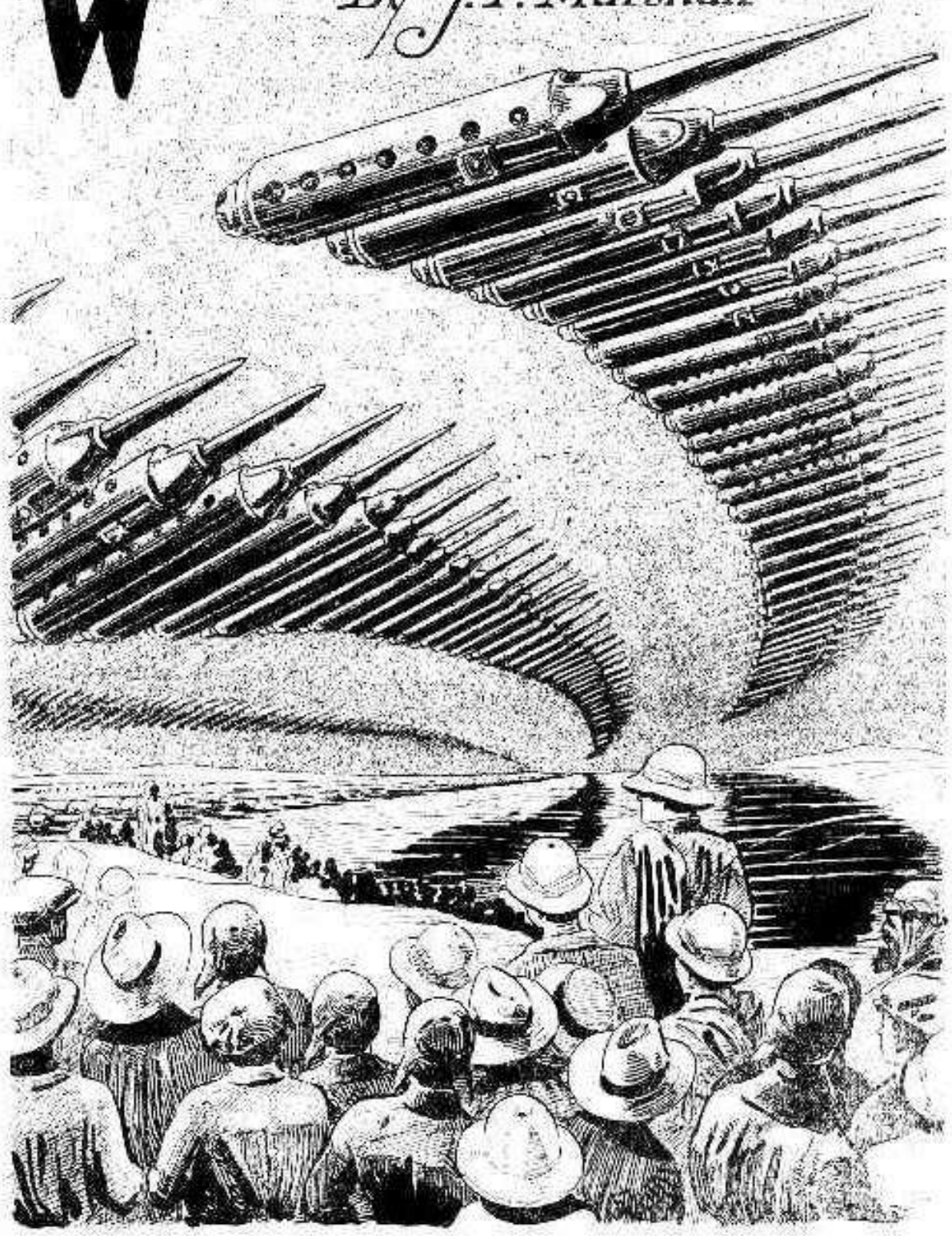
Warriors of Space

By J. P. Marshall



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CHAPTER I - After Thirty Years

PROFESSOR Arthur Maynard roused himself from his abstraction as the sound of light laughter came to him from the hallway. A girl in tennis togs stepped into the library, closely followed by a tall young man of twenty-six years.

Louise Leighton was a near neighbor of the professor! Nearly two years before her family had come to occupy the estate bordering his own, and for fully half that time he had been aware of the growing affection of his son for his fair neighbor.

“Oh, Professor!” laughter danced in the blue eyes of the girl as she shook back her closely shingled hair, “look out for Donald! He’s seething!” “Hello, Dad. Louise gave me an awful triming. I didn’t get a look-in all afternoon. I wouldn’t let her go home. She must have dinner with us. We’re starved! How long have we to wait?”

The flow of light talk came to an abrupt halt as Donald Maynard noticed the drawn features of his father.

“What is it, Dad,” he asked, instantly concerned, “is anything wrong?”

By way of answer, the professor handed him a telegram dated at Washington. The message was short:

“Green globes seen near Pacific coast this morning. Details later. Be ready to confer with War Science office tomorrow.”

Donald’s dark eyes narrowed as he looked up again. “Well?” he asked.

“Have you seen the afternoon papers?”

“No. What ?”

The professor handed him a newspaper from a nearby table. The scare heads ran the full width of the sheet. Donald turned so that the girl too could read:

GREEN GLOBES AGAIN MENACE THE EARTH.

And below:

“The liner Centurion, due at Seattle on Wednesday 'of this week, reports by radio that several large green globes were seen early this morning, hovering low over the Pacific near latitude 44 degrees north, longtitude 154 degrees west.

“The startling report of the liner will recall to many the terror of the first visitation of one of these weird craft when it appeared over New York City thirty years ago last month.

“On the afternoon of July 26, 19 — , a single globe about a hundred and fifty feet in diameter, was noticed floating over the city. On the evening of the same day it sent out a most peculiar green ray that practically wrecked the original Bartholdi statue of Liberty. Two old style bombing planes that attempted to shoot down the strange object were themselves destroyed by the ray which seemed to have the power to reduce to nothing any substance that it touched.

“On the following day the globe landed in Times Square. By means of a sort of telepathic form of communication, its commander made it known that he was from Dione, a satellite of Saturn, and he demanded the unconditional surrender of the country within three days.

“A squad of police machine gunners, who attempted to prevent the departure of the globe, also became victims of the ray, being entirely consumed except for several articles of gold that they had on their persons.

“The entire country was gripped by the terror of the thing. The military, naval and air forces were at once mobilized toward the scene of the disturbance, but it was evident that the weapons at hand could not cope with that ray of destruction.

“In an effort to discover some new means of defense, prominent astronomers and scientists of the day were consulted, and after some discussion a young scientist by the name of Arthur Maynard came forward with the startling suggestion that since gold was the only

substance that resisted the ray, men should be armored with gold, and armed with golden mirrors to turn back the ray on the enemy craft.

"The result is a matter of known history! After visiting the other nations of the world, and demanding the same unconditional surrender, the globe returned to New York for America's answer. During the brief battle that ensued, fifteen battle planes and a huge dreadnaught were utterly destroyed, as were also many of New York's proudest skyscrapers in the vicinity of Times Square.

"Twenty-four gold armored men, led by the young scientist himself, made a last stand in the middle of the ruined square. Bravely facing the terror of that globe they turned their golden mirrors upward and reflected the destroying rays back at their projector, consuming the globe itself in the same manner that it had destroyed its victims.

