# And the Walls Came Tumbling Down

# John Wyndham

Report No. 1. From Mantus, Commanding No. 8 Expeditionary Party (Sol 3), to Zennacus, C-in-C Vanguard Emigration Forces (Electra 4).

Sir,

Craft State: Fully serviceable 4; slightly damaged 1; lost in action 2.

Casualty State: Fit personnel 220; unfit 28; lost in action 102.

Present Position: 54/28/4 X 23/9/10-Sol 3.

Supply State: v. satisfactory. Equipment: satisfactory.

Morale: fair, improving.

Approach was made to Sol 3 at 28/11 (Electra 4 time). Signs of hostility were immediately encountered. Expedition withdrew without counter action. Approach made in other hemisphere. Signs of greater hostility encountered. Two ships were disintegrated with all aboard. Third ship sustained minor fractures, ditto 28 crew, 2 lost. Expedition withdrew. Signs of hostility in all inhabited places visited. Conference was called. It was decided to set down in uninhabited area, if suitable. Very suitable position located after search. Expedition set down without interference 34/12 at reading given. In consideration of hostility encountered, construction of a redoubt was commenced immediately.

Dear Zenn, the above is for the official record but even from that you may judge that this planet, Earth, is one hell of a spot. Just my damned luck to draw Party No. 8. Serves me right for behaving like an honest fool when I could as easily have fiddled the draw.

I’ll never get any place on politics, I’m afraid — even if I ever do get back from this grotesquely misconceived planet. I would sum it up as a disgusting and dangerous dump with the potentialities of a paradise.

To begin with the worse features — about two-thirds of the place is waterlogged. This results in masses of suspended vapour for ever hanging about in its atmosphere. Imagine the gloomy effect of that for a start!

But it is almost worse when the main masses of vapour clear, for then the humid air gives to the whole sky a hideously ominous shade of blue. Not, of course, that one would expect the place to look like home but there does seem to be a kind of wanton perversity over everything.

One would assume that development would take place in the most suitable and salubrious spots — but not here. The larger centres were not difficult to distinguish from above, being clearly of artificial construction with marks (some form of communications?) radiating from them. And all were remarkably ill-situated.

As we steered close to one, we had thought ourselves unperceived, but on our approach it was clear that preparations had been made against us. The defences were, indeed, already in action — without any attempt to inquire whether we came in good faith. One must assume from this that the inhabitants are of an abnormally suspicious or possibly a sheerly vicious disposition.

Considering it possible that other parts of this world might be uninformed about us, we moved halfway round the planet before making another approach. Here the centres of habitation were more frequent and had a more orderly appearance, many of them being laid out in lattice form.

They proved, however, to be even better defended, and over a considerable range. Indeed, so accurate was their estimate that two unfortunate vessels were completely disintegrated and another somewhat fractured.

We in the other four felt our craft and ourselves shaken so much and subjected to such stress and tension that we thought the end had come for us also. Luck, however, was with us and we were able to draw out to a safe distance with the loss of only certain fragile but unimportant objects.

After that we proceeded with great caution to investigate several other cities. We found every one of them embattled against us.

We do not understand why the inhabitants should, without provocation or inquiry, turn weapons upon us in this way. We have been given no chance to explain that we come with peaceful intentions — nor indeed any chance to attempt communication at all. It is a very disappointing and ominous climax to our long journey and it has depressed us.

I called a conference to decide on our next move. The views aired there were not encouraging. Every contribution to the debate endorsed that this planet is crazy beyond belief. Some compensations did emerge, however.

The concentration of civilization in unsuitable spots — moist humid areas, often alongside large bodies of water — cannot be accidental though its purpose is obscure. But it does, quite absurdly, mean that the most hospitable regions are without signs of life.

This observation, supported by several speakers, did much to raise our spirits. It was decided to set down in one such spot and there to build a redoubt where we can live safely until we shall have discovered some means of communicating with the inhabitants to assure them of our peaceable intentions.

This we have done at the position stated and I may explain the report on morale by saying that it has given everyone a great lift to be settled in a spot so rich, so lushly furnished with the good things of life. Imagine, if you can, an area composed almost entirely of silicates! This is sober fact. Never did I expect to see such a thing.

