

Civilisation ended when the Earth's atmosphere changed slightly. In a drowned world Kerans' sole idea was to return to the ocean depths from which Man had once emerged.

THE DROWNED WORLD

by J. G. BALLARD

Chapter One

Soon it would be too hot. Looking out from the hotel balcony shortly after eight o'clock, Kerans watched the sun rise behind the dense groves of giant gymnosperms crowding over the roofs of the abandoned department stores four hundred yards away on the east side of the lagoon. Even through the massive olive-green fronds the relentless power of the sun was plainly tangible. The blunt refracted rays drummed against his bare shoulders and chest, drawing out the first sweat, and he slipped on a pair of heavy sunglasses to protect his eyes. The solar disc was no longer a well-defined sphere, but a wide expanding ellipse that fanned out across the eastern horizon like a colossal fire-ball, its reflection turning the dead leaden surface of the lagoon into a brilliant copper shield. By noon, less than four hours away, the water seemed to burn.

Usually Kerans would wake at five, and reach the biological testing station in time to put in at least four or five hours' work before the heat became intolerable, but this morning he found

himself reluctant to leave the cool, air-curtained haven of the hotel suite. He had spent a couple of hours over breakfast alone, deliberately delaying his departure until Colonel Riggs passed the hotel in his patrol boat, knowing that by then it would be too late to go to the station.

Leaning on the balcony rail, the slack water ten storeys below reflecting his thin angular shoulders and gaunt profile, he watched one of the countless thermal storms rip through a clump of huge horse-tails lining the creek which led out of the lagoon. For a few seconds the steam clouds hanging over the water dispersed, and a vicious miniature tornado lashed across the 60-foot-high plants, toppling them like matchsticks. Then, as abruptly, the storm vanished, leaving the great columnar trunks to subside among one another in the water like sluggish alligators.

Rationalising, Kerans told himself that he had been wise to remain in the hotel—the storms were erupting more and more frequently as the temperature rose—but he knew that his real motive was his acceptance that little now remained to be done. The biological mapping had become a pointless game, the new flora following exactly the emergent lines anticipated twenty years earlier, and he was sure that no-one at Camp Byrd in Northern Greenland bothered to file his reports, let alone read them.

In fact, old Dr. Bodkin, Kerans' assistant at the station, had slyly prepared what purported to be an eye-witness description by one of Colonel Riggs' corporals of a large sail-backed lizard with a gigantic dorsal fin that had been seen cruising across one of the lagoons, in all respects indistinguishable from the Pelycosaur, an early Pennsylvanian reptile. Had the report been taken at its face value—heralding the momentous return of the age of the great reptiles—an army of ecologists would have descended on them immediately, backed by a tactical atomic weapons unit and orders to proceed south at a steady twenty knots. But apart from the routine acknowledgement signal nothing had been heard. Perhaps even the specialists at Camp Byrd were too tired to laugh.

At the end of the month Colonel Riggs and his small holding group would finally abandon the city (had it once been Berlin, Paris or London, Kerans asked himself) and set off northward, towing the testing station with them. Kerans

found it difficult to believe that he would soon leave the penthouse suite where he had lived for the past six months. The Ritz's reputation, he gladly agreed, was richly deserved, and it saddened him slightly to think that he was the last guest who would stay at the hotel. The suite had originally been designed for a Milanese financier, and was lavishly furnished and engineered.

The heat curtains were still perfectly sealed, although the first six storeys of the hotel were below water level and the walls were beginning to crack, and the 250-amp air-conditioning unit had worked without a halt. Too many of the other buildings around the lagoon had long since slipped and slid away below the silt, revealing their gimcrack origins, and the Ritz now stood in splendid isolation on the west shore, even the rich blue moulds sprouting from the carpets in the high dark corridors adding to its 19th Century dignity.

A giant *Anopheles* mosquito, the size of a dragon-fly, spat through the air past his face, then dived down towards the floating jetty where Kerans' catamaran was moored. The sun was still hidden behind the vegetation on the eastern side of the lagoon, but the mounting heat was bringing the huge vicious insects out of their lairs all over the moss-covered surface of the hotel. Kerans was reluctant to leave the balcony and retreat behind the wire-mesh enclosure. In the early morning light a strange mournful beauty hung over the lagoon; the sombre green-black fronds of the gymnosperms, intruders from the Triassic past, and the half-submerged white-faced buildings of the 20th Century still reflected together in the dark mirror of the water, the two interlocking worlds apparently suspended at some junction in time, the illusion momentarily broken when a giant water spider cleft the oily surface a hundred yards away.

In the distance, somewhere beyond the drowned bulk of a large Gothic building half a mile to the south, a diesel engine coughed and surged. Kerans left the balcony, closing the wire door behind him, and went into the bathroom to shave. Water had long ceased to flow through the gold-plated taps into the black marble basin, but Kerans maintained a reservoir in the plunge bath, carefully purified in a home-made still on the roof and piped in through the window.

Although he was only forty, Kerans' beard had been turned white by the radio-fluorine in the water, but his bleached

crew-cut hair and deep amber tan made him appear at least ten years younger. A chronic lack of appetite, and the new malarial, had shrunk the dry leathery skin under his cheekbones, emphasising the ascetic cast of his face, but in general his manner was relaxed and informal. On the way out he picked a monographed cream silk shirt from the stack left in the wardrobe by the financier, and slipped into a pair of neatly pressed slacks with a Zurich label.

He reached the landing stage as Colonel Riggs' cutter pulled in against the catamaran.

"Morning, Robert," Riggs greeted him, jumping down on to the swaying platform of fifty-gallon drums lashed inside a wooden frame. "Glad you're still here. I've got a job on my hands you can help me with. Can you take the morning off from the station?"

Kerans helped him on to the concrete balcony that had once jutted from a seventh-floor suite. "Of course, Colonel. As a matter of fact, I have already." Technically Riggs had overall authority for the testing station and Kerans should have asked his permission, but the relationship between the two men was without ceremony. They had worked together for over three years, as the testing station and its military escort had moved slowly northward through the European lagoons, and Riggs was content to let Kerans and Bodkin get on with their work, sufficiently busy himself with the jobs of mapping the shifting keys and harbours and evacuating the last inhabitants.

In the latter task he often needed Kerans' help, for most of the people still living on in the sinking cities were either psychopaths or suffering from malnutrition and radiation sickness. Despite his brisk military front, Kerans found the Colonel intelligent and sympathetic, and with a concealed reserve of droll humour. Sometimes he wondered whether to test this by telling the Colonel about Bodkin's Pelycosaur, but on the whole decided against it.

The corporal concerned in the hoax, a dour conscientious Scotsman called Macready, had climbed up on to the wire cage that enclosed the deck of the cutter and was carefully sweeping away the heavy fronds and vines strewn across it. None of the three other men tried to help him; under their heavy tans their faces looked pinched and drawn. The

continuous heat and the massive daily doses of antibiotics drained all energy from them.

As the sun rose up over the lagoon, driving clouds of steam into the great golden pall, Kerans felt the terrible stench of the water-line, the sweet compacted smells of dead vegetation and rotting animal carcasses. Huge flies spun by, bouncing off the wire cage of the cutter, and giant bats raced across the water towards their eyries in the ruined buildings. Beautiful and serene from his balcony a few minutes earlier, Kerans realised that the lagoon was nothing more than a garbage-filled swamp.

"Let's go up on to the deck," he suggested to Riggs. "I'll buy you a drink. What's your problem?"

"It's not *my* problem. If anything, in fact, it's yours." Riggs trudged up the staircase, slapping with his baton at the vines entwined around the rail. "Haven't you got the lift working yet? I always thought this place was over-rated." However he nodded appreciatively when they stepped into the clear ice-cool air of the penthouse, and sat down thankfully in one of the gilt-legged Louis XV armchairs. He indicated the grey-metal radio console half-buried under a pile of books. "Ever try listening to that thing?"

Kerans shook his head, pressing a tab in the wall and waiting as the cocktail bar disgorged itself from the wall. "Never. Is there any point? We know all the news for the next three million years."

"You don't. Really, you should switch it on just now and then. Hear all sorts of interesting things." He took a large Scotch from Kerans. "For example, this morning you would have heard that exactly three days from now we're packing up and leaving here for good." He nodded when Kerans looked round in surprise. "Came through last night from Byrd. Apparently the water level's still rising, all the work we've done has been a total waste—as I've always maintained, incidentally. The American and Russian units are being recalled as well. Temperatures at the Equator are up to one hundred and eighty degrees now, still rising steadily, and rain belts are continuous as high as the Twentieth parallel. There's more silt too—"

He broke off, watching Kerans speculatively. "What's the matter? Aren't you relieved to be going?"

"Of course," Kerans said, still holding his unfilled glass. He seemed to be searching the room for something. "Three days, you said?"

"What do you want—three million?" Riggs chuckled to himself. "Robert, I think you secretly want to stay behind."

Kerans filled his glass, collecting himself. He had only managed to survive the previous year by deliberately suspending himself outside the normal world of time and space, and the abrupt return to earth had momentarily disconcerted him. In addition, he knew, there were other motives and responsibilities.

"Don't be absurd," he replied easily. "Naturally I'm glad to be going. Though I admit I have enjoyed being here. Perhaps it appeals to my *fin de siècle* temperament. Up at Camp Byrd I'll be living in half a mess tin." He finished his drink abruptly. "Look, Colonel, I don't think I'll be able to come with you this morning after all. Something rather urgent has come up." He noticed Riggs nodding slowly. "I see. That was your problem. *My* problem."

Riggs stood up, buttoning his jacket. "Right. I rang her last night, and saw her again this morning. You'll have to convince her, Robert. At present she refuses point-blank to go. She doesn't realise that this time is the end, that there'll be no more holding units. She may be able to hang on for another six months, but next March, when the rain belts reach here, we won't even be able to get a helicopter in. Anyway, by then no-one will care. I told her that, and she just walked away."

Kerans smiled bleakly, visualising the familiar swirl of hip and haughty stride. "Beatrice can be difficult sometimes," he temporised, hoping that she hadn't offended Riggs. It would probably take more than three days to change her mind and he wanted to be sure that the Colonel would still be waiting. "She's a complex person, lives on many levels. Until they all synchronise she can behave as if she's insane."

Five minutes later, the catamaran gliding and swirling behind the cutter, they set off from the hotel across the lagoon. Golden waves glimmered up into the boiling air, the ring of massive plants around them seeming to dance in the heat gradients like a voodoo jungle.

"If she stays here much longer she *will* be insane," Riggs shouted across the roar of the two outboard diesels. "By

the way, that reminds me of another reason why we've got to get out." He glanced across at the tall lonely figure of Corporal Macready at the tiller, his eyes staring fixedly at the water, and at the pinched haunted faces of the other men. "Tell me, Doctor, how do you sleep these days?"

For a moment Kerans wondered whether the question obliquely referred to himself and Beatrice Dahl. "Very soundly," he replied carefully. "Never better. Why do you ask?"

But Riggs merely nodded and began to shout instructions to Macready.

Chapter Two

Screeching like a dispossessed banshee, a large hammer-nosed bat soared out of one of the narrow inlets off the creek and swerved straight towards the cutter. Its sonar confused by the labyrinth of giant webs spun across the inlet by the colonies of wolf spiders, it missed the wire hood above Kerans' head by only a few feet, and then sailed away along the line of submerged office blocks, gliding in and out of the huge sail-like fronds of the fern-trees sprouting from their roofs. Suddenly, as it passed one of the projecting cornices, a motionless stone-headed creature snapped out and plucked the bat from the air. There was a brief piercing squawk and Kerans caught a glimpse of the crushed wings clamped in the lizard's jaws. Then the reptile shrank back invisibly among the foliage.

All the way down the creek, perched in the windows of the office blocks and department stores, the iguanas watched them go past, their hard frozen heads jerking stiffly. They launched themselves into the wake of the cutter, snapping at the insects dislodged from the air-weed and rotting logs, then swam through the windows and clambered up the staircases to their former vantage points, piled three deep across each other. Without the reptiles, the lagoons and the creeks of office blocks half-submerged in the immense heat would have had a strange dream-like beauty, but the iguanas and basilisks brought the fantasy down to earth. As their seats in the one-time boardrooms indicated, the reptiles had taken over the city. Once again they were the dominant form of life.

Looking up at the ancient impassive faces, Kerans could understand the curious fear they roused, re-kindling archaic memories of the terrifying jungles of the Paleocene, when the reptiles had gone down before the emergent mammals, and sense the implacable hatred one zoological class feels towards another that usurps it.

