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(Illustration by Saaty)

With a cry, I drew my automatic pistol and fired, shot after shot,  
until the magazine was empty.

# DEATH FROM WITHIN

By

STERLING S. CRAMER

● I was glad he had come, the first white man in many months of soul-trying loneliness. Not that I had seen no man, for I was in the midst of people. But not among my own kind—brown men, black men, yellow men, pink men—the gamut of color produced by the fusion of two races, one white, the other black. A sprawling town of whitewashed houses. Twisting streets that led nowhere, teeming with a motley throng. Women, formless in voluminous cotton dresses, driving donkeys that staggered under heaping stacks of sugar cane. Women, barefoot, with swinging arms and hips. Women with red and blue patches sewn on their gowns, insurance against the death that lay on the other side of the mountains. Men in jackets suggesting shirts with vagrant tails hung outside their trousers. Men shambling with uncertain steps from curb to curb. Half-naked pickaninnies. Beggars. Drunken men blocking the sidewalks.

All day I had been watching for him. Innumerable times I had found myself gazing between the double row of silver-barked mahogany trees lining the road before my cottage. But the livid shadows of their delicate leaves were cast in complex patterns upon the walls by the rays of the setting sun before I finally saw him approaching. The rising mists from the steaming ground, wet from the afternoon rain, concealed his horse's legs. Rider and all seemed to be floating toward me, swimming through a sea of fog. He drew rein in front of the door.

"Lieutenant Keane?" he asked.

I lifted my fingers in a careless salute.

"Yes," I replied.

● Many of our readers have had considerable difficulty in comprehending the popular theories explaining the mysterious fourth dimension. They have read several stories which mention it casually but never really give them a good understanding of it.

In the present tale, Mr. Cramer explains this intriguing mystery of physics so completely, yet not technically, that a child could easily know what it's all about. He does not use any formula or complicated phrasings—rather, he makes it thrilling and romantic so that not one word in the story will bore you.

Though this is really the high spot, the story itself is exceedingly well-written and absorbing. You will mark this a distinctly *different* tale of the fourth dimension, for it does not contain the usual hackneyed invaders from the other world.

"I am Dr. Geddes."

"I have been expecting you."

The doctor climbed slowly from the saddle. Short-legged and rotund as he was, the descent was a difficult procedure. On the ground, he blinked at me through thick glasses.

"Sentry," I commanded, "take the doctor's horse."

The mulatto constable saluted smartly and led the horse away.

"Come inside, won't you?" I asked.

The doctor followed me into the tiny living room. I pushed a box of cigarettes across the rough surface of the home-made table.

"Smoke?"

"Thanks."

Dr. Geddes lit a cigarette. He sank wearily into a chair, dropping his sun-helmet onto the floor. He mopped his forehead with a moist handkerchief.

"I'm all in," he said.

I laughed mirthlessly.

"Wait till you cross the mountains," I replied.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"How are things in San Jose?" I continued.

"I can't tell you. I arrived only the day before yesterday."

"From St. Thomas?"

"From St. Thomas."

The doctor was silent a moment.

"But I can tell you something about myself," he said.

"Yes?"

"I'm dying for a drink."

"Sorry. I should have asked you."

I reached for a bottle and two glasses on the shelf above the table and poured a drink.

"Have some gin?"

"No thanks. I don't like the stuff. It makes you feel too cursed melancholy."

I nodded agreement.

"But it's not so saddening as no gin."

The doctor smiled.

"All right," he said.

"Say when."

I had poured out a drink strong enough to knock out a mule before Dr. Geddes lifted a pudgy finger. He took the glass and sipped the liquor tentatively.

"It isn't so bad," I remarked encouragingly. "You'll get used to it—if you stay here long enough."

The doctor wiped his mouth on a sweaty sleeve.

"I suppose I will."

The sun had gone. It was quite dark in the room. I lighted a pair of drooping candles stuck in the necks of empty gin bottles. A six inch centipede, disturbed by the action, scuttled up the wall undulating his greenish-yellow body from side to side.

"Listen," I said abruptly.

From somewhere outside, near at hand or far away we could not tell, came the throbbing of a drum. Rhythmic beats, an insistent pulsing, buffeted our consciousness like the unvaried sweep of waves, a sea of sound, stirred gently in a monotonous pattern.

"Voodoo?" asked Dr. Geddes.

"Yes. Haven't you heard them before?"

"I'm new to the islands."

"You'll hear them plenty before you leave. The natives are in a frenzy."

"I hadn't noticed."

"You won't see it in the daytime. But at night . . ."

The doctor drained his glass and set it on the table.

"Another shot?"

"If you please."

I poured another of those potent drinks. The doctor held the tumbler to the light, grunted, and drank deeply. The glass left a moist ring where it had rested on the board.

"They're making big magic these nights," I continued with a gesture toward the outdoors, "to keep the Death on the other side of the mountains."

"It hasn't appeared here yet?"

"No."

"Have you seen any cases?"

I shook my head.

"No, thank God. Not yet."

"It's rather bad, inland."

"I know. McMasters at Concepcion sent me an S.O.S. and I passed it on to the commandant at San Jose."

The doctor nodded.

"That's why I'm here," he said.

The pulsing rhythm swelled in volume. Three quick beats, one long, one short. A persistent figure indefinitely repeated.

"Where do you suppose it is?" the doctor asked.

"It's hard to say. That sounds as though it were far up in the mountains. But one night I actually surprised a drummer in one of my own outhouses."

"Huh!"

The drumming died abruptly, leaving an almost painful void in the symphony of night noises. Then another drum, seemingly much farther away, took up the burden.

