

The Tower of Evil

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ONE of the most mysterious things to the members of the white race is the apparently occult power possessed by the Hindus. Their ability to perform many so called "magical" tricks, some of them astounding, have been a source of wonder to us for years.

No doubt a great deal of their power is pure trickery, but there is also a great deal of profound scientific knowledge at the basis of some. Whether they obtained their knowledge through some now extinct race, or whether it has been slowly accumulated through centuries of penetration of nature's secrets, we do not know.

Our authors, in presenting this story, are attempting to show some of the scientific truth that may lie behind so-called "magic." The Towers of Evil that they write of do really exist in Arabia, as Seabrook in his *Adventures in Arabia* so eloquently describes. Our authors have taken the facts and woven them into a most startling story, of mystery, intrigue and adventure.

Into Tibet he went to probe those strange stories. Behind the priests' tricks he saw a great power...

Chapter I

HEIGHT on height the rocky cliffs loomed, a mad jumble of purple and red, and mauve. Here, in the remote interior of Tibet, even the very hills wore fantastic colors.

Up through this devil's playground could be seen a narrow path writhing its way amidst the jumble of tinted boulders. Up and up it wound, until at last it plunged down into a narrow gorge, cleft as by a knife a thousand feet through.

"This is the worst yet!" exclaimed John Dunton, as for the tenth time his struggles started a miniature landslide in the shale. "I don't see how those two bearers of mine manage to wangle their loads over this stuff and keep their footing. Good thing it's near noon and the sun overhead, so that some light gets down here or—well, what now!"

Suddenly, as though some gigantic hand had thrown an enormous screen across the narrow top of the defile, the dim light illumining the path vanished. A blackness enveloped the traveler and his two native bearers. Then in the defile there rose a moan from an almost imperceptible whisper to a crescendo of terror, until the air vibrated with the wailing of an unspeakable agony. Cold it had been at this mountain height, but now an icy blast roared down the cleft as if a door had been opened to some gigantic refrigerator. Clammy hands plucked at Dunton, tore at his arms, strove to drag him down into the rapids.

When it seemed that human brain could no longer retain its sanity under the impact of the tortured scream and the icy blast, a sudden silence came. The wind dropped, the plucking hands ceased their efforts to drag the explorer

down. The silence deepened, until it seemed to have a power of its own. An uncanny silence! Dunton could not even hear his own breathing, nor that of his bearers. Something seemed to press down on him, an almost physical weight of dread. The darkness was unrelieved.

But then as he stood uncertainly, in front of him there seemed to be a faint, almost insensible, lightening of the blackness. Was it so, or were his eyes deceiving him? Gradually, by the faintest of graduations, the luminescence strengthened, till Dunton could see floating directly in front of him a distinct and glowing cloud of light. A swirling, shapeless cloud of violet light, that cold violet which represents the very limit of the visible spectrum. The cloud swirled and eddied, and whirled about itself, drew itself together, slowly, until, not twenty feet before Dunton, towered a human figure of light.

It was not in Dunton's makeup to be afraid. Many a peril he had faced in his adventurous years wandering in the strange places of the earth. But now he trembled from some unnamable revulsion caused by the thing which he saw before him. Then a frenzy of hate seized him. Drawing his automatic, he sprang forward and opened fire. The sharp reports echoed and re-echoed from the cliffs, but the point-blank shots seemed to have no effect on that lama of light. Still he stood there with his ominous glance, his warning arm still upraised.

Two shrieks of terror behind him, a rapidly diminishing rattle of shale, and Dunton knew that his dark-skinned bearers had incontinently departed; they would take back to their village still another tale of horror about this mystic mountain land.

"I don't wonder they ran," he thought, as he surveyed the apparition barring the path. Ten feet tall, the figure stood, in the conical hat, the flowing robes, the skirted "shamtabs" of the Tibetan lamas. The beardless face was sternly set in a forbidding scowl. The right arm, hand extended, was raised in a gesture which clearly conveyed the message, "Go no further!" Motionless the giant figure stood, and the eyes, the entire form in fact, seemed to dominate the defile.

"So that's it!" Dunton grunted. "Well, we'll soon see whether you're real or not." Resuming his head-long rush, Dunton made straight for the figure. Suddenly his fierce attack was checked. Without warning, he had come up against an invisible but rigid barrier. He could see nothing, yet ten feet before he reached the evil image he had come up against a something that had resisted his drive. So sudden and unexpected was the check that he was sent crashing backward onto the shale. Bruised and bleeding, he leaped to his feet and again, rushed forward. Again he met the invisible barrier. Clubbing his automatic in his right hand, and grasping a long hunting knife in his left, he hammered frantically, and cut, and slashed at the Nothing which stayed him. But he could not approach the object of his wrath.

INTO THE PIT

AT last, exhausted, he paused. Glaring again at the mysterious lama, he saw it move for the first time. The arm was slowly descending, the outstretched fingers slowly closing. Down, down, came the arm until a long forefinger pointed straight at him.

Again Dunton rushed forward to the attack. Again he was thrown back by that invisible Nothingness. But this time, though he fell, he did not reach the ground. He felt himself lifted into the air by the same impalpable being he had

been so vainly battling. At the same time all power of volition left his limbs; he could not move!

Like some dead leaf soaring on the bosom of the west wind he was borne aloft, straight up between the towering walls of that narrow defile, up again into the light of day. Higher and higher he rose, in great swooping spirals, until he saw revolving far below him the snow-capped peaks and grassy plateaus of mysterious Tibet. Then off like an arrow he moved toward a distant range of mountains—taller even than their brethren.

Only his vision and his acute brain were alive. The powerful body of this six-foot American was as useless, as immovable, as a felled log.

But barely had he a chance to gather his senses, when he found this impetuous rush slowing far above the range that had been its objective, spiralling downward now. Again the circling swoops set in. Below, he could see, set deep amidst a ring of high and unscalable cliffs, a grassy bowl. It was almost circular in shape, patterned with masses of flowers, cut by winding paths that centered about a white tower. That tower, rising sheer three hundred feet from the gardened plain, was unlike anything his wide journeying had brought to his view. Covering a circular area of a full acre, soaring high in alabaster beauty, it was topped by a huge sphere of burnished metal about one hundred feet in diameter. The glare of the sun's reflection from the tremendous ball blinded Dunton, but in his paralysis he could neither turn his gaze from it, nor relieve his seared eyeballs by dropping their lids.

The swift spirals brought him closer and closer in diminishing circles to the blazing globe, till at last he hovered some hundred feet above it. Then, like an unfolding tulip, the upper hemisphere slowly opened, to reveal a black pit within. Suddenly the force supporting Dunton relinquished him, and like a plummet he dropped, losing consciousness with the awful rush of his fall...

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OUT of the blackness of oblivion the consciousness of the explorer beat its way. His eyes opened—opened on a scene whose unexpectedness startled his dazed brain to life. Dunton stared about him in amazement. Lying on a pile of cushions of rare and costly silks, he found himself in a room whose splendor surpassed anything he had beheld.

The circular chamber, with sea-blue ceiling a full twenty feet above him, was hung with tapestries worked in lustrous silks, in threads of gold and silver, encrusted with sapphires, diamonds, emeralds, opals and other precious stones. The floor was covered with a deep rug whose pattern was a maze of weird imagery. A low table near him was cut from the purest crystal in a tracery of carving such as only some Oriental Cellini could have produced. What could be seen of the floor and walls was of the purest alabaster. The scene was bathed in a soft sheen of opal light from a hidden source.

A VISION

TENTATIVELY Dunton moved an arm, a leg. His muscular control had returned. Carefully he felt his limbs. No broken bones, no bruises remained to mark that horrible fall. His traveling garments were gone, and in their place he was arrayed in robes of the finest silk.

The American arose, and stared about him. No window, no door, was apparent. Swiftly he strode to the wall nearest him, and skilfully he paced about the chamber, searching under the splendid hangings for some means of exit. An unbroken stretch of glowing alabaster mocked him.

"No chance of getting out of here," he muttered, as he returned to his cushioned resting place. "Major Blakely was right, I sure did get into a mess this trip."

His thoughts turned to the inception of this journey which had culminated thus strangely. The famous Shanghai Club—the grizzled English officer sitting across the table from him. The calm curling of pipe smoke contrasting so vividly with the tales of adventure in the far corners of the earth that the two exchanged as they sipped their pegs.

"I'm going into Tibet next," Dunton had said. "When I was in Arabia last, I heard some wild stories about Towers of Evil, erected in a chain around the world, from which malign influences are supposed to radiate. There is one in Arabia. I never got to it. But Seabrook, in his *Adventures in Arabia* tells of visiting it and being shown around. He didn't see much for he was kept out of a good half of the structure. The chief tower is said to be in the interior of Tibet, and I've made up my mind to have a try at finding it, as I know the language. In fact, I'm starting very shortly."

