

THE GOLDEN TEMPLE

By RAY CUMMINGS

A Pyramid of Gold, Seen in a Fourth Dimension Machine, Whips Up the Avarice of Parks, so He Goes After It Ruthlessly, Murderously!

"SO you're at it again?" Parks spoke from the shadows of the laboratory doorway. "Any luck this time, John?"

John Sinclair was at his instrument table over in a corner of the big, dim laboratory. From where Parks stood in the doorway he could see that some of the mechanisms were glowing. The weird blue-green and red sheens from them illumined Sinclair's thin bent figure, painted his intent face lurid.

It glinted like unearthly fire in his shock of grey-white hair.

Sinclair did not look up.

"You, Rolf? What do you want? You can see I'm busy."

"Well, naturally I'm interested," Parks drawled ironically. He was a big, powerful fellow; a man in his thirties, with a handsome, though heavy-featured face surmounted by a close-clipped shock of bristling, reddish hair. He was Dr. Sinclair's cousin. In his heart Parks felt a little contemptuous of the weird, mysterious research work at which Sinclair always was puttering. Parks knew nothing of science, and he cared less—except that possibly there might be some money in it for him.

The idea of profiting from some invention of Sinclair's had dawned upon Parks about a month before. Sinclair had never yet explained anything he was doing. But he had admitted he was on the verge of some big discovery. He was wholly impractical, just a cracked, aging scientist.

"You get the invention workable," Parks had told him, "and if there's any merit in it, I'll be your business manager. We'll turn it into money. You need business skill to get anywhere, John. Many a good invention just dies, or goes for a song, because the inventor is not a businessman."

Sinclair had not answered. By nature he was a secretive fellow. But Parks knew he could handle him. And handle the profits. He chuckled whenever he thought of that. Sinclair could be persuaded to put up the capital, and even if the thing was no good, Parks would get plenty out of it.

Old Sinclair would go back to fussing with more science, and never bother to check on what had happened to his capital.

"Aren't you going to invite me in?" Parks added.

"Come in," agreed Sinclair. "But keep quiet, will you?"

The older man was obviously tense, excited. Parks lounged into the room, scaled his hat to a bench and sat watching. On the table in front of Sinclair a dozen weird little mechanisms of vacuum tubes, wires and grids were all glowing with current.

FROM a big crystal, beams of colored lights were focused on a Liallic screen which stood upright on a white metal frame. And as Parks stared it seemed that on the screen colored images were taking form. A scene in weird, fantastic color — a scene with movement in it.

"Got it!" Sinclair suddenly murmured. "At last—"

"Got what?" Parks demanded. "What is that? Motion picture machine? Television? The color scheme is cockeyed."

The blurred little scene seemed to show a red sky, with blue trees and an orange-colored river, rippled with little waves by a wind.

"The new world!" murmured Sinclair. "New to us, but so old, so different . . . What we could imagine—and yet so different, this reality."

He seemed to have forgotten Parks. He sat staring, trembling. His hand clutched a switch-lever. As he worked the lever the scene clarified.

A broad river with flat banks appeared. Graceful trees lined the banks. Figures were on the road near the river—a quaint looking cart, with a thick-necked animal drawing it slowly along. Men walked along beside the cart. Other men worked in a flat field nearby.

Parks sucked in his breath. What a weird scene! Were those human figures? Some seemed white; others black, like negroes. But there were others, too. These were fantastically garbed shapes in red and blue—men with angular long robes and striped headdresses which dangled down the backs of their necks.

One group was almost nude, brawny men with orange-red skin and round bullet heads. A group of them appeared by the road, milling forward with half a dozen robed men lashing at them with long red whips.

"Weird," Parks said. "Say, John, where the devil are you getting that scene from?"

Still the absorbed Sinclair ignored him. Suddenly the viewpoint of the scene shifted a little so that a huge object by the river came into view. A golden temple, in the process of being built. It was a monstrous square structure of huge golden blocks.

GOLD! Fascinated, Parks stared breathless. Thousands of slaves, powerful, naked men with skins of white, black, orange and red, labored here. They were erecting the giant golden temple. Lashed by whips, a hundred or more of them, harnessed together, came along the road dragging one of the oblong golden blocks. It rested in a crude cradle of wood.

Pure gold! In a weird, iridescent sunlight, that sparkled with orange glints on the river, the great block of gold shone resplendent. Over by the big temple, which already had risen several tiers, myriad groups of the slaves toiled dragging more gold blocks. Slowly, precariously, they hoisted them with crude and cumbersome-looking contrivances of wood and rope, like giant blocks and tackles.

Fifty thousand slaves, working here in this day shift—a vast scene of unlimited man-power, pulling and shoving and sweating, with the cruel whips urging them as though in truth this were a desperate task so gigantic that to build this great temple in a lifetime needed desperate, unflagging haste.