"They're out in full force tonight," I remarked.

A boy shuffled in and began setting the table for dinner. His perspiring skin gleamed shiny black in the wavering light of the candles.

"No servant problem here," grunted Dr. Geddes.

"Not if you let them steal a little on the side. I know I'm feeding two or three families besides the ones who work for me. But if I keep my eyes shut, I get pretty good service from them."

We were hardly seated at the table when we heard a clatter of hoofbeats coming up the road. The sounds ceased just outside the door—the sentry's challenge and a rattle of equipment as the rider dismounted. Hobnailed boots scraped on the step. A khaki figure stood in the doorway, his right hand stiffly touching the flopping brim of his campaign hat—a native constable with an unfamiliar face.

"What is it?" I asked, mechanically returning the salute.

In answer, the negro drew a crumpled bit of folded paper from the breast-pocket of his tunic. With a flourish, he held it out to me. I seized it and read; then, with a sigh, I tossed the note across to Dr. Geddes.

"It's from the native constabulary sergeant at Concepcion," I said. "About Mc-Masters. He's dead. I guess I'll have to go with you tomorrow, myself."

## CHAPTER II

### Into the Mountains

● At daybreak the next morning we set out. Besides the doctor and myself, two of the native constables of my platoon accompanied us. My sergeant remained in command at the post. For a time, the road was open, winding through fields of towering sugar-cane that formed a narrow canyon whose shifting green walls rose high even above the heads of mounted men. Or between thick groves of wild coffee trees, their slender branches were laden with scarlet berries.

We met or overtook many people on the way. There were negroes carrying top-heavy loads on their heads, or driving donkeys; negroes wandering aimlessly, plodding through the thick ooze in bare feet. Silently. Their impassive faces turned to watch us go by as they stepped out of the roadway to avoid the mud flung from our horses' hoofs.

"Notice how quiet they are," I remarked over my shoulder to the doctor.

He spurred his horse forward until he was jogging along at my side, an incongruous figure, perched in the saddle, his plump body bouncing up and down beneath the wide-brimmed helmet.

"What'd you say?" he demanded.

"I was just remarking on the attitude of the natives," I said. "Ordinarily, they're singing and talking as they go about their business. But today, look at them—still, sullen, almost resentful of our presence."

"You don't expect any trouble, do you?"

I laughed.

"Not if the constabulary remains loyal," I replied. "No. It's the death that's frightening them. See how many we're meeting and how few are going our way. We're witnessing an exodus from the mountains."

"How long before we get into the trouble zone?" asked Dr. Geddes.

"Tomorrow. We ought to reach Concepcion in the late afternoon."

The road led continually upward. We followed the crest of a rocky ridge whose flanks were hidden by forests of gigantic pines. Above us rose fantastic peaks of naked rock, some cones, others soaring spires, sweeping up from the luxuriant green mass below.

Then, down into a valley we went, where the trail became scarcely visible. A sheer cliff of shining white chalk towered beside us. The valley became choked with heavy growth. Impenetrable jungle extended on every side; the trees tied together with tangled masses of vines and creepers, their branches meeting overhead, turning the pathway into a green tunnel, hiding the sun.

Here we were forced to dismount and to continue on foot, cutting our way through the vines and ferns that had stretched themselves across the trail since the last travelers had passed. Orchids hung in profusion from the branches, pink, white, purple, crimson splashes of color, filling the air with a poisonous sweetness. Gorgeous tropical birds flitted like wraiths



through the gloom, silent but for occasional croaking and squawking. A moist, sticky heat rose from the slimy earth. We began to encounter more and more frequent open spaces, dotted with stagnant pools covered with green scum. A fetid odor rose from them, like the humid breath of a foul beast. We advanced slowly, picking a path over the quivering ground.

It was mid-afternoon when the trail rose abruptly. The jungle slipped away behind us, making way for groves of pine. The valley narrowed until there was barely room to find a path beside the clear water of the stream rushing from the crest above. A stiff climb and we emerged from the forest upon a level place at the head of the pass. The stream had become a trickle. We found its source beneath a limestone crag. Clumps of stunted evergreens and ilex bushes replaced the pines. The twin summits of the range rose on either hand, pyramids of bare limestone. Nightfall overtook us here and we prepared to camp.

The native constables improvised a fire-place on the surface of a great flat rock, three stones to form a tripod which would support our cooking vessels. While they worked making ready our evening meal, the doctor and I examined with considerable interest the country around. We had found traces of other fires where our own were being kindled and an unused foot-path worn deep in the soft limestone. We followed it for a way, until it apparently ended at the base of a table-rock overhanging a cliff. Here were the marks of other fires. Seated on the edge of the boulder, we let our feet dangle into space as we looked far out across the jungle below, a carpet already hidden in part by the clouds of rapidly gathering fog.

The doctor pulled a battered pack of crumpled cigarettes from the damp pocket of his sweaty shirt and offered me a smoke. For a time, he sat silent, after I had lighted up, smoothing a white cylinder of wrinkled paper. Presently he took off his helmet, struck a match, and inhaled deeply on the cigarette.

"Do you know, Keane," he said with a deliberation that might have been taken for slow-wittedness, but which was due to a habit of his I was just beginning to recognize, a habit of thinking aloud, "do you know, the world is a funny place."

I grunted appreciatively.

"We know so little about it," he went on as though I had been silent or as though he had been alone. "We think we know a great deal. Our men of science have worked out laws, natural laws we call them in our ignorance, laws worked out according to reason, logically. But how do we know that the universe is rational? Have we any guarantee of security? Suppose these laws suddenly failed to operate? Suppose gravitation were to fail tomorrow; suppose the planets were to wander away aimlessly through space? Why not? Just because these things have not happened in the past is no reason for claiming that they will not happen in the future."

