

# Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

MAY, 1947

Cover by Matt Fox

## NOVELETTES

- THE PLACE WITH MANY WINDOWS** . . . . . Allison V. Harding 6  
*The dead there are who should be alive, and alive are things that should be dead!*
- MASKED BALL** . . . . . Seabury Quinn 24  
*When the tide of carnival reaches full flood the Evil Being it is who rides the crest*
- THE CORBIE DOOR** . . . . . Carl Jacobi 55  
*A pageant of the past with shady images bent on a monstrous, timeless evil*

## SHORT STORIES

- MISTRESS SARY** . . . . . William Tenn 37  
*Modern "Iarmin" up against ancient knowledge—with the Devil take the loser!*
- THE LIFTED VEIL** . . . . . Ray Cummings 44  
*Lying in the black prison of his thoughts the empty abyss of the future spread endlessly before him*
- THE BLACK MADONNA** . . . . . Harold Lawlor 68  
*A perfect crime, justified murder and a terrible revenge on the revengeful!*
- LOUP-GAROU** . . . . . Manly Banister 76  
*You have, of course, doubted the existence of the werewolf. Remember, no one is sure except the werewolf and his victim*
- THE TRAP** . . . . . Walter Harwood 86  
*The luminous glow beneath the black mirrored surface of those beast eyes suggested a striking combination of savagery and intelligence where none should be*
- SUPERSTITIONS AND TABOOS** . . . . . Irwin J. Weill 23
- THE EYRIE AND THE WEIRD TALES CLUB** . . . . . 5

*Except for personal experiences, the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.*

Published bi-monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y. Reentered as second-class matter January 26, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 15 cents. Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions, 90¢. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. English Office: Charles Lavell, Limited, 4 Clements Inn, Strand London, W.C.2, England. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession.

Copyright, 1947, by Weird Tales. Copyrighted in Great Britain.  
Title registered in U. S. Patent Office.

178  
Vol. 39, No. 11

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

D. McILWRAITH, Editor.

LAMONT BUCHANAN, Associate Editor.

# The Lifted Veil

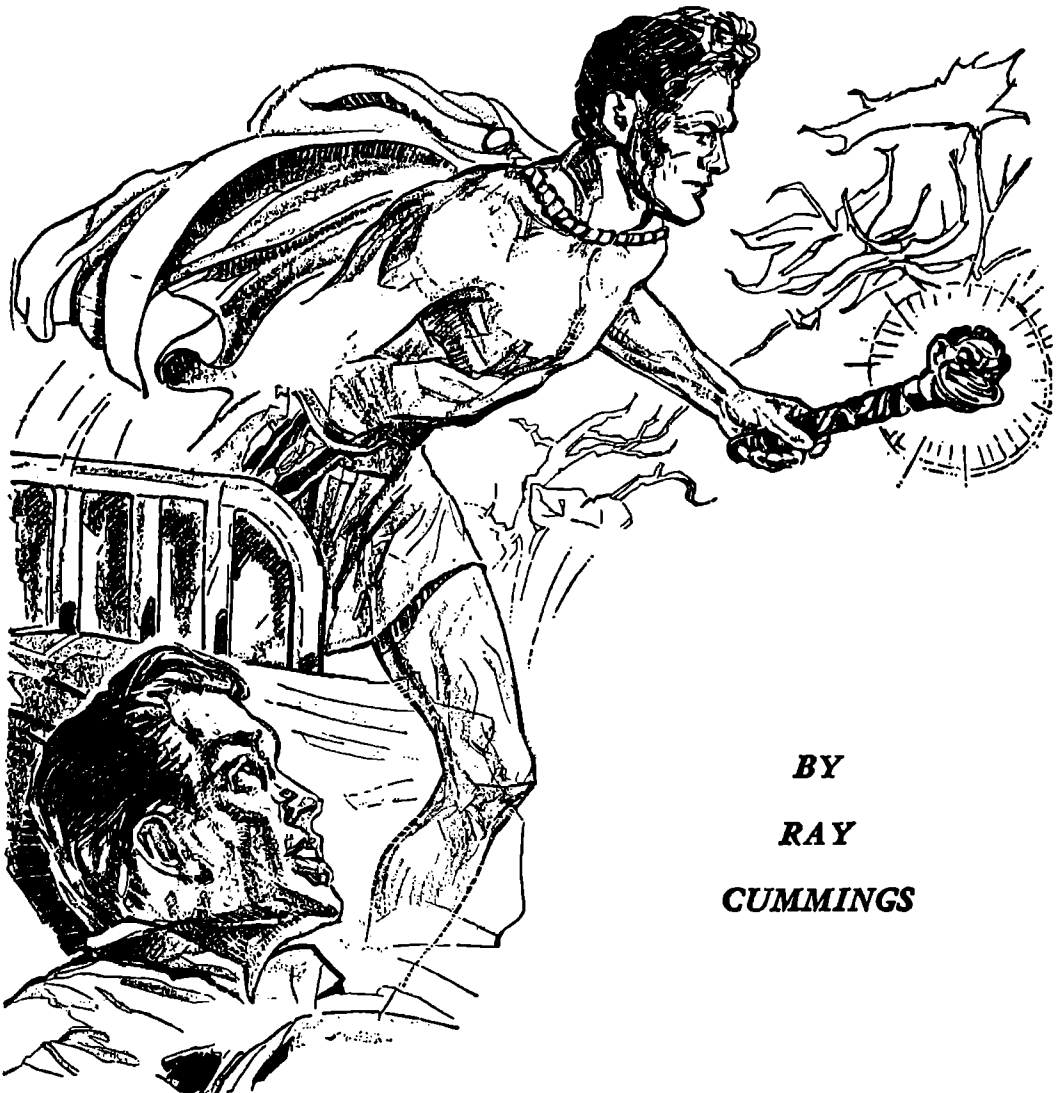
**H**E LAY on his hospital bed, gazing at the patch of moonlight that shafted through the window and spread on the white bed covering. It was a pallid patch, crossed with a mockery of shadow bars magnified from the woven pattern of the filmy, white window curtains. He knew it was that, of course. But the bars seemed horribly sinister as they spread there over him.

