



Otis Adelbert Kline

*The Metal
Monster*

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FOREWORD

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MUCH has been written about the terrific cataclysm of 1960—the eruption of the volcano, Coseguina, with its accompaniment of earthquakes, fires, floods and storms, which carried death and destruction into Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua.

The world has been told by a thousand writers, with a thousand different viewpoints, of the awful blackness, so much more intense and so far greater in extent than "La Oscuridad Grande"—"The Great Darkness" of 1835—as to relegate the former event, awe-inspiring as it was, to insignificance.

Eyewitnesses who were fortunate enough to escape with their lives from the devastated cities, have described their varying sensations when, with noon and midnight alike, tiles slid from the roofs, walls crumbled, buildings crashed to the shaking earth like houses of cards, bells tolled futilely in cracked towers, and the air was filled with shrieks, prayers and choking dust.

But, immense and devastating as it was, it is not of this cataclysm that I would write, but of that infinitely more terrible menace to all mankind which closely followed it—which was, in fact, loosed on the inhabitants of the earth's crust as a direct result of the eruption. For I was an eyewitness of the first appearance of the Metal Menace, as well as a direct participant in the action that followed, as men struggled to shake off the fetters with which the slimy

intelligences of the nether world were slowly and surely shackling and enslaving them.

It is difficult to attempt to write in an orderly fashion of those nerve- racking, reason-destroying events when they are yet so close to me, but life is fleeting, death may come to me at any moment, and there are many facts which are known to me alone, and which should be preserved for posterity. For this reason, I begin my task as chronicler now, instead of waiting for time to bring order and clarity to the vision. -Walter Stuart.

I. — THE METAL BEINGS

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"HOOVER," I shouted through the control room phone, and my pilot, Art Reeves, skillfully banked, returning the Blettendorf electroplane almost to the exact spot and holding it there suspended with helicopters whirring.

We were directly above the crater of Coseguina. But six months had passed since its eruption, the most spectacular and destructive in the history of the world, yet it had not only ceased to smoke, but the hot lava, which had bubbled and seethed for some months in this immense cauldron of Mother Nature, had suddenly receded, and there remained a yawning black shaft, the bottom of which was sunk so far into the bowels of the earth as to be invisible.

It was to investigate this singular and previously unheard of phenomenon that my chief, the secretary of the American Geographic Association, had sent me from Chicago in the Blettendorf, together with Pat Higgins, my photographer and assistant, and Pilot Reeves.

"Descend," I said, and we began swiftly and smoothly to drop toward the yawning blackness beneath us.

Pat flashed on his keel and side lights and started his automatic cameras clicking. Four of them, like the lights, were trained on the crater walls, and the fifth was pointed straight down through the floor.

The top of the crater was fully a mile in diameter, but as we descended, the walls gradually drew closer together. Presently, when our magnetic altimeter showed that we

were nearly five thousand feet below sea level, the shaft assumed a uniform diameter of about two hundred feet.

"Faith," said Pat with a grin, "this must be where the bottom dropped out of the kettle. If this keeps up, we'll be having tea with the devil in a couple of hours." I mopped the perspiration from my brow. The air in the cabin had grown uncomfortably warm. A glance at the thermometer showed a temperature of 120 degrees.

"I'm afraid we won't be able to get much closer to His Plutonic Majesty without asbestos suits," I replied. "Besides, the heat will thin our oil until its lubricating value will be nil. If we burn out a couple of helicopter bearings, we're due for a long, hard drop.

"Sure, we'd be old and gray by the time we hit the bottom," said Pat.

Watching the thermometer and magnetic altimeter, I saw that the heat was increasing at the rate of about one degree to every hundred feet of descent. When it reached 135 degrees I ordered Reeves to hover.

"We've come as far as we dare in this machine," I told Pat. "I'll take a look through the binoculars before we ascend."

I pointed my 50X Zeiss glasses downward in an effort to see the bottom of the shaft. But adjust them as I would, I could see only a tiny black speck where the seemingly converging walls—due to perspective—of the pit ended. I did notice something else, however, which caused me to utter an involuntary exclamation of surprise. The walls of the pit beneath us were of gleaming, silvery looking metal, and winding up around them was a railed metal stairway. On

this stairway there was a movement—a constant flow of shiny metal globes rolling upward.

Rapidly shifting the focus for a nearer view I looked for the top of the metal wall. I found it in a moment, and the powerful glasses brought every detail so close that it seemed as if I could almost reach out and touch the gleaming railing of the spiral stairway. Never, so long as I live, will I forget the strange, almost unbelievable sight that greeted my eyes.

Standing along the railing near the end of the stairway, were four grotesque creatures, somewhat man-like in form. Their bodies were glistening metal globes, like Osage oranges, from which, in lieu of arms and legs, there projected four tentacles, apparently constructed of many little globes strung together like beads. Perched on similar but shorter tentacles above the body spheres were smaller globes, evidently the heads of the creatures. They had enormous goggling eyes, literally like headlights, both in shape, and from the fact that they cast their own rays before them.

The first three of these strange beings carried long pipes slightly curved at the upper ends. The lower ends were attached to flexible tubes greatly resembling conduit, which trailed down the stairway. The fourth held a straight cylinder about three inches in diameter and four feet in length.

The first three individuals were exceedingly busy. In fact they seemed to be the sole structural workers on the stupendous metal shaft that was swiftly rising from the bowels of the earth. The metal globes which were rolling up the stairway were of three sizes, and appeared to be living