

THE LEGION  
OF TIME

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## THE LEGION OF TIME

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## Chapter 1

### APPOINTMENT AT THE RIVER

THE BEGINNING OF IT, for Dennis Lanning—the very beginning of his life—was on a hushed April evening of 1927. Then eighteen, Lanning was slender and almost delicately featured, with straw-yellow hair which usually stood on end. He usually wore a diffident smile; but his gray eyes could light with a fighting glint, and his wiry body held a quick and unsuspected strength.

In that beginning was the same fantastic contrast that ran through the whole adventure: the mingling of everyday reality with the stark Inexplicable.

Lanning, that last term, shared a Cambridge apartment with three other Harvard seniors, all a year or two older. Wilmot McLan, the mathematician, was a lean grave man, already absorbed in his work. Lao Meng Shan, proud but soft-spoken son of a mandarin of Szechwan, was eagerly drinking in the wonders of modern engineering. Good friends and swell fellows, both. But the one who stood closest to Lanning was Barry Halloran.

Gigantic red-haired All American tackle, Barry was first and last a fighter. Some stern bright spirit of eternal rebellion he and Lanning shared together. That spring the sky was still an exciting frontier, and they were taking flying lessons at the East Boston airport.

All three were out, however, on this drowsy Sunday evening. The house was still, and Lanning sat alone in his room, reading a thin little gray-bound book. It was Wilmont McLan's first scientific work, just published at his own expense. *Reality and Change*, he had called it, and this copy was inscribed, "To Denny, from Wil—a stitch in time."

Its mathematics was a new language to Lanning. He leaned back in his chair, with tired eyes closed, trying to

form some clear picture from the mist of abstruse symbols. McLan had quoted the famous words of Minkowski: "Space in itself and time in itself sink to mere shadows, and only a kind of union of the two retains an independent existence." If time, then, were simply another extension of the universe, was tomorrow as real as yesterday? If one could leap forward—

"Denny Lanning!"

A voice had spoken his name. Dropping the book, he sat upright in the chair. He blinked and swallowed; a quick little shudder ran up and down his spine. The door was still closed, and there had been no other sound. But a woman was standing before him on the rug.

A girl . . . beautiful!

A plain white robe swept long to her feet. Her hair was a shining mahogany-red, confined in a circle of something blue and brilliant. The composure of her perfect face seemed almost stern; but, behind it, Lanning felt—agony.

Before her, in two small hands, she held an object about the size and shape of a football but shimmering with deep inner splendors, like some incredible diamond.

Her grave eyes were on Lanning. They were wide, violet. Something in their depths—a haunting dread, a piercing, hopeless longing—stabbed him with pity for her. Then amazement came back, and he stumbled to his feet.

"Hello!" he gasped. "Yes, I'm Denny Lanning. But who are you?" His glance went to the locked door behind her. "And how'd you get inside?"

A faint smile touched the white cameo of her face.

"I am Lethonee." Her voice had an unfamiliar rhythm, a lilt that was almost song. "And I am not really in your room, but in my own city, Jonbar. It is only in your mind that we meet, through this." Her eyes dropped to the immense jewel. "And only your study of time enabled me to reach you now."

Open-mouthed, Lanning was drinking in the slim clean youth of her, the glory of her hair, her calm deep loveliness that was like an inner light.

"Lethonee—" he murmured, relishing the sound. "Lethonee—"

Dream or not, she was beautiful.

A quick little smile, pleased and tender, flickered across her troubled face.

"I have come a long way to find you, Denny Lanning," she said. "I have crossed a gulf more terrible than death to beg for your help."

A queer, trembling eagerness had seized him. Incredulity struggled with a breathless hope. A throbbing ache was in his throat, so that he couldn't speak. He walked uncertainly to her, and tried to touch the slim bare arms that held the shining object. His quivering fingers found nothing but air.

"I'll help you, Lethonee," he gulped at last. "But how?"

Her silver voice sank to an awed, urgent whisper. From the startling whiteness of her face, the great violet eyes seemed to look far beyond the room.

"Because destiny has chosen you, Denny Lanning. The fate of the human race is on your shoulders. My own life is in your hand, and the doom of Jonbar."

"Eh!" Lanning muttered. "How's that?" He rubbed his forehead, bewilderedly. "Where's Jonbar?"

His wondering dread increased, when the girl said:

"Look into the time crystal and I can show you Jonbar."

She lifted the huge jewel. Her eyes dropped to it. And colored rays shattered from it, blindingly. It exploded into a prismatic glare. The fire-mist slowly cleared, and he saw—Jonbar!

The lofty, graceful pylons of it would have dwarfed the skyscrapers of Manhattan. Of shimmering, silvery metal, they were set immensely far apart, among green parklands and broad, many-leveled roadways. Great white ships, teardrop-shaped, slipped through the air above them.

"That is my Jonbar, where I am," the girl said softly. "Now let me show you the city that may be—New Jonbar—lying far-off in the mists of futurity."

Bright flame veiled the city, and vanished again. And Lanning saw another more wondrous metropolis. The green hills along the horizon were the same. But the towers were taller, farther apart. They shone with clean soft colors, against the wooded parks. The city was one artistic whole; and its beauty caught his breath.

"New Jonbar!" the girl was breathing, reverently. "Its people are the *dynon*."

There were fewer ships in the air. But Lanning now saw tiny figures, clad it seemed in robes of pure bright flame, launching themselves from lofty roofs and terraces, soaring above the parks in perfect, wingless freedom.

"They fly through adaptation to the *dynat*," she whispered. "A power that makes them almost immortal. God-like! They are the perfect race to come."

Prismatic flame hid the vision. The girl lowered the crystal in her hands. Lanning stepped back. He blinked at the reading lamp, his books, the chair behind him. From that old, comforting reality, he looked back to the white wonder of the girl.

"Lethonee—" He paused to catch his breath. "Tell me, are you real?"

"As real as Jonbar is." Her voice was hushed and solemn. "You hold our destiny, to give us life or death. That is a truth already fixed in the frame of space and time."

"What—" Lanning gulped. "What can I do?"

Dread was a shadow in her eyes.

"I don't know, yet. The deed is dim in the flux of time. But you may strike for Jonbar—if you will. To win or to perish. I came to warn you of those who will seek to destroy you—and, through you, all my world."

The rhythm of her voice was almost a chant, a prophecy of evil.

"There is the dark, resistless power of the *gyrane*; and black Glarath, the priest of its horror. There is Sorainya, with her hordes of fighter slaves."

Lethonee had become almost stern. Sadness darkened her eyes, yet they flashed with unquenchable hatred.

"She is the greatest peril." Her voice lifted, like a battle-chant. "Sorainya, the woman of war. She is the evil flower of Gyronchi. And she must be destroyed."

Her voice fell, and Lethonee looked at Lanning, over the giant crystal, her white face filled with a tender and almost childish concern.

"Or else," she finished, "she will destroy you, Denny."

Lanning looked at her a long time. At last, hoarse with a sudden emotion, he said: "Whatever is going to happen,

I'm willing to help—if I can. Because of you. But what—what am I to do?"

"Beware of Sorainya!" Those words were bugle notes, but then her voice dropped appealingly. "Denny, make me one promise. Promise you won't fly tomorrow."

"But I'm going to!" Lanning protested. "Max—he's the instructor—says Barry and I can solo tomorrow, if the weather's right. I couldn't miss it."

"You must," said Lethonee.

Lanning met her violet eyes. A surge of unfamiliar feeling swept away some barrier between them. He looked into her very heart—and found it beautiful.

"I promise," he whispered. "I won't fly."

"Thank you, Denny." She smiled and touched his hand. "Now I must go."

"No!" Alarm took Lanning's breath. "I don't know half enough. Where you are, really. Or how to find you again. You can't go!"

"But I must." A shadow fell on her face. "For Sorainya could follow me here. And if she finds that the crisis turns indeed on you, she will strive to take you—or even destroy you. I know Sorainya!"

"But—" Lanning gulped. "Will I see you again?"

"Your hand is on the wheel of time," she said, "and not mine."

"Wait!" gasped Lanning. "I—"

But the fire of a million sunlit prisms had burst again from the jewel in her hands. Lanning was momentarily dazzled, blinded. And then he was alone in the room, speaking to vacant air.

Dream—or reality? The question racked him. Could she have been an actual person, come across the gulf of time from the remote possible future? Or was he crazy? Dazed, he picked up the little gray book, and reread a paragraph of Wil McLan's:

"To an external observer, gifted with four-dimensional senses, our quadraxial universe must appear complete, fixed, and forever unchanging. The sweep of time is no more than the hand of a subjective watch; it is no more than the intangible ray of consciousness, illuminating human experience. In any absolute sense, the events of

yesterday and tomorrow are alike eternal, immutable as the structure of space itself."

But the haunted loveliness of Lethonee rose against the page. How did that fit with her tale of worlds that might be, striving for existence?

He flung aside the book, helped himself to a generous slug of Barry Halloran's Irish whisky, and walked blindly down through Harvard square. It was late when at last he came in to bed, and then he slept with a dream of Lethonee.

He wanted to tell Barry, next morning; for they had been closer than brothers. But he thought the big redhead would only laugh—as he himself might have laughed if another had told him the thing. And he didn't want laughter at that dream, not even from Barry.

Half sick with a confusion of wonder and doubt, of hopeless hope for another glimpse of Lethonee and bitter dread that she had been all illusion, Lanning tried to read a textbook and found himself aimlessly walking the room.

"Buck up, kid!" Barry boomed at him. "I never thought you'd be shaky—Max says you've got the nerves of a hawk. I'm the one that should be turning green around the gills. Come out of it, and let's catch some sparrows."

Lanning stood up, uncertainly—and then the phone rang. He had made his own expenses, that year, covering university activities for a Boston paper; and this was his editor. It was an assignment that could have been evaded. But, listening, he saw the tragic eyes of Lethonee.

"Okay, Chief," he said. "On the job." He hung up and looked at Barry. "Sorry, old man. But business first. Tell Max I'll be out tomorrow. And happy landings, guy."

"Tough luck, kid."

The big tackle grinned, and crushed his hand, and ambled out.

Lanning read in his own paper, four hours later, that Barry Halloran was dead. The training plane had gone out of control, two thousand feet over Boston harbor, and plunged down into the Charles River channel. Grappling hooks had brought part of the battered wreckage up out of the mud, but the body had not been recovered.

Lanning shut his eyes against the black headlines,

reeling. He was sick with a dread that was almost terror, numbed with a black regret. For Lethonee had saved his own life, he knew—but at the cost of Barry Halloran's.

## Chapter 2

### THE CORRIDOR OF TIME

LANNING FELT NO GRATITUDE for the warning that had saved his life, but rather a sick regret, an aching sense of guilt for Barry's death. Yet he could feel no actual resentment toward Lethonee—the tragedy seemed a terrible proof of her reality. In her grave and troubled beauty, surely, there had been no evil.

A kind of excitement buoyed up Lanning for a few days, and made his grief endurable. There was his hope that she would come back—her memory was a haunting pain of loneliness, that would not die. Even her enigmatic warning, and his vague expectancy of unknown perils lent a certain spice to existence.

But life went on, after the funeral preached for Barry's unrecovered body, as if Lethonee had never come. Lao Meng Shan turned to China, eager to put his new science at her service. Wil McLan was off to Europe, on a fellowship in theoretical physics.

And Lanning presently embarked for Nicaragua, where American marines were straightening out the Sacasa-Chamorro fracas, on his first foreign press assignment. Barry's uncle had offered him an advertising job. But a burning unrest filled him, born of the conflicts within him, of doubt and hope, wonder and grief, dread and bitter longing. He saw no way ahead, save to break old ties, to forget.

It was on the little fruit steamer, bound for Corinto, that he first saw—Sorainya! And knew, indeed, that he had not dreamed, that he would never forget, nor ever

escape the strange web of destiny flung across space and time to snare him.

Velvet night had fallen on the tropical Pacific. The watch had just changed and now the decks were deserted. Lanning, the only passenger, was leaning on the foredeck rail, watching the milky phosphorescence that winged endlessly from the prow.

But his mind saw, instead, Lethonee's jewel of time, and her slim haunting form behind it. And it startled him strangely when a ringing golden voice, in pealing mockery of her own, called:

"Denny Lanning!"

His heart leaped and paused. He looked up eagerly, and hope gave way to awed wonderment. For, flying beside the rail, was a long golden shell, shaped like an immense shallow platter. Silken cushions made a couch of it, and lying amid them was a woman.

Sorainya—woman of war!

Lethonee's warning came back. For it was a warrior queen in the shell, clad in a gleaming crimson tunic of woven mail that swelled with her womanly curves. A long thin sword, in a jeweled sheath, lay beside her. She had put aside a black-plumed, crimson helmet, and thick masses of golden hair streamed down across her strong bare arms.

The white tapered fingers, scarlet-nailed, touched some control on the low rim of her strange craft, and it floated nearer the rail. Upraised on the pillows and one smooth elbow, the woman looked up at Lanning, smiling. Her eyes were long and brilliantly greenish. Across the white beauty of her face, her mocking lips were a long scarlet wound, voluptuous, and malicious.

Flower of evil—Lethonee's words again. Lanning stood gripping the rail, and a trembling weakness shook him. As if in a dream, swift, unbidden desire overcame his incredulity. He strove desperately to be its master.

"You are Sorainya?" He held his tone grave and low. "I had warning to expect you."

She sat up suddenly amid the cushions, as if a whip had flicked her. The green eyes narrowed, and her body was tense and splendid in the gleaming mail. Her red mouth became a thin line of scorn.

"Lethonee!" She spat the name. "So that slut of Jonbar has found you?"

Lanning flushed with anger, and his fingers drew hard on the rail. He remembered the cold glint of an answering hate in the eyes of Lethonee, and her stern statement, "Sorainya must be destroyed."

"So you are angry, Denny Lanning?" Her laugh was a mocking chime. "Angry, because of a shadow? For Lethonee is but a phantom, seeking with lies and tricks to live—at the cost of other lives. Perhaps you have discovered that?"

Lanning shuddered, and wet his lips.

"It's true," he whispered. "She caused Barry's death."

The scorn had fallen like a mask from Sorainya's face. Now she tossed her splendid head, and pushed back the tumbled glory of her hair. The sea-green eyes danced an invitation, and she smiled.

"Lethonee is no more than a spectre of possibility." Her tone was a suave caress. "She is less than a single speck of dust, less than a shadow on the wall. Let's forget her, Denny Lanning! Shall we?"

Lanning gulped, and a tremor shook him.

"But I am real, Denny." Her bare arms opened, beckoning. "And I have come for you, to take you with me back to Gyronchi. That is a mighty empire, more splendid than the pallid dream of Jonbar. And I am its mistress."

She stood up with one flowing movement, tall and regal in the scarlet mail. Her bare arms reached out, to help Lanning to the golden shell. Her cool green eyes were shining with intoxicating promise.

"Come, Denny Lanning. To rule with me in Gyronchi."

Lanning's hands gripped the rail until his knuckles cracked. His heart was pounding, and he drew a long shuddering breath.

"Why?" His voice rapped harsh and cold. "Of all men, why have you come for me?"

The shell drifted closer, and Sorainya smiled.

"I have searched all space and time for you, Denny Lanning. For we are the twain of destiny. Fate has given us the keys to power. Together on the golden throne of Gyronchi, we can never fail. Come!"

Lanning caught a sobbing breath.

"All right, beautiful," he gasped. "I don't know the game. But—you're on."

He climbed upon the rail, in the starlight, and reached out his hand to take Sorainya's.

"Denny—wait!" spoke an urgent voice beside him.

Lanning drew back instinctively, and saw Lethonee. A ghostly figure in her straight white robe, she was standing by the rail, holding the great jewel of time between her hands. Her face was drawn, desperate.

"Remember, Denny!" her warning rang out. "Sorainya would destroy you."

Sorainya stood stark upright upon the shell, her tense defiant body splendid in the scarlet armor. Slitted, her greenish eyes flamed with tigerish fury. Strong teeth flashed white in a snarl of hate. She hissed an unfamiliar word, and spat at Lethonee.

Lethonee trembled, and caught a sobbing breath. Her face had drained to a deadly white, and her violet eyes were flaming. One word rang from her lips: "Go!"

But Sorainya turned to Lanning again, and a slow smile drew across the blackness of her hate. Her long bare arms opened again.

"Come with me, Denny," she whispered. "And let that lying ghost go back to her dead city of dream."

"Look, Denny!" Lethonee bit her pale lip, as if to control her wrath. "Where Sorainya would have you leap."

She pointed down at the black tropic sea. And Lanning saw there the glittering phosphorescent trail that followed a shark's swift fin. The shock of cold dread had chilled him, and he climbed stiffly back from the rail. For he had touched, or tried to touch, Sorainya's extended hand. And his fingers had found nothing at all!

Shuddering, he looked at the slim white girl by the rail. He saw the gleam of tears in her eyes, and the pain that lay burning beneath the proud composure of her face.

"Forgive me, Lethonee!" he whispered. "I am sorry—very sorry."

"You were going, Denny!" Her voice was stricken. "Going—to her."

The golden shell had floated against the rail. A warrior

queen, regal, erect, Sorainya stood buckling on the golden sword. Her long green eyes flamed balefully.

"Lanning," the bugle of her voice pealed cold, "it is written on the tablets of time that we are to be enemies, or—one. And Gyronchi, defended by my fighting slaves, by Glarath and the *gyrane*, has no fear of you. But Jonbar is defenseless. Remember!"

One sturdy foot, scarlet-buskinned, touched something at the rim of the yellow shell. And instantly, like a projected image from a screen, she was gone.

Lanning turned slowly back toward Lethonee. Her face, beneath the band of blue that held her red-glinting hair, was white and stiff with tragedy.

"Please," he whispered. "Forgive me."

No smile lit her solemn face.

"Sorainya is beautiful," her voice came small and flat. "But if you ever yield to her, Denny, it is the end of Jonbar—and of me."

Lanning shook his head, dazed with a cold bewilderment.

"But why?" he demanded. "I don't understand."

The wide violet eyes of Lethonee looked at him for a long time. Once her lip stiffened, quivered, as if she were about to cry. But her voice, when at last she spoke, was grave and quiet.

"I'll try to tell you, Denny." Her face was illuminated, like a shrine, by the shimmer of the jewel in her hands. "The world is a long corridor, from the beginning of existence to the end. Events are groups in a sculptured frieze that runs endlessly along the walls. And time is a lantern carried steadily through the hall, to illuminate the groups one by one. It is the light of awareness, the subjective reality of consciousness.

"Again and again the corridor branches, for it is the museum of all that is possible. The bearer of the lantern may take one turning, or another. And always, many halls that might have been illuminated with reality are left forever in the dark.

"My world of Jonbar is one such possible way. It leads through splendid halls, bright vistas that have no limit. Gyronchi is another. But it is a barren track, through

narrowing, ugly passages, that comes to a dead and useless end."

The wide solemn eye of Lethonee looked at him, over the slumberous flame of the jewel. Lanning tensed and caught his breath, as if a light cold hand, from nowhere, had touched his shoulder.

"You, Denny Lanning," she went on, "are destined, for a little time, to carry the lantern. Yours is the choice of reality. Neither I nor Sorainya can come to you, bodily—unless perhaps at the moment of your death. But, through a partial mastery of time, we can each call to you, begging you to carry the lamp into our different halls. Denny—"

The silver voice caught with emotion.

"Denny, think well before you choose. For your choice will bring life to one possible world. And it will leave another in the darkness, never to be born."

A choking lump had risen in Lanning's throat. He looked at Lethonee, slim and immaculate and lovely in the jewel's clear light.

"Have no doubt—never again," he whispered huskily. "Because I love you, Lethonee. Just tell me what I must do. And tell me if I can ever come to you."

Her fine head shook, in the blue halo.

"Your life has not yet run to the moment of your choice," she said slowly. "And the event is vague and ambiguous in the mist of possibility."

Lanning tried again to touch her arm—in vain.

"Just remember me, Denny," she was breathing. "Remember what I have told you. For Sorainya still has her beauty, and Glarath the *gyrane's* power. Beware of Gyranchi. And the hour will come. Farewell."

Her eyes dropped to the jewel, and her fingers caressed its bright facets. Splintering diamond lances burst from it, and swallowed her in fire. She was gone.

