

Exiles From Below

By Neil R. Jones

Chapter 1 – The Plunge

Professor Jameson clung more tightly to his precarious perch on the sloping mountainside. His metal tentacles curled about treacherous knobs of slippery rock. His mechanical eyes circling the coned metal head regarding Gloph, the intelligent space creature who, too, fought for his life against the face of the looming peak. Around them shone the stars of space, and several little moons moved visibly in ever-changing phases. Out of the darkness, a blazing sun threw sharp-etched shadows all about them. Far beneath them, they saw the haze of the planet's low-lying, dense atmosphere up out of which the towering mountains reached beyond and into space, a bleak region, a veritable top of the world, where only Gloph and his species lived. The space ship of the Zoromes was gone. It had fallen when a part of the mountain peak had slid away. Weathering had weakened the mountain peak beneath the atmosphere line. The professor remembered 65G-849 remarking about this characteristic as they had approached and examined the strange world from out in space.

"There is no weathering on the mountain tops in space, other than what results from temperature changes when the sun shines," 65G-849 had assured his fellow Zoromes. "It is different, however, below the atmosphere line. Because of the presence of atmosphere and moisture, a good many of the mountain peaks are undermined around the edges."

Besides the space ship and those inside it, the five machine men who had come out of the space ship with the professor to talk with friendly space creatures had gone hurtling to their doom. The professor had seen 6W-438, 119M-5, 29G-75, 777Y-46 and 7H-88 grab frantically for something to stay their plunge. Only the professor and 119M-5 had been successful in gaining a hold, and 119M-5's respite had been but a brief one. The machine man's hold on the slippery surface had been even more insecure than the professor's 119M-5 had shot by the professor, radiating a departing farewell.

Among the group of space creatures accompanying the machine men, all had fallen, too, except Gloph, who with the professor and 119M-5 had been farthest from the edge of the great break. Before the catastrophe, the space creatures had formed a funeral cortege in the performance of strange rites for the two of their dead, and the machine men had watched. At the climax of the rites, it was the custom, the machine men had learned, to hurl the two dead bodies off the precipice and into the atmospheric sea far below. It was never just one. There always had to be two.

Professor Jameson looked across at Gloph and envied the latter's soft, shaggy feet which gave him some measure of support in avoiding the inevitable. "Are you all right?" he radiated. "For the moment", the long, thin creature with the luminous eyes formed the thought. "But I can get nowhere from here." He gazed up helplessly at the steep slope they were on.

His four long arms clung to scanty holds on the steep face of the mountain; four shaggy hooves settled against uneven spots on the slippery rock, while the long, gray body hugged the wall closely.

"We can't get up farther", the machine man told him. "If we could only climb down. It would be easier to climb if we were below the atmosphere line."

"I could not live very long down there, even if we did", said Gloph. "I do not know why, but it is so". "Have you ever been down there?" Professor Jameson asked. "Yes-twice. Once, I was quite young and venturesome. I almost did not come back, and if had not been for others who came in search of me, I would have died".

"What happened?"

"I became very weak. I felt death come very close. I lost my senses on the way back up and did not revive until some time after I was back up here. Another time, I journeyed with many others to another mountain where we had to descend and pass a low area. Again, I felt the old symptoms, but we were prepared for this, and we hurried and gained the higher levels again before it was too late."

"Is there life down there?" the professor asked.

"Yes. Strange life that stands with its feet in the ground and never moves out of that spot as long as it lives, moving only back and forth as the strange, thin medium which surrounds it moves it. Other life moves about off the ground on long flat arms which are waved vigorously to keep it from falling."

Professor Jameson regarded Gloph's triangular face thoughtfully. The only features were the three large, luminous eyes. "You never eat anything, do you?" he inquired, forming the idea and planting it in the creature's mind.

"Take something inside our bodies to keep us alive?" Gloph considered gravely. "Why, no, why should we? It is a stupid idea – but wait. I have heard it told that the creatures below practice such a strange ceremony—those who fly about on their long arms. Do they eat?"

"No," the Professor confessed.

"You are much like us, only different," pursued Gloph. "Where did you come from?"

The professor shifted his position, trying to use his useless metal legs, finding nothing against which to cling. "It is a long story. I was once such a kind of creature like those you tell about on this world below the atmosphere in appearance. I had to eat to live, also breathe the gas similar to what you have twice descended to. I died on my planet which was called Earth. I had my dead body shot into space in a rocket to keep it from disintegrating. Forty million years afterwards, machine men from another distant world, Zor, came and found me in my space rocket which had become a satellite of the earth. They recalled my brain to life and put it into one of these metal machines such as I am now. I have traveled with them ever since."

"Much of what you say to me is strange to me," confessed Gloph, "but I like you, You must have had many wonderful experiences."

"This may well be my last one," the professor observed gloomily. "My companions have all been hurled to their doom. If the space ship ever recovered itself and was not destroyed by the edge of the mountain sliding away, it would have been back by now looking for survivors."

"Hang on and do not give up hope," Gloph encouraged his new metal friend. "We have a saying 'it is not well to fear that which may never happen.'"

"Gloph, all my life, whether plant or animal, must be maintained with sustenance, yourself included. There is no reason to suggest that you are given a lifetime of energy at birth. I've

reached the conclusion that you on a constant bombardment of cosmic rays, or a conversion of naked sunlight.”

“What is that?” the space creature puzzled.

But the professor never answered. He was gone. In the vacuum of space, his body made no sound as it shot down the rocky slope and over the edge. Gloph was all alone.

Professor Jameson hurtled downward. His tentacles and feet had slipped off the rock, just as those of 119M-5 had done. His body had performed a slow turn, and the eyes of his coned metal head caught a dizzying passage of escarpment beyond him. Underneath, a haze obscured the atmosphere and what lay beyond. The haze rushed up to engulf him with a frightful speed, and he found himself falling through the planet’s atmosphere. It was like being struck suddenly by a giant pillow, and the professor became audibly aware of a whirring sound made by his rapid passage. Once in the atmosphere, the pattern of the topography below became distant. He saw land and water spread out in irregular design.

As he tried to gain his bearings and pick his probable landing spot, he became aware of circling dots below him. They grew larger swiftly, then expanded less rapidly. In perplexity, the professor all at once realized they, too, were falling, but at a slower rate of speed than himself. He came up with and passed them, yet something reached out and seized hold of a metal leg and continued to fall with him, yet at diminishing speed. Something dove by him from below, and he had another of the flying creatures holding back his speed. More of them dove at him as he passed them. He was surprised to find that he was no longer falling but was being carried across water, now quite close to the surface and in the direction of the land.

These were the flying things which Gloph had talked vaguely about. The professor examined one of them as well as he could while they carried him up the coast from the towering mountain peak where he had fallen. His first impression visualized a pair of streamlined, membranous wings through which the sunlight struck a netted pattern of veins and skeletal structure. Folded back in under each wing lay an anterior arm and digits at the extremity. A pair of slender legs flowed out behind in bird-like flight. Why had they reached him? He probed at their minds, finding them possessed of a simple intelligence. Two bright eyes and a horny beak gave them a sharp appearance. A short, thick fur covered their bodies. He gathered vaguely that they had stopped his headlong flight for selfish reasons.

Far over the land they sped to a low mountain ridge which connected with the series of tall peaks. At a dizzying speed, the professor was carried by this weird bevy over a strange pattern of criss-crossed poles built in a community of cave mouths in the mountain side. Perched on these were more of the winged creatures in various stages of growth. Professor Jameson quite suddenly felt himself released and hurtling at one of these grids cradled above a cave mouth. His metal cubed body struck it at such a high speed as to crash through it where he ricocheted off the mountain side close to the cave mouth, then rattled to a stop against the foundations of the overhead network.

Before he had a chance to gain his bearings, the flock of bird-things which had brought him were down upon him in a swarm of competitive assault as he felt their strong beaks snapping at him ineffectually amid weird sounds and guttural mouthings. In vain, their horny beaks grated at the edges of his cubed body, tried with persistent leverage to snap his metal tentacles. Weird, conversational sounds issued out of their throats, and the professor caught the idea out of their simple minds.

“He is too hard to eat,” one of them with the red wings remarked.

"It was never before so," observed another.

"The outside might be hard sometimes, but never like this."

"This one was so heavy," an ugly, broken-beak specimen of the species complained. "It took many of us to catch him and save him from the water."

"I thought there would be more for us to eat, he was so heavy."

Red wing gave him an experimental peck. "It is like the rock of our caves we live in."

"We have caught an idol dropped from above," ventured Broken Beak.

Professor Jameson remained immovable. He was undamaged, and once the bird-things lost interest he intended to escape by darkness.

"We have had our labour for naught," remarked Lamé Leg, hopping about awkwardly to contemplate the machine men from a different angle.

"I thought my wings were going to be torn off when I seized him. Never have I fallen so fast."

"Better had we let this one fall into the sea. It is no good."

"What about those-who-came-out-of-the-water?" Broken Beak suggested. "They might buy him from us."

"No, they want only the glittering stones and the dark-blue plants which grow high up in the mountains."

"They might want this thing too. We could try."

The inspiration was acted upon. Professor Jameson was dragged out into the open. Once more, several of the bird-creatures seized upon him and with great flapping wings carried him aloft. This time, the trip was a little longer, yet they were still in the vicinity of the mighty peak from which the professor had fallen. They approached a small city and swooped down into what appeared to be a public square. The machine man's attention was drawn from the smooth, cylindrical buildings with their overhanging, flat roofs to the new kind of creatures converging on the square where the bird-things waited with him.

