

The novels and stories signed "Charles Henneberg" were actually written by Charles Henneberg zu Irmelshausen Wasungen and his wife, Nathalie, in collaboration. Henneberg, born in Germany in 1899, had an active and varied career. He and his wife met when he was a member of the French Foreign Legion stationed at Homs, Syria; she was a Russian journalist. After their marriage they spent four years in the Arabian desert, and during the war fought together under de Gaulle. He was subsequently appointed Directeur des Medaille's Militaires. Henneberg died of a heart attack in March, 1959. His widow is carrying on the series of science-fantasy novels they had planned together, signing herself in his honor, "Nathalie Charles-Henneberg."—D.K.

MOON FISHERS

by Charles Henneberg

(translated by Damon Knight)

"IT IS THE AIRLOCK OF A SPACE-ship," Professor Reszky told Hugh Page, test pilot for the Chronos group in the year 2500, who was looking with interest at the white cockpit equipped with luminous dials, of the machine standing in the middle of the Paratime Research Laboratory.

"You are correct. We chose that shape for particular psychological reasons. The man who gets in there will be surrounded by cosmic radiation—as much so as any astronaut who takes off into space. The fourth dimension will contract around him, the universe will become immobile. The traveler can get off at any stop—past, present or future. Only his body will remain in that cockpit."

"Then this trip will be a dream?"

"No. It's a real world on the other side, everything is real. Understand me, I'm not hiding anything from you: the dangers you'll meet are real dangers. The only difference is, if you should die, your corpse will be here."

"That's a consolation," said Page.

With his archangelic stature, his unruly black curls and his long violet eyes, Page looked like a prince out of some Persian miniature. All things considered, Reszky thought to himself, it was because of that strange look that he had chosen Page from the crowd of standardized heroes. In a gentler tone, he said, "The principle behind the trip moderates the risk."

"Because it will operate under new laws?"

"Exactly. For about three centuries, in fact since the earliest hyperspace flights, mankind has been held back by an exasperating riddle. We know that time is a dimension, it expands and contracts according to its own laws; our spacemen come back young from distant galaxies, while the names of their parents have worn smooth on their tombstones. . . . But that path was closed to us, an invisible barrier stood in our way—worse than the monsters of the Odyssey, or those light and sound barriers that were broken by twentieth-century fliers. . . ."

"That demanded an explanation. Some people gave out extravagant hypotheses, some insisted on the immutability of the past. Some amused themselves with brain-teasers: 'Suppose you should be so unfortunate, during a stopover in the past, as to kill your grandfather before he'd become a parent—would you exist? And if you didn't, how could you have killed him?' It's what is called the temporal paradox."

Page laughed, shortly: "As if anybody could be sure of his grandparents!"

"The uncertainty principle, of course!" Reszky wiped his fogged eyeglasses. . . . "But that was only a temporary setback. The answer was really terribly simple. Ever since Wells, apparently, the world had been hypnotizing itself with false ideas—we'd all had a

material orientation to the problem. A machine, built of chrome and nickel, would move you up or down the Time Stream; you'd land in the middle of an era, bringing along your valise and briefcase, which would make for complications. Of course it was idiotic. We had to start all over again from the bottom."

"And where did we wind up?"

"At this fundamental idea, this egg of Columbus: *the time that acts on matter is external to it.* Our contact depends on extrasensory perception."

"In other words," Hugh said, "we're going to travel as disembodied spirits? Nobody will see or hear us, and we won't be able to interfere in anything that happens?"

"No," said the professor. He hesitated, looking very tired. "It always comes back to the Heisenberg principle, and Einsteinian relativity. Within certain limits, anything can happen. The present is built on an uncertain past, looking forward to a multiple and plastic future. Take the history of nations . . . Was Nero a misunderstood poet—a madman—or a complete monster? Was the first atomic bomb our doom, or our salvation? Each of these situations might be different, without changing the whole structure. Even the moment we're living in is nothing but a 'privileged configuration.' . . ."

"In other words—excuse the unscientific expression—I might 'bump into the past or the future'?"

"All that is still theory," Reszky sighed. "The first time journey is the one you're about to make, remember? All the same, I don't want to give you any illusions: there are no watertight compartments any more. There are phenomena of levitation, you see. And people gifted with strong psi faculties. Prophets and clairvoyants—"

"There was even," put in an assistant archeologist drily, "a certain continent with a strange reputation—Atlantis. Plato spoke of it in the *Critias* and the *Timaeus*. It was also described, in a wealth of detail, by a certain Theopompus who lived some three hundred eighty-nine years before Christ."

"A fable!" the scientist protested.

"Or a 'privileged configuration'? You said it yourself—anything can happen!"

"Look," said Hugh in a conciliatory tone, "what use could these Atlanteans be to us, in the case at hand?"

"What use? I don't know. I rather imagine they might cause you to run one of those well-known risks that Professor Reszky treats so lightly."

The physicist turned pale. "Explain that!" he said. "I don't care for half-truths. Just how could these fellows interfere with a para-

time voyage beginning in our own year, twenty-five hundred, when they lived over five thousand years before Christ, and the one thing we know about them for sure is that they went down with their continent?"