Shaken with a curious weakness, suddenly aware of complete exhaustion, Lanning caught the rail. His eyes fell to the water, and he saw the glitter of the shark's black fin, still cruising after the ship.

## Chapter 3

### THE KEY TO GYRONCHI

HIS LIFE WAS A DUSKY CORRIDOR, and the present, a lamp that he carried along it. Dennis Lanning never forgot Lethonee's figure of speech. Eagerly he looked forward to discovering her again, at some dark turning. But he walked down the hall of years, and looked in vain.

Nor could he forget Sorainya. Despite revulsion from all the ruthless evil he had sensed in her, despite Lethonee's warning, he found himself sometimes dreaming of the warrior queen in the splendor of her crimson mail. Found himself even dwelling upon the mysterious menace of Gyronchi, an eagerness mingled with his dread.

The hall he walked was a corridor of war. An old hatred of injustice set him always against the right of might. War correspondent, flying instructor, pilot, military adviser, he found forlorn causes on four continents.

He fought with words when he could find no better weapons. Once, waiting for Viennese doctors to persuade an obscure African amoeba to abandon his digestive tract, he wrote a utopian novel. *The Road of Dawn*, to picture the world that ought to be.

Again, in the military prison of a dictator whose war preparations he had exposed, he wrote a historical autobiography in the current style among journalists, in which he tried to show that the world was nearing a decisive conflict between democratic civilization and despotic absolutism.

In all those years, he had no glimpse of Lethonee. But once, on the field with the native army in Ethiopia, he woke in his tent to hear her grave warning voice still ringing in his ears:

"Denny, get up and leave your tent."

He dressed hastily, and walked out through the camp in

the thin bitter wind of dawn. The tent, a few minutes later, was struck by an Italian bomb.

Sorainya came, once.

It was a night in Madrid, the next year, where he had gone to join the Loyalist defense. He was sitting alone beside a little table in his hotel room, cleaning and loading his automatic. A queer little shudder passed over him, as if his malaria had come back from the Chaco and the Jungle War. He looked up, and saw that long shallow shell of yellow metal floating above the carpet.

Sorainya, in the same shining scarlet mail, looking as if he had seen her five minutes ago, instead of nine years, was lounging on her silken cushions. A bare arm flung back the golden wealth of her hair, and her greenish eyes smiled up at him with a taunting insolence.

"Well, Denny Lanning." Her voice was a husky, lingering drawl, and her long eyes studied him with a bold curiosity. "The ghost of Jonbar has guided you safely through the years. But has she brought you happiness?"

Lanning had grown rigid in his chair. He flushed, swallowed. The sudden white dazzle of her smile caught his breath.

"I am still the mistress of Gyronchi." Her voice was a caress. "And still the keys of fate are in our hands, if we but choose to turn them."

Her white and indolent arm indicated a space on the silken couch beside her.

"I have come again, Denny, to take you back with me to the throne of Gyronchi. I can give you half a mighty empire—myself, and all of it. What about it, Denny?"

Lanning tried to control his breath.

"Don't forget, Sorainya," he muttered. "I saw the shark."

She tossed back her head, and her hair fell like a yellow torrent across the colored cushions. And the lure of her smile set a pain to throbbing in his throat.

"The shark would have killed you, Denny. But you should know that death alone can bring you to me—and to the strong new life the *gyrane* gives. For our lives were cast far apart in the stream of time. And not all the power of the *gyrane* can lift you out of the time-stream, living—for then the whole current must be deflected. But

the stream has little grasp upon a few dead pounds of clay. I can carry that to Glarath, to be returned to life."

She came, with a gliding pantherine movement, to her knees on the cushions. Both hands pushed the flowing gold of her hair behind her red-mailed shoulders. And her bare arms reached out, in wide invitation.

"Denny, will you come with me tonight?" urged the golden drawl. "The way is in your hand."

Trembling, hot with desire, Lanning looked down at his hand. The automatic had slipped in his unconscious fingers, until its muzzle was pointed at his heart. His finger was near the trigger. One little pressure—it would be so like an accident.

Her indolent voice was seductive music:

"Gyronchi is waiting for us, Denny. A world to rule—"

The white and gold and crimson of her beauty was a stabbing pain in his heart. His pulse was hammering. His finger curled around the cool steel of the trigger. But sanity remained in one corner of his mind, and out of it spoke a voice like the quiet voice of Lethonee:

"Remember, Denny Lanning! You carry a light for the world to come."

Carefully, he made his quivering fingers snap on the safety, and he laid the gun down beside him on the little table. His voice a breathless rasp, he said:

"Try again, Sorainya!"

The green eyes glittered, and her red lips snarled with rage.

"I warned you, Denny Lanning!" All the indolence gone, her voice crackled brittle and sharp. "Take the side of that phantom of Jonbar, and you shall perish with her. I sought your strength. But Gyronchi can win without it."

With a tigerish savagery, she whipped out the long golden needle of her sword.

"When we meet again, guard yourself!"

A savage foot stamped down, and she was gone.

Those two anachronistic women set many a problem that Lanning could not solve. If they were actual visitors from conflicting possible worlds of futurity, he had no evidence of it save his own tortured memory. Many a weary night, pondering the haunting riddle, he wondered if he were going mad.

But a package that presently came to him in Spain contained another thin little book from Wilmot McLan, now the holder of many degrees and professor of astrophysics at a western university. Inscribed on the flyleaf, "To Denny, from Wil—a second stitch in time, to repair my last," the volume was entitled: *Probability and Determination*.

One underlined introductory paragraph Lanning searched desperately for a relevant meaning:

"The future has been held to be as real as the past, the only directional indicator being the constant correlating entropy and probability. But the new quantum mechanics, destroying the absolute function of cause and effect, must likewise annihilate that contention. There is no determination in small scale events, and consequently the 'certainties' of the microscopic world are at best merely statistical. Probability, in the unfolding future, must be substituted for determination. The elementary particles of the old physics may be retained, in the new continuum of five dimensions. But any consideration of this hyper-space-time continuum must take note of a conflicting infinitude of possible worlds, only one of which, at the intersection of their geodesics with the advancing plane of the present, can ever claim physical reality. It is this new outlook of which we attempt a mathematical examination."

*Conflicting . . . possible worlds!*

Those words haunted Lanning. Here, at last, was light. Here, in his old friend, was a possible confidant: the one man who might understand, who might tell him whether Lethonee and Sorainya were miraculous visitors out of time, or—insanity.

At once he wrote McLan, outlining his story and requesting an opinion. Delayed, doubtless, by the military censors, the letter at last came back from America, stamped: *Removed—Left no Address*. An inquiry to the university authorities informed him that McLan had resigned to undertake private research. His whereabouts were unknown.

And Lanning groped his way alone, through the dark hall of wars and years, to 1937. Lao Meng Shan's cable found him at Lausanne, recuperating from the war in

Spain, the splinter of a German shell still aching in his knee. He was writing another book.

Turned philosopher, he was trying to analyze the trends of the world: to pick out the influences of good and evil, the resolution of whose conflicting forces, so he believed, would either establish the new technological civilization or hurl the race back into a savage twilight.

"Denny, my old American friend," the cable ran, "humanity needs you here. Will you fly for China?"

Direct action had always been the only anodyne for Lanning's tortured mind. And the newspapers, that day, stirred his blood with accounts of hundreds of women and children killed by unexpected air raids. Ignoring the stiffening pain in his knee, he laid aside the ancient problem of good and evil, flew to Cairo, and caught a fast steamer east.

## Chapter 4

### THE SHIP OF THE DEAD

WINGED DOOM was a whisper in the sky. Sirens moaned warning of the *pei chee*—the "flying engines." Frightened Shanghai had been blacked out, but already yellow bursts of ruin and death had flared above Chapei in the north and eastward along the Whangpoo docks, where the first Japanese bombs were falling.

Limping on his game left leg, where Krupp steel still made an excellent barometer of impending weather, Lanning stumbled across the Lunghwa field, south of the sprawling city, to the battered antique of a plane roaring in the line. The cool of midnight cleared the sleep from his head, and he shuddered to the drumming in the sky.

Lao Meng Shan, now his gunner, was already beside the machine, dolefully shaking his watch. Solemnly, in his careful English, he shouted above roaring motors:

"Our commanders are too confident. My watch stopped

when the first bomb struck. That is a very bad omen."

Lanning never laughed at superstition—few fliers do. But his lean face smiled in the darkness.

"Once, Shan," he shouted in reply, "an ancient warrior named Joshua stopped the sun until his battle was won. Maybe that's the omen. Let's go."

Adjusting his helmet, the Chinese shrugged.

"I think it means that we shall not come down alive. If it is written, however, that we must die for China—"

He clambered deliberately into the rear cockpit.

Lanning tried the controls, signaled the ground crew, and gunned the motor. The time-proven machine lifted toward the thrumming in the sky. The fact that most of the defending aircraft had been bombed into the ground on the day before, he thought grimly, was a more conclusive omen than the watch.

Darkness was a blanket on the city, northward, hiding cowering millions. Troop lorries and fire trucks shrieked through the streets. Anti-aircraft batteries were hammering vainly. Probing searchlights flared against the white puffs of exploding shells, uselessly seeking the raiders.

Spiraling for altitude, Lanning narrowed gray eyes to search a thin cloud-wisp above. He winced to a yellow flare beneath. For his mind saw the toppling wreckage of a splendid modern city ruined, and heard shrieks and groans and wailing cries for aid. He could almost smell the sharp odor of searing human flesh. His thin body tensed, and he fired a burst to warm the guns.

They were level with the cloud when it burned white, abruptly, in the glare of a searchlight. A dark bomber was slipping out of it, swaying between the gray mushrooms of shells. Lanning tipped the ancient plane into a power dive. Shan waved cheerfully. Their machine guns clattered. The bomber swerved, and defending guns flickered red. But Lanning held his sights on it, grimly. Black smoke erupted from it suddenly, and it toppled earthward.

One . . .

He was pulling up the battered ship, gingerly, when a roving searchlight caught and held them. Black, ominous holes peppered the wings. Glass shattered from the instruments before him. A sudden numbness paralyzed his shoulder.

The betraying light went on. But gasoline reeked in his nostrils, and a quick banner of yellow flame rippled backward. Twisting in the cockpit, he saw behind them the second enemy, diving out of the cloud, still firing.

And he saw the dark blood that stained Shan's drawn face. They were done for. But Shan grinned stiffly, raised a crimson hand to gesture. Lanning flung the creaking ship through a reckless Immelmann turn. The attacker was caught dead ahead.

A red sledge of agony smashed all feeling from Lanning's right leg. But he held straight for the other ship, guns hammering. It dived. With flaming gasoline a roaring curtain beside him, Lanning clung grimly to its tail. The tiny puppets of its crew jerked and slumped. Then it, too, began to burn.

Two . . .

But an explosion buffeted Lanning's head. Metal fragments seared past. Hot oil splattered his seared face. The motor stopped, and a new torturing tongue of yellow licked back.

Strangling, Lanning sideslipped, so that the wind stream would carry away the heat and suffocating fumes. He looked back at Shan. The crimson face of the little Oriental was now a dreadful mask. With a queer, solemn little grin, he held up something in a dripping hand—his watch.

A cold shudder went down Lanning's spine. He had never laughed at superstition. And now this evidence that human intuition could perceive the future seemed as shocking, suddenly, as the close approach of death. A stark incredulity had frozen Shan's grin, and he pointed stiffly. Lanning's eyes followed the crimson-streaming arm. And a cold hand stopped his heart. For something was flashing down beside them.

A queer-looking ship—or the dim gray ghost of a ship. It was wingless, flat-decked—like no ship the sky had ever seen. Its slim hull was like a submarine's, except that its ends were two massive disks of metal, which now shone greenishly.

A singular crew lined the rail, along the open deck. At first they seemed spectral and incredible as the ship. Several were strange in odd trim tunics of silver-gray and

green. But there were a few in familiar military uniforms: a French colonel, an Austrian lieutenant, a tall lank captain of the Royal Air Force. Lanning's mouth fell open, and a sudden agony of joy wrenched his sick body.

For he saw Barry Halloran!

Unchanged since that fatal April day of ten years ago, even wearing the same baggy cords and football sweater, the gigantic tackle towered above the rest. He saw Lanning, and grinned, and waved an eager greeting.

The ghostly craft swept closer, dropping beside the burning plane. Suddenly, somehow, it turned more real. Lanning's pain was drowned in wonderment, and he ceased to breathe. He saw a thin white-haired man—a queer familiar figure—busy beneath the small crystal dome that capped a round metal turret, amidships. A tube like the muzzle of a crystal gun thrust out of the turret. A broad, blinding yellow ray funneled from it, caught the plane, drew.

Lanning felt a momentary wrenching pull. The plane and his body resisted that surge of mysterious force. Red mighty hands of agony twisted his hurt body. Then something yielded. And the ship became completely real, close beside the flaming plane.

Agony wrapped Lanning again, as his fingers slipped useless from the stick. He coughed and strangled, slipping down into a sea of suffocating darkness. Searing torture consumed him. Then he was being drawn over the rail of the stranger, out of that hurtling furnace.

Ghost ship no longer, it was still incredible. Quick, tender hands were laying them on stretchers. But Lanning was staring up at big, red-headed Barry Halloran, magically unchanged by ten years of time.

"Sure, old man, it's me!" boomed the once familiar voice. "Just take things easy. These guys will soon fix you up as good as new—or better. And then we'll have a talk. Guess I'm way behind the times."

A phantasmal ship, manned with a crew of the dead. Lanning had not been superstitious; not even, in the conventional sense, religious. His faith had been a belief in the high destiny of man. He had expected death to blot him out, individually; the race alone was eternal. This

Stygian craft ship was, therefore, utterly unexpected—but it looked decidedly interesting.

“Barry!” he whispered. “Glad—see you—”

A wave of shadow dimmed his eyes. Blood was welling from his shoulder, hot and sticky against his body. A dull throbbing came from his shattered leg. Dimly, he knew that the men in gray and green were picking up the stretcher. But his awareness flickered out.

## Chapter 5

### THE SHATTERED MAN

WHEN DENNIS LANNING began to be fully conscious again, it seemed that he had always been in that small, green-walled room. His old restless, rootless life seemed dream-like, somehow remote beyond reality—all save somehow the visitations of Lethonee and Sorainya.

Dimly he remembered an operating room: blinding lights; bustling men in white masks; the glitter and clink of surgical instruments; Barry Halloran standing by with a grin of encouragement; the first whiff of some strange anaesthetic.

Shan was lying in the opposite bed, quietly asleep. And Lanning, in some forgotten interval, had met the two others in the ward. They were Silvano Cresto, Spanish ace shot down in the Moroccan war; and Willy Rand, U.S.N. missing when the ill-fated airship *Akron* was destroyed at sea. The latter was now propped up on his pillows, inhaling through a cigarette. He grinned.

“Smoke?”

“Thanks.” Lanning caught the tossed white cylinder, in spite of a dull twinge from his bandaged shoulder. He asked, “What’s up?”

Willie Rand exhaled white vapor. “Dunno.”

“What is this—ship? Where’re we going?”

“Her name’s the *Chronion*.” Rand blew a great silver

ring. "Cap'n Wil McLan. We're bound, they say, for a place called Jonbar—wherever that is!"

Wonder stiffened Lanning. Wil McLan! His old roommate, who had been the student of time. Jonbar! Lethonee's city, that she had showed him, far-off in some dim futurity.

"But why?" he gasped. "I don't understand!"

"Nor me. All I know, messmate, I turned loose when the wreckage of the *Akron* was rolling over on me, and tried to dive clear. Something smashed into me, and I woke up on this bed. Maybe a week ago—"

"A week!" Lanning stared. "But the *Akron*—that was back in 'thirty-three!"

Rand lit another cigarette from the first.

"Time don't make no difference here. The last man on your bed was the Austrian, Erich von Arneth. He came from the Isonzo front, in 1915. The one in the Chink's bed was the Frenchman, Jean Querard. He was blown up in 1940, fighting to save Paris."

"Forty!" Lanning whispered softly. Was tomorrow, then, already real? Lethonee—and Sorainya!

A brisk man in gray and green hastened into the ward, gently removed the cigarettes and replaced them with odd-looking thermometers. Lanning took the instrument out of his mouth.

"Where's Barry?" he demanded. "I want to see Barry Halloran. And Will McLan!"

"Not now, sir." The rhythmic accent was curiously familiar—it was like Lethonee's! "It's time for your last IV. You'll be able to get up when you wake. Now just lie back, sir, and give me your arm."

He put back the thermometer. Another man rolled in a wheeled instrument table. Deft hands bared and swabbed Lanning's arm. He felt the sting of a hypodermic. And quiet sleep came over him.

When at last he woke, it was to a new, delicious sense of health and fitness. The bandages were gone. His shoulder, his shattered leg, felt well and whole again. Even the German steel no longer ached in his knee.

Shan, he saw, was gone from the opposite bed. In it lay a big man, swathed in bandages, regarding him with dark, stolid Slavic eyes. A silent orderly came in, thrust a dozen

little glowing needles into the Russian's bandages, and laid Lanning's old uniform, cleaned and neatly repaired, beside his bed.

"Boris Barinin," the orderly informed him. "Soviet rocket-flyer. We picked him up near the pole in 'forty-seven. Smashed, starved, frozen. Ripe for us. You may go, sir. Captain McLan will see you."

Lanning put on the uniform, elated with his new sense of health, and eagerly climbed to the deck of the *Chronion*. It was seventy feet long, between the polished faces of the great metal disks, and broken only with the turret amidships. Some mechanism throbbed softly below.

The ship must be moving. But where?

Looking about for a glimpse of the sun or any landmark, Lanning could see only a curiously flickering blue haze. He went to peer down over the rail. Still there was nothing. The *Chronion* hung in a featureless blue chasm.

The dancing shimmer in that azure mist was oddly disturbing. Sometimes, he thought, he could almost see the outline of some far mountain, the glint of waves, the shapes of trees or buildings—incongruous impressions, queerly flat, two-dimensional, piled one upon another. It was like a movie screen, he thought, upon which the frames were being thrown a thousand times too fast, so that the projected image became a dancing blur.

"Denny, old man!"

It was a glad shout, and Barry Halloran came to him with an eager step. Lanning gripped his hand, seized his big shoulder. It was good to feel his hard muscles, to see this reckless freckled grin.

"You're looking fit, Barry. Not a day older!"

The blue eyes were wide with awe.

"Funny business, Denny. It's ten days since they picked me up, trying to swim away from that smashed crate in the *Charles*, with both legs broken. But I gather you've lived ten years!"

"What's ahead of us, Barry?" Lanning asked huskily. "What's it all about?"

The big tackle scratched the unkempt tangle of his red hair.

"Dunno, Denny. Wil has promised us some kind of a

scrap to save this place they call Jonbar. But what the odds are, or who we're going to fight, or how come—I don't know."

"I'm going to find out," Lanning told him. "Where's Wil McLan?"

"On his bridge. I'll show you the way."

They met four men in the gray and green, just coming on the deck, carrying two rolled stretchers. Following them was the little group of fighting men in their various uniforms. Lao Meng Shan grinned happily to see Lanning, and introduced the others.

The Spaniard, Cresto. Willie Rand. The lank British flyer, Courtney-Pharr. Hard-faced Erich von Arneth. Dapper little Jean Querard. And Emil Schorn, a duel-scarred, herculean Prussian, who had been taken from a burning Zeppelin in 1917.

"Where we go?" Cresto shrugged, white teeth flashing through his dark brown grin. "*Quien sabe?* Anyhow, *amigos*, this is better than hell! *Verdad?*" He laughed.

"We are fighting men," rumbled Emil Schorn, grimly smiling. "We go to fight. *Ach*, that is enough."

"Quite a gang, eh?" Barry Halloran led Lanning on, to a small metal door in the turret. Inside, another man in gray and green waited alertly behind a bulky thing like a cannon with a barrel of glass. "You'll find Wil up under the dome."

Lanning climbed metal steps. Standing behind a bright wheel, under the flawless shell of crystal, he came upon a slight, strange little man—or the shattered wreck of a man. His breath sucked in, to the shock of sympathetic pain. For the stranger was hideous with the manifold print of unspeakable agony.