They were long and graceful, approaching with a slow, bobbing walk on two feet seemingly growing out of one lower appendage. The feet were long and flapping, and soled with a tough growth. Somehow, the professor could not recognize them as having been meant for ground travel. It was more as if the creatures had learned to use them for this mode of travel. The long bodies of the creatures were translucent. The machine man could dimly ascertain the outlines of their internal organs. The body narrowed at the top. The head of the new arrivals seemed almost a straight continuation of the body until the head turned, and then it seemed almost like being on a swivel. A fleshy hood came down to flow harmoniously into the streamline with the rest of the body. Lidded eyes blinked open in surprise at sight of the machine men. Nostrils dilated. A wide, loose mouth worked thoughtfully in conjuncture. Instantly, Professor Jameson sensed intelligence vastly superior to that of the space creatures up among the mountain tops.

The professor listened to the bickerings of the two species, as the bird-things sought to sell him to the citizens of the community. He heard the Flipper Feet refer to the birds as Glyj-ogs. The

Flipper Feet exhibited a lively scientific interest among themselves over this new find of the Glyj-ogs but did not allow awareness of it to escape them. Following a bit of haggling, several large boxes were brought, one for each of the winged creatures. Experimentally, each Glyj-og broke open his box for weight, and flew off satisfied with the bargain.

Not until the birds were gone, and the Flipper Feet crowding around to examine their new acquisition with subdued mouthings, did the professor show evidence of being other than just the idol the Glyj-ogs had exhibited him as. Then he took several steps, and the nearest Flipper Feet jumped back upon those crowding behind them in a hubbub of alarm.

“Don’t be afraid,” Professor Jameson placated them with calming radiations. “I am harmless to you. Your bargain, I hope was a good one, for you have more than what you expected me to be. I am alive. I am made of metal, all except my brain which is organic, like your own.”

He told his story briefly, A tall spokesman in the group then addressed the Zorome, accompanying his thoughts with spoken sounds.

“I am Byb-phry-tim. You say that you have come from beyond this world—that you have lost the means if travel you came here in—along with those who came with you. We know that there is life high in the mountains above the atmosphere, but we do not know what it is like. We cannot go above a certain height due to pressure and breathing. The Glyj-ogs go a great deal higher than we do. In fact, they live at a higher level than we, but they are an unreliable source of information. They are not very intelligent, and they are superstitious besides. They tell conflicting tales. Those below, from whom we originate, are also superstitious and have strange legends of a ghost-like life above the atmosphere which they call the Jumg-juj.”

“Those below, from whom you originate,” the professor repeated the thought. “What do you mean?”

“You will find but few cities like this above water. These few are founded by those of us who have been exiled from below. We were originally water creatures. There are many such underwater cities, for we exiles are a small minority. Those below, known as the Jyg-fyps, can only come out of the water for a short time, and then they must return. On the other hand, we can never more live in the submerged cities because our undersea breathing facilities have been surgically removed, and we are able to breathe atmosphere gas instead.”

Byb-phry-tim pushed back his loose, flapping hood to show the machine man healed scars where his underwater breathing organs had been removed.

“But why?” the professor puzzled.

“Why was this done to you? For what reason were you exiled?”

“Ostensibly because we are no longer able to propagate our species. That is the reason given us. It is true that with the strange transformation which comes over a very small percentage of us.. we lose our sex. We become virtually a third sex, or sexless you might say, depending on viewpoint. All our physical characteristics undergo change, and we appear distinctly different from either sex and come to look like you see us regardless of whether formally male or female. Myself, I was once a male, but by looking at the others you will notice no difference among us.

“You hint at a more primary reason for your exile,” the professor reminded him.

“Yes. With the change, we become superior to the others in intelligence. Long ago, our kind automatically became the ruling class. It had to be that way. Those so gifted with the mysterious transformation naturally strove ahead of the others. Their superior intelligence put them into the best positions of living, influence and power. A certain amount of indolence usually accompanies such a rise to the top when a goal is once attained, with the result that our ordinary species, the Jyg-fyps, vastly in the majority, became embittered and resentful. They not only felt their mental inferiority but realized that unless they underwent this transformation they were forever closed off from the higher attainments of life. They rebelled. The third sex was overcome and taken into custody. There were talk of putting them to death, and dealing with each case likewise. But there were other factors which gave them pause. For one thing, each and every Jyg-fyp never knew but what some time he might become one of the third sex. The transformation might even come to him in his old age. It showed no discrimination among either sexes or age groups. And with the entire group destroyed, the Jyg-fyps would never enjoy many of the inventions and conveniences of life furnished them by the intelligence of the third sex. So it was decided to exile us to the surface and remove the ability to breathe in the water. Ironically, it was the genius of the third sex which discovered this operation. We also originated many other forms of progress which advanced the race of Jyg-fyps and its science, but these have fallen into disuse, and since the rebellion there has been a slow growing tendency in the direction of what was primitive and backward.”

“Then I suppose whenever a transformation occurs, there is an immediate operation for the removal of the undersea organs of breathing,” the professor noted. “What causes this strange phenomenon?”

“We have never found out,” replied Byb-phry-tim. “It just happens—like life and death.”

“And are you happy to be up here instead of down there?”

“We were not happy at first—not for a long time. Afterwards, we just didn’t seem to care much, after becoming used to our new life. But it takes years. There is more to the change than our initial operation, and it is often a painful transformation. Sometimes, we die. There is the difference in pressure, for one thing, even though the underwater cities are not very far down. Then we have to accustom ourselves to direct sunlight. Our first year above, we avoid sunlight almost exclusively. Our bodies undergo other changes, too, such as the lack of buoyancy we find up here on the land. It is more difficult for us to maintain our balance, and it is harder on our feet in walking because out of the water we are heavier upon them. If you would know which of us have been here longer, look at our feet. They are turned from a heavily calloused on the bottom.”

Chapter II - At the Edge of the Abyss

“Have you seen the others like me?” Professor Jameson enquired. “Have there been any reports of anything resembling the craft in which we machine men came to your world?”

Byb-phry-tim’s reply was negative. “If there had been, the birds who brought you here would have told us. The great landslide occurred at night and woke all of us who were sleeping. It dropped into the sea. Those events are not uncommon in our history, but this one was by far the greatest in our recorded history above water.”

“What of those below? Will not the cities of the Jyg-fyps be in danger?”

“The undersea communities are not located very close to shore,” Byb-phry-tim told the professor. “Karg is the nearest city, and you must journey quite a ways to reach it.”

"Then the space ship must have fallen into the ocean along with the rest of my companions—and part of the mountain," the professor mused. "They are all down there, buried, perhaps, beneath all that rock slide." Byb-phry-tim nodded.

"How do I get down there?" the professor asked.

"There are various ways. The submersible transportation is poor and uncertain. We of the third sex originally invented it. Since the rebellion, it degenerated. You would have to wait until more like me are sent up here. It might be a long time before another transformation took place in Karg or another of the nearer cities."

"Why can't I just walk down there on the bottom?"

"You can, when I show you where to go," Byb-phry-tim told the machine man. "If you proceed uninstructed, you might fall into the depths. It would be the same as falling off the edge of a cliff up here, except that you would not fall rapidly. You would likely be smashed by gravity, but you would never return. The pressure would not bother you, however."

"Why would I never return?"

"No one ever has."

"What is down there?"

"Pressure, steep walls, great monsters."

"Has anyone ever been down there?"

"Before the rebellion, plans were formulated by the third sex, to descend in a sealed and weighted compartment, but nothing ever came of it. The Jyg-fyps in the undersea cities do not have the intelligence to undertake such a venture. Once in a great while, one of the monsters braves the low pressure to come up and raid one of the undersea communities. A few are taken off guard and eaten, before the monster is killed, dies from the release of his own internal pressure, or descends into the depths once more probably to die just the same."

"I want to go below and search for my companions," Professor Jameson told his host. "Those five who were with me when the avalanche broke off must be down there somewhere."

During the ensuing days which followed, the professor learned a great deal about the undersea cities, the Jyg-fyps and the venture he was about to go on. Byb-phry-tim and the rest of the strange mutants assisted him in every way possible. As for discovering the secret, or any clue as to why the peculiar transformation took place among various Jyg-fyps who suddenly found themselves sexless and greatly advanced in intelligence, the professor was unable to even advance a theory to Byb-phry-tim from his great store of interstellar lore.

When the time came for his descent into the sea, Byb-phry-tim and a good share of the community bobbed along on their awkwardly adapted flippers. Many of the newest mutants experienced tired or sore feet, became disinterested and dropped out.

At a selected point Byb-phry-tim had previously pointed out to the machine man on a map, the mutant pointed out to sea. "Walk into the water here and down the gradual incline. Keep away from the right hand side, or you will suddenly drop off into the depths. When darkness falls, halt and wait if you are not in sight or the lights of Karg. Daylight penetrates deeply, and you will need

to use but ordinary caution while it lasts. When you finally reach Karg, you will be taken before Pal-gol-kesp who is chief there. Tell him that Byb-phry-tim sent you.”

Professor Jameson thanked them for their help and for buying him from the Klyj-ops. He walked slowly into the water until it swirled above his coned head. His last impression of the third sex was a blurred caricature of them as water closed above the apex eye of his coned head. He walked down the incline which gradually leveled off. Where the sunlight shone down through the fathoms, it was almost as bright as on land. He kept on, mindful of the peril to his right. Something far ahead loomed mistily. He approached its swelling bulk. It was a rock. There was something fresh about one side as he examined it; the surface was sharp and rough. It was a part of the avalanche from the heights reaching into space. He kept on as sunlight faded and murky shadows succeeded it, realizing he was on the right track. He found more fragments of the great rock slide yet no traces of his comrades. Where was 119M-5 who had fallen long after the avalanche had taken the others? He could not be buried. Feeling that 119M-5 might be damaged but still alive, the professor sent out frequent strong radiations. Nothing came back to answer the anticipations of his eagerly attuned brain. Darkness overtook his steps. He was still in sight of Karg. Yet he did not stop as Byb-phry-tim had warned him to do. He put on his body lights and proceeded.

