

Far Future Calling

By Olaf Stapledon

Revised & Adapted for the 21st Century by Michael Winn



Stapledon's play offers a fresh perspective on futurist thinking. Essentially, he suggests that, since we live in a universe in which meaningful distances in time and space are measured in billions of units, our own view of the future should be consistent with this scale.

The pages below is the script as Stapledon wrote it. Music and sound cues have not yet been added, and I will be soon be posting our revision with changes to make it consistent with current science.

Far Future Calling

By Olaf Stapledon, 1931

Written shortly after publication of Stapledon's Last and First Men in 1930, he wrote this play at the request of the BBC and it is a summary of this book. The studio in Savoy Hill where the play is set was the BBC's home at that time. However, was never produced. This script is the most complete one available, and it includes a scene at the end that was not intended for the final version.

Characters:

AN ACTOR, at first impersonating a man of A.D. 2500, but subsequently revealed as a contemporary English-man. Light male voice.

AN ACTRESS, at first impersonating a woman of A.D. 2500, but subsequently revealed as a contemporary Englishwoman. Light female voice.

A FUTURE MAN, speaking from two billion years hence. Heavy male voice.

A FUTURE WOMAN, speaking from two billion years hence. Heavy female voice. (Contralto)

MINOR PARTS:

Two Childlike Voices

A Man's Voice, a Woman's Voice, and a Child's Voice

A Harsh Voice

[A Second Future Man's Voice and a Second Future Woman's Voice]

ACTION AND SCENE

The action of the play takes place in a studio in Savoy Hill.

In the play, a play is being broadcast.

ACTOR (with American accent). Hullo 1931! That you? A.D. 2500 calling. I've got to tell you a bit about things in my day, 500 years after yours. I'll start right in by saying that everything with us is just about 200% better than with you. We're far more intelligent, and far more vital. We gotta be, to stand the racket. And we're 163% more spiritual too, let me tell you. Everyone of our churches is nearly twice as beautiful and many times as high as your Saint Paul's Cathedral. In fact everything of ours is much bigger and faster than every- thing of yours, including our minds. And-gosh, here's one of my wives butting in. Now then Bobo, just blow a kiss into the microphone and quit.

ACTRESS (with American accent). Hullo duckies! (Sound of a kiss) Say... Are you the Crinoline Period? Or was it bustles, or harems, or pajamas, or cute little skirts? I was never any good at history. You ought to see my latest gown. The train of it's so long I've gotta have two gasoline motors to carry it. And the collar comes right up to the eyes.

ACTOR. That's enough, Bobo. Say, you prehistoric Britishers, What price our English idiom? We had to learn it up specially to communicate with you guys, in my timewe all speak American of course, modern American, I mean. Guess your Americans couldn't understand us when we're talking together, (Pause) Now boys, I gotta introduce you to a lot of our important personages. And the first here's the President of the World Republic. (Announcing) His Supreme Superlativity will now-

THE FUTURE MAN. Stop! Stop this play-acting!

ACTOR (with some hesitation), His Supreme Superl--

FUTURE MAN (with authority). Stop, I say!

ACTOR (under his breath, relapsing into English accent). Who on earth's that fool? Can't someone, muzzle him? (Continues his part) His Supreme Su--

FUTURE MAN (very loud). Silence! No more of that farce! You're a twentieth century Englishman, engaged by the BBC to broadcast in a play which I say shall not proceed.

ACTOR. Well of all the-

ACTRESS (under her breath). They won't hear him, Billy. He's not even in the room. Better get on with the stuff. The red light's still on.

ACTOR. His Supr-

FUTURE MAN. Silence! All you men and women of the planet Earth who happen to be listening in tonight, well! Something very strange is happening in this studio in Savoy Hill, something you would call incredible.

ACTOR. Oh! Why don't they kick him out? We'll lose our fees if this goes on. Let's stop him ourselves anyhow.

FUTURE MAN. You can't. You're paralyzed.

ACTRESS. It's true! I can't move. (Screams)

ACTOR (gasping). Nor can I. Why don't they switch us off?

FUTURE MAN. They can't. I've seen to that.

ACTOR. You'll be sorry for this prank afterwards, my man.

FUTURE MAN (soothingly). Now be calm and listen. Your play-acting is over for tonight. England is going to have something else. Instead of that cheap fantasy of five hundred years hence. The listeners shall hear the actual voice of a future incomparably more remote. I am speaking to you out of an age two thousand million years after your day. Realize what that means. The gulf that divides us is two thousand times wider than that which divides you from the ape-men of the past.

ACTOR. The man's mad. If I could reach the window. I'd call the police. But I can't move. I can't move.

ACTRESS (hysterically). I've got cramp all over.

ACTOR. It's probably some damned young undergraduate playing a practical joke on the BBC.

ACTRESS. Oh! I'm sure this chair's electric.

ACTOR. Some blasted young- (Chokes)

ACTRESS screams and chokes.