"The scientist, Arthur Maynard, now Professor Maynard of Long Island, has always maintained that other globes would appear some day. He has devoted his entire life to the development of weapons that would place this earth in a position to successfully combat any such future attack. From time to time huge sums of money have been advanced by the Congress of the United States to further his efforts and experiments, some of which have only recently startled the world.

"At the time of going to press, Professor Maynard had not made any statement, although he appeared calm when interviewed by our correspondent."

Rapidly Donald Maynard ran his eyes over the lesser column headings :

"NATIONS RUSH DELEGATES TO INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE CONFERENCE!"

"MAYNARD'S GRAVITY DEFYING SPACE CAR MAY BE OUR ONLY USEFUL WEAPON!"

"WILL PROFESSOR MAYNARD SAVE THE EARTH FOR A SECOND TIME?"

Donad felt the girl's hand tighten on his arm, while the muscles around his heart seemed to contract with a nameless dread. He straightened and regarded his father seriously.

"What will it mean?" he asked.

The professor slowly raised his eyes to the others. New lines were growing on his face with each passing minute as he realized the tremendous responsibility that was his.

"May God help us," he whispered. "It means war! War between two worlds. War to the destruction of one or the other! It can be no less!"

CHAPTER II - A Call in the Night

TWO o'clock in the morning. San Francisco slumbered.

Far out beyond the Golden Gate ten round luminous objects drifted along easily at a height of a mile or so above the water, like a string of heavenly pearls. Four muffled strokes of a ship's clock chimed softly over the harbor, and from somewhere came a voice:

"Four bells, and all's we Eeee-ahh! Turn out! Turn out! The globes are here!"

A ship's siren split the darkness. Another took up the call, the long rising wail of a fire-boat joining in the din as it rushed from its dock to investigate the disturbance. On shore a hoarse throat of brass shrieked out a tattoo of sound — a riot call! In less than two minutes after that first startled cry of the watch, it seemed that every whistle on harbor and shore was calling its warning.

For two days, the whole country, the Pacific Coast in particular, had been waiting, fearing to hear those warning signals. The terror of the unknown does not die quickly. Even after thirty years there were those who remembered the fate of proud New York, and remembering, their one thought was to escape.

From the houses rushed the populace of the city to look and then run back to gather what few belongings they could carry. The streets became clogged with the exodus of

automobiles. Speed laws went by the board as each driver grimly determined to get away from the danger zone.

The great Pacific Broadcast Station, just signing off its small-hour concert, bade its listeners to stand by; then out over the whole land went the warning. The government station at Arlington heard, and shot the news to Washington. The capitol leaped into action. Army, navy, and war science departments became alive, humming with activity, and as a final step the radiophone of the War Science Building beat out the signal:

1PAM. 1PAM.

Tuned to the wave, the receiver in Professor Maynard's library picked up the call.

1PAM! 1PAM! It roared through the house.

Young Donald Maynard was the first to reach the control panel. Grasping a dressing gown as he ran from his room, he took the stairs three at a jump, and threw over the control.

"1PAM answering; Donald Maynard speaking. What is it?"

"Your father, we want your father!"

Donald surrendered the instrument to the elder man.

"Yes, what is it?"

"Ten globes coming in over the Golden Gate at two o'clock. San Francisco may need help. What do you advise?"

Back in the War Science Building a bewildered operator raised his eyes to his superior.

"Well," the latter barked impatiently, "what did he say?"

"He said — He said he'd go right over. Be there in ten minutes or less — and then he cut off."

PROFESSOR MAYNARD turned from the radiophone, and with a speed belieing his sixty years, ran for the side door of the library.

"The car, Donald, the car," he called over his shoulder. "Don't stop to dress. Come!"

Out through a connecting passage, past an alert guard into a spacious hangar, ran the scientist, his son trailing close behind, the dressing gown still hanging over one arm. The guard wheeled to press a button. A gong filled the interior of the hangar with its din.

"The doors!"

Across the Continent

Evidently trained for just such an emergency, several men sprang to the doors swinging them wide before the bulky object that filled the hangar; the thing that the newspaper had called Professor Maynard's gravity defying space car.

In appearance the car looked like a huge overgrown steel-jacketed bullet, painted black, its nose running down to a stubby needle-pointed ram. Reaching an opening in its smooth surface, the scientist clambered inside. Donald had hardly followed suit when two others swung themselves in and clanged the shutters closed behind them.

Each knew his place. The professor climbed into a chair well forward in the craft, facing an array of controls that looked more like the keyboard of a pipe-organ than anything else. Hastily he drew about him the straps of a harness attached to the chair, and pulled the last buckle tight.

Donald stationed himself before a calculating machine above which hung a panel of meters and instruments, while the other two men busied themselves at a switchboard well aft.

A subdued hum sounded from a bank of transformers as one of the men threw a switch. Then came the drone of a fan — and a wave of fresh oxygen blew through the car.

Around the entire curve of the walls were vacuum tube settings, each holding a tube about the size of a small keg. Around each tube a lead shield was erected, completely surrounding the tube except for a cone shaped opening in each which pointed toward the outer walls of the car.

The professor raised his eyes to study an astronomical chart hanging above him, then he depressed a key. A tube glowed softly "within its lead housing. Then like a bit of thistle down the car rose into the air a few inches and remained suspended. The professor lifted his hand.

“Watch out! No time to take it easy!”

His hand fell, but not before the other three had grabbed wildly at the nearest stanchions. Three keys moved under the professor’s fingers; three more tubes glowed with life, and the car shot from the hangar in a steep arc that pointed its sharp nose up at an angle of over forty-five degrees.

“Throw on the floor tube, Henry,” the professor suggested, “we’re going straight up!”

The man named Henry shot home another switch, while the occupants of the car breathed easier, and let go their holds on the trusses. The professor’s hand moved again. The car tilted until its nose pointed straight up away from the earth.

Seemingly the three men who were standing should have been pitched into the lower end as the car tilted, but quite easily they trod the floor gratings, as if the car were resting on an even keel.

The explanation of this was what had startled the world less than two months before, when the professor had first made public the news of his success. The public, inured to modern miracles, had been willing to concede that Professor Maynard’s six element tubes could reverse the pull of gravity in one direction and amplify it in another, and so give the car its motive power. But it had seemed all but impossible that the energy of one of those tubes could be so directed that the floor of the car became a separate plane of gravity that could draw objects to it as the earth did.

“How high, Dad?” Donald asked, looking at his father.

“About fifteen miles, Don. High enough to get well above the atmosphere, and so get rid of the friction of the air, then we can begin to travel.” He consulted the clock. “Twenty-five minutes of three! Not so bad, eh?” There was an exultant note in his voice.

Not more than thirty-five minutes had passed since that first siren had boomed its warning over the harbor of San Francisco. And yet in that space of time a nation had been warned, and across the continent help was speeding toward the city to guard it from the menace of the terrible visitors.

Donald was counting:

“Twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fourteen and a half, fifteen. Straighten out, Dad. Fifteen and a half, sixteen, fifteen and a half, fifteen. Hold it there!”

The keel of the craft had dipped to a position parallel to the earth. The professor again studied the chart over his head, and then depressed a round half-dozen of keys. The men had the queer feeling that the car was trying to slip out from beneath them. Gaining, gaining, accelerating its speed every second, the car shot westward.

“Position?” barked the professor.

Donald scanned his meters, then ran his fingers over the keys of the calculating machine.

“Earth’s longtitude ninety-six degrees west, latitude forty degrees north,” he announced. “Just passing over Kansas.”

The professor pulled up two keys and depressed two others in their stead. “Position?” he called again, after a short wait.

