Once every year Philo Plat returned to the scene of his crime. It was a form of penance. On each anniversary he climbed the barren crest and gazed along the miles of smashed metal, concrete, and bones.

The area was desolate. The metal crumplings were still stainless and unrusted, their jagged teeth raised in futile anger. Somewhere among it all were the skeletons of the thousands who had died, of all ages and both sexes. Their skully sightlessness, for all he knew, was turning empty, curse-torn eye holes at him.

The stench had long since gone from the desert, and the lizards held their lairs untroubled. No man approached the fenced-off burial ground where what remained of bodies lay in the gashed crater carved out in that final fall.

Only Plat came. He returned year after year and always, as though to ward off so many Evil Eyes, he took his gold medal with him. It hung suspended bravely from his neck as he stood on the crest. On it was inscribed simply, “To the Liberator!”

This time, Fulton was with him. Fulton had been a Lower One once in the days before the crash; the days when there had been Higher Ones and Lower Ones.

Fulton said, “I am amazed you insist on coming here, Philo.”

Plat said, “I must. You know the sound of the crash was heard for hundreds of miles; seismographs registered it around the world. My ship was almost directly above it; the shock vibrations caught me and flung me miles. Yet all I can remember of sound is that one composite scream as Atlantis began its fall.”

“It had to be done.”

“Words,” sighed Plat. “There were babies and guiltless ones.”

“No one is guiltless.”

“Nor am I. Ought I to have been the executioner?”

“Someone had to be.” Fulton was firm. ’Consider the world now, twenty-five years later. Democracy re-established, education once more universal, culture available for the masses, and science once more advancing. Two expeditions have already landed

on Mars."

"I know. I know. But that, too, was a culture. THC called it Atlantis because it was an island that ruled the world. It was an island in the sky, not the sea. It was a city and a world all at once, Fulton. You never saw its crystal covering and its gorgeous buildings. It was a single jewel carved of stone and metal. It was a dream."

"It was concentrated happiness distilled out of the little supply distributed to billions of ordinary folk who lived on the Surface."

"Yes, you are right. Yes, it had to be. But it might have been so different, Fulton. You know," he seated himself on the hard rock, crossed his arms upon his knees and cradled his chin in them, "I think, sometimes, of how it must have been in the old days, when there were nations and wars upon the Earth. I think of how much a miracle it must have seemed to the peoples when the United Nations first became a real world government, and what Atlantis must have meant to them.

"It was a capital city that governed Earth but was not of it. It was a black disc in the air, capable of appearing anywhere on Earth at any height; belonging to no one nation, but to all the planet; the product of no one nation's ingenuity but the first great achievement of all the race – and then, what it became!"

Fulton said, "Shall we go? We'll want to get back to the ship before dark."

Plat went on, "In a way. I suppose it was inevitable. The human race never did invent an institution that didn't end as a cancer. Probably in prehistoric times, the medicine man who began as the repository of tribal wisdom ended as the last bar to tribal advance. In ancient Rome, the citizen army -"

Fulton was letting him speak – patiently. It was a queer echo of the past. And there had been other eyes upon him in those days, patiently waiting, while he talked.

"- the citizen army that defended the Romans against all comers from Veii to Carthage, became the professional Praetorian Guard that sold the Imperium and levied tribute on all the Empire. The Turks developed the Janissaries as their invincible advance guard against Europe and the Sultan ended as a slave of his Janissary slaves. The barons of medieval Europe protected the serfs against the Northmen and the Magyars, then remained six hundred years longer as a parasite aristocracy that contributed nothing."

Plat became aware of the patient eyes and said, "Don't you understand me?"

One of the bolder technicians said, "With your kind permission, Higher One, we must needs be at work."

“Yes, I suppose you must.”

The technician felt sorry. This Higher One was queer, but he meant well. Though he spoke a deal of nonsense, he inquired after their families, told them they were fine fellows, and that their work made them better than the Higher Ones.

So he explained, “You see, there is another shipment of granite and steel for the new theater and we will have to shift the energy distribution. It is becoming very hard to do that. The Higher Ones will not listen.”

“Now that’s what I mean. You should make them listen.”

But they just stared at him, and at that moment an idea crawled gently into Plat’s unconscious mind.

Leo Spinney waited for him on the crystal level. He was Plat’s age but taller and much more handsome. Plat’s face was thin, his eyes were china-blue, and he never smiled. Spinney was straight-nosed with brown eyes that seemed to laugh continuously.

Spinney called, “We’ll miss the game.”

“I don’t want to go, Leo. Please.”

Spinney said, “With the technicians again? Why do you waste your time?”

Plat said, “They work. I respect them. What right have we to idle?”

“Ought I to ask questions of the world as it is when it suits me so well’?”

“If you do not, someone will ask questions for you someday.”

“That will be someday, not this day. And, frankly, you had better come. The Sekjen has noticed that you are never present at the games and he doesn’t like it. Personally, I think people have been telling him of your talks to the technicians and your visits to the Surface. He might even think you consort with Lower Ones.”