FUTURE MAN. I must paralyze your speech organs too, I see, till I need you. Now we can proceed. (Pause) Members of the First Human Species I, a member of the Eighteenth Human Species, address you

across the ages. During the eons which have passed between your day and mine, man has suffered (or will suffer, if you prefer it) strange vicissitudes of fortune. Time after time he is to be seen struggling out of the darkness of the beast into the half light that you call human nature. Again and again, while he is painfully groping toward something better still, accident or his own folly crushes him down once more into mere animality. His worldwide organization crumbles and vanishes. His cities are swallowed up in jungle. All the hard-won treasures of the spirit are lost and utterly forgotten. For eons there are no men at all, but only degenerate subhuman beasts.

But again and again man wakes, and laboriously comes once more to be master of his little planet. Again and again he begins even to remake his own nature for more glorious life. But always the venture ends in disaster. Rarely, no more than once or twice in all his long history, he sees clearly what he should be doing with himself. But while he is still in the early stages of his profound remaking, some unforeseeable catastrophe wrecks him. Then at length, after nearly two thousand million years, the spirit of man awakens fully in the Eighteenth Human Species, my own kind. But for a moment only. (Pause) Fellow men and women (for such you are, in spite of your remoteness and your simplicity), you can hear me, but not see me. Those present in this room shall see me, and my world; but you others, scattered up and down England, will only hear. These two shall tell you what they see. Actor Billy and Actress Joan, when you are willing to cooperate, you will find you can speak.

ACTRESS (emits a shuddering sigh). Anything, so long as you will stop freezing up my throat.

ACTOR (after a deep breath). Get on with your dope then, whatever it is. But don't expect me to believe what you say. I'm a skeptic. But I'll keep my thoughts to myself.

FUTURE MAN. Your thoughts to yourself! I watch all your thoughts. I know more about them than you know yourself. For instance yesterday-

ACTOR (challenging). What do you mean?

FUTURE MAN. You thought, "If only she would die."

ACTOR (outraged). No, I did not. (Pause) Oh, my God! Get out of my mind, whatever you are, get out.

ACTRESS (laughing nervously). It must be God talking. He seems to know us better than we know ourselves.

FUTURE MAN. Not God, but your own remote descendant. I know your thoughts, because I am one of those whose work it is to study your period. I study your minds from within. How I laugh sometimes at all your follies and meannesses! And yet, how I come to love you, pathetic half-formed beings that you are, tortured by the discrepancies of your own nature, too subtle to be beast, too blind and weak to be truly man.

ACTRESS. But we are man.

FUTURE MAN. Do you really think that all your pettiness is essential to human nature? With us it is easy and natural to think straight and act straight, always; but you have to struggle not to be blockheads and rogues. And when you fail, as you most often do, you are tortured with shame. Yet you are bound to fail. Selfishness is an insanity inherent in you. But in my world there is no such thing as selfishness.

ACTOR. Utopia, what? How tedious! we're not so perfect here.

FUTURE MAN. No, not Utopia. Though we have outgrown the very primitive troubles that beset you, we have others. Two of them I think you could understand.

(Pause)

ACTOR. Well?

FUTURE MAN. Well, in the first place, our whole lovely world, and ourselves in it, will very soon be destroyed. A curious astronomical event will shortly bring about the end of the solar system, and of man.

ACTOR. The universe is going to get the human bug out of its flesh at last, is it?

FUTURE MAN. Just so. The end is much nearer than we expected. Man is like a tree, two thousand million years old. The seed fell upon good soil, but the seedling was nipped by frosts. It struggled, and became a sapling. Locusts stripped it, but still it grew. Beasts trampled it down, but it recovered. It was crooked, stunted, but still it had promise. It strove to put forth blossom; caterpillars devoured its treasure again and again. At last good fortune befell it. Strong and broad it became, and triumphantly covered itself with bloom. But now in my own day comes the final catastrophe. The tree's whole world will turn to fire.

ACTOR. Will you be alive when the trouble begins?

FUTURE MAN. Yes. It is due in a few thousand years, and we are a long-lived race. (Pause) Our second trouble comes to us from the past. Though our own condition is one of glorious fulfillment and joy, we cannot forget, we must not forget, the despair and agony of past aeons.

ACTRESS. But if you are happy yourselves, you need not bother about a past that is dead and gone.

FUTURE MAN. Stupid child! Are you dead and gone? You are past, remember; do you therefore not matter?

ACTRESS. To myself, now; but not to you, then.

FUTURE MAN. Last week I watched you miss an important appointment by taking the wrong bus. When you got home, your face was all spoilt with tears. Well, do you suppose your trouble didn't concern me, just because you were ancient history? To the developed mind, sorrow is sorrow, however remote the sufferer. Almost I chose to tamper with the order of the past by warning you, by slipping a doubt into your mind about that bus.

ACTOR (knowingly). I want to ask one question.

FUTURE MAN. Do.