He raised one knee. Just one knee, because the other was gone. His knee lifted

the bed covering. The bars of shadow bent and shifted, but they did not break. Horrible confining things, black symbols of the black prison where what was left of Bob Hallen lay tortured by his thoughts.

He closed his eyes so that he would not see the bars. It was much better, because now the shimmering, orange-colored forest was before him. There was comfort, out in that strange distant shimmer. . . .

A fly buzzed over him, droning in the heavy silence of the summer evening. It



*BY*  
*RAY*  
*CUMMINGS*

*The mind can travel many strange, dark paths, and who is to say  
for sure which is the real and the unreal!*

landed on his dank forehead. He opened his eyes, and his left hand flicked the fly away—his left hand, and it seemed now that he could see again, as plainly as when it had happened that night in the tropic island palmy thicket, how his right arm had looked when the shrapnel had struck it. And how his right leg had looked as it had swelled and blackened.

Now the horror of men murdering each other was all over, and here were the mutilated remains of Bob Hallen, lying in the black prison of his thoughts, with the empty abyss of his future spread before him.

The shimmering forest seemed closer. . . .

"He's asleep." That was Nora's murmuring voice. And then his father's voice:

"Should we wake him up, nurse? Is it all right? Or perhaps he's had a sedative for

the night? We shouldn't have come so late."

"No. It's all right, Mr. Hallen. He's probably not asleep."

He could see them as they stood hesitating in the doorway, with the corridor light edging their dark outlines.

"Go away," he said suddenly. "Go away. I want to sleep."

He could have talked for a little while with his father. But not with Nora. No. He never could talk with Nora again. Never see her.

It hurt too much. The thought of what might have been with Nora was the worst of all.

But they didn't go away. His father came forward, with Nora hesitating in the doorway. Behind her, the white figure of the



Heading by FRED HUMISTON

nurse moved back and merged with the corridor light and was gone.

"Hello, Bob."

"Hello, Dad."

"Feeling more spry tonight, eh, son? Well, that's fine." His father's voice was briskly cheerful. One must always exhude cheer for the brooding patient. The psychiatrist had probably said something like that. There wasn't anything the matter with Bob Hallen now, except just a psychoneurosis. How simple for science to explain away the wreck of a man who was all finished and knew it!

Then his father was sitting on the little white chair by the bed. "Shall I light the light, Bob?"

"Yes. Go ahead if you want to."

The small hooded light from the bedside table showed his father's thin figure with an outline of yellow; and it struck on his father's face where there was a cheerful smile so forced and phony that it could not hide his anxiety.

"They tell me you were up and around today, Bob," his father said. "That's good. And tomorrow—"

"Sure I was," he said, "in a wheelchair."

And then his father began the same argument all over again. "Any time you'll let them," his father said earnestly, "you can start learning how to use the new leg, Bob. And the arm—"

"Dad! Stop it! Stop it, I tell you!" Behind the small, bright glare of the table light, he could see the figure of Nora timidly standing there. Nora, to hear this gruesome talk of a leg and an arm—part of him irrevokably gone—sure, he had had a leg and an arm once and now they were lying somewhere, rotting, stinking, horrible. "You send her away!" he said. "You get her out of here!"

