

MOONS OF DEATH *by* DAVID V. REED

fantastic ADVENTURES

MAY 20c



FANTASTIC ADVENTURES

MAY 1941

THE INVISIBLE ROBINHOOD RETURNS IN
LAND of the SHADOW DRAGONS *by* EANDO BINDER

Also Stories by **McGIVERN ★ WILCOX ★ NORMAN**

Fantastic

ADVENTURES

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VOLUME 3,
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3 EYES In The Dark

BY DON WILCOX

Nort bore his Martian slavery patiently and dreamed of the day when "Three Eyes" would rescue mankind

LAGGAMON and Etang, the two Rabs, lay on their blankets beside the campfire. Nort, their slave, had prepared hot water for their baths, but they would not bathe. The mountain air was too chilly. Besides, they were already getting sleepy.

Nort, the Venortian slave, came trudging past them with his arms full of firewood.

Laggamon, nudging his companion, gave a swift swing of his muscular right arm that held a long woven black whip. The end of the blacksnake lashed the slave's ankles. Nort stumbled and fell, face down, into the heap of firewood.

"Pick it up, you wretch!" Laggamon shouted. "What's the matter? Can't you walk straight?"

"He must be drunk," Etang snorted. "Got intoxicated on that soup he gave us for supper."

The two Rabs made ready for bed. The Venortian slave shook the sand from their blankets and made up their beds in the open rear end of the truck. Then he went back to his firewood.

"Three fires every night," Etang

muttered. "Damned if Venortians aren't the most superstitious people that we ever chased off a planet."

"And how they hang on to their silly customs is a fright. Even invent new ones. Did you hear the latest that's making the rounds?"

"Three eyes in the dark?"

"That's it. One slave'll say to another, 'Have you seen three eyes in the dark?' And maybe the second slave will say 'yes', or maybe he'll give a blank stare—depending on how superstitious he is."

"There's something back of it," Etange grunted. "There's something about the number three. Look how he lays out those fires—in a triangle. It's always been the same, every season we take him out on these surveying trips. I'll swear if we were in a treeless desert, or above the timber line, he'd rustle enough wood to make three fires. He claims one's for cooking, one's for warmth, and one's for our Rab gods," and Etang expressed his contempt by spitting. "There's still too much Venortian about Nort for him to build a fire to *our* gods. If his people ever should



Reverently Nort knelt before the wonderful vision of "Three Eyes."

come back, he and a lot of other slaves might turn into something beside faithful, plodding servants."

"Pfff!" said Laggamon.

"Don't you believe it?"

"They'll never come back. Only a few thousand got away in third-rate space ships—and that was long ago—before our time. Even this fellow Nort was no more than a boy, so I've heard him say. And look how the seasons have tamed him. Now he's nothing but a harmless old man. Give him a few lashes with the blacksnake every day and he's as good a slave as any Rab could want."

With that Laggamon turned over and went to sleep. Etang watched the three flickering fires for several minutes, studied the slow, patient, mysterious figure of Nort the slave sitting by one of the fires patching his ragged garments.

"Bring me a drink of water, Nort," said Etang. When the slave came with the cup of water, the Rab eyed the weatherbeaten old face closely. "Have you seen three eyes in the dark?"

Not a flicker of change crossed the plodding old slave's countenance. "I do not understand."

"All right. Get yourself to bed, Harmless. We'll have a hard day tomorrow. I don't want you lagging with that supply cart."

"Master Etang," Nort spoke in his even, unemotional voice, "may I have a little salve from the medicine box?"

"What for?"

"For the lashes on my back."

"You and your lashes! You'll get over them. You always do. Get to bed, before I give you some more."

THE succeeding days took the little party of three higher into the sand-blown mountains. Nort, who had borne his burdens of slavery for countless sea-

sons, grew heavy at heart. The little steel supply cart that he hauled around at the beck and call of the two surveyors was light compared with the invisible load he carried.

It hurt Nort to see what had happened to this fine land. He had visited it when he was a boy. Then it had been irrigated from the mountain streams. That was how the Venortians had made it useful. Now it was a waste of mountainous desert. That was what the Rabs had done to it. They had not farmed it, they had come in with their gigantic machines and literally *mined* it.

Evening morning Nort saw the dull pink, arid sky. No promise of rain, only the promise of floating dust, wasted soil.

Every sleepless night Nort huddled by his fire, watching, the fine sand sift into the flame. Sand got in his eyebrows and clung to the deep lines that striped his face. Sand scoured his old memories bright.

How well he remembered the slaughter. It had come when he was only a youth. The Rabs had pounced down from the skies without warning. Their fighting ships with the sleek metallic lines had skimmed the surface of the planet, dragging sickles of death after them.

Nort remembered it as if it were yesterday. One can't witness the cold-blooded killing of one's parents and forget it in the same century of seasons.