With the coming of darkness, he caught frequent glimpses of marine life retreating from him, yet circling curiously in and out of the aura of his body lights which had attracted them to him. The boulders and stone fragments from the stellar pinnacles finally grew less and eventually disappeared entirely from his path.

Professor Jameson walked a long way on the bottom before a greenish effulgence far ahead heralded his approach to the city of Karg. The light grew brighter and a lighter green which gradually resolved itself into a soft yellow. Shadowy forms, seemingly different from the marine life he had previously glimpsed, hung just out of reach of his body lights, sometimes momentarily visible on the edge of the lesser light. They kept pace with him—all around him, he noticed—as he neared Karg. A subtle mental omniscience suggested to the professor that he was being escorted—in fact, that his coming had been anticipated. He thought of Byb-phry-tim who had previously spoken once of communication among the surface cities of the exiles. Why not with the underwater cities, too?

The professor was not surprised at being surrounded and led into the city of Karg. What surprised him was the matter-of-fact way these submarine counterparts of the exiled mutants above accepted him. This was unlike his usual reception by a species which had never before seen a Zorome. It gave the machine man a ray of hope. These creatures might have become familiar with the sight of other machine men—his lost companions. As the escort closed in upon him from all sides, he noted the important differences between them and the third sex. Here in the water, their hoods floated out like a skirt hanging from their heads. Their progress in the water was more stately, and as they bobbed along their feet scarcely touched as they walked.

“Are there more like me down here?” Professor Jameson asked hopefully, as they gathered about him.

There was no acknowledgement of his query, with an ill-concealed bluff at not having quite understood his question. He saw that their bodies were of a lighter hue than the mutants living above in the sunlight.

“We go now before Pal-gol-kesp,” the leader of the group told him. “I am Juf-rim-byk.”

The buildings in the underwater city were much like those he had seen on the surface, except that these were older and more ornately built. Inside the city, he saw distinctive differences

between the sexes. Juf-rim-byk and his group carried long cables which the professor had no doubts about. They were in some way to insure his subjection in case his own plans should run counter to what they had planned for him. As they turned into a broad avenue, he saw at the far end a multiple joining of cylindrical structures. Into this building, he was led.

There were no windows. Nor were there airlocks of any kind. Water coursed through the structure from the several doorways. The professor became aware of a slight current, like a draft of air blowing. There were no lights inside, nor did it seem necessary. The walls gave off a luminescence. Where corners had been knocked off, and the wall were pocked, the illumination was absent beyond a thin depth. Carefully guarded, the professor was taken before Pal-gol-kesp and several lesser dignitaries of Karg.

“So this is the great wonder Bub-phry-tim sends us,” Pal-gol-kesp jibed. “For a great intellectual, Byb-phry-tim is behindhand. We have five others just like this one. As for it being something beyond this world, that is more drivel concocted by the third sex. These metal creatures are really demons fro the high parts of the mountain where there is neither water nor air to live in, and where only demons can live. They are the Jung-juj. Our sexless brethren have become foolish from an overdose of breathing too much atmosphere and believing these lies told them by the demons. For ages, we have waited to see what the Jung-juj from up above looked like. Now, with the opportunity before us, Byb-phry-tim would have it something else. Really, the bird people had the better of the bargain with him.”

“What have you to say.” Juf-rim-byk leaned forward and put the question to the professor. “Do you broadcast the same lies the others told us?”

“Where are the others?” the machine man asked.

“You will get to see them soon enough,” Pal-gol-kesp promised. “Come, do you admit yourself to be a Jung-juj of the airless heights, or do you spin the same kind of fantastic lies as the others? We know there are no other worlds than Skrempdek.”

“Whatever my five companions told you is true,” the professor maintained.

“Take him to them,” ordered Palgol-kesp imperiously, waving him off. “Put him to something useful. Give Byb-phry-tim eleven credits.”

“He will want more or the demon back again,” one of the councilors intervened. “He did not get him from the Klyj-ojs for nothing.”

“He has no choice in the matter—if we consider the metal creature an invader from above. He must be kept under control and have no chance to do harm. The third sex have no such means. They would foolishly let this demon wander all over Skrempdek and do all the damage it wished.”

“We have no intention of doing anyone any harm,” Professor Jameson told him. “We wish only to find our own kind we have lost on this world.”

“They will turn up one by one,” promised Pal-gol-kesp. Our scatter-brained brethren above who can no longer procreate their kind will foolishly buy them one at a time from the crafty bird-people. Now, off with this animated piece of junk to do something really useful for us Jyg-fyps.”

Juf-rim-byk threw a cable about the professor; then another of the escorts did likewise. The cables fastened to the machine man and to each other with magnetic tenacity and made him a fast prisoner. He was dragged out of the building and down the street. Those they passed on the

street laughed at him. Already, the word had spread that this was the great wonder those above the water had sent down to them—and they already had five Byb-phry-tim and his friends had not known about.

Their way led in the direction of the abyss from which Byb-phry-tim had warned the professor. They came to a region of bulky stones which dotted the sea bottom. The machine man was minded of the rock fall from above until he noticed that these stones bore a finished look, as if they had been quarried.

On closer approach, he found most of them perfectly cubed or rectangular, while others varied in geometric shape. Then he saw the machine men. They were engaged in moving one of the stones with odd apparatus and levers. Quickly, he counted them. There were five.

“We thought you were lost I under the rock fall until 119M-5 joined us,” 6W-438 greeted him. “He said that you did not fall.”

“What are you doing here?” the professor asked them.

“Moving these stones off the edge,” 29G-75 answered. He pointed with a tentacle.

Not far away, the professor saw the ocean bottom abruptly disappear. Beyond lay the deep.

“Look,” said 777Y-46, “they are making you fast, too, like us.”

Professor Jameson watched one of the Jyg-fyps fastening the cables to a strong metal band which circled a huge boulder. He noticed that his companions were likewise secured.

“These cables are different from the ones they used on you in bringing you here,” 119M-5 explained. “They extend and stretch a good ways, but they are tough to break or wear away. It is an alloy which the third sex invented.”

“They will keep you from falling off into the deep water,” Juf-rim-byk jibed, “or becoming lost. Now, get to work and help move these over the edge.”

“What are these great blocks?” the professor asked. “They seem to have been shaped for construction of some kind.”

Juf-rim-byk chuckled. “Our foolish friends above water had the senseless idea they would build a tower above the water’s surface for regular examination of the sky above them. That was before the revolution, of course, before we unseated them where they could no longer rule and build such silly things at the labor and expense of others.”

“Were these blocks quarried some-where down there?” the professor inquired.

“No,” said 6W-438. “From what the Jyg-fyps say, the blocks were made of a rock-like composition. We do know, from having handled them, that they have a magnetic attraction from each other, which was to have helped in holding the structure together.”

Only two overseers were left to watch the six Zoromes, and they relaxed into indifferent vigilance once Juf-rim-byk and the others had departed back to nearby Karg. They gave few orders to the machine men and conducted themselves more in the capacity of guards.

"Where have you been?" the professor was asked. "What happened to the space ship and the others?"

"I know no more about them than you do," the professor confessed. He went on to tell them about the flying Klyj-ops, and how they had arrested his fall, and how they bartered him to the third sex.

"We were hunting round the edges of the landslide here in the ocean when we were surprised and taken by the Jyg-fyps," 6W-438 related. "We are of the opinion that the space ship was not destroyed beneath the slide."

"Have you tried to escape?" the professor asked them.

"Not actually," 29G-75 admitted.

"We have tested the cables, and they are very tough and durable."

"Escape to where?" 240Z-42 asked.

"If the space ship is drifting on the ocean somewhere, disabled, 744U-21 and the others will come and find us eventually."

"That is well for a time," Professor Jameson conceded. "We are as well off here as anywhere, but they may be stranded and in trouble somewhere. If nothing happens, we would do better above with the more intelligent third sex. Through them, we might be able to enlist the aid of the Klyj-ops to search for the space ship. By the way, what happened to the space creatures who fell when we did?"

"They must have died when they hit the water," 29G-75 replied. "They sank with us but more slowly. I never saw but one of them after we reached bottom, and then not for very long. Several fish came and ate it."

"I know of only one who still hung on when I slipped off," said the professor.

Moving the stones over the edge of the chasm was a slow business; using the means the Jyg-fyps had supplied them.

"Everything mechanical has fallen into decadence down here since the third sex was ousted and sentenced to exile above," 6W-438 pointed out. "Only a few undersea vehicles are still used for travel, and they are inferior to what the Jyg-fyps once knew."

"The Jyg-fyps would do better to get together with their exiled third sex and come to an understanding for mutual betterment," 29G-75 argued. "The third sex is handicapped because it is so much dependant on the Jyg-fyps for commodities it cannot obtain above water, principally many food items, so we have learned. The Jyg-fyps also tie them to restrictions in regards to manufacture, so there will be no opportunity or means for a counter-revolt. Items of sea food on which the lives of the third sex depend are traded by the Jyg-fyps for what manufactured goods the mutants are allowed to make. In this way, the Jyg-fyps have retained a mastery over them, as the third sex cannot return to the sea once their water-breathing organs have been removed by the Jyg-fyps. The Jyg-fyps can get along without the manufactured goods if they choose, but the third sex cannot subsist on what food they find above the water."