"Oh, I'm sorry, Bob." His father was frightened. "We won't talk of it, son."

"I told her yesterday never to come back! I told her!"

If only he could get away from all this torture! The shining, shimmering forest that he could see so plain and close was like a haven. . . . He was up on his one elbow in the bed now, glaring. And the slim little blob that was Nora behind the light seemed to be blurring. How idiotic for him to have

tears in his eyes! A wreck of a man lying here and blubbering like a fool over it! He sank back, steadying himself by crumpling the bedsheet with his twitching left-hand fingers.

"Please go away, Nora," he said. "I told you—"

"Oh, Bob, dear—"

It was horrible to hear her voice with words like that. . . . Bob, dear. . . . Her voice and the way she had always said it, had echoed so many times in his dreams of what was going to be, with Nora.

"You go away," he said. "I don't want you here."

He closed his eyes to bar her. And now the strange comforting shimmer of the orange-colored forest with the jutting, ragged little line of hills behind it, seemed suddenly to take on a new reality. In the blankness beside him, he heard that his father had quietly risen from the bedside chair. Then there was a faint, wafting perfume from Nora, her nearness, the rustle of her summer dress.

He twitched as her hand caressed his hair; he tried to jerk his head away.

"Bob," she murmured, "look at me. Open your eyes."

"No," he said. "Go away, Nora."

"I want to talk to you, Bob." Her voice was quiet, but firm with a sudden, queer little command to it. And there was his father's voice saying softly:

"I'll wait outside, Nora."

"Please, Bob. Don't be stubborn."

Of course, he was childish, that's what she was thinking. Through his closed eyelids he could see now that there was a little glowing river winding through the forest; and there were mound-shaped brown things that clustered in a group all along the slope off to the left. Maybe they were houses? It was queer that everything out there was so much plainer tonight. Closer. So close that it seemed as though now he could smell the redolence of the vegetation. . . .

Then again there was Nora's voice: "Sure, we talked yesterday, Bob. But I just can't let it go at that. I want—want another chance to make you realize—"

At the stammer in her voice, he opened his eyes; and the light from the bed table was glistening in her soft brown hair; it

rippled all over her soft, blue summer dress and it glowed on her earnest little face where the waves of her hair were like a frame, just the way it had always been in his dreams of her.

She was trying to smile. "You must see I mean it, Bob. I love you. I love you just the same as—as before."

"You're sorry for me," he muttered bitterly.

"Sure, I am. But not very much. You're all right now, and I—I just want us to get married the way we always planned."

"Because you're sorry for me, and it's your duty. That's the kind of girl you are. I'm not a fool."

Then she was gazing at him sidewise, mustering that little roguish smile he had loved so much.

"Don't jilt me, Bob." Then she was serious. "What you're thinking about yourself—that's plain bunk. Remember how you used to say you'd conquer the world—for me? Well, you still can. A little harder, maybe, but you can still do it."

She was leaning down, trying to kiss him. And the what might have been stirred in him with a new horror that was unbearable.

"Go away! I can't stand it! Let me alone!"

He knew that he was screaming at her hysterically. He hadn't broken like this for a week or more; he'd held it in check.

"Get out of here! Get out of here! I want to be alone! You let me alone!"

**T**HE Midge were worried. Frightened. Why not? There was the drumbeat of the Raans out there beyond the hills. The Raans were coming—they were coming again. . . . He could see the moving shapes of the frightened little Midge, here among their houses on the slope. Almost he could hear the distant, sinister drumbeats. . . .

"You get her out of here, I tell you!" He knew he was screaming it at Nora.

"Bob, dear—Oh I didn't mean to upset you!"

"You'd better leave, Nora." That was his father's frightened voice. "Nurse! Nurse! Come here quick!"

"You get out of here, all of you! I want to go to sleep! Let me alone!"

He hadn't gone to pieces like this for a long time. . . . Damn it, he mustn't let the

Midge get frightened! There was too much to do here now!

Then he could hear the nurse saying hurriedly, "I'll get Dr. Allen to quiet him. You and Miss Blake had better leave now."

How silly to go to pieces and get hysterical. He fought to calm himself. He lay thinking about the drumbeats of the Raans and what should be done about it; and when Dr. Allen came, he said, "I'm all right, doc." His left arm waved away the hypodermic. "I don't need that, doc. I—I'm hanging onto myself now."

Then he had the hospital doctor pacified, and he was alone. Queer, he didn't have to close his eyes now to see the shining country of the Midge. It lay glowing off there beyond his bed. . . . It still wasn't as plain as the room around him. It seemed as though there were a veil of mist here. . . .