The hands—restlessly fumbling with an odd little tube of bright-worn silver that hung by a thin chain about his neck—were yellow, bloodless claws, trembling, twisted with pain. His whole thin body was grotesquely stooped and gnarled, as if every bone had been broken on some torture wheel.

But it was the haggard, livid face, crosshatched with a white net of ridged scars, that chilled Lanning with its horror. Beneath a tangled abundance of loose white hair,

it was a stiff, pain-graven mask. Dark, deep-sunken, the eyes were somber wells of agony—and hate.

Strangely, those dreadful orbs lit with recognition.

"Denny!" It was an eager whisper, but strangely dry, voiceless.

The little man limped quickly to meet him, thrust out a trembling hand that was thin and twisted and broken, hideous with scars. His breath was a swift, whistling gasping. Lanning tried to put down the puzzled dread that shook him. He took that frail dry claw of a hand, and tried to smile.

"Wil?" he whispered. "You are Wil McLan?"

He choked back the other, fearful question: "*What has happened to you, Wil?*"

"Yes, Denny," hissed that voiceless voice. "But I've lived forty years more than you have—ten of them in Sorainya's torture vaults."

Lanning started to that name. And the old man stiffened as he spoke it, with hate glaring again in his hollow eyes—the unquenchable hate, Lanning thought, that must have kept his shattered body alive.

"I'm old, Denny," the dry rasping ran on. "I was fifty-three when the *Chronion* was launched at last on the time stream, in 1960. The ten years in Gyronchi—" The seamed face went white, the whisper sank. "They were a thousand!

"The last four years, in Jonbar, I've been preparing for our campaign." The shattered body came erect with a tense and desperate energy. "Old!" he rasped again. "But not too old to best Gyronchi!"

A sudden eager hope had risen in Lanning, above all his wonder and dread.

"Jonbar?" he whispered. "Then—then have you seen a girl named Lethonee?"

Desperately, he searched that scarred and tortured face. A painful pulse was throbbing in his throat. The tension of his hope was agony. Was it possible—possible that the "gulf more terrible than death" could now be crossed?

The broken man nodded, slowly. The stern strength of hate seemed to ebb out of him, and the bleak grimness of his face was lit with a stiff little smile.

"Yes, Denny," his whisper came softly. "Indeed I know Lethonee. It is she who set me free from the dungeons of Sorainya. It is for her, and her whole world, that we must fight. Or Gyronchi will—erase them."

Lanning caught his breath. Trembling, his fingers touched Wil McLan's twisted shoulder.

"Tell me, Wil," he begged. "This is all a riddle—a crazy, horrible riddle! Where is Jonbar? Can I ever really reach Lethonee? And, Sorainya—" Dread choked him. "What—what did she do to you?"

"I'll tell you, Denny—presently."

McLan's hollow eyes flashed to the knobs and levers and complicated dials of an instrument board. Moving with a swift precision that amazed Lanning, his gnarled fingers touched the knobs and levers, spun a polished wheel. He whispered some order into a tube, peered ahead through the crystal dome. An alert, surprising strength moved his shattered frame.

"Presently," his hoarse whisper came aside to Lanning. "As soon as this task is done. Watch, if you like."

Standing wonderingly behind him, Lanning stared out through the crystalline curve of the dome. The blue, enveloping haze flickered more violently. Bent over a creeping dial, McLan tapped a key. And the blue was gone.

The *Chronion* was flying low, over a gray, wave-tossed sea. It was late on a gloomy afternoon, and thick mists veiled the horizon. The little craft shuddered, abruptly, to the crash of mighty guns.

Lanning looked questioningly at Wil McLan. A twisted arm pointed, silently. And Lanning saw the long gray shapes of battle cruisers loom suddenly out of the haze, rocking as they erupted smoke and flame.

McLan tapped the keyboard beyond the wheel, and the *Chronion* slipped forward again. The turret revolved beneath them, and the crystal gun thrust out. Below, the stretcher crews moved alertly to the rail.

Peering through the fog of battle at the reeling ships, Lanning distinguished the Union Jack, and then, on another vessel, the German imperial standard. Suddenly, breathless with incredulous awe, he fitted this chaotic scene into what he knew of naval history.

"The *Defense* and the *Warrior!*" he gasped. "Attacking the *Weisbaden!* Is this—Jutland?"

Wil McLan glanced down at the dial.

"Yes. This is May 31, 1916. We await the sinking of the *Defense.*"

Through the haze of acrid smoke, the *Chronion* slipped nearer the attacking British vessels. Suddenly, then, the German cruiser fleet loomed out of the mist, seeking with a hurricane of fire to cover the stricken *Weisbaden*. Two terrific salvoes rocked the doomed flagship *Defense*, and it was lost in a sheet of flame.

The intermingled battle cruisers of both fleets were still plunging through the clouds of battle, belching smoke and death, as Wil McLan brought the *Chronion* down where the *Defense* had vanished. Shattered wreckage littered the sea, rushing into a great whirlpool where the flagship had sunk.

A long helix burned incandescent in the crystal gun, and a broad yellow ray poured out into the drifting smoke. His sweater stripped off, Barry Halloran jumped overboard, carrying a rope. He was dragged back, through the ray, towing a limp survivor. Dripping blood and brine, the rescued sailor was laid on a stretcher, rushed below.

Courtney-Pharr was poised to dive, when the steel prow of the disabled *Warspite* plunged suddenly out of the blinding smoke. He stumbled fearfully back. Lanning caught his breath. It had run them down!

But Wil McLan tapped a key, spun the shining wheel. Green radiance lit the great terminal disks. And the battling fleets were swept away into blue flickering twilight. The broken old man sighed with weary relief, and rubbed tiny beads of sweat from his scarred forehead.

"Well, Denny," he whispered. "One more man to fight for Jonbar."

"Now!" demanded Lanning, breathless. "Can you explain?"

## Chapter 6

### THE WINDOW INTO TIME

LEANING AGAINST the instrument panel, Wil McLan pushed back the snow-white shock of his hair. Then, as he still paused, his twisted fingers began tracing the white scars that seamed his face.

"Please forgive my voice, Denny," his hoarse whisper came at last. "But once in the dungeon, when I was nearly dead with thirst and begging for anything to drink, Sorainya had molten metal poured down my throat. Not even Lethonee's doctors can grown new vocal cords. Sorainya'll pay for that!"

Hate had flared in the sunken eyes again, and drawn the gnarled body taut. The old man tried to compose himself. He unclenched his hands, and his twisted face tried to smile, and he whispered deliberately:

"Time was always a challenge to me. When we lived in a simple continuum of four dimensions, with time the fourth, its conquest appeared deceptively simple—through some application, perhaps, of the classical Newtonian dynamics.

"But Max Planck came along with the quantum theory, de Broglie and Schroedinger with their wave mechanics, Heisenberg with his matrix mechanics. Every new discovery seemed to complicate the structure of the universe—and the problem of time.

"With the substitution of waves of probability for concrete particles, the world lines of objects are no longer the fixed and simple paths they once were. Geodesics have an infinite proliferation of possible branches, at the whim of subatomic indeterminism.

"Still, of course, in large masses, the statistical results of the new physics are not much different from those given by the classical laws. But there is a fundamental differ-

ence. The apparent reality of the universe is the same—but it rests upon a quicksand of possible change.

“Certainty is abolished. Let a man stand on a concrete floor. It is no longer certain that he will not fall through it. For he is sustained only by the continual reaction of atomic forces, and they are governed by probability alone.

“It is merely a very excellent statistical probability that keeps the man from radiating heat until his body is frozen solid, or absorbing it until he bursts into flame, or flying upward into space in defiance of Newtonian gravitation, or dissolving into a cloud of molecular particles.

“Mere probability is all we have left. And my first actual invention was a geodesic tracer, designed for probability analysis. It was a semi-mathematical instrument, essentially a refinement of the old harmonic analyzer. Tracing the possible world lines of material particles through time, it opened a window to futurity.”

The hoarse whisper paused, and old Wil McLan limped to the side of the dome. His scarred trembling hands lifted a black velvet cover from a rectangular block of some clear crystal mounted on the top of a metal cabinet.

“Here is the chronoscope,” he said. “A sort of window into time. It creates special fields, that bend radiation into the time-axis. We get a stereoscopic image in the crystal screen—there’s a selective fluorescence to the beat frequencies projected from below.”

The old man snapped a switch, manipulated dials at the end of the crystal block. It lit with a cloudy green. The green cleared, and a low cry escaped Lanning’s lips. Within the crystal, microscopically clear, he saw a new world in miniature.

A broad silver river cut a fertile green plain dotted with villages. Beyond the river rose two hills. One was crowned with a tremendous citadel. Its mighty walls gleamed like the strange red metal of Sorainya’s mail. Above the frowning towers were flowing banners of yellow and crimson and black. A wide gate opened, as he watched, in the foot of the hill. An armored troop poured out.

“Watch the marchers,” rasped McLan.

Lanning bent closer to the crystal block. It seemed suddenly that he was looking through a window, into an

actual world. He found the soldiers again, and uttered a muffled cry.

"They aren't men!" he gasped. "They're—insects!"

"Half ant," whispered the shattered man. "Half human. Sorainya's biologists have made some diabolical experiments. Those monsters are her warriors, bred to terrorize her slaves. That's her castle, where I was jailed. But look at the other hill."

Lanning found it, topped with a temple of ebon black. The building was vast, but squat and low, faced with endless colonnades of thick square columns. From the center of it rose a beam of *blackness*, of darkness thick and tangible, that widened into the sky like the angry funnel of some unimaginable tornado.

"The temple of the *gyrane*," husked Wil McLan, "where Glarath rules." He was adjusting the dials again. "But watch!"

A village of flimsy huts swam closer. The marching column of gigantic anthropoid ants was swiftly surrounding it, driving the villagers—a fair-skinned sturdy-looking folk, although ragged and starved—before them from the fields.

"This cruel thing happened while I was in prison," the old man rasped. "The offense of the people was that they had not paid their taxes to Sorainya and their tithes to the *gyrane*. The reason they had no grain to pay them, is that Sorainya and her lords, hunting a convict for sport, had trampled and destroyed the fields."

Armed with heavy golden axes and short thick guns of crimson metal, as well as their own frightful mandibles, the six-limbed fighters made a monstrous ring about the frightened village. And now an armored vehicle came lumbering down from the red citadel, and through the line of giants. A hot white beam flickered out of it, and miserable buildings exploded into flame. The wind carried a wall of fire across the village.

An entirely human figure, in black-plumed scarlet armor, sprang from the tank to join the great black half-human ants. A thin yellow sword played swiftly, cutting down men and women and children as they fled from the flames, until the slaughter was done. Then the human figure turned back from the new desolation, flung

up the crimsoned sword in triumph, and slipped off the helmet. A flood of yellow hair fell down across the scarlet mail. Lanning's breath sucked in, and a bright pain stabbed his heart.

"Why, that—" he gasped. "That's Sorainya!"

"Sorainya," whispered Wil McLan. "The lovely queen of Gyronchi."

He snapped a switch, and Sorainya dissolved, with her black warriors, into the pellucid transparency of the crystal block. His hollow eyes lifted slowly to Lanning, and in them was his slumberous hate. His gnarled hands knotted and relaxed, and lifted once more to fondle the little worn bright cylinder of silver that hung from his throat.

"It happened," the hoarse voiceless gasp went on, "that Gyronchi was the first future world, out of those possible, that the chronoscope revealed. Happened that I found Sorainya, splendid in her armor, fencing with one of her human ants.

"You can see that she is—well, attractive. At first the range of the instrument was limited to her youth, where scenes of such barbarity are less frequent. Remember, Denny, I was thirty years younger when I first saw her, back in 1945. Her glorious beauty, the military pomp of her empire—I was swept away.

"Neglecting all the other possible worlds, I followed her, for months—years. I didn't know, then, all the harm the temporal searchbeam was doing." His white head bowed; for a moment he was speechless. "But no process whatever can reveal the state of an electron without changing that state. The quanta of my scanning ray were absorbed by the atoms that refracted them. The result was an increase in the probability factor of Gyronchi—that is the root of all the tragedy."

The scarred face made a grimace of pain.

"The blame is mine. For, before I was aware of it, the absorption had cut down the probability of all other possible worlds, so that Gyronchi was the only one the limited power of my instrument could reach. That blinded me to the crime that I was doing.

"But I'm afraid you can't understand my passion for Sorainya."

Lanning's hoarse and breathless whisper was an echo of his own: "I can."

The sunken eyes flamed again, and McLan fondled the silver tube.

"I watched her, with the chronoscope," the rasping words ran. "Sometimes I was driven to despair by her remoteness in time and probability—and sometimes to desperate effort. For I had resolved to conquer time, and join her in Gyronchi.

"In 1952, after seven years of effort, I was able to communicate. By increasing the power and focal definition of the temporal radiation, I was able to project a speaking image of myself to Sorainya's fortress."

Agony stiffened McLan's scarred face. His lean jaw set. His breath came in rasping gusts, and it was half a minute before he could speak again.

"And so I made suit to Sorainya. At first she seemed puzzled and alarmed. But, after I had made several bodiless visits to her apartments, her attitude changed suddenly—perhaps she had got advice from Glarath."

His clenched hands cracked.

"She smiled," the old man rasped. "She welcomed me and asked me to return. And she began to ask about my discoveries—saying that perhaps the priests of the *gyrane*, being themselves able scientists, could solve my remaining problems. If I could come to Gyronchi, she promised, I might share her throne."

Lanning bit his lip and caught a gasping breath. Memory of Sorainya's visits mocked him. But he did not interrupt.

"A mistrust of the priests, fortunately," McLan went on, "kept me from divulging very much. But Sorainya's encouragements redoubled my efforts. There is a terrific resistance to the displacement of any body in time. For the geodesics are anchored in the future, as well as in the past. The removal of a living person, which might warp all futurity, is impossible. And even to dislodge inert matter requires tremendous power.

"Nothing less than atomic energy, I soon perceived, could even begin to overcome that resistance. I set out, therefore, with the searching ray of the chronoscope, to

study the atomic science of the future. But there I met a curious difficulty.

"For the instrument, which, after all, can only trace out probabilities, sometimes queerly blurred the fine detail of script or printing. Lōs Alamos and the Kremlin were equally open to the searching beam. I studied the works of many future scientists—of John Barr and Ivor Gyros and many more. But essential words always faded.

"There is a law of sequence and progression, I found at last, operating along a fifth rather than the temporal dimension, which imposes inexorable limits. It is that progression which actually creates reality out of possibility. And it is that higher law which prohibits all the trite absurdities met with in the old speculation about travel in time, such as the adventurer in time who returns to kill himself. The familiar logic of cause and effect is not abolished, but simply advanced to a higher dimension.

"With the search beam, I was able to look through the curtains of military secrecy. I studied uranium and hydrogen bombs, and found them useless to me. The first crude atomic heat engines, that ran on fission energy, were no better.

"It was only through independent research into atomic probability that I learned how to cause and control the fusion of ordinary hydrogen into heavier elements. I built the first hydrogen converter in 1958. It developed eight thousand horsepower, and I could carry it in one hand. But listen!"

He paused, to let Lanning hear the soft thrumming that vibrated through the deck. A weary triumph lit his emaciated features.

"The power of three hundred Niagaras!" he whispered. "From only a spoonful of water. Energy enough to break the wall of time! And I found a lever—the very absorption of the temporal ray, that had troubled me so much, is due to a resisting field, against which our drive reacts. For two years I worked desperately on the *Chronion*. Designed only for travel in time—not for a fighting machine—it was finished in June, 1960.

"At once, from my lonely laboratory in the Colorado Rockies, I set out for Gyronchi." The rasping whisper

turned raw with bitterness. "I was a fool. I hoped to reach Sorainya and share her diamond throne."

A spasm of agony racked the white, tortured face.

## Chapter 7

### COMMANDER OF THE LEGION

THE RASPING WHISPER PAUSED. Old Wil McLan limped swiftly about the dome, reading dials and gauges. His gnarled scarred hands deftly set controls, and moved the shining wheel. Aware of the soft steady thrum of the converter beneath, Lanning realized that the *Chronion* was moving again, through the blue flickering chasm. Through time?

"I went alone," Wil McLan looked back to him, with hollow, haunted eyes. "For the *Chronion*, with all her millions of horsepower, could not have drawn a crew of sound men from their places in time. Even alone, I had difficulty. An overloaded field coil burned out. The laboratory caught fire, and I was badly injured. The very accident, however, so weakened my future geodesics that the time-drive could pull me out. At the very instant the burning building collapsed, we broke free into the time stream."

The dark, smouldering eyes stared away into the shimmering abyss beyond the crystal dome.

"You have seen Gyronchi, in the chronoscope." The old man shuddered. "And one look at my body can tell you enough of what reception I had from Sorainya, when at last I came to her red citadel."

The lean, white-wealed face went hard again with agony and hate. Great tears burst suddenly from the sunken eyes. The broken, bloodless claws of hands came up again, unconsciously, to the bright silver tube. Lanning looked quickly away, until McLan went on:

"Excuse my self-pity, Denny. And I shall spare you the

humiliating details of Sorainya's treachery. The instant she had lured me off the ship, her monsters seized me. She mocked me for daring to desire the queen of Gyronchi, and offered me my life for the secrets of the time ship.

"When I wouldn't talk, she threw me into her dungeons, and turned the *Chronion* over to the priests of the *gyrane*." The whisper had become a thin, dry sobbing. "For ten years, in her torture vaults, Sorainya tried to extract my secrets, while her priests studied the ship."

The sobbing ceased. The dreadful eyes went shut. The seamed, livid face of Wil McLan, terrible with its web of white scars, became a mask of death. His twisted body quivered, and his breath was a hurried gasping. Lanning looked away again, until at last the old man whispered:

"It was Lethonee who set me free; I think you know her."

A little tremor of eagerness and dread ran over Dennis Lanning. He tried to speak, made only a little gulping sound, and waited silently.

"She came to me in Sorainya's dungeons," said Wil McLan. "White and beautiful, holding her time crystal—that's another geodesic tracer, somewhat like my chronoscope.

"Lethonee forgave all the harm my experiments had done Jonbar. She planned my escape. She searched time for the hour when the disposition of the guarding giants would make it possible. She examined the locks, and brought me measurements, for the keys, which I carved, there in the cell, from the bones of a previous occupant.

"When the chosen night came, she guided me out of the dungeons, through the quarters of Sorainya's sleeping soldiers—the queen had them roasted alive when she found that I was gone. Lethonee picked out a safe way for me down the cliff, and across Gyronchi to the black temple.

"Glarath and his priests had taken the *Chronion* there. Apparently they had dismantled and studied the drive. Perhaps they had not understood it completely, however, for they had not ventured on any time trips of their own. But with what they learned, and power from the *gyrane*, they had made a golden shell——"

Lanning caught his breath.

"I've seen that!" he gasped. "Carrying Sorainya!"

"Her projected image," said Wil McLan. "But Lethonee guided me to the temple," he resumed his whispered narrative. "The alarm spread. The fighting things roused the priests. With seconds to spare, I got aboard the *Chronion*, started the converters, and escaped into time. I returned to the early twentieth century. And then at last, guided by Lethonee down the fainter geodesics of her possible world, I came to Jonbar."

"Jonbar—" Lanning interrupted again, with a quick gesture at the crystal block of the chronoscope. "Can we see Jonbar, in that? And—Lethonee?"

Very gravely, Wil McLan shook his white, haggard head.

"Presently, we shall try," he whispered. "But the probability factor of Jonbar has become so small that I can reach it only with the utmost power of the scanning beam, and then the images are very poor. For Jonbar is at the brink of doom."

His broken fingers touched the thin white cylinder that hung from his throat.

"But there is still one chance." A stern light flashed in his hollowed eyes. "Jonbar hasn't given up. It was Lethonee's father, an archeologist digging in the Rockies where my laboratory used to be, who found there the charred books and age-rusted mechanisms from which he rediscovered the secret of time.

"He made the time crystal. With it, Lethonee soon discovered the menace born of my unwitting tampering with probability. And she brought me to Jonbar to aid the defense. That is why I have been gathering up you and your men, Denny."

Lanning was staring at him, frowning.

"I don't understand," he muttered. "What can we do?"