ACTOR. If you are in the future, she is past, as far as you are concerned. Well, the past is what it is, fixed like a fly in amber. The future can't conceivably alter it. Then how could you possibly whisper a doubt to her? Or for that matter, how could you possibly interfere with us tonight? (Laughs with relief)

FUTURE MAN. I am not imprisoned in a single fleeting moment of time, as you are. In a limited manner, I have the freedom of eternity. It is from eternity, not from the future merely, that I influence you. My home is in the future; but I can visit your age and be contemporary with you. And it is as your contemporary that I affect your minds.

ACTOR (with a snort). I know a young Cambridge philosopher who could teach you a thing or two, my friend.

FUTURE MAN: I know him too, a bright young man, and invaluable in your muddle-headed age. Splendidly loyal to the intellect. But limited.

ACTRESS. Tell me. Now that you find your world is going to be destroyed, you surely don't worry much about the past, do you?

FUTURE MAN. You are mistaken. The destruction of our world we have learned to accept. We even exult in it, as the fitting climax of the brief music that is Man. It is our

privilege so to admire the music that we can rise above our own misfortune, and exult in our own tragedy. But the pain and misery of all you poor blind children in the past is not transfigured in your minds by any such delight. It is your blindness, your musical deafness, so to speak, that plucks at our hearts.

ACTOR. Assuming that all this fantastic talk is true, then tell me this. Why do you interfere with us like this?

FUTURE MAN. Chiefly because we love you, and seek to help you. Because you are in darkness, and we are in light, and we would give you something of our vision.

THE FUTURE WOMAN. Too much talking! Let us show ourselves. The contact will not last long.

FUTURE MAN. Yes. (Pause) Men and women of England! These two in the room are now going to use their eyes and tell you what they see.

(Pause)

ACTRESS. I think I see a tall shadow. It's getting clearer.

ACTOR. I see a tall green-bronze thing, huge.

ACTRESS. Oh, it's a monster, not a man at all. And yet it is a man. But the eyes! Smouldering red!

ACTOR. A sort of dark pillar carved by savages to look like a god. The great columnar legs! As if they had to support a cathedral roof! The thighs! Stark naked, too.

ACTRESS. Look at its face, Billy. Man, and yet not man.

ACTOR. Something saurian about it. Something primitive, but vital. Subtle, too. Probably, devilishly intelligent.

ACTRESS. Face muscles all rippling with expression-- uncouth expression, but--significant, and--victorious. The great bald dome of its head! A hideous monster, and yet beautiful. Fancy my calling a hideous monster beautiful! But it is, isn't it, Billy?

ACTOR. You may think so, and perhaps I do in a way; but most people would call it just revolting, such a perplexing mixture of man and beast.

ACTRESS. And god.

FUTURE MAN. No, silly child. Remember you are my immensely-great-great-grandmother.

ACTRESS. The immensely-great-great-grandmother of a god!

FUTURE WOMAN. Now you shall see another of your immensely-great-great-grandchildren.

ACTRESS. I see a glowing mist beside him. It's getting clearer. Warm gold.

ACTOR. Another grotesque. Obviously female, this one. A sort of female obelisk, not to say basilisk. Oh woman, that you should ever be so distorted!

FUTURE MAN (laughing). That your women should ever give rise to loveliness such as this! To me her whole form is eloquent. Every curve sings. She is the perfection of lithe grace. And her face is just now alive with gentle, teasing merriment.

ACTOR. If Frankenstein should have a nightmare, it might be like this creature.

FUTURE WOMAN laughs with relish.

ACTRESS. Billy, don't! She is monstrous, like a rock in sunlight. But I almost see her as he does. Perhaps Frankenstein would appreciate her fully. So startlingly alive! So--liberated! So--rich, fulfilled, and yet so fresh. She can't be very old.

FUTURE WOMAN. Forty thousand years or so, Grannie.

ACTOR. Fancy a nightmare lasting that long!

ACTRESS. Billy, behave! Oh, she's fading away. She must be annoyed.

FUTURE WOMAN. Annoyed? Delighted. But our contact is failing.

FUTURE MAN. It is difficult for us to keep in touch with you. I had better explain. We cannot really take you into the future, of course; but we ourselves can explore all the time that to us is past, and we can project our experiences into your minds, to some extent, but insecurely. We lend wings to your imagination, and truthfulness also. We make you imagine things that will really be. But you are simple minds, and we cannot make you see, or understand, or admire, what is beyond your capacity.

(A faint sound of wind and waves, gradually increasing)

ACTRESS. Oh, you're both fading out altogether. How can we help to keep you?

ACTOR. What's that noise, like wind?

(The sounds have increased to the noise of a storm. Distant voices)

FUTURE MAN (rather distant). A temporary interruption. We'll get rid of it soon. You see, since the whole process is mental, some casual association may tangle us up with events anywhere in history.

FUTURE WOMAN. It's something like listening in to radio messages. Our selectivity is not quite good enough to prevent interference.