"How far down is it?" the professor asked, as they tipped over a great cube of stone and watched it grow dim and smaller in the watery depth beyond the subterranean cliff's edge.

6W-438 clung to the professor to keep from toppling over the edge as he felt himself caught in the sudden rush of water. "Very deep. How deep, the Jyg-fyps either don't know or else won't tell. The third sex probably have records and could tell you."

Successions of daylight and darkness followed each other. During the period of darkness, a soft green glow from Karg spread an eerie radiance upon the machine men and the forest of stones in which they were cabled. The Jyg-fyps, unaware that the machine men were tireless, allowed them a rest period during the darkness. Either night or day, two guards were always in attendance upon the six Zoromes. From them, the machine men learned whatever they wanted to know. A guard car visited the spot four times every day.

Then one day the monotony was broken. It was 777Y-46 who first saw the dark spot in the green depths swell upward rapidly. He called the other machine men.

"What is it?"

The two Jyg-fyps joined the group then made cries of alarm. "The monsters from below!"

Quickly, they ran in terror among the great stones. The machine men followed and watched to see what would happen. Like a great, black cloud of doom, they saw the great mass sway above them and poke questioningly among the stones. The giant fish found the hiding spot of the two guards, as if it has smelled flesh. Paralyzed with fright, the two Jyg-fyps were drawn into the cavernous mouth to their doom. Then the monster, vomiting bubbles, slipped down over the edge and into the murky depths from which it had risen. The machine men rushed to the edge. The bubbles still coursed upwards for some time after the great black raider had dwindled out of sight.

Not until the guard car came for the change of personnel did the Jyg-fyps of Karg learn that they had been visited by one of the deep-sea monsters.

"It will not live long," an official explained to the machine men. "The bubbles you saw prove it. These things are not accustomed to the low pressure near the surface. Something inside it bursts."

"Why did it not take you?" one of the Jyg-fyps asked the machine men in wonder.

"Possibly because it found us inedible."

"I think the demons from above are in league with the devils from below," the official suggested darkly. "We would do well to cast them all into the abyss."

"Wait until they have performed their job," another counseled. "Then—maybe."

When only the two guards remained with them, and the machine men were once more at work slowly moving another of the huge blocks in the direction of the drop, the professor made a suggestion. "We had best escape."

"When and how?"

"The next darkness"

"Can we wear our cables through in that length of time?"

"It will not be necessary," said the professor. "I still have the heat ray in a fore tentacle, and they know nothing about it."

"Where can we go?" 777Y-46 demanded. "On one side of us we have the precipice into unknown depths, while every other direction is guarded. We might fight our way through a good many of the Jyg-fyps, but with only your heat ray we would be overcome again by their magnetic cables. There are too many of them."

"The guard car," the professor reminded them. "We can overcome our guard and the driver, and escape in that. We can reach land."

During the next darkness, Professor Jameson burned through his own cables and those of his five companions. The job was performed as far from the guards as possible with many of the rocks in between. When freed, each Zorome returned to where the guards might see him yet not observe that he held the broken ends of his cable in a tentacle close to his metal body. The hissing and the bubbles occasioned by the use of the heat ray made the six machine men fearful of detection, but the pair of indolent Jyg-fyps guarding them rested lazily against a rock, their eyes upon the abyss where the monster had lately risen and sank again.

"It will be a long time before another comes," one of them told the machine men. "It has been ever so, yet it is well to be watchful of them."

The six Zoromes stood as if resting, waiting for the submarine car with its guard relief. As always before, it would bring four Jyg-fyps. Two operated the little craft while the other two comprised the new guard detail.

Chapter III – On the Bottom of the World

The machine men waited and watched from among the great blocks. 777Y-46 heralded the coming of two undersea craft. Not until the two guards had left the little submersible did the machine men act. They made a concerted rush and boarded the vehicle, overpowering and tossing out its two occupants taken by surprise. All six Jyg-fyps made a run for the car, brandishing slender explosion rods.

"Take off!" Professor Jameson urged his companions.

6W-438 fumbled with unfamiliar controls. The guards surrounded the car, blazing away at it. Not entirely enclosed, the machine men were rocked by the blasts which would have killed them had they been Jyg-fyps or other organic species. The professor retaliated with his heat ray, but its effect was partly nullified in its boiling passage through the water, and only burned the guard. But it was enough to cause their withdrawal. They ran in the direction of the city.

With the help of 7H-88, 6W-438 finally got the guard car underway. They started up a long slant in the direction of the distant shoreline.

"Look back there!" 119M-5 exclaimed. The machine man pointed towards the green glow which spread above Karg.

A strong piercing light clove the water in their wake. As they watched, they recognized that the light did not come from a stationery source.

"We are being followed!" The light grew brighter.

"More speed!" the professor urged. At this rate, we'll never make the surface and land in time."

Yet none of the machine men could get any more speed out of the vehicle, and the pursuing craft rapidly neared them to prevent their escape. And now a colored shaft darted angrily at them, and their little vessel bounced around so crazily that 29G-75 almost fell out. The ship from Karg seemed not only to overtake them, but it rose above them as well. Professor Jameson dispelled the illusion.

"We are dropping!"

"And our forward speed has stopped!" 6W-438 added.

Their assailant curved about to drop down with them when they landed. Quite suddenly, the green haze above nearby Karg blacked out, like a giant hand sweeping up and across it.

"We're in the abyss!" 777Y-46 announced.

It was true. The following Jyg-fyps had disabled their escape car above the abyss, and they were falling into it. That the net results had not been fully intended by the Jyg-fyps, the six Zoromes had good reason to doubt. Those on the pursuing craft, realizing what was happening, were making desperate attempts to come up with them and stop their fall. As the larger submersible craft approached their own in a long, circling dive, the machine men saw that it carried armament.

Attempts were made by the Jyg-fyps to grapple their own little car as both vehicles sank deeper into the undersea abyss. The six Zoromes looked on, unmoving, curiously examining the excited mental agitations of their late captors. The deeper undersea mysteries could be no worse than the bondage of the Jyg-fyps. Further chances of escape by the machine men would be reduced to a minimum, they gathered from the thoughts of the Jyg-fyps. Efforts to hook their car missed fire, mainly because both moved independently. The six Zoromes watched the distance between them and the larger vehicle widen perceptively, and when their pursuers abandoned the chase entirely, sweeping back upwards to disappear quickly. Suddenly without the lights of the larger ship, they found themselves in complete darkness. Daylight did not penetrate very far into the abyss. The machine men turned on their body lights.

"They can't stand the growing pressure," said the professor who the final mental emanations of the baffled Jyg-fyps. "They were compelled by physical limitations to give up following us."

The machine men were limited by no such physical handicaps as had bothered the Jyg-fyps, yet they were uncertain about what might await them at the bottom of the abyss. Down they dropped, ever downward, until they wondered if there was a bottom, or if this water did not extend clear through the planet. They held misgivings about ever finding a way out. Byb-phry-tim had spoken to the professor during their brief acquaintanceship of sheer, unscalable walls, although the outcast mutant had no knowledge of what lay at the bottom.

A few times, shadowy figures darted past the lost vehicle in its descent, momentarily illuminated by the body lights of the machine men. One of these was enormous.

"I wonder how far we have fallen?"

"Hard to say, we had no measure of distance." said the professor. "At least several of my miles, probably much more."

“We had better—“

The advice of 119M-5 terminated abruptly as the vehicle struck bottom, sending the six Zoromes clattering into a heap at the end which had hit first. It was a rough landing, yet none of them were dazed. The little craft they had stolen from the guards was a wreck, and they climbed out of it upon the ocean floor. Their body lights shone but a short distance.

“We might as well see what can be done,” said the professor. “At least, we are safe from the Jyg-fyps down here. Byb-phry-tim said there was no escape out of here, but he was never down here.”

Neither the professor nor the rest of the Zoromes felt the optimism of his logic. The third sex had made soundings and knew the ocean bottom near which they had once lived.

“It may take us a long time,” 29G-75 suggested, “but our best chance is to keep walking in a straight direction until we come up against one of the perpendicular walls, then follow it around.”

“Did Byb-phry-tim say what the distances were down here”? Queried 6W-438.

“Not exactly,” the professor replied. “I gathered that it is quite a broad area.”

They walked for a long time. All around them beyond the aura of their body lights lay the underwater gloom. Except for the occasional odd and grotesque forms of sea life, both great and small, there stretched the same monotonous flat bottom with here and there the sparse deep sea vegetation gently swaying in the water.

How long this might have gone on, they never found out. A dark mountain of flesh suddenly descended and engulfed them. The professor felt great, pulpy objects working against his metal body, forcing him along a close, dark passage of solid flesh. The thought that he was being swallowed forced immediate, excited reflections in the minds of the other five Zoromes, and metal clicked on metal as another of the machine men was pushed close to him. It was 7H-88, he quickly ascertained. In turn, both he and 7H-88 were forced along the constricted passage, into a more spacious area which they guessed to be the fish’s stomach. Here, the walls were soft and yielding. There was freedom of some movement and even open spaces, probably made so by stomach gases of the huge leviathan.

“Now what are we to do?” asked 777Y-46.

“Just what we have been doing,” came the mental answer out of the dark. “Or if you become tired of riding inside the fish you can always cut your way out and leave the thing to die.”