At the end of the creek they entered the next lagoon, a wide circle of dark green water almost half a mile in diameter. A lane of red plastic buoys marked a channel towards an opening on the far side. The cutter, a square flat-bottomed skiff like a huge shoe-box, had a draught of little more than a foot, and as they moved along through the flat water, the sun slanting down behind them opening up the submerged depths, they could see the clear outlines of five- and six-storey buildings looming like giant ghosts, here and there a moss-covered roof breaking the surface as the swell rolled past it.

Sixty feet below the cutter a straight grey promenade stretched away between the buildings, the remains of some former thoroughfare, the black humped shells of cars still standing by the curb. Many of the lagoons in the centre of the city were surrounded by an intact ring of buildings, and consequently little silt had entered them. Free of vegetation, apart from a few drifting clumps of Sargasso weed, the streets and shops had been preserved almost intact, like a reflection in a lake that has somehow lost its original.

The bulk of the city had long since vanished, and only the steel-supported buildings of the central commercial and financial areas had survived the encroaching flood waters. The brick houses and single-storey factories of the suburbs had disappeared completely below the drifting tides of silt. Where these broke surface giant forests reared up into the burning dull-green sky, smothering the former wheatfields of temperate Europe and North America. Impenetrable Matto Grossos over two hundred feet high, they were a nightmare world of competing organic forms returning rapidly to their Paleozoic past, and the only avenues of transit for the government units were through the lagoon systems that had superimposed themselves on the former cities. But even these were now being clogged with silt and then submerged.

Kerans could remember the unending succession of green twilight that had settled behind them as he and Riggs moved slowly northward across Europe, leaving one city after another,

the miasmatic vegetation swamping the narrow canals and draining from roof-top to roof-top.

Now they were about to abandon yet another city. Despite the massive construction of the main commercial buildings, it consisted of little more than three principal lagoons, surrounded by a nexus of small lakes fifty yards in diameter and a network of narrow creeks and inlets which wound off, roughly following the original street-plan of the city, into the outlying jungle. Here they either vanished altogether or expanded into the steaming sheets of open water that were the residues of the former oceans. In turn these gave way to the archipelagoes that coalesced to form the solid jungles of the southern massif.

The military base set up by Riggs and his platoon, which harboured the biological testing station, was in the most southerly of the three lagoons, sheltered by a number of the tallest buildings of the city, thirty-storey blocks in what had once been the down-town financial sector.

As they crossed the lagoon, leaving the base behind on their left, Kerans gazed up at the rectangular cliffs, enough of the windows intact to remind him of the illustrations of sun-dazzled promenades at Nice, Rio and Miami he had read about as a child in the encyclopaedias at Camp Byrd. Curiously, though, despite the potent magic of the lagoon worlds and the drowned cities, he had never felt any interest in their contents, and never bothered to identify which of the cities he was stationed in.

Dr. Bodkin, twenty-five years his senior, had actually lived in several of them, both in Europe and America, and spent most of his spare time punting around the remoter water-ways, searching out former libraries and museums. Not that they contained anything other than his memories.

Perhaps it was this absence of personal memories that made Kerans indifferent to the spectacle of these sinking civilisations. He had been born and brought up entirely within what had once been known as the Arctic Circle—now a sub-tropical zone with an annual mean temperature of eighty degrees—and had come southward only on joining one of the ecological surveys in his early 30's. The vast swamps and jungles had been a fabulous laboratory, the submerged cities little more than elaborate pedestals.

Apart from a few older men such as Bodkin there was no one who remembered living in them—and even during Bodkin's childhood the cities had been beleaguered citadels, hemmed in by enormous dykes and disintegrated by panic and despair. Their charm and beauty lay precisely in their emptiness, in the strange junction of two extremes of nature, like a discarded crown overgrown by wild orchids.

The succession of gigantic geophysical upheavals that had transformed the Earth's climate had made their first impact some sixty or seventy years earlier. Prolonged and violent solar storms lasting several years and caused by a slight instability in the Sun had diminished Earth's gravitational hold upon the outer layers of the ionosphere. As these vanished into space, depleting the Earth's barrier against the full impact of solar radiation, temperatures began to climb steadily, the heated atmosphere expanding outwards into the ionosphere where the cycle was completed.

All over the world mean temperatures rose by a few degrees each year. The majority of tropical areas became rapidly uninhabitable, entire populations migrating north or south from temperatures of a hundred and thirty or a hundred and forty degrees. Once-temperate areas became tropical, Europe and North America sweltering under continuous heat waves, temperatures rarely falling below a hundred degrees. Under the direction of the United Nations, the colonisation began of the Antarctic plateau and of the northern borders of the Canadian and Russian continents.

Over this initial period of twenty years a gradual adjustment of life took place to meet the altered climate. A slackening of the previous tempo was inevitable, and there was little spare energy available to cut back the encroaching jungles of the equatorial region. Not only was the growth of all plant forms accelerated, but the higher levels of radioactivity increased the rate at which mutations occurred. The first freak botanical forms appeared, recalling the giant tree-ferns of the Carboniferous period, and there was a drastic upsurge of all lower plant and animal forms.

The arrival of these distant forbears was overlaid by the second major geophysical upheaval. The continued heating of the atmosphere had begun to melt the polar ice-caps. The entrained ice-seas of the Antarctic plateau broke and dissolved, tens of thousands of glaciers around the Arctic Circle, from

Greenland and Northern Europe, Russia and North America, poured themselves into the sea, millions of acres of permafrost liquefied into gigantic rivers.

Here again the rise of global water levels would have been little more than a few feet, but the huge discharging channels carried with them billions of tons of top-soil. Massive deltas formed at their mouths, extending the continental coastlines and damming up the oceans. Their effective spread shrank from two-thirds of the world's area to only slightly more than half.

Driving the submerged silt before them, the new seas completely altered the shape and contours of the continents. The Mediterranean contracted into a system of inland lakes, the British Isles was linked again with northern France. The Middle West of the United States, filled by the Misissippi as it drained the Rocky Mountains, became an enormous gulf opening into the Hudson Bay, while the Carribean Sea was transformed into a desert of silt and salt flats. Europe became a system of giant lagoons, centred on the principal low lying cities, inundated by the silt carried southwards by the expanding rivers.

During the next thirty years the pole-ward migration of populations continued. A few fortified cities defied the rising water-levels and the encroaching jungle, building elaborate sea-walls around their perimeters, but one by one these were breached. Only within the former Arctic and Antarctic Circles was life tolerable. The oblique incidence of the Sun's rays provided a shield against the more powerful radiation. Cities on higher ground in mountainous areas nearer the Equator had been abandoned despite their cooler temperatures because of the diminished atmospheric protection.

It was this last factor which provided its own solution to the problem of re-settling the migrant populations of the new Earth. The steady decline in mammalian fertility, and the growing ascendancy of amphibian and reptile forms best adapted to an aquatic life in the lagoons and swamps, inverted the ecological pattern, and by the time of Kerans' birth at Camp Byrd, a city of ten thousand in northern Greenland, it was estimated that fewer than five million people were still living on the polar caps.

The birth of a child had become a rarity, and only one marriage in ten yielded any offspring. As Kerans sometimes reminded himself, the genealogical tree of mankind was

systematically pruning itself, apparently moving backwards in time, and a point might ultimately be reached where a second Adam and Eve found themselves alone in a new Eden.

Riggs noticed him smiling to himself at this conceit. "What's amusing you, Robert? Another of your obscure jokes? Don't try to explain it to me."

"I was just casting myself in a new role." Kerans looked out over the rail at the office blocks sliding past twenty feet away, the wash from the cutter splashing through the open windows along the water-line. The sharp tang of wet lime contrasted freshly with the over-sweet odours of the vegetation. Macready had taken them into the shadow of the buildings and it was pleasantly cool behind the breaking spray.

Over on the sun-ward side of the lagoon the yellow-striped three-storey drum of the floating base was almost obscured in the reflected light, the rotating blades of the helicopter on its roof throwing brilliant lances across the water at them. Two hundred yards down shore the smaller white-painted hull of the testing station seemed to have moved from its usual moorings against a broad hump-backed building that had been a former concert hall. Taking off his sunglasses, he saw that one of the motor launches was towing it slowly up-stream towards the base, and realised with a slight start that Riggs had meant what he said about leaving in three days' time.

Macready swung the tiller, and they pivoted round in a fan of spray into the lee of a tall white-faced building that lifted a full twenty storeys out of the water. The projecting roof of an adjacent smaller block served as a jetty, next to which was moored a rusty white-hulled power cruiser. The raked perspex windows of the driving cabin were cracked and stained, and the exhaust vents leaked a scaly oil on to the water.

They jumped down on to the jetty and crossed a narrow metal gangway that led into the apartment block. The walls of the corridor were slick with moisture, huge patches of mould feeding on the plaster, but the lift was still working, powered by the emergency diesel. They rose slowly towards the roof and stepped out on to the upper level of the duplex, then walked down a service corridor to the outer deck.

Directly below them was the lower level, a small pool with a covered patio, bright deck chairs drawn up in the shade by

the diving board. Beyond the far end of the pool was a wide open view of the lagoon, the city emerging from the encroaching jungle, flat sheets of silver water expanding towards the green blur along the southern horizon. Massive silt banks lifted their backs through the surface, a light yellow fur along their spines marking the emergence of the first giant bamboo groves.

The helicopter rose from its platform on the roof of the base and arced upwards into the air towards them, the pilot swinging the tail as he changed direction, then roared overhead, two men in the open hatchway searching the rooftops with binoculars.

Beatrice Dahl lay back on one of the deck chairs, her long oiled body gleaming in the shadows like a sleeping python. The pink-tipped fingers of one hand rested lightly on an ice-filled glass on a table beside her, the other hand turned slowly through the pages of a magazine. Wide blue-black sunglasses masked her smooth sleek face, but Kerans noted the slightly sullen pout of her firm lower lip. Obviously Riggs had annoyed her, forcing her to accept the logic of his argument.

The Colonel paused at the rail, looking down at the beautiful supple body with ungrudging approval. Noticing him, Beatrice pulled off her sunglasses, then tightened the loosened back-straps of her bikini under her arms. Her eyes glinted quietly.

"All right, you two, get on with it. I'm not a strip show."

Riggs chuckled and trotted down the white metal stairway, Kerans at his heels, wondering how he was going to persuade Beatrice to leave her private sanctuary.

"My dear Miss Dahl, you should be flattered that I keep coming to see you," Riggs told her, lifting back the awning and sitting down on one of the chairs. "Besides, as the military governor of this area—" here he winked slyly at Kerans "—I have certain responsibilities towards you. And vice versa."

Beatrice regarded him briefly with a jaundiced eye and reached out to turn up the volume of the radiogram behind her. "And what about you, Robert? What brings you out so early in the day?"

Kerans shrugged, smiling at her amiably. "I missed you."

"Good boy. I thought perhaps that the gauleiter here had been trying to frighten you with his horror stories."

"Well, he has, as a matter of fact." Kerans took the magazine propped against Beatrice's knee and leafed through it idly. It was a forty-year-old issue of Paris *Vogue*, from its icy pages evidently kept somewhere in cold storage. He dropped it on the green-tiled floor. "Bea, it looks as if we'll all have to leave here in a couple of days' time. The Colonel and his men are pulling out for good. We can't very well stay on after he's gone."

"We?" she repeated dryly. "I didn't know there was any chance of your staying behind?"

Kerans glanced involuntarily at Riggs, who was watching him steadily. "There isn't," he said firmly. "You know what I mean. There'll be a lot to do in the next forty-eight hours, try not to complicate things by making a last emotional stand."

Before the girl could cut back at Kerans, Riggs added smoothly: "The temperature is still going up, Miss Dahl, you won't find it easy to stand one hundred and thirty degrees when the fuel for your generator runs out. The big Equatorial rain belts are moving northward, and they'll be here in a month. When they leave, the water in that pool—" he indicated the tank of steaming, insect-strewn fluid "—will damn nearly boil. What with the Type X Anopheles, skin cancers and the iguanas shrieking all night down below, you'll get precious little sleep." Closing his eyes for a moment, he added pensively: "That is, assuming that you still want any."

At this last remark the girl's mouth fretted slightly. Kerans realised that the quiet ambiguity in Riggs' voice had not been directed at his relationship with Beatrice. The Colonel went on: "In addition, some of the human scavengers driven northward out of the Mediterranean lagoons won't be too easy to deal with."

Beatrice tossed her long black hair over one shoulder. "I'll keep the door locked, Colonel."

Irritated, Kerans snapped: "For God's sake, Beatrice, what are you trying to prove? These self-destructive impulses may be amusing to play with now, but when we've gone they won't be so funny. The Colonel's only trying to help you—he doesn't really give a hoot whether you stay behind or not."

