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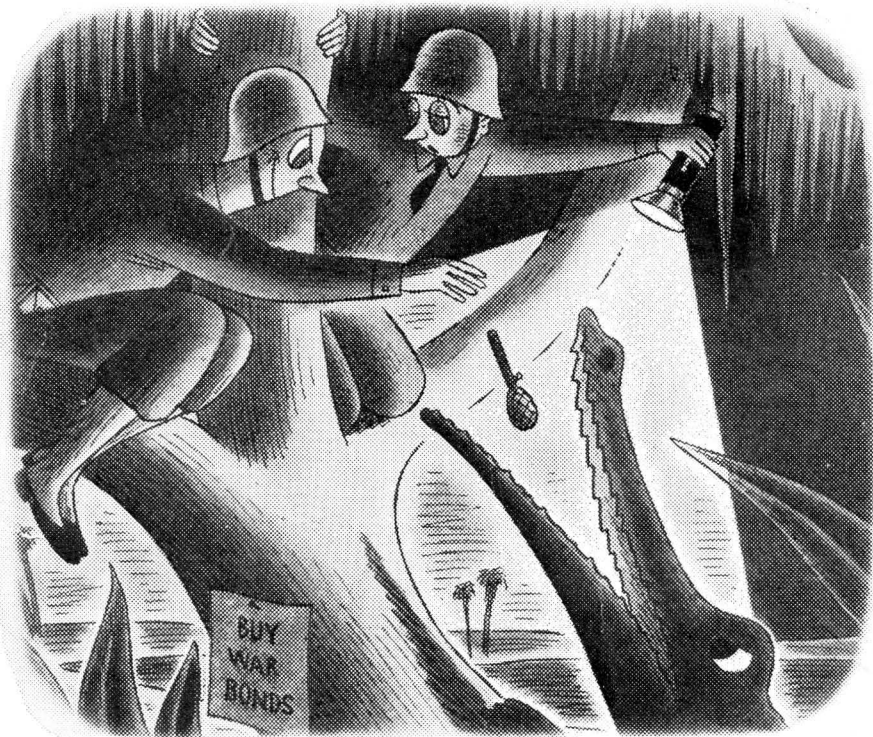
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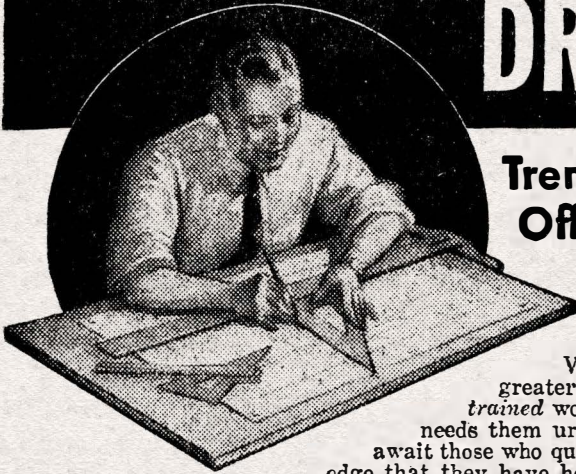
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STARTLING STORIES

Vol. 9, No. 2

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March, 1943

A Complete Book-Length Scientifiction Novel



SPEAK OF THE DEVIL

By

NORMAN A. DANIELS

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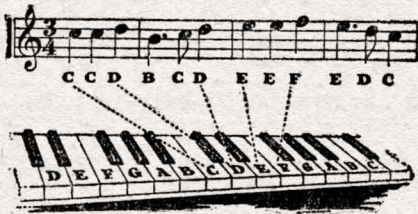
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A Department Where Readers, Writers and the Editors Get Together

BEFORE we seal the ports and take off for a mad voyage this trip the old Sarge will briefly check the manifests for next issue's cargo in the good old ship **STARTLING STORIES**. So, gather around the chart table, you junior astro-gators, and don't jostle one another while we scan the sheet.

The first item, one which fills the main hatch, is a complete novel by our old planet-trotting senior pilot—Ray Cummings. In **WINGS OF ICARUS**, Mr. Cummings takes us to incredible adventures on one of the outer planets of the Solar System. Three Earthmen set forth in a desperate, frenzied search for a certain mineral that man must have to prevent his interplanetary empire from crumbling, and they land in the midst of a world of winged people who have a desperate problem of their own.

In working out the solution to one problem the Earthmen work out the solution to the other, again proving the old adage that one man's meat is another man's poison. As neat a trick as Ray Cummings has ever pulled out of that scientific typewriter of his with the Martian symbols for letters and the Plutonian numerals. **WINGS OF ICARUS** is one of the best novels Cummings has ever written.

The Hall of Fame Classic which fills the after hatch is a yarn by that old favorite of yours, the late Stanley G. Weinbaum. **THE IDEAL** is another of those clever whimsies that Weinbaum was famous for.

There will be other brand new short stories packed away in the fore hatch. So, there you have it, my hearties. Roll up the manifest and clear the decks so we can see what the present cargo is for the booby hatch—pardon the old Sarge—the atrogation chamber.

ETHERGRAMS

Shake out the mail sack, Frog-eyes, and open a fresh case of Xeno. Wait—never mind the Xeno! Is that first ethergram

from a gal reader? That's the kind of spirit the old space dog wants.

JOINING THE ETHERWAVES

By Barbara Bovard

Dear Sarge: Having just—or nearly just—received my Science Fiction League Pin, and having been urged to join the Etherwaves, I decided that a rave over the November issue of **STARTLING STORIES** wouldn't hurt.

First and foremost, I want to shout about "The Earth Saver." There is a story that justifies science-fiction since its birth. I chuckled and chortled, gurgled and giggled until I had accordion pleats in my side. More, more, and yet more!

"The Ancient Brain" was a relief from the "doomed" future and hair-raising exploits of one man to save the world. It left me with faith in the future and an easy, restful feeling.

"The Death Ray" was a good short. The surprise ending pulls it out of the ordinary class.

Now, about "The Day of the Cloud." As is the case with all of Ross' stories, it was well written. The last time I saw him, we were talking about inspiration, and I said he hadn't any, so I hope this is in a sort of a form of apology. It was a new and different way of depicting the end of the world, and while I resent the necessity of pulling the moon to bits, I can understand and appreciate the logic behind it. And I hugged myself over a hero who was a heel! Of course, he turned out true-blue to the hero tradition; his transformation was right and proper. And while I got my eyes slightly crossed on the explanation of how his father got into future ahead of him, the story was a good one and leads me to hope there will be more.

Thanks for them kind words about "Censored" and the column "Unscientifics." I'm glad somebody liked them!

Now comes the trouble. Er—the cover illustration:

First, the ships are all out of proportion to the moon. It may be the size of the ray, but the moon doesn't look much larger than the perihelion of the N. Y. World's Fair. Second, its color and texture led me to believe that the childhood fable is true and the moon is made of green cheese! Uh—that's all, I think.

That's all, period.—1929 Page Street, San Francisco, Calif.

Honey lamb, as the old Sarge wearily pointed out to one of your contemporaries last issue, that cover picture on the November issue was really supposed to be a couple of Eversharp pencils poking fun at a gooseberry. Or maybe a couple of cosmic

(Continued on page 10)



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THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 8)

giants are playing space billiards with pointed cues.

Anyway, the old Sarge is glad you liked Rocklynn's yarn. So you know the long-haired gent personally, eh? Well, he's written a new novel which will appear in **THRILLING WONDER STORIES** some time this year. It's called **THE GIANT RUNT**. And you'll like it! (I guess I can plug my companion space ships if I wanna.)

1942 RATINGS

By Harry Loren Sinn

Dear Sarge: Just bought the current **STARTLING** and was overwhelmed by the perfectly scrumptuous cover. Bergey, who is consistently good, outdid himself this time. Perhaps the most outstanding thing about it was the **lack of heroine** and **BEMS**. Anyway, it favorably impressed me (that should be perfectly obvious by this time!) and reminded me strongly of the "good old days." By "good old days" I mean the time long past, when science fiction was **science** fiction.

As for trimmed edges I vote against it. I imagine expenses are high enough as is. I wonder if Tom Regan and Gene Hunter read the edges or the stories. As a collector, I have found that small-size magazines with untrimmed edges file easier and keep better than do those with trimmed edges.

Here are my ratings on the last year (six issues) of 1942 **STARTLING**:

- (1) "Tarnished Utopia," by Malcolm Jameison—March.
 - (2) "Blood on the Sun," Hal K. Wells—May.
 - (3) "City of Glass," Noel Loomis—July.
 - (4) "Day of the Cloud," Rocklynn—Nov.
 - (5) "Two Worlds to Save," Morrison—Sept.
 - (6) "Devil's Planet," M. W. Wellman—Jan.
- Probably the best reprint was "Cubic City," Tucker. The others were mediocre. Well, so long, Sarge, and please, or please! forget

(Continued on page 12)

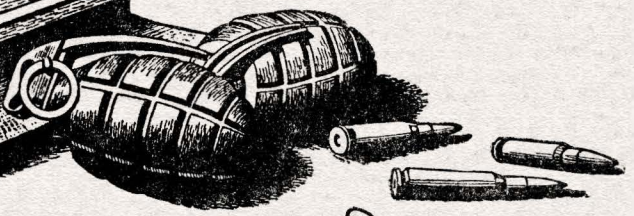
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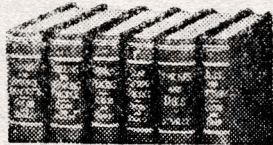
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THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 10)

about Xeno. It's getting monotonous. Oh, yes, you have the best fan-mag department in prodrom.—Carnation, Route One, Wash.

Harry, you make me feel better by the minute over that cover. In spite of what Pee-lotess Bovard just said. All kidding aside, the old Sarge passed judgment on the original painting before the cover plates were made, and I'm telling all you junior astrologers it was a beaut!

And what kind of talk is this about the good old days! I'll have you know, young feller, that science fiction is stepping up to the good new days. Snap out of that horse-and-buggy daze just because your tires and gasoline are temporarily rationed. You yourself don't seem to care for the yarns in the Hall of Fame niche, according to your own letter.

And never mind your cracks about Xeno. Did you—ever drink any—Sharlie? I rest my case.

ATTACK AT 0100

By Sergeant Jerry A. Mace

Dear Sarge: Well, give me a ring and call me Saturn! Sufferin' Space Burns, Sarge, am I taboo? Do I have B.O.? Remember me? I'm the guy who brewed the first batch of Xeno in an old Proton Cannon that time I was marooned on an asteroid with no Spacemen's Bar in sight. [Look fellers, it's agin the law to send infernal machines through the mail and besides, I'm boarding the next air-conditioned comet that's headed for Alpha Centauri. Anyway, hew was I to know my simple concoction would assume the proportions of a deluge? Xeno jugs to the right of us—Xeno jugs to the left of us—Great Galaxys, men, there hasn't been so much Xeno floating around since the V.S.W. (Veterans of Spatial Wars) held their annual convention on Ganymede last year. What a brawl!]

But where was I, Sarge? Ah yes, I was bemoaning the total lack of response accorded my last three Ethergrams [To T.W.S.]. Are Service men barred from the sacred Precincts of Pro, Con and what have you? Or has the quality of my flashes so deteriorated as to render them unfit to bulge the creaking seams of the old Rookles' Roost? Well, let's guzzle a Xeno Zombie while we disembowel the good ship. S.S.

(Continued on page 120)

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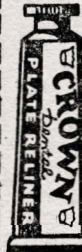
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Noting that Craig was paying no attention to what he did, Parker suddenly made a swift connection (Chap. I)

SPEAK of the DEVIL

By **NORMAN A. DANIELS**

When Alex Craig Is Exposed to Inventor Parker's Thought Intensifier, a Modern Streamlined Satan Pops Up — and Goes to Town on a Faustian Crusade Against Diabolical Fifth Columnists!

CHAPTER I

"I Don't Want to Be a Hero!"

THERE was plenty of applause as the final curtain went down on the new Cartwright hit, "Speak of the Devil," but none of it was for Alexander Hamilton Craig. He stood in the wings, a weird-looking object in the gloom, crushed and

defeated, a good picture of Lucifer just after being hurled over the ramparts of Heaven.

Two minutes before, he'd gone to the center of the stage and bowed when the curtain went up for his call. Only shouts of derision and waves of laughter had greeted him. True, the new Cartwright play was a comedy drama and people were supposed to laugh—but not at Alex Craig. For

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Alex played the title role of his Satanic Majesty in full regalia. And all he got was laughter—laughter which should have been reserved for the two comedians of the piece.

He reached up bitterly and ripped the fake horns from his head, stepped out of shoes that gave his feet the appearance of cloven hoofs, disengaged a wiry forked tail from about one of his sturdy legs and strode disgustedly toward his dressing room. Alex Craig, rising dramatic actor, had been laughed off the stage.

Of course, they were waiting for him down there—Valerie and the Cartwrights.

Valerie Lane came toward him quickly, taking both his hands. She was trim, naturally blonde, and with blue eyes that were always much alive. Craig admired her graceful lines so much that he almost forgot his splitting headache. In fact, he was head over heels in love with her and didn't care who knew it, so everybody did.

"Alex," she murmured sympathetically. "Oh, my dear—I knew you shouldn't have taken the role. It just isn't suited to you. You're a dramatic leading man, not a character actor. But sometimes you are so stubborn."

"It isn't my fault, Valerie," he said wearily, with a venomous glance toward Cory and Alicia Cartwright. "I knew what I was talking about when I said the Devil should be played straight—as a sinister man about town, instead of with these outmoded trappings of the Middle Ages and Doctor Faustus. But, in spite of these handicaps, I'm going to shove myself down the throats of the American public and make 'em like—"

"No, Alex," said Cory Cartwright, smiling gently as he stepped forward. "It's just no go. You don't make a good devil."