Major Blakely had started, then very impressively had warned him. "My boy, keep out of that forsaken country. I doubt you'd ever come out alive. It's hellish traveling. In the first place, the whole region stands on end. And then—well—queer things happen in there." He paused, blew some rings of smoke, watched them fade, then resumed.

"I was sent in there, fifteen years ago, with a small force, to punish some bandits. I don't like to think of what happened—but I was the only one who got out. And when I got home, my wife was dead—killed in a midnight attack on our little home—and my little three year old daughter—was gone. I have never found out what became of her and I don't speculate too often. Afraid to. Don't go! It's the Devil's own land."

"Well. I'll think it over," Dunton had replied. But his mind was set, and the Major's warning merely confirmed his determination to penetrate the mysteries of the Forbidden Land.

The American reviewed the months of toiling progress that followed. The difficulties he had overcome to assemble a sufficient number of bearers for his expedition. The ominous prophecies he had received as the caravan had proceeded from village to village. Dunton had laughed at the tales of horrors which lay before him, but his men had not laughed. One by one they had deserted, until only two stalwarts had been left to enter that narrow gorge with him and witness its terrors.

"Looks like there was something to those stories, all right. Of course, it isn't magic, but somebody here has control of forces that white scientists never even dreamed of. Well," he thought, "I suppose I'll be lots wiser before I'm much older. I've been in plenty of tight places before and I've always found a way out. But what a story I'll have to tell when next I see the boys at the Explorers' Club in New York. Meanwhile this isn't such a bad place—but I wonder if the idea is to starve me to death."

A soft rustle behind him, and he turned like a flash— "Well, where did you come from?"

There, set like a more gorgeous jewel in this glittering room of splendor was a girl—a white girl—a beautiful white girl. Rippling waves of golden fire, her long hair fell about her, framing a face whose loveliness sent a thrill of pain to his heart. Eyes, deeply blue, like the Mediterranean at midsummer. Small straight nose, whose nostrils, shell pink, quivered with her soft breathing. Red lips, with perfect lines, their luscious beauty parted to show the gleaming whiteness of her teeth. She was garmented in a single silken robe of cerulean blue, which dropped straight down from her shoulders, caught at the waist by its only ornament, a thick golden rope whose tasseled ends swung against a thin white ankle.

In her hands she held a crystal tray, on which were crystal dishes heaped with food, and a tall glass whose amber contents glowed in the opal light.

Dunton leaped to his feet with a torrent of questions. "Who are you? What is this place? How did you get in?" But the lovely maiden did not speak. She straightened, looked at him a moment—put an incomparably beautiful finger to those red lips—then as the explorer started toward her—slipped behind a hanging close beside her. In a moment Dunton had ripped the tapestry down—nothing but the cold white alabaster wall. Frantically he beat at it, pushed, pressed here and there on the smooth surface, sought for a nail hold. He could find not the slightest seam in the gleaming surface, no secret button, no yielding panel. He was imprisoned as securely as before.

Finally Dunton turned to the food the maiden had brought him. "That's the queerest of all—he mused as he ate. "I could swear that this is the Tower of Evil, but there's no evil about that girl, that I'll stake my life on. God, but she's beautiful. I've never seen any one who could hold a candle to her! And yet, and yet, there was something familiar about that face. It haunts me. Somewhere, some how I've run across some one who resembles her." He pondered for a long time. "No, can't place it. But I've never seen her before. No one could forget that beauty."

His hunger satisfied at last, he lay back among his cushions. "What next, I wonder?"

Chapter II

THROUGH THE WALL!

IT was sometime later as he sat musing that Dunton suddenly lifted his head, and sniffed the air. A faint subtle incense pervaded the room. What was it? Where had that peculiar, though not unpleasant fragrance greeted his nostrils before? The answer eluded him. Meanwhile the odor grew more and more definite—a heavy, sweet, cloying perfume. Thin wisps of vapor curled and floated round the room.

Suddenly a picture formed and grew clear in his mind. China... Peking... an obscure temple on the outskirts of the city... himself in mandarin costume, disguised; no foreign devil entered here on penalty of death... the underground chamber—the priests of the temple lying about on low couches in various stages of exaltation—the same peculiar essence. That was it! Hasheesh!(2-1)

Even as he recognized it, the wisps of fog clouded and billowed; the room and its contents blurred. The explorer felt his mental perceptions growing hazy. Though he fought against the feeling, his mind swayed and swooned; the powerful drug was numbing his senses—he was slipping... Then the fumes suddenly lifted and cleared!

The explorer shook himself, striving to clear his fuddled brain. What was coming next? Too long had he been in the East not to know that this was but the prelude for something sinister. He must be prepared for anything now.

It came! A panel noiselessly slid open in the smooth alabaster surface of the wall, revealing an opening about a foot square. Dunton backed away to the opposite wall, keeping a watchful eye.

A dark mass blocked the space, then floated through into the room. It poised momentarily, suspended in mid-air. Dunton crouched in readiness, determined to sell his life dearly. He gazed intently at the floating body. It slowly took shape and form. Brave though he was, he fell back in horror. An involuntary cry burst from his tortured throat!

Great Heavens! It was impossible! A tiny human being, eight inches in height, perfect in every lineament, floated and spun on the impalpable air. Even as he stared wild-eyed, the creature grew and visibly increased in size. Upward it floated, expanding all the while, until the head almost touched the ceiling. By this time the body had attained normal human dimensions. It hovered, then slowly descended until the feet were planted firmly on the floor, revealing to Dunton's bewildered eyes an old, old man. His wizened face was the color and texture of brown parchment, seamed with innumerable wrinkles almost out of all semblance to human features. A curving beaklike nose, and bony claw-like fingers gave the appearance of a bird of prey, hovering over its victim. Black beady eyes of astonishing lustre and vitality protruded from that incredibly ancient countenance. Surmounting all was a conical yellow hat.

He was clad in a flowing yellow robe, the costume of a Tibetan lama, but it was unusual in the richness of its ornaments and the profusion of strange characters that covered it. Afterwards the explorer discovered that these marks were mystic writings in Tibetan and ancient Persian. At the moment, however, he was too astounded to take note of the details.

The ancient lama gazed at him with an air of authority. "Who are you that dare set foot in the sacred limits of our territory, where no foreigner or Tibetan has ever penetrated; and what was your purpose in coming here?"

The explorer collected his scattered wits. For a moment he hesitated, then determined that frankness was the better plan.

DUNTON IS UNAFRAID

"MY name is John Dunton, and I am an American. I am an explorer by inclination, and have ventured in strange lands over the far stretches of the earth, setting foot in many places that no white man's foot but mine had trod before. Three months ago in China, I heard the legend of a strange sect that inhabited a secluded valley in the highest reaches of the Amnyi Machen Range, and of their still stranger practices. I determined to discover for myself the truth of this legend.

"For months I traversed the peaks and plateaus of China and Tibet, until finally I came to a wild gorge. The rest, no doubt you know."

"Yes, I do," the semblance of a smile found lodging in the withered features. "What was done, was done at my command."

Then the lama grew stern again.

"Know you that by attempting to penetrate our holy domain, your life has become forfeit? No living being may enter here except on my orders and for my purposes. No Tibetan in his right mind would come within twenty miles of the prohibited territory. Yet you have rashly dared, and must pay the penalty."

The American hid his emotions behind an impassive air. Not for worlds would he display even the semblance of fear before this cruel, cold-blooded, priest. Quickly his eye flashed around the room. If only there were an exit anywhere—a single bound would strangle the ancient creature before him; and then—perhaps—escape.

But the walls were impenetrably smooth; even the little panel had slid back into position, leaving no trace.

The lama smiled again. He seemed to have read the explorer's thoughts.

"Banish any idea of escape. I have ways of preventing that. Even should you gain the outer valley, you could not progress an inch unless I will it. You have seen enough to convince you I am possessed of more than mortal powers. By but a thought, I could blast you into eternal nothingness."

"Rot!" was the contemptuous retort. "I grant you have performed some weird tricks upon me. Some of them I can explain very easily. For instance that figure of light in the gorge. That could easily have been done with a magic lantern projector on a cloud mass. Your spectacular entrance into my prison, I attribute to a hypnotic illusion due to hasheesh fumes. Only that invisible wall of air in the gorge, and my levitation through space, I cannot explain. Possibly you have discovered the principle of gravity nullification. Or perhaps that too was a hypnotic illusion.