Riggs stood up. "Well, I wouldn't say that. Anyway, I'll see you later, Doctor." He saluted Beatrice with a smile. "Some time tomorrow I'll send the cutter over to collect your gear, Miss Dahl."

Chapter Three

When Riggs had gone Kerans lay back in his chair, watching the helicopter circle over the adjacent lagoon. Now and then it dived along the water's edge, the down-draught from its rotor blades beating through the flapping fronds of the fern-trees. Beatrice brought a drink from the small chromium bar at the rear of the patio and sat down on the chair at his feet.

"I wish you wouldn't analyse me in front of that man, Robert." She handed him the drink and then leaned against his knees, resting her chin on one wrist. Usually she looked sleek and well-fed, but her expression today seemed tired and wistful.

"I'm sorry," Kerans apologised. "Perhaps I was really analysing myself. Riggs' ultimatum came as a bit of a surprise; I wasn't expecting to leave so soon."

"You are going to leave then?"

Kerans paused. The automatic player in the radiogram switched from Beethoven's Pastoral to the Seventh, Toscanini giving way to Bruno Walter. All day, without a break, it played through the cycle of nine symphonies. He searched for an answer, the change of mood, to the sombre opening motif of the Seventh, overlaying his indecision.

"I suppose I want to, but I haven't yet found an adequate reason. Satisfying one's emotional needs isn't enough. There's got to be a more valid motive. Perhaps these sunken lagoons simply remind me of the drowned world of my uterine childhood—if so, the best thing is to leave straight away. Everything Riggs says is true. There's little hope of standing up to the rainstorms and the malaria."

He placed his hand on her forehead, feeling her temperature like a child. "What did Riggs mean when he said you wouldn't sleep well? That was the second time this morning he mentioned it."

Beatrice looked away for a moment. "Oh, nothing. I've just had one or two peculiar nightmares recently. A lot of people get them. Forget it. Tell me, Robert, seriously—if I decide to stay on here, would you? You could share this apartment."

Kerans grinned. "Trying to tempt me, Bea? What a question. Remember, not only are you the most beautiful woman here, but you're the only woman. Adam had no

THE DROWNED WORLD

aesthetic sense, or he would have realised that Eve was a pretty haphazard piece of work."

"You are being frank today." Beatrice stood up and went over to the edge of the pool. She swept her hair back off her forehead with both hands, her long supple body gleaming against the sunlight. "But is there as much urgency as Riggs claims? We've got the cruiser."

"It's a wreck. The first serious storm will split it open like a rusty can."

Nearing noon, the heat on the terrace had become uncomfortable and they left the patio and went indoors. Double venetian blinds filtered a thin sunlight into the low wide lounge, and the refrigerated air was cool and soothing. Beatrice stretched out on a long pale-blue elephant hide sofa, one hand playing with the fleecy pile of the carpet. The apartment had been one of her grandfather's *pied a terres*, and Kerans wondered how far his personality and its strange internal perspectives had been carried forward into his granddaughter. Over the mantelpiece was a huge painting by the early 20th Century surrealist Delvaux, in which ashen-faced women danced naked to the waist with dignified skeletons in tuxedos against a spectral bone-like landscape. On another wall one of Max Ernst's self-devouring phantasmagoric jungles screamed silently to itself, like the sump of some insane unconscious.

For a few moments Kerans stared quietly at the dim yellow annulus of Ernst's sun glowering through the exotic vegetation, a curious feeling of memory and recognition signalling through his brain. Far more potent than the Beethoven, the image of the archaic sun burned against his mind, illuminating the fleeting shadows that darted fitfully through its profoundest depths.

"Beatrice."

She looked up at him as he walked across to her, a light frown crossing her eyes.

"You realise that if we let Riggs go without us we don't merely leave here later. We *stay*."

Later that night, as Kerans lay asleep in his bunk at the testing station, the dark waters of the lagoon outside drifting through the drowned city, the first of the dreams came to him. He had left his cabin and walked out on to the deck, looking

down over the rail at the black luminous disc of the lagoon. Dense palls of opaque gas swirled across the sky only a few hundred feet overhead, through which he could just discern the faint glimmering outline of a gigantic sun. Booming distantly, it sent dull glows pulsing across the lagoon, momentarily lighting the long limestone cliffs which had taken the place of the ring of white-faced buildings.

Reflecting these intermittent flares, the deep bowl of the water shone in a diffused opalescent blur, the discharged light of myriads of phosphorescing animalcula, congregating in dense shoals like a succession of submerged haloes. Between them the water was thick with thousands of entwined snakes and eels, writhing together in frantic tangles that tore the surface of the lagoon.

As the great sun drummed nearer, almost filling the sky itself, the dense vegetation along the limestone cliffs was flung back abruptly, to reveal the black and stone-grey heads of enormous Triassic lizards. Strutting forward to the edge of the cliffs, they began to roar together at the sun, the noise gradually separating until it became indistinguishable from the volcanic pounding of the solar flares. Beating within him like his own pulse, Kerans felt the powerful mesmeric pull of the baying reptiles, and stepped out into the lake, whose waters now seemed an extension of his own blood-stream. As the dull pounding rose, he felt the barriers which divided his own cells from the surrounding medium dissolving, and he swam forwards, spreading outwards across the black thudding water . . .

He woke in the suffocating metal box of his cabin, his head splitting like a burst marrow, too exhausted to open his eyes. Even as he sat on the bed, splashing his face in the luke-warm water from the jug, he could still see the vast inflamed disc of the spectral sun, still hear the tremendous drumming of its beat. Timing them, he realised that the frequency was that of his own heartbeats, but in some insane way the sounds were magnified so that they remained just above the auditory threshold, pursuing him as he opened the cabin door and moved towards the galley.

Then he remembered that Beatrice Dahl had seen the same dream and pulled himself together. He went out on to the deck and looked up at the distant spire of the apartment block, trying to decide whether to drive across to her.

Bodkin was sitting at the table in the galley, placidly drinking coffee. His shrewd quick eyes, misleadingly set in a sagging face, watched Kerans unobtrusively as he lowered himself into a chair.

"So you're one of the dreamers now, Robert. You look tired. Was it a deep one?"

Kerans managed an uneasy laugh. "Are you trying to frighten me, Alan? I wouldn't know yet, but it felt deep enough. God, I wish I hadn't spent last night here. There are no nightmares at the Ritz." He sipped pensively at the hot coffee. "So that's what Riggs was talking about. How many of his men are seeing these dreams?"

"Riggs himself doesn't, but at least half the others. And Beatrice Dahl, of course. I've been seeing them for a full three months. It's basically the same recurrent dream in all cases."

Kerans gazed out through the window at the yellow bulk of the floating base moored alongside. High up on the top deck the helicopter pilot was standing motionless by the rail, staring across the cool early morning water. Perhaps he too had just woken from the same corporate nightmare, was filling his eyes with the olive-green spectrum of the lagoon in the hope of erasing the burning image of the dim Triassic sun. Kerans looked down at the dark shadows below the table, seeing again the faint glimmer of the phosphorescing pools. Distantly in his ears he could hear the sun drumming over the sunken water. As he recovered from his first fears he realised that there was something soothing about its sounds, almost reassuring and encouraging like his own heartbeats. But the giant reptiles had been terrifying.

To Bodkin he said: "Remind me to take a phenobarb tonight, Alan."

"Don't," Bodkin warned him firmly. "Not unless you want the impact doubled. Your residues of conscious control are the only thing holding up the dam." He buttoned his neat cotton jacket around his shirtless midriff. "That wasn't a true dream, Robert, but an ancient organic memory millions of years old."

He pointed at the ascending rim of the sun through the groves of gymnosperms. "The innate releasing mechanisms laid down in your cytoplasm millions of years ago have been awakened, the expanding sun and the rising temperature are

driving you back down the spinal levels into the drowned seas submerged beneath the lowest layers of your unconscious. This is the lumbar transfer, total biopsychic recall. We really remember these swamps and lagoons. After a few nights you won't be frightened of the dreams, despite their superficial horror. That's why Riggs has received orders for us to leave."

"The Pelycosaur . . . ?" Kerans asked.

Boskin nodded. "The joke was on us. The reason they didn't take it seriously at Byrd was that ours wasn't the first to be reported."

Footsteps sounded up the companionway and moved briskly along the metal deck outside. Colonel Riggs pushed back the double swing doors, freshly scrubbed and breakfasted.

He waved his baton at them amiably, eyeing the litter of unwashed cups and his two bare-chested subordinates.

"God, what a shambles. Morning to you both. We've got a busy day ahead of us so let's get our elbows off the table. I've fixed the departure time for twelve hundred hours tomorrow, and there'll be a final embarkation stand-by at ten hundred. I don't want to waste any more fuel than I have to, so dump everything you can overboard. You all right, Robert?"

"Perfectly," Kerans replied flatly, sitting up.

"Glad to hear it. You look a bit glassy. Right, then. If you want to borrow the cutter to evacuate the Ritz . . ."

Kerans listened to him automatically, watching the sun as it rose magnificently behind the gesticulating outline of the Colonel. What completely separated them now was the single fact that Riggs had not seen the dream, not felt its immense hallucinatory power. He was still obeying reason and logic, buzzing around his diminished, unimportant world with his little parcels of instructions like a worker bee about to return to the home nest. After a few minutes he ignored the Colonel completely and listened to the deep subliminal drumming in his ears, half-closed his eyes so that he could see the glimmering surface of the lake dapple across the dark underhang of the table.

Opposite him Bodkin appeared to be doing the same, his hands folded across his waist. Through how many of their recent conversations had he in fact been miles away?

THE DROWNED WORLD

When Riggs left, Kerans followed him to the door. "Of course, Colonel, everything will be ready in good time. Thank you for calling."

As the cutter moved off across the lagoon he went back to his chair. For a few minutes the two men stared across the table at each other, the insects outside bouncing off the wire mesh as the sun lifted into the sky. At last Kerans spoke.

"Alan, I'm not sure whether I shall be leaving."

Without replying, Bodkin took out his cigarettes. "Do you know where we are?" he asked after a pause. "The name of this city?" When Kerans shook his head he said: "Part of it used to be called London, not that it matters. Curiously enough, though, I was born here. Yesterday I rowed over to the old University quarter, a mass of little creeks, actually found the laboratory where my father used to teach. We left here when I was six, but I can just remember being taken to meet him one day. A few hundred yards away there was a planetarium, I saw a performance once—that was before they had to re-align the projector. The big dome is still there, about twenty feet below water. It looks like an enormous shell, fucus growing all over it, straight out of 'The Water Babies'—" He broke off abruptly, his face suddenly tired.

"Go on," Kerans said evenly.

Chapter Four

The two men moved quickly along the deck, their padded soles soundless on the metal plates. A white midnight sky hung across the dark surface of the lagoon, a few stationary clumps of cumulus like sleeping galleons. The low night sounds of the jungle drifted over the water; occasionally a marmoset gibbered or the iguanas shrieked distantly from their eyries in the submerged office blocks. Myriads of insects festered along the water-line, momentarily disturbed as the swells rolled in against the base, slapping at the canted sides of the pontoon.

One by one Kerans began to cast off the restraining lines, taking advantage of the swells to lift the loops off the rusting bollards. As the station slowly pivoted away he looked up anxiously at the dark bulk of the base. Gradually the three nearside blades of the helicopter came into view above the top

deck, then the slender tail rotor. He paused before releasing the last line, waiting for Bodkin to give the all-clear from the top deck of the station.

The tension on the line had doubled, and it took him several minutes to work the metal loop up the curving lip of the bollard, the successive swells giving him a few inches of slack as the station tilted, followed a moment later by the base. Above him he could hear Bodkin whispering impatiently—they had swung right around into the narrow interval of water behind them and were now face on to the lagoon, the single light in Beatrice Dahl's penthouse burning on its pylon. Then he cleared the lip and lowered the heavy cable into the slack water three feet below, watching it cleave back towards the base.

Freed of its attendant burden, and with its centre of gravity raised by the helicopter on its roof, the huge drum rolled over a full five degrees from the vertical, then gradually regained its balance. A light in one of the cabins went on, then flicked off again after a few moments. Kerans seized the boat-hook on the deck beside him as the interval of open water widened, first to twenty, then to fifty yards. A low current moved steadily through the lagoons, and would carry them back along the shore to their former mooring.

Holding the station off from the buildings they skirted, now and then crushing the great soft fern-trees sprouting through the windows, they soon covered two hundred yards, slowing as the current diminished around the curve, and finally lodged in a narrow inlet about a hundred feet square in size.