Gold! Gold in quantity here beyond the dreams of any man of this Earth-world! The sight of it shot a stabbing thrill into Parks. Just a few chips from just one of these big blocks would be enough to last one a lifetime!

"John," Parks gasped, "the gold—look at it! So that's what you've been after! You old fox! No wonder you didn't want to brag until you were sure. Well, you've done it. At least we can see it. The Fourth Dimension? Not this world, but still right here? I remember your lecture on that sort of thing ... Come on—tell me—is it—is it possible for us to get there?"

"Yes, I can get there," old Sinclair murmured. Seemingly he was talking mostly to himself. "A Golden Temple? Not a bad name for it. A thing of enduring splendor—"

The rambling words exasperated the excited Parks. Always a man of hot temper, he leaned forward and seized Sinclair by the arm.

"Stop that, will you?" he rasped. "What do you think I am? Here I've been waiting around all these months for you to produce something, and now you sit mumbling, ignoring me."

The grip on Sinclair's arm twitched the hand on the switch-lever. The current blinked out of the screen and the weird scene went dark.

Sinclair came out of his awed wonderment. He whirled on his chair. "Just what do you think you're doing, Rolf?" he demanded.

"I want to talk about it, cried Parks. "We've got a fortune here. I'm in it with you. You always said I was in it."

"Did I? I don't remember."

"Well, if you didn't, you implied it. I've waited around for months."

"Waiting because you're too lazy to work at anything. See here, Rolf, if you want let's have it out right now."

"I want to know what you've discovered here. You say we can go after that gold? Some Fourth Dimension mechanism? That scene we saw—"

"Yes, I can go. I don't know. I wonder if I would have enough nerve!"

His voice wandered off. Again the exasperated Parks seized him.

"You don't want to share anything with me. Is that it?"

"That's it," Sinclair snapped. "I don't want any part of you, Rolf, and you've always known it. But I'm not thinking of money. Fame, achievement and the advancement of science, what do you know of things like that? And then old Sinclair's temper flared. "Take your hands off me. Get out of here. Get out and stay out. You've always been a nuisance all your life."

PARKS had no idea how it happened. Certainly he did not intend it. But Sinclair's sarcastic words made him see red. His fist lashed out, caught Sinclair on the jaw. With a little mumbling moan the older man fell sidewise, twisted in his seat and slumped to the floor. There was a gruesome crack. His head hit a projection of the metal table-leg.

Parks staggered erect, staring down. The goggling white face of Sinclair stared up at him. Sinclair was dead. For a moment Parks stood mute with horror and fear. Already he had a prison record and he had been seen coming in here tonight.

The thought of escape now leaped into Parks' brain. A trip into the Fourth Dimension might be the answer. Old Sinclair's musing words echoed in his mind: "Yes, I can go. I don't know. I wonder if I would have enough nerve!"

Parks had nerve enough — now! There was no other way out. But where was the mechanism? And how did one operate it? ...

Then Parks remembered a little black book in which old Sinclair always so meticulously recorded the results of his experiments. Would that tell what to do? Where was the book?

A panic of haste swept over him. At any moment someone might come in here. But with his fear, triumph was mingled. Mountains of gold ingots were in that other realm. He would find some way of bringing back enough of it to make him rich for life. With riches, any difficulties regarding this murder would be solved.

He found the notebook in a drawer of the table. Swiftly he riffled through it. Weird formulae, meaningless scientific diagrams met his gaze. Then he found the heading:

TRANSITION MECHANISM

There was a diagram which illustrated a weird-looking skeleton headgear, with connecting wires to wristlets, a belt with a battery box, and wires down the legs to anklets. The scientific problems involved in the transition were meaningless to Parks. But a few phrases were intelligible:

"An aura, which in effect is an electrolite field, will be created around the living body of the operator. Within it, any objects close to the body of the operator, his clothing, his equipment, simultaneously will be affected."

Ah! So gold could be brought back! Parks, with triumph mounting in him, searched further through the pages. Here were directions for operating the mechanism. They seemed simple.

"With vibration-sorters automatically pre-set to my determined single destination, after starting, no manual operation should be necessary."

Simple enough. And the destination was that weird scene which had appeared on Sinclair's image-grid. A further sentence confirmed it.

"In effect the physical transition is a mere reversal of the visual reception. An attuned following of the incoming electrolite vibration-rays. Note that this involves a journey in our Earth-space, automatically attained, an equivalent of a few thousand spatial miles which of necessity separate the co-existing realms. A swift spatial transition, to the consciousness of the operator, perhaps only what would be termed a few minutes—"

Only a few minutes. No need for supplies, for food or water.

Parks found the skeleton transition mechanism in a box in a corner of the laboratory. Within a minute he had donned it. The tight fitting band he slipped over his forehead. The double-layer metal belt, with its dozen intricate little gadgets connected by wires to the battery, he buckled around his waist. More wires dangled from the belt to his wrists and ankles. All fool-proof. Parks chuckled.