“Longtitude one hundred and twenty, west; thirty-eight north,” came the answer. Donald narrowly watched the instruments.

“Down!” he called.

The car checked its headlong flight. Its sharp nose dropped, and down through space it rushed toward the earth. The scientist's hands were fairly flying as he manipulated the keys to check that descent. A slight shiver ran through the craft as it struck the air blanket over the earth. After a few seconds the car levelled off again and hung poised while its navigator jerked open a wicket behind a heavy glass port.

Beneath them lay the lights of a great city. Out to the west rolled the open Pacific, and slightly to the north, almost at the same level as the car, floated ten shining globes.

"Two forty-three," growled the professor. "Eight minutes across the continent. Three thousand miles — and we didn't open up even half a notch. Well, we'll see what we can do."

CHAPTER III - The First Blow

BUT in the short length of time since the globes first drifted in over the harbor, San Francisco had suffered.

When first that Pacific liner had radioed the news of their presence in mid-ocean, the warning had been broadcast to all parts of the world to allow the globes to come in peace if they would. No searching lights, no planes or aircraft guns had been turned against the visitors, and yet they had chosen the way of war. Dione must have bred a race of warriors whose only object in coming was to make a new conquest.

The globes had hardly reached a position over the city before they loosed that ray that was their weapon. From the globe nearest the city came a short green pencil of light. It lengthened, stretching down until it rested on the house-tops below. Some of the houses were merely seared, others had large sections conjured away as the ray touched only portions of them, but those on which the ray rested fairly seemed to melt into nothing. Absolutely nothing remained to mark where they had stood except a series of scarred craters with a light green mist that hung over them. The other nine globes had been quick to follow the example set by their

leader. With no apparent objective they flashed their rays down to the buildings below, leaving patches of desolation wherever they touched.

It was not within the limits of human endurance to be subjected to such an attack for long without at least attempting a reprisal. But an attempt was all that it became. A squadron of planes winged out to the attack, and as on that night in July, thirty years before, the planes went to their destruction under the baneful green stream.

Then the space car arrived.

Peering through the port, the professor rapidly surveyed the situation. For the second time in his life he was facing these globes of death. Ever since that initial experience he had worked with but one thing in view: the time when the world would again be menaced by those weird craft. Even his son had been brought up with the idea, and he had made ready to take over the work at his father's death.

"Get straps!" The scientists voice was sharp with excitement. "Get straps and tie yourselves to the stanchions. Hurry! They've seen us — and we're going to carry the fight to the enemy."

Indeed they had been noticed! The globes suddenly shifted to re-form in a close circle.

"Ready!" Donald pulled the last strap tight.

"We have a weak point," the professor admitted grimly, all the others I am sure of excepting that one. Those glass ports! They are made of layer after layer of glass with ray filters of gold salts in between. If a ray touched them and they hold — well and good. If they give way—," he shrugged expressively.

His hand fell to the keyboard. The car moved forward, slowly at first, then gathering momentum it swept by the globes, speeding far to the north before it cut a wide circle and rushed back straight toward the center of that shining circle.

A single green ray shone from the nearest globe, creeping out toward that hurtling menace. The Dionians seemed unperturbed, evidently confident that nothing could withstand their weapon. Perhaps they believed themselves to be omnipotent.

The ray touched the side of the car, stripping its coat of paint from it like a vanishing cloak. A flash of green showed through the ports and passed on. The glass had held! From the ground the watchers saw their champion turn from a dull black to a shining gold, and a wild cheer burst from their throats. Gold! The car was plated with gold — and safe.

The steady onrush of the car was disconcerting to the invaders. The globes suddenly shifted, the circle tipping so that each globe could bring its rays to bear. Then the night sky fairly bristled with a barrage of green streamers.

Literally bathed in a sea of green light the car plunged on.

"Now — the mirrors! Straight ahead!"

In answer to that command, the man named Henry grasped a double set of control handles and spun them about. Outside the car, two golden mirrors flashed their bright faces forward. Green rays caught on polished gold and shot back toward their origin. Two globes dropped from sight — destroyed by their own weapon. Then the space car entered the circle.

Too late a globe dropped from the line. The car veered and struck!

Traveling at such a terrific speed, the spur crumpled through the side of the globe as if it were only paper, telescoping the whole craft over the front of the car. Still carrying the wreckage the car rose until the lights of the city became only a tiny blur, then it turned and dropped, suddenly checking its flight less than a mile above the bay.

Like an apple slung from a stick, the wrecked globe shot from the impaling spur, down, down, until it struck a mighty splash and the waters of the harbor closed over it.

"Three gone!"

Victory

THE scientist put his machine through the twist of a hairpin turn and headed back again. The seven remaining globes split into two groups, speeding apart until a wide gulf lay between them. In comical bewilderment the professor scratched his head.

"It's a trap," he burst out, "but how am I supposed to walk into it? We'll see."

He coasted up to a position midway between the groups and hung them motionless.

But one tube glowed within its lead housing; the tube that robbed the car of its gravity. With that tube dead, the machine would become just an ordinary mass of metal, subject to all the power of the earth's attraction. The professor poised his hand over the controlling key and waited.

Suddenly the globes moved! The Dionians flashed no rays now ; they dared not after their late experience. From both sides they rushed toward the car, evidently intent on crushing their enemy between them. Their speed was unbelievable, fully as fast as the space car itself could travel; it would be only a matter of seconds before they struck. Nearer they came—nearer—

The professor's hand snapped up sharply. The glow died from that last tube, and the car, dropped, tumbling end over end as it fell toward the earth.

From above, in the space it had just quitted came a medley of metallic crashes, as the converging globes bumped not the enemy that they had thought to crush, but themselves. The professor laughed softly as he checked that headlong rush.

"They are not so clever, these men of Dione. How much damage did they do?"

Only three globes appeared in formation. Off to the west four others moved slowly out over the water. Perhaps somewhere in the Pacific they had an island base. The ocean was dotted with atolls, any one of which would serve their purpose.

The scientist clamped his jaws tightly.

"It's not nice," he ground out, "but it's war. We'll take the cripples first."

The car sped after the four limping globes which suddenly made a pitiful attempt to run for it — to no; purpose. They met the same fate as had the third one. One by one the space car impaled them on that deadly spur, and shook them off into the Pacific. Turning for the last time the victorious men searched for the three that were yet to be reckoned with, but they were gone! Far down to the south, mounting higher as they fled, three glowing points of light were rapidly fading from sight.

A very weary scientist leaned heavily on the edge of his control board.

"Take the car, Donald; I've had enough," he breather. "It's almost three o'clock. "We'll go down to see the damage and then hurry home." He smiled wanly. "You know how angry it makes the cook when we are late for breakfast."

CHAPTER IV - Many Things Happen

TWO weeks passed by without any further sight of the globes. The lull in hostilities was not surprising. The invaders had been so badly beaten in their encounter with the space car that it was only natural for them to consider carefully before making a second attack. If the three surviving globes had returned to their planet with the news of their defeat, then of necessity some time would have to elapse before any further action could take place.

The wait did not delude the earthly powers. It had been thirty years since the last visitation, and then there had been but one globe which had been destroyed. The men of that far planet could not have known of the fate of that first craft. It had taken years, perhaps years of further experimentation, and perfection of their carrier before the second attempt was made. But this last time three had escaped to carry the news of their discovery. It could be only a question of time before the next move was made, and the conference of the nations could only conjecture how strong a force would next appear.