"Once, in Africa, I overawed a savage tribe so that they bowed down before me like a God. Before their startled eyes I turned water into blood with a little phenolphthalein and soap—and back again into water with a dash of vinegar. I caused the trees to speak—my radio speaker was hidden in the leaves. And as a final touch—luck aided me with an opportune eclipse—I darkened the sun.

"Your scientific wonders, or illusions, do not dismay me. I respect your achievements, but I do not fear them."

The Lama looked at him again with keen, beady eyes; then appeared to lose himself in reflection.

The American waited tensely; his racing mind seeking some mode of extricating himself.

Abruptly the old priest raised his head.

"But you fear death?" he challenged.

An inner shudder traveled through Dunton. Brave and fearless to a fault, he could not view the prospect of immediate extinction without a qualm. But outwardly he remained calm. His captor must not be permitted to sneer over his tremblings or pleas for mercy.

"When it comes, I shall meet it as a brave man should," he said simply.

An unwilling gleam of admiration crept into the lama's eyes. "This is the man for my purposes," he muttered to himself.

Then he spoke. "Hearken carefully to what I say. Should you prove the man of sense and intelligence I take you to be, you shall not only avoid the frightful tortures already prepared for you, but you shall become possessed of power

undreamt of by mortal man. For almost a century have I toiled and perfected my plans; and now the day of accomplishment is near. To-morrow at the moment the sun rises over the mountain tops, the earth shall lie prostrate at my feet, and I shall rule over the nations; and the name of Lord Shaitan"—here he touched his forehead devoutly with one finger—"shall once more be worshiped by the people of the earth as in ancient wise. We shall destroy mercilessly the altars of your upstart God who too long has triumphed."

THE PRIEST EXPLAINS

THE explorer gazed at him in growing astonishment. Why, the man must be mad! "But I am old—very old," continued Shaitan's priest, "and soon the day will come when I must depart to the bosom of great Shaitan. Who then shall continue the great work? For years have I searched for a worthy successor. All in vain. These stupid lamas, my underlings, are fit only to take orders and obey them blindly, not to conceive and plan. Not one of them knows all my purpose. Only one—a girl—has the brains I require, but then—she is only a girl."

Here he turned, and pointed a claw-like finger at the astounded explorer.

"You—you are the very man; brave, intelligent, resourceful, and possessed of a knowledge of science. Cast your lot with me—become my second in command—adopt the worship of the true Lord, Shaitan, and you shall reign with me, and alone, after me. No despot of old ever had the sway that shall be mine—and yours! What say you?"

This astonishing speech had convinced Dunton that he was dealing with a fanatic. He must be careful in his replies, so as not to arouse his fury. Besides, a glimmer of hope awoke in his breast.

"What you say interests me immensely, and it is also very flattering. But you have told me very little—just what is your scheme for conquering the earth, and who is Shaitan, whom you worship? Before I come to a decision, I must know more."

The old lama nodded his head approvingly. "Quite right, and spoken like a wise man. I shall start from the very beginning, so that you may understand all. I am not afraid to reveal my plans to you. Either you join me or"—he paused significantly, "or you go where your knowledge will be of no value to you."

He paused, then continued. "Know then, that almost a thousand years ago, in the land of Persia, when the religion of the false Mohammed ruled the earth, my ancestor, Hassan ibn Sabbah, founded the society of Hashishin, or Assassins. He pretended to follow Mohammed but in reality he formed his society to worship the only true Lord, Shaitan—known to you as Satan.

"Uncounted ages before, Shaitan ruled the world, and Evil—the precious principle of Evil—flourished triumphant. Then the traitorous God—incarnation of the womanish Good—by low stratagems overthrew the rightful Lord. Since then Shaitan has languished in darkness; only our company kept his worship alive through the ages. But to-morrow the minds of the people shall turn to the Evil once again, and Shaitan shall once more come into his own.

"My ancestor, Hassan," he continued, "was the Supreme Chieftain. He was the Sheik-al-Jabal—known to you Westerners as the 'Old Man of the Mountains.' By means of hasheesh, he enrolled a band of young men—the Fedais—from whom the blindest obedience was exacted. On them the religion of

Islam was enforced, to the scorn of our initiate. By secret assassination, by cord and steel, those blind tools spread the power of Shaitan unwittingly.

"For several hundred years, the Society grew and flourished, until the fatal day when Hulagu, the Tatar, accursed be his name, smote down our brethren by the thousands, and destroyed their mountain citadel, Alamut."

Dunton listened in absorption. He had heard of that strange ancient sect of the Assassins.

"Fortunately, a few of the Initiate, headed by Hassan, the youthful son of Rukneddin, the then Sheik, managed to cut their way through the ring of their enemies. For years the devoted band wandered over the face of the earth—outcasts—their hands against the world, and the world's against them. Faithfully they kept alive the holy spark of Shaitan, in a world given over to false Gods.

"After many years of traveling in strange lands, the Hashishin came to the roof of the world—this high mountain region of Tibet, so like their former fastness in the mountains of Persia. Here they decided to halt, and found anew the society.

"In this very valley they settled. Conforming to ancient practice, outwardly they adopted the prevalent faith of Buddhism and Lamaism, while secretly practicing the holy rites of Shaitan. Through magical means, a ring of prohibition was placed about this valley, that no one has ever penetrated."

He smiled an evil smile. "They worked in secret, and utilized the prevalent beliefs for their own ends. About the year 1400, our then Sheik-al-Jabal, seized the power in Tibet for a sect he organized under the name of Geluba. To this day, Lamaism is insidiously impregnated with our doctrines, and so unknowingly the Tibetans do honor to Lord Shaitan."

Chapter III

NEW WONDERS

BY this time the explorer was listening with growing fascination. Was this mad old priest telling the truth or not? Was there in reality this Devil's Cult, and was it about to spread its pernicious tentacles over the world?

Triumphantly the old priest continued his marvelous tale.

"From the very beginning, the Hashishin had determined to bring the world once more to the altars of Shaitan, and to that they bent all their energies. Magic in all its aspects was studied by the Initiate, until now we are adepts at the Black Art. The marvels of the Hindu Fakirs are but child's play to what we can do. My entrance to this cell was but an elementary example of our art.

"Early in my youth, I devoted myself to a close study of the processes of Nature, for through the subjugation of natural forces, rather than through magical processes, did I foresee our chance to bring the world to the worship and gospel of Evil.

"Years of study and experimenting, and the secrets of Nature unrolled before me. I discovered, among other things, how to control and direct the minds of men, to the uttermost ends of the earth." He interrupted himself. "But you shall see for yourself."

With that he clapped his hands. A door slid open silently in a hitherto unbroken wall. Immediately two guards stepped into the cell, and salaamed deeply before the old lama. Powerful brutes they were, features decidedly Mongoloid, with close cropped bullet heads, wicked looking scimitars dangling from the girdles of their maroon colored robes.

A few staccato commands in Tibetan and the guards salaamed again, then placed themselves on either side of the American. "Follow me," beckoned the priest, and glided through the door. Dunton was pushed after him into a long narrow passageway, through which a soft yellowish glow was diffused, though he could discern no source of the illumination. But what was more surprising—the passage was not level—on the contrary, it slanted upwards steeply at a grade of over forty-five degrees for about fifty feet; then spiralled sharply out of sight.

Dunton stared in wonderment. Only with the greatest exertion could they climb that steep slope. "Are we to go that way?" he asked.

"Yes" answered the High Priest, smiling at his captive's puzzled look. "Just another of my inventions. Watch!"

With that, he pressed a button inconspicuously, imbedded in the wall. A faint moaning sound filled the corridor, like the noise of wind in trees. It grew in intensity to a high pitched whine; and suddenly, the American felt himself lifted off his feet. An invisible force was propelling him up through the winding passageway. In front of him soared the lama, and on either side floated a guard. Around and around they spiralled almost interminably. At about two hundred feet up, the whine ceased abruptly, and they were deposited once more on the solid floor. "This must be the top of the tower," thought Dunton.

Above them a door opened noiselessly and a white brilliance flooding the hall caused him to blink for a moment. Then the group rose, again lifted by the mysterious force into a vast circular domed chamber.

The vault of the dome, he saw was fifty feet in height. On its concave surface was painted the huge form of Shaitan—dark, forbidding, goat horned and goat bearded; cloven hoofs protruded from a richly emblazoned robe, and a huge forked tail wound its way over the face of the dome. He was seated on a golden throne; in one hand he grasped firmly a writhing three-headed serpent, each head bearing a golden crown; from the other hand, with outstretched palm downward, jagged lightnings darted and gleamed.

Below his cloven feet were depicted a multitude of figures, human in form and semblance, yet with a hideous aura of evil about them. The indescribable horror of what he saw depicted there, utterly unnerved Dunton. "Good God, can such monstrous things be?" He shuddered, not daring to look again.