It is Eptus’s opinion that the planet itself may consist almost entirely of silicates beneath the water and under a hideous green mould which covers most of the rest of its surface. It is difficult to believe in such a wonderful thing as that, so I am accepting his view with caution for the present.

If it were true, however, all our problems would be solved. A completely new era would open for us since we would be justified in assuming that the other planets of the Sol system are similar. In other words we should be able to report that we have found a whole system built of silicates in easily assimilable form and inexhaustible in extent.

This remains to be investigated and proved. It is not known to the rest of the company, who assume that this is a mere pocket delectably rich in silicates.

The exact site chosen lies between two large rocks, which will provide natural bastions to the north and south sides of the redoubt, making it unnecessary for us to do more — than build the east and west walls between them and roof the space thus enclosed.

This should take no great length of time. Sol is close enough to exert considerable force here. Several members of the party were immediately detailed to assimilate silicates until they were extended to the required shape and pattern.

They then arranged themselves in a refractory formation bearing upon a remarkably pure quart deposit. Fusing took place in quite a short time. Before long we had the material to make several furnace-lenses, and these are now fusing blocks of first-class boltik from the raw ingredients strewn all around us.

Since we set down we have seen nothing of the inhabitants, but several things lead us to suspect that the region, though neglected, is not entirely unknown to them. One is that a part of the ground surface has been hardened somewhat as though an exceedingly heavy weight of some land had been dragged over it.

This mark lies in a line roughly east and west, passing between our two rocks. Westward it continues without feature for a great distance. To the east, however, it shortly joins a broader mark evidently made by the traction of a still heavier object.

A little on our side of this junction stands a curious formation which, by its regularity, we take to be artificial. It is made of an impermanent fibrous material and bears apparently intentional markings. Thus:

DESERT ROAD

CARRY WATER

We do not understand the significance of this — if it has any.

Since I began this account Eptus and Podas have brought me the most fantastic news yet. I have to believe it because they should know what they are talking about, and assure me that it is positively a fact.

It seems that Podas collected locally a few specimens for examination. Several of them were asymmetrical objects attached in some way to the ground. Another was of different type and showed some degree of symmetry. This latter was in the form of a soft cylinder, having a blunt projection at one end and a tapered one at the other, and was supported by four further projections beneath.

It was by no means attached to the ground, being able to move itself with agility on the four lower projections. After examining them all carefully Podas declares that they are all living objects, and that the basis in both types is carbon! Don’t ask me how such a thing can be but Eptus supports him, so I have to accept it.

It has further occurred to them as a result of this discovery that if all life on this planet is on a carbon basis it may well account for the neglect of this excellent silicate region. It does not, however, account for the immediate and unprovoked hostility of the inhabitants, which is a matter that interests me more at the moment.

Podas states that none of his specimens exhibited intelligence, though the cylindrical object displayed some clear reflexes to external stimuli.

I find it difficult to imagine what a carbon-based intelligence could possibly look like but I expect we shall find out before long. I must admit that I look forward to this event not only with some misgiving, but with a considerable degree of distaste.

Report No. 2. All states and positions: No change. Redoubt completed. No confirmed contact yet with intelligent forms.

Dear Zenn. Soon after the third rising of Sol enabled us to set the furnace-lenses to work again we produced enough boltik to finish our redoubt. The last block was fused into place halfway through the diurnal period, which is very short here. I am relieved that it has been completed without interruption. Now that we and our craft have this protection we can face the future with more confidence.

Podas and Eptus have examined more specimens. These confirm their earlier views but add little. So far we have not made contact with an intelligence here. After our earlier experiences we are not seeking it out but are waiting for it to come to us.

As a qualification I should add that Podas thinks we almost contacted an intelligence during the fourth Sol and still may do so. Eptus, however, disagrees with him and on the face of it one would say Eptus was right. What hap-pened was this.

About the middle of the fourth Sol a cloud of dust was seem to the east of us above the long mark referred to in my last. It was soon evident that the creature responsible for the dust was travelling along this mark towards us.

We observed it with increasing amazement because it was clearly to be seen that this creature supported itself upon four disks. Its body was black and shining; at the front were metal appendages which shone like silver.