Alex put his arm about Valerie and faced the two producers. Cory and Alicia Cartwright saw eye to eye on every subject. They'd been married for fourteen years without a serious disagreement. They never appeared anywhere in public without each other. They still held hands in the theatre—and also considerable sway and power.

"I can do it, Cory," said Alex earnestly in his splendid baritone voice. "I know they laughed at me out there tonight. No—not at me, but at these silly contraptions you insisted that I wear to portray the character of Satan. Props like these things now belong to the past, or to comic opera.

Cory Cartwright shook his head sadly. "Afraid not, Alex. We just can't shove a character on stage, say, 'This is the Devil,' and let it go at that. The man who plays this role must wear the trappings."

CARTWRIGHT'S wife nodded in complete agreement. "Cory is right, Alex. There's nothing else we can do. You're a grand actor, but we horribly miscast you. You're the hero type."

"I don't want to be a hero!" declaimed Mr. Craig tragically. "In ten years I'll be too old to look like Hamlet. The greatest actors of the theatre have always been character actors. Look at the history of the stage. Take—"

"Never mind the dramatics, pal," said Cory Cartwright, cutting off the histrionics. "Never will it be said that I killed the career of a good actor by making a laughing stock of him. You don't go on tomorrow night."

"What? I don't even get another chance?" cried Craig in sharp protest. "Why, I can work over my lines and—"

"Sorry, Alex," put in Alicia. "At the end of the second act we decided to give the role to your understudy—Stan Haviland."

Alex gestured in grand disdain. He was acting better now than he had on the stage. "Oh—him!" he said with just the right accent to make his listeners fear they had made a horrible mistake.

"Yeah—*him!*" spoke an acrid voice behind his back, and Craig turned to face his understudy as Haviland came into the dressing room. "You needn't speak of me, Alex, in a voice you might apply to the call boy as he essays to do Hamlet. They won't be laughing at me tomorrow night."

Alex started forward. Valerie gripped his arm, and he relaxed.



Alex raised his left hand, his brow wrinkled in concentration (Chap. XV)

"For two cents, Stan, I'd fix your face so you could go on without make-up," he growled. "Oh—please clear out of here—all of you. I'll see you in a few minutes, Val. As soon as I get out of this ridiculous rigging."

After washing up, Alex took four aspirin tablets and met Valerie at the stage door. They ate a late supper in an obscure place. His head still ached, pounding nastily, but he didn't mention the fact to his friends. No use trying to find more alibis. But Valerie saw things for herself.

"You look tired, Alex," she murmured sympathetically, leaning over to run her fingers lightly through his hair. And, as he winced: "Oh, does your head ache, darling?"

"Like the devil!" he growled, trying to smile. "I guess it was that horrible performance."

"It's your sinuses," she said. "You know the doctor told you that you should live in a higher, drier climate."

"No," said Alex grimly. "I picked up this headache at the theatre."

ONE thing about Alex, he never took refuge in alibis to explain his failures. He had acquired this headache because he gave a rotten performance; he hadn't given a bad performance because he had a headache. He was a forthright and hard-working young man who took his work seriously and without conceit.

Obstacles only made him the more determined. He didn't know how, but he knew that he was going on tomorrow night in the title role—and he was going to put the part over.

"Come on," Valerie said, getting to her feet. "Let's get out of here and take a walk. The fresh air will blow the fumes from your brain—do us both good."

Alex paid the check and followed her out into the night. Valerie took his arm and they strolled in silence northward along Broadway, gradually working their way over toward Riverside Drive. The early editions were out and they stopped to buy one.

Against Valerie's better judgment they halted under a street light dimmed for the war, and Alex hurriedly turned to the theatrical pages.

He found what he sought, and he winced. The critics had pulled no punches. Alex crumpled the paper savagely and hurled it to the sidewalk.

"If I could only face them in the role of the Devil in the vile mood I'm in now," he muttered aloud as they strode along. "I'd freeze the marrow in their comic spines!"

"Never mind," murmured Valerie. "I know you are good."

After a bit they found themselves walking on Riverside Drive. With a start Alex realized that subconsciously he had been heading toward the home of Bill Parker. He always wound up at Parker's place when anything went wrong. It was pretty late tonight, but he shrugged, said nothing, and they went on. Bill wouldn't be in bed—likely be in his laboratory fooling around with one of his crackpot gadgets. Maybe he could do something to ease Alex's headache.

Dr. Parker was a physicist. He could have been a big money maker if he hadn't insisted on fooling around with obscure researches off the beaten path of economic science. He was always dabbling and dipping into such abstract and unprofitable things as the amount of electric current generated by the human brain, the effect of the gaze of an eye upon delicate flowers, the concentration of certain stimuli upon nerves and such.

Alex never half-understood Parker's theories and discourses, but Bill was a good scout and an old friend. Utterly disinterested in the theatre, he was an ideal person to talk to now. Maybe he had a few aspirin tablets or something for a devilish headache.

"Where are we going, Alex?" asked Valerie as he led the way up the steps of the old stoned mansion Parker had inherited from his grandfather.

Alex explained as he knocked the correct signal on the massive door panel.

"You know Bill Parker," he added, "and he'll be glad to see you. Or should I take you home first, honey?"

"Of course not. It's too late now, anyway—see?"

THE door was swinging open of its own accord—one of Bill Parker's

inventions to permit his intimate friends to enter without disturbing the household.

Wearily Alex conducted the girl up the grand staircase and into a monstrous room on the second floor. Parker had calmly removed most of the partitions there, converting the entire second floor into a huge laboratory.

He was at the far end of the great room now, surrounded by a litter of electrical gadgets which made Alex think of a radio repair shop after a cyclone. Parker was a slender, spectacled young man with a rapt look on his face as he bent over his work.

BEFORE him was a complicated radio outfit which mounted a grotesque-looking tube in the heart of a maze of wires and condensers. It looked to Alex, in comparison with regular radio tubes, as Edison's first light bulb might look compared to a fluorescent tube. It certainly had a weird sort of home-made look.

"Ah—MacBeth," greeted Parker, glancing up. And Juliet! Have chairs and keep quiet—if you can. How'd the new play go?"

"Fine," admitted Alex truthfully. "The Cartwrights have another hit. Personally, I stank."

"Did you now? Have a look at this arrangement of condensers. At last I've hit upon a method of intensifying sheer thought. You know I've worked along these lines for years, Alex. And now I've figured out a short-wave method of concentrating mental energy. I'm just finishing the final hook-up. I putter around with science a bit, Miss Lane," he explained apologetically to Valerie.

Alex sighed and settled himself more comfortably in his chair. He leaned back and pressed his hands to his throbbing head.

"Tonight I gave the rottenest performance of my career," he said. "I doubt the rankest amateur could have given a worse one. In fact, I acted like the devil!"

"That's what you were supposed to do, wasn't it?" asked Parker without looking up. "As soon as I make a special helmet to fit a patient's head and pick up his thought impulses, with

this power plant and this Parker oscillator tube, I can magnify a person's will thousands of times. In fact, I don't know just how far I can go with this. So you were good, eh?"

"I said I was rotten!" growled Alex. "And my head is aching furiously. Haven't you got something you can give me for it?"

"Eh? Oh, sure. Why didn't you tell me before. Your sinuses again, I guess. You shouldn't live in this foul climate, Alex. I've told you before. Sit down over there by the end of this bench and I'll give you a shot of diathermy treatment with that infra-red adaptation of mine. Nothing like it for penetrating human tissue."

As he talked, Parker deftly adjusted his friend's head against the back of the designated chair and fitted a metal skullcap not unlike a football helmet to Craig's head. He started to switch on the machine which would send short-wave heat treatments coursing through the temples of his patient and then, noting that Craig was paying no attention to what he did, he hesitated, and then suddenly began making swift connections between the diathermy machine and the queer apparatus he had just been working on. The girl was anxiously watching her fiancé's face.

Alex Craig talked on bitterly.

"The role of the Devil is okay, Bill. It's just those horrible contraptions that I had to wear. I know I could do a perfect job if the Cartwrights didn't insist on those crazy props. But they own the show. Who am I but a mere leading man hired to do as they tell me. I tell you, Bill, I can sit right here and just think the part of the Devil in a manner that would make your blood run cold. I don't need a single prop to project the idea of evil and sinister purpose that would run all the hoodlums out of the second gallery. But they won't let me out from under all those silly masks and props so I can act!"

"Oh, Alex!" exclaimed Valerie. "Don't talk like that."

He almost came out of the chair in the intensity of his emotion. Parker quickly thrust him back before he could tear out the helmet connections

from the machine.

"Here, here, take it easy!"

"Well, start that confounded dynamo of yours," growled Alex savagely. "My head feels like it is splitting open."

"All right, all right—just relax," soothed Parker. "Here goes."

HE snapped a switch and turned a couple of rheostats on the diathermy machine. A dull drone began to sound. He went swiftly back to his workbench and hastily made his final connections, cutting a gauge of some sort into the line, a drumlike gauge with an attached stylus that drew a line in red ink.

"As I was telling you about this machine of mine, Alex," he went on smoothly, soothingly, "you are aware of mass thought, of mass hypnotism—how when a lot of people think a certain thing is so, it's so. For instance, you've told me yourself how an exciting dramatic scene in a play in an air-conditioned theatre will show a rise of perhaps ten degrees in temperature on the gauge and make the conditioning units work faster to bring the temperature down.

"Without knowing it, the audience, *tout ensemble*, get a raise in blood pressure and thermal units which affects the air-conditioners. And you've heard of the mass hypnotism of Indian fakirs, and the curse or protective charm of an amulet which has had centuries of human belief behind it to bring the power it is purported to possess to life.

"Well, I have taken all these things into consideration in the pursuit of my study into the actual electrical power of the human brain. Instead of depending on mass belief in something over a period of great time, I think I can get even a more intense effect with this short-wave condenser of mine. How's your headache?"

"Terrible!" snarled Alex in a vile mood. "And that college lecture you're stuffing down my throat isn't helping any."

Parker laughed as he depressed another switch and turned up a rheostat. "All right, go ahead and stew in your vile humor," he said. "What do you

care for the weary hours I labored to design and create this Parker oscillator tube. It took me months to get it into concrete form, and all you can do is yap about your headache and your ability to think yourself into the essence of the Devil so you can scare shopgirls who paid too much for seats at your theater. Go ahead and think about the Devil. Think about barbecuing little babies and serving them up on buttered toast. Can I mix you a drink of some sort, Miss Lane?"

"I can think of it, Bill Parker!" yelled Alex viciously. "I don't want to be a matinee idol—a hero!"

And then an especially sharp pang shot through his temples like a jagged bolt of lightning, and he fainted. He didn't even hear Valerie's little scream of dismay.

It was like an electrocution, he imagined. Just as he was concentrating on his own conception of modern evil, a flash of orange-red pain that was searing pain—and then blackness.

When he came to his senses he found himself lying on the sofa that Parker kept in the laboratory for snatches of rest between experiments. Parker was working like mad at his precious condenser set, growling imprecations under his breath. And the foulous oscillator tube that he had been months making—it was a shattered wreckage of glass and grids and fine wire.

Miraculously, Alex's headache was gone. In fact, he felt marvelous.

"What happened?" he asked, and his voice had a depth and vibrant power to it which was strange to his own ears. "Where's Valerie?"

Parker started. "I fooled around with you and busted my oscillator tube." You passed out, and, after assuring your fiancée that you would be perfectly all right here with me the rest of the night, I sent her home in a cab."

"You busted that big tube? How could that happen?" demanded Alex. "It wasn't connected to anything, was it?"

"Of course!" snapped Parker, feverishly studying the drum dial and the wavy tracing of red ink that suddenly shot upward to the upper edge of the

revolving chart. "Shut up and leave me alone while I try to repair the damage."

Alex Craig shrugged, sat up, got to his feet and stretched. He walked silently to the far end of the huge room and sat down at Parker's littered desk. Shoving aside notebooks and slips of paper, he picked up a deck of cards he found there, riffled them, and laid them out for a game of solitaire.

HUMMING softly to himself, he played along until he found himself balked by the lack of a red four. He held a black five in his hand. If only it were the four of hearts, he could beat the game.

He was about to toss the card down and gather up the entire layout, but he glanced at the offending five-spot once more. And he nearly started out of his skin. It was the four of hearts!

He blinked, shook his head and looked again. It was still the four of hearts.

"I guess I'm going crazy," he murmured aloud. "I thought—"

"Play the card, old man," a suave voice said at his shoulder.

An arm in a well-tailored sleeve of black broadcloth reached over his shoulder and a slender, muscular hand plucked the four-spot from his fingers to lay it in the proper position. Alex twisted his head—and looked up into the face of a rank stranger.

The man was about thirty, perfectly dressed in a tuxedo. He had great, limpid dark eyes that laughed, lips that were curled up at the corners in a pleasant smile. In fact, he was about the handsomest man Alex had ever seen, and definitely likable.

"Hello," Alex said, returning the smile. "I didn't know Bill had another guest about. I don't believe I'd had the pleasure. . . ."

Bill Parker's voice sounded from the far end of the huge room. "What did you say, Alex?"

"I just said hello to your friend," Alex rejoined, waving his thumb toward the elegant man at his side.

Parker's eyes looked funny as he approached the desk. He was staring blankly at Alex.

"What friend?" he demanded.

Alex got up and turned to indicate the stranger. He gasped. There was no one standing beside him. He twisted his neck to look quickly around the rest of the room.