"These two possible worlds, each armed with the secret of time, are fighting for survival." A fierce glint burned in the old man's eyes. "Either Jonbar or Gyronchi—either Lethonee or Sorainya—may exist. But not both. The battle is on, all along the front of time. The outcome will be fixed by that higher progression, in the fifth dimension."

"But you can see the future," broke in Lanning. "Can't you tell?"

"The chronoscope reveals no certainties," said McLan. "Only probabilities—which it changes even as it reveals them." His white head shook. "I know, though, that the balance of probability is far in favor of Sorainya."

Desperately, Lanning had clutched at his thin shoulder.

"But we can help?" he demanded. "What is our part?"

"No direct geodesics link Jonbar and Gyronchi," explained McLan. "Therefore they have no common reality. They are contradictory. They can explore each other's trains of probability. But there can be no physical contact, because the existence of each is a denial of the other. Their forces, therefore, can never come directly to grips.

"Our contemporary world, however, joined by direct geodesics with all possible futurities, has a common existence with both Lethonee and Sorainya. That's how you get into the picture, Denny."

"Huh?" Lanning leaned forward desperately. "They both talked of destiny. You can tell me what they meant?"

The blue haunted eyes looked at him steadily, from beneath that startling shock of snowy hair.

"You are in the key position, Denny," breathed McLan. "Fate has made you the champion of Jonbar. Your triumph alone can save it. If you fail, it is lost."

"And that's why they came to me?"

"Sorainya has sought to cause your death." The old man nodded. "To carry you to Gyronchi, where your aid would insure her victory. And Lethonee took it upon herself to watch over you, until the moment we could pull you aboard the *Chronion*."

"Death..." Lanning whispered the echo. "Then we are—dead?"

"I came back to find you and a band of your contemporaries, to serve Jonbar. Since it is impossible to draw a sound, living man from his place in time—to do so might wrap the whole continuum—we had to wait until the moment when each of you was actually dead, to draw you aboard through the temporal field. Jonbar has provided a corps of surgeons, who were able to revive you immediately, with *dynat*."

"*Dynat*?" Lanning caught at the term. "I heard Lethonee use that word, and the doctors. What does it mean?"

"It is the vital scientific power upon which the whole civilization of Jonbar is based," said McLan. "The slow evolutionary adaptation to the use of its illimitable power is what will give birth to the *dynon*, the perfect race that may exist—if you win for Jonbar.

"The *dynat* is as important to Jonbar as the *gyrane* is to Gyronchi. But there's no time for nonessentials now. I've outlined the situation, Denny. What about it?"

The dark hollow eyes searched his face with a probing keenness almost painful.

"Will you accept the championship of Jonbar—knowing that it is a nearly hopeless battle? Will you set yourself against Sorainya, and give up whatever she may offer?" The hoarse whisper fell. "Remember, Denny, it's an act of yours that must kill Sorainya—or Lethonee."

A cold shudder passed over Dennis Lanning, and a choking ache closed his throat. The serene white image of Lethonee was before him, holding the jewel. But the proud, red-mailed splendor of Sorainya came instantly to push it away. He couldn't, he thought, endure the death of Lethonee. But could he—even if he would—destroy Sorainya? He gulped, and nodded painfully.

"Yes, Wil," he said. "I accept."

"Good for you, Denny!" Wil McLan's broken fingers gripped his hand. "And now I give you command of our legion out of time."

"No, Wil," Lanning protested. "I've earned no right to command."

"Gyronchi must be destroyed—and even Sorainya." A bitter light flashed in the hollow eyes again, and the gnarled fingers touched the worn silver tube. "I'll do my part. But I've no knack of leadership. My life has been spent too much with abstractions. You're a man of action, Denny, and in the crucial place. You must command."

"Okay. I'll do my best."

McLan's scarred hand lifted stiffly to salute him.

"Thank you, Denny. Now I suggest that you go down and brief your men. You may give them a choice—though

it's a pretty hard one. They may follow your command, or be returned to where we found them."

"Which would mean—death?"

Wil McLan nodded.

"There is no other place for them in time—alive. If we win, a place can be made for those who survive, probably in Jonbar. If we fail, there is only death again—perhaps in Sorainya's dungeons."

"In Jonbar—" repeated Lanning, huskily. "Can I go there if we win? To Lethonee?"

"If we win," the old man told him. "Now, if you will talk to your men, I'll try to find Jonbar with the chronoscope."

Eagerly, Lanning gasped, "May I—"

A solemn twinkle flashed briefly in McLan's hollow eyes.

"If I get Lethonee," he promised, "I'll call you. But it's very hard to find Jonbar."

Lanning went back down through the turret to the deck, and sent Barry Halloran to call the men together. Facing the curiously assorted little group, he told them:

"Men, I've just talked to Captain McLan." He saw the flash of anxious interest on their faces. "He has gathered us out of time, saved each one of us from certain death. In return, he wants us to fight, to save a future world. I know the cause is good.

"He has offered me the command. I must ask you either to follow me, or to be returned to your own place in time—to die. I'm sorry the terms are so hard—"

"Hard?" shouted Barry Halloran.

"*Nein!*" grunted Emil Schorn. "Are we craven, to turn back from Valhalla?"

"*Viva!*" shouted Cresto. "*Viva el capitan!*"

"Thank you," Lanning gulped. "If we win, there will be a place for us in Jonbar. Now, if you're all with us, repeat after me: I pledge loyalty to Jonbar, and I promise to serve dutifully in the Legion of Time."

The seven men, with right hands lifted, shouted the oath, and then, led by Willie Rand, roared out a cheer for "Jonbar and Cap'n Lanning."

One of the orderlies beckoned, and Lanning returned hastily to the bridge.

"Did you—" he began breathlessly. "Did you—"

Wil McLan shook his haggard head, and pointed to the cabinet of the chronoscope.

"I tried," he whispered hoarsely. "But the enemy has moved again. One more triumph of Sorainya is fixed in the fifth dimension. Jonbar is one step nearer extinction. The image flickered, and went out. Now this is all I can get."

Looking into the crystal block, Lanning once more saw Gyronchi. But it was strangely changed. Sorainya's proud citadel, on one hill, had collapsed in a heap of corroded, blackened metal. The black temple of the *gyrane*, on the other eminence, had crumbled to a tremendous mound of shattered stone. Beneath, upon the denuded wastelands where fields and villages had been, was a desolate untrodden wilderness of weeds and brush, leprously patched with strange scars of white, shining ash.

"Gyronchi?" breathed Lanning. "Destroyed?"

"Destroyed," rasped Wil McLan, "by its own evil. By a final war between Sorainya's half-human warriors and the priesthood of the *gyrane*. Mankind, in the picture you witness, is extinct."

His hoarse whisper sank very low.

"If we fail—if mankind follows the way of Gyronchi—that is the end of the road." Warily, he snapped off the switch, and the bleak scene vanished. "And now it seems that the road has been chosen. For no other geodesics remain strong enough for the instrument to trace."

His hands knotted impotently, Lanning stared blankly out through the dome, into the haze of flickering blue.

"What—" he demanded. "What could have happened?"

"I don't know." Wil McLan shook his head. "We must try to find what Sorainya has done, and try to undo it. If we could get back to Jonbar, and Lethonee's new geodesic laboratory—"

Lanning gripped his thin shoulder. "Can we?"

"I'm afraid," whispered Wil McLan, "that this move has so far undermined the probability of Jonbar that we can never reach it. But we can try!"

And the broken old hands spun the wheel of the *Chronion*.

## Chapter 8

### THE VANISHING OF JONBAR

BORIS BARININ CAME UP from the hospital ward. Two Canadians followed: lean silent twins named Isaac and Israel Enders, who had been snatched from a shell hole on Vimy Ridge in 1917. With Duffy Clark, the British sailor from Jutland, they made eleven men under Lanning. He organized them into two squads, made Emil Schorn his second in command.

Wil McLan had been collecting weapons. There were a dozen Mauser rifles, two dozen Luger pistols, four crated machine guns, several boxes of hand grenades, and a hundred thousand rounds of assorted ammunition, that all had come, along with a stock of food and a few medical supplies, from a sinking munitions ship.

"The first precaution," McLan told him. "We located a torpedoed ship, when we first came back from Jonbar, to collect supplies and arms—and test our technique of recovery. Weapons from Jonbar, you see, wouldn't function against targets from Gyronchi."

Since McLan's helpers from Jonbar would be unable to enter Gyronchi, Lanning detailed Clark, Barinin, and Willie Rand as a crew for the *Chronion*, and himself learned something of her navigation, as the time ship drove steadily down the geodesics of Jonbar. The hydrogen converter throbbed endlessly beneath the deck, but Wil McLan seemed disheartened with their progress.

"The world we seek is now all but impossible," he rasped. "The full power of the field drives us forward very slowly. And at any instant the geodesics of Jonbar may break, for they are weak enough already, and leave us—nowhere!"

Once, in his tiny cabin, aft, Lanning woke in his bunk with a clear memory of Lethonee. Slim and tall in her

long white robe, she had stood before him, holding the flaming jewel of time. Despair was a shadow on her face, and her violet eyes were dark pools of pain.

"Denny," her urgent words rang clear in his memory, "come to Jonbar—or we are dead."

Lanning went at once to the bridge, and told McLan. The old man shook his white head, grimly.

"We are already doing all that can be done," he said. "The geodesics of Jonbar are like microscopic wires drawn out thinner and thinner by the attenuation of probability. If the tracer loses them, or if they snap, Jonbar is—lost!"

Two weeks passed, by the time of the ship—physiological time, as measured by heartbeats and all bodily rhythms, in which life ran on toward its end, regardless of motion backward or forward along the time dimension. And at last the *Chronion* slipped silently out of the blue, shimmering abyss. Lanning, waiting eagerly on the deck, saw beneath them—Jonbar!

The ship was two miles high. Yet, that metropolis of futurity stretched out in every direction as far as he could see. Mirror-faced with polished metal, the soaring buildings seemed more inspiring than cathedrals. With a pleasing lack of regularity, they stood far apart all across the green park-like valley of a broad placid river, and crowned the wooded hills beyond. Many-leveled traffic viaducts flowed among them, busy with strange vehicles. Great silver teardrops came and went through the air about them.

Lanning had glimpsed the city once before, through Lethonee's time jewel; now its staggering vastness touched him with a troubled awe. Hundreds of millions, he knew, lived here in this heart-lifting splendor. Yet all the wonder of this world, the cruel fact came home to him like a stabbing blade, faced absolute annihilation.

Trembling with eagerness and dread, he hurried up to Wil McLan.

"So Jonbar's safe?" he whispered breathlessly. "And Lethonee is here?"

The bent old man turned solemnly from the polished wheel, and shook his scarred white head.

"We're here," came his voiceless answer. "But our

instruments show how its geodesics have faded out. It hangs by a strand weaker than a spider's web. But Lethonee will doubtless be at her new laboratory."

The *Chronion* was, gliding swiftly to one tall silver spire on a hill. A vast doorway slid open in a silvery wall. The little ship floated into an immense hangar-like space, crowded with streamlined craft. A green light beckoned them to an empty platform.

"This is the world we're fighting for," Lanning told the men.

"*Ach!*" rumbled Emil Schorn. "A good world."

Leaving the scarred Prussian in command, and warning him to be ready for instant action in case of emergency, Lanning and McLan left the ship. An elevator in a great pillar shot them upward. They emerged into cool open air, amid the fragrant greenery of a terrace garden. A sliding door opened in a bright wall beyond. Out of it came Lethonee.

Instead of the long white robe in which Lanning had always seen her, she wore a close-fitting dress of softly shimmering, metallic blue; and a blue band held her hair. Something of the grave solemnity of the apparitions was gone. She was just a lovely human girl, joyously eager to see him—and trying, he thought, to hide a tragic despair. She came quickly to him, through the bright garden, and took both his hands in an eager grasp. And Lanning felt a queer little shiver of joy at the warm reality of her touch.

"Denny Lanning!" she whispered. "At last you have come. I am so glad—"

Her weary, troubled eyes went to scarred old Wil McLan.

"Gyronchi has carried out some new attack," she told him. "The *dynon* tried to bring a warning from the future, but they were cut off. Now the time crystal shows no future at all, beyond tonight. This is the last possible night for Jonbar. Unless—"

Her haunted eyes clung desperately to Lanning's face.

"Unless the tide of probability is changed."

"I'm going to the laboratory." Wil McLan turned toward the sliding door. "I'll send for you, Denny," he whispered, "if we discover anything. But you can do nothing until—unless—we find what Sorainya has done."

He limped away, and Lanning was left alone with Lethonee.

"How can you be—not real?" Lanning stood gazing at her quiet loveliness, framed against the terrace garden. "What's the difference between reality and—such a seeming as you are?"

She hesitated, with a little frown of thought.

"There is a flow from probability to certainty, along the fifth dimension," she explained. "Probabilities are infinite, but there is only one reality. Many conflicting futures are possible, but the past is simple and complete. The geodesics branch at each point of uncertainty, but the flow of realization must always take one branch and obliterate the rest. All the geodesics tend to absorb energy; all possible worlds strive for reality. But the energy of probability must always be withdrawn again from all those other worlds that might have been, to create the single one that can be. All the rest must vanish, as their probability fades to zero."

"And Jonbar is—vanishing?"

She nodded. "It—and I. We were given creation by the atomic power of the *Chronion*, bringing you down the geodesics. We are only an illusion of possibility, the reflection of what may be—a reflection that is doomed."

Abruptly, then—and Lanning knew that it took a desperate effort—she tossed her lovely head, and smiled.

"But need illusions talk of illusion?" Her voice was almost gay. "Aren't you hungry, Denny? Gather flowers for the table. Let's dine—on illusion!"

With her own hands she set a little table against the terrace rail. Beyond the rail, a mile below, lay green parklands. Other silver pylons shimmered on distant hills. The genial sun shone from a serene sky, of a blue clarity that Lanning had never seen above a city, and the clean wind whispered in a silence of strange peace.

"Nothing can happen to you, or to Jonbar!" Lanning whispered suddenly. "Perfection can't die!"

"But it can." Her voice shuddered. "When the whole structure of space-time is shattered with war—it can."

Lanning caught her hand.

"Lethonee," he said huskily, "for ten years, since the

first night you came, I have lived in hope of finding you. Now, if anything should take you—”

“Remember, Denny.” She moved closer, shivering. “This is the last night of Jonbar. The time crystal shows no tomorrow.”

The blue dusk turned to mauve and to purple-black. The far towers of Jonbar shone like pillars of fire. Shadows filled the terrace. Some night-blooming shrub sent out a flood of intoxicating sweetness. Slow music came softly from somewhere below. Close to Lethonee, Lanning tried—and failed—to forget the darker shadow of extinction upon her. Suddenly her hand stiffened in his, and she caught a gasping, frightened breath.

“Greeting!” rang out a voice of golden mockery, “Queen of Nothingness!”

Lanning looked up, startled. He saw Sorainya’s golden shell. She stood upright in it, proudly erect in her woven scarlet mail. Beside her stood a tall, angular man, gaunt-faced, with dark sullen eyes and cruel heavy lips, robed to his feet in dull stiff black. Glarath, that would be, Lanning knew, high priest of the *gyrane*. His sunken black eyes smouldered malevolently, but Sorainya’s greenish glance held a mocking amusement.

“Best taste her kisses while you may, Denny Lanning,” she taunted. “For we have found a higher crucial factor. I didn’t need you, Denny Lanning, after all—Glarath, with the *gyrane*, has taken the place I once offered you. And now our struggle is won.”

The black-haired hand of the priest clutched possessively at her strong bare arm. He snarled some guttural, unintelligible word, and his dark eyes burned at Lanning, slitted with hate. Sorainya whipped out the thin golden needle of her sword, and drew it in a flashing arc above the dark city. And she leaned into the black priest’s arms.

“Farewell, Denny Lanning,” she called. “And take warning! All Jonbar—and the phantom in your arms—will be gone like fog before the wind. We’ve come to watch the end.”

She touched the sword to her red mouth and then flung it toward him, as if to toss him a derisive kiss. Her feet touched some control, and the shell soared upward and vanished in the night.

White-faced, shaken, Lethonee was on her feet.

"Come into the laboratory!" Her voice was dry with dread. "Though I'm afraid—afraid that everything has failed."

Lanning followed her to the sliding door. Beyond it he saw a vast tower room. At endless tables, hundreds of men and women were busy with what he took for mathematical instruments. Others, in a far wing beyond, stood peering into scores of huge crystals like Lethonee's jewel of time. They were still in the doorway when Lanning saw Wil McLan, coming to meet them at a frantic, limping run.

"Back, Denny!" the old man was screaming, voicelessly. "Get back aboard. Jonbar is—going!"

Lanning swept Lethonee with him into the elevator. McLan tumbled after them. The cage dropped toward the hāngar. Lanning held the girl hard against him.

"Darling—" he whispered. "You are coming with us!"

"No, Denny." She shook her head. "I am part of Jonbar."

She clung to him, desperately. He kissed her.

The elevator stopped. Lanning caught Lethonee's hand, and started running with her toward the *Chronion*. Ahead, a welcoming throng of gay-clad people were still gathered about the time ship, tossing flowers to the deck. Dapper Jean Querard stood by the rail, making a speech.

But a curious pale light had begun to shine from the crowd and the teardrop ships and the lofty walls, as if they were beginning to dissolve into luminous mist. Only the *Chronion* remained substantial. Lanning sprinted.

"Hurry!" he sobbed. "Darling—"

But Lethonee's fingers were gone from his hand. He stopped, and saw her still beside him—but dim as a ghost. Frantically, her shadow beckoned him to go on. He tried to catch her up in his arms, but she faded from his grasp. She was gone.

McLan had passed him. Lanning caught a sobbing breath, and fought a blinding pain, and stumbled on. But what was the use, his bitter agony demanded, if Lethonee was gone?

Everything was dim now, around him, and flickering like the blue abyss in which the time ship rode. He saw

Wil McLan scramble up a ladder. But the floor was giving away. His running feet sank deep, as if its bright metal had crumbled into rust. He caught his breath, and clutched out desperately, and fell. The last wraith of the building flickered away. Jonbar was gone. Beneath, under the empty night, lay only a featureless dark plain. He fell toward it, a cold wind screaming up about him.

"Farewell!" a malicious golden voice was pealing, and Lanning saw the long yellow shell flash by, Sorainya and Glarath lying together on its cushions. He fell past them, and the wind took his breath.

But then the *Chronion* flashed down beside him. The yellow ray flared from her crystal gun, and drew him to the rail. Barry Halloran hauled him safely aboard.

## Chapter 9

### GEODESICS TO GYRONCHI

THE SHIP IN A MOMENT was back in her timeless blue abyss, driving through the ceaseless flicker of possibility. Lanning hastened to join Wil McLan beneath the crystal dome, and asked his agonized question:

"Lethonee is gone—dead?"

"Not dead." McLan's haunted eyes rested on him sadly. "For she was never born. Jonbar was merely a faint probability of future time, which we illuminated for an instant with the power of the temporal ray. This last triumph of Sorainya has eliminated the geodesics that might have led to its existence. The reflection, therefore, vanished."

"Sorainya—" gasped Lanning. "What has she done?" He clutched McLan's twisted arm. "Did you discover—anything?"

The old man nodded slowly.

"In the last hour, before the laboratory was obliterated—"

"Yes?" Lanning urged him on.

"A moment, my boy," he whispered. "Seems the priests of the *gyrane* must have learned more than I thought from their examination of the *Chronion*. Sorainya's golden shell, as you know, is merely a projected temporal image. But now Glarath has built an actual time ship."

"Huh?"

"It's heavier than the *Chronion*, armored for war. It carries a horde of Sorainya's anthropoid ants."

"And they used that, against Jonbar?"

"They went back into the past," said the voiceless man. "Back to the turning point of probability. They found something there—it must have been a small material object, although we got no glimpse of it—which was the very foundation of Jonbar. Using *gyrane* power, they wrenched the thing, whatever it was, out of its place in time. The broken geodesics cut off the possibility of Jonbar."

"What became of this object?"

"They kept it concealed. And they carried it back to Gyronchi. It is guarded, there, in Sorainya's fortress."