Plans and specifications of the space car had become world property. Each nation was building them as quickly as they could. Radio and cable lines became taxed to capacity with the rush of official communications. The world was in arms!

Donald saw but little of his father during those days. The professor had turned the care of the space car over to his son, while he devoted his whole time to the many conferences. The space car needed repairs. The bath of green rays had harmed it not at all, but the five globes that had met destruction on the point of the spur had left their marks.

The spur itself was built up of alternate layers of steel and gold. Foreseeing the difficulty that might arise if its soft outer covering became gouged by a collision, the professor had wisely constructed his ram so that such an occurrence would only cause him to lose a layer or two of the many that made up the spur. If that gold skin became broken, exposing the steel to a green ray, the ray would merely destroy the steel down as far as the next layer of gold, when its action would be checked.

Louise spent much of her time with Donald while he worked on the car. Often she too would don overalls and insist on helping him.

It was on the evening of the second of September that an incident happened to remind the world that they were by no means free from the attentions of their foe.

Donald was working late on the interior of the space car, Louise, as usual, assisting him. The huge hanger doors stood open wide, while outside paced the ever watchful sentries.

"Come, Donald," the girl leaned near to him, "you have worked hard all day. You must get a breath of air before you sleep, and — and I want you to walk with me." There was a wistful note in her last words. She had had so little of him for the past two weeks. She missed their former evening strolls under the stars.

Donald gathered his tools, and smiled down tenderly at her.

“Things are in pretty fair shape now. It shall be your evening. I’m sorry that things have been so, but you know—”

The girl laid her hand softly on his arm.

“Yes, Donald, I know. On your father and you rests so great a burden, and you can not shirk it. I would not try to make you, only you must keep fit and not over-work.”

An Intruder

DONALD slipped lightly through the trap in the side of the car. It was dark in the hangar—and quiet. Only from outside came the tread of sentries.

In the far corner something moved!

“Is that you, Jack?” Donald called sharply.

No answer.

“Jack!”

“What is it, Donald?” the girl’s voice from within the car called to him. “Watch out. I’m coming down!”

“No!” There was a nameless dread clutching at Donald’s heart. Something was in that far corner of the hangar; something that moved and would not answer!

“Stay back, Louise,” he shouted. “Wait until I call!” then louder, “Guard! Ho! guard. Inside the hanger; it’s Donald calling!”

The sound of running feet came from outside. From the corner came a low musical hum, and a tiny thread of green cut its way through the dusk. Donald’s heart leaped into his throat and he recognized the color.

“Something is the matter, Donald; I’m coming down.”

Louise! in the rush of his fear for her, Donald forgot his own danger. He made a cat-like spring to one side, crooking his hand through the opening to spring the shutter catch.

"Stay there," he yelled.

The trap clanged shut. Louise would understand, and she would be safe inside.

That wandering thread of green touched the spot where he had been standing. Its tip moved along the side of the space car. Would the guard never come? There was no sound of running now. Had they been overpowered? Had that loyal little band of men met death at the hands of some confederate of the wielder of the green ray?

Donald cursed his stupidity in being unarmed. But then, who on earth could suspect such a form of attack? The tiny ray wandered back and forth. Donald crouched low, not daring to move lest he betray his position. Fascinated, his eyes followed the spot of light as it traveled now near, now far from him.

Suddenly a series of orange spurts leaped from the shadows around the doorway. A deafening roar filled the hangar, and through the crash of the rifles came a weird shrill scream.

A New Attack

THE lights flashed on. Blinking rapidly to accustom his eyes to the sudden change, Donald looked around him.

By the doors stood the members of the guard, poised, rifles ready—but there was no further need of them. In the corner lay the dwarfed figure of a man. Reaching him with a hasty sprint Donald turned the body over. It was fairly riddled with bullets. The man was dead.

Although short of stature, the dead man was heavy and muscular. There had been enormous strength in that squat body. The features too were cast in a strange pattern, even in death looking malignantly cruel.

"What does it mean, Mr. Donald?" the captain of the guard turned a grim face toward the young man. "We heard you call. We would have run in, but I thought better of it so we crept up quietly, and from the corner we saw that bit of green light coming." His jaw clamped

suddenly. “Green isn’t a popular color on this earth now—and I’m taking no chances. The professor’s orders were to shoot first and talk afterward if anyone tried to bother the space car.”

“You have done well, Captain, very well indeed!”

It was the voice of the scientist that spoke the words. He had come on the run, attracted by the sound of the firing. Donald gazed at his father wonderingly. On the night when they had conquered the ten globes he had known a new type of man for a father. This was still another who stood before him, eyes flashing, teeth clenched, an automatic swinging from either hand. The professor stooped.

“What’s this?”

“Don’t!” Donald’s sudden cry stopped his father’s fingers just short of a long metal cylinder that lay near the fallen man. “It’s death, Dad; be careful. It holds the green ray!”

“The green ray? Here? Tell me quickly, what happened?”

Donald explained with a few words, “and Louise is still in the car,” he ended.

“She is safe. Let her stay,” grunted the other. “Don’t let her see this. Captain, you take the body away and double the guard tonight.” Again he turned to his son. “Let Louise out when they have gone, but don’t tell her—the truth. Just tell her the guard shot and wounded a fellow who wandered into the hangar.”

“But, dad,” Donald’s eyes bored into those of his father, “I’m not Louise, and you are holding back something. What is it?”

Gingerly the scientist stooped to pick up that metal cylinder.

“Think, Donald,” he grated, “think! You have read the eye-witness accounts of thirty years ago, and this—this cylinder is the last bit of evidence, if it is needed. Do you think that is any earth man whom the guard shot? Donald, that is a man from another planet! That is a man from Dione!”

In the quiet of his own room Donald sat smoking. An enemy spy in the hangar! Had he been alone or were there others about? What had been his object in coming? If there were others who could tell at what instant that ray of destruction would be turned on the house and its occupants? Absently he gazed from the window of the darkened room up to the star strewn heavens. Up there, millions of miles away, was another world, a world peopled with a race that sought to conquer the earth.

A falling meteor cut its bright trail across the sky, arcing down toward the earth. Meteor? Before Donald could collect his scattered thoughts enough to realize the true significance of that speeding bit of brightness, it had grown, and it kept growing. With incredible speed it rushed down toward the house — a globe!

There was nothing that could be done. The knowledge tore through Donald's mind as he watched, fascinated. But before the thought could fairly register, the globe was past, skimming lightly through the air to come to rest in a field about half a mile from the house. Only a part of a minute elapsed before it moved again, cutting a long graceful curve as it rushed upward, growing smaller; now a mere pin point of light; then lost amid the myriads of stars.

Donald rubbed his eyes. It had been no hallucination, of that he was sure. But why?

The household was astir early the next morning. Foot by foot the professor and his aides went over the grounds surrounding the hangar. Beneath a window they found footprints — the prints of two men. One set of prints coincided with the peculiar footwear of the dead spy, the other set, similar but smaller, milled around and became lost in the short grass. After breakfast a car arrived from the city bringing two bloodhounds. Their work was soon done.

For a few minutes the dogs sniffed noisily about the spot where the two sets of footprints showed in the ground, then turning, they led the way across the grounds, with the keeper and the others hastening after. For half a mile or so they strained ahead steadily. Suddenly they

stopped. In widening circles the dogs beat about the field, only to return to where the men stood and start again.

Donald turned to look back toward the house. There could be no doubt! The place where the trail ended was also the place where that speeding globe had landed the night before.