FUTURE MAN. And so at any moment we may find that we have flown millions of years from our course.

(Storm recurs. Crashing of waves on a rocky coast)

FUTURE WOMAN. It sounds typical of man's second home, the planet Venus. Human voices are beginning to come through.

FIRST CHILDLIKE VOICE (distant, wailing, yet exultant):My wings fail! My wings fail! I faint! I fall!

FUTURE MAN. It is some obscure incident on the Planet Venus. During that epoch halfway between your age and ours, the human organism was adapted for aerial life. It was almost bat-like, and no bigger than an eagle. There was a strange aerial civilization, with its bases on the islands of the tempestuous oceanic planet.

FIRST CHILDLIKE VOICE (gasping). Farewell-best-loved one! Farewell! The song, that my life was, is done. Glad death!

SECOND CHILDLIKE VOICE. Farewell! Dear beautiful one, I praise the stars for the song's end. Farewell!

FUTURE MAN. Strange lyrical child-men and child- women! They delighted in

everything, even grief and death, so long as they were on the wing. But on the ground, they soon lost the ecstasy.

ACTOR (suspiciously). Kindly tell me how these creatures came to be talking English?

FUTURE MAN. You forget that you are hearing them through my mind. I hear them directly, and understand them; and my understanding of them translates itself in your minds into English.

ACTRESS. If only we could see them.

FUTURE MAN. You shall.

(Storm increases)

ACTRESS. I see movement, flying clouds, great white waves.

ACTOR. Dashing against a cliff, climbing and falling like caged beasts.

ACTRESS. Something on a rock, battered by the sea. Oh, poor thing, she's broken, done for, but still struggling.

ACTOR. Great silken membranous wings, all torn and bleeding. Face almost human, seal-like.

ACTRESS. But look at the expression! Gasping for breath, and yet-exultant. Tortured, and yet brilliant with joy.

FUTURE MAN. The ecstasy of flight is still on her, but it will fail soon, and leave her just a shattered animal.

ACTOR. Look! From the air, another of them, swooping to her.

ACTRESS. He's going to drag her clear of the waves. (Cry of horror) Oh! He's pushing her down. She's gone.

ACTOR. And now he's soaring. Pleased with his work, too!

SECOND CHILDLIKE VOICE. Farewell, loveliest of life-songs; now finished forever.

FUTURE MAN. He saved her by killing her, saved her from losing the aerial ecstasy.

ACTRESS. Have you ever that ecstasy?

FUTURE WOMAN. We have it always, but with a difference.

FUTURE MAN. Explanation would take too long. We must leave these winged children, and go further into the future, if we can.

(Pause)

ACTOR. It's all fading again. Here are our two grotesque friends once more. (Storm fades and ceases) Madam, I apologize for the rude things I said about you. I begin to see more in you. You're not a nightmare, but Eve in a crooked yellow mirror.

ACTRESS. Billy!

FUTURE WOMAN (laughing). And you, dear Billy, are not a leggy spider, as you seemed to me at first, but just a spider monkey.

ACTOR. Do you have spider monkeys in your world?

FUTURE WOMAN. No, but it is the business of archaeologists like us to know your world well.

ACTRESS. Do you like our world?

FUTURE WOMAN. As you like the nursery, with all its folly and timorousness, and innocent blind cruelty.

FUTURE MAN. In some ways it is less like a nursery than a jungle, with man as the king of beasts.

FUTURE WOMAN. Or with men as the monkeys in the treetops. Only they have stolen a few boxes of matches from the gods. They've terrified all the beasts by dropping lighted matches on them. And now their chief joy is to set fire to each other's tails, or roast each other alive. Soon there'll be a forest fire.

ACTOR. Is that how you regard us?

FUTURE WOMAN. Yes. But not only that way.

ACTRESS. Will they ever burn the forest down?

FUTURE MAN. Many times. But it grows again. After it has been burnt flat, it lies fallow for ages; and then it sprouts. And at last more monkeys and more matches.

(Sound of a shell screaming, followed by a dull bang)

ACTOR. What's that? Why, you're fading out again. What's happening?

(Another shell screams, and dully explodes)

A MAN'S VOICE (Cockney accent). Look out, that's gas. Gas in London! Curse the devils! Masks on, masks on, everyone. (Coughs and chokes)

A WOMAN'S VOICE (Cockney accent). Where's the child? Quick, Freddy!

CHILD'S VOICE screams, coughs, and chokes.

ACTOR. What's all this?

FUTURE MAN. It sounds like one of the wars that came shortly after your time. (Pause)
Now we'll try again.

ACTOR. You're both visible again. I'm almost glad to see you.

ACTRESS. There's something else, too, a man, or a tower, very misty.

ACTOR. Another of those dome-headed fellows. What great brains they must have!

ACTRESS. Oh, but it's fading again. You're fading yourselves.

FUTURE WOMAN. Another interference, I'm afraid.