THE GIRL AGAIN

WHEN he had somewhat regained his composure, he looked about him. At one side was a huge instrument board, covered with switches, metallic buttons, and tiny lights, flashing intermittently—red, yellow, blue and orange. Next to it was a huge white screen, of the type used in motion picture projection. In front of it, a platform that moved and swayed, was imbedded in the floor. At the far end of the dome, a lacquered partition cut off from observation a sizable area. From within could be heard a confused hum, faint crackles; and the peculiar odor of ozone pervaded the air.

The place was a hive of activity. Men, garmented in the red robes of Tibetan lamas, were streaming in and out of the door leading through the lacquer wall; low voiced orders were given in a tongue unknown to the explorer. Though their dress was Tibetan, these men had not the characteristic Mongol features of the native Tibetans or of his escorting guards. Their faces resembled in aquilinity and high breeding those of the old High Priest. Dunton puzzled over it for a moment. Then the solution came to him. These were Persians, far from their native mountains—relics of an ancient race.

"See you this tower," gloated the lama to Dunton, "it is from here that the world and the nations thereof will be conquered!"

Dunton stared at him skeptically. He had seen enough to convince him of the power of these Hashishin, but this was too fantastic, too unbelievable.

"But how?" he queried, "so far you have not shown me anything. All I see here is just what I could find in any well appointed electrical laboratory. When you boast of subduing the world from this place, that is asking me to believe too much. You will have to explain considerably."

The old man laughed harshly.

"You doubt my power? It would be well for you to believe and bow your head. Harken—!"

The deep tones of a gong interrupted him. As the brazen reverberations died away, the lamas ceased their labors. The priest nodded his head.

"Ah, yes—it is the time for the grand ceremonial." He turned to Dunton. "Tonight we celebrate the Nativity of our Lord Shaitan. You shall witness it. Then you will believe in His omnipotence, and in our powers as the servants of His Most Evil Spirit."

"Take him back to his chamber," he commanded the guards, "and when the ritual commences, bring him into the Garden of Paradise to view the holy rites; but see you guard him closely. If he escapes, your lives shall pay for it Go!"

Once more the guards ranged themselves on either side of Dunton, and moved him to the door of the spiral passageway. One pressed a button, and the three were lifted from the floor, floating swiftly down the twisting corridor back to the oriental chamber. There the explorer was unceremoniously deposited, the walls closed, and he was alone again.

The astounding events of the past hours, together with the even more astounding tale of the Priest of the Devil, whirled through his exhausted mind in a nightmare. And that maiden—was she real too, or some hypnotic vision? He lay back on his cushions to try to straighten out his maze of thoughts—but somehow his mind returned continually to the girl.

Minutes later, a sound roused him, a panel slid open, and there appeared again the girl of his thoughts. There was no doubt about it—she was real, living flesh and blood, bearing food on the crystal tray. Dunton forgot the lama and his strange story—his eyes feasted on her beautiful form. She was even more lovely than at her first appearance.

She felt his gaze upon her, and a rosy flush came to her cheeks. Timidly she looked at him. Was there pity in that glance, was that a tear starting from the blue of her eye? He started forward. Hastily she set down the tray and like a startled fawn, fled from the room. The tapestry swung back into position, and the too ardent explorer was brought up against the blank wall.

INTO THE GARDEN

ABSENTLY he ate the strange foods on the tray. The warm emotions he was experiencing left no room for any other sensations. Who was this white maiden, so English in appearance; what was she doing in this hellish place? How explain the mystery of her presence? And again there occurred to him the vague familiarity of her adorable countenance—somewhere he had seen features resembling hers—a crude likeness, as it were.

But the explorer was soon aroused from his romantic thoughts. Again the two guards stood before him. In his absorption he had not seen or heard their entry. Obediently, he followed them through an aperture that had not been disclosed before. For some time they stumbled through a long, low, dark tunnel, dripping with moisture.

A breath of warm, perfumed air caressed Dunton's cheek, and the next moment he was out in the open. Involuntarily, a cry of delight broke from him. The Garden of Paradise! A veritable Eden! Never in all his adventurous career had he seen anything to compare with the luxuriousness, the indescribable glories of this spot. No wonder the original Fedai—band of sworn assassins—met death gladly, if this was their foretaste of the Paradise to come!

Before him stretched a vast garden, bathed in a golden glow, its source unseen. It was night, and the velvet black sky was studded with brilliants. Patterned clusters of rare and exotic blooms grew in profusion, yielding soft perfumes. And closely intermingled, was the familiarly drowsy incense of hasheesh. Strange, soft music tinkled and strummed from invisible musicians—Oriental and sensuous—conjuring visions of harem beauties.

Finely carved tables were scattered around, bearing heaped fruits—dishes of luscious dates, ripe red pomegranates, golden oranges, and bursting tender figs, flanked by crystal goblets filled with amber liquor. Long low divans were near each table, gorgeously damasked, and strewn with silken scarves and cushions.

On the divans lolled a multitude of men, clad in immaculate white robes. Dunton walked down a flower lined path toward the reclining figures, closely followed by the maroon guards. As he approached the banqueters, they turned lustreless, disinterested eyes on him; then returned lazily to their feasting.

The first glimpse, however, was sufficient to bring Dunton up short with an exclamation of amazement. Of all the surprising sights he had witnessed in this crowded day and night, this was the strangest. These men were not Tibetans, they were not Orientals—they were Caucasians! Here reposed a tall, ruddy faced Englishman; next him sat a bearded Frenchman; on the other side sprawled an olive skinned Italian. All about was a polyglot assemblage—all the races of the earth were represented in this Tibetan garden—Russians, Germans, big boned Swedes, slant-eyed Chinamen, grave Arabs, swarthy Malays, giant Nubians, and even—several unmistakable Americans!

What lent an air of utter unreality to the scene, was the dullness of their eyes, the pallor of their faces, the set looks of automatons. Though they were feasting, there was no sound of revelry or merriment; they ate in silence with stiff mechanical movements; no one spoke to his neighbor, or seemed aware of his presence. There was something sinister about these men. Dunton shivered as though a cold blast had struck his heart. A pall of evil—some mighty enchantment—seemed laid on this company, and for a moment the adventurer was afraid—horribly afraid!

He had no time to investigate further. His warders prodded him, motioning for him to proceed. Down scented paths they moved. A figure darted across an intersecting path. His heart gave a quick leap as he recognized the girl of his dreams. She favored him with a side glance that thrilled him and then disappeared down a shaded lane.

Dunton found himself now on a level grassy area, about a hundred yards across. On one side squatted a row of red-clad lamas, on the other an orange hued row, and facing him from the farther end was stiffly drawn up a platoon of maroon guards, scimitars flashing in their hands. From behind Dunton, came slowly, desultorily, the band of banqueters, who ranged themselves irregularly to complete the fourth side of the open square. Dunton was pushed into a front row, where he was compelled to seat himself, guarded as before.

Chapter IV

THE DANCE OF EVIL

FOR a while there was silence—even the strains of distant music ceased. A hush of anticipation settled on the assembled throng—even the ranks of the polyglots rustled with faintly aroused interest.

The thick, silence was shattered by an ear-splitting blast, then a wailing rushing sound of strange tonalities, unlike anything Dunton had ever heard before. Then through an opening in the farther end of the square, marched slowly and solemnly a weird procession. Ten demons garbed in short blood-red gowns, distorted masks covering their faces, representing monkeys, jackals, vul-tures and pigs; wooden helmets surmounted by red flags on their heads; wristlets, anklets and necklaces of tiny human bones. In one hand each carried a trumpet made of a hollow human thigh bone, on which they blew concerted blasts. In the other, each brandished the *purbu*, a dagger-like weapon. From each girdle hung an apron of tanned human skin.

Dunton's flesh prickled with horror, but he could not remove his eyes from the diabolic scene. He watched with a sickening fascination.

The demons marched into the center of the square, where they halted in line, blowing a final blast on their frightful trumpets.

There followed them a group of graveyard ghouls, dressed as skeletons; eight monkey masks, clad in red and armed with bows, accompanied by eight devil's wives. They carried tiny drums, made of human skulls, over which were spread human skins. The drum sticks were small snakes, immobile when used to strike the drums, at other times they arched and wriggled rhythmically in the air.

The groups ranged themselves in serried rows on the fields, and commenced a high-pitched blood-curdling chant to the accompaniment of the trumpets and drums.

The chant rose to a wail as six masked demons stepped slowly into the field bearing on their shoulders a silken shield. Seated crosslegged thereon was the figure of a girl, robed in purest white, hands outstretched, head thrown back.