"You were right, Dad," he conceded, "they came to pick up their spy. Was it prearranged or did he signal? I wonder if we will ever know?"

The afternoon was still young when the radio began to drone its signal: 1PAM. 1PAM.

An excited operator at Washington blurted out his news to the professor :

"Three globes rushed down at one-fifteen, hung low over the mint and turned loose the green rays. The mint is gone, entirely destroyed. The vaults gave way along with the rest leaving the ground covered with gold bullion. The globes landed, took on board all the gold they could carry and left again. I will call you if anything else happens." He signed off.

CHAPTER V - An Idea and a Confession

EVENTS were not long in shaping themselves after that surprising week-end. Donald seemed to have drawn into a shell from which he could hardly be dragged. Long hours he spent in the library. Other hours he spent covering sheet after sheet with figures. Even Louis failed to draw him from his abstraction.

"Don't misunderstand, please," he begged her. "I am trying to settle something in my own mind. I dare not tell even you until I am sure, lest you think that I am insane."

And because Louise was a woman, and in love, she patted his shoulder and told him she understood, even while she did not understand at all.

For a week he continued to hide himself away. Then one afternoon he called his father to him. Laying down the sheaf of papers he had been poring over, he looked up as the scientist entered the library.

“What is it, Donald?” he asked.

Donald’s voice was small, like that of a frightened boy who proposes some madcap scheme: “Dad, when first the globes appeared you said it meant war ; war to the destruction of one or the other of the planets. You remember?”

The professor nodded. Donald continued.

“I — I hardly know how to begin. You may think I am mad, but here,” he indicated the pack of papers, “here is the proof!”

For half an hour Donald talked, slowly at first, then as he warmed to his subject the words came in a torrent. Fired by his enthusiasm the scientist seized a pencil and himself covered many pages with figures and equations. The afternoon waned, and still they talked. Heads together, they went over sheet after sheet, checking and rechecking the results of their work. At last the professor pushed back his chair.

“My, my boy,” he whispered, “what have you shown me? I am a scientist, Donald. I have trained myself to believe that which is supported by proof. But this! It is almost unbelievable, in spite of all proof. Still — it is the one real way to settle this warring of worlds.”

For a long time after that he sat silent, slumped down in his chair, chin cupped in hand, while the shadows of evening gathered in the library. Again he raised his head, then slowly pulled himself from the chair to stand beside his son.

“I will call the powers, Donald, and you shall tell them of your plan, but you must not be disappointed if they reject it. Remember, my boy, it will be hard to make them believe. Even I, with all my knowledge and training, am staggered by the thought of what you propose. It will be your task to convince them.”

Alone in the library, Donald turned on the desk light. His head sank forward to rest on his bended arms. Had it been only a few weeks before when he had been so carefree? Then he had looked on his father’s experiments and inventions as necessary steps toward some battle

of the ages that would never take place in his time. And now! His head throbbed with a dull ache; the strain of the past week had been tremendous. And outside was the world, hanging breathless, waiting for the knowledge of its fate, while over it hung the dark shadow of that sinister star.

He did not hear the light footsteps behind him, did not notice the presence of the girl until she gently touched his shoulder.

"Donald!"

"Louise," he raised his eyes to meet the deep glow in her own. He felt the hand on his shoulder trembling, "Louise, what is it?" He stood up to face the girl.

A sob, half strangled in her attempt to control it, was her only answer.

"Tell me, dear," unconsciously the endearment slipped past his lips.

"Your father told me," she whispered, "and I am afraid for you."

Donald struggled to control his own emotion. Yes, it had been but a month since he and this girl were such happy companions. Then happiness had seemed near. With each passing day he had felt the urge grow stronger to tell her of his love; and then the globes had come!

Donald had aged. The month had hastened the usually slow transition from youth to manhood. With possible destruction hovering over the earth he had tried to put the thought of his own love from his mind, but now — time was short. If the powers accepted his plan he would go, perhaps to his death. Could he go without telling her? Was it fair to either of them to let the sweet confession unspoken?

"Father told you all? The whole plan?" he asked.

"Enough, Donald. Enough so that I know the danger toward which you are going. I — I want you to know—"

The clasp of his arms about her stopped her words.

“I do know, Louise, without being told, and you know, too, that I love you. I have wanted to tell you for so long. It would have been before now, dear, if the globes had not come. My father needed my help. The world needed us both. It would have been selfish of me to neglect them while I comforted my own heart.

“You spoke of risk. There will be— some! I will not try to give you a false sense of security by denying it. But, my dear, my risk will be no greater than would be the danger to the whole world if I do not make the attempt.

“You must be brave, sweetheart. If I succeed, all the earth will be safe for love and happiness, and then I will come to you and ask you to be my wife. If we fail—” He did not finish. Instead he leaned to find her lips.

Another sob shook the girl, but there were no tears in her shining eyes.

“You — you mustn’t mind the sobs, Donald. I cannot hold them back. I would not keep you from doing your part, even if I could. I know — I know what success or failure means — but you must win.” Her arms suddenly tightened around him.

“My man,” she whispered, “mine! Death cannot take you from me. I will wait— through all eternity if need be.” She met his lips again with a tremulous little sigh.

CHAPTER VI - The Conference

PROFESSOR MAYNARD’S call to the powers brought quick response. There was need of haste, for there was no knowing at what moment the enemy planet would strike again. To hasten the gathering of the legates the professor himself drove the space car in a circuit of the world to pick them up. There was another reason that led him to his act, aside from that need of haste. He wished the delegates to know from their own experience the wonder of the car. It would be one thing to describe Donald’s plan of action to a group of men who knew

only vaguely the carrier that would be used. It would be a much simpler matter to convince them after they had themselves ridden over the world in that craft.

With the stop-overs that were necessary it took a whole day to gather the assembly and bring them to the professor's Long Island estate. He brought more than statesmen. From the nations he gathered scientists, astronomers, physicists, and added them to the company.

"Dinner first!" the scientist exclaimed when all had disembarked from the car, "Not a word of business until after dinner."

The meal was a solemn affair, despite the efforts of the host to keep his guests in a cheerful frame of mind. The cigars passed, and amid an expectant hush the professor rose from his chair.

"Gentlemen, what I have to say will not take long. There is no need to rehearse the events of the past month, nor to point out to you the gravity of the situation, but we will do well to consider the most recent developments.

"We have found spies in our midst, spies who I have every reason to believe are actually men from Dione, a moon of Saturn. A mint of my country has been destroyed and its gold carried away. Why?

"I believe that those spies found out that gold is the substance of our defense. Perhaps on their own planet there is no such element as gold, at least they have troubled themselves to the extent of seizing a large amount of the metal to carry away.

"This last attack on the mint was made by only three globes, the same number that survived the battle over San Francisco. Is it not reasonable to suppose that those globes have been near the earth ever since the night of that battle? One. of those globes dropped off spies to gather such information as they could, and later picked them up again. With that new information to go on they seized the largest store of gold that was available, and without doubt they have now carried that gold to their home planet.

“Arriving there, they must have told of their discoveries, of the battle and their defeat. They will experiment, find that the stuff they have taken is indeed impervious to their ray, and they will at once proceed to build a fleet of globes that will be armed with a plating of that gold. That will mean that their ray will become a useless weapon! It may strike our gold armored cars and be reflected to their gold armored globes, and the result will be nothing.

“We have no knowledge of any other weapons that they may have. By experimenting, they may so alter the frequency of the green ray that it will destroy gold, and in such a case we would be entirely at their mercy.