"Perhaps," I replied indifferently. "I'm not narrow-minded about such matters."

Dr. Geddes squinted through his thick glasses, examining me as though he had never seen me before.

"And reality," he continued; "what is it?"

I yawned and closed my eyes. I was tired after the exertion of the day.

"What is it?" I repeated after him.

"How do I know you exist?" he said, asking himself more than me. "My senses tell me you are there. My ears inform me you have been talking; they record the sound of your movements. But if we were both deaf, would there still be sound? My eyes see you; they inform my brain that a man in dirty khaki is lying on a rock beside me. But if I close my eyes, can I prove you are still there?"

"I suppose not," I admitted.

He ignored my remark and went on unperturbedly.

"It is only by inference that I know of your existence. You may be only a figment of my imagination, to use a trite expression. To the solipsist nothing exists but himself; the outside world lives only in his

thoughts. When he stops thinking about a thing, it ceases to exist.

"Men believe only what they want to believe. They understand things only in the light of their own experience. Try to explain to a blind man the color scheme of a great painting or to a deaf man the theme of a symphony. Your words of explanation are worthless. They are without meaning to either, no matter how obvious they may be to yourself.

"Try to point out a dozen reasons why that tree isn't an ostrich. You'll have to end up by admitting neither is the tree a tree—it only seems to be. So how can you prove something is not something else, when neither is something else or some other thing? There's nothing to prove."

I climbed slowly to my feet.

"You're too deep for me, Doctor," I said.

He looked at me with a strange smile.

"I go too fast, do I?" he asked.

I shrugged my shoulders. For a moment we both were silent, staring into the gathering gloom. The red rim of the sun disappeared behind the hills and, with a rush that was almost perceptible, darkness was upon us. And the dark brought in its train the booming of voodoo drums, throbbing their rhythmic chant in the valley below.

"Come on, Doctor," I urged. "Let's eat."

He seemed unaware that I had spoken. I left him there, gazing into the night, listening.

## CHAPTER III

### The Death Strikes

● The drumming persisted late into the night. By now, my ears were accustomed to the sound. I slept naturally and normally in spite of it. But Dr. Geddes seemed disturbed by the unvaried pattern. He squirmed and rolled around in his blanket, occasionally bumping against me, interrupting my sleep much more than did the beating of the drums. Finally, I awoke to discover him bending over me, his hand on my shoulder.

"What's the matter?" I asked drowsily.

"Those drums."

"Oh, forget the drums."

"I can't."

"You'll get used to them."

With a sudden movement, he threw off his blanket and scrambled to his feet. He drew on his coat, fumbling with the buttons, his fingers numbed by the cold of night in that high altitude. I raised myself on one elbow.

"Where are you going?" I demanded.

"I'm going to find those drums."

"Don't be foolish. You'll get lost."

"No I won't. Look."

He pointed into the valley ahead.

"Those are fires, aren't they?"

I rubbed my eyes.

"I guess so."

He pulled on his boots and felt around in the darkness for his helmet.

"Wait a minute," I protested. "I'm not going to have you wandering around by yourself. If you're bound to go, I'll have to go with you. I'm responsible for you."

Dr. Geddes grinned.

"I'm older than you are," he said.

"Maybe you are," I retorted, lacing my field boots hurriedly, "but you'd be a babe in the woods . . . out there."

He waited for me to dress.

"Anyhow, I think I'm really just about as curious as you are," I continued. "You don't mind my accompanying you, do you?"

The doctor lighted a cigarette.

"Not in the least," he said. "Delighted."

I strapped on my pistol and picked up my helmet.

"Clumsy things," I remarked, "but the only hats we have along . . . I'm ready, if you are."

I woke one of the constables and told him where we were going. Then we set off down the far side of the pass, carefully picking out the trail with the beam of my electric torch. Within a few hundred yards, we were among the pines again, and immediately lost sight of the fire which was our goal. I tried to fix its approximate

location in my mind, and led the way into the pitch darkness of the forest.

"Watch out for snakes, Doctor," I reminded. "They come out in the roads and paths at night . . . to keep warm."

"Snakes? Here?"

"Sure. You'll find the *fer-de-lance* in most of the Windward Islands. They've worked over from the mainland, somehow."

I fancied that momentary panic appeared in the doctor's eyes, or was it just the shifting light of the torch? However, he pressed on manfully enough through the high grass.

"They're bad medicine, Doctor," I went on. "I don't want to frighten you, but one bite and it's curtains."

"You have serum, haven't you?"

"Sure. But you have to work fast."

We were silent again. From the darkness on each side came vague rustlings and occasional cries of night birds. From the valley sounded the croakings of innumerable frogs and the buzzing of insects. The drumming seemed nearer, though I was unable to say from which direction the vibrant pulsing came. The pathway levelled out and the going became more difficult. The space beneath the trees was choked with undergrowth, thorn bushes that caught at our clothes with sharp talons. Then, with an abruptness that was startling, we came to the edge of an open space. Involuntarily, we both stopped short to survey the scene before us.

The embers of a bonfire glowed beneath the outstretched branch of a sand-box tree which extended over the clearing like a huge gnarled vine. A circle of men and women squatted over the coals. Occasionally, one of them stirred something cooking in a gasoline can perched precariously above the fire. Two rude huts with thatched roofs were visible in the shadows behind them. The drummer sat on a log before one of the huts. His right foot, passed through a rope, steadied the drum as it rested on the ground with the other end against his left knee. His right hand beat a stick against the drum-

head, producing a rolling series of deep, booming notes. And all the while he kept up an insistent throbbing with the heel and fingers of his left hand. A giant negress danced on the bare ground before him, flourishing a long pointed knife. From her lips poured a chant, low, melodious, barbaric.