Kerans leaned over the rail, looking down through the dark water at the small cinema theatre twenty feet below the surface, its flat roof luckily uncluttered by lift-heads or fire escapes. Waving to Bodkin on the deck above, he stepped in through the laboratory and made his way past the specimen tanks and sinks to the companionway leading down to the float.

Only one stop-cock had been built into the base of the float, but as he spun the handwheel a powerful jet of cold foaming water gushed up across his legs. By the time he returned to the lower deck, after a final check of the laboratory, water was already spilling ankle-deep through the scuppers. The station went down like a lift, and he waded waist-deep to the

companionway and climbed up to the next deck where Bodkin was exultantly watching the windows of the adjacent office blocks rise into the air.

They settled about three feet below deck level, on a flat keel with a convenient access point by the starboard bridge. Dimly below they could hear trapped air bubbling from the retorts and fume cupboards in the laboratory, and a frothy stain spread across the water from a submerged window by one of the reagent benches.

From the typewriter in his cabin Kerans took a sheet of paper, pinned it firmly to the door of the galley. Bodkin appended his signature to the message, and the two men went out on to the deck again and lowered Kerans' catamaran into the water.

Paddling slowly, the outboard shipped, they glided off across the black water, soon disappearing among the dark blue shadows along the edge of the lagoon.

The down-draught from its blades fanning furiously across the swimming pool, tearing at the striped awning of the patio, the helicopter circled deafeningly over the penthouse, plunging and diving as it searched for a landing point. Kerans smiled to himself as he watched through the plastic vanes over the lounge windows, confident that the tottering pile of kerosene drums he and Bodkin had pyramided over the roof would safely deter the pilot. One or two of the drums toppled down on to the patio and splashed into the pool, and the helicopter veered away and then came in more slowly, hovering steadily.

The pilot swung the fuselage around so that the hatch door faced the lounge windows, and the hatless figure of Riggs appeared in the doorway, two of the orderlies holding on to him as he bellowed into an electric megaphone.

Beatrice Dahl ran across to Kerans from her observation post at the far end of the lounge, cupping her ears from the din.

"Robert, he's trying to talk to us!"

Kerans nodded, the Colonel's voice completely lost in the engine roar. Riggs finished and the helicopter leaned backwards and soared away across the lagoon, taking the noise and vibration with it.

Kerans put his arm around Beatrice's shoulders, the bare oiled skin smooth under his fingers. "Well, I think we have a pretty good idea what he was saying."

They went out on to the patio, waving up to Bodkin who had appeared from the lift-house and was straightening the drums. Standing by the rail, Kerans pointed to the yellow hull of the floating base moored by the Ritz in the furthest of the three lagoons.

After a futile attempt to re-float the station Riggs had set off at noon as planned, sending the cutter over to the apartment house where he assumed the two biologists were hiding. Finding the lift out of order and refusing the alternative of a twenty-storey climb up the stairway—already a few iguanas had made their homes on the lower landings—Riggs had finally tried to reach them with the helicopter. Balked there, he was now crashing the Ritz.

"Thank God he's left," Beatrice said fervently. "For some reason he really got on my nerves. All that stiff upper lip and dressing for dinner in the jungle—a total lack of adaptability."

"Riggs was all right," Kerans remarked quietly. "He'll probably get by." He glanced at the thermo-alarm he wore next to his wrist-watch. It was after 4.30, but the temperature was a hundred and twenty degrees, the sun beating against his skin like a fist. They joined Bodkin and went into the air-conditioned lounge.

Resuming the action conference interrupted by the helicopter, Kerans said: "You've got about a thousand gallons left in the roof tank, Bea, enough for three months—or let's say two, as we can expect it to get a lot hotter—and I recommend you to close down the rest of the apartment and move into here. You're on the north side of the patio so the lift-house will protect you from the heavy rains when they come in on the southerly storms. Ten to one the shutters and air-seals along the bedroom walls will be breached. What about food, Alan? How long will the stocks in the deep freeze last?"

Bodkin chuckled dryly. "Well, as most of the lambs, tongues in aspic have been eaten they now consist chiefly of bully beef, so you could say 'indefinitely'. However, if you're actually going to eat the stuff—six months. But I'd prefer iguana."

"No doubt the iguana would prefer us. All right then, that seems pretty fair. Alan will be over in the station until the level rises, and I'll be holding out at the Ritz. Anything else?"

Beatrice wandered away around the sofa towards the bar. "Yes, darling. Shut up. You're beginning to sound like Riggs. The military manner doesn't suit you."

Kerans threw her a mock salute and strolled over to look at the Ernst, while Bodkin gazed down at the jungle through the window. More and more the two scenes were becoming to resemble each other, and in turn the third nightscape each of them carried within his mind. They never discussed their dreams, the common zone of twilight where they moved at night like the phantoms in the Delvaux painting.

Beatrice had sat down in the sofa with her back to him, and shrewdly Kerans guessed that the present unity of the group would not be long maintained. Now that they had made their decision the bonds between them had already begun to fade, and it was not simply a matter of convenience that they would live apart. Much as he needed Beatrice Dahl, her personality intruded upon the absolute freedom he required for himself. By and large, each of them would have to pursue his or her own pathway through the time jungles, mark their own points of return. Although they would see one another occasionally, around the lagoons or at the testing station, their only true meeting ground would be in their dreams.

Split by an immense roar, the early morning silence over the lagoon shattered abruptly, and a tremendous blare of noise battered past the windows of the hotel suite. Kerans leapt from his bed, kicked back the mesh door on to the balcony in time to see a huge black-hulled hydroplane speed by around the lagoon, its two long stepped planes cleaving perfect slices of white spray. As the heavy wash slapped against the wall of the hotel, breaking up the colonies of water spiders and disturbing the bats nesting among the rotting logs, he caught a glimpse of a tall, broad-shouldered man in the cockpit, wearing a white helmet and jerkin, standing upright at the controls.

He drove the hydroplane with an easy nonchalant swagger, accelerating the two powerful propellor turbines mounted in front of him as the craft hit the broad swells across the lagoon, so that it plunged and dived like a power-boat wrestling through giant rollers, throwing up gales of rainbowing spray. The man rolled with the surging motion of the craft, his long legs supple and relaxed, like a chariotteer completely in command of a spirited team.

The silver studs of a cartridge belt flashed around his waist, and as he reached the far side of the lagoon there was a series of short explosions. Signal shells burst over the water into ragged red umbrellas, the fragments spitting down across the shore.

In a final lunge of energy, its engines screaming, the hydroplane swerved out of the lagoon and gunned away down the canal to the next lagoon, its wash thrashing at the foliage. Kerans gripped the balcony rail, watching the disturbed restless water of the lagoon trying to re-settle itself, the giant cryptograms and scale trees along the shore tossed and flurried by the still surging air. A thin pall of red vapour drifted away to the north, fading with the diminishing sounds of the hydroplane. The violent irruption of noise and energy, and the arrival of this strange white-suited figure, momentarily disconcerted Kerans.

In the six weeks since Riggs' departure he had lived almost alone in his penthouse suite at the hotel, immersing himself more and more deeply in the silent world of the surrounding jungle. The continued increase in temperature—the thermoalarm on the balcony now rang up a noon high of a hundred and forty degrees—and the enervating humidity made it almost impossible to leave the hotel after ten o'clock in the morning; the lagoons and the surrounding jungles were filled with fire until six o'clock, by when he was usually too tired to do anything but return to bed.

All day he sat by the screened windows of the suite, listening from the shadows to the shifting movement of the jungle. Already many of the buildings around the lagoon had disappeared beneath the proliferating vegetation; huge club-mosses and calamites blotted out the white rectangular faces, shading the lizards in their window lairs.

Beyond the lagoon the endless tides of silt had begun to accumulate in enormous glittering banks, here and there overtopping the shore-line, like the immense tipplings of some distant gold-mine. The light drummed against his brain, bathing the submerged levels below his consciousness, carrying him downwards into warm pellucid depths where the nominal realities of time and space ceased to exist. Guided by his dreams, he was moving backwards through the emergent past, through a succession of stranger landscapes, centred upon the lagoon, each of which seemed to represent one of his own

spinal levels. At times the circle of water was spectral and vibrant, at others slack and murky, the shore apparently formed of shale, like the dull metallic skin of a reptile. Yet again the soft beaches would glow invitingly with a glossy carmine sheen, the sky warm and limpid, the emptiness of the long stretches of sand total and absolute, filling him with an exquisite and tender anguish.

He longed for this descent through archaeopsychic time to reach its conclusion, repressing the knowledge that when it did the external world around him would have become unbearable.

Sometimes, he restlessly made a few entries in his botanical diary about the new plant forms, and during the first weeks called several times on Dr. Bodkin and Beatrice Dahl. But both were increasingly preoccupied with their own descents through total time. Bodkin had become lost in his private reverie, punting aimlessly about the narrow creeks in search for the submerged world of his childhood. However, with Beatrice, despite their superficial estrangement, there was an intact underlying union, a tacit awareness of their symbolic roles.

More signal shells burst over the distant lagoon, containing the station and Beatrice's apartment house, and Kerans shielded his eyes as the bright fire-balls studded the sky. A few seconds later, several miles away among the silt banks to the south, there was a series of answering bursts, faint puffs that soon dispersed.

So the stranger driving the hydroplane was not alone. At the prospect of this imminent invasion Kerans pulled himself together. The distance separating the answering signals was wide enough to indicate that there was more than one group, and that the hydroplane was merely a scout vehicle.

Sealing the mesh door behind him, he hurried back into the bedroom, pulling his jacket off the chair. Out of habit he went into the bathroom and stood in front of the mirror, absently feeling the week-old stubble on his face. The hair was white as pearl, and with his ebony tan and blank eyes gave him the appearance of an elderly beachcombing tramp. A bucket-full of dingy water had leaked in from the wrecked still on the roof, and he scooped some out and splashed his face.

Using the metal-tipped boat hook to drive away two small iguanas idling on the jetty, he slid the catamaran into the water and cast off, the little outboard carrying him steadily through the sluggish swells. Huge clumps of algae stirred below the craft, and stick-beetle and water spider raced around its prows. It was a few minutes after seven o'clock, and the temperature was only eighty degrees, comparatively cool and pleasant, the air free of the enormous clouds of mosquito which would later be roused from their nests by the heat.

As he navigated the hundred-yard-long creek leading into the southern lagoon more signal rockets were exploding overhead, and he could hear the hydroplane zooming to and fro, occasionally glimpse the white-suited figure at its controls as it flashed past. Kerans cut the outboard at the entrance to the lagoon and glided quietly through the overhanging fern fronds, watching for water snakes disturbed from the branches by the surging wash.

Twenty-five yards along the shore he berthed the catamaran among the horsetails growing on the shelving roof of a department store, waded up the sloping concrete to a fire escape on the side of the adjacent building. He climbed the five storeys to the flat roof-top and lay down behind a low pediment, glancing up at the nearby bulk of Beatrice's apartment house.

The hydroplane was circling noisily by an inlet on the far side of the lagoon, the driver plunging it backwards and forward like a horseman reining his steed. More flares were going up, some only a quarter of a mile away. As he watched Kerans noticed a low but mounting roar, a harsh animal sound not unlike that emitted by the iguanas. It drew nearer, mingled with the drone of engines, followed by noise of vegetation being torn and buffeted. Sure enough, along the course followed by the inlet, the huge fern trees and calamites were flung down one after another, their branches waving as they fell like vanquished standards. The whole jungle was being torn apart. Doves of bats erupted into the air and scattered frantically across the lagoon, their screeching masked by the accelerating turbines of the hydroplane, and the exploding star-shells.

Abruptly, the water in the mouth of the inlet rose several feet into the air, what seemed to be an enormous log-jam crushed down it, tearing the vegetation away, and burst out into the lagoon. A miniature niagara of foaming water

ascended outwards, impelled by the pressure of the tidal bore behind it, on which rode several square black-hulled craft like Colonel Riggs' cutter. Manned by a dozen dusky-skinned figures in white shorts and singlets, the scows jockeyed out towards the centre of the lagoon, the last of the star-shells still going up from their decks in the general melee and excitement.

Half-deafened by the noise, Kerans stared down at the vast swarm of long brown forms swimming powerfully through the seething water, their massive tails lashing the foam. By far the largest alligators he had seen, many of them over twenty-five feet long, they jostled together ferociously as they fought their way into the clear water, churning in a pack around the now stationary hydroplane. The white-suited man was standing in the open hatchway, hands on hips, gazing exultantly at this reptilian brood. He waved lazily at the crews of the three scows, then gestured in a wide circle at the lagoon, indicating that they would anchor there.