"Well, where the devil did he go?" he demanded. "Who was he?"

"Who was who?" asked Parker bluntly. "Just because you passed out under my diathermy treatment, don't tell me you've got the willies now. Haven't you caused me enough grief?"

Alex's face became grim. "Look, pal," he said patiently but firmly, "I'm not playing games. There was a smooth-looking chap standing here just a second ago—a sort of man-about-townish fellow."

"Rave on," said Parker. "Anybody that can shatter a heavy oscillator with a mere thought can dream up a mere specter."

Parker looked sheepish. "Well, I thought I'd experiment a bit with you, Alex. I knew you wouldn't mind, so I connected that helmet and diathermy machine to my thought intensifier. Something went haywire, and you blew out the tube."

"You—*what?* Oh, you crazy fool! But you cured my headache, anyway. And any damage to your precious paraphernalia is your own fault. I'm going to catch a drink at an owl club and then go home to bed. Thanks a million for taking care of Valerie and listening to my bellyaching. And you're welcome to whatever you learned from me."

"I wonder," murmured Bill Parker as he watched his friend depart.

CHAPTER II

Cheerful Deputy

ALEX walked slowly down the street, still puzzled by the stranger whom even Bill couldn't account for. How had he entered the room? Alex had sat facing the door and he was certain it hadn't opened. Anyway, Bill always kept an electric lock on it.

Crossing town, Alex saw the inviting lights of a tavern. He picked up a bit of speed. Suddenly he heard

footsteps behind him. No—at his side. Alex stopped suddenly. The steps went on a pace or two and dragged to a stop.

"Who is it?" Alex said aloud. "Where are you?"

Then he put a hand over his eyes. The stranger who had been in Bill's lab stood there before him. He'd materialized right out of air. Impossible, of course, Alex's common sense told him. Shadows—darkness, must have hidden the man until this particular moment.

"We meet again," the stranger said with a smile. "So nice to know you, Mr. Craig. A pleasure. You were going for a drink. May I come along?"

"Now wait a minute," Alex said. "You're a funny sort. Bill must have told you my name and yet he doesn't even remember your being in the lab. Poor Bill—completely off, I guess. Tell me—how do you pop in and out of places like this?"

"It's my specialty. Very handy, too. Come along, my mouth is watering for a drink."

Alex shrugged and walked with the man into the tavern. They went to a booth and sat down.

"What'll it be?" the stranger asked.

"Why not champagne?" Alex said. "They celebrate success in it. I'll use the stuff to drown my sorrows."

"Ah, yes . . . the play. You were particularly stinko, my friend. No respectable devil would have looked as you did—or acted as you did. With all those facial contortions, fire breathing and the cloven hoofs—that tail—the horns. Absurd, I tell you."

A waiter prevented Alex from expressing his surprise.

"Champagne," Alex said.

"Oh, no—beer will do," the stranger broke in. "I insist. Beer can be equally as good as champagne. Wait and see."

The waiter looked them over. "Beer," he grunted sourly, "for a couple of sports. Yeah—beer."

The waiter came back with two seidels, foam running down their sides.

"Thank you," the stranger said, and smiled. "Alex—our champagne."

The waiter walked back to the bar.

Alex picked up the stein, stared at it and saw that all the foam had mysteriously vanished. Instead tiny bubbles popped from the liquid and it had changed color, become much lighter. He sipped of it and gasped.

"This *is* champagne! Listen—what goes on? Is this a gag? Or wait—I get it. You're a magician."

The stranger threw back his head and laughed. "Excellent, Alex. Certainly, I'm a magician. Order beer, convert it to champagne and enjoy the very best at the very least price. Not to think of the perfect way we cheat the owner of this establishment."

Alex leaned across the table. "Just who the devil are you?" he asked.

"Yes." The stranger bowed his head slightly. "That's right."

CRAIG stared in bewilderment.

"What's right? What are you talking about?"

"I'm the Devil."

Alex gave him a peculiar look, took another sip of the champagne and then doubt crept into his eyes. The way this man appeared and disappeared, how he changed one card to another, switched beer into champagne.

"Are you, really?" Alex queried. "Oh, come now, who is behind this? That idiot Stan Haviland? Sure, that's it. He hired you to tantalize me. I ought to break his head!"

"Why not? But you don't believe me, do you? That I'm the Devil, I mean? Right now you're thinking that the Devil has horns, a tail and all that clap-trap. The stuff you wore in the play. My badness, were you terrible!"

"Yes," Alex said, shuddering, "I guess I was."

"But you could be good. You could become the greatest devil that ever walked on a stage. I'd see to that—for a consideration."

Alex drank some more champagne. "You know," he said, "I almost believe you. But you're good-looking—young. Not at all like the Devil should be. At least, not like most people think."

"But like you thought, eh? Like everyone else thinks," the stranger

scoffed. "Who knows what I look like? Who, except those who are dead and they don't tell me. I am Satan. Call me that. But if you so much as mention Lucifer, Belial, Beezlebug, Mephistopheles or Old Nick, I'll . . . no, I won't at that. I need you too much."

"Supposing I do believe you," Alex said. "Don't you have a tail, horns—cloven hoofs?"

The stranger bent down, unlaced his shoes and took them off. He removed his socks and put two quite ordinary feet on the table.

"Are they cloven?" he asked with a smile. "Do you see horns or a tail? Of course not. That's why you were absolutely ludicrous tonight. Now shall we get down to business?"

"Just what is . . . this business?" Alex found his lips dry despite the smooth wine that flowed over them. "How do I fit in?"

The Devil removed his feet from the table, hunched forward and looked directly at Alex.

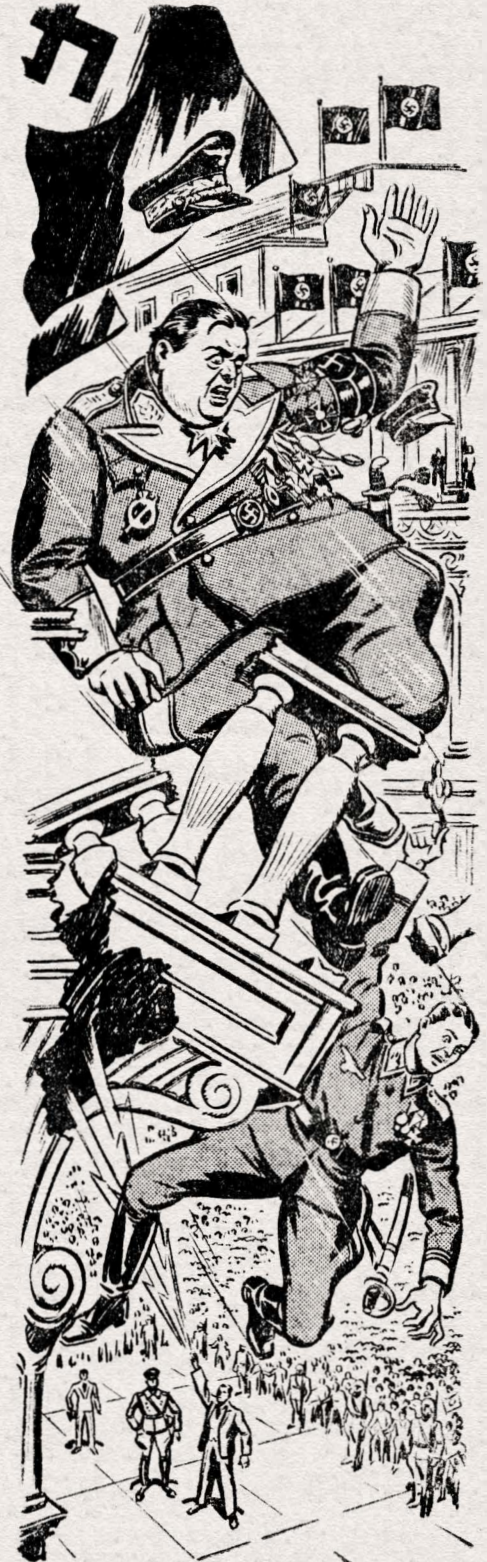
"I'm a very busy man. In fact, business is too good. I want you to help me. You see, I'm supposed to roam around and create a lot of mischief. Don't ask me why. I'd rather stay home and relax. Have a little fun. There are so many new arrivals these days. Some need my personal attention. Like Reinhard Heydrich, for instance. You know—the Nazi Hangman?"

"Is . . . he . . . down there?"

"Certainly. Where else did you expect him to be? Why, blast his miserable hide, the man is *heiling* Hitler all over the place. He's trying to convince my subjects that Hitler is greater than I. What sheer nonsense."

"Yeah," Alex said mournfully, "what nonsense is right. Imagine me sitting here, listening to all this, half-believing it, and tomorrow I'll read how another actor, taking my own role as the Devil, fooled me. Listen, pal, go tell Haviland that when I catch him, so help me, I'll poke him one."

"Look at your champagne," the stranger urged. "Look at it! Why, it's turned red. Port wine now. It's yellow—sauterne. It's clear white—plain water. Now it's pink. Pink



The stand began slowly sagging and the railing gave way (Chap. XVI)

champagne—ah, that's something. Have a drink."

ALEX tasted the stuff and it ran like nectar down his tongue.

"Look here," he said, "you are either the greatest magician I've ever seen or you really are . . . the Devil."

"Satan—I prefer it. Of course I am. Will you listen to my proposition?"

"No," Alex said, suddenly convinced. "Not on your life. I know the bargains you make. You'll turn me into a great actor, give me money and power. Then you'll take my soul. No, you hear me! No!"

"My dear chap," the Devil said soothingly. "I don't want your soul. Why, Hell is crowded now, what with war going on, famine, disease. I have to keep a line waiting all the time. Of course, I sort them out and those who wear swastikas can go hang. I cater to the more decent folk."

"What is . . . your proposition?" Alex asked nervously.

"I'm too busy to take care of things properly. There is so much to do elsewhere. I implore you, help me. In return, you will go on the stage at the next performance and wow 'em. Brother, you'll be the talk of the town."

"Please," Alex held up one hand weakly, "don't call me 'brother.' I—I'm not quite ready for that—yet."

The Devil smiled. "You can't insult me. After thousands of years insults have lost their sting. I'm really a grand fellow. It's just that I happen to own Hell. What if I didn't? Where would people go? Those who adhere to my principles, that is."

Alex nodded. "I guess I understand. You are a friendly sort. Nothing like the type I'd expect—wait! I'm wrong. You're exactly what I expected. What I tried to tell the Cartwrights you were like. How I tried to impersonate you. Exactly. Only they could not see it, the fools. I'd agree to just about anything to convince them and the critics. What do you want me to do?"

"Good. I demand very little and at no time will your petty soul be of interest to me. I'm reserving time and

space for a veritable horde of people who will come down as the war ends. They'll appear with their throats cut or stretched, their heads full of bullet holes. Self-inflicted, you know. What fun that will be. So help me, when Adolf expects to be saluted, I'll show him a thing or two."

"Please," Alex said, "never mind that. Let's get down to business."

"Of course. Now here it is. As I have said, business keeps me so occupied, I can't take care of small details. One of my lesser jobs is to create mischief—to cast evil over the world. I don't expect you to take in all that territory. Naturally, I have other agents. Your duty consists only of living just as you are now. Whatever happens, pay no attention to it."

"Suppose I don't like the job. What then?"

"You have only to call me and I'll release you at once. That is my solemn promise—and I do get solemn occasionally."

"How shall I call you? Just shout 'Satan!'"

THE other made a deprecatory gesture.

"Gracious, no! You'd startle everyone. Anyway, I can't be contacted like that. Remember your friend's short-wave condenser? You thought me into your presence with that. You intensified the force of evil as you conceived it—and here I am. You can reach me that way again."

Alex whistled softly. "So that's how you found out I might be amenable. All right—I'll do it. Remember, you don't own my soul. Not even a wisp of it. If I grow tired of my work, I have only to contact you by Bill's radio. Otherwise, I shall take your place in this sector assigned me. I'll agree without even knowing my exact duties."

The Devil smiled in glee. "Excellent. You'll do nicely, too. Very nicely. May I have your hand?"

"What for?"

"A slight blood transfusion. I do all my business in blood. Lends glamour. Come now—it won't hurt you."

Reluctantly, Alex put out his hand.

Satan took it in a firm grip. A slender knife suddenly appeared between his fingers. He made a small incision, repeated it on his own wrist and then quickly placed both wounds together so that the blood merged. He let go. Alex looked at his wrist. There was a tiny crescent scar visible.

His eyes still on the wrist, Alex said, "That does it. More stage props. Now I *know* Haviland is behind this. I . . ."

Alex looked up. His visitor was gone. The second seidel of champagne still stood there—empty. Alex closed both eyes tightly, opened them again and made sure there was nobody across the table.

He heard footsteps, relaxed and figured the odd stranger had merely gone to the bar for another drink. But it was the waiter who stood there, staring down at him.

"Time to close up, buddy. That'll be thirty cents. What happened to your pal? Didn't he like the beer?"

"It was champagne," Alex said. "Taste of it and see."

The waiter let out a howl of laughter. "Boy, are you nuts." Champagne, he says." The waiter picked up Alex's seidel, sipped and gave a startled oath.

"Holy Cow—it *is* champagne! What kind of a trick is this?"

Alex counted out thirty cents, added a dime and handed it over. The waiter backed up.

"Nix, pal. I made out a ticket for this stuff. I'd swear I drew it outa the beer tap, but I musta got confused and poured champagne instead. We'll call it square if you don't tell the boss. He'd have my heart."

"As you wish," Alex answered and grinned. If being the Devil drew results like this, it wasn't so bad.