ACTOR. There's a tower again, a squat grey turret, this time, like a "pillbox" of war days.

ACTRESS. And little wiry brown people running about.

FUTURE WOMAN. It must be one of the "Great Brains" and his slaves.

FUTURE MAN. Yes. There was a time, while man was still on the earth, when he conceived the fantastic aim of producing a human type that should be all brain. Unfortunately the plan succeeded. The turret that you see is the artificial cranium of a single huge brain. The building beside it holds the laboratory that digests its food, the pump that circulates blood through it, and the mechanism for oxidizing the blood. The brain itself develops from a half-natural, half-artificial human ovum.

ACTRESS. Horrible!

ACTOR. A little brown savage has opened the door of the turret and gone in.

FUTURE MAN. One of the brain's personal slaves. He has to keep an eye on the extremely complicated system of functions inside, some natural, some artificial.

ACTRESS. Two huge proboscises are stretching out of the side of the tower, and bending about.

FUTURE MAN. A pair of the creature's eyes. He has them on stalks, like a snail.

ACTOR. There's something else sticking out now. A huge pair of arms.

FUTURE MAN. His only natural limbs. Even the speech organs are artificial.

ACTRESS. The arms are reaching out toward that cowering slave.

AN EXTREMELY HARSH VOICE (threatening, hypnotic). Come here!

ACTRESS. He's got the poor wretch. (Screams) Oh! Horrible!

ACTOR. He's pulled the slave's head off, and flung body and head away.

HARSH VOICE. Clean up this mess! Quick! And remember, all of you, the fate of a butterfingers.

ACTOR. The scene is fading away again.

ACTRESS. Yes, thank God.

FUTURE MAN. These Great Brains in their turrets speedily dominated the natural men who had created them. For many thousands of years, turrets such as the one you have just seen were dotted about in all parts of the earth. These were highly intelligent beings, but without any emotional life, save passionate curiosity. Their whole world-society was organized for intellectual advancement. The natural species became mere living robots, performing menial service for them.

FUTURE WOMAN. But at last these purely intellectual monsters were exterminated by a nobler and more natural kind of man, whom they themselves had helped to produce.

ACTOR. How is it that you, who come after these grotesques, these turrets and these bats, are yet more or less like ourselves?

FUTURE MAN. There have been many brief aberrations from the erect biped form, but on the whole the shape that is common to ourselves and you has served man best.

FUTURE WOMAN. It is certainly matter for surprise that after two thousand million years the Last Men should be recognizably of the same type as the First Men.

ACTOR. Is that what you call us, the First Men?

FUTURE MAN. Of course. That is what you are, if you should be called men at all. And you really are human after all, though so terribly weak and blind.

FUTURE WOMAN. The contact won't last much longer. We must get our own world through to them somehow.

ACTOR. What is your own world then, not Earth, not Venus?

FUTURE MAN. The very distant planet that you call Neptune.

ACTOR. Our astronomers declare that on Neptune life, such as we know, is impossible.

FUTURE MAN. They are right. Life, such as you know. If you were to be transported there actually, not merely in imagination, you would very soon die. The composition of our air would be intolerable to your lungs. You would choke and faint. And the mere weight of our deep atmosphere would crush your tissues as though you had sunk to the bottom of the ocean. Even if by some miracle you could overcome these difficulties, you would be overwhelmed by the weight of your own feeble bodies, small though you are.

ACTOR. And no doubt in a world so far from the sun, the climate must be inconceivably cold.

FUTURE MAN. No, you would find it too hot; for long ago the sun's bulk and heat were immensely increased by a collision.

FUTURE WOMAN. Too much talking again! We must hurry on with our work.

FUTURE MAN. Yes. (Pause) Let us try an astronomical approach to our goal. In that way, we may perhaps avoid interferences.

(Pause)

(A deep, low buzzing, like an electric motor, begins faintly, but gradually increases)

ACTOR. Everything is going dark. Moonlight, is it? In a room. A glint of light on bits of metal.

ACTRESS. Oh, look down, Billy! Stars down below us!

ACTOR (gasps). It must be a reflection. But overhead all is dark. Why, it's a great window! But what has happened to gravity? A window in the floor, and the starry sky below! It makes one dizzy.

FUTURE MAN. You are out in space, in one of our ether-ships, approaching Neptune from Jupiter. She has been gathering the sun-products which we cultivate on that roasting planet for food. Her crew, some four thousand men and women, have had many months of labour, trawling the surface of Jupiter, keeping always on the shady side of the globe. They will be glad to get home.

FUTURE WOMAN. You are now in an observation room in the bottom of the hull, looking at the stars.

ACTOR. The constellations all seem unfamiliar.

FUTURE WOMAN. Even the constellations change in two thousand million years.

FUTURE MAN. Look behind you, and down through the next window.

ACTRESS (Gasp of surprise)

ACTOR. An immense moon below us, but coloured. A blinding spot of light in the middle of it.