Spinney laughed heartily, but Plat said nothing. It would not hurt them if they consorted with Lower Ones a bit more, learned something of their thinking. Atlantis had its guns and its battalions of Waves. It might learn someday that that was not enough. Not enough to save the Sekjen.

The Sekjen! Plat wanted to spit. The full title was “Secretary-General of the United Nations.” Two centuries before it had been an elective office; an honorable one. Now a

man like Guido Garshthavastra could fill it because he could prove he was the son of his equally worthless father.

“Guido G.” was what the Lower Ones on the Surface called him. And usually, with bitterness, “Shah Guido G.,” because “Shah” had been the title of a line of despotic oriental kings. The Lower Ones knew him for what he was. Plat wanted to tell Spinney that, but it wasn’t time yet.

The real games were held in the upper stratosphere, a hundred miles above Atlantis, though the Sky-Island was itself twenty miles above sea-level. The huge amphitheater was filled and the radiant globe in its center held all eyes. Each tiny one-man cruiser high above was represented by its own particular glowing symbol in the color that belonged to the fleet of which it was part. The little sparks reproduced in exact miniature the motions of the ships.

The game was starting as Plat and Spinney took their seats. The little dots were already flashing toward one another. skimming and missing, veering.

A large scoreboard blazoned the progress of the battle in conventional symbology that Plat did not understand. There was confused cheering for either fleet and for particular ships.

High up under a canopy was the Sekjen, the Shah Guido G. of the Lower Ones. Plat could barely see him but he could make out clearly the smaller replica of the game globe that was there for his private use.

Plat was watching the game for the first time. He understood none of the finer points and wondered at the reason for the particular shouts. Yet he understood that the dots were ships and that the streaks of light that licked out from them on frequent occasions represented energy beams which, one hundred miles above, were as real as flaring atoms could make them. Each time a dot streaked, there was a clamor in the audience that died in a great moan as a target dot veered and escaped.

And then there was a general yell and the audience, men and women up to the Sekjen himself clambered to its feet. One of the shining dots had been hit and was going down – spiraling, spiraling. A hundred miles above, a real ship was doing the same; plunging down into the thickening air that would heat and consume its specially designed magnesium alloy shell to harmless powdery ash before it could reach the surface of the Earth.

Plat turned away. “I’m leaving, Spinney.”

Spinney was marking his scorecard and saying, “That’s five ships the Greens have lost this week. We’ve got to have more.” He was on his feet, calling wildly, “Another one!”

The audience was taking up the shout, chanting it.

Plat said, “A man died in that ship.”

“You bet. One of the Green’s hest too. Damn good thing.” “Do you realize that a man died. ”

“They’re only Lower Ones. What’s bothering you?”

Plat made his slow way out among the rows of people. A few looked at him and whispered. Most had eyes for nothing but the game globe. There was perfume all about him and in the distance, occasionally heard amid the shouts, there was a faint wash of gentle music. As hepassed through a main exit, a yell trembled the air behind him.

Plat fought the nausea grimly.

He walked two miles, then stopped.

Steel girders were swaying at the end of diamagnetic beams and the coarse sound of orders yelled in Lower accents filled the air.

There was always building going on upon Atlantis. Two hundred years ago, when Atlantis had been the genuine seat of government, its lines had been straight, its spaces broad. But now it was much more than that. It was the Xanadu pleasure dome that Coleridge spoke of.

The crystal roof had been lifted upward and outward many times in the last two centuries. Each time it had been thickened so that Atlantis might more safely climb higher; more safely withstand the possible blows of meteoric pebbles not yet entirely burnt by the thin wisps of air.

And as Atlantis became more useless and more attractive, more and more of the Higher Ones left their estates and factories in the hands of managers and foremen and took up permanent residence on the Sky-Island. All built larger, higher, more elaborately.

And here was still another structure.

Waves were standing by in stolid, duty-ridden obedience. The name applied to the females – if, Plat thought sourly, they could be called that – was taken from the Early English of the days when Earth was divided into nations. There, too, conversion and degeneration had obtained. The old Waves had done paper work behind the lines.

These creatures, still called Waves, were front-line soldiers.

It made sense, Plat knew. Properly trained, women were more single-minded, more fanatic, less given to doubts and remorse than ever men could be.

They always had Waves present at the scene of any building, because the building was done by Lower Ones, and Lower Ones on Atlantis had to he guarded. Just as those on the Surface had to he cowed. In the last fifty years alone, the long-range atomic artillery that studded the underside of Atlantis had been doubled and tripled.

He watched the girder come softly down, two men yelling directions to each other as it settled in place. Soon there would be no further room for new buildings on Atlantis.

The idea that had nudged his unconscious mind earlier in the day gently touched his conscious mind.

Plat’s nostrils flared.

Plat’s nose twitched at the smell of oil and machinery. More than most of the perfume-spoiled Higher Ones, he was used to odors of all sorts. He had been on the Surface and smelled the pungence of its growing fields and the fumes of its cities.

He said to the technician, “I am seriously thinking of building a new house and would like your advice as to the best possible location.”

The technician was amazed and electrified. “Thank you, Higher One. It has become so difficult to arrange the available power.”