“Whatever weapons they may use, and whatever weapons we may invent to counteract them, it would seem that the future promises only a succession of battles, attacks and counter attacks, until one planet or the other is conquered or tires of the struggle.

“It is unthinkable that we can go on in such a way! There will never be a day when we can feel safe from attack. Those globes travel with such lightning-like swiftness that they may strike and be away before we can organize at the point of attack. The other extreme is equally untenable. We can not build so large a fleet of space cars that they will be able to constantly patrol the whole of the world and keep it safe. Perhaps we could build them, but to maintain such a patrol would necessitate giving our entire attention to that one activity. The whole structure of civilization would crumble with such a drain on our resources, and in the end we would attain only that which we strive to prevent — chaos!”

The professor paused, keenly scanning the faces about him; faces that were grim before the picture that he had drawn. He continued:

“So far I have gone on the supposition that we would be on the defensive, always waiting for the fight to be brought to us. There is an alternative. We can take the fight to the other planet!”

Confused Feelings

THERE was actual need for the professor to pause after his last words. The murmur of astonishment that went up from the astounded men would have drowned any words he might have uttered. A man at the far end of the room rose to his feet.

"And suppose it were possible? Suppose we did carry the war to the enemy; what could we do that would settle the matter? You have said that it might take years for them to conquer this planet. Would it not merely reverse the situation to attempt to conquer that other?"

"Yes!" The professor's head was up, his eyes flashing with the knowledge of what he had yet to say. "To attempt to crush the people of that planet would be merely the reverse of my argument. There can be but one way that will absolutely guarantee a lasting peace — and that way we must choose! We must destroy that star! by destroying Saturn and her eight moons."

From the babel of voice that filled the room one rang out sharply.

"Hear me! Hear me! In God's name, Professor Maynard, are you mad?" It was a European astronomer who cried the words. "We are separated from a planet by millions of miles, a planet that is vastly larger than our own world — and you propose to destroy it! You cannot! You must be mad!

"Do you realize what you would do if you could succeed? The whole planetary system depends on its units as a whole to give it stability. Destroy one of its members and you have destroyed the equilibrium of the whole! Would you attempt to wreck the universe?"

"Yes!" the professor spat out the word. "Rather would I destroy the whole universe than have it at the mercy of a world of human wolves. Is it not better to strike hard for peace and safety and run the risk of quick extinction, rather than to see the world die a lingering death with its peoples subjected to unknown horrors?

"You say we cannot destroy the enemy star. Presently I will give you proof that we can. As for the danger to the whole system, have you not over-estimated the risk? One planet is but a small part of our solar system. If one planet goes there will be changes; there must be some changes beyond a doubt, but will those changes be any more than a small shifting of the members to form a new state of equilibrium? With these figures which I will give you I hope to convince you." He passed a sheaf of papers to the astronomer, and again spoke to the whole company.

"The idea is not mine, gentlemen. I am growing old, and conservative. It remained for youth to point out the way. To me the thought of warring planets, and cars that travel through space is still a novelty, even after thirty years, but my son has grown up surrounded by such ideas. All his life he has studied my workings, followed my experiments, and from the knowledge that he has gathered he conceived the idea that will enable us to pull Saturn from its orbit and send it speeding into the sun. I was skeptical at first, but he convinced me. I pray that he may also convince you so that you will lend him the support of your nations' power. Gentlemen, I present to you my son, Donald Maynard."

Amidst a dead silence, Donald stumbled to his feet. Vaguely he was aware of a sense of hostility within the room; hostility directed not at himself, but at the idea that he was to explain. He started carefully, choosing his words so that they might convey to those others the faith that was his.

CHAPTER VII - Donald Maynard's Idea

"GENTLEMEN," Donald swept the room with his glance, "there is much that I must skim over without going into too great detail. Most of you here tonight are primarily statesmen, not scientists, and I mean no insult to your intelligence when I say that the finer details of my plan would bring out much that you would not understand. I shall tell you what I propose to

do, and how it may be done. The proofs of my statement are all included in those papers which my father has already surrendered. The scientists among us will go over those papers, and it shall be for them to tell you that I have proved my case.

"Today, each one of you rode in the machine known as the space car. No doubt you notice the absence of any visible motive power, and also its unique method of control. That keyboard at the front controls the tubes that are mounted around the walls of the car. Those tubes, each having six elements, are reversible in their action. With current flowing in one direction, they increase the pull of gravity of any body toward which they are directed. If the polarity of the current is reversed gravity becomes a repelling force from the same direction. Now, then, if our space car had but two tubes, one forward, one aft, and the car was pointed toward the sun, it would move toward the sun if the front tube was energized so that the sun's gravity would draw it. If now the rear tube was energized so that in effect it pushed against the earth, then the forward motion of the car would be increased. Am I making myself clear?"

Many heads nodded, and Donald continued:

"In practice we have many tubes, each directed at a different angle by means of the lead shielding about them. When the operator wishes the car to move he simply energizes the proper tubes in the right direction and achieves motion. Changes in direction are made by using other tubes to pull or push on the various heavenly bodies.

"Now for the moment imagine such a car traveling through space. By properly directing the filament current through the tubes the operator may so equalize the pulls in all directions that the car will become motionless, and hang suspended in space. Let us further suppose that the car is suspended in such a manner between the sun and Saturn. By holding all the other tubes constant, and increasing the current flow through the tubes that are directed toward the sun and the planet, a direct strain may be placed on the two bodies, tending to pull them together. Since the sun is so much larger and heavier it is logical to conclude that the actual

tendency would be for the sun to remain stationary, while the planet would strain to move toward it and with it all its eight moons, Dione included.

"The gravitational field of the planetary system is so great a source of energy that any one car has unlimited power at its command. However, the practical limit of power would be reached when the strain on the car itself became so great that the car would be in danger of being pulled apart. It would be impractical to build a car so strong that it could stand the enormous strain that will be necessary to start Saturn from its orbit, but it is possible to build a fleet of cars, the combined efforts of which will move the planet."

"You can't! You can't; it is impossible!" The words were almost sobbed out by one of the delegates. "Man, all the power in the world would not move such a mass!"

"My friend," Donald turned toward the speaker, "you must consider more than the power of one world, we are dealing with the universe. You must forget your present knowledge of weight and mass as they are known on earth. You have seen scales delicately balance, with perhaps a huge weight on either side. It takes but a fraction of an ounce to disturb that balance. The universe is like that, each member nicely balance by opposing forces. We have but to strengthen one of those forces on one member and the balance of that member will be destroyed, making it move as the stronger force directs.

"Among those papers before you, you will find the estimated weight of the planet as astronomy has given it to us. You will find an analysis of all the forces that give Saturn and its moons their equilibrium. You will find the safe power of strain of one space car built according to the given specifications, and you will find the number of such cars that will be needed to move our enemy. That number runs well up over eighteen thousand. We must allow for errors and for the possible failure of some of the cars when they are put to the test." He paused, and once more his glance swept the room. Then he leaned forward in his eagerness.

"Gentlemen, pledge me twenty thousand cars, armor them with a plating of gold to ensure their safety if attacked by the globes; recruit me a force to man those cars under my direction, and I pledge you, within two months from the time I take charge there will be one less planet in the solar system. The decision is in your hands."

Donald Wins

"QUESTION!" a voice cried, "only this one other question! You have eight hundred million miles between you and your objective, a distance so great that with light traveling at one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles per second it takes over seventy hours for a beam to travel from that planet to us. Today your father demonstrated that the space car has great speed, but can it attain a speed great enough to traverse such a distance in the ridiculously short time that you have stated? Tell me, what is the maximum speed of the car?"