ACTRESS. It's a hundred times too big for the moon, or too near.

FUTURE MAN. It's the planet Neptune. The spot of light is the sun's reflection in the ocean.

ACTOR. Where is the sun?

FUTURE MAN. Overhead, of course. The ship's bulk eclipses him from us.

(Distant music, the dance of supermen)

ACTOR. What's that?

FUTURE WOMAN. Merriment afoot somewhere in the ship. Probably they are going to dance.

ACTRESS. A ballroom in the sky!

ACTOR. Those white tracts on the planet are clouds, I suppose?

FUTURE MAN. Yes, and the blue-grey is sea. The greens and browns and golds and rusty reds are land.

ACTRESS. It's like a huge opal, or mother-of-pearl.

FUTURE MAN. Our ship is still a long way from port; and though she moves much faster than the planets move, she will take some time yet. Therefore, if we want to observe the planet from 'low altitudes, we must hurry through the intervening period. .

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FUTURE WOMAN. Listen! I hear voices. Wait a moment longer. Some of the crew are coming here.

(Metallic sound of a door opening and shutting, and of low, rippling laughter, which increases as the door opens)

ACTRESS. Two figures dimly visible. Very close together.

ACTOR. Spooning, in fact. I say, we're eavesdropping.

SECOND FUTURE WOMAN. My dear, you didn't really think I had changed my mind, did you? I couldn't come earlier.

SECOND FUTURE MAN. I don't know what I thought. But you're here, oh my dear, my dear!

SECOND FUTURE WOMAN (laughing and gasping). Don't, you're hurting, you old python!

SECOND FUTURE MAN. How many times, in all the ages, in all the worlds, has this thing happened! She and He, alone!

SECOND FUTURE WOMAN. How many times, after long seeking, they have found. And yet I think they never really found till now.

SECOND FUTURE MAN. I think he never found such loveliness. But something he always found.

SECOND FUTURE WOMAN. And now, we--find all.

SECOND FUTURE MAN. And down below, and all around, a million million stars! And the old world we live in, the great pearl we live on!

SECOND FUTURE WOMAN. It will be a new world for us, together.

SECOND FUTURE MAN. A new world. (Pause) And soon, the end of the world.

SECOND FUTURE WOMAN (with unsteady voice). In a few thousand years, they say.

SECOND FUTURE MAN. And then--first, intolerable weather, roasting weather. Then, disintegration of all things human. Fiercer and fiercer heat, till the whole world smoulders. At last, nothing but white-hot gas.

SECOND FUTURE WOMAN (low). We will hold together till we are one flame.

SECOND FUTURE MAN (suddenly wild). To cast such a world, such a pearl, into the fire! Such a world of spirits and sweet flesh.

SECOND FUTURE WOMAN. Oh! Don't!

SECOND FUTURE MAN (resuming in a quiet voice). No! Strange, how one's thoughts sometimes slip back into the old bad ways! As though for a moment we were to lose sight of the great Beauty, and be like the blind spirits of the past.

SECOND FUTURE WOMAN. When the end begins, shall we still see the great Beauty? Shall we see it even in the fire?

SECOND FUTURE MAN. Who knows? But we see

(Pause)

FIRST FUTURE MAN. These lovers are keeping us too long. We must accelerate events now, so that we may watch the ship make port.

(Music and the buzzing fade)

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ACTOR. The planet is getting bigger.

ACTRESS. Swelling like a child's balloon when you blow into it.

ACTOR. It is filling the whole window now. The room is bright with reflected sunlight.

ACTRESS. Seas, continents, and cloud tracts are streaming beneath us.

ACTOR. The great planet rotates, or we travel round it. And down, down!

ACTRESS. Odd little white spikes scattered over the land, some of them sticking up through the cloud.

ACTOR. In some places the surface of the planet is like the chin of an old man who needs a shave.

ACTRESS. Yes, they're like sparse bristles, mostly white. What are they?

FUTURE MAN. Buildings, skyscrapers, if you like.

ACTOR. But they must be gigantic, higher than mountains.

FUTURE MAN. They are. In spite of our violent gravitation, we build them many miles high, with the aid of artificial atoms.

ACTRESS. Your atmosphere is wonderfully clear.

FUTURE WOMAN. Yet it is very deep and very dense. We keep it clear, so that we may watch the stars.

ACTRESS. No smoke anywhere. Apparently no towns, but surely you have towns.

FUTURE WOMAN. Towns? No. But presently you will see little private houses scattered over the countryside, around the feet of the public buildings.

ACTOR. There's a huge dark tract with no bristles.

FUTURE MAN. A reserved wild tract, largely jungle, a holiday land.

ACTRESS. There's something moving, like microscopic fish over the bottom of a pool.

FUTURE MAN. An airship, far below us.

(Sound of wind, increasing rapidly, then fading out)

FUTURE MAN. We have entered the atmosphere. The ship slows now, lest her surface should fuse, with the friction of the air.