The few, the fortunate few, had crowded into the available Venortian space ships and taken off swiftly. The remaining Venortians, enslaved, would never cease to whisper of that dramatic escape of the ships. Those fortunate few had escaped with the promise that some day they would come back, to rescue the others.

"The mythical rescue!" That was what the cruel and mighty Rabs called

it. That was their joke, their favorite taunt to the Venortians they had enslaved.

The Venortians had been crushed into slavery swiftly. For many seasons the killing of slaves had been rampant. But after a time every living Venortian suppressed his rebel spirit and *pretended* patient obedience. Pretense was the price of living—waiting—hoping.

In rapid succession came the Rabs' crimes against the planet itself. All those natural resources, given by the gods for man's use, were ravaged and squandered. Lands that had been hundreds of thousands of seasons in the making was laid waste in a few seasons of helter-skelter management.

And now, each day, the realization filled Nort with such bitterness and hatred as he had never known before. This mountain trek gave him a more poignant perspective on man's crimes against the gods, and saturated him with acid hatred against the arrogant men who took relish in such crimes.

Then, one sleepless night while the weird winds whistled and the sands blew into the flames of his three fires, Nort saw the three eyes in the dark.

THE two Rabs were sound asleep. So far as Nort knew, there was no other living person within miles, other than Laggamon, Etang, and himself. The nearest Rab outpost was at least a quarter of a day's journey down the valley, at the lower end of the long winding irrigation pipe line that the Venortians themselves had built many generations ago.

And the nearest city was a day's journey beyond that.

Nor were these mountain wastes frequented by wild beasts. Animal life had migrated down the valley with the coming of the sands, and most of it had been exterminated.

But even if there had been beasts, Nort would not have thought of them now. Those three eyes that shone out of the blackness of night were no freak of biological nature. They were not really *eyes*. They were three glittering jewels, flashing back the light of Nort's campfires.

Nort saw them, coming out of the blackness, a little to one side of a withered brown pine tree that sang mournfully in the wind. He saw them coming closer, a triangle of flashing jeweled eyes; he brushed the sand from his eyelashes; he rose slowly. The advance of the three eyes stopped.

With a quick reassuring glance at his two masters, sound asleep in the truck, he ran to his tool cart, grasped a hand-ball blaster. This in case of unexpected danger. But Nort didn't really anticipate danger. Unless someone was using the ancient Venortian symbol of hope in mockery—

Nort advanced toward the old dead pine tree cautiously. It was more than three dots of light, hanging in the air in triangular formation. It was a black-hooded, black-cloaked figure. A slight motion of a black-gloved hand invited Nort to come.

Pressing one hand against the pocket that contained the hand-ball explosive, Nort came forward, every cell of his body tingling.

Within eight paces he stopped. By now the three "eyes" had become three ornaments, one at each shoulder, the third upon the belt buckle that clasped at the figure's waist.

As for the figure itself, it stood less tall than Nort, its hood was a full-blown creation, its flowing cape draped a pair of shoulders that were narrow, while the black covering of the graceful body and limbs were close-fitting. Nort knew at once that this was a girl.

"I am Nort, a Venortian slave," he

introduced himself with a courtesy reminiscent of pre-conquered days, though his poise was marked by a certain breathlessness that he couldn't prevent.

Slowly the girl removed the black hood from her face and head, revealing a countenance that was at once intent and indescribably beautiful. Even by the dim light of the waning campfires, her eyes struck Nort as having a penetrating quality unlike any eyes that had ever looked upon him before.

THE girl's gloved hand made a slight gesture toward her hair, which began to blow in loose waves the moment her hood was removed. Then she spoke, in a voice that seemed to still the winds—and her language was Venortian, the language forbidden by the Rabs!

"I am known as Three Eyes in the Dark. Have you ever seen me before?"

"No."

"I have seen so many in the past season that I no longer remember them all. But I hope to see everyone before the time—"

She hesitated, as if in danger of speaking too hastily. She looked toward the camp fires, the bright steel tool cart, the big Rab-made truck.

"You have come from one of the cities down in the valley, I presume," she spoke inquiringly.

"Yes, a day's ride beyond the old power plant down this trail." The eagerness in Nort's voice betrayed his thrill at speaking his native language again. Never except in the most guarded moments had he dared to say such words even to himself. "I am the slave of Etang and Laggamon, who are scouting these mountains for patches of land that can be farmed by Rab methods."

"I have often seen your three fires when flying over this region. Probably you have never heard me go over. My plane is almost perfectly silent." Again she gestured with her gloved hand, toward the deep blackness where her plane was evidently parked. Then in that low, intent tone of inquiry, "I do not mistake the meaning of your three fires?"

"They are the ancient Venortian symbol of hope," Nort's words came forth with a reverence that his masters would have been surprised to hear.

"Then I have not misjudged you," said the girl. "You realize that I am Three-eyes because I wear that symbol. I have come with a message of hope for all enslaved Venortians."

"You have come—from where?"

"From a distant planet, where my parents and all escaped Venortians found refuge."