For some moments we stood there, undiscovered. Then one of the natives glanced our way, rose to his feet and pointed, wordlessly. The circle of heads turned in our direction, as we walked slowly forward. No one moved. All eyes were focussed upon us, watching our every movement, staring blatantly, like astonished children. And all the while the drummer never hesitated, but continued his persistent rhythm. We walked around the circle toward the huts. The dancer ceased her gyrations as we approached, staring sullenly toward us, the long knife drooping in her relaxed fingers.

Then it was that we saw the voodoo priest. He had been hidden by the shadows at the drummer's side, as he crouched over his paraphernalia. The contents of a fetish bag were scattered on the ground before him, a weird collection of miscellaneous objects—teeth, small bones, black feathers, smooth stones, crude wax images . . . . He was spreading them around with a skinny finger, forming strange cabalistic designs, a cross, a spiral. From his clenched left fist, he dribbled a thin stream of meal, weaving an intricate pattern. All the while, his lips moved, mouthing strange syllables, meaningless except to the initiated. His coal-black face he kept turned downward, ignoring our presence as though we were of as little importance as the breeze gently stirring the rags in which he had wrapped himself.

Suddenly Dr. Geddes grasped my arm.

"Look," he whispered.

On the other side of the drummer, a strange figure sat, propped up in a rude chair. His black skin was bloodless; his white eyeballs gleamed in the flickering light, the pupils rolled upward, staring, dull, sightless. On his head the apparition wore a plug hat pushed far back from his



forehead. From his purple lips hung a half-smoked cigar. One hand held, in its stiff fingers, a half-filled gourd. He was a corpse. We had interrupted a funeral.

I drew the doctor toward the fire. The circle opened to make a place for us. We squatted beside the embers with the others. Someone thrust plates of food, taken from the gasoline tin, into our hands. We tasted gingerly, afraid to refuse them.

Throb . . . . throb . . . . throb . . . . The negress was dancing again. Her chant swelled, taken up this time by the circle of mourners. A man rose from beside the fire and refilled the cup in the dead man's hand. The fingers relaxed and the drink trickled out onto the ground.

The doctor looked at me with shining eyes.

"That's their custom, Doctor," I explained. "The corpse is merely another guest, though a guest of honor at that."

"I wonder what he died of," remarked Dr. Geddes.

I turned to the man at my side and put the question to him in Spanish. He rolled his eyes toward the corpse, fearfully, then answered in a low whisper.

"The Death," I translated briefly.

Dr. Geddes started to get up.

"I'm going to make an examination," he said eagerly.

"No you're not," I told him. "It would be the desecration of a corpse to do anything now. Wait till you get a case of your own. There'll be plenty of them at Concepcion."

The doctor hesitated. He stared longingly at the dead man. Then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he relaxed.

"I suppose you are right," he admitted. "It wouldn't do to antagonize the natives."

"Of course it wouldn't. You'll never get anywhere if you don't win their confidence. As it is, that wrinkled old chap with the bag of bones rates higher than either of us does right now."

The doctor nodded. He stirred restlessly.

"If this thing isn't stopped soon," he remarked, "it'll sweep the island. Look at these natives. Dirty. Unsanitary. No precautions against contagion. First thing I'll do is to work out some kind of a segregation program. Isolate each case as it appears."

I grunted.

"That'll keep you hustling," I said. "From what McMasters wrote me in the last communication I had from him, there's no time to do anything. He'd have done that himself, if he could have. He knew that much about preventive medicine. But the patients seem to die within a few moments after they show infection. Up until then, they seem perfectly normal and healthy. Take it from me, Doctor, you've got your job cut out for you, all right."

Dr. Geddes lighted a cigarette. He puffed slowly for a while, then flicked the half-smoked butt into the fire.

"There must be something," he replied, "some sign that a practiced eye can catch. But plenty of time for that. As you say, I've quite a job ahead of me, and believe me, I'm not underestimating it."

Abruptly, both of us became conscious of a strange stillness. Some element in the background of sound was missing . . . . The drum . . . . We turned our heads. The drummer was in his place. The drum was between his legs. But he was no longer beating upon it. Instead, he sat open-mouthed, staring, his face twisted in horrible astonishment. Deliberately, he rose. The drumstick dropped from his hand unnoticed. With clawing fingers, he clutched his stomach as scream after scream of agony tore itself from between his lips. For a moment he swayed uncertainly; then, gradually, gracefully, he relaxed, sliding to the ground in an inert heap.

Instantly, the clearing became the scene of wild confusion. The natives fled in every direction, shrieking in terror. By the time the doctor and I had reached the side of the fallen man, the place was deserted. We were alone with the dead.

## CHAPTER IV

## The Autopsy

● "It was the Death, wasn't it?" asked Dr. Geddes.

I nodded.

The doctor grinned cheerfully.

"This is a break," he said.

He looked around the clearing.

"They've left us alone," he continued.

"Now for that examination I wanted to make. Help me carry the cadavers into one of these huts. Or don't you want to take the chance of infection?"

"I'll risk it."

Together we bore the two corpses inside. I flashed my torch about the interior. There were stubs of candles stuck on the top of a table. I lighted them. We dragged the body of the drummer into the circle of illumination. The doctor knelt on the floor beside it and began removing the clothes.