"It has no limit," answered Donald gravely. "The thing that limits speed as we know it is friction. Given a certain amount of motive power a machine will accelerate until the friction of its moving parts, and the medium through which it travels just balances the force that propels it. Then the speed must become constant. If there were no friction, acceleration could go on for ever.

"Beyond the atmosphere, in outer space there is only a void, and so there can be no friction. The only thing that can limit the car is its own inertia, its own weight, that prevents it from reaching maximum speed instantly. However, it may start, and gain continually, so that its final speed is limited only by the time that it is in motion. When one is drawing from the power that holds the whole universe in its grip, one has infinite power at his command, and acceleration may be infinite. If you can imagine such a thing as infinite speed with that speed constantly added to by an infinite number of miles per second, then you will have some idea of the ultimate speed of the space car!"

Again the babble of voices filled the room. Man talked to man, building up arguments and breaking them down. A statesman took the floor.

"The scientific phases of the problem I am quite willing to leave in the hands of those whose knowledge fits them for the task," he declared, "but there is a problem of another nature to consider. To armor twenty thousand cars with gold will pull the gold store of the world so low that it will need to be withdrawn from money circulation. What then will we have for a standard? How can we prevent financial ruin?"

"Easily," cried another. "We represent the powers of the world. We can establish silver as a practical working standard at its present value in terms of gold. We as a body can authorize a commission to issue world bonds as certificates of indebtedness for all the gold that is surrendered to us. Then when our warriors of space return, with their golden cars, we can salvage the gold and re-distribute it."

The scientists suddenly stood as a body, their spokesman crying for attention.

"We have examined the proofs that were given to us," he announced firmly. "The plan as submitted is sound, built on established knowledge of the sciences. We have every reason to believe that it may be successfully carried out."

"Your answer, gentlemen, your answer?" Donald turned to the statesmen, his fingers gripping the edge of the table until the knuckles stood out white. "Will you pledge me those—"

The question was lost amid the thunderous chorus of assent.

CHAPTER VIII - Preparations and the Start

DAYS slipped into weeks, and weeks became months while the world labored. As the fleet of space cars grew, new men were enrolled and instructed in their operation. A regular patrol was established with the double purpose of giving the recruits actual service experience,

and at the same time watching for enemy globes. No expense or care was spared in making the new cars fit for their daring journey. Insulated walls to exclude all temperature changes, oxygen generating plants to replenish the air, new batteries chemically recharged, giving off oxygen instead of hydrogen gas; these were but a few of the wonders of those craft.

Quite early the need of a fit gathering place for the finished cars became apparent. In all the world there was but one place that answered the purpose; a place of waste and barrenness; the great desert of Sahara.

The two Maynards, father and son, toured the world, keeping a sharp eye on the construction, forcing the production to the limit of the nations' ability.

The sixth month neared its end. Two groups of fifty cars each were yet on the ways. Then came the day when the radiophone roared its message:

"Twenty thousand space cars await orders!"

The work was done!

In company with his father and Louise, Donald left his Long Island home and sped through the upper air to the Sahara.

There was no confusion, no aimless rushing to and fro on the desert. Stretching out over the sands, as far as the eye could see, lay row on row of the huge cars, each housing its crew of four men.

Donald hastened to the car which he was to command. Thrusting his head within, he called to the signal operator.

"Sound the signal," he commanded, "we leave within the hour."

The quiet of the Sahara was suddenly split by the sound of the radio horns. Men rushed to their posts. A clatter of sound filled the air as twenty thousand metal doors began to clank shut. Only a few minutes left now!

Professing a sudden interest in a nearby car, Donald's father wandered away, leaving the girl alone with her lover.

"Darling," he whispered, "look! It is wonderful. Thousand after thousand of cars. The answer of the world to its attacker;"

The girl did not follow his gaze. Instead she dropped her head to hide the gathering tears. A strong arm suddenly encircled her.

"You mustn't," he chided gently, brushing the tears from her cheeks. "In three months I will be back, and then we shall know all the happiness of which we have been cheated for the past months. Be brave, little girl."

For a long time she clung to him, wordless. Then at last she forced a little smile to her lips.

"I'll not say goodbye," she whispered, "only—till we meet again."

The foremost space car, lifted from the ground. Another followed, then another. One by one that whole vast fleet took to the air. Resting motionless, half a mile up, the first cars waited for the rest of the number. Slowly the column took form, a hundred cars abreast, two hundred deep, with that car holding Donald in the center.

Awed by the sight, the spectators on the ground stood in the shadow that lay over the desert like some huge carpet of ebony interlaced with spots of gold.

The first row of cars moved. Slowly at first, then rapidly gathering speed the column moved up and away. In five minutes it was lost to sight.

Fifteen minutes passed. The professor sighed deeply. Perhaps he, too, longed to be with those departed warriors.

"Come, Louise," he said gently, "we must go home."

Silently the girl turned and followed him into his car.

"Au revoir, Dad. Keep your eyes on Saturn!" Donald's voice rang through the car. Then the voice became softer. "Courage, dear girl, courage."

The professor bowed his head in silent prayer, then spoke aloud.

"Would to heaven that radio could bring back his voice through the days ahead, but even science has limits."

CHAPTER IX - The Passing of a World

DONALD pulled himself from the abstraction that gripped him, and thoughtfully scanned the meter board.

"Henry, look! he whispered.

The man addressed raised his eyes to the board. "What is it?"

"The meter—the speedometer; Ten thousand miles a minute! Faster than anything in the universe but light!" There was awe in Donald's voice. He snapped open a shutter to peer from the port out into the void.

"We're nearing Beren. Less than a hundred million miles now. We'll try it at the twenty million mark."

Quiet fell within the car for a time.

"Still accelerating," it was the man Henry who spoke. "We'll be there in less than a week. Hadn't we better start to slow down?"

Donald nodded and reached for the transmitter.

For a month of earth time the fleet of space cars had been hurtling through space, gaining increased velocity with every passing second. Donald had said they had infinite speed. Purposely he had restrained himself from ordering that maximum. He was content to drive his fleet at an easy operating rate, thereby lessening the danger of overstrained tubes and burned out filaments.

For the next five days the cars rushed on, steadily diminishing the velocity that they had been gaining for days. Donald looked at the car clock. It was noon earth time. He turned to the radio again.

"Kill all speed and stand by to come to rest!"

Reversed tubes began to drag on the cars. As the hours passed the needles on the speedometers swung slowly back over the course. Donald stepped to the rear berths, and awakened the other two men.

"It is near time," he told them quietly. "I may need you."

"Twenty-one million," announced Henry.

The radio called its order again:

"Stop!"

Slowly the needles dropped to the zero point.

"Come about and balance."

The operator in Donald's own car manipulated the keyboard with flying fingers. The car circled until its nose pointed to the blazing orb of the sun, now dimmed by distance. The other cars followed. Grouped together, side by side over a cast circle, like a huge bundle of stubby cigars suspended in space, the cars rested nose to the sun, tails pointed toward Saturn.

As one car after another reported its position and well-being, Donald's heart began to pound so that it seemed to echo through the whole interior of the car. He leaned toward the transmitter again, trying to speak, but only an inarticulate squawk came from his throat. For what seemed like ages he fought to regain his calmness. It would not come! Try as he would, that lump in his throat kept interfering with his speech. At last the lump settled; slowly the constriction left his throat until suddenly leaning close to the transmitter he shouted the one word:

"Pull!"