As his Negro lieutenants re-started their engines and drifted off towards the bank, he surveyed the surrounding buildings with a critical eye, his strong face raised almost jauntily to one side. The alligators congregated like hounds around their master, more and more joining the pack, cruising shoulder to shoulder in a clock-wise spiral, until at least two thousand were present, a massive group incarnation of reptilian evil.

Chapter Five

With a shout, the pilot swung back to his controls, the two thousand snouts lifting in recognition. The propellers kicked into life and lifted the hydroplane forward across the water. Its sharp planes ploughing straight across the hapless creatures in their path, it drove away towards the communicating creek into the next lagoon, the great mass of alligators surging along behind it. A few detached themselves and cruised off in pairs around the lagoon, ferreting among the submerged windows and driving off the iguanas who had come out to watch. Others glided among the buildings and took up their positions on the barely covered rooftops.

As the advancing armada headed towards the creek on his left, Kerans scrambled down the fire escape and splashed

down the slope to the catamaran. Before he could reach it the heavy wash set up by the hydroplane had rocked the craft adrift and it floated off into the oncoming mass. Within a few seconds it was engulfed, upended by the press of alligators fighting to get into the creek and cut to pieces in their snapping jaws.

A large caiman bringing up the rear spotted Kerans waist-deep among the horsetails and veered towards him, its eyes steadying. Quickly Kerans retreated up the slope, slipping once to his shoulders, reached the fire escape as the reptile lumbered out of the shallows on its short hooked legs and lunged at his leaping feet.

Panting, Kerans leaned on the rail, looking down at its cold unblinking eyes, regarding him dispassionately.

"You're a well-trained watchdog," he told it ungrudgingly. He eased a loose brick from the wall and launched it with both hands at the caiman's snout, grinning as it bellowed and backed off, snapping irritably at the horsetails and a few drifting spars of the catamaran.

After half an hour, and a few minor duels with the retreating iguanas, he managed to cross the intervening two hundred yards of shoreline and reach Beatrice's apartment house. She met him as he stepped out of the lift, wide-eyed with alarm.

"Robert, what's happening?" She put her hands on his shoulders and pressed her head against his damp shirt. "Have you seen the alligators? There are thousands of them!"

"Seen them—I was nearly eaten by one on your doorstep." Kerans released himself from her and hurried over to the window, pushed back the plastic vanes. The hydroplane had entered the central lagoon and was circling it at speed, the shoal of alligators following in its wake, those at the tail breaking off to station themselves at points around the shore. At least thirty or forty had remained in the lagoon below, and were cruising about slowly in small patrols, occasionally swerving on a careless iguana.

"Those devilish things must be their watchguards," Kerans decided. "Like a tame troupe of tarantulas. Nothing better, when you come to think of it."

Beatrice stood beside him, nervously fingering the collar of the faded Paisley shirt she had pulled on over her swim-suit.

Her face was without make-up, and she wore her hair piled loosely on top of her head.

"But who are they, Robert? That man in the speed-boat frightens me. I wish Colonel Riggs was here."

"He'll be a thousand miles away by now, if he hasn't already reached Byrd. Don't worry, Bea. They may look a piratical crew, but there's nothing we can give them."

A large three-decker paddle-boat, paddles set fore and aft, had entered the lagoon and was slowly moving over to the three scows drawn up a few yards from where Riggs' base had been moored. It was loaded with gear and cargo, decks crammed with large bales and canvas-swathed machinery, so that there was only six inches of freeboard amidships.

Kerans guessed that this was the group's depot ship, and that they were engaged, like most of the other freebooters still wandering through the Equatorial lagoons and archipelagoes, in pillaging the drowned cities, reclaiming the heavy specialised machinery such as electrical power generators and switch-gear that had been perforce abandoned by the government. Nominally such looting was highly penalised, but in fact the authorities were only too eager to pay a generous price for any salvage.

"Look!"

Beatrice gripped Kerans' elbow. She pointed down at the testing station, where the rumped, shaggy-haired figure of Dr. Bodkin stood on the roof, waving slowly at the men on the bridge of the paddle-boat. One of them, a bare-chested Negro in white slacks and a white peaked cap, began to shout back through a hailer.

Kerans shrugged. "Alan's right. We've everything to gain by showing ourselves. If we help them they'll soon push off and leave us alone."

Beatrice hesitated, but Kerans took her arm. The hydroplane, now free of its entourage, was crossing the central lagoon on its return, leaping lightly through the water on a beautiful wake of foam.

"Come on, if we get down to the jetty in time, he'll probably give us a lift."

His handsome saturnine face regarding them with a mixture of suspicion and amused contempt, Strangman lounged back under the cool awning that shaded the poop deck of the depot

ship. He had changed into a crisp white suit, the silk-like surface of which reflected the gilt plate of his high-backed Renaissance throne, presumably dredged from some Venetian or Florentine lagoon, and invested his strange personality with an almost magical aura.

"Your motives seem so complex, Doctor," he remarked to Kerans. "But perhaps you've given up hope of understanding them yourself. We shall label them the total beach syndrome and leave it at that."

He snapped his fingers at the steward standing in the shadows behind him and selected an olive from the tray of small chow. Beatrice, Kerans and Bodkin sat in a semicircle on the low couches, alternately chilled and roasted as the erratic air-conditioner above them varied its perimeter. Outside, half an hour before noon, the lagoon was a bowl of fire, the scattered light almost masking the tall apartment house on the opposite bank. The jungle was motionless in the immense heat, the alligators hiding in whatever shade they could find.

Nonetheless several of Strangman's men were messing about in one of the scows, unloading some heavy diving equipment, under the direction of a huge hunchbacked Negro in a pair of green cotton shorts. Now and then he took off his eye-patch to bellow abuse at them, and the mingled grunts and curses drifted across the steaming air.

"But tell me, Doctor," Strangman pressed, apparently dissatisfied with Kerans' answers, "when do you finally propose to leave?"

Kerans hesitated, wondering whether to invent a date. After waiting an hour for Strangman to change, he had offered their greetings to him and tried to explain why they were still there. However, Strangman seemed unable to take the explanation seriously, swinging abruptly from amusement at their naivety to sharp suspicion.

"We haven't really considered the possibility," Kerans said. "I think we all hope to stay on indefinitely. We have small stocks of supplies."

"But my dear man," Strangman remonstrated, "the temperature will soon be up to nearly two hundred degrees. The entire planet is rapidly returning to the Mesozoic Period."

"Precisely," Dr. Bodkin cut in, rousing himself for a moment from his deep introspection. "And insofar as we are

part of the planet, a piece of the main, we too are returning. This is our zone of transit, here we are re-assimilating our own biological pasts. There is no ulterior motive, Strangman."

"Of course not, Doctor, I completely respect your sincerity." Shifts of mood seemed to cross and re-cross Strangman's face, making him look in turn irritable, amiable, abstracted and speculative. He listened to an air-line pumping from the scow, then asked: "Dr. Bodkin, did you live in London as a child? You must have many sentimental memories to recapture." He added: "Or are the only claims you recognise pre-uterine ones?"

Kerans looked up, noting that Strangman was not only watching Bodkin shrewdly, but also waiting for any reaction from himself and Beatrice.

But Bodkin gestured vaguely. "No, I'm afraid I remember nothing of it. The immediate past is of no interest to me."

"What a pity," Strangman rejoined archly. "The trouble with you people is that you've been here for thirty million years and your perspectives are all wrong. You miss so much of the transitory beauty of life. I'm fascinated by the immediate past—the treasures of the Triassic compare pretty unfavourably with those of the closing years of the Second Millenium."

Over his shoulder he rapped a short command at the steward, then sat frowning to himself. Kerans realised that the skin of his face and his hands was uncannily white, devoid altogether of any pigmentation. Keran's heavy sunburn, like that of Beatrice and Dr. Bodkin, made him virtually indistinguishable from the remainder of the crew, and the subtle distinctions between the mulattos and quadroons had vanished. Strangman alone retained his original paleness, the effect emphasised by the white suit he had chosen.

The bare-chested Negro in the peaked cap appeared, sweat rilling across his powerful muscles. His manner was deferential and observant, and Kerans wondered how Strangman managed to maintain his authority over the crew, and why they accepted his harsh, callous tone.

Strangman introduced the Negro curtly. "This is the Admiral, my chief whip. If I'm not around when you want me, deal with him." He stood up. "Before you leave, let me take you on a brief tour of my treasure ship." He extended an arm gallantly to Beatrice, who took it timorously, his eyes glinting and rapacious.

Four decks below, they entered the main storehold, a dim stifling cavern packed with crates, the floor strewn with sawdust. The Admiral and another sailor followed them closely, continually hosing them with ice-cold air. Strangman snapped his fingers and the Admiral quickly began to pull away the canvas wrappings.

In the thin light Kerans could just see the glimmering outlines of a huge ornamented altarpiece, fitted with elaborate scroll-work and towering dolphin candelabra, topped by a neo-classical proscenium which would have covered a small house. Next to it stood a dozen pieces of statuary, both bronze and marble, all of the Renaissance, stacks of heavy gilt frames propped against them. Beyond these were several smaller altar-pieces and triptyches, an intact pulpit in panelled gold, three large equestrian statues, a few strands of sea-weed still entwined in the horses' manes, several pairs of enormous cathedral doors, embossed in gold and silver, and a large tiered fountain. The metal shelves around the sides of the hold were loaded with smaller bric a brac; votive urns, goblets, shields and salvers, pieces of decorative armour, ceremonial inkstands and the like.

Still holding Beatrice's arm, Strangman gestured expansively a few yards ahead. Kerans heard him say 'Sistine Chapel' but Bodkin muttered: "Aesthetically most of this is rubbish, picked for the gold content alone."

Kerans nodded, watching Strangman in his white suit, the bare-legged Beatrice beside him. Suddenly he remembered the Delvaux painting, with its tuxedoed skeletons. Strangman's chalk-white face was like a skull, and he had something of the skeleton's jauntiness. For no reason he began to feel an intense loathing for the man, his hostility more generalised than personal.

"Well, Kerans, what do you think of them?" Strangman pivoted at the end of the aisle and swung back, barking at the Admiral to cover the exhibits again. "Impressed, Doctor?"

Kerans managed to take his eyes off Strangman's face and glanced at the looted relics.

"They're like bones," he said flatly.

Baffled, Strangman shook his head. "Bones? What on earth are you talking about? Kerans, you're insane! Bones, Good God!"

As he let out a martyred groan, the Admiral took up the refrain, first saying the word quietly to himself, then repeating it more and more rapidly, his broad face gibbering with laughter. The other crew-man joined in, and together they began to chant it out, convulsed over the fire hose.

"Bones! Yes, man, dem's all bones! Dem bones dem bones dem . . .!"

In annoyance Strangman rushed forward, pressed the palm of his hand in Keran's back and propelled him along the aisle out of the hold. Five minutes later, as they drove off in one of the scows, the Admiral and five or six other members of the crew lined the rail, still chanting and dancing. Strangman had regained his humour, and stood coolly in his white suit, detached from the others, waving ironically.

Chapter Six

During the next two weeks, as the southern horizon became increasingly darkened by the approaching rain-clouds, Kerans saw Strangman frequently. Usually he would be driving his hydroplane at speed around the lagoons, his white lounge suit exchanged for overalls and helmet, supervising the work of the salvage teams. One scow, with half a dozen men, was working in each of the three lagoons, the divers methodically exploring the sunken buildings. Occasionally the placid routines of descent and pump would be interrupted by the sounds of rifle fire as an alligator venturing too near the divers was despatched.

Sitting in the darkness in his hotel suite, Kerans was far away from the lagoon, content to let Strangman dive for his loot as long as he would soon leave. More and more the dreams had begun to encroach on his waking life, his conscious mind becoming increasingly drained and withdrawn. The single plane of time on which Strangman and his men existed seemed so transparent as to have a negligible claim to reality. Now and then, when Strangman came to call on him, he would emerge for a few minutes on to this tenuous plane, but the real centre of his consciousness was elsewhere.

Curiously, after his initial irritation, Strangman had developed a sneaking liking for Kerans. The biologist's quiet, angular mind was a perfect target for Strangman's dry humour. At times he would subtly mimic Kerans, earnestly taking his

arm during one of their dialogues and saying in a pious voice: "You know, Kerans, leaving the sea two hundred million years ago may have been a deep trauma from which we've never recovered . . ."

On another occasion he sent two of his men over in a skiff to the lagoon; on one of the largest buildings on the opposite bank they painted in letters thirty feet high:

TIME ZONE

Kerans took this banter in good part, ignoring it when the diver's lack of success made it more severe. Sinking backward through the past, he waited patiently for the coming of the rain.

"Kerans!"

Roused by the deep blare of the hydroplane approaching the landing stage, Kerans managed to climb out of bed by the time Strangman climbed the stairs.