"They are alive? Then there is hope!"

"They are coming back soon. That is my message. Make ready. When they come it will be war, but it will be victory if the enslaved Venortians are ready to help."

"Will it be soon?" Tears of eagerness and happiness surged near the surface of Nort's eyes.

"Perhaps a matter of days. I cannot say. When we were sent forth, the preparations were moving ahead rapidly. That was more than a season ago. Four of us, each with planes, came in a small space ship to spread the secret news. Our landing met with disaster. I am the only one of the four who lived to carry on the work. But every true Venortian has helped to pass the word along. And the stupid Rabs who get wind of it call it superstition. But I must hurry on."

Three-Eyes extended her gloved hand to Nort, who pressed it between

his two rough palms.

"I'll do anything I can."

"There'll be something for everyone, to do, even if the fighting ships land on the opposite side of the planet." The girl's deep, penetrating dark eyes lingered on the blood marks in Nort's shirt. She reached into an inner pocket of her black cape brought forth a small jar of cream. Her smooth fingers were gentle, caressing, as she spread the cream on his wounds.

"This will ease your wounds."

And as she spoke, Nort could no longer feel any pain. He uttered the Venortian words that expressed deepest appreciation.

To which Three-Eyes replied with a long-forgotten word for farewell. Then she was gone. And though Nort listened almost until dawn, he never heard her plane when it soared away.

CHAPTER II

A War Fleet in the Sky

"GET up, your damned lazy wretch!" Laggamon punctuated his words with a crack of the blacksnake. Nort wisely slept out of range. Neither of his masters ever bothered to climb out of bed in order to make the day's first crack of the whip effective. They were content to shout and curse at him until such time as the spirit moved them to get up. And they never got up until Nort had breakfast ready and waiting.

Nort rose stiffly. He was already dressed, except for his boots. He stirred one of the fires, started breakfast, hurried to the spring for water.

"Get a move on, Harmless!" Etang shouted in a harsh sleepy voice.

Harmless! That was what they called him—the harmless old man. Nort felt a twinge in his shoulders, a tingle at his finger-tips.

While the pails filled with water, Nort seized time to finish strapping his boots with the odds and ends of ragged straps that still clung. Involuntarily his eyes roved skyward. Pink dust of dawn. Impenetrable haze. A vague hint of purple, high overhead;—that was doubtless a sharp-edged cloud, screened by the opaque fog of floating soil.

Nort's furtive eyes shot back toward the camp. He must not be seen sky-gazing. Or day-dreaming. Or trembling from the strange new boundless emotions—

Three-Eyes! Three-Eyes! Three-Eyes! What a mystical creature! No wonder every Venortian slave was whispering, 'Have you seen her'?

Stop thinking about her! Stop, or they'll hear your heart pounding! They'll see it in your face. They'll probe you and torture for your secret. They'll kill you, before the time is ripe *for you to kill them*—

Harmless old man! All right, let them think it. But for the lashings you would be in the prime of life. And harmless? Well, let them think it, but when that day comes that Three-Eyes foretold—

The hand-ball blasters! Slip a few of them out, hide them. Miscount the ones you use to clear the trails for them. Then when the day comes you'll be ready. Blast them into elements! Let their pulverized cells enrich the soil they've set adrift!

Stop thinking about it! They'll hear your heart!

Nort's gaze again swept the purple streak in the sky overhead, lowered to take in the vast fingers of mountain that pointed out into the plains where the floor of farmland stretched, brown and barren, toward a horizon lost in haze. The richest of plains were turning to desert under the ruthless monster-

machines of the Rabs.

In their day the Venortians, too, had used machines; but their machines had been made to work *with* the soil, not against it.

Nort's eyes lingered upon the pinkish-white stone structure halfway down the mountainous valley. There was a sturdy reminder of the old days. It had been a Venortian power station.

Now it was one of the Rabs' many defense outposts. The barrel of a huge atomic gun extended upward on an angle from the top of the building, like a black smokestack caught in the act of falling.

Except for the sight of that gun, Nort liked to look at the old power station and think of the glorious past.

Water no longer ran down the long winding concrete pipeline; once it had roared with the rush of an unlimited supply of waterpower. But the Rabs had scorned water-power as obsolete, and irrigation as primitive. With their coming, the forests had been depleted, lake dams had fallen into neglect, and water flumes such as this one had gone silent.

A film of dust gathered on each pail of water as Nort jogged back to camp.

He paused for a final moment of nostalgic sentiment as he crossed over the square-topped concrete pipeline. All the way down the old power station it trailed, like a perfectly graded railroad bed. It was solid beneath Nort's boots. For all its long disuse, it showed no signs of decay. The concrete encasement was too thick to give forth much of a hollow plunk when Nort kicked a stone across it.

On up the mountainside it wound, like a serpentine path of steel ablaze with morning light, blotched here and there by small landslides that had covered it over. Nort wondered if water would ever run through it again.