Dunton jumped to his feet in incredulous horror. The girl again! Here among these fiends! With a shout he sprang forward. Flaming anger blurred his vision.

He had only one idea—to scatter those loathsome demons and rescue her. After that, he neither knew nor cared what would happen.

But the burly guards threw themselves upon him, and bore him to the ground. He struggled in their iron grips, until finally the point of a scimitar prodded into his side brought him to his senses. It was the veriest madness, he realized. He must wait until a more favorable occasion arose. Quietly he sat between his scowling captors, arms pinioned, inwardly raging.

The girl-goddess was seemingly unaware of the commotion she had aroused. As she was borne around the grassy plain her face was set and rigid, her eyes gazed straight ahead with a fixed hypnotic stare.

the chant increased in volume. Eight bird-masked demons bore aloft a low throne of gold, on which was seated the High Priest of Shaitan. He was clad in a richly embroidered robe, inset with precious stones. In one hand he carried a trident, on the prongs of which were impaled three human heads, and in the other a purbu, ruby encrusted.

A MADDENING SCENE

THE chant ceased. A pause. Then the very heavens were split with a hideous clamor. In came ten devils, horned, hoofed, tailed, and ringleted with human bones, bearing aloft a high throne, dazzling with the sparkle of innumerable gems. Seated thereon was a huge figure—Shaitan himself—the incarnation of pure Evil. A necklace dangled to its breast—of freshly torn, bleeding human hearts! A huge cobra writhed and twisted in its clammy grip. Against his better judgment, against his very reason, Dunton knew the malign thing to be alive.

Shaitan was placed in the center of the field. On the right hand his High Priest was set at a respectful distance; on his left the girl-goddess.

Dunton clenched his hands until the finger nails pierced his palms, but made no outward sign. God in heaven! What could he do? He coldly determined, that at the first sign of any harm to the girl, he would seize a scimitar from an unsuspecting guard, and fling himself upon those devils, slaying until the end. He had no illusions about that end, but strangely, he felt no qualms; a fierce elation buoyed him. The lust of battle sang in his veins.

A red lama arose, and encircled the figure of Shaitan, strewing a powder on the ground as he did so. Immediately a ring of flame sprang up. Then he walked in a great circle enclosing all three, strewing powder and muttering an unintelligible incantation. Another flaming circle, concentric with the lesser one, leapt into being. "This is a scene out of Hell," thought Dunton.

Then commenced a slow rolling of the drums. The animal masks came forward, threw themselves upon the ground grovelling before the Satanic image, and then arose. They commenced a slow weaving dance, in which group by group, the whole host of demons joined, until they completely surrounded the fiery circle. A weird unearthly chant rose and fell; the trumpets sounded. Slowly at first, then faster and faster danced the demonic crew. Louder and louder shrieked the trumpets, more and more rapidly beat the drums, higher and higher rose the chant, until finally, the circle of dancers ran and spun and whirled with inconceivable rapidity, and the frightful noise reached an unbearable pitch. The sweetish odor of hasheesh impregnated the air. Dunton felt his senses swooning—the leaping figures blurred before him.

He shook his head to clear his brain, and looked again. What was this? The circling demons were rising from the ground, spinning and weaving. Higher and higher into the air they rose—robes, masks, ornaments in one vast whirlpool of spinning color. From the whirling mass dropped the graveyard ghouls, trailing spectral light. As they touched the earth, the ground yawned, and they sank out of sight. A moment later, they popped up into the air to join the spinning crew. With lightning rapidity they rose and fell, rose and fell, so that the air was full of shooting figures, and the airy crew whirled and spun, dancing on nothing. Dunton felt his mind giving way—the whole phantasmagoria became a huge kaleidoscope of demoniac figures and dazzling colors. Huger and huger it grew—until it exploded in a shower of sparks like a great Roman candle!

Chapter V

THE GREAT THREAT!

WHEN Dunton came to, a deathly quiet prevailed. The masked demons were gone, vanished without a trace; only the flaming rings and the three throned figures they enclosed reminded the explorer that the whole had not been a nightmare.

The High Priest was speaking. Slowly he salaamed to the bestial figure of Shaitan, then straightened.

"Hashishin, initiates, brethren of our holy faith! All is in readiness. Tomorrow, as the sun gilds the top of yonder mountain, the earth and its inhabitants shall bow in worship of Most High Shaitan, Lord of the Nether Lands, and of all that creep, or swim, or fly. Once more shall his ancient majesty be renewed, and that God who wrested dominion from him, shall retreat in terror to the outer bounds of space! For fifty years I toiled in secret, and now, through the grace of Shaitan, the means have been perfected. See our great Tower,"—and he pointed.

Dunton turned around, and saw, a half mile to the rear, the huge alabaster Tower rearing its white height above the fragrant gardens. It swam in the golden glow, surmounted by the huge metallic ball. Innumerable little flashes of white light played over its surface.

"From yonder Tower," the Priest of Evil exulted, "and from its brother Towers, at dawn shall flash the emanations that shall bend the proud and stiff necked people to our will—slaves to do our bidding and the bidding of our Lord!"

Was it a fantasy, or did the American actually see the gleam of satisfaction in Shaitan's terrible eyes, and the slight nodding of the head?

"And I—" here the old man cast a haughty glance at the assemblage, "and I shall be the Vicar of our Lord on earth, not to be disobeyed on penalty of immediate extinction."

"And you—my brethren," he turned to the red lamas, "shall once more resume the Ministry of Evil, and tend the altars and the sacrificial offerings. The burnt flesh shall be as incense to your senses."

"Ho! slaves!" he shouted in a terrible voice, and shook his trident.

The alien company surrounding Dunton stirred and rose. With the drugged movements of somnambulists they moved forward, eyes fixed and staring.

"Heavens, how uncanny they are!" thought the explorer, with mingled feelings of pity and repulsion, "they look as though their souls have been removed, and only the tenantless bodies remained."

The old man gazed on them with hideous glee.

"These wretched things were brought here from the four corners of the globe to do our will. Already have they been subjected to the secret emanations. Tonight they shall be transported back to their native lands, and to-morrow when our spells are cast like nets over the earth, they shall raise their voices like roaring bulls, and lead the stricken hordes to the altars of Shaitan, now set up in secret places. When their task is done, they shall furnish the first bloody sacrifice to appease the nostrils of our Lord."

Again it seemed to Dunton's fascinated vision that the idol leered at him. His brain reeled with the horror of it all, but he was worse than helpless. "God," he prayed inwardly, "grant me the means to rid the earth of this nightmare crew."

The Priest rose from his throne, and pointed the trident at the glowing ball atop the Tower. Throwing back his head, he intoned an incantation. The flickering lights grew in intensity. Then the ball began to rotate, throwing out innumerable streamers of light. Like huge searchlights they swept the heavens. Suddenly they swooped down to earth, and to Dunton's amazement, each ray fastened on one of the slaves, and slid up into space again, with the man dangling at its tip. The rays whirled to the four points of the compass; the unfortunate men were shot along the beams in all directions. Faster—faster they moved; huge birds that grew ever smaller with the speed of their flight. Then they passed over the surrounding mountain walls, and vanished.

For the first time in his life, the brave adventurer felt blind panic sweep through him. With a mighty effort, he crushed down the hysteria within him, and turned to the three figures.

Even as he turned, he caught a glimpse of the girl he loved fading out into thin mist, leaving a blank shield to his startled view. An exclamation rose to his lips, and he started to his feet. But the vigilant guards pinioned him before the movement was completed.

THE PRIEST CONFESSES

A RAY of light darted down to the throne of the High Priest. The ancient one seated himself on the broad beam, and promptly floated up the shining path, up to the Tower dome, that opened to receive its Master.

The throne of Shaitan rose slowly and perpendicularly into the air. A green radiance enveloped the ghastly figure. Upward it flew, until it seemed a tiny ball of green fire, and then it mingled indistinguishably with the stars.

The red lamas arose, and vanished into the maze of paths. Dunton was alone with his escort. For a moment, the wild hope of a sudden dash for liberty rose in his bosom, but the point of a scimitar pricking his side convinced him the time was not yet.

"What do you want now?" he spoke angrily.

The impassive Oriental gestured for him to move ahead, significantly twirling his weapon. Back to the Tower they went. The smooth white wall opened at their approach, and they stepped into what seemed the bottom of a deep well. From the orifice, high overhead, came a faint gleam. Even as they strode to the center, they were lifted straight up. Up they floated, and out of the opening into

a small room. Through a door, the Mongols pushed the American, and once more he found himself in the interior of the dome.

There sat Sheik-al-Jabal, attired in the yellow lama's robe in which Dunton had first encountered him—as though the whole devil's scene in the garden had been a dream. This time the lama was alone!