"Guarded?" Lanning echoed. His fingers twisted together in a sudden agony of hope, and his eyes rose to search McLan's wealed face. "Then if we took it—carried it back—would that help Jonbar?"

Desperately, he seized McLan's thin shoulder.

"Can—can anything bring back Lethonee?"

"Yes." The bent white head moved to a tiny nod. "If we could recover the object, if we could discover where they found it, in space and time, if we could put it back there, if we could prevent Sorainya from disturbing it again until the turning point has passed in the fifth dimension—then Jonbar would again be possible."

Lanning's fist smashed into his palm. "Then we must do that."

"Yes," whispered Wil McLan, very softly, "we must do that." A solemn light had come into his haggard eyes, and his broken hand softly touched Lanning's arm. "This is the mission for which we gathered your legion, Denny—although the details have not been clear until now."

"Okay," Lanning said. "Let's go!"

"We are now retracing the broken geodesics of Jon-

bar," McLan told him, "back toward your own time. There we can pick up the branching world lines of Gyronchi, and follow them forward again, to seek that guarded object."

"And let Sorainya look out!"

But McLan caught Lanning's arm again, with a firmer grasp.

"I must warn you, Denny. Don't be too hopeful—we need every bit of caution. The odds are all against us. A dozen men against all Gyronchi. Jonbar can help us no more. Even the surgeons we had aboard vanished with all the rest."

"We'll beat 'em," Lanning was muttering. "We've got to."

But he saw McLan's haunted eyes.

"It's thirty years since I first saw Sorainya." The old man spoke as if to himself, absently fingering the worn silver tube that hung from his throat. "A glorious flame that lured me across the gulf of time. I—I loved her."

Tears burst into his hollow eyes, and his gulp was a startling little sound.

"Fifteen years—" he rasped again, "since I found what a demon she is." Some deep-hidden agony throbbled in his words. "I hate Sorainya! She tricked me, tortured me, maimed me forever! She—she—" Something seemed to choke him. "But still—for all her monstrous evil—could I kill Sorainya? Could any man?"

Lanning's own fists were knotted.

"I have seen her," he said hoarsely. "And I don't know." Then he strode suddenly across the room and back, moved by an inner agony. "But we must—to save Jonbar."

"We must," echoed the man she had broken. "If we can!"

A week, ship's time, had passed, when the dials registered 1921.

"Here," Wil McLan told Lanning, "the last broken geodesic of Jonbar joins reality. In this year, it is just possible, we may find the apex of that new cone of probability formed when Glarath took the object out of time—if we can ever come back to search."

The *Chronion* came briefly out of her blue, flickering

gulf, high above the brilliant blue Pacific where the circle of an atoll glistened green and white about a pale lagoon. In an instant they were gone again, back through the blur of multitudinous possibility, down the geodesic track of Gyronchi.

Lanning and Schorn were drilling the men on the deck when the attack came, yet it was an utter surprise. Jaunty little Jean Querard, leaping from his place in the line, screamed the first warning:

"*Grand Dieu!* A ship from hell!"

Turning, Lanning saw a black-shadow against the shimmering blue. It vanished, reappeared, flickered, became suddenly real. The time ship from Gyronchi!

Three times the *Chronion's* length, it was massively armored. The ends were two immense square plates, which shone with the same greenish glow as the *Chronion's* polar disks. Black muzzles frowned from the side, and the deck was crowded with a black-armored horde of Sorainya's half-human warriors.

On a high quarter-deck, Lanning thought he glimpsed the black-robed angularity of Glarath. But it disappeared. A dazzling white beam jetted from a projecting tube. A two-foot section of the *Chronion's* rail turned incandescent and exploded, fused and vaporized.

"Lie flat!" ordered Lanning. "Fire at will!" He shouted to Schorn: "Get the Maxims going!"

But what could bullets do against that terrible energy? He ran to the speaking tube, forward, that communicated with McLan.

"Wil!" he sobbed. "What now?"

The white beam flashed again behind him. And Israel Enders, kneeling to fire, collapsed in a smoking huddle. There was one brief scream, agony-thinned. And bright flame burst up from a little heap of burned cloth and seared flesh and fused metal.

With an answering scream that was the echo of his brother's, Isaac Enders fed a belt of ammunition into his Maxim, and sprayed lead at Sorainya's monsters, who were leveling their guns. Their bullets spattered the *Chronion*.

The hoarse tortured whisper came back at last from McLan:

"The *Chronion's* no battle ship. We can't fight the *gyrane* ray."

"Then what?"

"Outrun them!" rasped McLan. "The only hope. The *Chronion's* lighter. Hold 'em off! And I'll try—"

Blinded by blood from a wound on his forehead, the Austrian, von Arneth, was fumbling with his jammed Maxim. Lanning ran to the gun, burned his fingers freeing the hot action, and trained it on the port from which the ray had flashed.

He hammered lead at the black-armored ship, but it kept drifting nearer. Another volley from the giants screamed around him. The white ray stabbed again. One of the Maxims exploded. Willie Rand, behind it, rolled moaning on the deck, beating at his flaming garments.

This couldn't go on! Shuddering, Lanning fed another belt into his own gun. A few of Sorainya's creatures had fallen, yet the battle was clearly hopeless. He listened. Was the throb beneath the deck a little swifter?

The great black ship had slipped close, before he could fire again. Swinging their golden axes, the humanoid ants lined the rail. Were they preparing to board? Lanning tilted up the Maxim, to rake them. But a thick black tube crept down, stopped in line with him. His breath caught. It was time for that fearful ray. Blinding fire exploded at him—

But the enemy ship flickered and vanished. Lanning left his hot gun and stumbled to the speaking tube.

"Wil?" he called.

"We've outrun them, Denny," came McLan's voiceless rasp. "I think we can keep a little ahead, along the time dimension. But they'll be back to Gyronchi close behind us, with their warning. And we've already lost—how many men?"

Lanning turned to survey the battle-cluttered deck. The tall grim-faced Canadian was on his knees beside the smoking remains of his brother, sobbing. Barry Halloran was dressing von Arneth's wound. Willie Rand, his clothing still smoking, was groping about the deck, cursing in a soft, wary monotone. Lanning saw his eyes, and felt a shock of horror. Staring wide and blank from his red seared face, they were cooked white from the ray, blind.

"Israel Enders dead," he reported to McLan, in a sick voice. "Von Arneth wounded. Rand blind. One Maxim destroyed, by that terrible ray—"

"The *gyrane*," rasped McLan. "The odds are all against us, Denny. We must avoid another battle—if we can. But now that they are warned—"

The whisper faded, on a note of tired despair.

Wrapped in a sheet, to which were pinned a tiny Canadian flag and the silver star of Jonbar, the remains of Israel Enders and his fused rifle were consigned to the shimmering gulf of time—where, McLan said, having the velocity of the ship they would drift on into ultimate futurity.

The deck was cleared, the broken rail mended. The guns were cleaned and repaired. Atomic converters throbbing swiftly, polar plates glowing green, the *Chronion* plunged on down the track of probability, toward Gyronchi.

Erich von Arneth came up from the hospital, with a new livid scar across his forehead. Asking for a Mauser whose lock was broken. Willie Rand sat for long hours on the deck, bandaged head bowed, whetting its gleaming bayonet and testing the edge with his thumb.

On the bridge, Lanning and Wil McLan watched the crystal block of the chronoscope, using its temporal ray to scan Gyronchi, seeking out the best instant for the raid. They failed, however, to look actually into Sorainya's mighty citadel, to find the object they sought to recover.

"Another application of the *gyrane*," rasped Wil McLan. "An interfering field, set up about the metal walls, that damps out the temporal radiation." A stern light glinted in his hollow eyes. "But I know Sorainya's fortress," he added grimly. "With Lethonee's aid, planning that escape, I memorized every inch of it."

His broken fingers mapped it, for Lanning and Schorn.

"The great strong room," he said, "where Sorainya keeps her treasure, is in the eastern tower. It is reached only by a ladder through a trap door in the floor of Sorainya's own apartments. And the great hall, outside, through which you must enter, is guarded always by a hundred warriors.

"It must be a sudden strike," he added. "A moment lost, a wasted step, can finish us."

And at last a moment came when he spun the shining wheel and tapped a key, to stop the time ship in Gyronchi.

## Chapter 10

### IN SORAINYA'S CITADEL

IN THE SOMBER DUSK of a cloudy day, the *Chronion* first paused in Sorainya's world. Tiny fields, the broad river dully silver in the twilight, sprawled miserable villages—and a blackened, barren patch where Lanning had seen one village burned. The twin hills beyond, topped with the temple of the *gyrane* and Sorainya's citadel.

Standing on the deck, Lanning scanned the fortress through binoculars. A mountainous, frowning pile of the eternal crimson alloy, it had been the fastness of Sorainya's dynasty, he knew from the chronoscope, for half a thousand years. Scores of the black-armored fighters, glittering with the gold and scarlet of their weapons, were marching in sentry duty along the high battlements. And Lanning saw, mounted cannon-like upon the walls, a dozen of the thick black tubes that projected the *gyrane* ray.

"*Gott in Himmell*" rumbled Emil Schorn at his side. "Der thing we must recover is in that castle, *nein*? It looks a *verdammt* stubborn nut to crack!"

"It is," said Lanning. "One slip, and we are lost. There must be no slip." He handed the glasses to the Prussian. "We have only paused here to look over the ground by daylight," he swiftly explained. "We are to land after midnight on that ledge that breaks the north precipice—see it?"

"Ja!"

"Sorainya herself will then be gone to visit Glarath in his temple—so we saw in the chronoscope. And perhaps

at that hour her guards will not be too alert. Our landing party must climb to the little balcony above, where the skeleton hangs—”

“*Ach, Gott! A dizzy climb!*”

“The little door on the balcony gives into the dungeons. Wil McLan has the keys he carved there, for his escape. We’ll enter through the dungeons, and try to reach the great hall above. Is that all clear?”

“*Jal Clear as death.*”

Lanning waved his arm to Wil McLan, in his crystal dome, and the *Chronion* slipped again into the shadowy gulf of time. The landing party gathered on the foredeck. A grim, silent little band—save for Barry Halloran, who tried to make them join in a college yell for Jonbar. Isaac Enders and von Arneth were to carry two of the Maxims. Cresto and Courtney-Pharr packed the fifty-pound tripods. The others were laden with climbing ropes, rifles, grenades, and ammunition.

Boris Barinin set up the remaining gun, to guard the ship. And blinded Willie Rand sat silently beside him, breathing white cigarette smoke and whetting at the bayonet of his broken gun.

And the *Chronion* plunged into the blackness of a wet midnight. The overwhelming mass of Sorainya’s citadel was a vague shadow in the clouds, as the time ship slipped silently down to the high narrow ledge. A cold rain drizzled on the deck, and a bitter wind howled about the battlements above.

Noiseless as a shadow, the *Chronion* settled among the gnarled and stunted brush that clung to the ledge. Limping down from his bridge, Wil McLan handed Lanning three white keys carved from human bone.

“For the balcony entrance,” he whispered. “For the dungeon doors. And the inside gate. But I’ve none for the strong room—you must find some other way.” His broken hand tightened like a claw on Lanning’s arm. “I’ve told you all I can, Denny. You’ll pass through the prison where I lay for ten years. We may all rot there, if you fail. Don’t fail!”

Burdened with Mauser, coiled rope, and a hamper of grenades, Lanning led the way over the rail and up the precipitous cliff. The mossy rock was slippery with mist.

Wet cold numbed him. The wind tugged at him with icy, treacherous hands. In the darkness he could see nothing save bulking vague shadows; he had to grope and fumble for the way.

Knives of granite cut his fingers, and damp cold deadened them. Once he slipped, and clawed at the sharp rock to catch himself, scraping flesh away. An age-long instant, he hung by the snapping fingers of one hand.

But he recovered himself, and climbed again. He came at last to a stout little oak, well anchored in a crevice, that he had seen through the binoculars. He knotted a rope to it, tested its strength, and dropped the coil to the men below.

He climbed on. Icy gusts of wind beat at him. The rain, in bigger, colder drops, chilled him through. Pale lightning flashed once above, and he shivered with dread that it might reveal them.

He fastened another rope about a projecting spur of rock, and dropped it back, and climbed again. Trembling with strain, he came at last to the narrow rugged ledge where the precipice of stone joined the sheer unscalable precipice of crimson metal. Wedging his bayonet in a fissure, he anchored another rope. He had begun to inch his way along the ledge, when he heard a stifled scream beneath.

He froze. A long silence. Something crashed faintly, far below. Shuddering, he waited. The storm moaned dismally about the battlements, still hundreds of feet above. There was no alarm. On hands and knees, he crept on again.

"*Ach, Gott!*" came a hushed muttering. "*This verdammmt blackness—it would blind der deffil!*"

Emil Schorn came up the rope behind him, and followed along the ledge. They came to the little balcony of rusted metal. A gallows arm projected above it. A rope hung through an open trap door, and beneath it, swaying in the wind, white bones dangled in their chains.

As Lanning tried the thin bone key in the metal door, the other men joined them, one by one, breathless, dripping shivering with cold—all save the Austrian, von Arneth.

"*Madre del Dios!*" shuddered the Spanish flyer, Cresto. "He fell past me, screaming. He must have splashed, at

the foot of the mountain! *Cabron!* And now we have one Maxim only."

The thick metal door slid suddenly aside, and a fetid breath came out of Sorainya's dungeons. The reek of unwashed human misery, of human waste and human death, mingled with the suffocating acrid pungence of the anthropoid ants. Clenching his jaw against a fluttering of sickness in his stomach, Lanning led the raiders forward.

At first he saw no light in the dungeons. He led the way by touch alone through the narrow, rock-hewn passages, counting his steps and groping for the memorized turns. But presently he could see a little, by a phosphorescence of decay that patched the walls and floors.

Beyond the bars of cells he glimpsed abject human creatures, maimed, blinded, less than half alive, sprawled among the bones of the wholly dead that lay still chained beside them, shining with a cold blue luminescent rot.

A dreadful silence filled most of the prison. But in one cell was a great squeaking and thumping commotion. Lanning glimpsed huge sleek rats battling over a motionless body in chains.

Farther on, in another cell, a sightless, famished wretch had bitten his own wrist, to let a few drops of blood flow upon the floor. He crouched there, listening, and snatched again and again, blindly, with fettered hands, at the great wary rats that came to his bait.

"My word!" gasped the British flyer, Courtney-Pharr. "When we meet that she-devil, she'll account for all this. Rather!"

Lanning stopped, at a turning, and breathed his warning: "Ready, men!"

With a little jingle of their weapons, four of Sorainya's warriors came down the corridor. Great black giants, walking erect, eight feet tall. Huge compound eyes burning in the darkness, strange jewels of evil fire. Mandibled, monstrous insects. Yet somehow, sickeningly human.

"Bayonets," whispered Lanning. "No noise."

But his own bayonet had been left back on the precipice, to hold the rope. He clubbed his rifle to lead the rush, swung it down to crack an armored skull. Taken by

surprise, the monsters reeled back, snatching with strange claws for their weapons.

They were mute, as if their creators had sacrificed speech for deadliness. But little red boxes clamped to their heads, might, Lanning thought, be communicators. A black limb was fumbling at one of them. He snapped the rifle down in a second hasty blow, to crush it.

Ugly mandibles seized the Mauser's stock, sheared through the hard wood. And a mighty golden battle-axe came hissing down. Lanning parried at it with the barrel of the broken gun, but the flat of its blade grazed his head, flung him down into fire-veined blackness.

He lay on the floor, dazed and nerveless. Red agony splintered his temple. Yet he retained a curious detached awareness. He could see the weird feet stamping about in front of his face, on the faintly glowing slime. The reek of formic acid stung his nostrils, burning out the odor of the cells. The monsters fought wordlessly, but their hard bodies made odd little clicks and creaks.

The men had followed Lanning, with bayonets fixed, but they were dwarfed by the four-armed fighters. And now the advantage of surprise was gone.

"*Vive Jonbar!*" sobbed Cresto. The dexterous sweep of his blade completely decapitated the nearest fighter. But its insect inheritance was not so quickly vanquished. The headless thing remained for a moment upright, and the great yellow axe struck again, deep into the Spaniard's skull.

"*Por Dios—*"

His gaunt body lurched automatically forward, and came down on top of the creature, driving the bayonet deep into the armored thorax. Meantime Emil Schorn had slashed into the one remaining monster with a force that carried it over backward. Barry Halloran followed him, with a ripping lunge. And the battle was ended.

Barry helped Lanning to his feet, and he stood a moment swaying, fighting for control of his body. Courtney-Pharr produced a silver flask of brandy, splashed its liquid fire on his temple, gave him a gulp of it. His head began to clear. He seized Cresto's rifle and staggered on, following Emil Schorn.

An outstretched hand and a whispered warning stopped

him in the darkness. Greenish light shone through massive bars ahead. He crept up beside Schorn, and looked into a long guard room.

A dozen of the warriors were lounging in the room, and the air was thick with their acrid smell. Several, at a low table, were sucking at sponges in basins of some red liquid. Two couples were preening one another's glistening black bodies. A few were polishing battle-axes and thick red guns. One, in a gloomy corner, knelt in a mysterious travesty of prayer, as if begging for its lost humanity.

"No hope for silence, now," Lanning breathed to Schorn. "We'll take 'em! With all we've got."

He was working at the lock, with the fragile bone key. Isaac Enders and Courtney-Pharr, beyond him, were setting up the Maxim on its tripod, the muzzle jutting through the bars. The lock snapped silently. He nodded to Schorn, and began to swing the door slowly open.

The compound eyes of the farther giant glittered as they moved, and it sprang up from its attitude of prayer, inhuman as all the rest. An electric silence crackled in the guard room.

"Now!" Lanning shouted. "At 'em!"

"*Allons!*" echoed Jean Querard. "With you, *mon capitaine!*"

The Maxim thundered suddenly, filling the room with blue smoke and ricocheting lead. Lanning flung wide the door, and ran with Schorn and Querard and Barry Halloran diagonally across the room, to hold the other entrance.

The monsters were bred to retain a humenopterous vitality. Even when riddled with bullets they did not immediately die. Under the Maxim's hail, they abandoned their occupations, seized weapons, and came charging in two groups at the entrances. Courtney-Pharr slammed the prison gate to protect Enders and his weapon, defending the lock with his bayonet. And the creatures in front of the gun began at last reluctantly to slump and topple.

The defense of the other door, however, was less successful. Lanning and his companions met the charging creatures with tossed grenades and a blaze of rifle fire. Out of seven, two were blown to fragments by the bombs, and another crippled. Four of them came on, with axes

swinging, to meet the bayonets. The cripple fell back, to load and fire its clumsy gun, before a burst from the Maxim crumpled it.

But little Jean Querard was staggering forward, blood spurting from his breast. Knees trembling, he held himself upright for a moment, propped his rifle so that a charging warrior impaled itself on the bayonet. Loud and clear his voice rang out:

*"Allons! Jonbar!"*

And he slipped down beside the dying thing.

Lanning checked one of the creatures with three quick shots to its head, and then ripped open its armored thorax with a bayonet lunge that killed it. Schorn stopped another. But the third caught the barrel of Halloran's gun a ringing blow with its axe, dragged him down with its claws, and lunged past. Lanning snapped another clip into his Mauser, and fired after it. But it dropped forward and scuttled out of sight, at a six-limbed, atavistic run.

Barry Halloran staggered back to his feet, his shirt torn off and blood dripping from a long red mark across his breast and shoulder, where a mandible had raked him.

"Sorry, Denny!" he sobbed. "I tried to hold the line!"

"Good work, guy," Lanning gasped, running back to open the door again for Pharr and Enders with their gun.

But already, somewhere ahead, a great alarm gong was throbbing out a brazen-throated warning that moaned and sighed and shuddered through all the long halls of Sorainya's citadel.

## *Chapter 11*

### BEYOND THE DIAMOND THRONE

THE FIVE SURVIVORS, PHARR and Enders, Halloran and Schorn and Lanning, running with their burden of weapons, came up a long winding flight of steps and through

a small door into the end of Sorainya's ceremonial hall, where the warning gong was booming.

The hall was enormous. Great square pillars of black soared up against the red metal walls, and between them stood colossal statues in yellow gold—no doubt Sorainya's warlike ancestors, for all were armed and armored.