BACK at camp, Nort made swift work of the breakfast preparations, ate his own meal as he worked—for he never sat down with his masters if he could avoid it. He loaded the cart with the tools he had sharpened and polished the evening before. He carefully packed in a few hand-ball blasters to be used if Laggamon wanted to explode away some obstructions.

"Harmless!" Laggamon called between bites.

"Yes, Master Laggamon?"

"Get me the air map of this region."

"It's in your hip pocket, Master Laggamon."

Laggamon grunted. Etang gave a snort and made a light jab at the Venortian slave for knowing the contents of his masters' pockets, at which Nort smiled discreetly.

Laggamon spread the map before him, passed a finger across one side of it to trace their course. Most of the valley surrounding the outpost he had already crossed out with a blue pencil. Here and there he had encircled a patch with red.

"Not much land worth farming between these strings of mountains," Laggamon muttered, crossing out the previous day's survey with a blue pencil.

"Old Harmless thinks there's lots of good land through here," Etang said with a wink. "Don't you, Old Man?"

"It used to be good," said Nort. He took a lash of the blacksnake without looking up. The tart answer had escaped his lips before he could stop it. His spirits were too high. If his heart didn't stop thumping so loud, he would never get through the day.

Nort continued to apply grease to the axles of his little steel tool cart. He was bending down. To the two Rabs the back of his shaggy head was much in evidence.

Laggamon droned on.

"We can't be bothered by Nort's kind of land. Any areas that can't be stirred and seeded with our flying plows and planters aren't worth bothering about. When all the good grounds are gone we'll simply have to find another planet. Our standard of living—"

"Laggamon, look at that!" Etang interrupted.

"What?"

"The Harmless Old Man's hair!"

"Well, by the gods!"

Shaggy as Nort's hair was, the Rabs could nevertheless discern the high white streak running upward from the back of the neck across the base of the skull. It was crudely cut, but it was unmistakable—the symbol of Venortian allegiance.

"When did you do *that*?" Laggamon demanded.

"Speak up, wretch!" Etang roared.

"Last night," Nort answered. "Late last night."

THE white-line design in the Venortian hair cut had once been nothing more than an accepted style. The Rabs had made it a matter for persecution. Everything Venortian must be stamped out completely.

"Come here, Harmless!" Laggamon ordered. "Bring the scissors with you!"

Etang rubbed his hands together. "Nothing like a little sport to start the day right."

Nort obediently bent before his two masters. The scissors began to chop over the surface of his head. He watched the bunches of gray-brown hair fall to the sand, and wondered if Three-Eyes would recognize him if she ever saw him again.

"If we had time we'd shave his damned head," Laggamon suggested.

"And paint it with Rab colors. It wouldn't take much time. We can

always make up lost time by keeping him on the double-quick all day. Besides, there's nothing we need around here so much as a little discipline. I'll get a razor."

"And some paint, Etang."

Then both of the Rabs suddenly forgot what they were about, for the gentle rumble of a motor car sounded from somewhere down the valley road.

"Shine up my boots, Harmless!" Laggamon abruptly ordered.

"Mine too," shouted Etang, returning from the truck. "Who do you think it is, Laggamon?"

"Probably Kentl again. He gets lonesome down at that outpost by himself."

Nort went to work on four boots at once, the two men standing before him, their eyes turned toward the valley.

"Strange," Etang mused, "that they keep a paralytic on that job."

"Why not? There's nothing to do," Laggamon retorted. "Nothing, unless you take stock in the predictions old Harmless used to make. By the way, Harmless, what about those those old rusty predictions? Are a few lashes on the back too great a price to pay for the right to express a few eloquent bars of Venortian patriotism?"

"Perhaps," said Nort without looking up.

Laggamon prodded him with a boot.

"It's been many a season since you've hinted that your fly-away Nort might come back some day and blast us off this planet—" Laggamon broke off, fascinated by the pronounced tremble in his servant's hands. "Look, Etang, look at that damned wretch shake!"

Etang gave an amused bark.

"We scared the wits out of him on that shave and paint job."

As the sounds of the car rounded the last hairpin curve the boot job came

to a quick finish. The two Rabs turned, with spick-and-span manners, to greet their company.

It was Kentl in his official car. He plowed into the camp site with a harsh stop, he was shouting.

"They're over us! They're coming down. I know they are! It's them! Come on! You've got to help me!"

KENTL'S body, partially paralyzed, seemed to fairly explode as he shouted. His withered arm jerked about wildly, his official Rab guardsmen's uniform fluttered in disarray, his uncontrolled face contorted in torment.

"Talk like a sane man!" Laggamon demanded, pacing up to the car. "What's wrong?"

Kentl went over his words with even more fury, angered that the two surveyors didn't share his excitement at once. He swung his better arm erratically at the skies.

"Invaders, invaders, I tell you! They're going to land! They've got an armada up there!"

"How do you know?"