Again Dunton looked about the vast hall, lighted now with a green glow that lent to all its apparatus a spectral appearance. The buzz of activity was absent, only the lama was there in the wide circle of this domed chamber. The old Assassin was seated directly before the white screen on an ebony throne, over whose surface writhed all the evil forms he had but now beheld.

The American made a quick movement forward as if to attack the wizened Disciple of Evil. But the lama raised his hand. "Stop! You should know my power by now. Stand there, before me on that platform."

Dunton reluctantly obeyed. As he stepped on the platform its swaying ceased, but he could feel beneath his feet a steady vibration as of some powerful electric force barely held in check.

"Hearken!" Satan's High Priest began, "and ponder carefully. You have seen our holy ritual. You have witnessed the mystic wonders at my command. You have beheld the coming of our Lord Shaitan. You know now how I, his humble servant, can summon and command men of every race and clime. This mighty power is yours to take and wield, if you but say the word. Say but that you are convinced, bow down in subjection to our Lord Shaitan, and while I live you shall be my sword and my hand. Join our mighty sect and when Shaitan at last deems me worthy of rest, you shall follow me as his vicar on earth. You shall be the Sheik-al-Jabal of a world remade for Evil. With but a single word you can take for your own the earth and the fulness thereof. Deny Shaitan now, and you shall die the Death of a Thousand Needles; the death so horrible that even Shaitan himself shudders at the very thought."

The American drew himself up proudly. "Old man," he said, "what superstitious Mongol do you think you have here, that you would have me believe these mummeries to be occult power? You have great power but the wonders you have shown me come not from any supernatural cause, but from a mastery of natural forces. If you would have me cast my lot with you, cast aside this puppet play of devil worship in which neither I nor you believe. Show me the inner workings of these marvels, and then, perhaps, I shall accede to your demand."

Again an involuntary gleam of admiration flitted across the seamed and evil visage.

"So be it. I see it is useless to pretend any further with you. I believe no more in Shaitan than in any other God. But the fiction had its uses." He arose and descended from the ebony throne. "Come with me behind the screen and you shall see the source of my power; the great machine with which I shall sway the minds of all men to my will." He led the way through the door in the lacquered screen, and Dunton followed.

THE SECRET OF POWER

AT the threshold the explorer halted in amazement. The entire space, almost half the vast circle of the hemisphere, was filled with a maze of glittering apparatus on a giant scale. Vast coils of gleaming copper to which ran cables

thicker than a man's arm. Tubes ten feet high, with elements like steel bridge-structures. Circular rheostats like the twenty-foot constrictors of the Amazonian wilds. Variable condensers with Brob-dignagian plates. It was as though two natives of Gulliver's Lilliput had wandered into the interior of a complex modern radio set.

Gradually, the chaotic mass of apparatus took on some order to Dunton's bewildered gaze. There appeared to be two distinct groups; to each of which ran huge conductors from a gigantic distributor board at one end of the space, on which the gleaming bus-bars bulked like copper girders. Each apparatus was fitted with a motor to actuate its members. In the opposite end of the space a motor-generator transformer hummed.

Dunton's attention focussed on the great tubes, only one of which showed by its light that it was active. They were like, yet unlike, the familiar radio tubes he had so often handled.

The priest was speaking: "After long nights of study I wrested from Nature the Secrets which here you see made incarnate. There are only two essential discoveries which are the basis of my power. The first is this.

"As you must know, the flashing to and fro of impulses in the nerve system of the human frame bears a marked similarity to the shuttling of power, light and sound over electric conductors. My researches revealed to me that the analogy is a true one—that from brain through nerve to muscle, from sense organ through nerve to brain, reports and commands flash as flash the impulses of electrical vibrations to and fro over the network of a modern city. The only real difference is in the character of the vibration. I found the peculiar frequency, and then it was a simple matter to construct apparatus to reproduce it. Once this was done, the next step followed—that by impinging a beam of my vibrator on any individual, or by spreading a fan of these radiations over a group or a nation, I could control to a limited extent their thoughts or nervous processes. I found that I could make them evil or good, throw them into a panic of fear, make them belligerent and warlike, or spread a flame of revolt and anarchy through a state or a nation. It was my experimentation which caused the revolution in Russia, the Civil War in China, the wave of murder and crime now sweeping your own country.

"My next problem was one of transportation. When I was ready to grasp the mastery of the world, I needed to be able to bring here and send back to their posts, almost instantaneously, these chosen men. Many more years of study and thought, and I solved that problem. I was led to consider the nature of gravitation; the attraction of one body for another. Here too I found an analogy to a known science, that of electro-magnetism. Gravity, I found, was a magnetism akin to, but not quite the same as, electro-magnetism. Following out the analogy, I found that I could cause the earth to repel rather than attract an individual. I also became able to regulate the strength of the repulsion, i.e., the height to which an individual would levitate.

"Then I evolved a method by which I could make that person fly at any speed I willed to this Tower. By a mere reversal of the process, naturally I could send my subjects to anywhere on earth I willed.

"This second discovery of mine had minor uses. By a system of crossing and intersecting beams of gravito-magnetic force I could erect an invisible and impalpable screen of repulsion anywhere I chose, a screen through which nothing, whether bullet or being, could pass." A grim smile appeared on the

lama's visage. "You have good reason, I believe, to appreciate the efficacy of that device. The electric energy I need is produced in a giant powerhouse operated by a thousand-foot waterfall about ten miles distant."

Chapter VI

TRAPPED!

DUNTON thought of the battle in the gorge, and grinned. "So that's how it was done. Pretty useful trick, I'll say."

"I need not" the lama resumed, "weary you further. You have guessed at the secrets of some of my more theatrical effects. Mass-hypnotism, stereopticon, and other childish but useful devices which have come down through the ages; utilized by the fakirs of India, and the tricksters of every land to mystify and delude the credulous."

He turned and led the way to the massive control board in the outer room. "Here is the brain of my network of control. I early found that each race had a slightly different range of nerve-vibration, and so I established seven Towers, six of them smaller replicas of this, in seven lands. Arabia, Manchuria, Russia, Mexico, Brazil, and Abyssinia, each have a Tower of Evil. The nerve-radiations emanating from here are slightly transformed and re-broadcast for the races dominant in the territory roundabout. These six switches, or this master switch alternatively, control this process. To-morrow at dawn, when I swing down this switch, my dreams will at last come true. After long years I shall control the world. Rebellion and anarchy in every land will overthrow the prating womanish rulers, and set up my rule instead.

"My chosen slaves, whom you saw today, will dominate each his land in fealty to me. Seven days will suffice to make the great change. Then will I reverse this other master switch, and my deputies will flock back to these holy precincts. Shaitan will come again, and we shall celebrate our triumph.

"With you it rests, whether you will celebrate that triumph with me, or die in dreadful agony. Stand now again on the audience platform while I ascend my throne. Ponder well your answer, then I shall receive it. The night grows late and I am weary. I must need rest for tomorrow's work."

Dunton stepped again on the platform that ceased its swaying, and faced the throne, to which the aged lama had again ascended. The explorer's head was in a whirl. He knew now that a very real, a very terrible danger menaced the unsuspecting world. He knew too, that only he could save civilization from a holocaust of evil. This mad priest would keep his word to the very letter. Open defiance could only be a futile gesture. What then? He had better pretend to comply, pretend to be convinced. Then tomorrow, as trusted aide of this madman, he would watch his chance.

"Yes, that's it," he thought, "go slow. Lull him into unwariness, then I'll get my two hands around that skinny throat, and—"

"Great Priest," he raised his hand in salutation, "I am convinced. Your power, is greater far than any man has yet attained. I shall be glad to join and work with you. From now on I am yours to command!"

The old priest's reception of this speech, which seemed to be so complete a victory for him, was astounding. His face grew livid, his claw-hands were extended in trembling rage. "Liar!" he shouted, "fool! Do you dare to mock me? Do you dream to deceive me? Look behind you, fool!"

Dunton, in consternation, whirled about. On the screen behind him he saw—himself, with his hands clasped about the throat of the lama. Dumbfounded, he stepped back—as he left the platform the screen went blank.

"Fool!" the old man was still shrieking, "did you think I would bare to you all my secrets? That platform, that screen, form my thought reading device. Every secret thought of him who stands there is pictured in vivid pantomime on that screen. And you thought to deceive me!"

Laughter filled the great hemisphere. The lama clapped his hands. Two maroon guards rushed in and seized the American. "Take him away, he dies to-morrow."

"No!—wait, John Dunton, I have changed my mind. You shall die the slow Death of a Thousand Needles. To the lowest dungeon with him, to await his end."

