were dying each breath-space, Sarka raced into the laboratory and gave the signal to race up the speed of the Beryls, to attune them with the increasing speed of the Master Beryl, whose jade lever now was set at the halfway mark in the onyx slot.

When he returned to the Observatory, Dalis was gone, and Sarka the Second sat alone.

"I knew he would go," said Sarka, "for he cannot endure to see someone else take credit for winning this first victory—if it is even possible to win it! I knew that, vain though he is, Dalis is yet a man!"

"I am not so sure of that, son!" replied the Elder Sarka. "For I have known him longer than you have! There's something else in that brain of his which takes no thought of the death of people of his Gens—or for the betterment of the other people of the Earth! I wonder...."

But even as he spoke, Dalis was away, flying free and fast toward the scene of battle.

In a few minutes his will would be felt by his Gens, and Jaska could return again. Sarka sought for her. She was still safe, high above the battle. Thousands and thousands of those shriveled things now floated in the space about the cars, above them, below them, everywhere. But the Gens of Dalis had at last caused some trouble to the Aircars of the Moon.

A hundred of them, like stricken birds, were falling downward toward the Moon, great holes torn in their sides. But as they fell, their tentacles, which whipped here and there like snakes in their death-throes, carried with them their full capacity in people of the Gens of Dalis!

With the partial destruction of the Aircars which were falling, the force that actuated the death-dealing of those tentacles seemed to have gone out of them. For the people now held in the grip of the mighty tentacles were still alive! Their squirmings could be plainly seen, and their cries could have been heard, had it not been that the noise of battle drowned out all other sounds.

A hundred Aircars falling, and the men and fighting women of the Gens of Dalis, with new courage in them now they realized that the Aircars were not entirely invincible, renewed the attack with savage vigor.

Taking no thought of the death which must surely come to them, they circled and pressed the Aircars; and when the tentacles caught at some of them, others climbed to the very body of the Aircars, over the shriveling bodies of the dying, and turned their Ray Directors and Atom Disintegrators against the gray sides of the monsters.

Even before Dalis had reached the vanguard of his Gens another hundred Aircars were falling, each with its tentacles wrapped tightly about such of the earthlings as they could grasp. Falling ... falling ... still living, plunging down.

Now Dalis had reached the scene of the fray, and was assuming command.

As he did so a single white-robed figure, life-size when seen through the Micro-Telescopes, darted out of the fray and headed at top speed for the dwelling place of Sarka. Jaska, relieved, was returning home!

But though Jaska flew at top speed, she did not seem to grow larger, or draw nearer to the Earth!

Out of the ruck of the defenders of the Moon, a single Aircar, whose gleaming gray side was marked with queer crimson splashes, broke free to pursue Jaska!

She fled at top speed, yet the Aircar was gaining, proof that the Moon had developed speed greater than Earth had attained.

"But why," queried Sarka, "does she draw no nearer?"

"Great God!" ejaculated Sarka the Second, after a brief examination of certain chartographs beside his Micro-Telescope. "We are moving away from the Moon! Something is forcing us away! The people of the Moon have something whose nature we do not know, capable of forcing them away from us—while they pull our people toward them! You see? If they pulled us toward them, we could overthrow them, for we outnumber them perhaps thousands to one; but if they force themselves away faster than the Gens of Dalis, if defeated, can follow us, they can destroy, or capture, the Gens at their leisure!"

Suddenly, out of the Earth, past the all-seeing eyes of the Micro-Telescopes, swept a new myriad. Men in white, wearing the Red Lily of the House of Cleric! Cleric was sending out men to rescue Jaska from the Aircar which pursued her! But would Jaska or these who went forth to fetch her ever be able again to attain landing place upon the Earth!

It looked doubtful.

Even as Sarka asked himself this question fresh Aircars shot from the rims of Moon craters, rushing outward to add their weight in the battle against the Gens of Dalis. The Gens of Dalis was doomed!

In the mind of Sarka the Second there still loomed a hellish doubt that would not down.

The men of Cleric were surrounding Jaska now, protecting her with their lives against the tentacles of that lone Aircar splashed with crimson—and all were flying a losing race with the Earth, which was still being forced outward from the Moon!