CHAPTER III

Manifestations

ALLEX CRAIG woke up late the next morning, clear-headed, clear-eyed. He called Valerie, listened to her sympathetic phrases and

hung up without making a date. He stepped under a cold shower and began singing at the top of his voice.

Suddenly he stopped. Water continued to pour down him and he wasn't aware of it. He recalled his experience in the tavern. It seemed like a dream. It was a dream. Hard, brutal facts returned. In a few hours he should be going on stage in his title role. Instead, Stan Haviland was taking his place. The Cartwrights had insisted upon it so . . . that was that."

Alex dried himself, dressed and phoned Bill Parker.

"Feel better this morning?" Bill asked. "Seeing any more strangers, or cards turning from spades to hearts? I knew you'd be okay, Alex."

"Your radio?" Alex said. "Did you find out what broke your special tube?"

"Uh-uh. Worked until dawn. Can't understand it. But it was my own fault, so don't you worry any. The diathermy machine was too much of a load for it, I guess."

"See you later," Alex said absently. "Got things to do now. S'long."

He paced the floor and convinced himself that he'd either been suffering from hallucinations or the man posing at Satan had been hopped up by Stan Haviland who wanted to have fun. Alex scowled at the idea.

He went around to the theater half an hour before curtain time. The marquee was darkened in accordance with dim-out regulations, but he could see that his name had been removed and Stan Haviland's put up in its place. At least this part was no dream.

Alex wandered backstage, into the full fury of activity just before curtain time. Valerie was nowhere about. Alex tapped on the door marked "OFFICE-PRIVATE."

Cory Cartwright's voice told him to come in. Alex opened the door, stepped inside and saw Stan Haviland going over his lines. He wore the cloven hoofed shoes, the horns and the forked tail. Alex laughed.

"What's so funny?" Haviland demanded angrily. "You're just sore because I'm getting the part. Watch and see what happens. They won't laugh at me."

"I'm laughing at you," Alex declared. "Brother, I never realized you were so much shorter than I. It shows up by the length of that crazy tail. You're liable to trip over it and break your leg."

"Oh, I am, am I?" Haviland shouted angrily. He took two steps toward Alex. The end of the tail suddenly seemed possessed of life. It wound itself around one ankle. Haviland gave a yelp, fell flat on his face and began groaning.

"My leg—it's broken. It's broken, I tell you. Alex Craig, you did that!"

Cory Cartwright said, "Alex wasn't anywhere near you, Stan. Oh, Alicia—call an ambulance, will you? I'll go out front and explain to the audience. Doggone the luck. Just when we're sold out six weeks."

Alicia made the call, got up and stood looking down at Haviland. Oddly enough, no one displayed much sympathy for his groans. Alicia looked at her husband.

"Darling, Alex is here. He can go on."

"No," Cory said sharply. "Nothing doing. Didn't you read the roastings he took?"

FIVE minutes before curtain time, an ambulance took Haviland away. The overture was rising in a crescendo. Call boys were yelling places. Cory Cartwright sat down at his desk, clapped both hands to his head and started cursing, softly, feelingly.

"Cory, darling," his wife said. "Alex can take the part for one night. It's better than having no performance at all."

"I said no. What do you want me to do—draw pictures?"

Alicia Cartwright walked over to another desk, picked up a fifteen-pound encyclopedia and returned to stand behind her husband.

Alex gave a sharp cry. "Alicia, what are you going to do?"

"Flatten a piece of paper," she said. "It's in that darn fool brain of my husband. In fact, it's the exact weight of his brain. Tissue paper!"

She brought the volume down on his head as she spoke. Cory slid out of the chair, rolled down on the floor

and made no sound whatsoever. Alicia Cartwright turned toward Alex.

"Get out there. Show them you can act. Show them, do you hear me?"

"Yes . . . yes, sure." Alex started for the door. "But, Cory—you knocked him silly. That's the first time you ever—"

"Argued? Sure it is. But listen, Alex, I never felt so much like beaning people with encyclopedias in all my life. Get out before I sock you."

Alex slammed the door and hurried toward his dressing room. He paused. There was no sense to his dressing for the part. In the first place, the overture was half-finished and it took a long time to don grease paint properly. Then too, most of the props had gone with Haviland to the hospital.

"Alex." Valerie hurried toward him. She was quite prepared to go on. "What is it?"

"I'm going on—without makeup or props. Got to—no time for anything else. Val—pray for me. If the audience laughed last night—how will they behave tonight?"

He crossed his fingers, marched into the wings and waited for the cue. Two actors were onstage, opening the play. Alex's part was to enter and proclaim himself as Satan, dickering for souls.

He thought about what had happened at Bill Parker's, about the scene in the tavern, the way Alicia had suddenly switched from a loving wife to one with ideas concerned with mayhem. He actually found himself wondering if that episode of the night before really had been some crazy trick on the part of his so-called friends, or something else.

His cue! Alex braced himself for the resounding roar of laughter that would go up. He stepped on stage. Somebody tittered. It was taken up. A few remembered other parts which Alex had taken and there was a smattering of applause.

Alex went into his part. Suddenly, he could almost feel it—as though playing Satan was second nature. As though he knew every move, every gesture Satan would make.

He advanced toward the actors in the center of the stage. One of them

had a smirk on his face which vanished as if by the wave of a magician's wand. He backed up, one arm out-thrust as if to ward off Alex. The other actor managed to get his lines across.

Alex said, "So you do not believe I am Satan. You ask for manifestations." There Alex paused. He was supposed to say that manifestations were unnecessary. Instead, he raised one arm high, brought it down with pointed finger aimed at a small table. A burst of smoke and flame encompassed that piece of furniture for an instant and then was gone.

ALLEX sucked in a quick breath. They'd apparently changed the play since the last performance. The Cartwrights had ordered more props, more stage business. But how could he have known of it?

He turned slowly, his arm still extended. One of the actors gave a genuine yelp and covered his face as he backed up.

"Don't point your finger at me. Don't, you—you devil!"

That wasn't in the play either, although it fitted perfectly. Alex lowered his arm. Now came the hardest part. He had to face the audience and convince them that he was truly Satan.

He turned very slowly, like a well-oiled piece of mechanism. One man let out a hoarse laugh, not of mirth, but of sheer surprise and terror. Those in the first few rows, shrank back in their seats. Alex could hear the breathing of that audience. A theatre had never been quite so still.

He smiled. That was part of the role. He drew himself up and bent a stern gaze on the audience. For a moment he thought some of them were going to get up and run for it.

"Those fools,"—he gestured toward the pair of actors—"do not believe. You believe—all you good people! You know I am Satan from the very depths of Hell! Satan—with powers to turn white light into red."

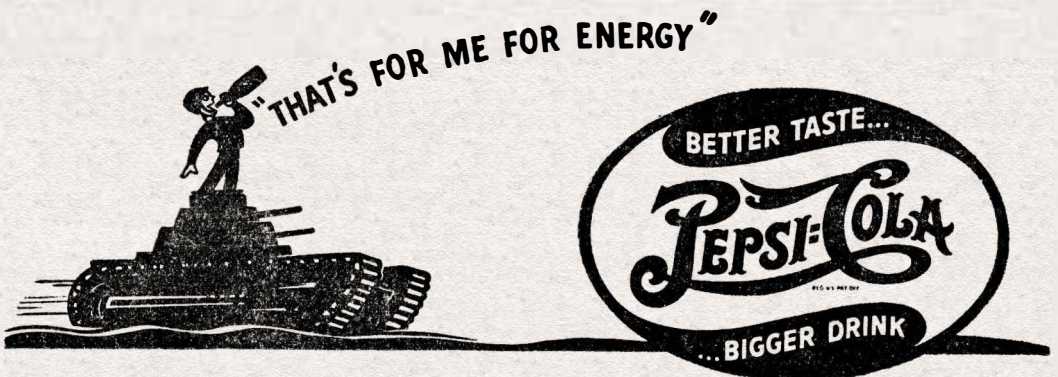
As he finished, the brilliant foot-lights grew dimmer, changed color and bathed the stage in a hue that looked like a waterfall of blood. Alex blinked. This was new, too. Or was it? The first real doubt assailed him and no one in that audience felt terror more acutely than did Alex Craig himself.

Was Satan behind this? Was he responsible for that burst of flame and smoke, the changing of these lights? Alex pivoted neatly and walked toward a full-length mirror which was part of the stage scenery.

He stood before it, head high, and saw that his eyes were blazing pools of light; that his entire body seemed to exude a strange luminous glow—his very features were twisted into the story book allegations of how the Devil looked. His face seemed thinner, temples higher, cheeks slightly sunken. Teeth were bared in a sly smile and his chin had become pointed.

If he'd worn the most elaborate makeup in the world, it wouldn't have made him look more frightening. No wonder his fellow actors were afraid of him. No wonder the audience

[Turn page]



shrank back.

All this required but a moment. Alex regained possession of his wits and realized the show must go on. Somehow, he knew the audience would accept anything he did and take it as part of the play.

He began acting. Other members of the cast came onstage. Valerie appeared and one hand shot toward her lips in the most dramatic gesture Alex had ever seen. That had not been acting.

The curtain went down on the first act. For a full two minutes no sound came from out front and Alex found he was bathed in sweat. Then, like a rising crescendo, the applause filled the theatre. Even electricians and property men joined in.

CHAPTER IV

The Missing Shadow

THE rest of the play went over smoothly. There were no more manifestations. None were required. Every person in that audience accepted Alex as Satan. Every move, every gesture or word, emphasized that belief.

Alex took seven curtain calls and could have responded to seven more, but he didn't feel like it. True, he'd given a great performance, but now that the play was over, he lost that eerie feeling of being possessed of another personality. He even shivered at a recollection of what had occurred on the stage.

Valerie came over.

"Alex," she said softly, "I don't think any actor ever assumed a role so genuinely. And such a difficult part, too. It just proves what I have always believed—that you are the best actor in the world."

He patted her hand. "Thanks, Val. I . . . guess it was pretty good. Even scared myself if you want the truth. Listen! They're still applauding."

"This play will probably break every record," Valerie said thoughtfully, "but if it does, it will be only because people want to see you act.

To be frightened by you. Alex, you even frightened me."

He grinned. "Lady, when that prop went off—you know, the smoke and fire—I almost collapsed. Then the lights changed color. Nobody told me of those changes."

"Nor me," Valerie said. "I heard some of the other members of the cast say they were scared out of their wits, too. Makes no difference—those things all helped. But, Alex, just how did you do it? I mean—last night you were so utterly—"

"Louśy? That's the word for it, darling. I'll tell you a secret. After you left Parker's last night, I made a bargain with Old Nick—pardon me. I meant to say Satan. He appeared to me and he was no cloven-hoofed, horned creature like that which exists in our imagination. He was a nice guy, really. Smooth, educated, well spoken and most convincing. That's how I portrayed him and . . . it went over."

"Did it!" Valerie closed her eyes in ecstasy. "Listen, they're still clapping. I don't care what sort of a silly story you told me. Something happened to you, darling. Something that's made a great actor out of you. Could that machine of Parker's have had any effect on you? Bill Parker swore you would be all right.

"Yes." Alex said very softly. "Something must have happened. That's what I'm afraid of."

"What did you say?" Valerie asked.

"Nothing. Nothing at all. Run along now. We're stepping tonight."

While she changed, Alex went to Cartwright's office again. Cory was seated in a chair, gently massaging his head. His wife bent over him, murmuring sympathetically.

"Cory, darling, I don't know what came over me. Forgive me, I didn't mean it. Why, we've never had an argument in our lives."

"Forget all about it. Entirely my fault," Cory said. "Ah, there's Alex. Congratulations, my boy. Never saw anyone take a part so effectively. I . . . Alicia! Don't. For heaven's sake, don't!"

The encyclopedia came down on his head with a crash. Alicia watched

him slide down on the floor again. She threw the heavy volume to one side, dusted her hands and smiled at Alex.

"He just said a mouthful. His fault is right. Why, the stupid, lug-minded simpleton. Wait until he wakes up. I'll bash him again. Wait and see. I'll bash him for breakfast every morning, bash him for lunch and bash him twice for dinner. Love birds, are we? Ahhh—"

Alex hastily backed out of the office. He'd seen something his eyes could hardly believe. Alicia Cartwright, of all people, talking about bashing her husband. Ridiculing the love of her husband.

VALERIE arrived at the stage door a few moments later, proudly tucked one arm under Alex's and they went out to meet a frenzied crowd that pressed around Alex demanding his autograph.

One woman yanked at his lapel, tearing it. Then she decided to do a good job and ripped it off, darting away through the crowd.

"Hey . . . you darned fool!" Alex yelled. "Come back here."

The woman skidded to a halt, turned and made a wild dash back to his side. She handed him the lapel, turned and rushed away again.

"Of all the crazy people," Alex said. "Tearing the clothes off my back. I wonder how she'd like it."

There was a horrible shriek behind him. He saw a flash of a pink body leaping into a cab. On the curb was a pile of feminine clothes.

"Alex," Valerie cried, "what on earth happened? You remarked you wondered how she'd feel, and then—she was—"

"Let's get out of here," Alex said unsteadily. "I—don't feel so good. This crowd frightens me. I wish they'd go home. I—"

Every man and woman in the throng suddenly turned and started walking rapidly away. After half a dozen steps, they broke into a run. Within half a moment there was not a soul to be seen.

A cab turned the corner, cruised lazily along and then suddenly the

driver stepped on it. He began shooting past Alex who raised one hand and whistled. The cab stopped with a jerk and a squealing of tires.

"What's the matter with you?" Alex asked the driver as he helped Valerie in.