"Scouting plane, damn it! It circled down last night—then went back! They're up there. You can see them through the telescope. A whole damned fleet, hovering right over me!"

"Why the devil didn't you report to —"

"Hell, I've tried all night long! Couldn't get through!" Kentl wailed with an awful shake of his head. "Damned instruments all knocked out. Nothing in shape down there but the big gun. But that's all we need. Only my damned arms—you've got to help me with the levers! Get in!"

It all happened so quickly that Nort couldn't collect his thoughts. He stood by, dazed and helpless. The wild joy that leaped through him at the prospect of a return of his people went frozen

with terror. Those big atomic motors! They could paint the sky with death. Only a thrust of a lever or two would be necessary.

The three Rabs started away, Laggamon at the wheel. On the instant Nort whirled to the truck. He would follow. He would crash them—plunge them over an embankment! No matter if he was killed! But let no Rabs' hands touch the atomic gun. Then that blessed sky armada would be safe to come down, seize a foothold.

But like the racer who jumps the gun and forfeits the race, Nort started for the truck a moment too soon. From the Rabs' car, curving away in a cloud of dust, came a shrill shriek of brakes. At high speed the car came backing up to the camp.

For a split second Nort flinched. He was caught! But not if he got to the truck before they did. Etang leaped out of the car. Then it was a race of hard pounding footsteps, straight toward the driver's cab of the truck. A race between Venortian and Rab—slave and master.

"Stop, you damned traitorous whelp! I'll—"

Etang's bellow, from three paces back of Nort, carried the ring of rage—the rage of a master being openly defied for the first time by a slave he had faithfully beaten for many seasons. But Etang had not neglected to bring his whip.

The blacksnake cracked out, wrapped around Nort's ankle, jerked him to a hard fall against the side of the truck. Then Etang laid on the blows. But only for a moment. There was no time.

"I'll tend to you later!"

ETANG mounted the driver's cab. The truck roared. Nort, lying in a beaten heap, rolled to escape the wheels. He lay there motionless,

breathing hard, mumbling with each breath. . . . Venortian curses. The car and the truck disappeared from view. Nort sprang up.

There was still a chance. For a few minutes the Rabs would be riding the switchback trail, down the mountainside from the camp. There was still a chance—

Nort ran to the little steel tool wagon, grabbed a spade and a crowbar. He filled his pockets with a double handful of the potent little hand-ball blasters. He sped toward the turn of the trail as hard as he could go. The roar of the two vehicles thundered up to his ears. The cloud of dust widened.

Car and truck were shooting along on the third level below him. He dropped his tools, hurled a hand-ball toward the path of the car. And a second and a third. One by one they descended over the mountain slope—and fell short.

Each missile threw up a fan of black earth and rocks and a cloud of dust. One large rock started rolling downward—Nort's heart leaped hopefully at the sight—but the boulder only thumped to a stop when it reached the road. The cars were already on the level beyond.

The blasts from the explosions echoed back from the mountainsides and were lost in the roar of motors.

Frantically Nort plied his tools, trying in vain to start a landslide that might still overtake them. Rocks bounced downward with the vigor of gigantic molecules, but one after another they dissipated their energies harmlessly. The Rabs were away!

Nort stalked back to the camp level, a sick man. His eyes roved over the ashes of the three fires—his symbol of Venortian hope. Scarcely an ember glowed. Nor did he stir the white ashes. Now he watched the heavens.

The haze was thinning. The wisp of purple cloud he had seen earlier was still there, its jagged edges more sharply defined. It was the armada, hovering high overhead like a floating skyline almost lost in the distance. How many hundreds of ships—or thousands—within that mass of purple, he couldn't hope to guess. But that made no difference now, he reasoned.

Before mid-day the Rabs would release death from the big gun. One by one the ships would drop like hailstones, to break on the mountainsides.

Or would they descend at once, before the Rabs reached the power-station? If they only would! But no, they wouldn't take such a chance of being sighted from distant cities. They would wait for night—but night would never come for them.

Nort watched them as one might watch a friend waiting for the guillotine—a friend that one might have saved. But now it was too late.

Nort's hands clung to the side of the little tool cart, he buried his ragged head in his arms.

"Lost! Lost! And I might have—" his voice choked away. The dust sifted over his tortured body.

"There is still time to help," came a voice from a little distance. Nort looked up. At first he wasn't sure whether it was a voice or simply the freakish echoes of wind blowing through the rocks and trees. But it came again. "There is still time to help, Nort. . . . But you must act quickly!"

"Three-Eyes!" Nort cried, springing up. "Where are you?"

His gaze combed the camp site, the trees and underbrush beyond. He looked up to the ravine beyond the concrete pipeline.

"Where are you, Three-Eyes?"

"Over here. My plane is grounded. I've tried all night to fix it. But it's

impossible. That's why I'm still here. Hurry, Nort! Bring your tool cart—"

The voice was lost in a gust of wind. Nort whirled about, mystified. He couldn't see the grounded plane anywhere. He wasn't even sure which way the voice came from.