But the veil was lifting. . . .

The hospital was very silent. He had been lying here for a long time, since Dr. Allen finally had left. He guessed it could be after midnight now. Outside his window there was the distant hum of traffic, a tiny voice blended of a myriad sounds. . . . But of course he couldn't hear the drumbeats of the Raans, because they were too far away. It was the time of sleep in the Midge village, but no one was sleeping. There was too much alarm; too much to do; too much confusion.

They needed someone to plan for them now. Someone who wasn't afraid, and who could think clearly of what should be done to repel the Raans.

Bob started to get out of the hospital bed. But he relaxed, because that was silly. And now he was aware of the strangeness. Things coming into reality, and other things fading away. . . . The traffic down on the highway—was it that? Or was it now the blended, distant, frightened little cries of the Midge? The hospital bed held him lightly. But he could feel it still, quite plainly. There was a bouyancy here; a lifting. A sense of lightness down into the very core of him; a thing that tingled like wine in his veins.

And there was an urgency. A pulling sense of urgency that queerly steadied his jangled nerves so that the last of the hysteria was gone because things now must be done.

And now he knew that the veil had lifted at last . . .

From the rocky hillside here where he was lying propped up on his elbow, he could see down the slope to the little valley, beyond which the ground rose up again and the orange-colored forest began, with the Midge village off to the left. The night air, stirring gently with a breeze, had a musk-like scent. That was the smell of the food-pods ripening.

He stood up on the rocks, balanced on his left foot. It was easy to stand, because there was such a lightness to him. A different gravity. Of course, that was it. The knowledge was like a memory. Yet it was a little different from that. The instinct of knowledge. The smell of the food-pods ripening. The Midge. The Raans. Things he never had known before, but now seemed instinctively coming to him, so that they were natural, not strange. A gravity which might make him weigh fifteen or twenty pounds, instead of his normal hundred and forty. It brought a lightness, a sense of untrammelled freedom.

He could hear the voices of the Midge quite plainly now as they wafted across the little valley and up the slope, carried by the redolent night-breeze. He must join them. He bent his left knee and made a leap; and his body sailed in an arc through the shimmering air and landed twenty or thirty feet down the slope. He laughed a little as he wobbled, fell and picked himself up. Of course! The damned right leg was gone, and this was something new. The bound stump of his right arm waved as though to balance him. Then he was aware of the brown fabric drape that clothed him—a sort of round-necked tunic with crescent-shaped shoulder lines upturned; a belt that bound him at the waist, and the drapes falling almost to his knee. In his left hand there was a stone or metal shaft, like a spear. A weapon? It could not be that, because it had a small gargoyle image at the end of it. Queer, he had no instinctive knowledge of what it was. And then he understood, because it was something new; something unusual, like his missing right arm and leg.

He was poised for another leap down the slope, when suddenly there was a movement among the shadowed rocks near him.

A little gray-blue blob. One of the Midge. Then as he stood up, he saw her more clearly! a young girl, with her gray-blue drapes, somewhat like his own, clinging to her slim brown body, waving with her long, pale hair in the night-breeze.

It came to Bob Hallen then—a shafting stray thought across the background of his mind—that the Midge were fashioned in a very human mould, only smaller, more frail, with a birdlike quality to their little pointed faces. This girl was barely four feet tall, as she stood there on the rock mutely staring at him—a fragile little thing, and you would expect her to hop over the rocks like a bird. But she wouldn't, of course. She would walk with stiff, jerky little steps, or she would awkwardly run because despite this slight gravity, her strength was equally slight. . . .

She was staring, frightened, but mostly with wonderment. And Bob said suddenly, "Don't be afraid. I won't hurt you."

"No," she said. "No. I am not afraid. You will not hurt me. That is true. I can feel it." Her tone was different from his, but not unmusical. Her words came in little, breathless jerks. Of course. All the young Midge spoke like that. The impetuosity of youth. When they got older, their speech was more measured. The same language, but spoken with a heavy guttural slur. A slow, dull-witted, ponderous speech.

"What's your name?" he said.

"I am Nyah. The family of Megano."

"Megano?" he said. "Oh yes, I remember—No, I don't mean that. I mean I know—Megano, they call him the Ancient One."

"Yes," she said. "What is your name? I have not seen you before. Not anyone, like you."

"I'm Bob," he said. "Bob Hallen."

Strange dialogue. Again Bob's normal memories came to mingle with this which now was his reality. Was this English they were talking? It sounded so. His thoughts were couched in it. But he knew it wasn't, because it was the language of the Midge.

"You have the Mace," she said. "I have never seen it before." She smiled a little. "I did not really believe it existed. I did not. I thought it was just a symbol. Because nobody ever really had seen it."