Struggling vainly, the American was unceremoniously pushed to the well, and floated down to the main hall. There, one of the guards pressed another button, and a black, seemingly bottomless pit yawned in front of him. Into this he was pushed. As he staggered over the verge, he caught a fleeting glimpse of the girl just entering the hall. A glimpse of horror depicted on her beautiful face—and he was precipitated into the yawning pit. Down—down into emptiness...

THE DEATH OF A THOUSAND NEEDLES

FOR what seemed an interminable distance he fell, and just as his nerves were snapping from the imminent crash, his flight was suddenly checked and cushioned, and he was deposited slowly on the ground.

"Well, this looks like the old man means business," Dunton muttered, as he looked about the cell in which he found himself. A dim phosphorescence came from the decaying filth about, and revealed a noisome chamber, whose rough stone walls were black with shiny moisture, and whose floor was covered with rotting debris. Walls and floors were alive with pale crawling creatures of decay.

"God, I'd like to have that mad apostle of evil at my pistol's end!" What a hell the world will be when he is master of it!"

Back and forth, back and forth he paced, tramping a path through the foul ordure. One wild scheme for escape after another passed through his tortured brain, only to be despairingly rejected as their utter futility was quickly revealed. Black despair oppressed him. But all his planning, all his despair, could not keep his thoughts from returning always to the girl, the beautiful jewel in this foul setting.

And so, the long night through, the prisoner paced back and forth in his narrow cell. Sleep was an impossibility, what with the filth of the dungeon and the torturings of his reeling brain. The silence was broken only by the squidge, squidge of Dunton's steps through the slime.

What seemed many hours dragged slowly past. Then, startlingly, the American heard a sharp grating as of stone on stone behind him. Fists clenched, the American whirled. But no human antagonist met his startled eye.

Instead from the walls now protruded long needles, gleaming sinister. "The Death of a Thousand Needles." The mad lama's phrase flashed into his mind. A thousand needles indeed, aye, more than a thousand surrounded him on every hand!

But wait. No need for panic. As long as he remained away from the bristling walls he was safe. Did the old man expect him to rush headlong on the point? He laughed aloud in relief.

Again the grating of stone upon stone smote his ears. What was this? A moment ago there had been an irregular smear at the base of the wall before him. It was gone! From wall to wall his glance darted. The space seemed smaller. Or did his eyes deceive him. Swiftly he paced the distance. A long moment he waited, while the ominous rasping continued. Again he measured the distance between the imprisoning walls. An icy hand closed about his heart. They were closer together! Slowly, imperceptibly, the bristling ranks of needles were approaching each other. Inexorably a horrible death, was closing in on him.

Then indeed, Dunton gave up all hope! "The devil, the inhuman monster! Even the Inquisition had no horror such as this. Well, I'll not stand here quiet to be slowly impaled. When those needles begin to sting me I'll thrust myself upon them and make a quick end of it. I'll not give him the satisfaction of witnessing my lingering agonies."

Grimly the American took his stand, arms folded, in the centre of the cell. Slowly, oh so slowly, the needle points approached. Long minutes passed.

At last the end was at hand. Already some of the fatal points were entering the doomed man's clothing. He closed his eyes and began a last prayer to the God of his fathers. He was resigned. Suddenly the pressure relaxed—a breath of moving air fanned him. He opened his eyes. Miracle of miracles, the walls were swiftly retreating. The needles had disappeared. In a moment all was as before.

Again he heard stone grating on stone. "What, again. Was the release merely a trick to make the torture more lingering?" A black oblong showed in the wall. "Hush" a soft voice came to his ears.

Dunton relaxed. Dimly he descried in the black rectangle the form of the beautiful girl who had so haunted his thoughts.

"Here, quickly, take this," and to his astonishment he found in his hand his beloved automatic.

"Now I feel like a man again! But how in the name of all that's good were you able to make those damnable walls recede? And why have you done this for me? Who are you?"—a thousand questions tumbled from his lips.

"Hush! softly! or we both die the Death. Should he find us here he will condemn us both to eternity in Hell."

LEILA'S DREAM

"I AM called Leila," the soft voice went on in low voiced murmuring. "I am the foster daughter of the great lama, and I serve him in his noble work. Who my own people are, I know not. Sometimes I dream—but this is not the time for that. I have lived here many years, and he has taught me many things—the motions of the moon and the stars, and the greater knowledge that great Shaitan has vouchsafed only to him. He has taught me the languages of all the

earth so that when the great day comes I might aid him, the Vicar of Shaitan on earth, to rule wisely—that the greatest evil might come to His people.

"Always have I prayed to Shaitan that the day might come soon. Never have I doubted the true faith. Till—woe is me!—till you came, fair skinned as I. When I first beheld you something within me drew towards you, somehow I felt a kinship with you. Somehow, then, doubt crept into my mind, doubt of Shaitan and of His teachings. I fought against it, I had nigh won the fight, till I saw them drag you straggling to this foul dungeon. Then I knew, John Dunton, that he was wrong, that Evil was not the great principle, I knew that God was the greater. All this I knew, John Dunton, because—" A flush made more beautiful that flowerlike cheek—"because—"

"Because you love me," Dunton burst forth, "and I love you, my dearest!" And in that cell the two were enfolded in each other's arms.

A long minute they remained thus; their horrible surroundings forgotten. Then, lingeringly they parted, and Leila spoke again.

"It was the best of luck, my dear one, that you were put in this, the cell of a Thousand Needles. Many years ago I found a secret passage in the walls, a passage which was unknown even to him, and I traced it to this cell. There is a spring that causes the walls to withdraw. There is another spring which moves aside one of the great rocks that form the wall.

"I waited till the small hours of the morning, then I stole to where they had placed the clothes in which you were brought. I found your weapon, then I made my way to the entrance of the secret passage, just below the great hall, within the station of the outer guard, and came here, to you!"

"My brave, my dear Leila! Thanks only to you am I still alive. But enough of this, we have work to do—my God, the opening has shut itself."

Aghast, the two sprang to the wall where Leila had appeared. It was true. While they had forgotten the world in their rapture, something had moved the great stone and barred the exit. Frantically they pulled and pushed at the great rock, but it was immovable. Then Dunton's usual calmness returned.

"Think a moment, dearest. This device must be planned along the lines of the other secret panels in the tower. How do they work?"

"You are right, there must be some marks which indicate the proper places to press the hidden springs. But it is too dark to see them."

"Then let us wait for the morning. There seems to be a window way up on that wall. See there, where that dark circle breaks the phosphorescent glow. Perhaps, when the sun rises there will be light enough to see the marks."

"The waiting will not be too long, together."

Dunton slipped off the jeweled robe which he still wore and spread it in a corner. "Come, dear, sit here with me and tell me of the dreams of which you referred. Since first I set eyes on your dear face I have been haunted by some strange familiarity in your features. Perhaps your dreams will give some clue as to who you are."

Leila nestled close against her stalwart lover, and began:

"These dreams of mine are not at all vivid. They are confused and shadowy, but they come back again and again. I seem to be living in a small white house. I have many toys, and I am very happy. There are yellow skinned people about; they sweep and clean. One, a woman, does not sweep and clean, but she is always near me.

"There is another woman, not yellow but white. She seems very dear to me. When I see her in my dreams my heart aches, and an unbearable yearning comes over me.

"There are white men too, sometimes many of them tramp about. They are dressed in beautiful red clothes. Sometimes they give me shiny buttons to play with. At other times there is just one white man in a red coat He too seems very dear to me. I kiss him, and he throws me up in the air, and laughs.

"But the dream I have oftenest is not pleasant. Time and again I have waked up screaming from its terrors. It is night, and I seem to be awakened by a terrible scream. There are muffled thumpings as of many men rushing about softly. Then my door opens and two dark men run in. One of them holds a cloth in his hand which he throws over my head. There is a sweetish smell—then I wake up."

"By the seven stars, I've got it!" Dunton sat up straight in his excitement. "I know who you are. Great guns, what a coincidence! I know whom you remind me of, now. Major Blakely! You're his daughter, stolen fifteen years ago!

Swiftly he told her of the tale he had heard in the Shanghai Club. Wide-eyed Leila drank in the tale. "Then I'm an Englishwoman. And that old man is planning to ruin my own people. John, we must save them. Oh, if it were only light so that I could see how to get out of here. But tell me all about my father, and my country."

THE FATEFUL HOUR

FOR a long time Dunton talked to the girl in his arms, till he saw her pretty head droop and her blue eyes veiled in sleep. Gently he held her, until he too dozed off, exhausted by the stirring emotions of that fateful day.

His adventurous years had habituated Dunton to awakening at any prearranged time, and so, just as a faint paling of the black aperture in the wall told of the near approach of dawn, his eyes opened. He waited yet a moment, till the blackness of the cell had a little lightened; then awakened his new found sweetheart with a kiss.