The six Zoromes from the labor camp of the Jyg-fyps gave a start of surprise, for this was a seventh voice which spoke. And an eighth voice added further information before they had a chance to recover and realize that another Zorome had spoken. It was 41C-98.

“19K-59 and I have been riding around inside this fish for some time.”

Questions leaped upon one another with the rapidity of thought as the six fugitives from Karg sought explanations from the two Zoromes who had been among those in the space ship when the avalanche started.

“The space ship is down here,” 41C-98 told them. “Hurling rocks damaged it when it fell into the sea beneath a rain of boulders. A good many of us were damaged, and all of us were knocked

out upon the impact with the water. That is when the boulders did their damage. From those who regained consciousness first and saw it happen, we learned that the space ship drifted and slowly sank. Because we have found but little debris from the avalanche down here, and because the ship settled not far from one of the sheer walls, we gather that the main body of the avalanche hit a shallower area above us."

"Why haven't you repaired the ship and pumped it out, so as to rise to the surface?" asked the professor.

"We lack the necessary metal," 19K-59 confessed. "There is a small amount of it in the landslide. We know there is much of it in the mountains above the atmosphere because we both saw it and detected it, and it can probably be mined in the lower surface areas, but that does not help us down here. As for the necessary gas to expel the water and bring us to the surface, we have the chemical means of generating that by extraction from the water, but we must first repair the ship."

"I am surprised that the fish swallowed us, inasmuch as we are metal," said the professor. "Up above near the village of Karg, we were left alone."

"You were swallowed down here because you were in motion," 41C-98 explained. "Before, you probably remained still."

"Why do you stay in the fish?" the professor asked them.

"Because 744U-21 is hopeful of a long chance. We have found the dead remains of a rare instance where one of these fish had risen to a higher level and possibly escape."

"Probably the one we saw," the professor mused. "It is such an unusual event, so the Jyg-fyps told us."

"We have pressure detectors and also know when we are above higher sea bottom," 19K-59 added. "744U-21 only allows two of us to each fish."

"And what if two of you finally achieve the coincidence of being inside a fish which takes the extreme notion it wants to violate its better instincts to explore the higher altitudes of lesser pressure?"

"We shall find sufficient metal to cast down into this great hole in the sea for repair of the space ship."

At this point Professor Jameson related his own adventures, and told of the various forms of life he had encountered in his descent from the mountains of space to this lower strata of the sea. He told what he knew, too, of the social problems and relationships.

"Then it may not be too easy to accomplish our mission even if two of us should reach the surface," 41C-98 observed thoughtfully.

"If you could reach the city of the third sex, Byb-phry-tim might help you, but stay away from the underwater cities or you will be taken prisoners as we were. The third sex are more intelligent and imaginative. The group from which for some unaccountable reason they rise is stupid, unappreciative but practical."

"Is there no other possible escape from this undersea pit?" 6W-438 wanted to know.

"We have explored the entire bottom, and there are only steep, unscalable walls," 19K-59 confessed.

"Is there no way of making this fish take us to the surface?" Professor Jameson asked. "Can we not control its brain?"

"We gave that up long ago," said 41C-98. "The intelligence is so minute and so far beneath ours that we have no possible communication with it whatsoever. Any ascent to the surface by the fish will result purely from sudden impulse or whimsy."

Professor Jameson was strongly minded to leave the fish and hunt out 744U-21 and the space ship. There must be some way they could reach the surface. Yet knowing they could free themselves at will from the deep sea giant, he was fascinated by the novelty of their situation—possibly also by the long gamble. After all, he has seen one of the great undersea beasts in the shallow neighborhood of Karg. There would be time enough to free themselves and take council with the other Zoromes. He and the others were temporarily content to ride inside the darkness of the big fish and wait.

For one thing, the professor had to try his mental persuasions on their mammoth host. After all, his brain structure was different from that of the Zoromes, and in several past instances he had found it possible to accomplish with it what lay beyond their own grasp. Conversely, he had sometimes found in peculiar instances where their own mental faculties solved problems with which his own brain could not cope. But he, too, admitted himself baffled. It was an intelligence too weak, too uncomprehending of any mental influence it might have felt.

The machine men were often churned around in the great stomach but never digested. They put on their body lights and saw lesser fish swallowed, watched them fade and deteriorate into eventual assimilation. Sometimes, the fish's huge stomach contracted, and they were jammed close together and immovable. Other times, the stomach lay more relaxed, and they moved about by easy resistance to the blubbery walls. Gas, too, created spaces for movement and observations.

In the endless progress of digestion, Professor Jameson finally saw something which excited him and also aroused the interest of his seven companions when he drew their attention to it.

"The body of a space creature!"

It was true. One of those from the mountains in space lay in the fish's stomach, recently swallowed, his body bent at a grotesque angle.

"There has been another funeral," said the professor. "I wonder what happened to the second body."

"Possibly caught while it was falling and eaten by those birds you told us about," 41C-98 ventured.

They saw the body of the space creature longer than the marine food the great fish had swallowed. It took longer to digest. It held its solidarity for a longer time and did not become translucent so quickly before breaking up and disappearing.

It was not very long after the eight Zoromes had experienced the novelty of seeing the space creatures slowly digested and they noticed an erratic behavior on the part of their host. It had changed its habits.

"Our instruments show a great deal less pressure outside than formerly," 19K-59 announced. This is a much higher altitude for the fish to be swimming in than has been its usual habit since we were swallowed. Although not a danger to its continued life, it cannot be a comfortable feeling for the fish."

The machine men scarcely dared hope that a great fish would ascend and cruise about the shallow levels of the ocean where the undersea cities of the Jyg-fyps lay. On the contrary, the fish once more descended to its natural habitat. Yet its movements and habits persisted in staying eccentric. It was the professor, periodically probing away at the dwarfed intelligence of the fish, who struck a flash of hope for them.

"I believe I am making progress. I can just barely grasp the thing's mental faculties. As yet, I have caused no influence of any kind that I can recognize." The others bent their mental perceptions upon the beast's little mind. The professor was proved to be right, and all eight machine men excitedly focused the one impulse, the one thought, their own desire—for the fish to take them to the surface. That their efforts were not entirely ineffective was manifest as the deep sea monster cruised upwards, then slanted down again to familiar depths, only to rise again restlessly and hover uncertainly at higher levels. It almost seemed as if its instincts fought subconsciously with a new excited urge.

"If we could only get it up over the edge," 7H-88 hoped.

"It would be even better to reach the shore and get to the city of the third sex," Professor Jameson told them. "It is well not to go near the undersea cities of the Jyg-fyps."

The great beast suddenly shot for the surface, as if its uncertainty had suddenly vanished and its impulse became sharply defined. Professor Jameson and his mental companions concentrated on it to guide them close to shore.

"Be ready to kill it and cut our way out once it reaches a higher level, in case it shows a change of mind," 41C-98 warned.

19K-59 announced highly satisfactory readings from his altimeter and pressure indicator. "We are now over the edge of the abyss!"

Under the direction of the eight Zoromes, the huge fish sped through the shallow water for shore. The machine men remained poised for instant action in the event that the deep sea monster should turn capricious and head back from the depths. It was doomed, now, to a slow death at best from ruptured organs unnaturally freed of the tremendous water pressure. But their fears were groundless. The fish headed shoreward with fatalistic precision. Not until it was almost grounded did the fish stop.

Quickly, the eight machine men acted. 19K-59 and 41C-98 unfolded big cutting instruments. The great fish was quickly and expertly killed, and the Zoromes leisurely cut their way free.

"This is better than 744U-21 ever hoped for," 19K-59 exulted. "There are now eight of us up here instead of just two."

They followed the gradual incline and broke water. Before them lay the coast. Wading out Professor Jameson climbed to high ground and looked hopefully up and down the coast. In the near distance, looming into the sky beyond their visibility towered the mighty peaks reaching up beyond the atmosphere and into space. In the opposite direction, tiny and dim with distance, rose

the flat rooftops of the city where the exiled third sex lived. Professor Jameson pointed to this as their destination. There swelled Byb-phry-tim upon whom the professor felt that he could rely.

Chapter IV – The City of the Third Sex

Behind them lay the soaring pinnacles as they picked their way to the city of the exiles. Only Professor Jameson had previously seen the world from its surface near the sea. Lesser mountains receded from their taller neighbors in a long ridge stretching inland into obscurity. The machine men were not more than halfway into the city when vehicles met them, bobbing along and touching the ground only momentarily in long, low bounces. These vehicles were more aerial in travel than otherwise, even though their highest altitude never exceeded a few yards.

One of the third sex familiar to the professor stepped out of the leading vehicle which bounced to a stop near the eight Zoromes. His great loose mouth worked thoughtfully as he spoke what the alert Zoromes had already ascertained from his mind.

“Byb-phry-tim sent us to bring you to the city once we saw you coming. We have been told to watch for your kind.”

The long, graceful creature hopped along on his single, split, lower appendage, his eyes blinked excitedly. His loose hood fluttered as he turned his head to motion the remaining vehicles to pull up. The machine men divided up among the vehicles and glided back to the city in long, bounding hops, the cars seeming scarcely to make contact with the ground.

Byb-phry-tim greeted the professor warmly. “I hear that you found Karg safely.”

“Those of Karg found me,” Professor Jameson corrected him, “and I was given safe conduct.”

Byb-phry-tim did not miss the barb, and he shrugged. “You have been to the bottom of the abyss and returned. What is it like down there?”

Briefly, the professor satisfied the creature’s scientific curiosity. Then he turned to the subject which had brought them there.