The reflected light from the lofty crimson vault had a sinister redness. Most of the floor was bare. Far toward the other end stood a tall pillar of shimmering splendor—the diamond throne that once Sorainya had offered Lanning, as treacherously, perhaps, as she had also offered it to Wil McLan.

The huge gong hung from a heavy chain beside the throne, a forty-foot scarlet disk. Tiny-seeming in that vast hall, two of the warrior monsters were furiously beating its moaning curve. And a little army of them—thirty, Lanning estimated—came swarming across the floor.

"Quick!" he rapped. "The Maxim!" He helped set the hot machine gun up, gasping to Schorn, "We've got to get through—and back! The door to Sorainya's own apartments is behind the throne. We reach the strong room through a trap door, beside her bed."

"Devil-things!" muttered Isaac Enders. His lean face was a hard bitter mask as he started an ammunition belt into the Maxim, dropped down behind it. "To kill my brother!"

The gun jetted flame, sweeping the line of anthropoid ants. Beside him, Pharr and Barry Halloran blazed away with rifles. Lanning and Schorn met the monsters with a barrage of hand grenades.

The creatures fired a volley as they came. Their thick crimson guns were single-shot weapons, of heavy calibre but limited range. Most of the bullets went wide, spattering on the metal wall. But one struck Enders, drilling a great black hole in his forehead.

He lurched upright, behind the Maxim. His long, gaunt arms spread wide. A curious expression of shocked, incredulous eagerness lit his stern face for an instant, until it was drowned in a gush of blood. His voice pealed out, in a last loud shout:

"Israel!"

He slid forward, and lay shuddering across the gun.

Courtney-Pharr tossed his body away, and crouched to fire the Maxim.

It took the warriors a long while to come down the hall. Or time, measured only by the sequence of events, seemed curiously extended. Lanning had space to snatch a deep breath of this clean air. He wondered how, without key or combination, they could break into the strong room. And how soon, after this alarm, Sorainya herself might return from the temple with more of her creatures to block the retreat.

A few of the enemy, riddled with lead, had time to slump and fall. A few more, running over the tossed grenades, were hurled mangled into the air. But the most of them came on, converging toward the door, clubbing crimson guns, spinning yellow battle-axes.

The four men waited in a line across the doorway, the Maxim drumming its deadly roll. Schorn flung his last grenade, when the black rank was a dozen yards away, and snatched his bayonet to meet the charge. Saving back two grenades, Lanning leveled his rifle to guard the machine gun.

Three of the foremost monsters slumped and fell. But the rest came on like a tide of death. Insectile giants, fantastic in chitinous black, but yet dreadful with their hints of humanity, great eyes glittering redly evil in the bloody light, golden axes singing.

Lanning's Mauser snapped, empty. He lunged, and his bayonet ripped open one armored thorax. But the golden blade of another monster rang against the rifle, tore it from his fingers. A flailing gun, at the same instant, struck his shoulder with a sledge of agony, hurled him back against the wall.

One arm was tingling, nerveless. He groped with his left hand for the Luger at his belt, surged to his knees, sent lead tearing upward through armored, acid-reeking bodies.

Savage mandibles seized the rifle of Emil Schorn, and the Prussian went down beneath the towering monsters. They trampled down the drumming Maxim. Great black jaws seized the bare blonde head of Courtney-Pharr. The gun abruptly ceased to fire, and in the breathless scrap of silence the crushing of his skull made a soft, sickening sound.

"Fight 'em!" Barry Halloran was singing out. "Fight 'em!"

Furiously, with his bayonet, the big red-headed tackle fell upon the two creatures sprawled over the silent machine gun and the Briton's decapitated body.

The Luger was empty again. Lanning dropped it, groped for his rifle on the floor, and surged up to meet the second rank of attackers. If he could hold them for a moment, give Barry a chance to recover the Maxim—

The mute giants pressed down on him. But his paralyzed arm had come to life again. And he had learned a deadly technique: a lunge that ripped the hard thorax, upward, then a deep, twisting thrust, to right and left, that tore the vital organs.

Yellow axes were hissing at him. But the black warriors were piled before the doorway, now, in a sort of barricade; and the floor was slippery with reeking life-fluids, so that strange claws slid and scratched for balance. Lanning evaded the blows, and lunged, and lunged again.

Behind him, Barry had finished one creature with the bayonet. His blade snapped off, in the armor of the other. He snatched out his Luger, pumped lead into the black body. But it sprang upon him, clubbed him down with the flat of a golden axe, and fell at last across him.

Alone against the horde, Lanning thrust and ripped and parried. He laid one monster on top of the barricade, and another, and a third. Then his own foot slipped in the slime. Great mandibles gripped his wavering bayonet, twisted, snapped it off.

He tried to club the gun. But black claws ripped it from his hands. Three more giants bore him down. His own gun crashed against his head. He slipped to the floor, sobbing bitterly:

"Lethonee! I tried—"

The victorious attackers came clambering over the barrier of their dead. Tramping claws scratched him. He fought for strength to rise again, and failed. Jonbar was doomed. And, for him, would it be Sorainya's dungeons?

The sudden loud tattoo of the Maxim was a wholly incredible sound. Lanning in his daze thought at first the sound must be a dream. But the reeking body of a

dismembered monster toppled across him. He twisted his head, with a savage effort, and saw Emil Schorn.

The big Prussian had once gone down. His bull-like body was nearly naked, shredded, red with dripping blood. But he was on his feet again, swaying, his blue eyes flaming.

"*Heil, Jonbar!*" he was roaring. "*Heil, Valhalla!*"

He started another belt into the Maxim, and came forward again, holding it in his arms, firing it like a rifle—a terrific feat, even for such a giant as he. The remaining warriors came leaping at him, and he met them with a hail of death. One by one, they slumped and fell. A great golden axe came hurtling across the barricade. Its blade cut deep into his naked breast. Foaming red spurted out.

But still the German stood upright, leaning against the shattering recoil of the gun, sweeping it back and forth. At last it was empty, and he dropped it from seared hands. Wide and fixed, his blue eyes watched the last giant stagger and fall.

"Jonbar!" his deep voice rumbled. "*Ach, Thor!*"

Like a massive pillar falling, he crashed down beside the red-hot Maxim. For a little space there was a strange hushed silence in Sorainya's crimson hall, disturbed only by the faint sorrowful reverberation that still throbbed from the mighty gong. The golden colossi, in their panoplies of war, looked triumphantly down upon the cold peace that follows death.

A little life, however, was seeping back into Lanning's battered body. He twisted, and began to push at the great dead thing that had fallen on his legs. A sudden throbbing eagerness lent him strength. For Schorn had opened the way to the strong room. There might still be time, before escape was blocked.

But Barry Halloran was the first on his feet. Lanning had supposed him dead beneath the warrior that brought him down. But there was a sudden, muffled shout:

"Fight 'em! Fight— Huh! Denny, can you hear me?"

"Barry!"

And the big tackle came stalking through the dead, his naked torso as red as Schorn's. He dragged the armored thing from Lanning's legs, and Lanning sat up. Pain dazed

him, and the next he knew Halloran was pressing Courtney-Pharr's silver flask to his lips. He gulped the searing brandy.

"Make it, Denny?"

Lanning stood up, swaying drunkenly. A great anvil of agony rang at the back of his head. His vision blurred. The great red hall spun and tilted, and the golden colossi came marching down it, to defend Sorainya's golden throne.

"Let's go," his voice came fuzzy and thick. "Get that thing. Get back to the ship. Before Sorainya comes! Two grenades—key to the strong room."

Barry Halloran found the two bombs he had saved, and bent to pick up the hot Maxim. Lanning told him the ammunition was gone. He found a rifle, and seized Lanning's arm. They started, at a weary, stumbling run, down the silent crimson hall.

It was an interminable way, past the frowning yellow giants and the soaring pillars of black, down to the high diamond splendor of Sorainya's throne. But they passed at last beneath the undying sigh of the mighty gong, and staggered on beyond the throne.

Beyond was a broad arched doorway, curtained with black. They pushed through the heavy drapes, into the queen's private chambers. Lanning did not pause to catalog their splendor, but he saw a shimmer of immense crystal mirrors, a gleam of ivory and gold. Sorainya's bed, hewn from a colossal block of sapphire crystal, and canopied with jewel-sewn silk, shone like a second throne at the end of that vista of barbaric magnificence. Lanning and Halloran ran panting toward it, trailing drops of blood.

Lanning ripped back a deep-piled rug beside the bed. In the floor he found the fine dark line that marked the edge of a well-fitted door, and, in the center of that, a smaller square.

Barry Halloran used his bayonet to pry out the central block, while Lanning unscrewed the detonator cylinders from the two grenades. Beneath the block was revealed a long keyhole. Lanning poured the two ounces of powder from each grenade into the little square depression, let it run down into the lock. He thrust one detonator into the

keyhole, with the safety fuse projecting. Barry came dragging a great jeweled coffer of red metal from the foot of the bed, pushed it over the lock to retain the force of the blast. Lanning took the rifle, put a bullet into the percussion cap.

The floor quivered. Glittering fragments of the burst coffer rocketed to the ceiling. Jewels showered the room. They ran back around the sapphire bed. A blackened hole yawned, where a tough sheet of red metal had burst jaggedly upward. Lanning reached his arm through, to manipulate hot bolts and tumblers. The square door dropped suddenly, elevator-like. Halloran, after a startled instant, stepped upon it with Lanning. They sank swiftly into the strong room.

It was huge and windowless. Concealed lights sprang on, as they descended, to show Sorainya's treasure. Great shimmering stacks of silver and golden ingots, immense mysterious coffers, great slabs of unworked synthetic crystal, sapphire, emerald, ruby, diamond. Statuary, paintings, strange mechanisms and instruments, tapestries, books and manuscripts—all the precious relics of her dynasty. Most curious of all, a long row of tall crystal blocks, in which, like flies in amber, were embedded oddly life-like human forms—the armored originals of the golden colossi above. This was not only the treasury but the mausoleum of Gyronchi's rulers.

"Ye gods!" murmured Barry Halloran, blinking, "The old girl's one collector! This junk is worth—worth more money than there is! King Midas would turn green!"

Lanning's jaw went white.

"I saw her once—collecting!" he whispered bitterly.

The dropping platform touched the floor.

"We're looking for a little black brick," Lanning said, swiftly. "Something covered with a black cement, to hide it from our search ray." Shuddering to a trapped feeling, he looked back up at the door. "Better keep moving. We've been a long time, and that gong would wake the dead. Sorainya'll soon be boiling in, with reinforcements."

They began a frantic search for the small black brick, breaking open coffers of jewels, shaking out chests of silks and furs. It was Barry Halloran who found the little ebon

rectangle, in a cracked pottery jar that lay as if discarded in a dusty corner.

"That's it!" Lanning gasped. "Let's get out!"

They stepped back upon the platform. Lanning tapped a button on the floor beside it, and it lifted silently. His red hands trembling with wondering awe, Halloran handed the heavy little brick to Lanning.

"What could it be?" he whispered.

"Dunno," Lanning shook his battered head. "But listen!"

They were rising back into the queen's bedchamber. He heard a distant clang like the closing of a metal gate, a far tinkle of weapons, and the clear tiny peal of a woman's anger-heightened voice. His strength went out, and cold dread ached in every bone.

"Sorainya!" he sobbed. "She's coming back!"

They scrambled up to the floor, and ran desperately back through the empty glitter of the vast apartments, the way they had come. They passed the black hangings. Once more they came into the enormous hall of the golden colossi. Again they ran beneath the sighing gong beside the high diamond throne. And there, under the moaning disk, they halted in cold despair.

For a new horde of Sorainya's giants, still tiny in the distance, were pouring into the hall. Running gracefully to lead them, flashing in her red-mailed splendor, came the warrior queen herself. Lanning turned to look at Barry's stricken face. Warily, he shook his head.

"She has cut us off!" he breathed. "There's no way out—"

## *Chapter 12*

### THE SECRET OF THE BRICK

LANNING'S RED FINGERS closed hard on the heavy black brick, the precious cornerstone of Jonbar. "Fine!" he gasped. "There's time enough to get—her!"

Yet, as soon as Barry raised the Mauser, he was sorry he had spoken. For the queen of Gyronchi, in her black-plumed splendor, was too lovely to be slain. Demon-queen! He bit his lip, and quenched a frantic impulse to snatch the rifle down.

The gun crashed. Lanning waited, with a stricken heart, to see Sorainya fall. But it was one of her insectile soldiers that staggered and clutched with four queer limbs at its hard black shell.

"I had it on her," muttered Halloran. "But they'd get us just the same. And she's so—beautiful."

Lanning swayed. The anvil of agony rang louder in his brain. He groped foggily for any possible way back to the ship, but there was none. And Wil McLan's tormented question was rasping his ears. Could any man kill Sorainya?

But she must be destroyed, so McLan had said. And Lethonee had told him, long ago, that he himself must choose one of the two, and so doom the other. His heart came up in his throat, and he reached out a trembling hand.

"Give me—"

But the rifle had snapped, empty. Halloran flung it down, folded his crimsoned arms, stood waiting grimly. Lanning bent to pick up the gun, gasping, "Don't let 'em take us—"

But Sorainya had paused to level the yellow needle of her sword, which was more than a sword. A hot blue spark hissed to the rifle. Lanning's hand jerked away from the half-fused weapon, burned and paralyzed. The triumphant bugle of her voice pealed down the hall.

"Well, Denny Lanning! So you have chosen my dungeons to my throne?"

Lanning blinked. Sorainya and her charging horde were already halfway down the hall. Beneath her crested helmet, he could see her face still white with vengeful anger, the long green eyes cold as ice. But something came between.

A shadow. A thickening silver veil. The shadow grew abruptly real. Breathless, Lanning rubbed at his eyes, shuddering to the shock of incredulous hope. It was the *Chronion!*

The green glow fading slowly from her polar disks, the time ship landed on the floor before the throne. Lao Meng Shan, on the foredeck, turned the Maxim mounted there toward Sorainya and her creatures—and then fell desperately to taking the gun apart, for it was jammed.

The thin twisted figure of Wil McLan, under his crystal dome, was beckoning urgently. After that first stunned instant, Lanning caught Barry's arm, and they ran frantically to climb aboard.

Sorainya screamed a battle cry. With a flashing sweep of her golden sword, she led her black giants on. A scattering volley from their heavy guns peppered the *Chronion*. But the turret was turning beneath the dome. The yellow ray flamed upon Lanning and Halloran from the crystal gun, to pull them to the ship.

Lanning had glimpsed the blind, bewildered navy airman, Willie Rand, stark and alone on the deck. But, when he and Halloran tumbled breathless over the rail, where Shan still bent over the useless Maxim, Rand was gone.

"Look, Denny!" Barry Halloran was shouting, hoarse with an awed admiration. "The damn blind fool!"

He pointed toward Sorainya's horde, and Lanning saw Willie Rand going to meet them. Bandaged head bent low, he moved at a blind, stumbling run. The broken Mauser was level in his hands, the whetted bayonet gleaming.

The black warriors paused before that solitary charge, as if bewildered. Sorainya's fierce shout urged them on. Their guns rattled, and the sailor staggered. But he ran on.

Lanning stumbled to the speaking tube.

"Will!" he gasped. "Can we help?"

"No." Wil McLan, under the dome, shook his head. "But it's what he wanted. Useless—but grand!"

Even Sorainya had halted. Her golden needle spat blue fire. Willie Rand lurched. His clothing began to smoke. But still he lurched on, to meet the yellow axes lifted. Lanning had dropped on his knees, to help with the jammed gun. But he saw Rand come to Sorainya's ranks. He saw the flashing bayonet, as if guided by some extrasensory vision, drive deep into a black thorax.

The golden axes fell—

But Wil McLan, on his bridge, had spun his shining wheel, and the *Chronion* was gone from Sorainya's hall, back into the blue shimmering gulf of her own timeless track. Lanning reeled through the turret, where Duffy Clark was now on duty behind the crystal gun, and up to join Wil McLan in the dome. The old man seized his arm, desperately.

"Denny? You got it?"

"Yes. But how'd you happen to meet us? And where's Barinin?"

"They found us on the ledge," breathed the voiceless man. "Turned down a *gyrane* ray, from the battlements. Barinin was caught at the gun. Crisped!" He shuddered.

"We had to take off. I drove on into the future, to avoid their time ship. I was afraid to enter the fortress with the ship—when we couldn't explore it with the search beam, there was too much danger of collision with some solid object, with very disastrous results.

"But nothing else was left. We had to take the risk—and we won." He mopped sweat from his scar-seamed face. "That hall was the largest room. From my plans, and a study of the ruins in futurity, I approximated its position. And we came back to where it had been.

"But—the object you recovered?"

Lanning handed him the glazed black brick.

"Open it up," the old man rasped. "We've got to discover where Glarath and Sorainya found it, in time and space, and replace it there."

Lanning lifted his eyes from the little block that was the foundation of all Jonbar. Anxiously, he caught at McLan's twisted arm. "Do you think—? Will they follow?"

"Of course they'll follow." McLan's hollow eyes glazed with dread. "This means life and death to them. And they have their own time ship. If they fail to overtake us on the way, they will surely be waiting where the object must be placed. They know the spot." He returned the brick to Lanning. "See if you can break it open."

The block was glass-hard. Lanning tapped at it vainly, broke his pocket knife on it, then carried it down to the deck. It yielded at last to hack saw, chisel, and sledge. It proved to be a thick-walled box, packed with white fiber.

His quivering fingers lifted the packings to uncover a thick, V-shaped piece of rusty iron.

His vague, wild expectations had been all of something spectacular: perhaps some impressive document of state upon which history should have turned, or the martyr's weapon that might have assassinated some enemy of progress. Sick with disappointment, he carried the thing back to Wil McLan.

"Just a piece of scrap iron," he said. "A rusty old magnet, out of the magneto of a Model T. And we spent all those lives to find it!"

"No matter what it is," the old man whispered. "It was important enough, when Sorainya wrenched it out of the past, to deflect the whole direction of probability—to break the last geodesics of Jonbar.

"Now, with the chronoscope, I must try to find where it belongs. Then we must put it back—if Sorainya allows us!" He looked up at Lanning. "But you're all in, Denny. You've been hurt."

Lanning had hardly been conscious of fatigue. Even the ring and throb of pain in the back of his brain had become endurable, a vague and distant phenomenon that did not greatly matter. He felt a great surprise, now, when the dome went black and he knew that he was falling to the floor.

## Chapter 13

### SEED OF FUTURITY

LANNING WOKE, with his head bandaged, lying in the little green-walled hospital. Barry Holloran grinned at him from the opposite bed. The little cockney, Duffy Clark, came presently with a covered tray.

"Cap'n McLan?" he drawled. "Why, 'e's lookin' inter 'is bloomin' gadgets, tryin' to find where that she-devil and 'er blarsted hants got 'old of that magnet."

"Any luck?" demanded Lanning.

"Not yet, sor." He shook a tousled head. "Wot with hall spayce and time to search for the spot. And the woman an' her blarsted 'igh priest is arfter us, sor, in a black ship full of the bloomin' hants!"

"But we can outrun them!" Barry Halloran broke in. "We can give 'em all they want."

"Hi dunno, sor!" Clark shook his head. "We're going hall out. And still they're 'olding us, neck and neck."

A leaden lethargy still weighed Lanning down. He ate a little, and slept again. Many hours of the ship's time must have passed when he suddenly woke, aware of another sound above the accelerated throb of the hydrogen converter—the Maxim hammering.

He tumbled out of bed, with Barry Halloran after him, and ran to the deck. The firing had already stopped. The *Chronion* was once more thrumming alone through the flickering blue abyss. But little Duffy Clark lay beside the gun, smoking and still, his body half consumed by the *gyrane* ray.

Shuddering, Lanning climbed into the dome.

"They caught us," sobbed Wil McLan. "They'll catch us again. The converter's overdriven. As the grids are consumed, they lose efficiency. Clark's gone. That leaves four."

"Did you find—anything?"

The old man nodded, and Lanning listened breathlessly.

"The time is an afternoon in August of the year 1921," whispered Wil McLan. "The broken geodesics of Jonbar had already given us a clue to that. Now I have found the place, with the search beam."

Lanning gripped his arm. "Where?"