"Oh, it's only a hypothesis . . . As long as you were talking about prophets and other clairvoyants. They were blue, it seems."

"An extenuating circumstance," said Hugh gravely. "But so what?"

The archeologist seemed indignant that a layman should presume to argue with him. "It seems," he explained rapidly, "that they also had unusual psychic abilities. *'They dreamed of the past and remembered the future.'* That means that these 'moon fishers' traveled far beyond us in the Time Stream, capturing visions in their nets and hatching out events to come."

"An unverifiable statement," Reszky interrupted coldly. "Let me remind you that the Service concerns itself only with the *exact* sciences."

Her name was Neter.

She was born some three thousand years before Christ. The hieroglyph of her name signified: life and lotus, the primal ocean, mystery; the beginning of the world and its feminine principle . . . and a throng of corollaries: moonbeams like a net on the waves; and on the desert, where it is a mirage; all that troubles, beck-

ons, stirs up change; the veil of Isis over the future—and over the past as well. In the Nile valley, this royal name, bestowed upon an ordinary girl, was astonishing.

Isides, her father, was one of a small group of blue men—refugees from a vanished continent which was sometimes called Mu, Gondwanaland or Lemuria, but most commonly Atlantis. These people were gentle and wise; their long life-spans awed the Egyptians, whose lives were short and swift. Some of them continued their migration, and carried their wisdom across the Red Sea. Isides, whom tradition credited with a span of nearly two hundred years, was venerated at Giza, where he founded the subterranean temple. Rumor gave him many wives—both goddesses and mortals (for in those days, the gods came easily down to Earth).

And one daughter: Neter.

We believe her mother was a Terran. Interplanetary cross-matings were hazardous then: thus was born ibis-headed Thoth, the baboon-faced Anubis, and Sekhmet with the body of a youth, surmounted by a lion's muzzle. Troubles by the thousand came from these births, not to mention Echidne and other sirens.

Neter, at fifteen, was beautiful and supple as a dancing serpent. Her whiteness was blue-tinged, as with all the Atlanteans: you can see her picture on a sarcophagus in

the Valley of Kings, where she smiles beneath her tiara of sapphire. Necklaces of golden rose-leaves cover her long, flexible neck. The mouth is childish, sensitive and passionate, and her opal eyes languish under extraordinary lashes.

Now in those days, Egypt was throwing off an ancient oppression: the Hyksos invaders were being expelled, the Eighteenth Dynasty was mounting the throne, and the age of gold was about to open.

Not that the land was entirely free; dark terror reigned in the desert. The Interplanetarians were landing in these sands. They were of many kinds. Much later, the Pharaoh Psammetichus III noted: *"They fell from the sky like the fruits of a fig-tree that is shaken; they were the color of copper and sulphur, and some had three eyes. . . ."*

These were paratroops from a neighboring planet. But at the dawn of the Eighteenth Dynasty, others were landing in those many-eyed wheels of which the prophet Ezekiel speaks: they had a lion's body, wings, and a human face. Their leader was called Ptah. His statue—that of the Sphinx—burdened the plain.

Dark tales went about: these beings were ambitious to rule; lurking in the tomb-chambers of the Valley of Kings, they fed subtly on human sap—they drank the

soul and not the blood. Multitudes of fellahs had confirmed these rumors by sight; but others put the blame on ghosts and spectres. Trembling, the land waited for the day when that power would make itself felt. There was much calculation of the time of the apocalypse, and its exact form.

Humanity was accustomed, already, to these random terrors, and these interminable eves of battle.

There came a night when the Atlantean Isides, in his cypress-girdled white house on the Nile, read a sign in the stars. He arose, rolled up his papyri in their cases, and went to the window beneath the archway: no, he had not been mistaken—a great trampling, a swell of hooting came from the desert, and above the wall of his house spiral antlers, sharp horns were outlined, as if a herd of antelopes, wild asses and sheep were hurrying onward, surrounded by adders and lizards: every creature that was mild, inoffensive, that shrank from death in the shadows, had taken flight.

Isides went in haste to awaken his daughter, and reassured her, gazing deep into Neter's clear pupils. Nonetheless, they got into a litter closed with curtains of Cretan "woven air," carried by four giant Nubians. The litter was swallowed up in the silent procession of animals; and along the banks of the Nile, three or four villages rose up and followed.

Neter had asked her father no questions; everything was understood between them. From time to time, parting the draperies, she put out her hand, which glowed in the darkness, and stroked a hind's velvet-soft muzzle. From the zenith, the moon cast her silver rays over the desert and seemed to draw to herself all Mizraim as her prey. Much later, when Thebes—all hanging gardens and alabaster towers—outlined itself on the pale horizon, Isides said: "Your uncle, Naphtali, the son of Jacob, is waiting for us."

That day, the fire from the desert consumed the oasis which surrounded the Atlantean's house, and the roaring of lions was heard in broad day.

Sunset found Neter sitting on a wall beside Deborah, the fourth wife of her uncle Naphtali, the two of them crunching melon seeds.