"Well, you see it now," he said. "And the Raans are coming—"

Fear swept her. "The Raans! I had forgotten. You must come! Megano sent me up here—"

"To meet me?"

"Yes. He said he thought there would be the Mace—"

It was hard for him to hop with short enough leaps not to outdistance the running little Nyah. And then the awed, jabbering Midge were around them as they advanced into the group of mound-shaped dwellings.

"You keep back!" Nyah called.

"The Mace! He carries the Mace!" . . .

"The Raans will feel its power now!" . . .

"He brings the Mace! We need not fear the Raans now!" . . .

The jabbering Midge, men, and women with children in their arms, and larger children clinging to them, all surged forward, with little Nyah ordering them back. In the midst of it, Bob Hallen stood towering over them, balanced on his single left leg and with the shining Mace in his left hand. He was smiling whimsically, because still there were his normal memories, and the oddness of all this made him smile. To the Midge he was a miracle, come to them now bearing the fabled Mace, with its invincible magic power of Right and Justice to triumph over all that was evil. . . .

"And now we need not fear the Raans. . . ."

"Megano said he might come!"

"You better get me into Megano's dwelling," Bob said hurriedly to Nyah.

"Yes, it is here."

He had to be careful, hopping in through its small brown doorway. And then in the dim draped room, the small, shriveled figure of Megano sat staring at him in a moment of silent awe.

"You came?" Megano murmured at last. "I did hope that it was true and you would come." His wizened, birdlike face with the wide slit of mouth of the very old, wrinkled into a smile of welcome. But still his slow, thoughtful voice was awed. "What is your name?"

"Bob. Bob Hallen."

"It sounds strange to us. But of course, that is natural. Are you thirsty and hungry? Nyah, have Rotan bring food and drink."

"I have it here," Rotan said.

Bob gazed at the halfbreed. There were only a few of them, and Rotan was typical—a heavy-set fellow, lumpish with slack flesh. He was a little taller than the Midge.

The servant here; he set the crushed food-pod paste and the spicy drink before Bob, and then melted back respectfully into the shadows of an inner doorway.

"You knew I was coming?" Bob said. "A different world—how could you know anything about me, and my world?"

"About you—nothing," Megano said. "But I am very old. There was a time when it was thought that I was dying. To me, it was like a vision, very brief, given to me. I saw your big world so near us in the stream of Time. And I understood it, or it seemed that I did, just a little."

"Dying?" Bob said. "Then—am I dead? In my own world up there—am I dead?" Queer that the thought should bring, not exactly horror, but more a wonderment.

"Dead?" Megano echoed. "No, I do not think so. You are here to help us. And you bring the Mace. That is beyond science, or metaphysics. More in the nature of a miracle, not to be explained perhaps. Or perhaps it is just an outward symbol of your ability to help us."

"I want to help you," Bob said.

"I know it." The ancient Megano smiled again so that his little brown face was a wrinkled knot around his pointed nose. "I have—all my Midge here, we have an instinct of trust in you. Here to help us. And I think too, that you are here for another purpose."

"What?" Bob asked.

"I do not know." He turned to Nyah, who was sitting peering from one to the other of them with her quick glance. "You, Nyah—it was you who told me he was coming. Just a little while ago, and then he came."

"You?" Bob said. "You knew—"

"There was a great-need," Nyah said softly. Her voice seemed awed, and puzzled. "I did not understand anything, but there was great unhappiness—fear—"

"The young female can often sense things beyond her understanding," Megano said.

"You mean, fear that the Raans were coming?" Bob said. He started from his seat. "And we're sitting here talking, when—"

Megano waved him back. "There is time: They come slowly—a horde of them through the Lower Passage, but there is time."

"Fear of the Raans," Nyah said. "Yes. That. And there was something else. It was like a vision or a dream. There was a dark place with a small light to the side and I was very frightened. I wanted to help, but I could not."

"But she seemed to know that you were coming," Megano put in. "Our worlds, it seems to me, are very close. It is as though we were just a little echo of you."

A co-existing realm. The Fourth Dimension. A different segment of a branching Time-stream. . . . Bob had often read of such things, but after all, who could explain them? Was this something like that? It seemed so. And yet, somehow, it seemed not quite that either. . . .

"My human body is here," Bob said. "Did some force alter its state of being—" He groped to try and phrase it so that it might be a rational thing of factual science.

"A force," Megano said, "but it could be the force of the human mind. *There* is the real miracle of science, Bob Hallen! The human mind. A thought. A memory. What are they? And human Reason. What process is it? Thought is the Great Unknown. And it can do strange things to Time. Shorten it. Hasten it. Sometimes almost obliterate it altogether."