"You got me, buddy," the driver looked dazed. "I just turned the corner, thought you and the lady might be fares and then all of a sudden I got a terrific yen to go home. What for, I dunno. The old lady heaved me out after dinner because I wouldn't wash dishes. Then you whistled and, so help me, the old crate stopped all by itself. Honest, I ain't had my foot off the gas pedal. See?"

"Well, push the foot a bit and take us to the Club Martini," Alex said.

They had to cross town for almost a mile and as they approached traffic lights, each one turned green. Valerie paid no attention. She was looking up at Alex.

"Darling, the play will go on for months and months. It's bound to, with you in it. Cory and Alicia will give you any salary you ask. Don't you think it's about time to pop the question? If you know what I mean."

Alex held her close. "Valerie, you know darned well I want to marry you, but we've got to wait. Just a little longer. I must be sure of something. Don't ask me what. I couldn't answer. It's—it's too silly to be put into words. Just trust me."

"Of course I will," Valerie said. "Oh, Alex, I knew you were a great actor. I knew it all along. I'm content with that. Nothing else matters."

They rode in silence for a moment. Then Valerie frowned.

"Alex, wasn't it odd the way that woman obeyed you. The way this taxi stopped when you whistled. But that woman . . . you said you wondered how she'd like to have someone take the clothes off her back—"

"Let's not talk about it," Alex grunted. "Gives me the creeps. Tonight, I want to enjoy myself. Ah, here we are."

THEY were both applauded when they walked toward their table at the very fashionable night club. Mrs.

Roger Worthington, a buxom woman, weighted down with a few hundred thousand dollars' worth of diamonds, waddled up to him.

"Oh, Mr. Craig—my dear Alex—I feel that I must ask you to attend the wedding of my nephew tomorrow. You remember him, of course. He went to dramatic school with you."

"Yes," Alex answered. "I remember the little squirt. Whom is he insulting by marrying?"

"Oh, you're so terribly funny," the woman tittered. "Nothing like the Devil you play on the stage. Will you come? I'll even have Chauncey make you best man if you wish. It will be the most fashionable wedding in the last twenty years."

"Tell me the truth," Alex said. "Is it me or my act you want present? Me or my fame?"

"Why, of course it isn't because you are just you. Heavens, no. It will lend prestige to have one of the greatest actors of our times be my nephew's best man. Oh—what am I saying?"

"The truth as you see it, for once in your life," Alex snapped. "I'll be there."

The decorum of the club was suddenly broken when an elderly man arose, walked to another table and calmly slugged another man his own age. For two or three minutes the thing threatened to become a free-for-all which Alex watched and laughed at until his sides hurt.

"Alex," Valerie said, "I don't see anything funny about it. Two old fools acting like that. I—"

The bartender drew their attention by nonchalantly leaning over the bar and breaking a wine bottle on the head of the fawning, hand-rubbing head waiter. Another fight started. There were four more of them before Valerie insisted that they leave.

"Let's walk," she suggested. "It isn't far to my place and I'd like some fresh air after what happened at the club. Those people were acting as if they belonged in some waterfront cafe."

"Maybe they do," Alex chuckled. "Going to the wedding with me tomorrow?"

Valerie gave him a peculiar glance.

"Are you really going? I thought you hated things like that."

"I do," Alex confessed, "but I feel that I should go. Come with me. Might even be fun."

They stopped outside her apartment building. It was very late. The dimmed-out street lamp gave the neighborhood a weird look. Alex stepped a little closer.

"Alex," Valerie cried. "See there—against the wall. My shadow, but you're not making any. Move your arm, Alex."

He moved it and there was no shadow. He took up exactly the same position from which Valerie's shadow had been thrown upon the wall. Still no shadow.

"Isn't that odd?" He frowned. "Must be something to do with the light."

Valerie took his arm tightly. "Of course," she agreed in a small voice. Then: "That reminded me of something my father used to say. He maintained that you could always tell when you met the Devil because—because he cast no shadow."

Alex went rigid and gasped. He wetted his lips, regained possession of his wits and finally said good-night. After she entered the house, he stood in all manner of positions before that crazy street light. No matter what he did there was no shadow. He looked at his wrist quickly. A tiny crescent-shaped scar glistened there.

"It was real," he muttered. "That stranger was Satan. He *did* proclaim a blood pact. Now, I—I'm really the—the representative of the Devil."

CHAPTER V

Closing Doors

STRANGELY enough, Alex went to bed with the idea that he'd never sleep again and—fell asleep in two minutes. He awoke next morning feeling fresh and alert. Even memories of his meeting with Satan, the weird events that soon had followed and the fact that he did not cast a shadow, seemed lighter, easier

to bear.

He dressed carefully in striped trousers, Eton tie, cutaway coat. After all, he was going to be the best man at the most fashionable wedding New York had seen in many years. Not that he was stupid enough to believe that Mrs. Worthington or her son wanted him because he was close to them. Their motives were purely selfish, and so were Alex's. Publicity of this kind never harmed an actor yet. There were bound to be photographers by the score.

He had no time to eat a leisurely breakfast so he hurried across the street and entered a cafeteria. It was extremely busy, for Alex Craig's breakfast time coincided closely with the lunch period of those who worked in offices or factories. He was conscious of an urge for haste.

When he started down the center of the cafeteria, a woman dropped a tray loaded with food. Two men bumped into one another, scattering beef stew and boiled tongue in all directions. A bus boy, mopping up the debris, tripped two people with his mop.

On the grill a small steak began burning, the steam table sprang a leak. Alex took his tray, went to a corner table and sat down. He merely glanced at a pretty girl nearby and a passing customer tilted his tray so that its contents fell into the girl's lap. From then on, Alex kept his eyes riveted on the food.

As he ate, he gradually acquired more confidence. This was all silly. Those things that happened—they were just coincidences. Some of them he might never have even noticed except for the wild idea that he had become Satan's understudy. The lack of shadow was also a coincidental trick. He was positive of it now.

Thinking in broad daylight, with many people bustling about, was easier and clearer. Whoever heard of Satan coming to earth and appointing someone as his agent to handle small, mischievous details because he was too busy to give such minor matters his personal attention?

Alex laughed at the idea and then

wincing. The cash register drawer stuck suddenly and the cashier, in trying to pull it loose, pulled the entire register off its platform and it crashed through a glass tobacco counter. It took three attendants to restore it and clean up the mess.

"Be reasonable," Alex told himself half-audibly. "I didn't do that. Probably happens twenty times a day all over the world. Utter nonsense to think that I had anything to do with the accident."

He finished his breakfast, paid the check with a one-dollar bill and received change for a twenty. He was honest about it, and the cashier opened her register again. She removed a bill and held it up.

"Mister, I don't know what your game is, but you gave me this double sawbuck. It was on top of all the other big bills in my register and I remember putting it there. So take your change and beat it. I'm busy."

Alex shrugged, stuffed the money into his pocket and walked out. The cashier muttered something, started to replace the bill and then gave a yelp. The twenty was now a one-dollar bill. Visions of a week's pay disappearing just as fast made the cashier groan in misery.

ALEX used a taxi, drove around and picked up Valerie. She smiled at him gayly.

"I really shouldn't be going to this wedding, darling. I wasn't even invited and you were selected as best man only because you are Alex Craig, actor-extraordinary. The whole set-up smells like the performance you gave the first night."

"I know," Alex nodded. "But the publicity won't hurt either of us and if they so much as breathe a command for you to leave, I'll go, too. Val—about that odd business last night. You know, I cast no shadow and it reminded you of the Devil because he casts none either. What's that idea all about? Where did it originate?"

She laughed. "Just an old superstition, that's all. Don't tell me it worried you. Why, Alex, how are we even certain there is a Devil? Anyway, let's not talk of things like that now.

"We're going to church."

Alex suddenly slumped low in the seat and broke out in a cold sweat. He didn't know why, but he felt as though something invisible and mighty closed around him. A million voices chattered indistinguishable words in his ears. He shook himself violently, grasped Valerie's hand and held it in a firm grasp.

"Alex," she said, "what's the matter? You look positively ill."

He gulped. "It's just — these darned weddings. Don't know why I ever let myself in for this."

"Neither do I," Valerie said. "But you'll have to go through with it. The morning papers had quite an account of your great and close friendship with the groom. Seems you two are inseparable. What's he like? And the bride—do you know her?"

"The bride is one of two things. A dried-up, butternut type who is grabbing anything, or else she'll be pretty, blond and a gold digger. No average woman would marry that guy. We're to go to Mrs. Worthington's house and ride with the bride and groom."

Valerie opened a small florist's box, extracted orchids and pinned them on.

"I knew you'd have no time to provide the flowers," she smiled, "so I got some myself."

Alex was looking out the window. He grunted something. Then the cab pulled into the driveway of Mrs. Worthington's sumptuous home. It stopped at the porte-cochere where the wedding party was assembled on the porch.

Alex shook hands with a lot of people who fawned on him and made him feel sick to his stomach. Then they climbed into a luxurious limousine with the bride and groom. Alex hardly looked at them.

The car headed for the church, followed by a small parade of other cars. A crowd was assembled outside, lined up on the wide steps that led into the church. Two gigantic bronze doors were opened wide, and music floated out onto the street.

Valerie tugged at his elbow and Alex stepped to one side with her while the bride and groom emerged.

"Alex, she's the gold digger type

all right. Did you listen to her line of chatter? If pins were brains, she'd never be bothered by any steel priority rulings. A perfect match for Chauncey. I'll bet the marriage will last all of two days."

Alex looked at the girl and found her beautiful, but with vacant blue eyes and a silly smile constantly present on her heavily painted lips.

Suddenly, the girl gave a shrill cry. "My flowers! Chauncey, whatever did you do to them? They're wilted. And flowers are so important to a wedding. Chauncey, do something!"

VALERIE glanced at her own corsage and frowned. The orchids which had been so fresh only a few moments before, hung wilted and lifeless.

The other cars drew up. There was no time to bother with flowers. A red-faced man, who wore his dress suit as though it were a straight-jacket, took the girl's arm and answered to the name of "Poppy." He staggered a little and gave off a gin breath, but he marched up the church stairs with his daughter on his arm.

"This wedding is being run like a honky-tonk affair," Valerie said softly. "When we are married, darling, you won't see me until I start walking down the aisle. It's unlucky for the groom to see the bride before the ceremony."

"Yeah," Alex said absently. "Let's go. Somehow, I've a feeling this whole thing is going to be a bungled mess before it's over. I should have kept out of it, but now it's too late."

Photographers' bulbs flashed, shutters clicked and dozens of photographs were taken. Seventy-five per cent of them were of Alex and Valerie. Being good actors and publicity conscious, they both put on their best smiles.

Yet all the while, Alex felt more and more ill-at-ease. He glanced up at the towering steeples of the church and shivered again. They reached the top step, started across a wide concrete platform, and very suddenly those gigantic church doors began to close.

"Hey," Alex yelled. "What's the

idea? Who is closing those doors."

Two church attendants rushed out before the doors slammed shut. They put shoulders against them and were brushed back like flies. One of the men looked at Alex helplessly.

"I don't know what is happening, sir. We're not closing the doors. We're trying to hold them open, but they insist on closing. All by themselves!"

Alex wetted his suddenly dry lips, stepped backward until he had descended half of the stairs. The giant bronze doors swung open again, just as mysteriously as before, all but precipitating the two perspiring ushers to the floor.

"What in the world!" Valerie cried.

"Come on," Alex said. "This is some kind of a joke. They always play jokes at weddings."

But when they approached the entrance again, the doors started to close once more. Alex let go of Valerie, gave a leap toward the doors and almost got himself crushed to death. He went halfway down the steps again and the doors swung open.

"Maybe," he said hoarsely, "the joke is on me. Probably Stan Haviland having some more fun. That guy hates me, Val. Sure, I know he's still in the hospital, but he has money enough to hire someone to pull a thing like this."

"What will we do?" Valerie asked. "We can't get in. Alex, all the rest of the bridal party are inside. We're marooned out here like—like—"

She began to sob quietly. Alex shot her a quick glance.

"I didn't think you gave a hoot about attending this shindig and now you're at the crying stage already. Look, you go in alone. If the doors don't close, I'll know it's a trick aimed just at me. Go on. I'll join you in a moment—if I have to enter through the cellar."

Valerie gave him a doubtful glance, hurried up the steps and all but bolted into the church. The doors never moved. On the sidewalk, news photographers and the usual crowd which a fashionable wedding always brings out, watched with bated breaths.

Slightly to the front of the crowd

was a rather short, pudgy, spectacled man. Behind his glasses, blue eyes gleamed in the strangest stare.

Alex found himself shivering again. He knew why those church doors were closing. They'd close every single time he approached them. The doors of this or any other church would try to keep him out.

ALEX closed his eyes. "Please," he muttered, "let me go in. I can't help what has happened to me. Solemnly, I promise that nothing will happen. I won't let it happen. Two people are going to be married. I'm the best man and they need me."

He felt a little better after that odd prayer, squared his shoulders and marched up the church steps. He didn't breathe once until he passed through the doors. They remained sedately open. Valerie hurried up to him.

"It must have been a trick and I think you're right in suspecting Stan Haviland. Wait until the next time I see him. But hurry, darling. The organ is playing the Wedding March. The bride is waiting. Chauncey is at the altar already and if you've got a pint on your hip, slip him a drink. He looks ready to collapse."

"See you later." Alex squeezed her hand. He stepped into the aisle and paced slowly toward the altar. Chauncey moved very close to him. One hand grabbed at Alex's coat and held on for dear life.

The organ burst into the final chorus of the Wedding March. Alex turned his head and watched the bride and her father start down the aisle. Someone clapped vociferously and the bride's father grinned broadly, clasped both hands and shook them above his head as acknowledgment of the applause.