"Uncle" was only a title of friendship, for Isides, descended from the holy continent, had no blood relationship with the hard-working and prolific family of the shepherd Jacob. But, a poet at heart (for it is said: "Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words"), the Hebrew valued the Atlantean spirit, in its clarity and pride; he himself was very wise, even though deep in intrigues and married many times. His last wife, Deborah, was just Neter's age; they too were bound by friendship.

Now Thebes was stirred by momentous happenings: the Pharaoh Ahmose was dead, and his son was away at war. A certain Apopi, working in the pay of the Hyksos, was preaching revolt: what had Egypt to do with a bellicose young prince who went off seeking conquest and emptying the granaries? Besides, nobody knew him, and his family was nothing but a tribe of the Delta . . . and similar nonsense. The dregs of the populace drank palm wine at his expense and shouted loudly. But towards noon, a panting quartermaster ran up, announcing a cloud of dust that heralded the coming of an innumerable army. Every heart missed a beat. "The Pharaoh!" He arrived, having crossed the Nile.

His name was Amenophis. At twenty, he was beautiful with a violent beauty; all the girls of Mizraim were in love with him. Brought up far from the court, he was said to be secretive. The rumor ran that he would enter by the South Gate . . . and everyone went to the ramparts, the former revolutionaries shouting their joy louder than anyone. That crowd blocked all the streets, and persons of quality, lingering at the jewellers' or the Greeks', where they haggled over amber and purple, found themselves carried into the front row of spectators.

Thus Neter and Deborah leaned over a wall, and the little Jew said, shaking her brown locks: "Do

you think he will really reign, this one . . . Amenophis?"

"What else?" The Atlantean seemed pale and distraught.

"I don't know . . ." said Deborah. "No, really. You hear so many stories! They say that in him we shall have a great, conquering king. They say he will raise up the peoples of Egypt like a wave, to hurl them upon Elam and Canaan . . . and perhaps on Mesopotamia and the Indies too. The earth will tremble before him, and he shall possess it in blood and tumult."

"I imagine," said Neter drily, "that he will think first of delivering his own country from Ptah and the shadows of Ptah."

"That—" Deborah stopped and bit her fingernail, as if she had said too much. The Atlantean gazed at her curiously.

"You don't believe it, do you? You have curious perceptions. You've changed since our last journey, Deborah!"

She lowered her voice. Around the two foreigners, the Theban mob exploded in color, shouts and laughter; women were chattering, children running naked, and a muffled psalmody arose from the priests' procession. But Neter, even in broad daylight, in the City, felt the shadow and ice of an eternal night. Deborah laughed slightly, leaned over, and with her dainty cat's tongue licked the white nape of her friend's neck.

"It's good," she said. "Like cream. Why don't you like to make love, Neter? Of course, they say you'll be queen one day . . . don't forget your little handmaiden then! I'll tell you everything, if you promise not to betray me. Listen: each night I'm visited by a winged Keroub . . . no, not a Keroub: they have a bull's body, and they bellow. This one is like a feline—long, powerful and soft. He does whatever he likes with me, and he pours things into my soul . . . oh! I don't know how to tell you! It's terrible, and delicious."

"And Naphtali, Deborah?"

"He's a hundred years old! My friendship with the Visitor can't do him any harm. Why shouldn't you try it, Neter? It's nothing at all like our human stupidity: you grow so powerful, so wise—you become one with Ptah! It's such ecstasy! At the same time, you know you're lost, you know everything. . . ."

"You exaggerate," answered Neter. She would have liked to escape this friendly arm that embraced her, this charming, soiled creature, but now she knew: Destiny was beginning to weave its threads. In a pattern planned long before, Deborah was the unforeseeable and necessary arabesque.

Frozen with horror, Neter chose her words carefully. "Prove to me that you know one secret, just one . . . and I'll believe you."

Deborah saw herself mirrored in the clear gaze of her friend: she had vertical pupils, like a cat's.

"Well then," she said, "listen again. . . . After tonight, for a certainly, the Pharaoh will no longer be Amenophis, son of Ahmose."

"Do you mean . . . they'll kill him?"

"There won't be any need. The Ptahs are wise: they'll put another soul in his body. And he'll serve them, he will be their slave."

"Another soul? You're crazy. He has one of his own."

"Do you think so? Perhaps he has one, after all. But the Ptahs only need his face and his body. I've found out they often perform such operations. There's a phrase I happen to remember—perhaps you'll understand it: 'Since we have discovered we are resistant to all mutation, we shall live on in another fashion . . . men have a horror of princes with wings and talons!'"

"It's impossible," said Neter harshly. "The Pharaoh won't let those beasts come near him. He's well guarded."

"Yes. Except for tonight. For you know there's a very old custom: the armed Vigil. A young sovereign of Egypt passes the night before his coronation in the Temple of Ammon, in its Oasis. He must be alone. On the sill, a priest offers him a wine mixed with myrrh. Ptah knows the priest. In

the wine there will be a mixture of herbs and a charm, so that Amenophis shall fall asleep, and the Most Mysterious shall come and take possession of that empty envelope—that vacant body. . . .”

Neter controlled herself again, but she had sunk her nails into her palm, and it was almost with relief that she felt the human warmth of her own blood. In a low, soft voice, she asked, “You don’t find this an odious treachery? I’m not talking about Amenophis: but what about Egypt? She deserves another king.”