“The rest of us and the ship of space in which we entered your planetary system are at the bottom of the undersea abyss. We need material in the way of metals for its repair and raising. Can you help us locate and mine these?”

“Yes—of course,” Byb-phry-tim agreed enthusiastically. “Let us have a consultation with technicians and find what kinds you will want that we have. Some are easy to get. Others are not only distant from here but must be dug and smelted.”

“We see metal outcrops up in the mountains above the atmosphere which would serve our purpose and would not take much processing,” the machine man told Byb-phry-tim.

“In fact, my people could process it down there—in the water.”

“Anything that high up, we cannot help you with. Not even the flying Glyj-ogs could get that high, and they often bring us from the higher altitudes bits of metal we have never before seen.”

The machine men met the technicians. There was agreement between them and the Zoromes, but much argument among the technicians themselves as to ways and means. There were frequent adjournments. These creatures had to eat and sleep periodically. Three days and a half passed, when Byb-phry-tim came to where the eight machine men were quartered, his hood flaring outward in a state of high excitement.

"Quit the city as quickly as you can!" he warned them. "Pal-gol-kesp has orders out to take you into captivity. I am supposed to lure you into a trap this afternoon. Jyg-fyps from Karg are already in the city ready to take you back. Now that they know your friends are at the bottom of the abyss, they plan to build and lower long cables to tempt them out and then make them all slaves along with yourselves. But it is a program which will take years to perform, even with our scientific aid. Pal-gol-kesp has no intelligent conception of the distance down to your friends and the amount of labor and materials involved. Meanwhile, don't let them catch you. They have grown wiser in your ways, and next time you will not escape them so easily, if at all. We exiles on the surface will be turned against you. We dare not defy the Jyg-fyps from which we emerged. They have not as yet been able to overcome even with our superior Intelligence. They have made us depend on them."

"How can we get out of the city without being seen?" 6W-438 asked.

"I will show you a tunnel which leads out upon the plain between here and the mountains. Take it. Leave the city and hide yourselves. Go into forests near the slopes of the mountains."

Byb-phry-tim led them by an obscure route through several buildings and fenced-in areas to a cellar. Here, they entered a tunnel. The leader of the third sex did not accompany them. "It is an open route all the way to the end. You will come out among low shrubbery. Hide there until darkness, which will come soon."

"We shall see you again, Byb-phry-tim," Professor Jameson promised him, "when the space ship is raised. If we can get high enough into the mountains, we shall be able to get our own metal."

"I wish that I could do more for you, but I dare not. Pal-gol-kesp would have me killed for what I am doing, if he should learn of it. Goodbye, metal men of space!"

The eight Zoromes hurried down the tunnel. Behind them, Byb-phry-tim closed the opening, and they were plunged into darkness. The machine men used their body lights. The tunnel ran straight and long. They caught a tiny glow of light at the distant end which grew as they approached it. Weak daylight shone through overgrown shrubbery. They stepped forth.

Not until they were all out of the tunnel did a break in the silence come. Then, many bodies broke through the bushes, and they suddenly became the center of a milling throng. Several Jyg-fyps with their cables led and urged on a score or more of the third sex. The exiles aimed weapons at the machine men, and metal projectiles ricocheted and hummed of the bodies and heads of the machine men. The third sex showed a respect and reluctance in attacking the eight Zoromes, but not so with the Jyg-fyps. With contempt and reckless abandon, the Jyg-fyps threw themselves at the machine men in close quarters, entangling them with their long cables. One of them Professor Jameson quickly recognized as Juf-rim-byk.

"Stop where you are, slaves!" the Jyg-fyp shrieked. "Get back to the water! We'll have all of you yet!"

The professor seized the suddenly surprised creature with two of his tentacles and twisted his head off. The others were being dealt with roughly by the Zoromes who fought their way out of the throng.

"We can distance them by running," said the professor.

They broke into a quick trot. Behind them, they left two dead Jyg-fyps and a third one badly injured. The third sex too, counted several casualties. If the machine men were being chased, they were not aware of it. Distant forests on the rising slopes beckoned. Untiring, they clattered on. They saw no pursuit. None of their late assailants appeared from the clump of bushes at the tunnel's end, and soon other vegetation screened them from sight.

Gaining the edges of the forest, they stopped and held council. Darkness came.

"We had best get as high as we can," Professor Jameson advised them. "There will be bigger and better organized attacks to take us. We want to get metal to the space ship as quickly as we can, too."

They kept on through a thickly wooded area. Progress was slow and devious. Their own radiance did not spread very far. They could not see as far ahead as by daylight. Dawn found them emerging from the forest and on the lower slopes of the mountain. The dawn attack which they feared came.

The bouncing cars of the third sex appeared in the distance like tiny bugs, growing slowly in perspective. Odd, balloon-like, aerial vehicles floated in the distance, too. The ground craft had evidently circled the far edge of the woods. The machine men wondered how their enemies had so quickly discovered the direction they had taken. Then, they saw the swooping, circling objects high in the sky above.

"The Glyg-ogs!" Professor Jameson exclaimed. He all too quickly recognized the sinister birds which had diverted his plunge off the mountain and had tried to eat him. "Run for higher ground!"

Quickly and tirelessly, the machine men ascended the slope and were at the foot of the lower heights before the hoard of aircraft and bouncing cars converged upon them. The cars were crowded with both Jyg-fyps and their intellectual mutants, the third sex. From the aerial balloons, there shot a fusillade of metal projectiles which staggered and knocked over several of the machine men but did not otherwise harm them. They arose and hurried on to join the others. Several of the bouncing cars disgorged their passengers who had awaited the initial onslaught of the aerial bombardment. The Jyg-fyps and their more intelligent minions ranged themselves between the eight Zoromes and escape up the rough slope. None of them had yet felt the blighting heat of Professor Jameson's heat ray. He charged the strong line opposing their escape, waving a path of death. Over the bodies of their fallen foes, the machine men clattered on. Like angry bees, the aerial ships containing the third sex showered them with missiles.

7H-88 reported his apex eye knocked out. He could no longer see directly upwards. The rest of their assailants scrambled after them in hopes that the assault from above would halt the machine men, so that they might overtake them and get their cables fastened. The Jyg-fyps were the more furious and determined of the two species. The third sex were less enthused but more calculating.

"Don't forget that the Jyg-fyps can stay out of the ocean only just so long and must return," 6W-438 reminded his companions. They will soon fight themselves out."

Their only weapon was the professor's heat ray. 19K-59 and 29G-75 had carried force guns inside the monster fish but had left them back in the city of the third sex when forced to leave so unexpectedly. Their only defense were the long whipping tentacles and threshing feet.

Higher the machine men climbed. The aircraft swarmed above them, hampering the machine men so those on the ground might overtake them. Reinforcements were landed above, ready to creep down and meet the eight Zoromes and waylay them. The strategy of this revealed itself when a group of the Jyg-fyps snared 119M-5 with their strong cables. 777Y-46 and 19k-59 sprang to his aid and were entangled and bedeviled by the simple but effectual contraptions carried by the sea dwellers. A horde of both organic species closed in. More cables were readied. Machine men fought them off, but made little progress against the cables which had trapped the three machine men.

It was the professor's heat ray which finally freed them while the other machine men fought off both the Jyg-fyps and the third sex. Freed of the cables, the eight Zoromes hurried ever upward, alert to further ambush, never letting the remaining enemy cut them off again in force. They either fought off, or else discouraged by a show of force, the little pockets of further resistance on their way up the mountain. Their untiring gait and the steeper incline of the heights gradually put their pursuers farther behind.

"Look!" exclaimed 6W-438. "The Jyg-fyps are dropping out!"

It was true. Only the third sex struggled upward, rather hopelessly, apparently urged on by the Jyg-fyps who watched from below. Many were heading slowly back in the direction of the lowlands.

"They are too long out of their natural element," said 240Z-42.

"Or else it is the altitude which is commencing to effect them."

It might have been for either reason or both, but many of the airships were coming to rest in the lowlands, and the Jyg-fyps were disembarking from several and loading up on others. This maneuver explained itself when several aircraft set out in the direction of sea level. The others rose once more determinedly, ready to block or waylay the escaping metal things the Jyg-fyps coveted. Far off, near the woods they had left, the bouncing cars stood abandoned or else headed around the wood in the direction from which the machine men had seen them come.

On high circled the Glyj-ogs. There seemed to be more of them. The machine men climbed ever higher. The mutants and allies of the Jyg-fyps in their aircraft tried more of their hampering tactics, coming so close that the machine men could almost touch them with their up-thrust tentacles. There were only two more casualties; the same as before, mechanical eyes. More efforts were made to block their escape. This time, the circling Glyj-ogs joined in, shooting down on their membranous wings through which the sun shone. The machine men found them to be of prime nuisance value and so disconcerting as to draw their attention away from the third sex who menaced the Zoromes with cables furnished them by the Jyg-fyps.

Turning to fight off the mutants, the machine men found ignoring their winged assailants a dangerous affair. Several of them flapped low and seized Professor Jameson by his tentacles. As he became lifted aloft, his heat ray blazed wildly, burning the air, then the wing of one of the creatures. The burned Glyj-og fell with a gurgling cry of alarm, but jerked to a stop, adding his dead weight with that of Professor Jameson to whom he clung. The remaining birds fought to remain aloft. Then a curious accident happened which sent both the professor and the Glyj-og groundward and free of the others. The professor's fore tentacle with its flaming heat ray snapped in a jerking arc as the weight of the falling Glyj-og suddenly yanked upon him. It blazed a deep corrugation across his metal body and cut off the two tentacles to which the other birds clung. The doleful screech of the falling bird ended abruptly as both Glyj-og and machine man hit the ground. Professor Jameson found one of his legs bent so badly that he limped back to where the

rest of the machine men battled the third sex. He saw the mutants so badly beaten and tired from their own efforts as to pant for loss of breath.