"It's a little valley in the Ozarks of Arkansas. I'll show you the decisive scene."

McLan limped to the metal cabinet of the geodesic analyzer. His broken fingers set its dials. A greenish luminescence filled the crystal block, and cleared. Lanning bent forward eagerly, looking into that strange window of probability.

An eroded farm, folded in the low and ancient hills. A sagging paintless shack, a broken window gaping and the roof inadequately patched with rusty tin. A rocky cow

pasture, its steep slopes scantily covered with useless brush. A small freckled boy in faded overalls and a big ragged straw hat, trudging slowly barefoot down the slope, accompanied by a gaunt yellow dog, driving two lean red-spotted cows home to the milking pen.

"Watch him," whispered Wil McLan urgently.

As Lanning watched, the boy stopped to encourage his dog digging furiously after a rabbit. He squatted to observe a colony of ants. He ran to catch a gaudy butterfly, and carefully dissected it with a broken pocket knife. He rose unwillingly to answer the calls of a slatternly woman from the house below, and ambled after the cows again. Wil McLan's gnarled fingers closed on Lanning's arm; urgently.

"Now!"

The boy paused over something beside a sumac bush, and stopped to pick it up. The object blurred oddly in the crystal screen, so that Lanning could not distinguish it. The scene was erased, as Wil McLan snapped off the mechanism.

"Well?" Lanning turned to him, in bewilderment. "What has that to do with Jonbar?"

"That is John Barr," said the voiceless man. "For that metropolis of future possibility will be—or may be—named for him. He is twelve years old in 1921, barefoot son of a tenant farmer. You saw him at the turning point of his life—and the life of the world."

"But I don't understand!"

"The geodesics diverge from the thing he stoops to pick up," whispered Wil McLan. "It is either the magnet that we recovered from Sorainya's citadel—or else only an oddly colored pebble that lies beside it. That small choice—which Sorainya sought to decide by removing the magnet—determines which one of two possible John Barrs is to be ultimately established in reality."

"Just a scrap of iron," Lanning said.

"The seed of Jonbar," answered McLan. "If he picks up the discarded magnet, he'll discover the mysterious attraction it has for the blade of his knife, and the strange north-seeking power of its poles. He'll wonder, experiment, theorize. His curiosity will deepen. The scientist will be born in him."

"He'll study, borrow books from the teacher at the one-room school in the hollow. He'll presently leave the farm, running away from a domineering father who sneers at 'book larnin'; to work his way through college. He'll become a teacher of science in country schools, an amateur experimenter.

"Sometimes the flame will burn low in him, inspiration forgotten in the drudgery of life. He'll marry and raise two children. But his old thirst for knowledge will never be quite extinguished. Finally, at the age of fifty-five, he'll run away again—this time from a domineering wife and an obnoxious son-in-law—to carry on his research.

"A bald, plump little man, mild-mannered, dreamy, impractical, he'll work for years alone in a little cottage in the Ozarks. Every possible cent will go for the makeshift apparatus. He'll often go hungry. Once a neighbor will find him starving, nearly dead of influenza.

"But at last, in 1980, a tired but triumphant little man of seventy-one, he'll publish his great discovery. The dynatomic tensors—soon shortened to *dynat*. A totally new law of nature, linking life and mind to atomic probability. I had stumbled on one phase of it, with the hydrogen converter. But his tensors will open up a tremendous new technology for the direct release of atomic energy, under full control of the human will.

"Given freely to the world, the new science of the *dynat* will create a whole new civilization—although John Barr himself, always too busy to wait for material success, will be quietly buried that same year beside a little church in the Ozarks. The illimitable power of atoms fully tamed will become the life-blood of Jonbar.

"Nor is that all. Humanity will soar on the wings of this most magnificent slave. The *dynat* will bring a new contact of mind and matter, new senses, new capabilities. Gradually, as time goes on, mankind will become adapted to the full use of the *dynat*."

The whisper was hoarse with a breathless awe.

"And at last a new race will arise, calling themselves the *dynon*. The splendid children of John Barr's old discovery, they will possess faculties and powers that we can hardly dream of—"

"Wait!" Lanning broke in. "I've seen the *dynon*! When

Lethonee first came, so long ago, to my room in Cambridge, she showed me New Jonbar in her time crystal. A city of majestic shining pylons. And, flying above them, a glorious people, clad, it seemed, in pure fire!"

Hollow eyes shining, Wil McLan nodded solemnly.

"I, too, have looked into New Jonbar," he whispered. "I have seen the promised glory beyond: the triumphant flight of the *dynon*, from star to star, forever. In that direction, there was no ending to the story of mankind.

"But in the other—"

His white head shook. There was silence under the dome. Lanning could hear the swiftened throb of the converter, driving them back through the giddy blue shimmer of possibility toward the quiet scene in the Ozarks they had watched in the crystal block. He saw Lao Meng Shan cleaning the Maxim on the deck below; and Barry Halloran, rifle ready, peering alertly into the flickering abyss.

"If we're unable to replace the magnet," McLan whispered again, "the boy John Barr will pick up the pebble instead, and the tide of probability will be turned—as, indeed, it is turned—toward Gyronchi. The boy will toss the pebble in his hand, and throw it in his sling to kill a singing bird. All his life thereafter will want a precious spark. It will remain curiously similar, yet significantly different.

"John Barr, in this outcome also, will run away from his father's home, but now to become a shiftless migratory worker. He will marry the same woman, raise the same two children, and leave them at last. The same ingenuity, turned to the same basic problems of probability, will lead him to invent a new gambling device, on which he will make and lose a fortune. He will die, equally penniless, in the same year, and lie at last in the same graveyard.

"The secret of mentally released atomic power will now be discovered nine years later, but with a control far less complete than John Barr would have attained. The discoverer will be one Ivor Gyros, an exiled engineer from Soviet Eurasia, working with a renegade Buddhist priest. Calling their half-mastered secret the *gyrane*, the two will guard it selfishly, use it to destroy their enemies and

impress the superstitious. They'll establish a fanatical new religion, and a new despotic empire. That's the beginning of the cult of the *gyrane*, and Sorainya's dark dynasty. You have seen the end of them."

"I have!"

And a shudder touched Lanning, as he recalled that desolate scene: mankind annihilated in the final war of the priests and the kings, by the *gyrane* and the monstrous creatures it had bred; the jungle returning across a devastated planet, to cover the rusting pile of Sorainya's citadel and the shattered ruins of her temple of ignorance and fear. He grasped at the rusty V-magnet.

"And so—" he nodded. "All we have to do is put it back, where John Barr will find it?"

"All," rasped Wil McLan. "Enough!"

The sudden rattle of the Maxim took Lanning's breath. Stiff with startled dread, Wil McLan was pointing. Lanning turned. Close beyond the dome, he saw the black ugly shape of the time ship from Gyronchi.

"Caught!" sobbed McLan. "The converter—failing!"

He flung his broken body toward the controls. But already, Lanning saw, the decks had touched. In the face of the hammering Maxim, a horde of the anthropoid ants were pouring over the rail. Leading them with her flaming golden blade, magnificent in her crimson mail, came Sorainya!

## Chapter 14

### SORAINYA'S KISS

LANNING SHIVERED.

"Sorainya!" Wil McLan rasped savagely, as if her name had been an oath. His quivering, broken hands came slowly up to finger the odd little tube of bright-worn silver hanging at his throat. A smouldering hate glazed his eyes again, as he looked at the warrior-queen. Something

twisted his white-scarred lips. A grimace of agony. Or was it a smile?

"Why, Sorainya?" he breathed faintly. "Why must it be?"

"Wil!" Lanning shouted at him. "They're boarding us! Can't we get away?"

"Huh!" McLan blinked at the swarming monsters, as if he hadn't seen them before. "'Fraid not, Denny." His thin hands dropped back to the controls, but he was shaking his head. The converter—already overloaded—"

A score of the black giants came over the rail, rushing the Maxim. Lao Meng Shan crouched to meet them with the clattering gun. Barry Halloran stood beside it, a sturdy, smiling, wholly human giant, ready with his bayonet.

"Fight 'em!" his great voice was booming. "Stop that pass!"

Grinning blandly, the little Chinese made no sound at all.

With a ringing war cry, Sorainya had turned toward the turret, followed by a dozen warriors. The needle of her golden sword flashed up, pointing at Wil McLan in the dome. And her green-eyed face was suddenly contorted with such a furious passion of hate that Lanning shuddered.

"She's coming here!" sobbed Wil McLan. "After me!"

Lanning was already on the turret stair. I'll go down to meet her."

McLan whispered after him, "I'll pull away, if the converter'll stand it—"

In the little turret, beside the crystal tube that projected the temporal field, Lanning belted on a Luger. He snatched the last Mauser from the rack, loaded it. His eye caught one hand grenade left in the box. He scooped it up, gripped the safety pin.

The little door was groaning and ringing to a furious assault from without—for the *Chronion* had not been designed for a fighting ship. It yielded suddenly, and a black monster pitched through.

Lanning tossed the grenade through the doorway, and ripped at the attacker with his bayonet. A sour reek of formic acid stung his eyes. A savage mandible ripped

trousers and skin from his leg. But the third thrust stopped the creature, and he stepped into the doorway.

Outside, the grenade had checked the charge. Three black warriors lay where it had tossed them, crushed and dying. But the queen herself stood unharmed in the crimson mail, with eight more giants about her. A savage light of battle flamed in her long green eyes, and she urged them forward with her golden sword.

"Denny Lanning," her voice cut cold as steel. "You were warned. But you defied Gyronchi, and chose Jonbar. So—die!"

Yet Lanning, waiting in the turret door, had a moment left. He had time for a glimpse of Barry and Shan, now engaged in a furious battle about the Maxim, holding back a murderous avalanche. He caught Barry's gasping:

"Fight! Fight, team! Fight!"

And he saw the high dark side of the other ship, beyond. He glimpsed the gaunt, cadaverous priest, Glarath, safe on his quarter-deck. He saw a second company of armored giants, gathering at the rail, ready to follow the first.

Panic gripped him. The odds were overwhelming—

But suddenly the black ship was gone, with Glarath and the rank of giants. There was only the dancing haze of the blue abyss. He knew that Wil McLan had driven the *Chronion* ahead once more, in that race into the past.

But Sorainya and her boarding party were still on the deck. The Maxim suddenly ceased to fire. Shan and Barry were surrounded. But then the attackers converged upon Lanning, and he crouched to meet them. The bayonet had proved more effective than bullets against the creatures. And now he fought with the same technique he had learned in Sorainya's citadel.

A ripping lunge, a twist, a savage thrust. One giant fell. Another. A third. Black, reeking bodies piled the doorway. Spilled vital fluids were slippery on the deck. The bullet from a crimson gun raked Lanning's side. A golden axe touched his head with searing pain. A heavy gun, flung spinning like a club, knocked out his breath. But he recovered himself, in time to lunge again.

Sorainya ran back and forth behind the warriors, screaming her battle cry, her white face both beautiful

and dreadful with the cold elation burning in her greenish eyes. Once, when the giants fell back and gave her an opening, she leveled the needle of her sword at Lanning. Knowing the deadly fire it held, he dropped and whipped a shot at her red-mailed body with the Luger.

His bullet whined harmless from her armor. And her jet of strange fire merely grazed his shoulder. A jolting shock hurled him aside against the wall. Half blind, dazed, he slapped at his burning shirt, and reeled back to meet her giants.

Four were left. His staggering lunge caught one. Another fell, queerly, before his bayonet had touched it. And a hearty voice came roaring to his ears:

"Fight, gang! Fight!"

He saw that the battle on the foredeck was ended. A great pile of Sorainya's monsters lay dead about the Maxim. Lao Meng Shan was looking over the barricade, with a curiously cheerful grin fixed on his yellow round face. And Barry Halloran, crimson and terrible with the marks of battle, came chanting down the deck. It was a burst from his Luger that had dropped the creature beside Lanning. He flung the empty pistol aside, and leveled his dripping bayonet.

Lanning was swaying, gasping for breath, fighting a descending blindness, as he fought the two remaining giants, fainted, lunged, recovered, parried, defending the turret door.

But he saw Sorainya turn to meet Barry Halloran, and heard her low mocking laugh. He saw the rifle lifted, in Barry's crimson hands, ready for the lunge that might have pierced the queen's woven mail.

"Fight—"

Barry's chanting stopped on a low breathless cry, muted with astonishment. The grim smile of battle was driven from his face by a sudden, involuntary admiration.

"My God, I can't—"

The bayonet wavered. And the queen of war, with a brilliant smile and a mocking flirt of her sable plume, darted quickly forward. The golden needle flickered out in a lightning thrust, to drive his body through.

Lanning's reeling lunge caught one of the attackers. He ripped, twisted, recovered. He staggered back from a

flashing yellow blade, lurched forward again to engage the one survivor.

But his eyes went back again to Barry and Sorainya. With all a dancer's grace, she followed through with her savage thrust, and leaned to recover her blade. He saw her draw it through her naked hand, and then blow Barry a malicious kiss from fingers red with his own lifeblood.

A dark fountain burst and foamed from Barry Halloran's heart. The admiration on his face gave way to a pale grimace of hate. His hands tried to lift the rifle, but it slipped away from them and fell. His eyes came to Lanning, wide and dark and bewildered, like a lost child's.

"Denny—" he sobbed faintly. "*Kill her!*"

And he slipped down, beyond Sorainya.

Lanning brought his staggered mind back to the one remaining giant. Too late. Its golden axe was falling, but he had time to finish his lunge. A little deflected, the flat of the blade crashed against his head, and drowned him in black pain.

Automatically, the run-down machine of his body finished that familiar rhythm: rip, twist, slash, before it toppled down beside the dying monster. Some atom of awareness lingered for another instant. *Don't quit now!* it shrieked. *Or Sorainya will kill Wil McLan. She'll take the magnet back. And Jonbar will be lost.*

But that despairing scream faded with his consciousness.

## Chapter 15

### THE SILVER TUBE

AGONY WAS STILL a rush and a drumming beat, through all of Lanning's head. But desperate purpose had torn through his oblivion, and somehow set him on his feet again. The throbbing deck spun beneath him, and the blinding fog in his eyes veiled the flickering blue. But he

saw Lao Meng Shan and Barry Halloran lying dead among the slaughtered giants. Sorainya was gone from the deck, but he could hear her malicious golden voice.

"... a long pursuit, Wil McLan. I thank you for the pleasure of the chase. Remember, once I promised you my sword—"

A terrible muted scream whispered down from the dome, and then Lanning heard Sorainya's pitiless laugh.

"Perhaps you've always had the means to destroy me, Wil McLan. But never the will—for I know why you first came to Gyronchi. Other men have tried to kill me—like moths trying with their wings to beat out a flame!"

"We'll see, Sorainya," Lanning muttered. "For Barry's sake!"

His body moved stiffly, like a rusted machine. It staggered and reeled. Pain ran like a river through his brain. A mist of darkness clouded his sight. His limbs were dead, useless tools. Even his own garments hampered him, stiff with drying blood.

But he found the Mauser, and picked it up, and staggered into the turret he had tried to guard, where the metal stair led up to the bridge. Sorainya's voice came down to him again, as she boasted:

"You're a fool, Wil McLan, to bring your silly little men against me. For, since you brought us the secret of time, the *gyrane* can conquer death also. With the time shell, I've searched the future for the hour of my death. And I found no danger that can't be avoided. I may be the last of my line—but I shall reign forever!"

Reeling up the turret stair, Lanning came into the space beneath the dome. Wil McLan lay on the floor, beneath the shining wheel. His broken hands were set down in a wide pool of his own dark blood, as he strove to raise himself. His emaciated face was lifted to Sorainya, sick and dreadful with a hopeless, helpless hate. Suspended by its thin white chain from his neck, the little silver tube hung over the spreading pool of blood.

Lithe and tall in the red splendor of her black-plumed mail, Sorainya stood smiling down at McLan, crimson drops still falling from her sword. But she heard Lanning's unsteady step, and turned swiftly to meet him at the top of the stair. A bright exultation lit her face. A deadly

eager light flashed in her narrowed eyes, at sight of Lanning.

"Well, Denny!" she greeted him. "So you would try, where all the rest have failed?"

Her ringing blade struck sparks from his bayonet.

She was as tall, almost, as Lanning, and quick with a hard feline vitality. The woven red mail followed every flowing curve of her. Her wide nostrils flared, and high breasts rose to her quickened breathing. She attacked like a panther springing.

Lanning parried with the bayonet, thrust warily. She swayed aside. The bayonet slid harmless by her armored breast. And the yellow needle flicked Lanning's shoulder with a whip of pain.

His weapon was the longer, the heavier. It made no difference, he tried to tell himself, that she was a woman, so beautiful. Barry's death was still dark agony writhing in him, and he could see Wil McLan sprawled in the pool of blood behind her, gasping terribly for breath and following the battle with glazed, hate-litten eyes.

But he fought a fatigue more deadly than her blade. All his strength had been poured out in the battle with her giants. She was fresh, and she had a tireless quickness. He saw her cruel little smile of elation, as the rifle grew too heavy for his clumsy hands. His vision dulled to a blurry monochrome. Sorainya was a shadow, that could not die.

He was glad she blurred, for he could no longer see her lissome loveliness. He tried to see, in her place, one of her insectile monsters. He lunged into the rhythm of the old attack: rip, twist, slash.

But the bayonet slithered again, harmless, from her woven armor. And the flash of her sword drew a red line of pain down his arm. She danced back, with a pantherine grace, and then stood, as if to mock him, with the yellow needle lowered to her side.

"No, Denny Lanning!" She gave a little breathless laugh. "Strike if you will—for I shall never die. I scanned all the future for the hour of my death, and found no danger. I can't be slain!"

"I'll see!" Lanning caught a long gasping breath, and shook his ringing head. "For Barry—"

With the last atom of his ebbing strength, he gripped

the rifle hard and rushed across the tiny room under the dome. He thrust the gleaming bayonet, with every ounce of muscle, up under the curve of her breast, toward her heart.

"Denny!"

It was a choking sob of warning from Wil McLan. The golden needle flashed up to touch the rifle. Blue fire hissed from its point. The rifle fell out of Lanning's hands. He staggered backward, stunned and blinded by the shock, smelling his seared hands and a burning pungence of ozone.

He caught his weight against the curve of the dome, and leaned there, shuddering. It took all his will to keep his knees from buckling. He caught a deep rasping breath, and blinked his eyes. He saw Sorainya gliding forward, light as a dancer. Beneath stray wisps of golden hair, her white face was dazzling with a smile. And her lazy voice drawled softly:

"Now, Denny Lanning! Who is immortal?"

Her arm flashed up as she spoke, slim and red in its sleeve of mail. A terrible tigerish joy flashed in her green eyes. Her sword, like a living thing, leapt at Lanning's heart.

He struck at the blade, with his empty hand. It slashed his wrist. Deflected a little, it drove through his shoulder, a cold thin needle of numbing pain, and rang against the hard crystal behind him.

Sorainya whipped out the sword, and wiped its thin length on her fingers. She blew him a crimson kiss, and stood waiting with a thirsty smile for him to fall.

"Well?" Her voice was a liquid caress. "Another?"

Then Lanning's failing eyes went beyond her. The tiny dome swam. It took a desperate effort for him to find Wil McLan. But he saw the jerky little movement that broke the thin white chain, tossed the worn silver tube toward him. He heard McLan's voiceless gasp:

"Break it, Denny! I—can't!"

Sorainya had sensed the movement behind her. Her breath caught sharply. The yellow sword darted again, swift as a flash of light, straight for Lanning's heart. Even the tigerish quickness of that last thrust, he thought, was beautiful—

But the silver cylinder had rolled to his foot. Desperately, shuddering with a cold, incredulous awareness that, somehow, he was so crushing Sorainya's victorious beauty, he drove his heel down upon the tube.

It made a tiny crunching sound. But Lanning didn't look down. His eyes were fixed, in a trembling breathless dread, upon Sorainya. No visible hand had touched her. But, from the instant his heel came down, she was—stricken.

The bright blade slipped out of her hand, rang against the dome, and fell at Lanning's feet. Her smile of triumph was somehow frozen on her face, forgotten. Then, in a fractional second, her beauty was—erased.