“Oh, this one will be very great!” Deborah lowered her kohl-painted lids, with a guilty and voluptuous air. “Any anyhow . . . how can we know the gods? Perhaps it’s already happened! Many princes who were hollow as bells have turned into Pharaohs full of wisdom. Suppose the trial of the Oasis is really nothing but . . . that exchange? My lover shall reign over Egypt! But don’t tell Naphtali! And tonight, tonight . . .”

Neter had slipped down from the wall, but she could not move forward. It was, she thought, like a nightmare, in which you want to run, cry out—and you are fixed to the spot, while every word dies in your throat.

A cloud of scarlet dust veiled the horizon; fanfares burst out. Standing on the ramparts, the Thebans beat on their cymbals and

let fall a rain of lotus and rose petals. The priests were waving their censers. Deborah called something, holding out her slender arms toward her friend. As often befell her in moments of great emotion, the Atlantean had to cling to the present by a cornice, a fellah’s robe, to keep from toppling into one of the two vertiginous abysses that gaped for her equally: the future and the past.

She ran. She must warn, help . . . Above all, she must silence her thoughts—so many telepathic beings were hidden in that crowd—and now Deborah was their creature. She stopped, gasping: the street ahead was choked. Tiny as she was, the blue tunics and floating klaphtes of the priests blocked her view . . . she could have wept. Suddenly the hypnagogic fog—the state of indecision, of vacuity—in which she had floated all that day, was dissipated, and she realized with horror that she must see Amenophis at that instant: *otherwise she would never be sure*. Her little fists drummed boldly on the back of a tall Lydian, who turned with a grin. “So little, and so naughty! What do you want, O daughter of Isis?”

Panting, she stammered, “I must see the Pharaoh!”

“Oho! You’re all crazy for that. Climb up here.”

He was a musician; he lifted her onto his harp, which stood up-

right in a sandalwood case. There she remained, like a sculptured figurine, a victory. It was time: down below, the bronze doors were opening; with a thunderous sound, amid clouds of aromatics, noisy, dazzling as a barbaric jewel, heavy—like a python with a thousand coils—the army of Mizraim entered Thebes.

Slim runners in leather aprons preceded the clumsy Ionian mercenaries, whose cuirasses prefigured interplanetary armor. Numidians galloped on their fine golden mares, and Libian Negroes led packs of desert leopards.

In a chariot drawn by four white stallions stood a golden statue, motionless. A serpent of emeralds—the royal Uraeus—writhed on his forehead; the dark, perfect countenance was bare. When the Pharaoh of Egypt passed, followed by the melodious wall of his harpists, he raised his eyes. Behind the thick grills of his lashes, Neter met two lakes of night: dark and dull. She could set her mind at rest: Amenophis I had no soul. Not yet.

In 2500, Hugh Page, the first paratime traveler, entered his cockpit after many handshakes, leaving Professor Reszky to fend for himself in the midst of a crowd of reporters. The importance people gave to this trip was beyond him. He wasn't leaving much behind, and he had no great love for his own era. There had been more

beautiful ones; he'd learned about them in his hypno courses. Certain primitive statues, frescoes of the Italian Renaissance, enamels found in the syrinxes of the Valley of Kings, awoke in him some distant echo, natural, intensely moving. . . . He adjusted his electrode helmet and watched Reszky.

Snatches of conversation drifted over to him. What had that other freak said, again? *The Atlanteans, in order to travel in time, left vacant spaces, empty forms, in various eras. That explains the appearance of these great, unparalleled geniuses: da Vinci, Pascal, Einstein. They were men of the future. . . .* In the false daylight of the neons, the archaeologist's face was turning blue. Hugh consulted his chronometer, and pressed the selenium control lever.

And there was a different world.

An immense white moon hung over the desert. Page did not remember leaving the cabin—but here he was among these red dunes. The sand sparkled faintly; it looked like Syrtis Major, on Mars. He opened the faceplate of his helmet slightly, and a dry wind, charged with oxygen, burned his cheeks.

He was uneasy: was this really Earth? The first trial might be subject to routing errors. Under three metallic palms ran a thin crystal stream that seemed heavy

to him, saturated with mineral salts.

For a moment the traveler wavered: he was done for; Reszky, mistaking the direction, had sent him into an unforeseeable future, a dead Earth—this desert was nothing but the bottom of an ocean, dried up by evaporation, and this cindery-tasting trickle, the last water. . . . The altered pattern of the stars, the limpid atmosphere bore out the horror of that theory: the stars seemed enormous, and the Pole Star had changed its place, as if the axis of the globe had straightened slightly. Would Reszky know how to find him again? . . . On the burned or frozen planets he had visited in the old days, at least he'd had his spaceship, but not here. . . .

Almost at the same moment, a savage howl, as alarming as an air-raid siren, came from behind a dune. With his electrogun off safety (though he could well believe the weapon was useless), Page saw a fantastic monster rise in outline against the white disk. The moon sparkled on its silvery, blue-shadowed pelt; tall as a loading crane, it had long, flexible legs and neck, a hump in the middle of its back, and a supercilious expression. The monster took a few lurching steps, then folded its knees, manlike, and fell over in the sand. And the spaceman heard a melodious sob.