"Doesn't look like disease to me," he remarked as he worked. "Didn't act like disease either . . . more like poison."

The body was nude. Rapidly but thoroughly Dr. Geddes examined each square inch of skin.

"No wounds of any sort," he said. "No eruptions, no sores, nothing to indicate the injection of poison or the working of a malignant disease."

He shook his head dubiously.

"I haven't missed anything, have I?"

"It looked thorough to me," I said.

From his pocket the doctor drew a small case of surgical instruments. He spread the contents on the dirt floor beside him, two or three scalpels, forceps, a pair of scissors.

"I guess there's nothing for it but to open him up."

Skillfully, he began dissecting, while I watched with growing uneasiness, fascinated, unable to look away. He laid bare the vital organs with a few deft strokes and paused abruptly, knife poised.

"Look here, Lieutenant," he said.

With a fat finger, he stirred the mass of flesh. I looked where he indicated.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Can't you see? The condition of the heart and lungs. They've been mangled, cut through and through as though with a sharp instrument."

"But how can that be? There were no wounds on the body."

"That's just it."

The doctor poked around in the bloody débris. Deliberately he wiped his hands on the negro's clothes. He fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette.

"Have one?"

"Thanks."

He perched himself on the edge of the table.

"I don't understand this, Keane," he said, exhaling a cloud of smoke. "Never, in all my years of professional experience, have I encountered a condition like this."

He stirred the corpse with his foot.

"There's a man," he went on, "who, ten minutes ago, was in perfect health. All of a sudden, he grabs his stomach, pitches on his face and dies. I open him up. There's no mark on him outside. But inside . . . his lungs are punctured, his heart is pierced, his intestines are all messed up like a Chinese puzzle . . . just as if someone had been inside him, taking him apart."

I made no reply.

The doctor sighed. He flung his cigarette on the floor and stamped upon it.

"Now for the other one," he said.

Again, the routine examination disclosed no break on the skin. Dissection showed that the insides of the man were almost cut to pieces.

"That was a better job than the other," remarked the doctor, rising from the gory figure on the floor. "The cutting wasn't done at random. I'd almost swear he'd been dissected by a surgeon."

He wiped his instruments and returned them to their case.

"What do you make of it, Lieutenant?" he asked.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"How should I know?" I replied.

The doctor set his helmet on the table-top and cleared his throat.

"The scientific method," he began, "consists essentially in the collection and arrangement of facts. The interpretation depends upon the man who is trying to fit these miscellaneous bits of knowledge into a homogeneous pattern. Of necessity, some things are included, some are discarded as irrelevant. That is a simple and accurate procedure when one is dealing with items where the points of difference are clear-cut. But nature seldom draws sharp dividing lines. Take, for instance, the classification of life between the animal and vegetable kingdoms. One can easily tell the difference between, let us say, a man and a tree. They represent extremes. But closer together, there are organisms harder to classify. Some plants show signs of animal characteristics. Take the sundew trapping and devouring its prey. Consider parasitic vines that choke a tree to death . . . . Some animals show plant-like qualities like the barnacle, or the oyster. The line isn't broken sharply; it is more continuous . . . . like a color spectrum. Suppose we try to classify colors as blue or yellow. Where does green come in, which is neither, yet both?"

"And so with other phenomena. Science is often arbitrary, choosing what fits its theories, discarding what doesn't. Take, for example, meteorites. A hundred years ago no reputable scientist believed in their existence. There are no stones in the sky; therefore no stones can fall from the sky. But the major premise was proved fallacious. Stones did fall. Today science accepts them as meteorites. But it accepts only stones of a certain type, stones of fused metal. Other objects are claimed to have fallen from the sky—mud, organic matter, ashes, bits of fabricated materials, stones with inscriptions. How do they fit in? Perhaps meteorites are only one item in a continuous series. Perhaps up above there are other worlds than ours, other planes. Perhaps there are weak spots in the bottom and occasionally things fall through.

"Sometimes, the different planes seem to grope at one another's existence . . . . the phenomenon of mental telepathy, an

outcast from the smug scientific circle . . . . spiritualism . . . ."

The doctor hesitated.

"Can this be such a case?" he asked.

His eyes gleamed.

There was only one candle still burning. It sent our shadows sprawling gigantically across the two mutilated corpses on the floor. I tried to turn my eyes away. I did not want to look at them. The atmosphere of the tiny hut was becoming electric, charged with pregnant possibilities . . . . other worlds . . . . other planes of existence, in fumbling contact with our own, experimenting, killing. The flickering light made the corpses seem to move, to stir uneasily. If I looked at them long enough, I knew I would see that movement, would see it unmistakably. No, no. Such things were impossible. The world was not really like that. Things kept their sanity, even if people did not. It was only one's self that was pushed over the edge, where horrors began.

## CHAPTER V

### Dr. Geddes Theorizes

- With an effort, I regained my composure.

"But, Doctor, how can such things be? Why haven't men made contact before? Our astronomers, with their telescopes, why haven't they seen these other planes, if they exist?"

Dr. Geddes smiled.

"It's like this, Keane," he explained. "Our universe is curved. That is, if one were to start out, traveling in a straight line with the speed of light, after incalculable ages he would return to the place from which he started. Our universe, therefore, is finite. It contains a certain number of stars; it occupies a certain measurable amount of space. But it is limitless; at least man can never find the end, the outermost boundaries. Like a circle, one can measure its diameter and circumference, but he can go on forever around and around without ever coming to the beginning or end.

"Astronomers believe that some of the more distant nebulae are actually identical

with others in the opposite direction, only seen from the other side."

"What's that got to do with these?" I pointed to the dead men on the floor.