Some of the bride's friends were there, too, it seemed. Alex stifled a grin when he saw the bride kick her father in the shins. Things straightened out after that and Alex started to breathe more easily.

The notes of the organ rose to full crescendo. The clergyman walked slowly to his place. Then the organ was muted. A select choir—hand-

somely paid for affairs of this kind—began to sing very softly. Sunlight streamed through the west windows in wide, cheerful rays. The procession was three-quarters of the way down the aisle.

Then, very suddenly, the tempo of the organ changed. It rose to full *cr scendo* again and the music was switched from the Wedding March to the wild, blaring rhythms of boogie-woogie as if the organist was interpolating half a dozen of the latest Harlem tunes.

The choir broke into loud, wailing song. A hubbub of chattering arose from the packed church. The clergyman raised surprised eyes toward the organ loft and began to wave his hand. Still the music kept on, growing wilder, more boogie-woogie than ever.

Oddly too, no more sunlight streamed through the windows and the church assumed a somber atmosphere. Alex listened to the riot of confusion until he felt he could stand it no longer.

Raising his voice, he yelled, "Silence!"

The din stopped abruptly, organ, choir and spectators alike. The resulting silence was so intense it hurt as much, or more, than the noise. Alex turned toward the clergyman.

"You may proceed," he said, as if granting a boon.

The clergyman stood there, his mouth half-open, one arm still raised high as if it had frozen while he tried to silence the organ.

"The bridal party and everyone necessary to the ceremony will proceed," Alex said again.

THE clergyman lowered his hand, opened the book and began reading the ceremony just as if nothing had happened. The spectators remained frozen just as they'd been when Alex yelled for silence.

"... and do you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband?" The clergyman smiled benignly on the bride.

"Yes," she said very softly. "I take this man to be my lawfully wedded husband."

And she flung herself at Alex, wound both arms around his neck and held on like a drowning swimmer.

Ordinarily, the packed church should have stared with amazement, yet no one moved.

"Let go," Alex yelled. "Hey—you're marrying Chauncey. Let go of my neck."

She obeyed instantly, but verbally objected. "I don't want Chauncey. I want you. I'm going to marry you."

"Yeah?" Alex lifted her from the floor and very unceremoniously deposited her into Chauncey's arms. "In a pig's eye, you are. Val! Let's get out of here."

Valerie came to his side and they rushed up the aisle. As they neared the doors, everyone in the church came to life again. The huge bronze doors began to shake violently as Alex passed through them. He shielded Valerie and was prepared to hurl her through if they began closing. They didn't. The shivering was all that happened.

Outside, they hailed a cab. Alex helped her in, started to enter himself and in doing so, turned halfway about and saw the blue-eyed, pudgy man watching him intently. He started forward with arm outstretched, but Alex had had enough for this day. He slammed the cab door and ordered the driver to head for the park and keep cruising around.

Valerie tore the flowers from her dress, rolled down a window and tossed the wilted things onto the street. Her lips were trembling. There were tears in her eyes.

"Val," Alex said softly, "something's wrong with me."

"Something is wrong with everybody," Valerie cried. "Oh, Alex, such a mess. Why in the world did that blonde throw herself into your arms and proclaim the fact that she wanted to marry you? I thought you two had never met before."

"We hadn't," Alex said softly. "That's the truth, Val. I swear it. Hang onto your curls, darling. I'm going to tell you something and when I finish, you can leave me anywhere you say. I'll get out gladly."

She looked up at him curiously.

Alex took a deep breath, clenched both hands.

"Val . . . I'm a deputy of Satan. I might even be Satan himself."

CHAPTER VI

Call Back the Devil

VALERIE began to laugh a little. "Alex, this is no time for joking. Or are you joking? Alex, you didn't take that too seriously about the old belief that one who casts no shadow is the Devil? You're sure you feel all right?"

"I feel too good," Alex grunted. "I didn't expect you to believe me, of course, but you must listen. Remember how Stan Haviland broke his leg so opportunely, how Alicia Cartwright suddenly socked her husband after all those years of blissful, married life? How that woman returned when I commanded her? How she—ah—lost her clothes? That's only the half of it. Take the church doors, for instance. They were closing because I'd blaspheme any church, any place of worship. It was only when I promised to enter myself that I was allowed to behave and then—those things happened, and I had to stop them."

"Alex," Valerie said in a kindly tone. "You'd better go home and rest. Don't forget you have a performance to do tonight."

"That's another thing. Did anyone ever portray the Devil so well on any stage in all history? No. Why not? Because I'm filled with the very essence of Satan himself. I didn't even have to act. The audience unconsciously recognized the fact that I was evil."

Valerie leaned forward and tapped on the glass partition. "Driver, take us to—"

"No," Alex shouted. "Keep on cruising around." He dropped his voice. "Val, you've got to believe me. It's the truth. I felt miserable after I lost the part. Something happened to me at Bill Parker's. He'd rigged up some kind of a dizzy thought con-

centrator so powerful its waves reached straight down into Hell itself. I didn't know that when I started shooting off my mouth about doing anything to play that part. The Devil appeared to me after you left. Val . . . Val, get that wild look out of your eyes. You'll hear this thing through and you'll be convinced."

"I'm . . . beginning to . . . be," Val said very slowly in a barely audible voice.

"It's about time. I was afraid I'd have to give you some concrete examples of what I can do—the mischief I can create. Satan did come. He was exactly as I expected him to be. Rather nice chap, but I suppose that attitude is all part of his game. I thought he was spoofing me, just as you refused to believe a little while ago. I made a deal with him."

"Oh Alex, you're—"

"No. Absolutely not. We didn't bargain over my soul or anyone's else. It's only that Satan is so doggone busy he can't handle minor details so he needed deputies. I'm assigned to this part of the world. I can't help the things that happen when I'm around.

"Don't ask me how this happened. I don't know. Bill Parker doesn't know. Maybe there isn't any Devil—but there certainly are strong forces for good and for evil. Perhaps they can be intensified just as Bill claimed. Anyway, I admit that I was in a particularly vile mood when he put that contraption on my head. Maybe I did conjure up my own conception of the Devil. Whatever it is—something terrible's happened to me!"

Valerie stirred herself. "Alex," the way you say this makes me almost believe you, but I think I know the answer. All those coincidences and then my reminding you that you cast no shadow add up to one thing. You had a bad dream and it stayed with you. You just think you made a pact with the devil. Now, let's stop talking nonsense. Give me a cigarette, please."

Alex opened his case, handed her a cigarette and thrust another between his own lips. He lit a match, holding the pack carelessly. His hands shook

so badly that Valerie had difficulty in getting a light.

ALEX transferred the match to his own cigarette. The pack of matches slipped a little closer and caught fire. Flame seared up into his face. He dropped the matches, let out a cry of pain and then he blinked a little. Ordinarily, he would have been burned—painfully. Yet he felt nothing.

Deliberately, he reached into his pocket, found another pack of matches and lit one. He raised the flame to one extended finger and let the fire lap around it. There wasn't even a smudge and he certainly felt nothing at all.

"Alex—oh, Alex!" Valerie cried.

"Yeah, 'Alex, oh Alex,'" he said slowly. "Are you convinced now? I belong in Hell because fire doesn't burn me. Nothing can harm me. Not a thing. I'm immune."

For a moment he thought Valerie was going to open the cab door and jump. Instead, she suddenly threw her arms around him.

"Alex—I do believe you. Fantastic as it sounds, I do believe. There are so many unexplainable things in life. This must be one of them. But, somehow, it can be explained scientifically. It *has* to be! You must be under some sort of self-hypnosis."

"Val," he whispered, "Val, you can't be with me any longer. Whatever it is, I'm no good for you or anyone else. I'm the personification of all that is evil. I don't even know the powers I hold except that wherever I go, ugly things happen."

She raised tear-stained cheeks. "Alex, it doesn't make any difference. I love you, not what you've been turned into. We've got to do something about this. We *must*, darling."

He nodded. "Yes, you're right. I have one loophole. Satan told me I could break the bargain any time I was so inclined. All I had to do was summon him and I can do that through Bill Parker's machine. I will summon him. I'll tell him to go to—to go home and stay there. I'll do that, Val. My word of honor."

"Right away?" she asked.

"I'll drop you off and go straight to Parker's place. Maybe I'll pull a terrific flop on the stage tonight. That doesn't matter. Nothing matters except that I get rid of this—this power I hold."

The attendant on duty in front of Valerie's apartment house broke his wrist opening the cab door. Valerie gave Alex a pleading glance and then rushed into the building. Alex told the driver Bill Parker's address, settled back and lit another cigarette. This time his hands didn't shake.

He began laughing. That wedding certainly had turned into something. And all because of him. If Chauncey refused to marry that little gold digger, so much the better. He'd save himself a quarter of a million dollars or so. Maybe Alex could use his powers to circumvent the devil—do good with them.

Oddly, Alex felt suddenly very good. He actually enjoyed himself and for a few moments he almost considered the idea of letting things ride. He could tell Val he'd tried to be released from his bargain and failed. But, no—that would be a particularly nasty trick. Even possessed of the Devil as he was, he could see that. After all, he was in love with Valerie.

PARKER'S butler let him in. Alex hurried to the lab. Parker greeted him absent-mindedly until Alex shook the man and pushed him into a chair.

"You're going to listen, Bill," he said sternly, "because more depends on my getting your co-operation than anything else in the world. Yes—you can even include the fact that Hitler might win this war. What I have to say is more vital."

"More vital—than winning the war?" Parker gasped.

"Exactly. Listen, you switched on your confounded thought intensifier the other night. You said it was so powerful you could get some sort of intense effect. Well—it did!"

Parker just gasped and said nothing. Alex went on.

"I told you I saw a stranger in this lab after I recovered. I did, even though you didn't. It was Satan! He

followed me when I left. We even had a drink together and made a deal. Never mind the terms. And never mind thinking I'm crazy. If you can't understand it, it's a cinch I can't! What I'm getting at is the fact that I've got to break my contract with Satan. That's where you come in.

"Call it concentrated hypnotism or cock-eyed psychosis or whatever you please. But you're going to turn on your screwy machine and hook it up to me so I can get in touch with the Devil. If I could think him up in concrete form, I can blot him out, too. Hurry up! Switch on your crazy machine and turn it up full power."

"Sure, Alex, sure," soothed Parker, his eyes apprehensive. "Anything for a friend like you. But the big oscillator tube is just patched, you know, and I don't think it will work like it did the other night, but—"

"It had better," warned Alex, clenching his fist. "Give me that silly thought helmet."

He grabbed the headpiece up and crammed it down over his ears.

"Satan!" he yelled. "Satan—you down there. Hear me? I want to see you."

"Then just turn around, my very able deputy," a pleasant voice said.

Alex turned slowly. There stood that handsome, debonair man smiling at him. Alex stepped closer. He felt no fear.

"Damn you," he cried. "I didn't know what I was letting myself in for. But I'm—"

"Damn me?" Satan asked quietly. The racket from the diathermy machine seemed to have quieted to a mere whisper although Bill Parker stood with both hands still clapped tightly against his ears.

"Yes—damn you," Alex repeated venomously.

"But, my dear fellow," Satan said, "when you damn me, that is the same as if you said to a close friend 'Bless you!' I thrive on damns. Now what's wrong? Aren't you having fun?"

"You know darned well I'm not. Everywhere I go, things happen—evil things. It's getting my goat. I want to break our bargain."

"That lovely blood pact? Alex,

I'm surprised at you. I rarely misjudge people. Come now, think it over. All those things would have happened, anyway. They were bound to because I must create mischief. It so happens you were just a means to an end. Nothing really serious happened, now did it?"

"That wedding was ghastly."

"Oh yes. Very clever of you to promise to behave so the church doors would remain open. Clever also to break your word. A man after my own heart, Alex. Remember in the cab—on your way here? You thought it all over. You knew that Chauncey would have suffered if that little gold digger ever married him. You helped the man. That girl and her father were all set to make Chauncey and his mother pay through the nose."

"What about the rest of it? The wilting flowers. I like flowers."

SATAN arched his eyebrows.

"Ah, but they don't like you. Inconsequential stuff, Alex. You must give me a better reason."

"Now see here," Alex protested, "I got myself into this mess because I was greedy. I wanted to play my part on the stage to perfection. I did. You carried out your end of the deal. But you also promised I could break our contract whenever I chose. I'm holding you to your word."

Satan smiled. Then he laughed, throwing back his head as if this was one of the most joyous moments of his eternal career.

"Yes," he admitted, "we did make a bargain. Sealed it in blood too. But I'm Satan. The Devil! Did you expect me to keep my word? Devils are made to be liars. I'm the greatest little liar in all history."

"Then you . . . won't . . . let me go?"

"Please," Satan held up one hand in a grand gesture, "don't put it so crudely. Most assuredly, I won't permit you to break our agreement. Why should I? You're doing very well at it."

"Then I'll go on . . . like this? Always creating trouble?"

"Not necessarily. You see, it's only that I'm so pressed for time that I

need your help. When conditions remedy themselves—as they always do—I'll find time to handle my own affairs. The minor ones, I mean."

"That may be centuries," Alex groaned.

"I guarantee not. Now let me point out certain facts. Mischief is all you'll create. Never anything big because I reserve the big things for myself. After all, I'm not delegating the full extent of my power. Perhaps a few people will be hurt. What of it? They'd be hurt, anyway. Lots of them will be embarrassed, but they deserve it. Leave things to me and stop worrying."

"Leave 'em to you and I'll be wielding a pitchfork down there," Alex grunted.