“It is why l come to you.”

They talked at length, Plat asked a great many questions and when he returned to crystal level his mind was a maze of speculation. Two days passed in an agony of doubt. Then he remembered the shining dot, spiraling and spiraling, and the young, wondering eyes upon his own as Spinnev said, “They’re only Lower Ones.”

He made up his mind and applied for audience with the Sekjen.

The Sekjen’s drawling voice accentuated the boredom he did not care to hide. He said. “The Plats are of good family, yet you amuse yourself with technicians. I am told you speak to them as equals. I hope that it will not become necessary to remind you that your estates on the Surface require your care.”

That would have meant exile from Atlantis, of course.

Plat said, “It is necessary to watch the technicians, Sire. They are of Lower extraction.”

The Sekjen frowned. “Our Wave Commander has her job she takes care of such matters.”

“She docs her best, I have no doubt, Sire, but I havemade friends with the technicians. They are not safe. Would I have any other reason to soil my hands with them, but the safety of Atlantis.”

The Sekjen listened. First, doubtfully; then, with fear on his soft face. He said, “I shall have them in custody -”

“Softly, Sire,” said Plat. “We cannot do without them meanwhile, since none of us can man the guns and the antigravs. It would be better to give them no opportunity for rebellion. In two weeks the new theater will be dedicated with games and feasting.”

“And what do they intend then?” “I am not yet certain, Sire. But I know enough to recommend that a division of Waves be brought to Atlantis. Secretly, of course, and at the last minute so that it will be too late for the rebels to change any plans they have made. They will have to drop them altogether, and the proper moment, once lost, may never be regained. Thereafter, I will learn more. If necessary, we will train new men. It would be a pity, Sire, to tell anyone of this in advance. If the technicians learn our countermeasures prematurely, matters may go badly.”

The Sekjen, with his jeweled hand to his chin, mused – and believed.

Shah Guido G., thought Philo Plat. In history, you’ll go down as Shah Guido G.

Philo Plat watched the gaiety from a distance. Atlantis’s central squares were crawling black with people. That was good. He himself had managed to get away only with difficulty. And none too soon, since the Wave Division had already cross-hatched the sky with their ships.

They were maneuvering edgily now, adjusting themselves into final position over Atlantis’s huge, raised air field, which was well able to take their ships all at once.

The cruisers were descending now vertically, in parade formation. Plat looked quickly toward the city proper. The populace had grown quieter as they watched the unscheduled demonstration, and it seemed to him that he had never seen so many Higher Ones upon the Sky-Island at one time. For a moment, a last misgiving arose. There was still time for a warning.

And even as he thought that he knew that there wasn’t. The cruisers were dropping

speedily. He would have to go hurry if he were himself to escape in his own little craft. He wondered sickly, even as he grasped the controls, whether his friends on the Surface had received his yesterday's warning, or would believe it if they had received it. If they could not act quickly the Higher Ones would yet recover from the first blow, devastating though it was.

He was in the air when the Waves landed, seven thousand five hundred tear-drop ships covering the airfield like a descending net. Plat drove his ship upward, watching -

And Atlantis went dark. It was like a candle over which a mighty hand was suddenly cupped. One moment it blazed the night into brilliance for fifty miles around; the next it was black against blackness.

To Plat the thousands of screams blended into one thin, lost shriek of fear. He Red, and the shock vibrations of Atlantis's crash to Earth caught his ship and hurled it far.

He never stopped hearing that scream.

Fulton was staring at Plat. He said, "Have you ever told this to anyone?"

Plat shook his head.

Fulton's mind went back a quarter century, too. "We got your message, of course. It was hard to believe, as you expected. Many feared a trap even after report of the Fall arrived. But – well, it's history. The Higher Ones that remained, those on the Surface, were demoralized and before they could recover, they were done.

"But tell me," he turned to Plat with sudden, hard curiosity. "What was it you did'! We've always assumed you sabotaged the power stations."

"I know. The truth is so much less romantic, Fulton. The world would prefer to believe its myth. Let it."

"May I have the truth?"

"If you will. As I told you, the Higher Ones built and built to saturation. The antigrav energy beams had to support a weight in buildings, guns, and enclosing shell that doubled and tripled as the years went on. Any requests the technicians might have made for newer or bigger motors were turned down, since the Higher Ones would rather have the room and money for their mansions and there was always enough power for the moment.

"The technicians, as I said, had already reached the stage where they were disturbed

at the construction of single buildings. I questioned them and found exactly how little margin of safety remained. They were waiting only for the completion of the new theater to make a new request. They did not realize, however, that, at my suggestion, Atlantis would be called upon to support the sudden additional burden of a division of Wave cavalry in their ships. Seven thousand five hundred ships, fully rigged!

“When the Waves landed, by then almost two thousand tons, the antigrav power supply was overloaded. The motors failed and Atlantis was only a vast rock, ten miles above the ground. What could such a rock do but fall.”

Plat arose. Together they turned back toward their ship.

Fulton laughed harshly. “You know, there is a fatality in names.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, that once more in history Atlantis sank beneath the Waves.”