"Yes, everyone experiences that," Bob agreed.

"And thought—yours, and Nyah's too, perhaps—altered the Time-factor of your existence, brought you here."

"And I've never been here before?"

"No. I think not. But when here, you are part of us. A knowledge of us is with you." Megano was slowly pondering it, with the wisdom of his long life behind him. "I think you have had no connection with us here, until now.

"But it seems to me that others of us here, sometimes, have an aura of something within them from your world. Like a little echo, linking them—"

A noise outside the dwelling mound interrupted him. There was a shadow in the doorway. A Midge man came hurriedly in. His breath was a little cloud like steam from his parted mouth. He had been running, and

the radiant heat from his body rose over him in visible waves.

"Boyne," Megano said. "You Boyne, what is—"

"I was in the hills where you sent me to watch," Boyne gasped. "And the Raan horde is not coming by the Lower Passage! A few of them went there yesterday and beat the deathdrums there, but that was to fool us! They come by the—"

The words died in his gasping mouth. Bob saw a little flick of shining thing come in the window beside the messenger. It struck him in the chest. There was a gruesome, gurgling hiss as the inner-pressure of the body tissue came out through the wound. His shriveling body spun for an instant on his twisting little legs, and then he fell.

THE messenger had been silenced before he could tell about the oncoming Raans! Killed by someone from outside, with a blowtube! Bob was out of his seat, balanced on his left leg. His left arm gestured to the terrified Nyah and Megano.

"Stay inside!" he said. A single hop took him to the doorway. He crouched as he went through, fell outside. Then he was up again. Out beyond two of the shadowed mound-dwellings, a brown-clad figure was running in the glowing dimness.

A leap took Bob over the nearest of the little houses, and as he landed he saw the figure again, clinging to the shadows as it ran. Another sailing leap . . . Another . . . There was a strangely wild, fierce exultation to it. The pursuit of a killer . . . Bob had ignored the Mace, which he had carefully stood beside him in Megano's room. The Mace was only a symbol; a thing to inspire the Midge. But Bob Hallen knew his power now; knew it; exulted in it; a thing that was a great need to him so that now as he felt it, there was almost an unreasoning sweep of triumph within him. . . .

He was muttering, "You damned little murderer! When I get hold of you—"

And the running figure saw him coming. The fugitive gave a gasp as the big bulk of Bob came with a sailing leap over him, balanced and turned to seize him.

"Rotan! Why you damned little murderous traitor—"

It was the halfbreed. He had dropped his



blowtube. He tried to duck away, but with a lunge Bob was on him.

"Got you! You damned little—"

Rotan screamed. But that was all. A single gruesome, gurgling scream as Bob's body bore him down. A horror . . . There was nothing in Bob's endowment of knowledge to warn him of this horror as like a brittle-shelled insect the body of Rotan smashed within his grip and under his pouncing weight . . . Then Bob scrambled off the welter, rubbing dirt from the ground upon himself, and dirt to cleanse his hands.

Noisome . . . horrible. . .

Then he went bounding back to the dim room where Megano and Nyah bent over the fallen messenger.

"I got him," Bob said grimly. "He's lying out there—it was that cursed Rotan—"

"And I trusted him," Megano said. "I should not have done that."

"Bend down," Nyah said. "Quickly now. He tries to speak."

The little messenger was not dead, but he was quickly dying now. Bob bent down.

"Speak, Boyne. Tell us. Not coming by the Lower Passage—"

"They come—over the Top Ridge—high above the glow—"

Above the glow of the orange-colored forest! Up through the pass, high up on the Dividing Ridge! But that was up where the Invisible Things lurked! The monstrous Invisible Things that were afraid of the orange-colored radiation from the forests so that they only lurked high in the crags! And the Raans dared to come that way!

Megano gasped, "Why—why, how do they dare?"

"Not too great a chance maybe," Bob said. "They figure we would never expect them by that route, and if they could surprise us, getting down here in the open—a horde of them—" He stooped back to the ground. "When are they coming, Boyne? How far away are they now?"

But the little messenger lay shriveled in death.

"Up by the Invisible Things?" Nyah gasped. "Our men must go there to stop the Raans? But they will not! They will be too frightened!"

Frightened indeed. But when the strange towering figure balanced on the single leg

and with the Great Miracle of the Mace in his hand stood among them, they would go. They jabbered it, gathering in a milling group.

"I don't want many," Bob said. "We won't need it to turn them back."