"Just this. Our universe is three-dimensional, but it seems to be set into a four-dimensional space. Some authorities say that the fourth dimension is time. But is it? Why can't it be geometric, though non-Euclidean? This fourth dimension can be demonstrated mathematically.

"A point has no dimension, only location. Move a point in space and you produce a line which has one dimension, length. Move the line and you have a plane which has two dimensions. Move the plane and a solid is produced which has three dimensions. Logically, one can move the solid in some direction which is neither up nor down, right nor left, backwards nor forwards, and produce a something or other that has four dimensions."

"Which way would you move it?" I asked. "It seems to me you've exhausted all the possibilities by the time you reach the third dimension."

"Just because you cannot appreciate something outside your own experience is no reason for saying that thing doesn't exist," retorted the doctor. "Make an analogy. Imagine a two-dimensional being, limited to the four directions of the compass. Up and down would be incomprehensible to him, but no less real.

"But to reply to your question: which direction would you move the solid? I can only say that I don't know. My mind refuses to grasp the problem empirically. However, I can arrive at a certain conclusion by means of analogy. Consider the two-dimensional being again. His body is bounded by its limits in the plane in which it lives. These limits are what we, in a three-dimensional world, would call his sides. But his top and bottom are open to us. What direction would up and down be to him? It would be inside, wouldn't it?

"If we were experimentally inclined, we could watch the functioning of such a being's vital organs. We could touch them

without ever penetrating his outside limits, what he would call his skin."

Dr. Geddes pointed to the figures on the ground.

"How else can one explain those?" he asked.

I shuddered at the conception.

"Four-dimensional beings experimenting upon men, dissecting them while still alive . . . Examining their interiors from another plane," the doctor continued.

"But, Doctor, why should they harm us? Why should they be unfriendly?"

"Men kill microbes by the million, don't they? They even cut up living animals just to see how the beasts are put together, don't they? Maybe these four-dimensional beings consider us in the same light—as inferior organisms."

"They could kill every man in the world," I gasped.

The doctor nodded.

"Certainly," he replied in a matter-of-fact voice. "However, perhaps this place is the only point of contact between their plane and ours. Why else would they select an obscure island in the Windward group for their experiments?"

I glanced fearfully around the room. Were such beings even now watching us? Were they considering us as possible subjects for their diabolical research? Where could I hide from them? A closed room would be as open to them as if locks and doors and walls did not exist . . . just as I could put my finger within the confines of a boundary drawn upon a piece of paper. My thoughts raced on. Suppose some presence were to manifest itself in the space beside me, moving from the plane of the fourth dimension into the world I knew.

"I'm going to get out of here," I exclaimed in sudden panic, "before they decide to work on me."

The doctor shook his head.

"Why?" he asked. "Where would you go?"

I hesitated. If things were as he said, there was no escape, no security anywhere on the island . . . no security any place in the world.

The doctor placed a reassuring hand on my shoulder.

"Come on, Lieutenant," he said; "it's all supposition. I may be just a crank. How do you know?"

"You present a logical case," I replied.

"Sure. But the chances are that I'm wrong. Don't take it so seriously. It may be some new type of bacterium, some disease as yet unknown to medicine. And anyhow, even if my theory were right, what could we do about it? Nothing. We can only carry on."

I breathed more easily.

"Sorry," I said. "I'm all right now. After all, I'm a soldier. I risk my life every day, one way or another. It's just that this idea is so strange, so utterly at variance with experience."

The doctor slid down from the table and picked up his helmet.

"Shall we go back to camp?" he suggested.

"Fine," I replied in relief . . . anything to leave this death-infested clearing.

We followed the trail back toward the summit of the pass. It was easier now. A greying of the darkness beneath the trees presaged the approach of daylight. As we reached the open space near our camp, our shadows, elongated by the rising sun, stretched grotesquely before us.

The camp seemed just as we had left it. The two constables lay still, wrapped in their blankets.

"Time to get up," I cried.

Neither of the men moved. I bent over the nearer and shook him by the shoulder. His head rolled limply to one side. I touched his face. The black cheek was cold. The man was dead. So was the other. Both had been killed in their sleep.

## CHAPTER VI

### The Beings

● The doctor and I looked at each other silently. No need to examine these corpses, no need of an autopsy . . . both of us knew what we would find. Gently, I drew the corner of a blanket over each

face. Then, I began assembling my equipment. I strapped the blanket roll to the back of the saddle and replaced my other gear in the saddlebags. Without a word, I threw the saddle onto my horse's back and tightened the girth.

"Where are you going?" asked the doctor.

I pointed into the valley behind us, toward the trail we had followed the day before.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"Go ahead," he said. "I'm going on, alone, if necessary."

I hesitated.

"And, when the commandant in San Jose asks about me," he continued, "what are you going to tell him?"

"I'm going to resign my commission," I muttered.

Dr. Geddes put his hand on my arm.

"No, you're not, Keane," he said.

I pushed his hand aside.

"Let me alone," I retorted. "Can't you see I want to be let alone?"

The doctor lighted a cigarette.

"All right," he answered. "Go ahead."

He turned his back and began packing his things. I watched him uneasily. He saddled his horse and mounted.

"Goodbye, Lieutenant," he said.

"Wait a minute," I called after him.

He turned in the saddle.

"I'll go with you part way," I said. "You'll get lost."

"There's no need. I'll get along all right."

He rode down the pass toward Concepcion. I watched him go for a moment, then spurred my horse and galloped after him.

"Doctor!" I cried. "Wait. I'm going with you."

He drew rein. I pulled up beside him. The doctor held out his hand.