A small silhouette detached it-

self from the shadow. A long blue cloak trailed behind her, and for an instant, Page glimpsed a face cast down, a pearly whiteness, a whiteness of cherry-trees in blossom, of the abyss—lashes pearled with tears, and a child's mouth. The girl ran blindly forward (to Hugh, she was undeniably a girl), and the traveler followed her: This life-form, the first intelligent one he had found, was delightful. He tried to pick up her thoughts. A flood of disorderly waves struck him (true, his psi faculties were unusually acute here): the girl was weary, frightened, she had been traveling all night. There was a feeling of urgency. And this wretched dromedary refused to go! Page went up to her, nearly asked her a question, but remembered in time that he was invisible and inaudible. Nevertheless, as if in answer, the girl's thoughts concentrated with extraordinary power on a foreign danger, alive and merciless—something that came from another world. For a moment, Page had a ridiculous hunch—other spacemen had arrived before him in this country, and the girl was fleeing from the invaders.

Meanwhile, in the turbulent mental flood, two images swam up with remarkable clarity. The first was that of an oasis and a semi-circular building, constructed of enormous blocks of black marble and jasper—a solitary, nocturnal temple, from which radiated a

feeling of horror. Hugh's hypnotic instruction enabled him to recognize one of the oldest sanctuaries in the world: the Temple of Ammon Ra, where all the sovereigns of Egypt, including Alexander the Great, had sought consecration. Then he was on Earth—but in the depths of what illusory past?

The strange girl went on running; she stumbled, and a second image detached itself from her thought-waves: a man—no, more than a man. Page could not make out his features—only the brilliance of a cuirass which looked, Page thought to himself, rather like space armor. This creature was threatened by some danger, worse than death. Trying to clarify that shadow, bring it into sharper detail, Page drew a blank. Evidently his reception was out of phase with the girl's sending: he saw nothing but the desert, and the image of the sphinx of Giza.

As if in despair at being unable to communicate more clearly, the fugitive stopped and wrung her hands. A shock, more felt than heard, had made the plain tremble, and yet nothing was to be seen: only, at the edge of vision, sand-devils danced like columns of incense-smoke. A second later, a whirlwind shape hurled itself past them: it was the white dromedary, its shadow flying like a cloud across the desert; ears laid back, neck trembling, it disappeared in a curtain of dust.

And Page saw the lions come.

The first roar sounded from the bottom of a fault, deep under the plain. Thunder rolled along the ground, then broke up into staccato trains of roars and shrieks. A wavering tornado arose among the dunes—a cloud of sand, claws and lightings-flashes—a wind from the forge. The girl fell to the ground, and before the spaceman could move, that volcano was upon them.

Twenty, or a hundred, or a thousand red sand-devils. A hundred, or a thousand long, roaring flames—muzzles carved in granite, manes intermingling—and when they came near, the twin pupils of boiling gold. Certainly there were more than enough to hurl back, rip to shreds, two vulnerable human bodies. Page had instinctively bent his knees, wrapping his arms around the slender body of the girl, who seemed to be hiding her face against him in spite of the space armor. He had had no time to draw his electro-gun. Could people die on the paratemporal plane? Reszky had said . . . He closed his eyes.

A minute later, he was still alive; and the brazier-wind, the living hurricane, had passed. The girl in his arms held herself still and attentive. Hugh opened his eyes, to see the tawny mass disappear over the horizon. A few stragglers galloped by, bounding aside from the spot where the Invisible

stood. No dromedary was in sight, and the universe was settling down in vast waves of earth-shock.

Animals could sense "presences," the traveler reminded himself. He recalled familiar sights (so distant from this frenzied world): his dog pointing at an empty spot—a housecat motionless, staring at the night. For them, the darkness was alive. But the girl who had taken shelter against him? . . . She was standing; he could see her better now in the moonlight, and a dizziness overcame him. Page's time was full of spectacular girls, hard and civilized, admirable mannequins. Never before had he seen a creature who made him think of lilies.

"Lord," she said, "I must go. The trial is beginning, when each one must be alone. You know now . . . Ptah . . ."

Was it a prayer, addressed to some invisible god? She was already moving away. Now other shadows were passing over the desert. A chariot with shining wheels rolled past, and in it were two men speaking in curt thoughts. Once more Page saw the image of the oasis, its parallel palm-shadows, the temple with its pillars of jasper. But to these travelers, there was a man holding vigil within; and beyond doubt, he was the one the girl was trying to reach. Page made an effort and saw—beyond the sand and mist—a tall silhouette, a dark, handsome face that

was strangely familiar, and the emeralds of the file. "A king," he thought. "A Pharaoh. Probably they've got a date. My little stranger does all right for herself." Full of an unaccountable bitterness, he turned away from the oasis.

Now that he was left alone, he could better appreciate his state of being, suspended between temporal planes. He was actually floating above the dunes. He had only to think of a gap in the rock, and he found himself instantly on the edge of the cliff. Down below, cool air arose from a spring. "This is what they call levitation, or telekinesis," he thought. A solitary lion leaped up, roared, pricked his ears, then bounded aside, because Page was walking deliberately into him. The enormous beast ran off, head down, like a whipped dog. Mentally, Page made him turn back, sent him sliding over the cliff: so, animals obeyed him . . .