"The tool cart, Nort!" It was that same low intent tone of voice, but even stronger with urgency. "I haven't any way to warn them, Nort. They'll come down today, I'm sure. Or tonight. But whether they come down dead or alive depends upon you! Come!"

"I'm coming!" Nort cried, catching the tongue of his tool wagon

"Throw out the tools, Nort. You'll only need the flashlanterns and the explosives. . . . *This way, Nort!*"

CHAPTER III

Last Hope

HE dragged the little steel wagon as fast as he could go—across the sandy tracks he had made toward the spring. He stopped short before the square surfaced trail of concrete—the old Venortian water tunnel.

Nowhere did he catch sight of Three-Eyes. But he didn't stop to question her commands. Now he understood.

He seized a hand-ball blaster, hurled it, then dropped under the steel wagon and waited for the fragments to fall.

The thudding ceased, and before Nort's eyes was a section of the concrete tunnel torn wide open. In an instant he was in, and the wagon with him. The tunnel was fully six feet in diameter—dry and musty.

Nort jumped on the wagon, stomach down, eyes ahead, and shoved off with a powerful push of his ragged boot against the floor. Into the long black cylindrical cavern he rolled.

At first the grade seemed too slight

to be effective. Then the wagon began to gain speed. The daylight back of him began to fade. But abruptly Nort stopped. There was a triangle of eyes in the darkness before him.

Three dots of brightness standing solid, unmoving, in the center of his cavernous path! Three clusters of jewels catching the dimly reflected light of day! Could this be Three-Eyes again? *Inside* the tunnel?

Nort turned on the flashlantern. The three scintillating eyes became adornments on the black costume of a hooded figure. A jeweled belt-clasp and two shoulder ornaments.

"Three-Eyes!" Nort cried, leaping to his feet. "I thought you—"

"You thought I was outside—and so I was. I entered through a break in the tunnel." The girl hurried toward him, slipping the hood off, revealing the same beautiful face that Nort had looked upon the night before. "I shall ride with you, Nort. It may take both of us—"

They mounted the little steel wagon, clutched tightly as it gained speed. Daylight was lost behind. They coasted into what seemed an endless passage of unexplored blackness. There was a momentary flick of sunlight—the break in the walls where Three-Eyes had entered, no doubt.

Faster—faster! Click. . . click. . . click! Like giant tiles laid end to end the sections of concrete flew past them, now a straight-away, now a shift curve. The flashlantern fought the dark like a candle against the night.

"We'll be there almost as soon as the Rabs," Three-Eyes sang out against the roar of the wheels. Her voice made round alto echoes through the long passage. Nort could feel her tense breathing close against the back of his neck. "Have you many explosives?"

"Ten or twelve," Nort called back.

His teeth were clenched, his muscles taut. Every bend was more dangerous than the last, for they were still gaining speed. He guided the cart with wonderful skill. He was losing all sense of direction, of time, of distance.

On and on came the mysterious stream of blackness, unfolding at an ever swifter pace. Sometimes a spot of outdoor light would flash across the path. Sometimes clumps of soil and rocks would loom up, to deal them a rough joggle as they coasted over. The joints of the giant tiles had allowed bits of landslides to wedge through. But only once did they have to blast their way through an obstruction. And again they were off.

A fresh flashlantern helped. Then, after, a time, a third flashlantern was pressed into service. This time the shift was made without a stop, but it almost resulted in a costly accident. The speeding wagon was momentarily thrown into a perilous balance. Nort's hand, cramped and knotted on the wagon tongue, jerked abruptly. The wagon swerved.

IN that swerve Nort scraped against the flying wall, ripped his shirt, burned his shoulder. But the wagon righted itself and sailed on. Nort could hear the beautiful girl breathing in quick, fearful gasps.

"Were you hurt, Three-Eyes?"

"No, I'm—I'm all right."

The clutch of her hands around his waist seemed to be slipping. Now came a long straight-away. For minutes they seemed to be falling downward through a bottomless shaft. And every minute Nort felt that the warm fingers clutching at his sides were growing weaker.

"Hold me tight!" Nort called.

"Don't mind me!" came the gasping reply. "Keep going. . . ." And after a little time she repeated the half-

whispered command. "Keep going. . . . Whatever happens to me, keep going. . . . Time is short. . . ."

The tunnel shuddered. A roar echoed up through it—a low ominous thunder.

"Could that be the atomic gun?" Three-Eyes cried out against the rumbling echoes.

"The atomic guns are noiseless," Nort muttered fiercely.

"Then that must have been a falling ship!" And a moment later when the thundering echo repeated, she added knowingly, "Another ship. They're crashing against the mountainside. We're almost too la—*Keep going!*"

The final command came from Three-Eyes as she fell. The wagon dashed over a clump of obstructing rocks, cutting its speed. Nort burned his boot against the tunnel wall to try to stop, but he was unable to prevent the girl's fall.