Chuckling his helmet down on to the floor, Strangman produced a decanter of hot black coffee and a tinned Stilton cheese green with age.

"A present for you." He examined Kerans' dulled eyes with an amiable frown. "Well, how are things in deep time?"

Kerans sat on the edge of the bed, waiting for the booming of the phantom jungles in his mind to fade. Like an endless shallows, the residues of the dreams stretched away below the surface of the reality around him. "What brings you here?" he asked flatly.

Strangman put on an expression of deep injury.

"Kerans, I like you. You keep forgetting that." He turned up the volume of the air-conditioner, smiling at Kerans, who gazed watchfully at the wry, perverted leer. "Actually I have another motive—I want you to have dinner with me tonight. Don't start shaking your head. I have to keep coming here, it's time I returned your hospitality. Beatrice and old Bodkin will be there, it should be pretty swagger—fire-work displays, bongo drums *and* a surprise."

"What exactly?"

"You'll see. Something really spectacular, believe me, I don't do things by halves. I'd have those 'gators dancing on the tips of their tails if I wanted to." He nodded solemnly. "Kerans, you're going to be impressed. And it may even do you some good mentally, stop this crazy time machine of

yours." His mood changed again, becoming distant and abstracted. "But I mustn't poke fun at you, Kerans, I couldn't bear a tenth of the personal responsibility you've shouldered. The tragic loneliness, for example, and those haunted Triassic swamps." He picked a copy of Donne's poems off the air-conditioner and extemporised a line: "World within world, each man an island unto himself, swimming through seas of archipelagoes . . ."

Fairly certain that he was fooling, Kerans asked: "How's the diving going?"

"Frankly, not very well. The city's too far north for much to have been left. But we've discovered a few interesting things. You'll see tonight."

As he rode across the lagoon to the paddle-ship later that evening, Kerans speculated on the probable nature of Strangman's 'surprise', hoping that it would not be some elaborate practical joke. The effort of shaving off his beard and putting on a white dinner jacket had tired him, and he doubted if he would have enough energy left to make small talk with Dr. Bodkin and Beatrice. He had seen neither of them since their joint first meeting with Strangman, though every evening the latter drove over in his hydroplane to Beatrice's apartment house. What success he had Kerans could only guess, but Strangman's references to her—"These women exist on too many levels" or "She keeps talking about you, Robert, confound her"—suggested a negative response.

Some sort of preparations were obviously afoot in the lagoon. The depot ship had been moored about fifty yards from shore, strung with awnings and coloured lights, and the two remaining scows were working systematically along the banks, driving the alligators into the central lagoon.

Kerans pointed to a big caiman thrashing about in a circle of boat hooks. "What's on the menu tonight—roast alligator?"

The giant hunch-backed mulatto at the helm of the scow—known to Strangman as Big Caesar—shrugged with studied vagueness. "Strang' got a big show tonight, Mistah Kerans, a real big show. You see."

Strangman met each one as they arrived at the head of the gangway. In high spirits, he managed a sustained mood of charm and good cheer, complimenting Beatrice elaborately on

her appearance. She wore a full-length blue brocade ball dress, the turquoise mascara around her eyes making her look like some exotic bird of paradise. Even Bodkin had managed to trim his beard and salvage a respectable linen jacket and old piece of crepe around his neck a ragged concession to a black tie. Like Kerans, however, they both seemed glazed and remote, joining in the conversation over dinner automatically.

Throughout the meal Strangman supervised the succession of wines, taking advantage of his absences from the table to confer with the Admiral. With the final brandies before them Strangman sat down apparently for the last time, winking broadly at Kerans. Two of the scows had moved over to the inlet by the far side of the lagoon, and the third took up its position in the centre, from where it released a small fire-work display.

The last sunlight still lay over the water, but had faded sufficiently for the bright catherine wheels and rockets to flicker and dazzle, their sharp explosions etched clearly against the crepuscular sky. The smile on Strangman's face grew broader and broader, until he lay back on his chesterfield grinning soundlessly to himself, the red and green flashes illuminating his saturnine features.

Uncomfortably, Kerans leaned forward to ask him when their surprise would materialise, but Strangman anticipated him.

"Well, haven't you noticed? Beatrice, Dr. Bodkin? You three are slow. Come out of deep time for a moment."

Puzzled, Kerans searched the sky and the lagoon. The dusk had come in rather more quickly than he expected, the faces of the buildings opposite sinking into shadow. At the same time the sky remained clear and visible in the sunset, the tops of the surrounding vegetation brilliantly tinted.

A low drumming sounded somewhere in the distance, the air-pumps that had worked all day and whose noise had been masked by the pyrotechnic display. Around the ship the water had become curiously slack and lifeless, the low swells that usually disturbed it absent. Wondering whether an exhibition of underwater swimming had been arranged for a troupe of trained alligators, he peered down at the surface.

"Alan! Look, for heaven's sake! Beatrice, can you see?" Kerans kicked back his chair and leapt to the rail,

pointing down in amazement at the water. "The level's going down!"

Looming just below the dark pellucid surface were the dim rectangular outlines of the submerged buildings, their open windows like empty eyes in enormous drowned skulls. Only a few feet from the surface, they drew closer, emerging from the depths like an immense intact Atlantis. First a dozen, then a score of buildings appeared to view, their cornices and fire escapes clearly visible through the thinning refracting glass of the water. Most of them were only four or five storeys high, part of a district of small shops and offices enclosed by the taller buildings that had formed the perimeter of the lagoon.

Fifty yards away the first of the roofs broke surface, a blunted rectangle smothered with weeds and algae across which slithered a few desperate fish. Immediately half a dozen others appeared around it, already roughly delineating a narrow street. The upper line of windows emerged, water spilling from their ledges, fucus draped from the straggling wires that sagged across the roadways.

Already the lagoon had vanished. As they sank slowly downwards, settling into what seemed to be a large open square, they were now looking across a diffuse straggle of rooftops, punctuated by eroded chimneys and spires, the flat sheet of the surface transformed into a jungle of cubist blocks, at its boundaries merging into the higher ground of the enveloping vegetation. What remained of the water had formed into distinct channels, dark and sombre, eddying away around corners and into narrow alleyways.

"Robert, stop it! It's horrible!" Kerans felt Beatrice seize his arm, her long blue nails biting through the fabric. She gazed out at the emerging city, an expression of revulsion on her tense face, physically repelled by the sharp acrid smells of the exposed water-weeds and algae, the damp barnacled forms of rusting litter. Veils of scum draped from the criss-crossing telegraph wires and tilting neon signs, and a thin coating of silt cloaked the faces of the buildings, turning the once limpid beauty of the underwater city into a drained and festering sewer.

For a moment Kerans fought to free his mind, grappling with this total inversion of his normal world, unable to accept the logic of the rebirth before him. First he wondered

whether there had been a total climatic reversal that was shrinking the formerly expanding seas, draining the submerged cities. If so, he would have to make his way back to this new present, or be marooned millions of years away on the beach of some lost Triassic lagoon. But deep within his mind the great masked sun pounded dimly with a strength still undiminished, and beside him he heard Bodkin mutter:

"Those pumps are powerful. The water's going down by a good two or three feet a minute. We're not far from the bottom now. The whole thing's fantastic!"

Laughter rocked out into the darkening air as Strangman rolled about mirthfully on the chesterfield, dabbing his eyes with a napkin. Released from the tension of staging the spectacle he was now exulting in the three bewildered faces at the rail. On the bridge above him the Admiral watched with dry amusement, the fading light across his bare chest. Two or three men below were taking in the mooring lines, holding the orientation of the ship in the square.

The two scows which had moved over to the creek mouth during the fire work display were floating behind a massive boom, and a foaming mass of water poured from the twin vents of a huge pumping system. Then the roof-tops obscured their view across the interval, and the people on the deck were looking up at the blanched buildings of the square. Only fifteen or twenty feet of water remained, and a hundred yards away down one of the side streets they could see the third scow wending tentatively below the trailing wires.

Strangman controlled himself and came over to the rail. "Perfect, don't you agree, Dr. Bodkin? What a jest, a really superb spectacle! Come on, Doctor, don't look so piqued, congratulate me! It wasn't too easy to arrange."

Bodkin nodded and moved away along the rail, his face still stunned. Kerans asked: "But how did you seal off the perimeter? There's no continuous wall around the lagoon."

"There is now, Doctor. I thought you were the expert in marine biology. The fungi growing in the swamp mud outside consolidated the entire mass, for the last week there's only been one point of influx, took us five minutes to dam it up."

He gazed out brightly at the emerging streets in the dim light around them, the humped backs of cars and buses appearing

through the surface. Giant anemones and star-fish flopped limply in the shadows, collapsing kelp straggled out of windows.

Numbly, Bodkin said: "Leicester Square."

His laughter vanishing, Strangman swung on him, his eyes peering eagerly at the neon-covered porticos of the hulks of former cinemas and theatres.

"So you *do* know your way around here, Doctor! A pity you couldn't have helped us before, when we were getting nowhere." He slammed the rail with an oath, jarring Kerans' elbow. "By God, though, we're really in business now!" With a snarl he flung himself away from them, kicking back the dining table, shouting up at the Admiral.

Beatrice watched him disappear below with alarm, a slender hand on her throat. "Robert, he's insane. What are we going to do—he'll drain all the lagoons."

Kerans looked up at the round bulk of the testing station, poised on the cinema behind them like an enormous boulder on the edge of a cliff. Apparently eighty to ninety feet higher, the tall buildings around the lagoon perimeter now cut off half the sky, enclosing them in a dim canyon-floor world.

"It doesn't matter that much," Kerans temporised. He steadied her against his arm, as the ship touched bottom and rolled slightly, crushing a small car under the port bow. "When he's finished stripping the stores and museums they'll leave. Anyway, the rain-storms will be here in a week or two."

Beatrice cleared her throat distastefully, wincing as the first bats flickered among the roof-tops, darting from one dripping eave to another. "But it's all so hideous. I can't believe that anyone ever lived here. It's like some imaginary city of hell. Robert, I *need* the lagoon."

"Well, we could leave and move south across the silt flats. What do you think, Alan?"

Bodkin shook his head slowly, still staring out blankly at the darkened buildings around the square. "You two go, I must stay here."

The streets had almost been drained. The approaching scow ran aground on the pavement, pushed off again and then stuck finally on a traffic island. Led by Big Caesar, the three-man crew jumped down into the waist-deep water and waded noisily towards the depot ship, splashing water excitedly into the open shop-fronts.

With a jolt the paddle-ship settled itself firmly on the bottom, cheers and shouts going up from Strangman and the rest of the crew as they fended off the snapping overhead wires and tilted telegraph poles. A small dinghy was thrown into the water, and to a chorus of fists pounding a drum-beat on the rail the Admiral rowed Strangman across the shallow water to a fountain in the centre of the square. Here Strangman debarked, pulled a flare pistol from a pocket of his dinner jacket and with an exultant shout began to fire salvo after salvo of coloured star-shells into the air overhead.

Chapter Seven

Half an hour later Beatrice, Kerans and Dr. Bodkin were able to walk out into the streets. Huge pools of water still lay about everywhere, leaking from the ground floors of the buildings, but they were little more than two or three feet deep. There were clear stretches of pavement over a hundred yards long, and many of the further streets were completely drained. Dying fish and marine plants expired in the centre of the roadways, and huge banks of black sludge were silted up into the gutters and over the pavement, but fortunately the escaping waters had cut long pathways through them.

Strangman at their head, racing along in his white suit, firing star-shells into the dark streets, the crew charged off in a bellowing pack, those in the front balancing a rum keg on their upturned palms, the others brandishing an assortment of bottles, machetes and guitars. A few derisive shouts of 'Mistah Bones' faded around Kerans as he helped Beatrice down off the gangway, and then the trio were left alone in the silence by the huge stranded paddle-ship.

Glancing up uncertainly at the high distant ring of the jungle looming out of the darkness like the encircling lip of a volcano cone, Kerans led the way across the pavement to the nearest buildings. They stood in the entrance of one of the huge cinemas, sea urchins and cucumbers flickering faintly across the tiled floor, sand dollars flowering in the former ticket booth.

Beatrice gathering her skirt in one hand, they moved slowly down the line of cinemas, past cafes and amusement arcades, patronised now only by the molluscs and bivalves. At the

first corner they turned away from the sounds of revelry coming from the other side of the square, and walked westwards down the dim dripping canyons. A few star-shells continued to explode overhead, the delicate glass sponges in the doorways glowing softly as they reflected the pink and blue light.