Queer exultation of his power. It was as though all his life he had been waiting for this chance to show what a man can do. Not to anyone else, but just to show himself. And the thought was in him as at the head of his little army of about a hundred of the Midge, he hopped forward with restrained, sailing leaps. It was a strange thought. The doubled background of his mind contemplated it with a vague wonderment. All this, so vital to the Midge. A thing of life or death. To Bob Hallen it was a demonstration. Like the Mace—a symbol. A symbol of what a man can do. . .

He could not shake the thought. But at last, when they had passed beyond the orange glow of the forests, and were up in the jagged, naked brown hilltops, the thought dropped from him in the grim emergency that was here for the Midge. . .

And now, wafting up from down beyond the Divide, came the muffled, hollow beat of the deathdrums of the Raans. Then he and the gathered Midge could see them—the massed horde of them coming in a slow, long line to enter the narrow pass here among the crags.

Bob dispersed his Midge along the top brink of the rocky defile. It was a narrow, winding canyon, twenty or thirty feet wide in places, and equally as deep, straggling through the broken, tumbled summit of the Divide. The little Midge army was fully equipped in its simple, primitive fashion with the small Midge blowtubes and with an array of crude spears, clubs and bludgeons. And with headgear and padded garments to resist the lethal darts the Raans would send.

Primitive, odd little battle. But it was critical to these frightened, excited little Midge. And to Bob Hallen as he hopped in his great sailing leaps from one crag to another, the singular feeling still lurked that here was something of terrible import for him as well.

An ambush. The oncoming Raans thought that the Midge would oppose them in the

Lower Passage. Their drumbeats were stilled now. Silently they came, like a great line of slugs shoving forward. Already the first of them had entered the defile, not more than what would be half an Earth-mile from where the Midge were crouching on the upper brink. Bob chuckled. The dull-witted Raans were in for a surprise.

But there was the gruesome threat, up here, of the Invisible Things. Strange monsters that hovered in the glowing purple air, away from the orange sheen of the forests which they feared. Perhaps they might not attack the living; but like vultures they would come pouncing upon the dead, and the maimed.

"Wait until I order you to attack," Bob called softly. "In a few minutes now."

Then at last the moving lines of the Raans were passing along the defile beneath him, sluggish, lumpy brown figures of men, grotesque travesties of humans. Dull-witted, slow of mind and body, they moved with dragging steps. Enemies that were dangerous, only because there were so many of them. Some were unarmed; some carried chunks of rock, and slabs of stone and wood for bludgeons. And some of them had blow-tubes.

Bob cast an apprehensive glance up into the purple air; and then he stood up, shouting to the Midge. . . .

It was a brief conflict, briefer even than Bob had hoped. A wave of the tiny whizzing darts went down upon the Raans. Some went wild; others found their mark, with gruesome little puffs as the brown bodies shriveled and fell. Then the Midge were tumbling loose rocks over the brink, rocks that crashed down, mashing the brown shapes.

In that first moment of the surprise attack, the curving segment of the canyon here was a gruesome mass of struggling Raans. Their shouts and guttural screams came up. Over the piled bodies of the weltering dead, the others struggled and milled in confusion. A few sent up darts. Near Bob a little Midge tumbled and fell. Beside him, another was struggling to shove a boulder over the lip of the brink. It resisted his puny efforts, but with a twenty foot leap, Bob was there. With his shoulder hunched against the big rock, he shoved. So easy, here in this little

world! The great boulder stirred, rolled, went down into the chaos below.

Then Bob was everywhere, almost at once, with his great sailing leaps landing at some vantage point to shove a rock, and then another. A leap took him over the width of the canyon itself, where on the other side a mass of loose rock was lying. He sent it down in a clattering little avalanche. From the canyon now the guttural screams were a weird horror. But from around the bend new columns of the Raans pressed doggedly forward, climbing upon the slimy, weltering mass of the dead and the dying.

And Bob saw that a column of them had climbed to the top of the defile. They were pressing forward with a group of the now terrified little Midge blowing darts at them. With a leap, Bob was there. The waving Mace in his left hand was a symbol, but it was a weapon as well. His swinging blows with it gruesomely crashed through the lumps of brown bodies. Then Bob had a mass of them around him at once, dumb brown lumps of humans that screamed as they pressed at him. Behind him he could see some of the Midge, standing stricken, watching with frightened awe. With a leap he was out of the brown waves of flesh that threatened to engulf him, landing behind them. He had dropped the Mace now. He seized one of the screaming Raans by the legs, whirled him crashing against others. Then he was tumbling them bodily over the brink.

Down in the canyon now there was a new horror. The whining swoop of a pouncing, dropping Unseen Thing from above. And then another. For a moment Bob stared, with his heart pounding and his flesh crawling. In a little shadow down there, he could see faintly the palpitating pink outline of the monster as it mouthed the mangled Raan bodies . . . tearing them apart . . . some of the weltering parts now were weirdly scattering, sailing upward, carried away by the monstrous Unseen Things that fought with each other as they went. . . .