He glanced back, almost stopped.

"Keep going!" she called out. "I'm not hurt. I'll come! Keep going Kee-e-e-ep goin-n-ng!"

He could only see the three dots of light that adorned her black costume. The swiftness with which they receded warned him that he was accelerating down a sharper grade.

"Kee-ep goin-n-ng!" The musical call went round and round in the tunnel fading fainter, fainter. Nort could still feel that last lingering touch of her warm fingertips as they slipped past the tear in his shirt.

The end of the tunnel was just ahead. The shaft turned sharply downward. He scooted to a stop. Another thundering crash best his ears.

Another ship! That meant that the big atomic gun was finding its mark, scraping the edges, at least, of the hovering fleet. Soon they might be falling like a shower of stones from a volcano.

NORT remembered this downward turn of the water flume, having seen it from the outside. It was the turn that had once led straight down to the Venortian turbines.

Down the steel ladder he went, trying to carry the wagon with him. The thing was terribly heavy. But he might need it. He had a half-formed plan . . . but he wasn't sure what he would find . . . or what he could do. Down—down—his arm was breaking, his torn shoulder bleeding a stream. But he had a plan—

The hand-ball blasters spilled out, plummeted down the open shaft toward the daylight. Everything went—explosives and flashlanterns—but Nort clung to the wagon, fought his way on down the ladder.

The light of the explosions glared up at him, but he was never sure that he heard their blast. Another terrific rumble pounded against the mountain-side somewhere near, and sent its heavy thunder leaping up through the concrete.

This time Nort caught a glimpse of the ship, rolling and spilling over the rocks. Uniformed Venortians tumbled out of the wrecked hull, as dead as stones.

Nort's ladder had suddenly come to an end in mid-air. The old water flume had been cut away to make room for the vast base of the atomic gun. Down across the open court he could see the glass enclosed control room where the three Rabs stood. Laggamon was at the controls, Etang and Kentl were at a window watching the rain of dead Venortians. Kentl was leaping about in an uncontrolled frenzy of jubilation, Etang was pacing, slapping the folded whip against his thigh, as if he were the master of the world.

No one saw Nort. No one thought

to look across to the catwalk that led around the vast base, passing beneath the dangling end of the flume ladder. The center of their interest was in the other direction.

In a final burst of energy, Nort leaped to the catwalk, dragging the wagon with him. He rounded the narrow curving walk, spiraled upward into a level that was dense with shadows. Shadows streaked with gleaming copper cables, brightened intermittently by rattling sparks.

Instantly Nort gambled his chances on the two lead wires, which stretched, bright and bare, into the opaque shadows. He had only his steel wagon and his life to give. He gave. He hurled the wagon with all his might. . .

CHAPTER IV

A Dreamer's Victory

THAT day the armada of Venortians landed in the mountain valley beside the old power station. The days that followed brought the opening attacks upon the cities of Rabs. There were victories, there were defeats, then more victories. At last, when a season had passed, the planet was again in the hands of its rightful owners, and every Venortian who had been a slave was now a victor.

One of the many military parties assigned to the conferring of honors upon citizens motored up the newly-surfaced mountain road to a tourists' stop known as Nort's Outpost.

Nort, bareheaded, his hair neatly trimmed in the customary Venortian style, came down the steps to confront the party.

"I have a group of tourists waiting to enter the tunnel. Have you come to join us?"

The tourists gathered on the porch

back of him, but the military-honors party disregarded them. A marshal stepped forward, extending a jeweled medal."

". . . to you, Nort, for highly meritorious service," said the marshal smiling. "Since you disregarded our summons to come for this award, we were forced to bring it to you."

"It does not belong to me," Nort protested. "It belongs to Three-Eyes—"

"To you," declared the marshal, still holding forth the medal. "All Venortia knows how you were found hanging to the steel wagon that you somehow hurled across the wires. Though no one knows by what miracle you survived that daring deed. You were found half dead from electrocution—but, as all Venortia knows, you stopped the atomic gun—"

"The reward belongs to Three-Eyes, I tell you. She came to me, even as death was ready to claim me—"

"Three-eyes is a beautiful myth," said the marshal. "Without that myth, the enslaved Venortians would not have been ready to help."

The marshal pinned the glittering medal upon Nort.

"I shall give it to Three-Eyes."

The marshal smiled. "Do with it as you will."

Nort turned to the waiting tourists, led them away by the crooked mountain path to the break in the pipeline.

The military party loitered about, fascinated by the mystic feelings that the one-time slave had somehow engendered in them.

"He's one who will never be convinced," said the marshal's lieutenant. "I've heard he even claims his wounds were soothed by a magic salve applied with Three-Eyes' own hands."

"A curious superstition," said the marshal. "But we've proved con-

clusively that it is nothing more. First, we know that no party of Venortian scouts ever landed, previous to the night of our attack. Next, we've never found any trace of Three-Eyes, living or dead. Thirdly, we've traced the myth to its origin—a child's prank on a dark night. But someone was taken in, and from then on, every downtrodden person tried to see those three eyes in the dark—our symbol of hope."