It was then that the danger became clear.

It wasn't a living being, at least not yet. Rather it was a shaft of mental waves—powerful, inexorable, commanding. It was a body-emptying thing, before which all human thought faced and died. He had to call on all his discipline to keep from running away; instead, he moved forward. This, he realized, was the customary attack of an ancient and carnivorous race which had developed its pow-

ers of absorption at the expense of all moral faculties. A race of psychic vampires, in short, or else . . . The tide was so powerful that it automatically projected the image of a sphinx onto Page's vision. But this time, the sphinx was alive. . . .

"Why not?" Hugh asked himself. Terrestrial monuments are covered with these divine and bestial masks; planetary legends are full of horrible, insane things, blasphemous things that we try to forget, because it's too hard to live with them. But all the same, men have encountered those Assyrian bull-kings somewhere, those harpies and gorgons . . . Why not a Sphinx, reigning over the night?

Page wavered; the projected vision had struck him with such force that he experienced it as a physical blow; a curtain of blood veiled his sight, and a wave of hallucinations broke over him. "Just like a groggy fighter," he thought, trying to put up a defensive screen. But perhaps no hurt fighter had ever felt such thunderous pain. Yet the wave flowed back, and he caught his breath long enough to bring order into the sensations that were assailing him.

They were of all kinds, and evidently radiated from at least two different beings: one was dark and gigantic; built on the scale of a demented universe, it evoked black infinity, burned and frozen globes revolving around giant suns; and

these stars bore the names of luminaries which humanity had not yet reached: Sirius, Altair, Aldebaran. . . . Was it from thence that the greedy, carnivorous beings came? These waves forced themselves upon him with their visions and discordant sounds, their worlds exploding in cosmic collisions; from the titanic bellowing of the saurians of their carboniferous ages, from the musky stench of the primal swamps where all life was born and perished, they pulled together a history of combats, shouts and violence—a whole universe of terror, mental and physical.

Page could not doubt that these were the personal memories of a Monster. Ptah—the girl had spoken that name: Ptah . . . Under the name of Sokaris, he had already reigned over Memphis—or had that been one of his ancestors? At any rate, today he meant to stretch out his claws over the whole land. . . . But why should he launch an attack on a paratime traveler? (For an instant, the spaceman wished he had stuck to his own profession—precise, limited by the laws of physics . . . clearly, Reszky and his assistants had not foreseen this danger.) His struggles against the invading personality were growing weaker; sharp, penetrating, inhuman sensations were taking possession of his subconscious mind.

But a feeble wave, like a strain

of music—a thread of crystal, a moonbeam—came to his aid. This one was profoundly human: she spoke of a cerulean sea, a continent of opal, a cold wisdom, built in harmony, that made you proud to be a Terran. Page's whole being went out toward that stream of images, and he realized that the stranger was fighting beside him. But then—the temple, the oasis . . . Was she not by the side of her handsome dark Pharaoh?

He had no time to reflect on it, for the carnivorous mind returned to the assault. Until now it had only shouted and thundered; it had been terror and helpless annihilation. . . . Now it was changing its tactics, having tested its adversary's strength—and not without surprise—; now it was making itself monstrously sweet, insinuating, attacking the nerves, which it filled to brimming with a horrible delight beyond all physical pleasure and sharper than pain. And it promised and murmured, almost at the level of consciousness, of terrible things; it dripped the essence of punishment and ecstasy. The being that had taken over his nervous system, and was performing astonishing symphonies on that clavier, had lived so long and drained so many frightful joys that the human mind dissolved at its touch, the human soul, irrevocably stained, fell into oblivion. In a flash of despair, Page sensed that all these experi-

ences were happening at this very moment; by a concentration of his will, Ptah lived, and made him share his inferno.

Him. Always him. Then where was the Pharaoh that the Monster was to attack?

He fought as a man, as an explorer, one who had been taught to preserve his own personality in isolation and in chaos: he was Hugh Page, a unique human being, from the year 2500—and he had nothing to do with this outpouring of hatred and lust. That realization broke the spell; the wave of black and red withdrew. Hugh found himself on his knees under a dune; he had rolled among blocks of stone, and his hands were full of blood; the beating of his heart made him dizzy, and he realized that the last attack had been so violent, it had almost torn him out of the fourth dimension—he was regaining physical form. . . . He shuddered.

In the silence of the desert, a melodious thought-wave spoke (perhaps the voice of the stranger, but warmer and more penetrating). "Run! Oh, run! It's you they want to destroy!"

"Me? What for? I don't belong in this country, or this time."

"You know nothing about it. The most horrible danger—"

"Can I go to you?" Hugh asked—and each word tore his dry throat. "Can I be any help?"

"No. No. . . ."

"I want to see you again"

"It's impossible. You're lost, if they succeed in materializing you."

"And can they do it?"

"I don't know. They have robbed so many Atlantean brains! Integrate yourself into another dimension. Don't think about me any more."

(That wasn't the stranger: she couldn't talk that way.)