"Pitchfork? Bah—you read too many fairy tales. I'm not as crude as that. What does it matter if a fellow has a bit of fun? Eternity is a long time. Without fun, I'd stagnate and perhaps think of something really dreadful."

Alex ran fingers through his hair. "Let's get this straight," he said. "Are you insinuating that so long as I handle your petty affairs, I may save mankind from something worse? You'll be content to sit back and enjoy yourself?"

"You may assume that if you wish," Satan replied.

"Uh—yes, but can I believe you? I've never talked to anybody with so slick a tongue."

"Of course, you haven't, my dear fellow. I'm the smoothest person on—in—let it go. You know what I mean. Now suppose you just go about your business and let me go back to mine. You've no idea how urgently I'm needed in certain quarters."

"What quarters?" Alex demanded.

THE Devil smiled at him. "Why, didn't you know there was a war going on? Ah yes, the greatest little war in history. Won't be long before I have so many reservations I can sit down and be choosy. I like that. Even the Devil has to be careful whom he allows in his home. Believe me, lots of people are awful wrong these days."

"Meaning just what?"

"Well—they condemn certain people to Hades. Millions raise a drink, for instance, and toast little Adolf to hell. Fools! Do they think I want him? Cluttering up my habitations? Like as not he'd bring Goebbels with him. What then? Propaganda in Hell? Hah—I think not."

Alex sighed. "Will you please come back to business? Promise me that if I agree to keep on acting as your—ah—agent, I will be released finally. I will prevent you from brooding too much and making worse trouble on earth than you'd permit me to create."

"I promise," Satan bowed very low.

"All right then," Alex agreed reluctantly. "I'll keep on. Can I call you again? If I begin to grow doubtful?"

"Of course—if you can reach me."

"I'll reach you," Alex vowed. "All I want is to shake hands on the deal—as it stands now."

Satan put out his hand and took Alex's in a warm, friendly grasp. "There's no need to seal it in blood again. Of course, there is one thing you should know."

"Yes? What is it?"

"Merely that I'm the greatest little liar ever known. Good-by, Alex. We'll meet again."

Alex turned and raised his voice into a shout that made the laboratory walls tremble.

"Bill! Bill Parker—turn that infernal machine off."

Alex started forward. Where Satan had stood was nothing. He'd vanished.

CHAPTER VII

The Unwanted Power

ALEX walked slowly over to where Bill Parker stood. Parker began to back away.

"I don't blame you, Bill," Alex said. "You're convinced now, aren't you? You did see me talking to Satan?"

"I—saw you talking to—nothing. You were raving, Alex. You need attention. I know a good doctor. Let

me call him for you."

Alex sat down heavily. "So he didn't show himself to you. Bill, I hoped you'd be convinced because I need help. Look, there's some big glass apparatus over there on that farther table. Nothing to do with the thought intensifier, I hope."

"Nothing to do with that," Parker answered slowly. "It's something I made to study cosmic rays. Took me weeks. Guard it like I would my life. Why? What does that apparatus mean to you?"

safe here with you?"

Alex picked up a house phone, got the butler and told him to bring some fresh flowers into the lab, a bunch of dewy roses that had been on a table in the hallway when Alex entered.

The butler brought them. Alex had him put the vase in a far corner of the room. After the door closed and the butler was gone, Alex arose.

"Watch carefully, Bill," he said, "flowers wilt when I get close to them. I give off an aura of evil. You'll be convinced if I have to pull some black



*Charlton, King of the Bat
People of Uranus, Puts
Amazing Obstacles in the
Way of Three Spaceteers of
Earth—and Jeopardizes the
Destinies of Two Planets.*

in

WINGS of ICARUS

By RAY CUMMINGS

Next Issue's Astounding Complete Book-Length Novel

"I hate to do this, Bill. Just as much as you're going to hate losing that mess of glass. But I must convince you. I must! Therefore, your beautiful glass apparatus is now—no more."

There was a horrible cracking sound and the glass apparatus fell into a million pieces. Parker let out a screech, rushed over to the table and then his shoulders fell.

"Alex, I didn't see you throw anything, but you must have. Now will you tell me why you did this? Are you stark mad? Is it so bad I'm not

magic out of my hat. Watch those flowers! See how fresh they are, how straight they stand. Ah, look at them now. I'm getting closer. They feel my presence."

The roses slowly bowed their heads. Petals and leaves curled until only the thorns stood out boldly. Bill Parker gave a yelp of alarm.

"Stay away from me," he implored. "If you can make roses wilt, you'll probably turn me into a jellyfish. All right—I'm convinced! What can I do to help you?"

"Sit down, Bill," Alex said. "Cool

off. I wouldn't hurt you. You and Valerie will soon be all I have left when the news of what I am leaks out. Bill—I did make a deal with Satan. He's bound me to it, unfairly and by lies, but I'm stuck. You must help me figure out a way to trick the Devil. Between us, we should cook up something. After all, you're partly to blame for this mess."

"I'll do all I can," Parker promised. "Take my word for it. I'll not even stop to sleep or eat as I try to figure things out. Only—you'd better leave now. The shock. . . ."

"All right." Alex walked toward the door. "I'll get in touch with you after tonight's performance. Have something thought up, will you?"

As Alex hurried down the steps, Bill Parker arose, walked to one of his lab benches and picked up a heavy metal bar. There was a look of determination on his face as he approached his thought intensifier.

GOING to his own apartment, Alex opened a couple of cans of food. He no longer dared eat in public. No telling who'd get a cup of hot coffee spilled down his neck. He ate without relish, got out of his striped trousers and cutaway coat. He shaved and showered, put on a neat gray suit and found himself whistling cheerfully as he waited for the elevator.

The theater lobby and entrance was jammed. Everyone knew about the show and about how Alex Craig played the part of Satan to such perfection as actually to seem real. A few ticket scalpers were doing a land office business at boom prices.

Alex greeted the doorman with a smile, looked around backstage for Valerie and decided she must be in her dressing room. He walked up to the Cartwrights' office, opened the door and stepped in.

Cory and Alicia Cartwright were sitting on a small davenport, holding hands. They looked up. Alicia arose slowly, bent a stern gaze upon her husband who was watching Alex. She walked sedately to where the big encyclopedia was parked, lifted it and hurried back to bring it down on her astonished husband's skull.

She watched him collapse on the floor, rubbed her hands and smiled at Alex.

"I get the darnedest kick out of doing that," she gloated. "Alex, be a good boy and get my smelling salts. I want to bring Cory out of it and sock him again."

"Nix," Alex cried. "Alicia, you don't know what you're doing. You can't know!"

"But it is fun," Alicia protested shrilly. "I can read his mind, the nitwit. The moment you entered the room, I knew he was wondering if you, in some way, caused Stan Haviland to break his leg. Should have broken his fool neck."

"Look," Alex said, "I'm acting in this show. You own it. You pay me, but for your own good state of mind, stay away from me. Have nothing to do with me; that's all I ask. Good-by."

He bolted out of the room, hesitated down the corridor a bit and then tiptoed back. He listened at the flimsy panelled door and heard Alicia murmuring apologies to Cory Cartwright.

He cursed and walked swiftly to his dressing room. Maybe what he'd seen wasn't very much so far as Satan himself was concerned, but Alex knew these two, knew how much they loved one another and that their squabbling was entirely due to his presence. He began wondering if sooner, or later, everyone he met would go through the same thing.

As before, he used no makeup. Not a trace of it. With the characterization of the Devil seared into his heart, he couldn't fail to make an audience believe in him if he came out dressed as a scarecrow.

At the close of the first act, he maneuvered so that he could stop Valerie as she left the stage. Somehow, he gathered, she'd avoided meeting him except during the necessary lines of the play.

"Val," he whispered as he looked around covertly. "I saw him again. I talked to him."

"Yes, Alex, what did he say? Are you released?"

"No—not exactly. Val, you must listen. Don't turn away. I'm sacrificing myself for the good of every-

one. You, Alicia, Cory—even Stan Haviland. Unless I agreed to carry on, Satan swore he'd start things humming around here."

"I know what happened in Alicia's office," Valerie whispered. "Alicia feels horribly about it. Can't explain why she does those things. I know. It's because of you—just your presence. Alex . . . we had a date tonight. I won't keep it."

Alex flushed. His usually friendly eyes grew stern and uncompromising.

"Yes, you will," he said hoarsely. "Wait and see. I'm going to explain things if I have to tie you down."

THE rest of the play went off smoothly. Alex took his usual quota of curtain calls, but somehow they didn't affect him as well tonight. If those fools out front only knew who and what they were applauding!

He went to his dressing room, changed and then hurried to Valerie's quarters. A colored maid told him Miss Valerie had been gone for four or five minutes, that she'd been in a terrific hurry.

Alex said, "Oh," rather flatly and walked out of the theatre. He brushed aside the horde of autograph seekers, but they were persistent. With an angry gesture he commanded them to move aside. They did—like automatons and remained frozen until he drove away in a taxicab.

He smiled grimly. At least there was a certain measure of usefulness in his hellish power. Then he began thinking and rubbing his chin. Why, he could get away with sheer murder if he chose. He could go about, never paying a penny for anything. No one could deny him anything. Fire couldn't burn him.

It was just as possible that he might be immune to death. Alex whistled gayly and contemplated the many things he could do by merely exercising his will. He decided to try it.

"Driver," he said, "pull up."

The cab slid to the curb along a street that was composed mainly of small, fashionable shops. Alex got out into the dimmed light. He

stepped up to the cab.

"I think I paid you with a five-dollar bill," he said.

The driver gasped, opened his mouth to offer some choice vituperation and closed it again quickly. He shivered, gulped and spoke.

"Yes, sir. Five dollars it was. I remember now. Sorry, sir. Here's your change."

Alex took the money, stared at it for a moment and then handed it back.

"You're a very good driver. The change is yours."

"A four-fifty tip for a half a buck ride." The driver grinned from ear to ear. "Say, thanks, buddy. You're a sport all right."

"Wait until you tally up tonight," Alex said mysteriously. "Then see how much you'll thank me."

He started walking and wondered why the blazes he'd been silly enough to dismiss the taxi in this desolate section of town. It was incredibly dark. The street lights were spaced far apart and illuminated by very dim bulbs. Not a light came from the window of any store. Alex suddenly remembered he was part of a nation at war. This was the dim-out.

About two blocks farther on, he thought he saw a shadowy form slink into a doorway. Alex hesitated. Of all places a thug might pick to hold him up, this was one of the very best. Alex slowed up. He momentarily forgot that he could control anyone and became cautious.

"Pal," a voice hissed. "Hey, pal. You got a minute. Honest, this is on the level."

Alex stopped. A thick-set man was coming toward him. In the weak rays of a street light Alex saw that he was coarse-featured with all the earmarks of a professional mug.

"Well," Alex asked gruffly. "what is it?"

"It's like this, pal," the man said. "I got outa stir two weeks ago. No parole—I served my full time so they got no hold over me. But I was in the can a long, long time. I got to thinkin' and I see there's no future in crime. I'm lookin' for a job—any kind of a job."

"Sorry," Alex said, "I can't fix you up."

"It ain't that, boss. Y'see, I ain't eaten in thirty hours. Ain't had no place to sleep except a park bench and the cops keep movin' me. All I ask is a buck to get some chow and a flop. That's a lot of dough these days. Sure it is, but listen, mister, if I don't get somebody to help me pretty soon I'll have to go back to the old ways and help myself—if you know what I mean."

ALEX nodded. The man was obviously sincere. The amount he asked for, the excuse he gave and his frank confession of being an ex-con all added up to the truth. Alex took a five-dollar bill from his pocket.

"Take this. You don't have to pay it back to me, but society expects something for this money. Good luck."

The ex-convict carefully folded the bill, tucked it into the watch-pocket of his bedraggled trousers and removed his cap.

"You won't regret this, mister. Just a minute ago I says to myself, if this guy don't come through, then it's back to my old racket. I had enough, but now you give me faith. Sure, that's it. Faith. God bless you, pal."

Alex winced. As the thug turned away, he turned and gazed curiously at himself in the reflection in a store window. He, a deputy of the Devil, handing out five dollars to some wheedling crook. What kind of a deputy was he, anyhow?"

Alex grinned. One thing—the Devil had no firm grip on him. He could do good if he wanted to. Then Alex gave a cry and started forward. The thug he'd helped had picked up a brick, was walking briskly toward the window of a jewelry store and paid no heed to Alex's frantic yell.

The thug hurled the rock. As the glass shattered, he rushed forward and scooped up everything he could hold from the window display. Laughing gleefully, he started to run.

But the crash of the window had been very loud and a uniformed patrolman barged around the corner. The fleeing thug all but ran straight

into his arms. The cop drew a gun, leveled it and barked a command.

"Reach, or I'll let you have it. Reach high!"

Alex quietly stepped into the doorway of a store. If the cop saw him, used him as a witness and the whole story came out, plenty of people would have a good laugh. Over an actor who was talked into lending five dollars to a crook who wanted to go straight. Then, ten seconds afterwards, broke a jewelry store window for loot.

It didn't occur to Alex that he might be responsible for all this. That the crook might have been very much on the level until the evil influence of a devil's deputy reached out and grasped him by the neck.

The thug backed away slowly, his hands half-raised. The cop stood rigidly still, gun ready.

"Don't be a fool," the cop warned. "Run for it and I'll put one through your back. I've seen your mug before on headquarters posters. You're a crook and, by the looks of you, good and desperate."

"Yeah. Yeah, desperate is right," the crook answered. "I'm a three-timer. One more rap and I get the whole book. I'd rather be gunned out than rot in prison. I'd rather die now!"