“They won’t care to go much higher,” 6W-438 flashed. “This altitude is too high now for much exertion on their part.”

Again the machine man scaled the heights. Only the Glyj-ogs bothered them any longer. Below them and far away, spread a magnificent panorama. Even the airships had fallen behind. A few of them still floated in the air below, but did not seem to be able to make further altitude in the rarefied atmosphere. If the third sex were found to have abandoned the chase, it seemed a signal for the flying Glyj-ogs to renew a more savage and concerted attack. Their numbers increased alarmingly as the machine men climbed higher and higher. From somewhere, the birds were coming in great flocks. In their minds, the machine men caught the incentive of fabulous rewards of a lifetime of gastronomic luxuries if they could only disable, capture or otherwise prevent the escape of the metal creatures. The climbing became steep and dangerous. When 119M-5 was toppled off an escarpment and his body and legs so badly damaged they had to be abandoned, the eight machine men retreated into a small cave where they might protect the opening. After a number of the Glyj-ogs had suffered broken wings and heads, they held off and waited. Darkness found the besieged Zoromes in this situation. They waited for dawn. They could not climb in the darkness very well, and the Glyj-ogs seemed as adapted to seeing in the dark as in the light.

With dawn, the machine men abandoned their cave and set out once more for higher ground. Space beckoned. Sharp-etched shadows on the peaks high above marked the end of their quest and safety. But the horde of flying Glyj-ogs discouraged the anticipation. They attacked continuously, trying to carry off the machine men, or tear them from the precarious holds to cause a fall. Already, the progress of the group was slowed by Professor Jameson’s limp. They dared not take too direct a route upward if it meant scaling heights where a forced fall by the Glyj-ogs could mean a crippled body or even death.

“We must follow the safest means of travel,” the professor told them. “If we could only get above the limitations of their flight,” the head of 119M-5 suggested hopefully.

“They are very light but strong creatures,” 41C-98 pointed out. “It may well be a matter of respiration which will eventually prove the limitation.”

By the own words of Byb-phry-tim, Professor Jameson knew these furry things to be amazingly adaptable to the different levels of varying atmospheric pressure and climate. It was biting cold at these heights.

Whenever a group of the flying creature’s succeeded in lifting one of the heavy Zoromes off his feet, the others seized hold and added their weight. Flailing tentacles either killed or drove off those which had seized the machine man. Casualties among the Glyj-ogs were high, but it did not deter them. They might have been more cautious afterwards, but nevertheless they remained just as persistent. All the going could not be safely chosen. It came to a point where the eight Zoromes had to choose between a stretch of perilous climbing or else retrace their steps to look for easier ascent. There was not always an easier way, and there was no turning back. 19K-59 next became a head to be carried with that of 119-5. He was toppled by a concerted rush of the Glyj-ogs against the face of a precipice. Both 29G-75 and 777Y-46 had to return to the bottom of the cliff and remove his head. One dared not go alone.

With the loss of 119M-5 as an active Zorome, it meant one more to carry, and one less to fight off the swarm from the sky. 240Z-42 was next to fall. Now, there were only five left.

“We are getting closer to the topmost regions,” 6W-438 enthused.

He was right. The stars became increasingly brilliant and sharper by night, and a few of the largest ones could be seen in the daytime without any great difficulty of finding them. The rarefied atmosphere began to tell on their pursuers. The machine men noticed that although they never abandoned the attack, there were not as many of the birds at any one time. It became apparent that the Glyj-ogs were spelling one another off. Unable to remain at this height continuously, one group flew to a lower level, the others which had recuperated flew up to take their places. Strong, horny beaks continued to harass the machine men, however, and delay their progress, as snatching fingers extended from beneath wings clutched at the tentacles and legs of the Zoromes.

6W-438 became the next victim, and in trying to save him, 777Y-46 fell, too. They pulled down one of the Glyj-ogs with them. This helped break the fall, for the bird flapped hard and desperately to the last, yet 6W-438 was so badly crippled by the fall that he had to be assisted, and 777Y-46 was little better off, although able to proceed at a slow, awkward gait by himself.

"If we were not likely to need parts of your body later on, we might better abandon all but your head in the interests of traveling faster," the professor told 6W-438.

Chapter V – The Fight on the Heights

With only the professor, 29G75 and 41C-98 left to aid or carry the others, the Glyj-ogs sensed victory. Their attack lacked the vigor of earlier attempts, yet they realized instinctively that their quarry would soon escape them if they climbed higher, and they fought more desperately. 41C-98 was lifted high up where he fought five of the creatures carrying him. His flailing tentacles cut the nearest one to ribbons, while another holding grimly to a metal leg was kicked to death. The others quickly released their prisoner who became junk against the rocks upon which he plunged.

Professor Jameson and 29G-75 were no longer interested in progress of any kind. They searched madly for cover and protection of some kind against the flying menace, now redoubling its efforts. Yet they were so high that several of the Glyj-ogs fell exhausted and dying from their efforts, gasping out their lives in the weak, thin air of the towering height to which the Zoromes had climbed.

"There's a crevice in the Cliffside," the alert head of 240Z-42 announced.

Fighting off the swarm of wings and clutching fingers, the two Zoromes gained the refuge and climbed inside. They almost lost the crippled body of 6W-438, dragging it from the grasp of several Glyj-ogs. The crevice narrowed rapidly. The professor and 29G-75 pushed the heads of 119M-5, 19K-59 and 240Z-42 as far as they would go and jammed the bodies of 6W-438 and 41C-98 against them. This left the professor, 29G-75 and 777Y-46 to guard the narrow entrance. 777Y-46 could only walk by being helped along. The professor still limped on a bent leg. Only 29G-75 had escaped the casualty list.

The Glyj-ogs now found themselves blocked. Only one or two could possibly get at the Zoromes at one time, they learned to their pain and sorrow. They withdrew, but not far. 29G-75 went out to reconnoiter and was only a short distance from the crevice when he was rushed so abruptly from all directions by concealed Glyj-ogs, that only a rear sortie by the professor saved him from being carried away. Both fought back again to the safety of the crevice where 777Y-46 had protected the heads. The Glyj-ogs did not try to bother them in the crevice but waited patiently outside. Darkness came quickly. Overhead glowed the thickly carpeted scintillation of stardust against the velvety sky. Dawn came and a few stars still lingered, visible all day.

Night succeeded night. A few short excursions by the professor and 29G-75 assured them of the continued presence and watchfulness of the flying minions of the Jyg-fyps and third sex.

“What do we do now?” 119K-59 asked.

“Wait.”

“What about those in the space ship at the bottom of the sea depths?” 6W-438 queried.

“They are not flesh and blood. They are patient. This generation of Jyg-fyps might die, and our companions at the bottom of the abyss would become a legend.”

“And do we meanwhile become a legend, to, here?”

“The Glyj-ogs are flesh and blood,” 41C-98 reminded them.

“They may become discouraged and leave.”

“If it were just themselves—yes,” the professor agreed. “But they are being goaded by the Jyg-fyps and the third sex.”

“The birds are unlike the third sex in the respect that they are free and independent. They can do as they choose. They may soon tire of this and abandon us. It is not their climate and they suffer here.

“But they relieve each other,” 119M-5 reminded them, “and they are tenacious and belligerent. They have been promised too much for them to give up. The third sex and the Jyg-fyps keep constantly reminding them of this.”

“It is in the minds of the new arrivals,” 29G-75 agreed. “They are even now being rewarded in a small way.”

Day after day passed, and aside from the quick excursions of Professor Jameson and 29G-75 outside to assure themselves that the birds were still watchful, nothing else broke the monotony. There were always new arrivals to replace the old guard. This much, the machine men learned from the limited intelligence of the Glyj-ogs. The machine men always held the hope that their jailers would leave them unguarded long enough so they might dash to safety above the atmosphere line where even the Glyj-ogs could not follow them up among the peaks and perpetual starlight. But the birds never relaxed their vigilance. They knew, or had been told, that the metal things could exist and travel upwards where they themselves could not. Often, these brief reconnaissances of the two Zoromes ended in battle, with the injury or deaths of one or more Glyj-ogs, but not always. The machine men detected a subtle anticipation of the birds to lure them as far enough from the crevice to overcome them, and then carry off the remaining heads and battered bodies of those left in the crevice.

The situation remained a stalemate. The professor and 29G-75 never allowed themselves to be tempted very far, and the Glyj-ogs were always close by. No further attacks were made upon the crevice. The Glyj-ogs rarely looked inside, other than to fly past once or twice each day to be sure of their quarry.

So when an object one day paused at the opening of the crevice and looked inside, Professor Jameson and his companions steeled themselves against a new effort by the Glyj-ogs. The machine men sensed a new trick of some kind. It was a new trick, they quickly discovered, but

not by the Gylj-ogs. A large globe was projected just inside the perpendicular lips of rock. The machine men themselves stared at and considered. The globe was a dull green in color, and was mounted on a long body, which ended in big, flapping feet.

"The third sex!" exclaimed 777Y-46.

A mental flash substantiated the discovery. Behind the first globe, other globes crowded.

"A kind of breathing helmet!" the professor guessed. "They probably came up here as far as airships would bring them, then walked the rest of the way."

"You are right," the leading globe countered. "We are here to bring you back to your masters, the Jyg-fyps."