Her altered face was blind, hideous, pocked with queerly bluish ulcerations. Her features dissolved, frightfully, into fluid blue corruption. And Lanning had an instant's impression of a naked skull grinning fearfully out of her red armor.

And Sorainya was gone.

The woven mail, for a weird timeless instant, still held the curves of her body. It slumped grotesquely, and fell with a dull little thud on the floor. The plumed helmet clattered down beside it, and rolled, and looked back at Lanning with an empty, enigmatic stare.

Lanning tried to look back at Wil McLan, for an explanation of this appalling victory. But a thickening darkness shut out his vision, and the ringing was deafening in his head. A shuddering numbness ran through him from the wound in his shoulder. And his knees collapsed.

## Chapter 16

### RENDEZVOUS WITH DESTINY

LANNING LAY under the crystal dome. The throb of the atomic converters rang loud on the deck beneath his head. An anvil of agony still rang in his skull, and all his body was an aching, blood-clotted stiffness. But, queerly, the

cold pain had ebbed from the sword-thrust in his shoulder.

"Denny?"

It was a voiceless sob from Wil McLan, husky with an urgent pleading. Lanning was surprised that the old man still survived Sorainya's attack. He struggled to his feet, and found McLan still lying in that darkening, clotting pool.

"Wil! What can I do?"

"The needle in the drawer," gasped McLan. "Four c.c. Intravenous—"

Lanning stumbled to the control board, found, in the drawer beneath it, a bright hypodermic and a small bottle of heavy lead, marked: *Dynatomic Formula L 648. Filled, New York City, August, 1935.* The liquid, in the needle, shone with a greenish luminescence. He rolled up McLan's sleeve, thrust the point into a vein at the elbow, pushed home the little plunger.

He examined the old man's wound. It had already ceased to bleed. It looked puzzlingly as if it had been healing for days, instead of minutes.

"Thanks," whispered McLan. "Now yourself—but only two c.c."

He lay back on the floor, with his eyes closed. Lanning made the injection into his own arm, and felt a quick tide of life running through his veins. His dulled senses cleared. Still he was dead-tired, still his battered head ached; yet he felt a quickening stir of the same strange well-being that he had found once before aboard the *Chronion*, after the surgeons of Jonbar had brought him back from death. He picked up the rusty little magnet lying on the floor beside Sorainya's empty armor.

"Do you think—?" he whispered hoarsely. "Can we put it back?"

"If the converter holds out." McLan pulled himself, feebly, up to the wheel. "Glarath will be guarding the spot, with his ship and the monsters. And you'll be all alone. I can take you there, but I'm about done for."

The thrumming of the converter was swifter again, as his broken hands touched keys and dials.

"Sorainya? That tube I broke?" Lanning touched his twisted shoulder. "Wil, what happened to Sorainya?"

The old man turned. Clutching the bright wheel with

both gnarled hands to support his weight, he looked at Lanning. The hatred was gone from his haggard eyes; they were dull with an agony of grief.

"Her life was in that silver tube," he whispered. "I've carried it, all these years. But I could never pour it out."

"Her life?" Horror touched Lanning again. "But nothing touched her, when I broke the tube."

"She thought she was immortal." McLan's voiceless voice was faint and dry with pain. "She failed to discover the hour of her death when she searched her future. Because it was in her past! The year she came to the throne, the Blue Death swept Gyronchi—a plague that came from some mutant virus created accidentally by the breeders of those half-human ants. That's what killed Sorainya."

"But—?" Lanning stared at him blankly. "I don't understand!"

"After I got out of Sorainya's dungeons, I determined to destroy her," he sobbed. "I searched her past, with the temporal ray, for a node of probability. I found it, in the year of the Blue Death.

"You see the priests of the *gyrane* managed to prepare a few shots of effective antitoxin. When Sorainya caught the disease, Glarath rushed to the palace with the last tube of the serum, to save her life. But if the tube had been broken before it reached her, the analyzer revealed, she would have died. So I drove the *Chronion* back through the temple to the plague year, and carried away the tube."

"I see!" Lanning nodded slowly, awed. "It was like carrying away the magnet, to destroy Jonbar."

"Not quite," pointed out Wil McLan. "The magnet was carried so far into the conflicting future of Gyronchi that its geodesics were strained and finally snapped at the vital node, so that Jonbar was blotted from the fifth-dimensional sequence.

"But I carried the tube back into Sorainya's past. The geodesics were never quite broken, and it was still possible for them to loop back to the node. Therefore—so long as the tube was intact—her survival was still possible. But when you spilled the serum, that possibility was obliterated.

"But if—" Lanning stood staring, numbed with a wondering dread. "If Sorainya died as a girl, what about

Sorainya the queen? The woman that imprisoned you, and haunted me, and fought the legion—did she never exist?"

McLan smiled faintly at his bewilderment.

"Remember, we are dealing with probabilities alone. The new physics has banished absolute certainty from the world. Jonbar and Gyronchi, the two Sorainyas, living and dead, are but conflicting branches of possibility, as yet unfixed in the fifth dimension. The crushing of the tube merely altered the probability factors affecting Sorainya's possible life."

A soft gleam of tears was in his hollow eyes. They looked down at the little glistening heap of woven mail, the empty helmet and the golden sword.

"But she was real, to me," he breathed. "Too real."

"These wounds?" Lanning demanded suddenly. "How were they made by a woman who didn't exist?"

"When they were made, her probability did exist," whispered Wil McLan. "And a lot of atomic power had been spent, through the temporal field, to match our probability to hers. But you'll notice they're disappearing now, with a remarkable rapidity."

His bright hollow eyes lifted to Lanning.

"Just keep in mind, Denny, that the logical laws of causation are still rigid—but only one step removed. The absolute sequence of events, in the fifth dimension, is not parallel with time—although our three-dimensional minds commonly perceive it as so. But that inviolable progression is the unalterable frame of all the universe."

His gnarled fingers reached out to touch the rusty magnet in Lanning's hand.

"The march of that progression, higher than time," his hushed whisper ran on solemnly, "has now forever obliterated Sorainya the queen. The sequence of events has not yet settled the fates of Jonbar and Gyronchi. But still the odds are all with Gyronchi."

He gripped Lanning's arm, his thin hand quivering.

"The last play is near," he breathed. "The hope—the probability—of Jonbar is all in you, Denny. And the outcome will soon be engraved forever in the fifth dimension."

He turned to grasp the wheel.

And the *Chronion* ran back down her geodesic track un-

til the dials stood at 5:49 P.M., August 12, 1921. McLan raised his feeble hand in a warning signal, and his whisper quavered down through the speaking tube:

"Ready, Denny! They'll be waiting."

Lanning stood peering into the dancing mists of time. As a desperate ruse that might win a precious moment, he had put on Sorainya's armor. Her black plume waved above his head. He clutched her golden sword—but whatever device had made it project that deadly blue ray was either broken or exhausted. He moistly gripped the rusty magnet, that must be returned to its place in space and time.

His weary brain, as he waited, dully pondered a last paradox: though they had outrun the time ship of Glarath in the long race backward through the centuries, no possible speed could bring them first to the goal ahead. He gripped the sword, as the throb of the converter stopped, and straightened in the borrowed mail.

And the *Chronion* flashed out of the blue again, into the lonely hush of that eroded valley in the age-worn Ozarks. Everything was exactly as Lanning had seen it in the shining block of the chronoscope: the idle, tattered boy, following the two lean cows down the rocky slope toward the dilapidated farm, with his gaunt yellow dog roving beside him.

Everything—except that now the great, squarish black mass of the time ship from Gyronchi lay beside the trail, like a battleship aground. Glarath was a tall black pillar on his lofty deck. The ugly projectors of the *gyrane* beam scowled from their ports. Scores of the warrior giants had been disembarked, to make a hideous wall about the spot where the magnet must be placed.

Whistling, the dawdling boy had come within twenty yards of the spot, but he gave no evidence that he saw either ship or monsters. One of the red-spotted cows, ahead, plodded calmly through an anthropoid monster. And back to Lanning, where he waited to leap from the deck, came McLan's whispered explanation:

"No, the boy John Barr won't be aware of us at all—unless we should turn the temporal field upon him. For his life is already almost completely fixed by the advancing progression in the fifth dimension. In terms of

his experience, we are no more than the most shadowy phantoms of probability. Travelers backward into time can affect the past only at carefully selected nodes, and then only at the expense of the terrific power required to deflect the probability-inertia of the whole continuum. Glarath and Sorainya spent atomic energy enough to blast continents, just to lift the magnet from John Barr's path."

Gripping the magnet and the sword, Lanning flung himself to the ground. He stumbled on a rock, fell to his knees, staggered back to his feet, ran desperately toward the time ship and the armored horde ahead of the loitering boy.

He waved the golden sword, as he ran, in Sorainya's familiar gesture. Glarath, on his bridge, waved a black-swathed arm to answer—but then, as Lanning's heavy feet tripped again, with none of Sorainya's grace, the black priest went rigid with alarm. His great hoarse voice bellowed a command. The wall of giants came to attention, bristling with the crimson and yellow metal. And a thick black tube swung down in its port.

The first blast of atomic radiation struck a rock beside Lanning. The granite exploded. Molten stone splattered the red mail. A hot fragment slapped his cheek with white agony, and blinded him with the smoke of his own flesh burning.

The boy, meantime, had already walked into the unsuspected warrior ranks, and cold desperation caught Lanning's heart. In a few moments more, John Barr would pick up the pebble instead of the magnet, and settle the fate of two worlds forever.

Strangled with bitter white smoke, Lanning caught a sobbing breath, and sprinted. Another blinding jet of atomic fire fused the soil to a smoking pool of lava, close behind him. He ran on, too close now for the *gyrane* rays to reach him, but the wall of monsters waited ahead.

Thick crimson guns came level, and a volley battered him. The bullets failed to pierce the woven mail. But the impacts were bruising, staggering blows, and one missile raked his unprotected jaw and neck, beneath the helmet. A sickening pain loosened his muscles. Red gouts splashed down on the crimson mail. He spat broken teeth and blood, and stumbled on.

Insect limbs whirled yellow axes high. He raised Sorainya's sword, and stumbled on to meet them. For an instant he thought the creatures would yield, in awe of the dead queen's armor. But when Glarath cracked another command from above, they fell upon him furiously.

Golden blades ripped and battered at his mail. He drove Sorainya's sword into a shining hard thorax. A clubbed red gun smashed against his extended arm. The bone gave with a brittle snap, and his arm fell useless in the sleeve of mail. He clutched the precious magnet close to his body, and lunged ahead.

Blows rained on him. Something battered the helmet stunningly against his skull. A cleaving axe cut his neck half in two, at the juncture of helmet and mail. Hot blood gushed down inside the shirt, and his limbs went lax.

Yet some old terror of their dead mistress repelled the giants from any actual contact with her armor. So Lanning, even wounded and beaten down, came reeling through their ranks to the hollow square they guarded.

He saw the ragged boy stroll whistling idly through the line of giants, the hungry dog at his heels. He saw the gleam of the pebble, the triangular print in the clay where the magnet had lain, not two paces from the boy. Another second—

But he was falling. His strength was spurting out in the red stream jetting from his neck. Another merciless blow smashed his shoulder, numbed the arm that held the magnet, crushed him down.

His eyes fogged with pain. But, as he fell, he saw beside him, or thought he did, a splendid figure. A grave majestic head, towering out of a shimmering opalescence. The stranger looked at him, and his body tingled as if a cool unseen something had brushed against him. A calm voice spoke, if only in his mind:

"Courage, Denny Lanning!"

And the man was gone.

Lanning knew that he had been one of the *dynon*, the remote heirs of Jonbar. His mere glance had somehow eased Lanning's pain, brought life back to his collapsing limbs. But Glarath had bellowed another command. An avalanche of giants fell upon Lanning. And the aimless boy was already stooping for the pebble.

Lanning hurled himself forward, his good arm thrust out with the magnet. A yellow blade hacked through his arm. Mute monsters crushed him down. But the magnet, flung with the last effort of his fingers, dropped into the triangular print where it belonged.

A bright curiosity—the very light of science—was born in the eyes of the stooping boy. His inquisitive fingers closed on the V of steel. And the acid-reeking creatures piled on Lanning's body were suddenly gone.

The black ship flickered like a wing of shadow, and vanished.

John Barr picked up the magnet, with a faint whistle of wonder at a rusty nail clinging to it. He went on down the slope, driving his two spotted cows through the unseen hull of the *Chronion*.

Dennis Lanning was left alone beside the trail. He knew he was dying. But the fading throb of his pain was a triumphant drum. He knew Jonbar had won.

His dimming eyes clung to the *Chronion*. Hopelessly, he tried to hope that Wil McLan would come before he died. But the time ship shimmered and disappeared. He lay quite alone in the sunset on the hill.

## Chapter 17

### WORLDS THAT NEVER WERE

IT WAS A DREAM, he knew, but Lethonee had been standing beside him. Tall and straight in the same white gown, with the great bright crystal of time cradled in her hands.

"Thank you—thank you, Denny Lanning." Her low voice had trembled and broken. "I bring you the gratitude of Jonbar, for something no other could have done."

Lanning struggled against the stiffening cold that had seized his body, and failed to speak a single word. But he

saw her violet eyes shining with tears, and heard her sobbing voice:

"Don't die, Denny! Come back to me, in Jonbar!"

He had fought the cold rigor in him, but he couldn't answer. And now she was gone, like a fading dream. He knew that he lay dying, on that lonely Ozark hill.

But now there was another dream, even more fantastic. He thought he was once again lying in a clean bed in the little green-walled hospital on the *Chronion*. The brisk, efficient surgeons of Jonbar had been attending him for a long time, it seemed, in the dim drowsy intervals of sleep. Their wondrous science, he dreamed, had made his body whole again.

It had to be a dream. For Willie Rand was sitting up on the opposite bed, grinning at him with clear, seeing eyes. Willie Rand! who had been slain, blind and alone, in that fantastic hopeless charge against the anthropoid ants, before Sorainya's diamond throne. He was blowing a smoke ring, watching it happily.

"Howdy, Cap'n Lanning. Cigarette?"

Numbed with bewilderment, Lanning reached automatically to catch the cigarette. There was no pain in the arm that the giant's clubbed gun had broken. He tried the fingers again, incredulously, and stared across at Willie Rand.

"What's happened?" he demanded. "I thought you were—were blind and dead. And I was cashing out—"

"Right, cap'n," Rand exhaled a white cloud, grinning through it. "Reckon we've all died twice. But now we're getting another stack of chips—all but poor old McLan."

"But—?" Lanning stared at the smoke, as if it had been the blue haze of time. "How—"

But then he heard a clatter on the stair. Barry Halloran and bull-like Emil Schorn came down from the deck, carrying a stretcher. Two of the surgeons from Jonbar followed, and a third rolled in a table of instruments. They laid the bandaged figure gently on a bed. Lanning caught the glint of a hypodermic and the glow of the little needles that shone with some healing radiation.

"The little limey, Duff Clark," Willie Rand was drawing. "Nearly lost him. Went overboard, you know, on the way back, and sort of got mislaid in probability and

time. Took days to untangle the geo—geodesics. Scorched with the *gyrane*—the same hell-fire that burned out my eyes. But I reckon these medics can tune him up again.”

Lanning was sitting up on the side of his bed, unsteadily at first. Now Barry Halloran discovered him. Barry, alive again! His rugged, freckled face lit with a joyous grin.

“Denny, old man!” He strode to grip Lanning’s hand. “About time you came alive!”

“Tell me, Barry!” Lanning clung to his powerful hand, shuddering to a sudden agony of hope. “How did all this happen? And can we—can we—?” He gulped, and his desperate eyes searched Barry’s broad, cheerful face. “Can we go back to Jonbar?”

A shadow of pain blotted out the smile.

“Wil did it.” Barry Halloran said. “The last thing he did. He left you where you put that magnet, and drove the *Chronion* back down to Jonbar. Dead when he got there—dead beyond the power of our friends to revive him.”

The big tackle looked away for a moment.

“Wil knew he was going down,” he went on huskily. “He rigged an automatic switch to stop the *Chronion* when it came to Jonbar. A new crew brought these doctors back, to haul us aboard and resurrect us again. Quite a hunt, I gather, through a snarl of broken geodesics—”

“Lethonee?” whispered Lanning, urgently. “Can we—”

“*Ach!*” It was a bellow of greeting from Emil Schorn. He smashed Lanning’s fingers in a great ham of a hand. “*Ja, Denny! Jonbar iss Valhalla! Where men fight und die—und fight und die again! Und Sorainya—*”

An awed admiration deepened his bellow.

“Der red queen off war! *Ach, a Valkyrie! A battlemaid-en, terrible but beautiful. None like her in Jonbar, nein.*”

“Jonbar?” Lanning gasped out the question. “Are we going there?”

“*Ach, Ja!* In our own times, we’re all kaput. But der *Herren doktors* will find room for us there. We may even fight again, for Jonbar.” His face lit. “*Ach, heil, Valhalla!*”

Lanning was standing on the deck, aglow once more

with the quiet elation of perfect bodily well-being, when the *Chronion* slipped again from the shifting mists of time, into the clear sky over Jonbar.

Genial sunlight of a calm spring morning lay soft and warm upon the tall silver pylons. Gay-clad multitudes were pouring out across vast green parks and broad viaducts and the terrace gardens of the towers, to greet the *Chronion*.

The battered little time ship drifted down slowly above them. The men out of the past, radiantly fit, but still, as Barry Halloran remarked, a scarecrow crew in their ragged, faded, oddly assorted uniforms, were gathered at the rail, waving happily.

All the legion, alive again! Schorn and Rand and Duffy Clark, swarthy Cresto and somber Barinin and grinning Lao Meng Shan. The two lean Canadians, Isaac and Israel Enders, side by side. Courtney-Pharr, and Erich von Arneth, and Barry Halloran. And dapper little Jean Querard, perched perilously on the rail, making a speech into space.

But now it was one of the scientists from Jonbar who held the bright wheel under the dome. A great door had opened high in the wall of a familiar-seeming tower. The *Chronion* nosed through, to settle on her own platform in the great hangar, where a noisy crowd was waiting. Jean Querard strutted and inflated his chest. Teetering on the rail, he waved for silence.

"*C'est bon,*" his high voice began. "*C'est tres bon—*"

Trembling with a still incredulous eagerness, Lanning slipped past him, into the crowd. He found the elevator. It flung him upward, and he stepped out into that same terrace garden, where he had dined with Lethonee.

Amid its fragrant, white-flowered shrubbery, he paused for a moment to catch his breath. His eyes fell to the wide green parks that spread to the placid river, a full mile beneath. And he saw a thing that stabbed his heart with a queer little needle of pain.

For this great river, he saw, was the same river that had curved through Gyronchi. Great pylons stood where miserable villages had huddled. The largest of them towered from the very hill that had been topped by the squat black temple of the *gyrane*.

But where was the other hill, where Sorainya's red citadel had been?

His breath quivered and caught, when he saw that it was this same hill, that bore the tower of Lethonee. His hands gripped hard on the railing, and he looked down at the little table where he had sat with Lethonee, on the dreadful night of Jonbar's dissolution. For Sorainya, glorious on her golden shell, rose again to mock him, as she had done that night. Tears dimmed his eyes, and a haunting, sudden ache gripped his pausing heart.

*Oh, fair Sorainya . . . slain!*

A light step raced through the sliding door behind the shrubs, and a breathless voice called his name, joyously. Lanning looked up, slowly. And a numbing wonder shook him.

"Denny Lanning!"

Lethonee came running toward him, through the flowers. Her violet eyes were bright with tears, and her face was a white smile of incredulous delight. Lanning moved shuddering to meet her, speechless.

For the golden voice of the warrior queen had mocked him in her cry. And the ghost of Sorainya's glance glinted green in her shining eyes. She even wore a close-fitted gown of shimmering metallic crimson, that shone like Sorainya's mail.

She came into his open, trembling arms.

"Denny—" she sobbed happily. "At last we are—one."

His new world spun. This same hill had carried Sorainya's citadel. But neither Jonbar nor Gyronchi had ever actually existed. Divergent roads of probability, stemming from the same beginning, they were now fused into the same reality. Lethonee and Sorainya—

"Yes, my darling." He drew them both against his racing heart, breathing softly, "One!"