An hour passed. Donald consulted the instrument board.

"The same," he breathed, in answer to the questioning look of the operator. "Nothing has moved!"

Another hour! Still those thousands of cars tugged at their invisible halters with no apparent effect. As motionless as a statute, and almost as white, Donald sat before the still meters.

"It must work," he groaned, "it must. But to start such a mass—it will take time."

Another day passed eventless, while Donald hardly left the board. Overhead the clock ticked the minutes away. Five o'clock, earth time. Six o'clock. Seven! Donald dozed. Suddenly he started up and rubbed his eyes. Did he imagine it, or did that needle on the speedometer flicked ever so little? Yes, it stirred again, so slightly that but a fraction of an inch lay between the needle point and the zero on the scale. The gap widened another fraction. They were moving—moving toward the sun—and with Saturn in tow!

Into the Sun

ACROSS the boundless emptiness of space the helpless planet sped toward the sun. Twenty millions of miles to the fore the huge fleet of space cars tugged on, faster—always faster. As the tow yielded to their power caution went to the winds. The commanding car flashed the signal for the limit of speed that the cars could stand, and dully glowing tubes suddenly became bright! Infinite speed Donald had said; Infinite speed they fast attained!

Time passed unnoticed; the marvelous cortege swept on. As the days passed, the blazing orb that was the sun grew larger, closer, blinding in its dazzling brilliance.

Hovering over the meters, Donald anxiously made numerous calculations. The added pull of the sun's natural attraction began to fasten on the hurtling planet. The load on the space cars lessened perceptibly. A little while yet! The calculating machine clattered sharply.

Suddenly Donald whirled to the transmitter.

"Cut loose," he cried, "cut loose and circle. Quick, or we will be into the sun!"

Millions of miles were whirling by each hour. Traveling at such a speed it would be impossible to stop the space cars even if the pilots would do so. They cast loose from their victim. In a wide majestic circle they swept around. Fear gripped them at last. Those men who had dared the unknown, who had ripped a planet from its place in the universe, were suddenly afraid. With every available tube that could be brought to bear pushing against the sun; with every other tube pulling away from it, they fled from the vicinity of the impending catastrophe.

And Saturn?

Adrift within the field of the sun's full force, already moving with a velocity so great as to be unrecordable, it rushed straight toward the heart of that fiery mass, carrying with it the eight moons.

To the watchers in the cars it seemed eternities; actually it was but a little time before it struck. As the distance grew the girth of the planet became smaller, dwindling until it appeared only as a black marble against a curtain of molten gold. Then—it was gone! Dazzling rays of even brighter hue seemed to leap from the sun, hang quivering, and die. The space cars lurched giddily as the two great masses came together and fused into one. A cry came from one of the men. He pointed a trembling finger at a series of black dots, just as they too became lost in that sea of white heat—the eight moons of Saturn, following their master to doom!

The nerveless commander turned staring eyes away from the port of his car. Like one who is blind he felt around for the signal transmitter.

"Home!" The one word slipped out thru space, to be echoed by every man in the fleet.

"Home!"

CHAPTER X - The Heart of the Universe

NIGHT after night Professor Maynard had sat before the telescope. Night after night he had turned its huge glass eye up to Saturn and then to Dione, barely visible. When ageing eyes had wearied of the strain he had called Louise, and together they had kept their vigil.

On the evening of the thirtieth day since Donald's departure, they again entered the observatory as dusk began to change to dark. The long strain had left its mark on Louise. Her blue eyes were shadowed by growing circles.

"Why, oh, why doesn't something happen!" she cried. "Tell me, Professor, tell me again that he must be safe!"

The elderly scientist gently drew his arm over her shoulders.

"Courage, dear girl. Remember that was his message: courage. He is safe, I am sure. He has a long way to travel, and it must take time. Do not place too much store in the things that you see—or do not see happen. Remember, little girl, we cannot see any movement of that planet until nearly three whole days after it has actually moved. It will take that long for its light rays to reach us."

The girl bit her lips to stop the flood of her emotion.

"Three days!" she whispered, "three days before we can know! Oh, it is cruel!"

For a long time they sat silent, each busy with his own thoughts. The evening grew late.

"You are tired, Louise," the professor chided gently. "It can do no good, our waiting here. Won't you let me send for a car to take you home? I will radio you if anything happens."

"I—I believe I will go. I am tired." The girl started to rise, then suddenly she clasped the arms of the chair while her eyes sought those of the scientist.

For gradually and then increasing in volume until it became a great terrifying roar they heard the wind lashing about the house, and the terrible beating of the surf on the shores miles away. Beneath them the floor heaved queerly and they had the strange sensation of descending into a great pit.

“What is it?” she shouted against the beating thunder of the wind and waves. With startled senses and an awful fear she awaited his answer.

“We are sinking, the earth is sinking,” the scientist shouted into her ear, moving toward her. Then with a bound he reached the telescope and swung its ponderous length over the arc of the heavens.

Louise rushed to the window.

“The moon! Look at the moon!”

Overhead shone the moon, more than three quarters full. For centuries—ever since the beginning of recorded time, that moon had lighted the night world, presenting always the same face, but now it was changing. Slowly, it rotated on its unseen axis. New lines and shadows came into view. The old familiar contours were slipping from sight.

“They have done it! They have thrown Saturn into the sun! The earth is sinking; the moon is turning; the whole universe is changing! Suddenly calm the professor crossed to where Louise stood clutching the window frame.

“Do not be afraid,” he murmured, “it is only to be expected, but I wonder— where will we stop?”

For days the sensation of a strange disturbance in the world continued, while the fury of the wind and the waves hardly abated. News came to them of the inundation of villages along the shore near them and along the coast line in every country. Mountainous waves were seen at sea and the greatest ships were swept about like so many bits of wood. Nothing could live in those seas. The reports also came of the sweeping of the sea over entire lands and the removal of the sea from others. The entire geography of those areas has changed. Old lands disappeared and new ones came into being.

Then one day as they were standing fearfully at the telescope watching, fascinated, the brilliant electrical display of the sky, the strange motion of the earth to which they had almost

become accustomed, ceased. The moon, too, became still, a new face shining down on the awe-struck world. A strange calm stole over the world.

Very gently the scientist, his face worn by Sleepless nights, put his arm about the girl.

"It is done! Now we have but to wait. Long days passed. Then one day. . .

Out from the upper air, down toward the earth coasted a gleaming golden car. Lightly it checked itself and floated to rest before the Maynard homestead on Long Island. A door in its side opened, and a young man vaulted out to run joyously toward the house. Halfway there he was met by an elderly man and a girl who rushed to meet him.

"My boy, my boy!" the elder Maynard threw his arms over his son's shoulders and madly pumped his hand. "I thank God that you are safe and that you have succeeded. Oh, we know about it! You have yet to learn of the jolt you gave this old earth. But those things can wait." There was a suspicious moisture in the scientist's eyes as he turned Donald toward the girl.

"Louise !"

Only the one word, but it spoke the whole thought of Donald's heart.

"Donald, my Donald, come back to me." The girl's eyes were bright with the light of growing happiness. She raised a hand to touch him lightly, as if she were afraid to find him only a shadow. "My wonder-man," she breathed, "moulder of a new universe!"

His arms went around her, holding her close. For a minute he stood smiling down at her, then his lips brushed close to her ear.

"You are the wonderful one," he whispered. "My universe is built around your heart."