"I knew you would," he said simply.

Our hands met.

"Thank you, Doctor."

I led the way along the trail. We passed the clearing with the two grass-roofed huts and plunged into the forest on the other side. All morning we pressed on, as



swiftly as the going permitted. About noon, as we skirted the white shoulder of a limestone ridge, we caught a glimpse of Concepcion, a cluster of whitewashed mud huts at the edge of the landlocked bay below. The listless flopping of a flag indicated the constabulary headquarters near the center of the town. I focussed my binoculars and stared intently at the little settlement. The streets were deserted . . . no sign of living creatures anywhere. But didn't I see movement? Those shapeless masses in the square, what were they? I handed the glasses to the doctor. He looked and shook his head.

"It's too far," he remarked.

He looked again.

"They're gone," he said.

"Must have been people," I suggested.

"No. We could have seen men clearly enough to be certain. They might have been animals, cattle, dogs . . ."

I replaced the glasses in their case.

"Probably," I replied. "Of course, that's what they were."

We rode on. The trail dipped suddenly toward the plain along the ocean. We lost sight of Concepcion; it was hidden by the increasing tangle of jungle as we left the hills. So when we arrived, our approach was abrupt—out of the hills into the empty streets. Puzzled by the silence, we rode toward the square.

Suddenly the doctor gasped and drew rein. He pointed. My eyes followed his outstretched arm. The crumpled figure of a man lay half in, half out of the doorway of a house. We rode on. We passed other corpses, lying as they had fallen.

"The Death," remarked the doctor grimly.

I nodded.

We dismounted before the constabulary headquarters and went inside. A fallen sentry lay beside the door. The guard room was unoccupied, but in the office we found a huddle of twisted bodies in grotesque attitudes. Then I noticed that the soldiers had their bayonets fixed. On the floor were scattered copper cylinders, empty cartridges. The plastered walls were rid-

dled with bullets. These men had died fighting.

Dr. Geddes lifted one of the bodies from the heap. A large, furry tarantula emerged from underneath and confronted us indignantly. With a lucky blow, I crippled it and crushed it under my foot. We examined the bodies. No marks of violence showed on any of them; not a wound was visible. But some had bloody lips and nostrils, indicating punctured lungs. An autopsy was obviously unnecessary. We both knew what the doctor's knives would show, inside.

"They must have seen something," I remarked, indicating a cartridge with the toe of my boot. "There must have been something to shoot at."

Dr. Geddes nodded slowly.

"The visitors are becoming bold," he said.

"I don't see any trace of them," I replied. "With all this shooting . . ."

"Bullets wouldn't harm them. Go back to our analogy, Lieutenant. Suppose there were a two-dimensional world, and you, a three-dimensional being, entered it. Suppose the plane of its existence cut across your waist. How would you appear to the inhabitants of that plane? You'd be, roughly, a circle. Suppose one of them attacked you. Suppose he thrust a weapon of some sort through the boundary of that circle. It wouldn't hurt you a bit. The two-dimensional plane would have no thickness. A two-dimensional object could pierce you through and through, without disturbing the solid mass of your body. And so it would be with us attacking a four-dimensional being. To him, we would lack substance. Our weapons would pass through his body harmlessly."

I shuddered.

"You painted a grisly picture, Doctor."

He pushed his helmet back from his forehead and mopped the sweat away with a dirty handkerchief.

"It's a logical one, isn't it?" he asked.

I could not help but agree.

"What are we going to do?" I added.

He shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"What can we do?" I persisted. "Can

we even get away from here with our own lives?"

"I doubt it," replied the doctor soberly. "They must know we are here by now. And yet there is one chance, small as it seems. If we keep moving, they may never be able to get close enough to hurt us. You see, they must be subject to the same limitations that we are subject to, only in a different form. If, for example, you were trying to catch a two-dimensional being, you would have to follow him along his own plane, wouldn't you? If he moved faster than you did, he'd get away, wouldn't he? And, if he lost himself among the complexities of some intricate pattern on his plane, you might not find him, might you?"

My body tensed, filled with a growing hope.

"The jungle," I cried. They might not find us there. Come on!"

"I'm not going . . . yet."

"Why not? It's suicide to stay here."

"Listen, Keane, I came here for a definite purpose—to find out all I could about the Death. And I'm not going to leave until I have a more concrete proof of what is going on than I have at present."

I pointed to the corpses on the floor.

"What more do you want?" I cried.

"I want to see these four-dimensional beings with my own eyes. Even then, I doubt if anyone will believe our story. The inertia among scientific minds is often harder to overcome than the prejudices of the mass of common people."

"See them!"

"Yes."

"I wonder what they would look like."

"Nothing you ever saw before."

"What do you propose to do?"

"Just this. You and I will go outside. We'll get on our horses and ride around the square. After a while, some of these beings from another plane are bound to notice us. They'll try to kill us too. But I hope we'll be able to see them first. We shall stay until either we catch a glimpse of them, or, well, if we don't see them in time, it won't matter. If they get one of

us, the survivor must go back to San Jose as quickly as he can."

I wiped my face on my sleeve.

"All right, Doctor," I said. "I'm game."

He grinned.

"Good boy!" he exclaimed.

There were glasses on the desk and a bottle. He poured us each a drink. We lifted the tumblers silently and drank. Suddenly, the glass slipped from the doctor's hand. His mouth gaped wide. He stared at the open door. I whirled around, my hand instinctively seeking the butt of my pistol. I saw what he saw.