"Come dear, wake up! We must work quickly. The old man set sunrise as the hour when he will throw the switch. We must get to him before that."

Leila sprang up, and the two ran to the wall through which she had entered. "It should be just about here," the girl murmured. "You see this depression is too regular in shape to be accidental. Here is another, there should be a third so that the three make a triangle—here it is. Now to find the right combination!"

A moment of tentative pressings—then the great rock swung aside. Beyond Dunton glimpsed the beginning of a steep staircase of stone, shiny with the moist drippings of ages. Swiftly Leila closed it.

"There's some of the old devil's magic for him to ponder over," Dunton laughed grimly. "Now, keep behind me and direct me by touching my back—left, right, and the small of my back for stop. Don't talk!"

Guided thus, the explorer and the long-lost English girl hastened silently upward. The staircase seemed interminable as the pressing need for haste goaded them. At last Dunton felt the signal to halt.

They listened. Not a sound penetrated to them. In a barely perceptible whisper Dunton directed. "Open the door, then jump aside. When I have gone

out, close it again, and you stay here till I knock six times on the wall—three slow, three fast.

A rectangle of opalescent light appeared. Beyond was the spiral slope that first had brought the American to the dome. Just above him a maroon guard was floating upward.

Dunton stepped out onto the slope. At once he felt the levitating force grip him. He floated on and up.

Almost at once the summit of the slope was reached. As the attraction was released momentarily for the opening of the trap above, Dunton viciously struck the guard's head with his clubbed automatic. Then immediately the explorer ripped off the now unconscious Mongol's maroon robe and hat, and donned them in mid-air as he rose to pass into the great hemisphere above.

A scene of great activity burst on Dunton as he reached the floor of his objective. A horde of the lama's minions were rushing about in the ordered confusion of an enormous enterprise. A hum slowly rising in pitch told of the starting of the huge generator. The screen was gone, and the great tubes were beginning to glow cherry red as the electrical current commenced to heat their filaments.

Dunton merged himself with the busy throng till he reached the rear of the thought transference screen; then crouched there, securely hidden. To his delight, he found that the screen was a network of fine wire, and thus, from his dark vantage point the explorer could see every corner of the brilliantly lighted room, himself unseen. Before him Shaitan's High Priest was seated on his throne, listening to reports and dispatching orders through a constant stream of messengers.

A deep-toned gong reverberated through the space. The old lama arose as a sudden paralysis seized the scurrying crowd. The priest raised his right hand high, and spoke:

"All is now prepared. In a moment the sun's rays will gild the topmost peaks of the mountains, and the Shaitan's Day will dawn. I would be alone in the hour of His triumph, alone with Shaitan. Ye have done well, ye faithful servants of the true Master of the World. Go ye now each to his quarters, and await my call. When next ye behold me ye shall have received your reward."

BEHIND THE WOMAN

AS the crowded space cleared, Dunton gasped with horror. Leila, whom he thought safely hidden in the secret passage, was making her way through the retreating mob to the lama's throne. The priest saw her. "What do you here, maiden? Have you not heard my command?"

"Father," the clear voice replied, "think you that I could be any other where at this moment. Despite your command or that of any other one, my place is here."

Dunton realized that the speech was for his ears. In spite of his distress he glowed with pride at her desire to be at his side in the hour of danger.

"So be it! I had not thought of thee, but I am indeed glad that thou art here. For look you, those fools who have labored here, and whose usefulness to Shaitan and to me is now at an end will indeed receive their reward ere they again behold me. Their quarters are filled with a most deadly gas, and their

next meeting with me will be in Shaitan's realm. Silence now, while I invoke Him to witness His triumph."

The old man strode to the center of the room, raised his arms to the image of his Master on the dome overhead, and intoned a prayer.

"O Lord of Evil, great Shaitan, Thy humble servant brings thee now the great gift which he so long ago vowed to make Thee. The whole world and all its people I lay at thy feet, asking no reward, content but that Thou shall be glorified. I invoke that Thou accept this my offering!"

Did Dunton dream it, or did an unholy expression of evil triumph illumine the face of the fiend painted on the dome?

"And now to throw the master switch," the priest turned toward the great board.

"Stop!" Dunton had leaped from his hiding place with his menacing automatic outthrust. "Stop, or I shoot!"

The startled priest stared incredulously at the sudden apparition. A moment of realization, then with a snarl of baffled rage he turned. With uncanny swiftness he seized Leila and swung her before him as a living shield. Then only he spoke—

"So, you think to defeat me in the very instant of realization. Shoot then, but your woman's God will not let you shoot a woman even in his defense." With this he commenced backing slowly toward the switch which would debase the globe.

Dunton was aghast. He must choose between killing his beloved and the ruin of the world. Whitefaced he tried to force his reeling brain to make the awful decision. But Leila was quiescent. Frantically she beat and clawed at the old man's face, frenziedly she kicked and struggled. That slight form seemed to be invested with a strength almost equal to the madman's own. He reeled and staggered. Then with a final surge of desperate force she broke loose from the lama's clutch—he fell with her fierce thrust. But as he fell, he reached for the switch—his hands grasped—not the switch but two huge terminals. A scream of agony—a blinding flash—a smell of burnt flesh—and an inert body dropped to the floor.

When the two saviors of the world somewhat recovered from the terrific strain of that scene, and determined that the arch-enemy was indeed dead, Dunton seized a small ebony chair and turned toward the intricate maze of apparatus. Leila detained him.

"What are you going to do, dear?"

"Smash up every bit of the hellish devices so that never again can anyone use them to menace civilization. I want to destroy every vestige of that product of distorted genius, and then forget even the little I know of its working!"

"But wait just a minute, John. Think first of those poor slaves whom we saw last night. They are still under the spell. If you destroy the apparatus now, they will remain forever in its power. Why not bring them back here first and release them?"

"You are right, dear heart. And now that I stop to think, only one of the old devil's inventions is essentially evil. It would be a shame to destroy that marvelous transportation device—that at least is of tremendous value.

"Now let me see, there are the keys which will bring back those poor lost souls. 'Turn this way'—he said." And Dunton operated the switches he had pointed out.

"Now let's get down into the garden. Good clean air will be most welcome after that cell, and all we have gone through in this horrible place."

Again they entered the gorgeous garden. Beauty had been there before, but an evil beauty. Now the bright morning sun illumined a flowery fairyland whose fresh colors bespoke the beauty of Nature's loveliness.

"Look there, dear—they are coming."

Over the snowy caps of the towering peaks that rimmed the gardens, now appeared, one after another, what seemed huge birds. High in that illimitable blue they soared, then in great swooping spirals they descended. From every point of the compass they came, till the garden was again peopled with a throng of men of every race. Again they walked the garden with their lack-lustre eyes.

RELEASED!

WHEN the sky was clear again, Dunton ascended again to the great hall. He found a sliding panel through which he could see the garden.

"How am I going to release them?" he pondered. He walked over to the tubes which he knew produced the nerve-vibration. Only two were glowing, the same two which had been lit when first he had beheld them.

"Hm, perhaps these control the vibrations. I'll chance it!" Picking up the ebony chair he had intended to use before, he sent it crashing through the glass of the two tubes. Then he leaped back to his lookout. Far below him he could see the crowd of men. But no longer were they moving about aimlessly, mechanically. Most were still, as if in bewilderment, but even from that great height the American could determine that there was no mechanical stiffness about the gestures of those who were not still.

Hastily he descended to the garden. It was true. Bewildered, wondering where they were and how they had been brought there, the erstwhile robots were human once again!

Little remains to be told. After the explanation of what had occurred to them had finally penetrated the astounded minds of the freed ones, they aided Dunton with a will in obliterating that part of the lama's apparatus which produced and controlled the nerve-vibrations. It was unanimously decided that the unbelievable tale should not be told to the world, and it was also voted that the transportation rays be not used until their operation had been thoroughly studied by qualified scientists.

The experience of the explorer stood all in good stead in organizing and conducting the return to civilization. Major Blakely's astonished joy at the recovery of his long-lost daughter need not be described, as need not the simple ceremony which united the American explorer and the maiden.

One incident is, however, worthy of mention. As the long cavalcade struggled over the summit of a pass through the mountains guarding the gardens of the Tower of Evil, John and Leila intoned the immemorial phrase which every Tibetan voices as he reaches the highest point of his journey from one side of a mountain range to the other. Never had that phrase been more appropriate:—

"Lha Gvalo! De Tamche Pham."

(The Gods win! The demons are defeated!)



(2-1) An intoxicating Indian drug either drunk or inhaled like opium.