

1 -The lost Continent

The Coldwater, borne up by her buoyant screen, was speeding eastward. We knew what her speed in the air was, and we knew that that speed was uniform. An hour's absence would give her sixty miles of easting, and we were scarce ten minutes from her when her lofty outlines had been etched against the sky for a moment by the sinking sun.

"We must signal her," I said, and, selecting a spot close by the water, I began gathering sticks and leaves, for we had no means of making a fire without them. The three men helped me, but we had much ado to accommodate so small a fire-place with fuel for so large a fire as we designed to make. The sun had disappeared before we had discovered any means of making fire, but our needs pressed us so that we could not afford to await the rising of another sun. Finally, one of the men suggested that we attempt to attract attention by firing one of the mortars which formed a part of the armament of all our craft. I called to mind that the Coldwater carried such pieces of ordnance, and, further, I knew that they were automatic in action, and could be fired by a child. It remained, therefore, to seek a means to discharge one of them.

The three men detailed to different parts of the boat, returned with the report that all the magazines exploded apparently at the instant of the commencement of the conflagration, for the magazines were chambers dug below the water line; and as the floors were consumed, the sea, rushing through the apertures made by the flames, had drowned the powder that otherwise would have been detonated by contact with the flames; for even fasbestos, of which the powder magazines were constructed, would have been consumed in that terrific fire. It had, of course, been among our calculations that the powder magazines would be exploded when water poured into them, and the uneasy motion of the boat had warned us to leave her, that we might be

blown to pieces by such an explosion--or, at least, that we might not be aboard were she to founder.

But this apparent destroyer of our hopes, in reality, proved our preserver. The magazines did not detonate, and among them were several thousand rounds of ammunition for the small-arms with which the Coldwater had been armed. To fire the mortar, it was only necessary to find one of the many tubes; but when I sent men to the magazines to report on conditions they returned to report that the steel covers to the chambers had been unhinged at the first alarm of fire, and that the seas which dashed the Coldwater until her hopelessly wrecked deck was level with the water's edge had made such inroads upon her inflammable interior that she soon would dive to the bottom.