## CHAPTER VII

### The Blow Falls

● Between us and the door, at about the height of a man's shoulder, hung a lump of red, quivering flesh about the size of two clenched fists. On the side toward us was a small, translucent spot that blinked like an eye. While we watched, frozen with horror, the mass seemed to shrink into itself, the outer portions disappearing until only the eye was left. Then, it too was gone.

"We've seen one of them!" cried the doctor exultantly.

"But how did it vanish like that?" I asked.

"Simple," replied Dr. Geddes. "It merely moved out of our plane."

"What do you mean?"

"Remember our analogy? Suppose a sphere moved into a two-dimensional world; where it first touched, it would appear as a point. As it moved farther into that plane, it would be seen as a gradually expanding circle. As it moved on through, the circle would diminish until it was a point once more, and finally would disappear completely. So with these four-dimensional beings. As they move into our plane, they appear to us as expanding or contracting solids. We can never see the entire organism.

"Well," I said, "are you satisfied now?"

The doctor smiled grimly.

"Yes," he answered. "Let's go."

But, as we turned, the eye reappeared. The flesh around it swelled rapidly. Some parts seemed to be covered with fine hair, others with a kind of fabric. Fascinated, we watched the thing grow larger and larger until it became almost as large as a man. A slender shaft of flesh appeared in the air beside it. The two were not connected in any manner that we could see, and yet I had the impression that we were gazing at different parts of the same body. The newly materialized portion began to swing towards us, almost like an arm. At its tip gleamed a sliver of metal.

With a cry, I drew my automatic pistol and fired, shot after shot, until the magazine was empty. I could see the holes that the bullets had made. I could hear the impact upon soft, living matter. But, as the arm moved, the holes seemed, somehow, to disappear. The slow advance of the arm continued. Two eyes were now watching us from the main part instead of one.

I sprang forward, swinging my fist. I could feel the substance give as the blow went home, and yet the solid mass eluded me. I tried to seize hold of the arm but it slid out of my grasp . . . not like a snake or some slippery object; it was more as if the flesh receded from me, as though I pushed it into nothing, for the place I touched vanished. The arm was in two pieces now, two pieces that retained the same relative position toward each other.

Somehow, I stumbled past it through the doorway out into the street. I untied my horse and leaped into the saddle. The doctor's footsteps sounded close behind me. I saw him stop and loosen his horse's tether. I saw him clutch his breast. I heard him shriek as he squirmed in agony. I saw him fall, writhing, on the ground.

Mad with terror, I spurred my horse to a gallop and fled headlong down the street. I felt a sharp, stinging pain in my left arm. I felt the horse leap beneath me. His mad screams rang in my ears. Then, we were in the jungle, clattering along a narrow, overgrown trail. For a

mile or so the desperate pace continued, until suddenly the horse staggered and fell, pitching me out of the saddle into the thick undergrowth beside the trail. I landed heavily, struggled vainly to reach my feet, then collapsed, unconscious.

How long I lay there, I cannot say. My next recollection is a vision of eyes, the film covered eyes of four-dimensional beings, appearing and disappearing in the air above my dead horse. I lay quietly, striving to control my fear, knowing the fate that was in store for me if they found me. I lay motionless for hours.

Not until night came to hide me under its welcome cloak of darkness did I venture forth. The eyes had been gone for some time, but I knew that their vigilance had not relaxed. They were searching for me. I realized what a narrow escape I had had. My useless arm, hanging at my side, was a grim reminder of the knife thrust that had missed reaching a vital spot. The dead body of my horse told of one blow that had gone home. My mind still pictured the gruesome fate of the doctor. He was a gallant little man, I told myself, a hero if there ever was one. I set off down the trail at a dog-trot.

Of the next few days I have only confused memories. In my panic, I had taken a path leading to the ocean instead of toward the hills. Afraid to go back, I was forced to pick my way along the coast, where there were no roads, no trails, no people . . . nothing but trackless jungle, stretching from the water's edge to the rocky walls above.

There were days of thirst, days of hunger. There was the day I feasted on oysters left high and dry by the outgoing tide, oysters that seemed to be growing from the overhanging branches of mangrove trees fringing a lagoon of brackish water. There were days of madness, days when I fancied that the gnawing of hunger was the exploring fingers of beings from another world. Then, at last, came the day that I stumbled into a field of sugar cane, to be discovered at nightfall by a passing band of negro workmen.

## EPILOGUE

● The little-known island of Santa Lucia lies at the extreme southern edge of the Windward group, just off the coast of Venezuela. It was obtained, through purchase, by the United States, shortly after the acquisition of the Virgin Islands. Its government was at first administered by United States Marines and, even today, the native constabulary is officered by members of that corps.

A few months ago, a plague of an exceptionally virulent type broke out near the settlement of Concepcion, wiping out the entire population of the town. Dr. Geddes, the resident physician at St. Thomas, was sent to investigate the outbreak. Accompanied by Lieutenant Keane of the constabulary, the doctor plunged into the jungle, only to fall a victim of the disease himself, adding one

more name to the long list of martyrs to the cause of science. Lieutenant Keane, however, survived a similar attack. He was found in a delirious condition by native workmen on a sugar plantation, miles from the scene of the epidemic. Unfortunately, the lieutenant's mind was permanently affected by his experiences. While apparently normal most of the time, he seems to be suffering from a delusion of persecution, constantly fearing an attack by beings from a four-dimensional world. Physically, he has entirely recovered, but the strength and persistence of his system of delusions remain. At present, he is a patient in the United States Marine Hospital in Palo Alto, California, where it is hoped that his psychosis will eventually prove subject to treatment.

The district around Concepcion is still uninhabitable. All those venturing into the town have fallen victims of the plague.

THE END

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