It moved at a moderate speed but clearly with discomfort since its disk supports transmitted the result of every inequality of the ground surface to its carcass. Eptus deduces from this that it evolved upon some level surface, possibly ice, and is ill adapted to this district.

That its intention was hostile there could be no doubt for it projected strongly against us. Luckily it was either ill-informed regarding us or was not capable of serious attack, for it operated upon a quite harmless range. Out of interest we let it come quite close before we turned the beam on it.

When we did we saw with astonishment — and I must admit some consternation — that nothing whatever resulted. We watched it with growing anxiety as it came on, still keeping close to the line. Two more beams were turned on to it, still without effect.

Podas said, “I don’t think it can be sentient. It is coming as if we weren’t here at all.” And indeed it was.

In spite of our defences it continued to come until, without slackening speed in the least, it ran right into the side of the redoubt where the front of it was crushed and some pieces fell off.

We waited some moments, and then when it did not stir again, we left the redoubt to examine it. It appeared to be a composite creature. One part had become detached and projected forward against the wall by the sudden stop.

This we found to bear a generic resemblance to the cylinder spoken of in my last report but was unlike it in that it was covered with detachable teguments. Its forward blunt projection had encountered the side of the redoubt with some force. Possibly this was the cause of its deanimation.

Podas, investigating, found a smaller creature inside the body of the disked creature and unattached to it. Possibly this is some singular form of parturition natural to this planet. I could not say. It is hard enough in this crazy place to hang on to one’s reason, let alone try to apply it to the utterly unreasonable.

Against the idea is the fact that neither of the smaller creatures showed any vestige of disks. Also both of these were covered in teguments which can scarcely be natural — especially in the case of the latter creature, where the tegument seemed designed with the purpose of hampering the hinder limbs — though it may have some other purpose un-guessed.

The two creatures were brought into the redoubt for closer examination. The parent or host — for Frinctus has put forward the theory that the two we have may be parasitic upon it — creature was left outside on account of its size.

More careful examination showed that our two new specimens were not identical though the differences are of no great importance. The shortness of the fibres on the blunt projection of one compared with those on the other could easily be due to some kind of accident, for instance.

Podas, who set about opening up the revoltingly squashy body of our first find with scientific lack of disgust that I can only envy, reports that its internal arrangements, while quite incomprehensible to him, are on the same general lines as those of the small cylindrical creature referred to in my last.

Eptus is anxious to open the other for confirmation but Podas is against it. He says that we shall learn nothing more from it than from the other and that furthermore it is not entirely inactive. It inflates and deflates in a most curious rhythmic manner which interests him. As it is Podas’ department, the matter rests there for the moment.

Meanwhile, Orkiss, our chief mathematician, who had out of curiosity been examining the supposed parent creature outside, returned to say that in his opinion it is not a creature at all but an artifact. Podas went back with Mm to look at it again and now concurs. Eptus reserves his opinion.

Podas has also tentatively suggested that our second specimen — the one with its nether limbs webbed by the odd tegument — may possibly be the vessel for an intelligence of some sort, since it was inside the artifact. To his Eptus objects strongly.

How, he asks, can any form of intelligence recognizable as such be expected from a sloppy collection of innumerable tubes slung on a hardened lime framework? Further, says he, reason presupposes at least the ability to comprehend a straight line. This type of creature has not a straight line in its make-up.

It is pudgy and squashy and would be almost amorphous but for its framework. Clearly it is not of a nature that could comprehend a straight line — and if it cannot do that it follows that it cannot be capable of mathematical nor, therefore, logical thinking. Which, I must say, sounds to me a very reasonable argument.

Podus replies that there are certainly straight lines in the construction of the artifact outside. Eptus says, if it is an artifact. Podas maintains that it definitely is an artifact and the existence of a creature which is just a sack full of tubes is riot reasonable in itself, let alone that it should generate reason.

And that, for the moment, is how things stand.

Report No. 3. All states and positions (except casualty) —No change. Casualty — one lost.

Little progress to report. One intelligent being of a kind has been discovered. Contact with it is not yet established. The term ’intelligent’ is here to be understood technically as being the power to influence reflexes to some extent.