"They have robbed so many Atlantean brains!"

His, too, undoubtedly—Page felt drained. Since he'd shared the memories and sensations of the Monster for some moments, it followed that the others had had access to his own knowledge. He shivered: whatever else he might be, he was a good physicist and a better spaceman. Would they know how to use his knowledge? Could they. . . ? He shuddered at the thought of Earth, in the year 2500, invaded by the bestial masks of pharaonic Egypt.

But: integrate himself into another dimension? On the other shore of Time, the silhouette of Professor Reszky seemed to him oddly insubstantial. That phantom ought to turn on a control board, press the "return" lever. . . . That seemed impossible. Suddenly, he began to appreciate the violent world into which he had fallen: it was *his* Earth, and yet a new planet: the air was in-

toxicatingly pure; all the colors leaped out in lively contrast, the pink moon among the sand-devils blazed incredibly . . . the luxuriant oasis, its palms as if washed by a rainstorm, everything, even the dizzy scents that rose from the pale cups of the water lilies, the musk of hidden beasts, the coolness of a spring, forcefully proclaimed a young, rich, intoxicating universe. And at the same time, never had horror and death been so immediate, so close: everything in this world was an invitation to live for the moment. "I live!" cried the osier-bed trampled beneath the tree-trunk legs of the hippopotamus. "I exist!" sparkled the moth in the jaws of darkness. The fleeting moment distilled a piercing delight.

It was in that pink glow that they showed themselves in outline, at the other side of the plain—and truly, Page had never seen anything more hideous on any carboniferous planet. To begin with, because there was a certain order, the parody of human discipline, in their movements, and because some of them, riding in chariots, holding the reins, seemed familiar, like childhood nightmares. (Who has not dreamed himself pursued, trailed by a pack, falling from a dizzy height, falling forever. . . .) Page had tried in vain to believe, on the strength of the hypno-courses, that many of Egypt's gods had little humanity

about them; he hadn't been able to take it in. Now, from every hollow of the ground ("In that accursed land," says a Chaldean manuscript, "every hollow in the sand hides a million demons . . ."), from every dune, bizarre visions were springing up: winged or squat, octopod or cynocephalous, some crawling on the ground, with a crackling of coils, a sound and smell of the tide; others whirling in an eddy of plumes—all came toward the Oasis of Ammon, and there were saurians and giant rams, entities with the heads of jackals, the broad backs of hippopotamuses; the gods of Bubastis, Mendes, Assyria; monsters and idols without faces. All the terrors of the dark ages were following a conqueror's chariot.

Up above, upon wheels of gold, under a purple canopy, the living Sphinx was enthroned.

The procession advanced with inexorable slowness. There was no resisting it; nothing could have halted that march toward victory. All the reawakened terrors of childhood, all the old familiar spectres . . . a man would have been nothing but a doormat to that procession of gods.

And they were heading toward the Oasis of Ammon.

For a moment, the urge to be with the stranger in the Temple was so strong that Hugh bit his wrist. No, he hadn't come here for that. He was on a mission, he must

simply collect and retain all the facts he could, fight if he were attacked, and return to his own era. But the mere thought of returning seemed to him cosmically absurd. And unfair . . .

On his knees, so exhausted he was, he crawled toward the spring in the reeds. The water was burning cold. He drank in great gulps, aware without surprise that his senses were growing more and more acute. The spring that fed the oasis disappeared a little farther down into a fault in the granite, from which arose a raucous murmuring. Curious, Hugh leaned over the edge, and a terrible wild-animal stench struck his nostrils. It was the lion *wadi*, on a lower level of the plain. It billowed like an ocean; it was a deep, reddish tidal wave, in which the thin trickle of water sparkled here and there. Hugh saw what man had never seen and lived.

The animals drank with courtesy, making room for the weakest. In the mass he could make out the great beasts of the Gulf, blunt-fashioned, with muzzles carved in sandstone, with their tumbling cubs and beautiful lionesses, the color of ripe corn. A little farther down were outlined the horns of a ram whose thirst had made him forget danger; a rhinoceros, with its little bloodshot eyes, rolled over, tearing up the margin of the crumbling cliff. Dune leopards, blossoming with black roses more

plentifully than the fields of May, slunk among the towering obliqueness of striped giants. In the ripples of sand, tiny kraits hissed.

...
All at once, as the wind changed, a motionless shiver went over the living mass. It was almost instantaneous. A beautiful lioness, pink as a nude woman, leaped away into the dunes. A tiger that was almost blue slashed the air. Jackals howled as they were trampled underfoot, and above the roaring concert could be heard the frightful laugh of the hyena. Astounded, Hugh realized that the animals were aware of his presence; the tidal wave was in motion ahead of him. He moved forward. It was a material force, unleashed, capable of sweeping anything out of its path—or anyone. . . .

"Come on, Ptah!" said Page to himself.

The collision of the two masses shook the desert.

Hugh Page came to himself in the deep coolness of the vaults. His head lay on a blue robe, folded up in a trough of marble, and he remembered that Egyptian beds included a half-moon-shaped cavity in place of the pillow. It made for sweet dreams, evidently. The idea was so foolish that he laughed. A ring of metal was squeezing his temples, and two immense opal eyes, veiled with long lashes, were watching him.