"And your masters, too," the professor pointed out. "You are their intellectual masters, yet you fear them and do their ignorant bidding. These helmets of yours are your own invention, not theirs."

"It is always so," the green helmeted leader replied. "Come out peacefully, or you will be dragged out."

"Many of you will die," the professor reminded the third sex, "and still you will not have taken us back."

"That we shall see," said the green-globed leader. He stepped aside from the mouth of the crevice and gave an order. Up walked two more of the third sex on their flipper feet. They wielded the magnetic cables the machine men had come to dislike. Quickly, they lashed at the Zoromes as the professor and 29G-75 darted forward to grapple with them. The cables clung, curled around them, pinioned their tentacles, then their legs and dragged them out helplessly. The crippled Zoromes and the heads were then retrieved. Once securely fastened, the machine men became the secondary interest of the third sex. Their scientific curiosity about their own world asserted itself.

"This is the highest any of our race has ever been," said the leader.

"Let us look around and make experiments before we leave. After all, we have accomplished the mission of capturing these machines. Let us do something for our own interests."

The machine men counted almost a score of the green-helmeted creatures who also wore a close-fitting covering over their bodies against the extreme cold of the rarefied heights. The captive Zoromes were carried as the ambitious mutants climbed even higher, lured on by the wonders of this dizzying altitude. They marveled at the stars in the daytime, the odd, purplish cast of the sky, and hot sunlight in extreme cold, the wonderful panorama, the lack of weathering by the elements and other scientific phenomena. Only a curious few of the Gylj-ogs followed. Most of the winged creatures were happy to fly back down to a more comfortable altitude, their part in the capture of the machine men accomplished.

"744U-21 and the others will never receive our help, no," mourned 6W-438 pessimistically.

"Unless another fish carries more of our number out of the abyss," 41C-98 suggested.

"What made the fish act as it did?" asked the professor.

"It is a secret your own particular Earth mind has held off from us."

"We may be able to use it in bargaining for our release," Professor Jameson replied.

"But not from the Jyg-fyps, once they get us," 19K-59 promised.

"Look!" 119M-5 seized upon their attention.

The third sex had stopped climbing. On a ledge above them there approached a weird assemblage which gave them pause. Long, thin gray creatures with triangular faces out of which shone three luminous eyes. Four arms carried strange objects. Four long legs ended in shaggy hooves padding silently down towards the mutants, the odd objects held with purpose and menace. Curiosity in the minds of the third sex mingled with fear of the unknown. The weird party outnumbered the third sex almost two to one.

Professor Jameson gave vent to mental exclamation. "The space creatures!" he radiated.

He reached out mentally to grasp the intellects of those from above the atmosphere level. Already, they were regarding the captive machine men in wonder and recognition, and the third sex with curiosity and purpose. One of the space creatures exhibited great excitement both mentally and in his haste to be the first to reach the machine men and their captors.

"Gloph!" Professor Jameson was too overcome with exhilaration to do more than wonder how the doomed space creature had survived his perilous hold after the landslide. "Free us from these things who have bound us up!" Again and again, the professor radiated this thought.

The mutant minions of the Jyg-fyps betrayed an unnerved effect at the sight of these legendary creatures once considered to exist only in the disordered imaginations of the Glyj-ogs, but they stood their ground. They landed at the upper world denizens with the cables, knocking down a few, but they were not metal, and the magnetic strands did not cling, tighten nor hold.

There were a few injuries, and that was all. More injuries were inflicted by the projectiles shot at the space creatures, but still they came. Four arms of each space creature swung crude but effective weapons at the invaders from the sea level.

"Smash the globes!" 6W-438 encouraged their liberators. "They cannot live up here without them!"

The stars and a few lingering and excited Glyj-ogs witnessed the strange combat of two extreme species meeting for the first time in a nether world strata to which neither belonged and could not long survive, a no-man's land inhospitable to both. The third sex clung stubbornly to the eight helpless Zoromes, but soon found themselves involved in a losing combat. Their worst handicap was not the rarefied heights in which they fought but the superior speed and dexterity of the space creatures on their four long legs. It was over quickly. Broken helmets soon meant death as the cold, rare atmosphere, rushed into the lungs of the mutants. The machine men were dropped, with the exceptions of 119M-5 and 7H-88, whose heads two of the awkward mutants with their flipper feet tried to take with them in their flight down the rocky slope. Professor Jameson alerted the space creatures who raced down upon them and recovered the metal heads. Only a few of the third sex were allowed to escape.

"Carry us above to safety," the professor urged Gloph. "Tell me, how did you escape falling?"

"More of my kind came and climbed down as far as they could; then dug footholds in the rock to reach me."

"How did you happen to be down this low? You once told me you could not survive here."

"Not for long," Gloph admitted as he and several others worked at loosening or wearing away the cables. "We saw from just above this strange sea we are now in much activity down here for quite a time. We saw and recognized you creatures from the stars though only at infrequent intervals and briefly. Then when we saw you fighting with the things which swam in this sea, we decided to come down in force and find out if we could help you."

The space creatures were anxious to return to their own element before the upper air level weakened and overcame them. They deferred the freedom of the eight Zoromes from their bonds until safe in the upper reaches of the great peaks. The trip up into space was a quick one. Either because of the extra burden, or the exposure to the lower elements, Gloph and his companions admitted to being tired.

Using crude methods, the space creatures eventually freed the machine men from the tight metal bands. Their weapons and tools turned out to be odd-shaped rocks and pieces of meteorites.

"Tell me," said 41C-98, turning to the professor, "What is the secret of the third sex?"

"Do you remember how soon after our sea monster ate the dead space creature his intelligence increased to a point where we were able to direct his activities?"

"Yes. But why should this increase either the intelligence of the fish or make one of the Jyg-fyps suddenly sexless and a mental superior of his race?"

"Before I fell off the mountain, I learned by questioning Gloph that his people survive up here in space by living on a constant bombardment of pure unfiltered cosmic rays."

"But do the Jyg-fyps eat the bodies of the space creatures hurled off the peak in funeral ceremony?"

"No. But they occasionally must eat a fish which in turn eaten from a dead space creature," the professor surmised. "That is how these mutants occur among the Jyg-fyps. Their mental capacity is stimulated, and they undergo a physical change, including the loss of their sex."

"What about the flying Glyj-ogs?" 777Y-46 queried. "They eat the dead space creatures. They thought you were one when you fell off the mountain."

"These Glyj-ogs do not live down in the water. They live at a high altitude and are more accustomed to strong cosmic rays. Their systems are not shocked and stimulated by them."

"You have hinted at control of this phenomenon," 6W-438 reminded the professor.

"There are several ways, depending on how the Jyg-fyps and the third sex take a view of matters. For one thing, we could induce the space creatures from throwing their dead off the mountain. Secondly, if the Jyg-fyps could be persuaded to restrict their diet, and select only those worthy of being more intellectual and becoming leaders to eat of the irradiated fish, they might find a progressive future in which there would be no exiles.

"What we must do first," 19K-59 reminded them, is to mine metal and get it down to the space ship."

"How shall we get it there?" 41C-98 asked. "We cannot throw it off the mountain and have it fall into the abyss. True, it will fall in the ocean, but it will still be a long ways from the edge of that hole."

"We can figure that out while we are mining it," the professor suggested.

By repair and the division among them of legs and appendages, the eight Zoromes partly equipped the five metal bodies they still had. The metal was not hard to reach, and the space creatures, who like themselves never slept, helped them. Yet the work went slowly because the machine men were only partly equipped, badly repaired and without tools other than what they were able to fashion from the meteorites Gloph and his friends possessed. Up in the airless mountain heights, day after day passed, abrupt mornings with sudden, full daylight, followed by a day's work, then night again as abruptly as morning had come. The machine men did little mining at night due to the poor lighting.

One day, Professor Jameson wandered far, heading down a ridge which led through the upper air level before rising again to another height. The space creatures had spoken about another community of their kind which they rarely visited. The machine man climbed the ridge up out of the rarefied atmosphere and into space. He climbed higher and found traces of the space creatures. Then he saw a group of them, and they saw him. They showed great excitement and gesticulated among themselves.

"Things out of space!" they radiated. "Here is another one! Come!"

To the professor's surprise, two machine men appeared around a jutting escarpment.

"21MM392!" they exclaimed.

"12W-62 and 6N-24! How did you get up here? Did another fish swim up and out of the abyss with you?"

"No. We are all here. We came in the space ship."

"How did you repair it and float it? Where did you get the metal?"

"From great blocks dropped into the abyss not very long after the space ship sunk. We know that they were not there when we came. We explored the bottom of the pit well. 19K-59 and 41C-98 disappeared soon after being swallowed by a fish. We thought they might have done it, or caused it to be done in some manner, for the blocks were very large and heavy. They must have escaped out of the pit, and they were on such a mission."

"The blocks were dropped over the edge of the abyss by order of the Jyg-fyps when they held six of us captives. This must have happened before 19K-59 and 41C-98 were swallowed by the fish," the professor explained. "We pushed them over the edge only by great labor and difficulty, but we never realized they contained metal."

"Nor would we," said 12W-62, "only that one of them broke when it fell bradside across the sharp edge of another."

"I remember, now, that they had a magnetic attraction for one another."

The professor hurried with them back to the space ship and the others. He and 744U-21 told their separate stories.

“It was only makeshift,” 744U-21 told the professor, “but it served the purpose. We escaped out of there and can now really do a good job o the space ship.”

“Come over to the next peak,” Professor Jameson told them. “We have been mining metal and storing it up. Once we put the space ship in good shape again, I want to visit Byb-phry-tim in the city of the third sex.”

The End

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