Sinclair had planned better than he realized when he had made the contrivance so simple. Nothing much here to operate but a starting lever.

PARKS was ready. He lay down on the floor. And suddenly he realized that he was trembling. One cannot stand upon the brink of the Unknown without being afraid. But he mastered the fear. He pressed the little switch.

A tremendous shock ran through him. His senses reeled. This was followed by a gliding sensation as though he had been hurled into eternity.

Next he realized that he had been unconscious. His senses were slowly coming back. Also he had not been hurt. Everything certainly must be all right ...

Though he could not analyze it, it was just partial consciousness. He seemed to be floating, weightless, in a vast, humming grey abyss. Blurred shifting shadows like swirling mist flitted dimly around him. Everything was faintly humming, throbbing.

It could have been only a brief consciousness. Then pleasantly he slid again into dark and silent emptiness...

Queer. Had it all been imagination? Memory of the dead Sinclair, the laboratory room, that adventure .into the Unknown—were all those things hallucinations?

Abruptly Parks realized he was lying on a soft sandy ground. It was daylight. A warm day, with a gentle breeze. He raised himself up on one elbow and found he was dizzy. Those memories? Of course they had been real. The transition mechanism was on him now. It was no longer humming, throbbing.

He looked around at the strange scene. A placid blue sky arched overhead, sparkling with sunlight, speckled with fleecy-white, slowly drifting clouds. The place where he was resting seemed to be a flat, sandy desert. A river gurgled nearby. Flat banks and fringes of trees marked its edges.

Then Parks, not yet alertly conscious, with his mind slow of impressions, became aware of certain sounds. Men shouted stridently, whips cracked. The axles of, a crude vehicle squealed like a lost soul.

On a road near Parks a big primitive, woden cart with thick, solid wheels came into view. It was laden with grain. A thick-necked brown animal was drawing it. As Parks stared, the cart stopped at the side of the road. Cracking whips and shouting men's voices grew louder. The cart had drawn cumbersomely aside as a long, harnessed line of brown skinned men clad only with gee-strings went by. After them they dragged a great stone block in a wooden cradle.

Sweating, a hundred or more of these panting slaves tugged at this gigantic square of stone. A group of men in queer triangular fabric-robcs urged them onward with cracking whips. These whip wielders were sharp-featured and brown-skinned. Fabric headdresses protected the back of their necks from the hot sunlight.

The scene was the same one that had registered in old Sinclair's image grid. With confused, startled surprise Parks recognized it. But where had gone the fantastic color? This blue-grey river sparkled with normal sunlight. These men were all brown-skinned, though the brawny, muscular slaves were darker. And the Golden Temple?

Quickly Parks turned and stared across the desert sand.

Well back from the river, behind a line of the fleecy green trees, towered a giant, partially finished edifice.

Thousands of drudging slaves with crude tools were hoisting great stone blocks into tier-like steps. Already three tiers had been constructed. The materials they used were blocks—gray stone blocks.

A LITTLE knowledge is such a dangerous thing! Those fantastic colors of the image on Sinclair's screen were just aberrations of his light-color beams, distortions of reception through an intricate set of vacuums, prisms and filters. As though by the magic of alchemy the same aberrations, to Parks'

unscientific and always avaricious gaze, had transmuted these huge stone blocks into gold!

The dazed, numbed Parks little realized he had staggered to his feet. That great edifice which was being built had a peculiar shape. He saw now that there were others behind it, far smaller than this one was destined to be. The smaller ones were finished. In the distance they stood out against the yellow sands of the desert like mute sentinels, picketing their vast domain.

A sudden shout sounded near at hand. Parks became aware that robed figures were rushing toward him. A long leather whip cracked like a pistol shot.

The weight of the lash on Parks' face sent him reeling. He stumbled and fell as the lash stung him again. Angry voices babbled in a strange language.

Hands seized him, jerked him erect. Ruthlessly, they stripped off the transition mechanism and most of his clothing.

In vain he screamed and fought. Again the lash knocked him down. It bit into his bare flesh as he lay trying to protect himself with futile hands. Existence became a prolonged agony of pain.

Then he was yanked erect and shoved roughly in among the harnessed slaves on the road.

With a broad leather halter about his chest he could do what the others were doing, straining forward dragging the huge stone block in its cradle after them.

On the grey hot desert of Gizeh, that summer afternoon of 2876 B.C., the building of the Great Pyramid was well under way. The placid Nile nearby sparkled in the sunlight. A hundred thousand sweating slaves, lashed by the whips of a thousand overseers, for more than ten years had been toiling to erect these first few tiers. But steadily the great limestone blocks were being hauled into place. Immense task, to the glory of Khufu. Under the watchful, indomitable Cheops, the giant monument was rising.

Unceasing, toiling effort, on through the years. No one particularly noticed the pale-skinned, queer-looking slave, except that he was always clumsy and seemed to need more lashing than the others.