Both ratiocination and perception are so restricted in the specimen observed as to make it appear unlikely that this can be the most advanced form here. The creature is hostile and has caused one casualty — Althis, engineer. Contact with more intelligent forms is still awaited.

Dear Zenn. Too much of the good things of life presents almost as many problems as too little. The temptation of such a wealth of easily assimilable silicates has proved too much for several of our party. A dozen have succumbed to it and indulged in what can only be described as an orgy of gormandizing a little west of our position.

When discovered, they had already created a pit of some size and had increased themselves beyond possibility of their re-entering the redoubt. So there they will have to stay and take their chance. I drew the attention of the rest to the result of such intemperance with, I hope, salutary effect. We shall see.

Meanwhile Podas has turned out to be astonishingly justified in some of his deductions. Eptus is a trifle piqued about this and doggedly insists upon applying reason in what seems to me — and to Podas — an unreasonable way.

As I pointed out to him, this is by no means a reasonable planet. After what we have seen of it I, for one, would be by no means surprised to find that two and two make seven by the local rules. To this Eptus obstinately asserts that reason is absolute and universal and therefore must hold good on even the craziest planet. All I can say to that is that it just doesn’t look that way from here.

Podas’ second specimen — the one taken from the disked artifact — after lying for some time doing nothing perceptible beyond expansion and contraction, then began for no discoverable reason to show signs of re-animation. It moved a little.

Then we observed that small flaps in the tegument —the permanent, not the dispensable tegument — covering the blunt projection were drawn back, uncovering a kind of lenses made, seemingly, of liquid. For a short while no more happened. But it was then that we realized that it did have intelligence of a kind.

We could feel its mind, which had apparently been absent or in some way diffused before, coalescing into some sort of form. Quite suddenly it raised its cylindrical main mass to the vertical on the rounded lower end — where, in this species, there is no tapered projection.

Immediate reflex concern filled its mind at the absence of the detachable teguments Podas had removed when examining it. This concern, however, was quickly replaced by another — an urgent fear of falling. It turned its lenses downward. There was immediate chaos in its mind but the dominant question seemed to be — why did it not drop to the ground some little distance beneath?

Well, why should it? It was supported on a solid block of boltik, which in turn rested on the solid boltik floor. This it presently discovered for itself by sliding one of its slender upper projections over the surface. At this its confusion grew rather than diminished.

Then we made the surprising discovery that its lenses were extraordinarily defective. Their range was so limited that they were quite insensitive not only to boltik but to all our other materials, including ourselves! It had no means of detecting them or us except by touch.

Consequently, what it was now asking itself was how it came to be suspended above the ground in the middle of a desert. It gave a long look at the damaged artifact outside.

It took hold of a part of itself, apparently with the intention of proving its own existence to itself.

Hostility is evidently instinctive to this species. Its weapon is concealed somewhere within it and is projected from an orifice a little below the lenses. It takes the form of a slot or a rough circle according to the force employed. It began to use it now, fortunately on a low power and register which caused us no more than a slight discomfort.

It moved one of its lower projections and found the edge of the block. Thence it felt downward to the floor. Assured by touch that that existed it put down the matching projection — but instead of bring down the other pair of projections, it remained balanced upon two!

At this point Eptus complained that he must be suffering from hallucinations. The creature was so manifestly top-heavy that it was against reason for it to remain stable in the position in which he now saw it.

We agreed in principle, but pointed out that we were seeing the same thing, so that we must accept its reality in spite of reason. Eptus declared that Podas must have overlooked a gyroscope somewhere in the tangle of tubes.

The creature remained vertical but stationary for a moment. It then began to make its way, by an ungainly swaying of its weight from one projection to the other, towards the disked artifact.

Not being able to perceive the wall of the redoubt it encountered it somewhat suddenly and with natural surprise. It continued its manifestations of hostility as it felt about the boltik surface in bewilderment. Then, discouraged, it turned back.

It was at that moment that it saw for the first time the other specimen which Podas’ investigations had reduced to a rather disorderly condition.

It stopped. Its lenses widened. The slot below them also widened. In that instant we learned how terrible the attack of these creatures can be. Although it could not see us it must have sensed in some way that we were there — we could feel its awareness of danger — so it gave its weapon full power.