ACTRESS. The streaming lands below are slowing too.

FUTURE MAN. We are keeping pace with the planet's rotation, approximately.

ACTOR. A great green country is opening out under us, and there's sea ahead.

ACTRESS. Only three of the "bristles" are in sight, and they have become gigantic pillars.

ACTOR. We're nearing one of them, a geometrical Matterhorn of architecture, but more slender, and surely far higher.

ACTRESS. More like Cleopatra's needle magnified thousands of times. Or a bunch of such needles, or a cluster of huge crystals. White on top, like snow.

FUTURE WOMAN. It is snow. Naturally, at that height.

ACTOR. Now we're dropping below the top of it and leaving it behind. Ahead, a great rectangular arm of the sea.

ACTRESS. What are those little white points on the green, like sheep?

FUTURE MAN. Those are the private houses, visible at last.

ACTOR. Now we're nearing another building, a sort of Crystal Palace, this one, all window.

ACTRESS. Look! Small insect things darting along toward it.

FUTURE MAN. Flying boats. If you look carefully as we approach, you will see something like a swarm of gnats round the building.

ACTOR. I see nothing.

ACTRESS. Nor I. (Pause) Oh, yes! Motes of dust! What are they?

FUTURE MAN. Individual men and women flying.

ACTOR. But you have no wings.

FUTURE MAN. No, but for minor flights we use flying-suits, equipped with subatomic power units. With these we swim in the air.

ACTOR. Now we're over the sea, and dropping toward it. A strange sea, smooth as glass. Look! There's something moving in it, a huge black thing, like a half-revealed leviathan, right below us, swimming along with us.

FUTURE MAN. The reflection of the ship herself on the smooth sea. Watch how it swells as we descend.

ACTRESS. But it's beginning to churn up the sea. What's happening?

FUTURE MAN. No, we are churning up the sea with the pressure of our power units. It is as though the ship were thrusting against the water with her fields of force, to break her fall.

ACTRESS (nervously). Isn't it time we moved from this spot?

FUTURE WOMAN. We are quite safe here. The ship will settle as gently as a gull.

FUTURE MAN. Yes, but now that you have had a general view of our planet, we will shift the scene.

(Pause)

ACTRESS. Everything is fading again. What now?

ACTOR. Before we have any more adventures, I should like to ask another question. You say these great buildings are "public" buildings. But how can you need so many? What are they all?

FUTURE MAN. Just laboratories, libraries, observatories, factories, and so on. Many of them serve purposes which you could not understand. Observatories are particularly common, since our culture is essentially astronomical. For you, astronomy is a very remote subject. It has almost no bearing on your daily life. But for us it is concrete, urgent. All the most important activities of the race depend upon astronomy.

FUTURE WOMAN. You have not noticed, by the way, that we have an eye on the crown of the head. We call it the astronomical eye. It can be projected like a minute but very efficient telescope. With it we perceive almost as much detail in the heavens as your astronomers infer from data given by their instruments.

ACTOR. But what practical significance has astronomy for you?

FUTURE MAN. We get most of our food from Jupiter, and minerals from other planets. But, more important, astronomical knowledge and perception moulds every individual mind. It affords, so to speak, the great "out-of-doors," in contrast with the cozy "indoor" experience of our planet's surface.

FUTURE WOMAN. And now that we know that our world is about to be destroyed, one of our two great aims is to discover in some corner of the galaxy a sphere wherein we may establish a seed of life to flourish when man is no more.

ACTOR. And the other aim?

FUTURE MAN. To know fully the human past, and help it.

ACTOR. Strange beings! Do you all agree about these aims? Have you no social discords?

FUTURE MAN. No. Nor any government, in your sense. In that respect we are more like the bees than you.

ACTRESS. It is growing light overhead.

ACTOR. Sky again. Blue, but an unearthly green blue.

ACTRESS. We are standing on the edge of a ghastly precipice. It drops sheer for miles. At the bottom a vast drab-coloured plain, stretching to the horizon.

FUTURE MAN. We are on top of one of the great buildings. Now we must aid your sight. You will find that if you look intently at any distant object, your eyes will act as telescopes. The object that you are looking at will seem to approach and enlarge. Now look carefully at some point on the plain.

ACTRESS. Just an even brown grey. Oh no, it is very finely speckled.

ACTOR. The speckles are enlarging themselves, as he said they would.

ACTRESS. Oh Billy, they're people! The whole plain is packed with human beings wherever you look. Faces, faces, faces. Myriads of them! Grains of sand in a desert! Cells in the leaves of a forest, or in the flesh of some very great beast.

ACTOR. Surely the whole population of your world must be here. What are they doing? They seem to be waiting for something to happen.

FUTURE MAN. Not the whole population of our world by a very long way. Scattered over the planet at this moment there are thousands of groups such as this that you see now.

ACTRESS. Then what is it all about? Do they expect to see something, or is it a religious service, or what?