"Coventry Street, Haymarket . . ." Kerans read off the rusting street signs. They stepped quickly into a doorway as Strangman and his pack charged back across the square in a blaze of light and noise, machetes slashing at the rotting boards over the shop-fronts.

"Let's hope they find something that satisfies them," Bodkin murmured. He searched the crowded skyline, as if looking for the deep black water that had once covered the buildings.

For several hours they wandered like forlorn elegant ghosts through narrow streets, occasionally meeting one of the roistering crew, ambling drunkenly along the centre of the roadway with the remnants of some fading garment in one hand, a machete in the other. A few small fires had been started in the centre of the street junctions, little groups of two or three men warming themselves over the flaring tinder.

Avoiding these, the trio blundered into a winding cul de sac, managed to step back in time as a large caiman lunged at them from a shallow pool. Darting between the rusting shells of cars, they regained the open street, the alligator racing behind them. It paused by a lamp post on the pavement edge, tail whipping slowly, jaws flexing, and Kerans pulled Beatrice by the arm. They broke into a run and had covered ten yards when Bodkin slipped and fell heavily into a bank of silt.

"Alan! Hurry!" Kerans started to go back for him, the caiman's head pivoting towards them.

Suddenly there was a roar of gunfire, the flames stabbing across the roadway. Flares held above their heads, a group of men appeared around a corner. In front of them was the white-faced figure of Strangman, followed by the Admiral and Big Caesar, shot-guns at their shoulders.

Strangman's eyes glittered in the flare light. He made a small bow towards Beatrice, then saluted Kerans. Its spine shattered, the alligator thrashed impotently in the gutter, revealing its yellow underbelly, and Big Caesar drew his machete and began to hack at its head.

Strangman watched it with evil pleasure. "Loathsome brute," he commented, then pulled from his pocket a huge rhinestone necklace, still encrusted with algae, and held it out to Beatrice.

"For you, my dear." Deftly, he strung the strands around her neck, regarding the effect with pleasure. The entwined weeds among the sparkling stones against the white skin of her breast made her look like some naiad of the deep. "And all the other jewels of this dead sea."

With a flourish he was off again, the flares vanishing in the darkness with the shouts of his men, leaving them alone in silence with the white jewels and the decapitated alligator.

During the next days events proceeded to even greater madness. Completely disorientated, Kerans would wander alone through the dark streets at night—by day it became unbearably hot in the labyrinth of alleyways—unable to tear himself away from his memories of the old lagoon, yet at the same time locked fast to the empty streets and gutted buildings.

The great sun beating in his mind almost drowned out the sounds of the looting and revelry, the roars of explosives and shotguns. Like a blind man he stumbled in and out of the old arcades and entrances, his white dinner suit stained and grimy, jeered at by sailors as they charged by him, playfully buffeting his shoulders. At midnight he would sit beside Strangman at his parties in the square, hiding back under the shadow of the paddle-ship, watching the dancing and listening to the beat of the drums and guitars, overlaid in his mind by the insistent pounding of the black sun.

Bodkin had disappeared somewhere, presumably to the lagoons in the south, but always Beatrice would join Strangman at his parties. She sat numbly beside him in her blue evening dress, her hair studded with half a dozen of the tiaras Strangman had looted from the old jewellery vaults, her breasts smothered under a mass of glittering chains and crescents, like a mad queen in a horror drama.

Wilder now than Kerans had ever seen him, Strangman danced about the camp fires, sometimes forcing Kerans to join him, inciting the bongo drummers to ever faster rhythms. Then, exhausted, he would slump back on his divan, his thin white face like blue chalk.

Leaning on one elbow, he stared sombrely at Kerans, squatting on a cushion behind him.

"Do you know why they fear me, Kerans? The Admiral, Big Caesar and the others. Let me tell you my secret." Then in a whisper: "Because they think I'm dead."

In a spasm of laughter, he rocked back into the divan, shaking helplessly. "Oh, my God, Kerans. What's the matter with you two? Come out of that trance." He looked up as Big Caesar approached. "Yes, what is it? A special song for Doctor Kerans? Capital! Did you hear that, Doctor? Let's go then, with *The Ballad of Mistah Bones!*"

Clearing his throat, with much prancing and gesticulation, the big negro began, his voice deep and guttural.

*"Mistah Bones, he loves dried men,
Got himself a banana girl; three prophets sly,
She played him all crazy, drowned him in the snake wine,
Never heard so many swamp birds,
That old boss alligator.*

*Rum Bones, he went skull fishing,
Down off Angel Creek, where the dried men run,
Took out his turtle stone, waited for the chapel boat,
Three prophets landing,
Some bad joss.*

*Rum Bones, he saw the loving girl,
Gave his turtle stone for two bananas,
He had that banana girl like a hot mangrove;
Prophets saw him,
No dried men coming for Rum Bones.*

*Rum Bones, he danced for that loving girl,
Built a banana house for her loving bed——"*

With a sudden shout, Strangman leapt from the divan, raced past Big Caesar into the centre of the square, pointing up at the perimeter wall of the lagoon high above them. Outlined against the setting sky was the small square figure of Dr. Bodkin, picking his way slowly across the wooden barrage that held back the creek waters outside. Unaware that he had been spotted by the party below, he carried a small wooden box in one hand, a faint light fizzing from a trailing wire.

Wide awake, Strangman bellowed: "Admiral, Big Caesar, get him, he's got a bomb!"

In a wild scramble the party dissolved, everyone with the exception of Beatrice and Kerans raced off across the square. Shotguns slammed left and right, and Kerans saw Bodkin pause uncertainly, the fuse wire sparking about his legs. Then he turned and began to edge back along the barrage.

Kerans jumped to his feet and ran after the others. As he reached the perimeter wall star-shells were bursting into the air, spitting magnesium fragments across the roadway. Strangman and the Admiral were leaping up a fire escape, Big Caesar's shotgun slamming out over their heads. Bodkin had left his bomb in the centre of the dam and was racing away over the rooftops.

Straddling the final ledge, Strangman leapt up on to the barrage, in a dozen strides reached the bomb and kicked it out into the centre of the creek. As the splash died away a cheer of approval went up from those below. Catching his breath, Strangman buttoned his jacket, then slipped a short-barrelled .38 from his shoulder holster. Whipping on the cries of his followers, he set out after Bodkin as he scaled his way painfully up the pontoon of the testing station.

Kerans listened numbly to the final shots, then walked slowly back to the square, where Beatrice still sat on her heap of cushions. As he reached her he heard the footsteps behind him slowing menacingly, a strange silence fall over the pack.

He swung round to see Strangman saunter forward, a thin smirk on his face. Big Caesar and the Admiral were at his shoulder, their shotguns exchanged for machetes. The rest of the crew fanned out in a loose semi-circle.

"That was rather stupid of Bodkin, don't you think, Doctor? Dangerous too, as a matter of fact. We could damn nearly have all been drowned." Strangman paused a few feet from Kerans, eyeing him moodily. "You knew Bodkin pretty well, I'm surprised you didn't anticipate that. I don't know whether I should take any more chances with mad biologists."

He was about to gesture to Big Caesar when Beatrice jumped to her feet, rushed over to Strangman.

"Strangman! For heaven's sake, one's enough! Stop it, we won't hurt you! Look, you can have all these."

With a wrench she unclasped the mass of necklaces, tore the tiaras from her hair and flung them at Strangman. Snarling

with anger, Strangman kicked them into the gutter, and Big Caesar stepped past her, the machete swinging upward.

Before Kerans could start to run something seized him from behind and pulled him backwards off balance. Recovering his foothold on the damp pavement, he heard Strangman shout in surprise and saw a group of brown-uniformed men step rapidly from the shadows, their rifles at their hips. At their head was the trim, brisk figure of Colonel Riggs.

"Okay, Strangman, that will do very nicely." He rapped his baton across Big Caesar's chest and forced him back into the others.

Kerans felt someone take his elbow. He looked round at the solicitous beak-like face of Corporal Macready, a sub-machine-gun in the crook of his arm. "You all right, sir? Sorry to jerk you about like that. Looks as if you've been having a bit of a party here."

By ten the next morning Riggs had stabilised the situation and was able to see Kerans informally. His headquarters were in the testing station, with a commanding view over the streets below, and particularly of the paddle-ship in the square. Stripped of their weapons, Strangman and his crew sat around in the shade under the hull, supervised by a light machine-gun manned by Macready and two of his men.

"I guessed Strangman was here," Riggs explained. "One of our aerial patrols reported seeing the hydroplane and I reckoned you might have a little trouble with him if you were still hanging on. The pretext of trying to reclaim the testing station was a fair one." He sat on the edge of the desk, watching the helicopter circle the rooftops, occasionally diving into the open streets. "Pretty grim down there, isn't it. Damn shame about old Bodkin. He really should have come north with us."

Kerans nodded, looking across the office at the machete scars freshly sliced into the woodwork around the door, part of the damage gratuitously inflicted on the furniture in the station after Bodkin's death. Most of the mess had been cleaned up, his body flown out to Riggs' tender in the next lagoon. "Why don't you arrest Strangman?" he asked.

"Because there's absolutely nothing I can hold him on. Legally, as he full well knows, he was absolutely entitled to defend himself against Bodkin, kill him if necessary. Remember the Reclaimed Lands Act and the Dykes Maintenance

Regulations. I know Strangman's a nasty piece of work—with that white skin and his alligators—but strictly speaking he deserves a medal for pumping out the lagoon. If he complains I'll have a job explaining that machine-gun down there. Believe me, Robert, if I'd arrived five minutes later and found you chopped to bits Strangman could have claimed that you were an accomplice and I'd have been able to do nothing. He's a clever fellow."

"What about the looting?"

Riggs shrugged. "Apart from a few trinkets filched from an old Woolworths he's taken nothing that couldn't be put down to natural exuberance on the part of his men. The only reason he's sitting quiet now is that he knows he's got the law on his side. If he hadn't there'd be a battle royal going on." He broke off, peering shrewdly at Kerans. "You look all in, Robert. Are you still getting these dreams?"

"Now and then." Kerans shuddered. "The last few days have been insane here. It's difficult to describe Strangman—he's like a white devil out of a voodoo cult. I can't accept the idea that he'll go scot free. When are you going to re-flood the lagoon?"

"Re-flood the——?" Riggs repeated, shaking his head in bewilderment. "Robert, you really are out of touch. The sooner you get away from here the better. The last thing I intend to do is re-flood the lagoon. If anybody tries I'll personally blow his head off. Reclaiming land, particularly an urban area like this in a former capital city, is a Class A1 priority. If Strangman is serious about pumping out the next two lagoons he'll not only get a free pardon but a governor generalship to boot." He looked down through the window. "Here he comes now, I wonder what's on his evil little mind."

Kerans went over to Riggs, averting his eyes from the maze of festering yellow rooftops. "Colonel, you've got to flood it again, laws or no laws. Have you been down in those streets, they're obscene and hideous! It's a nightmare world that's dead and finished, you're resurrecting a corpse! After two or three days here you'll——"

Riggs swung away from the desk, cutting Kerans off. An element of impatience crept into his voice. "I don't intend to stay here for three days," he snapped curtly. "Don't worry, I'm not suffering from any crazy obsession about these lagoons,

flooded or otherwise. We're leaving first thing tomorrow, all of us."

Puzzled, Kerans said: "But you can't leave, Colonel. Strangmen will still be here."

"Of course he will. Do you think that paddle-boat has got wings? There's no reason for *him* to leave, if he thinks he can take the big heat waves coming and the rainstorms. You never know, if he gets a few of these big buildings refrigerated he may be able to. But there's nothing for me to stay for—I can't move the station now, but it's a fair loss. Anyway, you and the Dahl girl need a rest. And a brain-lift. This time you're really coming with us."

Kerans nodded, pulling himself together as a firm rap sounded on the door.

"Yes, Colonel," he said carefully, "I'm coming with you."

Chapter Eight

Crouched down in a small office two floors above the barrage, Kerans listened to the music playing amid the lights on the top deck of the depot ship. Propelled by two junior members of the crew, the big paddles rotated slowly, their blades dividing the coloured lights and swinging them up across the sky. Seen from above, the white awnings resembled the marquee of a fairground, a brilliant focus of noise and activity in the darkened square.

As a concession to Strangman, Riggs had joined him at this farewell party. A bargain had been struck between the two leaders; earlier the machine-gun had been withdrawn and the lower level placed out of bounds to the Colonel's men. All day Strangman and his pack had roved the streets, and the random sounds of looting and firing echoed to and fro. Even now, as the Colonel and Beatrice Dahl climbed the fire escape up to the testing station, fighting had broken out on deck and bottles were being hurled down into the street.