By misfortune, I think, rather than by design, it had the range of one of us exactly. Poor Althis, the engineer, was shattered in a twinkling and fell in a pile of dust. Simultaneously a fissure occurred in one of the interior walls of the redoubt.

Luckily the sharp report of Althis’ disintegration startled the creature. It ceased the attack momentarily and stood looking round to see whence the sound had come. Before it could renew its attack we took action, holding the creature in such a way that it could not use its weapon.

Podas, with great presence of mind, cast a shape of boltik and cooled it — for we have found that the substance of these creatures calcines at quite low temperatures — and then fitted it to the creature in such a way that it could not open its slot and was thus virtually disarmed.

It is true that this did not pacify it, for it continued to attempt to use its weapon, but its power was reduced to mere nuisance value. When we released it, it struck at us with its upper projections although it could not see us.

In doing so it cut its soft tegument on Eptus and left a smear of its red liquid upon him. The sight of this moving as he moved seemed to worry it a great deal. Finding that its soft members suffered in this way when they encountered us, it desisted and turned its attention to trying to rid itself of Podus’ frame in order to attack us again.

This was, of course, far beyond its feeble power and in a short time it began to feel its way round the interior of the redoubts, apparently seeking for a way out and still making suppressed attempts to use its weapon.

It seemed also to have damaged its lenses in some way, for liquid from them was running down towards its slot. Its mind was so confused and disturbed that such thought processes as we could discern were by no means rational.

This was still going on when the approach of another disked artifact similar to the first was reported. It held to the mark in the same way but when it reached a point close behind the other it stopped. A part of it opened and a creature similar to our first specimen (i.e. the bifurcated, not the webbed type) emerged. It looked at the first artifact with obvious curiosity and peered within it.

Meanwhile, our specimen within the redoubt had also noticed the creature’s approach. It tried to move towards it but was, of course, held back by the redoubt wall. It stood there, obviously trying to bring its weapon into use against one of its own kind, which puzzled us very much.

Presently the creature outside looked up and saw the one inside. For a moment we expected an attack. Its lenses widened quite remarkably, its slot dropped wide open — but oddly enough nothing came from it immediately. When it did it was surprisingly weak and harmless.

“We should catch it before it attacks,” Eptus advised.

“It may not attack — unless we give it reason,” Podas replied.

“Reason — bah!” said Eptus, irritably.

A sudden confusion came over our specimen. It picked up a piece of the tegument which Podas had removed and held it against itself.

The creature outside cleared its mind somewhat and began to project thoughts at the other. We found that when it made this direct form of address we could follow it concisely.

It said, “What a shame you’re not real, honey. If mirages are like this, I’ve wasted my time on bathing beaches.”

Why it said this we do not understand. But we observed the very curious fact that though its mind was by no means hostile it was making low-power aggression with its slot. We also observed that our specimen did not receive the message. It was, in fact, simultaneously putting out a confused plea for help which the other was not receiving — or was only faintly aware of.

“This is curious indeed,” said Podas. “There seems to be no comprehension between the two — and ours is struggling hard to use its weapon, yet with no aggressive intent in its mind. Is it possible that these weapons have the secondary purpose of communication?”

“In this place anything is possible and everything is unlikely,” said Eptus. “I have reached the state where I am prepared to believe that they normally communicate by battering one another to death if you claim that it is so.”

The creature outside approached and encountered the wall of the redoubt. It rubbed the part of itself that had made contact, and exploded the wall with both upper projections. Its mind was full of astonishment.

Meanwhile the creature inside appeared to be trying to push itself through the wall. Finding that futile, it started to make signs with its projections. It indicated itself, the artifact and the first specimen.

When the outside creature saw the first specimen, which, as I have said Podas had left in a very untidy state, its mind hardened remarkably. It stepped back, and took something out of a slit in its tegument. It extended this object towards the redoubt. There was a crack — not dissimilar to the sound of a person disintegrating and therefore on a harmless range.

Something hit the wall and fell. The creature moved forward and picked up a round flat splash of metal. One could sense that it was extremely puzzled. Then it put its projections against the wall and felt carefully all the way along the rock on one side to that on the other.