FUTURE MAN. That question is rather hard to answer. We have many powers which have no counterpart in your nature. The most important of them is at work now. By means of a special kind of telepathic intercourse, our individual minds can come together to give birth to a single racial mind. In this strange experience each of us wakes up, so to speak, to discover that he is the mind of the race. He sees with all eyes, and touches with all hands and feet. In fact he has all the sense perceptions of the whole race. Thus, for instance, he discovers that he is embracing the whole planet through the feet of all men and women.

FUTURE WOMAN. He finds himself holding it, so to speak, as you might hold a ball in the hand. And, through all the observatories at once, he sees the stars, some of them standing visibly out, stereoscopically, in front of the rest.

FUTURE MAN. He also experiences the emotions and desires of all men and women, all hungers and loves and fears. And over and above this great expansion of perception and desire, he enters into an entirely new order of experience. He gains an insight into the nature of things and an appreciation of the tragic beauty of existence, which were quite impossible to him as a separate individual. Many metaphysical

problems become clear to him; and also he achieves what we regard as the supreme act of the spirit, an ecstatic but intellectual love of the cosmos.

FUTURE WOMAN. What you see now is one group, out of many, waiting for this glorious enlightenment to begin. They seem to be watching for a signal, but in reality the signal is an invisible telepathic message which will issue from the summit of this building, and from others in all parts of the world.

FUTURE MAN. Look more closely at them, and say what you see.

ACTOR. You say they are all men and women, but really they seem to be many kinds of animals. Of course, they are all erect bipeds, but there the similarity ends. They are of all sorts of sizes and colours and shapes.

ACTRESS. Most of them are naked, but some seem to be wearing furs.

FUTURE WOMAN. It is their own fur that they are wearing. We are all of one human species, but we are a very variable species, far more variable even than your terrestrial dog. And the diversity of our bodies is no greater than the diversity of our minds. You primitive creatures seem to us tediously similar, like sheep.

FUTURE MAN. And yet in spite of our diversity, we can understand one another and sympathize with one another to an extent impossible to you. But what more do you see?

ACTOR. Each of these weird beings has something like a mackintosh hanging over one arm.

FUTURE MAN. The flying-suit in which he came, and will presently depart.

ACTRESS. All the faces are turned in our direction, as if they expected us to make a speech.

FUTURE MAN. We are near the centre of interest, the summit of this building.

ACTRESS. Strange faces! So unlike, even at a first glance.

ACTOR. Alike only in being animal faces-horse-like, kangaroo-like, leonine, feline, yes and reptilian.

ACTRESS. And yet quite definitely human-or god-like. How is it that you seem to us so much more animal than ourselves, as well as so much more human and divine?

FUTURE WOMAN. We are so securely human that we are not afraid of being animal too. But in you, humanity is precarious; and so, in dread and with shame, you kill the animal in you. And its slaughter poisons you.

ACTOR. How motionless they stand! Intent, eager.

ACTRESS. Their faces are like the faces of lovers, or saints.

(An obscure and solemn music, rising gradually)

ACTRESS. Music! So you have music on these great occasions.

FUTURE MAN. Strange that you should hear music! The telepathic influence has begun, but of course you cannot receive it. It is affecting you indirectly through our minds, and is translated into music. A poor, crude, utterly inadequate translation.

(Music gradually develops into wild splendours, and after a few moments fades and ceases)

ACTRESS. Is it over now, this strange experience of theirs?

FUTURE MAN. No, it is only beginning. Now they will all go their ways, and live their own lives, love their loves, and fulfill their special functions in the community. Yet all the while they will be possessed. Each one of them will be all the while perceiving and thinking as the mind of the race. As a cell in a brain lives its own life, yet is possessed by the man's mind.

FUTURE WOMAN. Yes, but after some weeks or months of intense racial experience, they will sink back into being mere individuals, until another call is heard. Look! They are preparing to go.

ACTOR. There is movement. They are putting on their flying-suits.

ACTRESS. The whole surface of the plain is restless. Now it's rising in whiffs, like the dusty surface of a road on a windy day, or steam from hot water.

ACTOR. They are rising. A vast smoke of men and women.

(Faint rushing sound, increasing)

ACTRESS. Like an immense flock of birds. Like boiling cloud beneath us, rising toward us.

ACTOR. Now there's a great streaming away toward the horizon in all directions.

ACTRESS. And still they rise. Now some of them are level with us. The air is thick with swarming clothed creatures, with outspread arms.

(The rushing sound is now a loud surging. Distant voices)

ACTOR. They are all over the sky above us, myriads of them.

(The sounds fade and cease. Pause)

ACTRESS. It's all dark. Where are our two friends?

(Pause)

ACTOR. Hullo! Back in the dear old studio again! By ourselves, too.

ACTRESS. It's over. And I'm tired, terribly tired. (Yawns)

ACTOR (under his breath). Hush, you idiot, the Listeners! (Aloud) Er-- Goodnight, everyone, goodnight.