Kerans had put in a token appearance at the party, keeping well away from Strangman, who made no attempt to talk to him. Beatrice had also seemed subdued, apparently grappling with the psychic paradox that had blocked Kerans' brain the previous day. Now determined on the only solution available, Kerans' own mind felt clear and co-ordinated again,

extending outwards beyond the perimeter of the drained lagoon.

Only fifty miles to the south. the rain-clouds were packed together in tight layers, blotting out the swamps and archipelagoes of the horizon. Obscured by the events of the past days, the archaic sun in his mind beat again with immense power, its identity merging now with that of the real sun hidden behind the rain-clouds. Relentless and magnetic, it seemed to call him southward, to the great heat and the submerged lagoons of the Equator.

Assisted by Riggs, Beatrice climbed up on to the roof of the building which also served as the helicopter landing stage. When the pilot started his engine and the rotors began to spin, Kerans quickly made his way down to the balcony which ringed the building two floors below. Separated by a hundred yards or so on either side, he was directly between the helicopter and the barrage, the continuous terrace of the large office block linking the three points.

Behind the building was an enormous bank of silt, reaching upwards out of the surrounding swamp to the railings of the terrace, on to which spilled a luxurious outcrop of vegetation. Ducking below the broad fronds of the fern-trees, he raced along to the barrage, fitted between the end of the building and the adjacent shoulder. The original inlet, once twenty yards wide and deep had shrunk to a narrow channel clogged with mud and fungi, its six-foot-wide mouth blocked by a rampart of heavy logs. Initially, once the rampart was removed, the rate of flow would be small, but as more and more of the silt was carried away the mouth would widen again.

From a small cache below a loose flagstone he withdrew two square black boxes, each containing six sticks of dynamite lashed together. As the helicopter engine began to fire more loudly, the exhaust spitting brightly into the darkness, he lit the short 30-second fuse, straddled the rail and ran out towards the centre of the barrage.

There he bent down and suspended the boxes from a small peg he had driven into the outer row of logs that afternoon. They hung safely out of view, about two feet from the water's edge.

"Dr. Kerans! Get away from there, sir!"

He looked up to see Corporal Macready at the further end of the barrage, standing at the rail of the next roof. He leaned

forward, suddenly spotting the flickering end of the fuse, then rapidly unslung his Thompson gun.

Head down, Kerans raced back along the barrage, reached the terrace as Macready shouted again and then fired a short burst. The slugs tore at the railings, gouging out pieces of the stone, and Kerans fell as one struck his right leg just above the ankle. Pulling himself over the rail, he saw Macready shoulder the gun and jump down on to the barrage.

"Macready! Go back!" he shouted to the Corporal, who was loping across the wooden planks. "It's going to blow!"

Backing away among the fronds, his voice lost in the roar of the helicopter as it carried out its take-off check, he helplessly watched Macready stop in the centre of the barrage and reach down to the boxes.

"Twenty-eight, twenty-nine . . ." Kerans concluded automatically to himself. Turning his back on the barrage, he limped away down the terrace, then threw himself on to the floor.

As the tremendous roar of the explosion lifted up into the dark sky, the immense fountain of erupting foam and silt briefly illuminated the terrace, outlining Kerans' spread-eagled form. From an initial crescendo the noise seemed to mount in a continuous sustained rumble, the breaking thunder of the shock wave yielding to the low rush of the bursting cataract. Clods of silt and torn vegetation spattering on the tiles around him, Kerans stumbled to his feet and reached the rail.

Widening as he watched, the water jetted down into the open streets below, carrying with it huge sections of the silt bank. There was a concerted rush to the deck of the depot-ship, a dozen arms pointing up at the water pouring out of the breach. It swilled into the square, only a few feet deep, blotting out the fires and splashing against the hull of the ship, still rocking slightly from the impact of the explosion.

Then, abruptly, the lower section of the barrage fell forwards, a brace of a dozen twenty-foot logs going down together. The U-shaped saddle of silt behind capsized in turn, exposing the full bore of the inlet creek, and what appeared to be a gigantic cube of water fifty feet high tipped into the street below like a flopping piece of jelly. With a dull rumbling roar of collapsing buildings the sea poured in full flood.

"Kerans!"

He turned as a shot whipped overhead, saw Riggs running forward from the landing stage, pistol in hand. His engine stalled, the pilot of the helicopter was helping Beatrice out of the cabin.

The building was shaking under the impact of the torrent sweeping past its shoulder. Supporting his right leg with his hand, Kerans hobbled into the lee of the small tower which held his previous observation window. From his trouser belt he pulled a heavy .45 Colt, held the butt in both hands and fired twice around the corner at the approaching figure of Riggs. Both shots went wild, but Riggs stopped and backed off a few feet, taking cover behind a balustrade.

Feet moved quickly towards him and he looked round as Beatrice raced along the terrace. Reaching the corner as Riggs and the pilot shouted after her she sank down on her knees beside Kerans.

"Robert, you've got to leave! Now, before Riggs brings more of his men! He wants to kill you, I know."

Kerans nodded, getting to his feet. "The Corporal—I didn't realise he was patrolling." He took a last look at the lagoon, the black water surging across it through the buildings, level with the top line of their windows. Upended, its paddles stripped away, the depot-ship drifted slowly towards the far shore. Kerans watched it with pleasure, smelling the fresh tang that the water had brought again to the lagoon.

"Robert! Hurry!" Beatrice pulled his arm, glancing back over her shoulder at the darting figures of Riggs and the pilot only fifty yards away. "Darling, where are you going? I'm sorry I can't be with you..."

"South," Kerans said softly, listening to the roar of the deepening water. "Towards the sun. You'll be with me, Bea."

He embraced her, then tore himself from her arms and ran to the rear rail of the terrace, pushing back the heavy fern fronds. As he stepped down on to the silt bank Riggs and the pilot appeared round the corner and fired into the foliage, but Kerans ducked and ran away between the curving trunks, sinking up to his knees in the soft mud.

The edge of the swamp had receded slightly, and he painfully dragged the bulky catamaran, home-made from four fifty-gallon drums arranged in parallel pairs, through the thick

rasp-weeds to the water. Riggs and the pilot emerged through the ferns as he pushed off.

While the outboard kicked into life he lay exhausted on the planking, the shots from Riggs' .38 cutting through the small triangular sail. Slowly the interval of water widened to a hundred and then two hundred yards, and he reached the first of the small islands that grew out of the swamp on the roofs of isolated buildings. Hidden by them, he sat up and reefed the sail, then looked back for the last time at the perimeter of the lagoon.

Riggs and the pilot were no longer visible, but high up on the tower of the building he could see the lonely figure of Beatrice, waving slowly towards the swamp, changing tirelessly from one arm to the other although she was unable to distinguish him among the islands. Far to her right, rising up above the encompassing silt banks, were the other familiar landmarks he knew so well, even the green roof of the Ritz, fading into the haze. At last all he could see were the isolated letters of the giant slogan Strangman's men had painted, looming out of the darkness over the flat water like a concluding epitaph: TIME ZONE.

The opposing flow of water slowed his progress, and fifteen minutes later, when the helicopter roared over, he had still not reached the edge of the swamp. Passing the top floor of a small building, he glided in through one of the windows, waited quietly as the aircraft roared up and down, machine-gunning the islands.

When it left he pushed on again, within an hour finally navigated the exit waters of the swamp and entered the broad inland sea that would lead him to the south. Large islands, several hundred yards in length, covered its surface, their vegetation crowding out into the water. Shipping the outboard, he set the small sail, made a steady two or three miles an hour tacking across the light southerly breeze.

His leg had begun to stiffen below the knee, and he opened the small medical kit he had packed and washed the wound in a penicillin spray, then bandaged it tightly. Just before dawn, when the pain became unbearable, he took one of the morphine tablets and fell off into a loud, booming sleep, in which the great sun expanded until it filled the entire universe, the stars themselves jolted by each of its beats.

He woke at seven the next morning, lying back against the mast in bright sunlight, the medical kit open on his lap, the bows of the catamaran rammed lightly into a large fern-tree growing off the edge of a small island. A mile away, flying fifty feet above the water, the helicopter raced along, machine-gun fire flickering from its cabin at the islands below. Kerans shipped the mast and glided in under the tree, waiting until the helicopter left. Massaging his leg, but fearful of the morphine, he made a small meal of a bar of chocolate, the first of ten he had been able to collect.

The aerial attacks were resumed at half-hour intervals, the aircraft once flying directly overhead. From his hiding place in one of the islands Kerans clearly saw Riggs looking out from the hatchway, his small jaw jutting fiercely. However, the machine-gun fire became more and more sporadic, and the flights were discontinued finally that afternoon.

By then, at five o'clock, Kerans was almost completely exhausted. The noon temperature of a hundred and fifty degrees had drained the life out of him, and he lay limply under the moistened sail, letting the hot water drip down on to his chest and face, praying for the cooler air of the evening. The surface of the water turned to fire, so that the craft seemed suspended on a cloud of drifting flame. Pursued by strange visions, he paddled feebly with one hand.

The next day, by good luck, as the storm-clouds moved overhead between himself and the sun, the air grew markedly cooler, falling to ninety-five degrees at noon. The massive black cumulus, only four or five hundred feet above, dimmed the air and he revived sufficiently to start the outboard and raise his speed to ten miles per hour. Circling between the islands, he moved on southwards, following the sun that pounded in his mind. Later that evening, as the rain-storms lashed down, he felt well enough to stand up on one leg by the mast, letting the torrential bursts rain across his chest, stripping away the ragged fabric of his jacket. When the first of the storm-belts moved off the visibility cleared, and he could see the southern edge of the sea, a line of tremendous silt banks over a hundred yards in height. In the spasmodic sunlight they glittered like fields of gold along the horizon, the jungle beyond rising above them.

Half a mile from the shore the outboard ran dry, and he unbolted the motor and threw it into the water, paddling

slowly against the head-breeze. Beaching the craft, he dismantled it and ported the sections up the enormous sludge-covered slopes, hoping for a southward extension of the waterway. Around him the great banks undulated for miles, the curving dunes dotted with cuttlefish and nautiloids.

Finally he abandoned the craft and trudged on ahead with a small parcel of supplies, looking back from the next crest as the drums sank slowly below the surface. Carefully avoiding the quicksands in the hollows between the dunes, he moved on towards the jungle, the great horsetails and fern-trees reaching a hundred feet into the air.

He rested again below a tree on the edge of the forest, carefully cleaning his pistol. Ahead of him he could hear the bats screech and dive among the dark trunks in the endless twilight world of the forest floor, the iguanas grunt and snarl. Cutting a branch off one of the trees, he hobbled forward into the shadows.

By evening the rainfall started, slashing at the huge umbrellas a hundred feet above, the black light only broken when phosphorescent rivers of water broke and poured down on him. Frightened of resting for the night, he pressed on, shooting off the attacking iguanas, darting from the shelter of one massive tree-trunk to the next.

For three days he pushed ahead sleeplessly through the forest, feeding on giant berries like clusters of apples, cutting a longer branch as a crutch. Now and then, to his left, he glimpsed the silver back of a jungle river, its surface dancing in the rainstorms, but massive mangroves formed the banks and he was unable to reach it.

Then, abruptly, he stepped out on to the shores of an immense lagoon, over a mile in diameter, ringed by a beach of white sand, through which protruded the top floors of a few ruined buildings, like beach chalets seen at a distance. In one of these he rested for a full day, trying to mend his ankle, which had become black and swollen. Looking out from the window at the disc of water, he watched the rain discharge itself into the surface with relentless fury; as the clouds moved away and the water smoothed into a glass sheet its colours seemed to recapitulate all the changes he had witnessed in his dreams.

That he had travelled over a hundred and fifty miles southward he could tell from the marked rise in temperature. Again the heat had become all-pervading, rising to a hundred and forty degrees, and he felt reluctant to leave the lagoon, with its empty beaches and quiet ring of jungle.

At last he tied the crutch to his leg again, and with the butt of the empty .45 scratched on the wall below the window, almost sure that no-one would ever read the message:

*14th day. Have rested and am moving
south. All is well. Kerans.*

So he left the lagoon and entered the jungle again, within a few days was completely lost, following the lagoons southward through the increasing heat, attacked by alligators and giant bats, a second Adam searching for the forgotten paradises of the reborn Sun.

—J. G. Ballard

*
* ***Missed Any Issues ?*** *
* * * * *

The first issues of this magazine
are still available, each one packed
with exciting action adventure
science fiction stories

Nos. 4 to 7; 9 to 18, 2/- each (35 cents)

Nos. 19 to 23, 2/6 (40 cents)

post free

NOVA PUBLICATIONS LTD
Maclaren House, 131 Great Suffolk Street, London, S.E.1