It was dismayed. It shifted the tegument on its blunt projection and tried to aid its thoughts by stimulating the surface exposed. It went back to its artifact and returned holding a squat cylinder. This proved to contain a black viscous substance which it daubed on our wall. The marks are still there. From our side they appear so:

WAIT! I’LL BE BACK.

Our creature comprehended this and made a sign.

The other re-entered its artifact and went away.

And so the situation rests.

Eptus now agrees that the disked affair is an artifact but contends that so squashy and semi-liquid a creature as our specimens cannot have made anything so hard. Therefore, he argues, there must be another and doubtless higher type of intelligence here, housed in a harder form capable of dealing with such materials.

Podas is still trying to communicate with our specimen. It has folded itself up against an angle of the wall and floor where it again tries quite desperately at intervals to remove the boltik frame which prevents it from using its weapon.

He is convinced that the slot is somehow linked with its transmission of thought. Eptus says this is nonsense — it has become quite clear to him that our wall interrupts these creatures’ thought-waves, so that they fall back on a secondary form of communication by marks.

Podas objects that we were able to distinguish the outside creature’s thought waves — some of them very clearly. To which Eptus objects that it stands to reason that we are a great deal more sensitive than this soggy and revolting form of life.

Argument on such lines, it seems to me, not only can go on for some time but doubtless will.

Interim Report.

Dear Zenn, I have become worried by recent developments. The plain fact is that we do not know enough about these strange creatures here to keep the situation firmly in hand. There is now a crowd of them with their artifacts outside our east wall.

Several of our party have disintegrated and I fear that more may go at any moment. The creatures fling the most dangerous frequencies around, not only without effort but regardless of consequences.

Podas suggests that they may not know the danger in the frequencies since their pudgy bodies are unlikely to respond, that they are, in fact naturally sound-absorbent. Fantastic as this may seem Eptus is for once inclined to support him. It is also apparently endorsed by our attempts to beam them.

We directed a most powerful beam upon them and ran it through a range of highly destructive frequencies. One cannot say it was entirely without effect. For a moment they did check and we were gratified — we thought we were near a critical length.

They turned to look at one another with obvious puzzlement in their minds. Then they started to communicate — it does look as if Podas were right, for they invariably accompany thought projection with movement of their slots.

As far as we could interpret they were ’saying’ such things as, “Do you hear it too? ... It’s not just my ears, is it? ... Like a funny kind of music — only it isn’t music ... Not, not exactly music ... It’s very queer...”

That last seemed to be the most general reaction. So far from disintegrating them it did not seem, even at full power, to do more than disturb them slightly, and puzzle them. In other words this powerful weapon is useless against them. And we are left somewhat at a loss.

Not caring for the situation, I decided to anticipate my usual report time and give you this immediate current account.

The creature which had visited us previously returned accompanied by a number of similar artifacts. More followed later and indeed I can see still more approaching as I make this report.

Before that the creature we hold here had become listless. Podas was of the opinion that it required nourishment of some kind. Eptus put some silicates before it, but it was clearly uninterested. Podas, recalling its chemical basis, reduced some of the local growths to carbon, and offered it that — also without success.

We do not wish to cause the creature unnecessary distress but it is difficult to know what to do about it. We might try injecting some carbon into it if we were at all sure which of its several orifices it uses for purposes of assimilation.

However the return of the other creature stimulated it to some activity, so that it raised itself erect again.

Almost all the creatures that now arrived were the type with bifurcated teguments — a number of them being exactly similar in dark blue with metal attachments. Their reaction at the sight of our specimen was much the same as that of the other at first. It was then we discovered how rankly careless they are with their frequencies. Luckily however, all were below danger level.

Like the other they began by feeling their way along the wall of the redoubt. All their minds were and still are full of astonishment. Having discovered the length of the wall, they set about determining the height, and presently there were some moving about on the roof above us.

Nearly all of them were given to stimulating their blunt, upper-most projections where they appear to carry their minds, by friction of their upper limbs. They made use of several metallic implements experimentally but the metal was, of course, far too soft to make any impression on boltik. They seemed as much at a loss to deal with us as we with them.