"You fought bravely," said a crystal voice. And after a silence: "And you are handsome. . . ."

"Then you can see me?" he asked politely, trying to get up. But a small hand restrained him.

"Don't move. When we picked you up, you seemed dead: all the lions of the desert and the whole army of Ptah had passed over your armor—luckily, it was made of tough material."

"Where is Ptah?"

"He has fled, I think," she said absently. "He's hiding in the desert—he's lost nearly everything he had, and after all, he's nothing but a big beast!"

"Who picked me up—was it you?"

"My father. My uncle Naphtali. Some strangers. You can pay them later; it doesn't matter much. In a few minutes, the remedy we've given you will begin to work and then you can walk, and go back to Thebes. There you will be received as a living god."

"But," said Hugh, "I don't want to go to Thebes! Certainly not, if everyone can see me now."

"A Pharaoh must be crowned in Thebes."

"But—"

"And you are the Pharaoh. Your name is Amenophis I, son of Ahmose, grandson of Kamose. You rule over the two Egypts, the White and the Blue; over part of Asia, and the numberless peoples of the desert. You wear the

Uraeus and the Pschent, and you are a god."

The remedy must have worked, for Hugh Page sat up in his burst armor.

"Listen," he said, "one of us is crazy: my name is Hugh Page, and I'm a pilot on a mission. I came here from the year 2500, via the Time Stream, and I'm going to go back the same way. Anyhow, I thought I understood yesterday—reading your thoughts—that the Pharaoh Amenophis was in this temple. Where is he? He's the real king of Egypt, and I have no business usurping his prerogatives."

The bluegray eyes expressed a delightful despair. "Uncle Naph-tali!" the stranger cried. "Uncle Naphtali! Come quickly! The shock was greater than we thought—our prince is mad!"

An admirable white-bearded oldster, with the manner of a patriarch, threw himself on Hugh and took his pulse. "O Pharaoh! he said. "May your name be blessed a million and again a million times. . . . May Your Majesty recover his senses: there is no more fever."

"I'm no more the Pharaoh than you are!"

"A common effect of battle against the demons, Sire: I am your cup-bearer and your court poet, I recognize you formally as my king. Would you like me to call my brother Joseph, your high commissioner? Or my brother Dan, your chief of police? Or the

High Priest Isides, who is present. . . ."

"You wear the Uraeus and the Pschent, Sire," said a calm blue oldster.

Hugh put his hand to his forehead—he felt the scales of the golden serpent, the cold of the jewels. Kneeling before him, a Nubian slave offered a disk of silver which acted as a mirror. Was this really his face, this dark, perfect image, with the great eyes in which flashes of light came and went? . . .

"I—" he began. "I don't understand any more. There's been a substitution."

"An impossible thing, Sire: your servants have kept vigil all the night in the oasis. And before, and after the combat, the princess Neter, your betrothed, remained by your side."

The princess Neter, his betrothed . . .

He looked deeply into the opal eyes that were smiling at him. She was the most delightful girl he had ever met, and a loyal comrade in battle. She had picked him up among the remains of the monsters. It seemed to him that he had always known her—or at least dreamed of her, in a past which was perhaps really the future. . . .

"Leave us alone," he said, in an imperious voice that was strange to him. "I wish to speak with the princess Neter."

And they were alone, before the altar of Ammon-Ra, among the holy disks and the pillars of jasper. Page leaned against the base of a statue, and Neter took his hand to caress it softly with her long lashes.

"I'm not Amenophis I," he said. "And you know it, Neter."

"You will be Amenophis."

"What good is this cruel game? Some day they'll find the real Pharaoh—or his corpse."

"There is no other Pharaoh. Do you think the jealous lords of the desert would have let him live? *There was only a shadow, an envelope of our making which already had your face, because we Atlanteans have always known you would come.* It was so perfect that even Ptah let himself be tempted to take it. . . . That turned out very well, incidentally: he has given you all his knowledge. . . . I admired your battle. You will be a great king, Amenophis."

"But the other Pharaohs—"

"How do you know their origins were any different? It's due to paratime travelers that humanity has been able to progress in spite of invasions and cataclysms. That's the usefulness, and the real mean-

ing of your discovery. Egypt needs you. And so do I."

The fine strands of her hair smelled of honey and amber. Her pale mouth was there—and Hugh felt himself weakening. He tried once more to get his footing in the stable, solid world where he had thought he belonged. "There can't be any interference with the Time Stream. This is a dream we're in!"

"No: a privileged configuration. Amenophis I comes out of the Temple of Ammon changed, you know. The chroniclers will say: '*He grew like unto the gods.*'"

"Exactly, and I'm not. Not even a little bit! And besides—" he seized this idea with the despair of a castaway who, drowning, sinks contentedly to the bottom—"don't forget, I may be called back to the year 2500 at any moment! All it takes is for Professor Reszky to pull the lever. . . ."

"No," said Neter. "*We moonfishers, ascending the Time Stream, gather souls and images in our nets.*' Someone said that. . . . Kiss me, and you'll understand. Now, do you see? The paratime cockpit is empty. . . . Your body is here."