Brief, horrible little struggle. The Raans pressing forward around the bend in the canyon had stopped now; milling about, trampling each other. Then they were turning back in a rout with the whining Unseen Things hovering over them, waiting to

**pounce.** A rout. It spread back to all the lines of Raan columns down the further slope of the Divide—a screaming, terrified rout. And now the Raan deathdrums were sounding again. But not the rhythmic beat of the advance to battle. This was the chattering dirge of defeat, a wail of it starting here and spreading back into the dim dark distance down the slope of the Divide. . . .

**BOB** had long since drawn his Midge away. They stood in a chattering, triumphant group around him. . . . The dirge of the Raan drumbeats was fading into the shadowy lower distance. From the canyon the last of the whining things rose up and was gone. . . .

And Bob felt the awe of the Midge as they gazed silently at him. There was a thrill to it. But queerly he felt suddenly humble, with a thankfulness that what he had wanted to do, had been done. . . . Quietly he turned the Midge back toward the orange-colored glow of their protecting forests down the slope. . . .

A hero. He stood, feeling very strange inside as the Midge jabbered around him, back in the village of little mound-shaped dwellings. And the ancient Megano was here, thanking him, but not so much with awe, just a thoughtful smile of welcome and praise.

Then later he was sitting in the glowing dimness outside Megano's mound, with Nyah; and the little Midge girl wanted to hear all about it. But he tried to wave it away. He was thinking of something else, something which somehow seemed very important.

"Nyah," he said, "When you first got the idea that there was a need here—"

"The Raans," she said. "I was so afraid."

"Yes, I know. But you said—you had some sort of vision or something. You were in a dark place, with a small light to the side."

"Yes, I remember. I was very frightened."

"About me, maybe? Could it have been you were frightened about me?" He held his breath.

"You?" she said. Her luminous little eyes widened with wonderment. "You? But I knew nothing about you. There were voices and I was very frightened. About—about

the Raans, I guess. How could it have been anything else?"

How indeed? "Of course, of course," he said.

This world, like a little echo of his own. Something here, that had come into this tiny eddy of the Time-stream, and was here for a purpose? Something just a little beyond human understanding? A tiny thread of the vast fabric of the Unknown? Was it that?

But little Nyah already had forgotten his questions. She was gazing at the orange dimness around them. "I am surely glad you came," she murmured.

And then she was looking at him archly—a queer little roguish side glance. His heart leaped. . . . This little whimsical, impish smile. . . .

"Why—why—" He choked back the words. And suddenly there was a confusion here within him; a blurring of unreality so that the orange haze was swimming into a mist. . . .

A mist like a veil. . . .

And things were pulling at him. A little pulling here to hold him, but something else dragging him away. . . .

An orange mist, like a veil. But it was a lifting veil because now there was a little spot of yellow glow here beside him. And a low, distant murmur. A murmur of far-away sound that was coming in the window. Of course. That was it. . . . Nora. . . . It was his thought of Nora that was lifting the veil, drawing him back. Because he was up on his elbow now, he could see between the filmy white window curtains out to where the murmuring sound was the traffic on the highway.

The little light was burning on the table beside his hospital bed. He reached and turned it off, because now the dawnlight was coming in the window. The white little room was brightening with the rose-glow of it.

A man can do so much, if he wants to try. . . .

He was glad it was early. There was a lot to do today. He lay pondering it. That little business which he had always planned with Nora, to be started when the damnable affair overseas was wound up. A little business can grow pretty fast, if you handle it right. The Government would help him

finance it. In a year or so, it would expand maybe so he could open a branch. A business can grow to any size, if you stick at it. If it needed more capital his father had plenty of collateral. His father's signature on his notes would turn them into cash in a hurry at any bank. Or maybe the expanding business would be able to finance itself. That would be better.

Sure were a lot of things to do. But you couldn't hop around on one damn leg with thirty foot leaps the way he'd been doing. Not here.

He'd have to get that new leg and arm in action right away.

He lay pondering it. And he wanted to

tell Nora about it all. He wanted that most of everything.

He reached for the telephone, which was on the bedside table.

"But Mr. Hallen," the hospital operator protested. "So early? It's hardly daybreak. Is anything wrong? You'd better buzz for the nurse. She'll help you. Don't get excited now—you're all right."

"Don't let's be silly, shall we?" he said. "Sure I'm all right. I'll buzz the nurse because I want some breakfast. But this outside call's important. Put it through, please."

He could hear her dialing the number. He sat waiting for Nora's voice.