But not all of them were employed in the same way. One in particular remained close to its artifact, holding a small object before its slot, and making frequencies at it. It was dear from its mind that it was describing what went on —but to whom or to what or why we cannot perceive.

Thinking we might learn something new from an animate specimen of this type, we opened our door. One of them discovered the entrance as it felt along and came in. Podas had a frame ready to prevent it making distressing frequencies and we shut the door again behind.

This seemed to cause some consternation to the others outside. By bringing the new specimen close to the other one, we established fairly conclusively the correctness of Podas’ theory of slot-communication in the species. Both struggled to use them but, failing, remained out of communication.

Our attention was diverted from this interesting discovery by the arrival of more artifacts. Some of these contained creatures with webbed teguments. These are now established as the more dangerous. One of them, immediately upon emerging, uttered a frequency which was extremely painful to many of us.

Unfortunately Ankis and Falmus happened to hold just that critical periodicity and disintegrated on the spot. The sharp report of their simultaneous demise startled all the creatures, who began ineffectually to make a search for the source of it.

We cannot learn much from our new specimen yet. Its mind is quite chaotic with alarm. It seems particularly disorganized by the sight of Podas’ work on the first specimen. I have already suggested to Podas that he should incinerate this untidy object. I shall now insist...

I have done so. Unfortunately the result does not seem to have had a sedative effect upon the minds of either of our other specimens.

We continue to be greatly puzzled by the creature which never stops emitting noises at its instrument. At first we heard it alone. Now, however, we hear it considerably amplified, issuing from several of the disked artifacts, How can this be? Why should it be? There is no sense in it. The creatures here are observing for themselves the very facts he is communicating. And it is very wearing to us.

A row of the creatures outside is now trying to communicate with our two specimens. They emit very strongly on a harmless though disagreeable frequency without success. Now they are making marks on white surfaces to which our two are responding by signs.

Another artifact with a lensed machine on top has arrived. It is directed at us by a creature standing behind it. It is quite ineffective, and does not trouble us at all.

Still more disked artifacts continue to arrive. All the creatures are puzzled over what to do next. In one small group they are discussing whether they shall bring something — something that disintegrates violently — I do not understand two specimens at the same time. One of the creatures exploring our roof has discovered the farther edge by falling off it. Others have come around to pick it up, so now they are on both sides of us.

Meanwhile, we are still trying to communicate with the specimens. Podas has arranged a battery of ten minds concentrating thought upon them simultaneously. The pressure is terrific — and entirely without effect. They are obtuse coarse hopeless clods as insensitive to thought as they are to sound.

One of the webbed creatures outside has just emitted a frequency which has destroyed three of our party in a twinkling. This is a shocking business. We are going to try our beams again.

They are surprised — but no more. The talking creature has stopped talking. It is holding up its instrument as though to catch our beams. What? Stop! Stop! STOP!

That was dreadful. Somehow our beams were coming back at us. There’s a fissure in our wall, cracks in our roof. Half a dozen more of us have disintegrated. I’m sure it was something to do with that talking creature and its instrument — but how? I don’t understand. Now it has started talking again.

All the creatures are trying to trace the sounds of the disintegrations. They are very bewildered.

The talking creature has stopped talking — that’s better. But the reproduced sound from the disked artifacts has not stopped! How? Oh, it must be amplifying another creature now, the resonances are different. Queer!

It’s the sound they make — but it means nothing. I can catch no thought-wave connected with it. It must originate somewhere else. I don’t understand ... There, it has stopped now, and a good thing, too.

The— Oh, merciful heaven, what a sound from those reproducers! What excruciation! An appalling sound! Rhythmic, pulsating, piercing, devilish! This is killing us, damn them! It’s — oh! — it’s shaking us to pieces—

Dreadful... Agonizing ... Oh — oh!

A couple of dozen have gone — Podas with them. Now Eptus—

The whole redoubt is trembling ... That frequency ... It’s almost critical... If it goes any higher ...

Too late! The boltik has shattered. It’s falling in powder round what’s left of us...

Oh! That sound — that awful sound! I can’t, oh, what agony! Almost on my frequency...

Now it’s — Oh! OH! — OH!