"Then the symbol became a beautiful girl, whispering words of encouragement—"

"All a myth—but their faith in what they *thought* they saw spread like wildfire!"

"Odd," said the lieutenant a bit skeptically, "that it should have happened during the very season that we were preparing."

"Perhaps when telepathy is better understood," said the marshal, "it will not be so odd."

The two officers fell silent. The people were returning from the tunnel, murmuring in low voices. There was a strange rapture in their faces. They spoke in reverent whispers—of *Three-Eyes, whom they had seen in the darkness*. They spoke of the singing echoes they had heard—ceaseless echoes that seemed to say, "*Keeeeeep goinnnnng! Keeeeeep goinnnnng!*"

The people departed. Tomorrow others would come, some believing, some skeptical.

Nort smiled to himself as he plodded up the steps. He was not a slave, he was not a harmless old man—no, no Rab would ever rise from the dead to call him that again. He was Nort the Venortian, as proud as any man who lived.

He paused to look out over the vast valley—a valley that was beginning to bloom again. Proud he was of that valley, and proud of the view which he

commanded from this cabin—the cabin the Venortian government had helped him build.

And he was happy. Let them think that Three-Eyes was a figment of his imagination. He knew better. He could still feel her fingers on his mutilated back; on the ragged whip-wounds that had healed so marvelously well.

He knew she was real, and he knew that someday she would come to him again. She still lived—for if she had died, he would have found her body in the tunnel.

Until she came, he would wait—and be happy with those other people, those tourists, who could also see . . . three eyes in the dark!

« IT'S A WONDERFUL WORLD! »

If you are adventure bent and have a flair for the scientific, you can carve out a career for yourself by taking a course recently offered at the University of Michigan. Scientific adventuring and exploration is the background of this course, with actual field work in such far-off regions as the Yukon being included in the study requirements. Also included in actual work in the various uncharted wilds to which the students are sent, is land mapping, study of animal and plant life, and geological and natural resources estimation.

THAT BIG EYE

The much discussed giant telescope under completion at the California Institute of Technology is 640,000 times the strength of your own eyesight. In other words, if you stood on a street in New York looking at a sign on a shop window on the other side, you would—through the use of the giant telescope—be able to move that sign clear across the continent, to San Francisco, and still be able to read its every letter! Another interesting expectation concerning the giant 'scope which holds scientists breathless with anxiety, is the fact that—once completed—the Great Eye is expected to reveal over *one million new universes* whose existence has hitherto been unproven!

DON'T BET ON THIS

Undoubtedly you've heard the expression, "I'll eat my shirt," and just as undoubtedly, you've probably thought of it as an absurdly fantastic bit of phraseology. Nevertheless, it can be done—literally. A Harvard chemistry professor, having made a bet that he would eat his shirt if something didn't occur as he predicted, fulfilled his bet through his knowledge of science. After dissolving his shirt in acid, then neutralizing the acid with a base, he filtered the precipitated matter, carefully spread it on a piece of bread—and ate it!

SCIENCE AND THE CROOKED GAMBLER

The next time you feel the urge to "play a friendly hand" or "roll a few for the baby's shoes," pause long enough to remind yourself what science has done to make the art of crooked gambling

even more nefarious. There is a large middle-western manufacturing company which puts out all sorts of crooked gambling devices. This company manufactures no less than 62 various decks of marked cards which absolutely defy detection, and 73 types of "loaded" transparent dice which have been so cleverly made that they can be weighed, measured, cut, burned, or tested with calipers—and still defy any efforts to prove their dishonesty!

THE FUTURE LOOKS SILENT

Recently a time capsule was sealed into the corner of a New York building. But, unlike other time capsules, this one contained merely recordings—of street noises! It was explained that honking horns, police whistles, cries of newsboys, screeching of brakes, rumblings of traffic, and other common city noises, would very probably be nonexistent in future metropolitan areas. The playing of these recordings, it was stated, would enable future generations to hear what they were missing!

STOMACH ACHE

The hydrochloric acid in the human stomach is some twenty-five thousand times that of a fatal dose of carbolic acid. Remember this the next time you burn your hand in a laboratory. No wonder they call it "intestinal fortitude"!

DINOSAURS AS DOG FOOD

In Siberia, peasant farmers on the frozen wastes occasionally discover perfectly preserved and frozen mammoths, over ten thousand years old! These ancient animals, which made their last stand in Siberia thousands of years ago while retreating southward before the ice, were trapped in the soft, ice-water marshes and frozen solidly into the tough soil. Some of them, on discovery, are still with hide, flesh, hair, and even undigested remains of food in their stomachs. To the peasant who unearths them, however, this is of little importance, for he merely rips off enough red meat from the ancient mammoths to feed his dogs!—*John York Cabot.*