He suddenly leaped forward with both arms outstretched, fingers meant to claw into the cop's throat. The gun blasted twice and still the thug kept going. Two more shots slowed him up. He stood there, a huddled heap of dying flesh, rocking slowly back and forth on his heels and then, like a very tired man, he lay down. One minute later, he was dead.

The cop blew on his whistle, darted back around the corner to look for help and Alex made his escape without being seen. The thing rattled him. He knew now that he was responsible. A man had died because of him. That wasn't mischief. Death went much further than that. He shivered violently. Valerie was right, all the way through. He shouldn't expose anyone to the evil aura of his presence. He brought only trouble and now—death.

For an hour he walked through a section of the large public park trying and trying to see some way out of all this. There wasn't a loophole. Nothing! His brain reverted to his former way of thinking. Perhaps he should make the best of his lot and pray for the moment when his release would come.

Meanwhile, he had to carry on. At a taxi feed line he got a cab and asked to be driven straight home. He leaned back against the seat, as fatigued as if he'd spent twenty hours rehearsing a new play.

CHAPTER VIII

The Second Scar

BELLS clanged behind the taxi and it shot to one side, allowing fire apparatus to roll past. Alex saw a red glow against the skyline. The driver saw it, too.

"How about going over there?" he asked. "Looks like a big one. I'll pull my flag down. Me, I'm nuts about fires."

"Go ahead," Alex grunted. "I might as well have a good close look at Hell."

Fire lines blocked them. Alex got out and walked with the driver as close as police would allow them. It was a six-story tenement block, old wooden structures that seemed to be a complete mass of flames. Hoses squirted tons of water quite ineffectively. Aerial ladders were raised. A fireman swarmed to the top of one and waved a hand energetically.

"Holy saints," someone cried. "There's a woman and a kid up there on the roof. Trapped! Look at 'em, when the wind blows smoke away. She looks like she's going to jump. It'll be suicide."

"Suicide, my eye," someone else shouted. "All that dame has is a choice to get smashed on the pavements or roasted alive. They can't get her down. Nobody in this world could enter that house and live."

"Nobody in this world," Alex said softly. He pushed his way forward.

A cop barred him, then suddenly dropped the thick arm and waved Alex on. Alex rushed past a fire truck. Two men, one a deputy chief, grabbed him.

"Look, friend," the chief said, "it can't be done. If that's your wife and child up there—"

"I haven't the vaguest idea who they are," Alex answered solemnly, "but I hope to get them down here safely. Going to do anything about it?"

"We-ell, no. No, I guess not. Man wants to commit suicide, it's okay with me."

Alex reached the blazing furnace that had been a doorway. He stopped and looked up. The woman, with the child in her arms, was teetering on the edge of the roof.

"Stay where you are," Alex shouted. "Don't move."

The woman certainly could never have heard him above the din of the fire, the shouts of the crowd and the noise created by the hoses. Yet she seemed to obey.

Alex didn't even put a protecting arm around his face. He walked boldly into the blaze and felt no pain, no heat, no fear. He located what was left of the stairway, seized red hot banisters and pulled himself slowly up the ruins. He reached the fourth floor and stopped to get his breath. The smoke didn't bother him. In fact, it almost felt as though it gave him new vigor.

He kept on going. Maybe Valerie would think differently if he brought this woman and her child to safety. He reached the fifth floor and was halfway up the last flight when the roof caved in. Alex went plunging down with the flaming debris. He should have been killed, but he didn't suffer so much as a bruise.

Hoses were turned his way. Powerful searchlights brought him into stark relief as he pushed beams away and gradually wormed his way into an upright position. He worked a path across the ruins. Eager hands seized him. A doctor rushed up. Alex waved him aside.

"I'm all right, thanks. Not a scratch. Miraculous, eh, but it's so."

SOMEBODY yelled out a cheer that was taken up by others. Photographers snapped his picture by the dozen. He was recognized, called by name. Alex paid little attention to this. He found the deputy chief who had permitted him to go through the lines.

"What about the woman—the child?" he demanded.

"Dead. Never had a chance, but what you did, Mr. Craig, was about the bravest thing I ever saw in my career. Can't figure out what came over me to even think of letting you enter that building."

"You idiot," Alex growled. "Why weren't life nets spread? She might have saved herself by jumping."

The deputy chief turned deathly pale. "Life nets? I never thought of them. Never thought, and yet I should have. First thing to enter my mind should have been life nets. Nobody else thought of them, either."

"You incompetent—" Alex began and suddenly closed his mouth. This had not been the fault of anyone but himself. This was just another manifestation of Satan. One of his "minor" mischiefs. Alex closed both eyes and stumbled through the crowd, their cheers still ringing in his ears.

The same taxi driver was waiting. Alex brushed aside his praise.

"Take me to the two thousand block on Riverside," he ordered. "And hurry. Never mind lights or cops or anything else. This is a matter of life and death."

The wild trip was accomplished without interference. In fact, they passed a radio car while they were doing fifty-five and the policemen inside it never so much as gave the speeding cab a glance.

Alex jumped out, threw a bill to the driver and ten seconds later he pounded and kicked at the door while his finger pressed the bell of Bill Parker's home.

The butler let him in. Alex brushed past the startled man, raced upstairs and banged on Parker's door. The electric mechanism clicked. Parker hurried forward to meet him, stopped halfway across the big room and started to retreat slowly.

Alex said, "Bill," get over at that thought machine. Switch on full power and leave it there. I've got to summon the—the—Satan. That's what he asked me to call him. I can think of a lot better methods of expressing how I feel about him. Bill, the thought machine, man. Don't you hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you," Parker replied. "Too well. You want to use my machine again to contact the Devil. Why? Why is it so important if he's doomed you to remain as his deputy for the rest of your life? What can you do about it?"

"I can make him keep his promise to release me. There must be a way to force his hand. There has to be, Bill. I'm running into death—violence. The mischief has become a petty thing. Three people died tonight because of me. That wasn't in our bargain. Bill, if you don't get that machine started, so help me—"

Parker sat down very, very slowly. He made no attempt to move over to the lab bench.

"Alex," he said, "you proved to me that you had materialized the Devil through my machine. Reached straight down into Hell and summoned him. After you left, I became frightened. What if he acquired a hundred new deputies? A thousand? Millions of them? Then what? Alex, the strange power of that thought intensifier was established through a tube that took me years to make."

"Never mind the chatter," Alex cried. "I don't care how long it took you. Start the thing."

"I can't," Parker looked miserable. "I—I destroyed the tube—and all the plans by which I created it. I—can't use that machine again."

THE lab began to swim before Alex's eyes. Bill Parker became a blur. Alex knew he spoke, but the words were gibberish. Then, as if from far away, he heard a laugh. It made his blood run cold. There was fury and condemnation and high elation in those tones. They seemed to rise straight up through the floor.

Alex was sipping a drink of straight

brandy when his wits returned. Bill Parker stood over him, fanning energetically with a folded magazine.

"Alex—Alex, snap out of it. I didn't know what I was doing. I thought you were finished, anyhow, and I was afraid I'd be next. I became a coward. I don't know why. If you could face such a thing as this, there's no reason why I couldn't and yet—"

"Forget it," Alex said slowly. "There's no use diluting my brandy with tears. Have a drink yourself. We both need it. I know why you destroyed the machine. The Devil reached up and made you do it. That was his hand smashing the oscillator tube, his will directing its ruin. You couldn't help it and you're no more a coward than I am."

Parker chewed on his lower lip for a moment. "Alex, you must be right. Incredible as all this seems to be, it's real. You and I are involved in something bigger than us. Bigger, possibly, than everyone in the world. Yet we're human. We must fight it."

"How?" Alex asked dismally. "You don't know what I'm up against. You're clean—there's no taint on you . . . or is there? Bill, let me see your right wrist. Let me see it."

Parker pulled up his sleeve. The wrist bore no odd crescent scar. Alex let go with a sigh of relief.

"At least, *you* are all right. For a moment I was afraid. Bill, you're right. Somehow, someway we have to find a method to fight the Devil. Six months more of this and I'll be ready for an asylum."

"Not you," Bill corrected. "The Devil takes care of his own, they say, and I believe it. There is only one way. Apparently when you call, Satan has to answer whether he wants to or not. I'll build another oscillator tube. It will take me a year, probably. But I'll do it, work as many hours a day as I can stay on my feet. That's a promise."

Alex smiled wanly, finished his drink and arose. He stretched out one hand.

"If you don't mind shaking hands with a Devil on earth, I'd appreciate it. You're the only friend I have left.

Even Valerie has turned against me."

Bill shook hands with a grin. "Maybe you ought to buy some nice, quiet mausoleum, Alex, and stow yourself away there."

Alex shuddered. "Wouldn't do a bit of good. The population of that cemetery would probably rise up and heave me out. No, I've got to go my own way. Try to make this mischief as small as possible and keep away from my friends. I don't like to push you around, but time is precious. Hadn't you better—get to work?"

Parker made a dash for the bench, waved to Alex and opened the door for him. Downstairs, Alex called the butler.

"Mr. Parker is going to be busy from now on," he said. "See that he isn't disturbed by anyone. Be certain of it, do you understand?"

"Yes, sir." The butler started to open the door. "You can rest assured sir—ow! Oh, my eye. Pulled the door right against it. Stupidity, that's what it was."

"The Devil's own luck, you mean," Alex told him.

HE WALKED to his own apartment even though it was almost all the way across town. He needed time to think. Time and a cool brain and quiet conditions to puzzle out some way to defeat Satan.

"He told me," Alex mused half-aloud, "that he was very busy on earth. That probably means he is personally directing something—has entered the soul of someone. If I could find that person—that place, I might be able to devise a scheme to make Satan show himself."

He brightened at the idea and then cursed himself for being a fool.

"What good would it do?" he asked. "Didn't Satan tell me he was a liar, that he doted on lies? Therefore, he was stringing me along all the time. He never meant to release me. What a fool I was! For the privilege of playing the Devil on a stage, making a great actor out of myself, I've taken on Satan's work. I've become a human devil. Wherever I go, there is trouble. Whoever I meet, encounters mischief.

He rummaged in his pocket, found keys and opened the lobby door that was always locked soon after midnight. No one was in the lobby and he felt relieved at that. He'd had enough of mischief for one day.

He unlocked his apartment door, lit the light and stepped inside. He doffed his hat and coat, walked into the living room and snapped on a table lamp. Raising his head, he froze in that position.

There was a high-backed chair before the fireplace. From it, lazily arose a column of smoke. The chair must be occupied. Alex picked up a heavy cigarette box, grimaced and laid it down again. If the inferno of fire couldn't hurt him, no cheap crook could do it. Alex walked around the chair and looked down at its occupant.

He saw the same pudgy, spectacled man who'd been watching him so intently at the Worthington wedding. The man smiled, snuffed out his cigarette and leaned back.

"You are very late, Mr. Alex Craig. But I suppose part of a theatrical career consists of much early-hour running around. Or did something else keep you?"

"What do you want? Who are you and what is the meaning of invading my apartment like this?"

The man chuckled. "I and people of my kind are very good at invasions, Mr. Craig. Please sit down. There's no need to be frightened of me. Perhaps I can help you."

Alex sat down, still fuming with rage. He said, "How can you help me? How do you know I need help?"

The man leaned forward unexpectedly, seized Alex's wrist and drew up the sleeve to expose that strange scar. Then he let go, raised his own right arm and showed another scar. It was the same shape, located in exactly the same position but it seemed to be fading gradually. Other than that it was like the one which had been burned into Alex's flesh by the Devil's pact.

"Are you—" Alex gasped.

"No. No, I'm Satan's deputy no longer, Mr. Craig. You can see that my scar is fading slowly. Perhaps, in

another four or five months it will be entirely gone."

"But once you were?"

"Oh, yes. For eight glorious years I served Satan. I spread his mischief and then—well, I'd rather not explain further."

"You will explain," Alex snapped. "I can make you."

"Wait! Yes, I know very well just what you are capable of. I'll talk. My name is Dingle. Not my real name, of course, but it will do. I am a German. A Nazi."

"A rat," Alex said gently. "A louse. Which means the same thing. Go ahead and be assured that now I don't give a hoot what happens to you."

HIS visitor blinked at his words. "My," Dingle gasped, "you're taking this work to heart, aren't you? Well, I'm not only a Nazi, but a spy. My mission in the United States is to destroy, find out secrets and transmit them to my own country. You're going to help me."

"Look," Alex reminded him, "I'm only Satan's deputy. Not Satan himself. I still possess some sense of decency. Now forget all about such wild ideas. There is something I must know. How did you get rid of—of this ghastly influence?"

"If you promise to listen to what I have to offer, I'll tell you everything. I must have that promise because you could make me turn into a pillar of flame if you wished. I confess I'm afraid of you. More afraid than of anything in all my life and I've taken many chances."

"I'll listen," Alex promised.

"Very well. Eight years ago I was a prosperous manufacturer in Berlin. Something happened one day and I called on the Devil. He came. I got what I wanted, but I became his deputy. I performed his mischief and I enjoyed it. Then—I got too ambitious."

"Yes, go on. You became too ambitious. What happened then?"

"The Devil fired me. Gave me the gate."

"Why? Tell me, man. I've got to know!"

"Well, a man named Hitler came along. He was ambitious, too, and I helped him. The influence I possessed got rid of Hitler's enemies, gradually brought him more and more power. He became Chancellor. He rearmed Germany secretly, made it the glorious country—"

"Of thieves and murderers," Alex interjected. "Keep talking."

Dingle flushed angrily, but he knew better than to go off the handle. Dingle even seemed to have difficulty in talking straight.

More than once, when Alex looked his rage, Dingle's teeth actually chattered noisily.

"Many of the things that happened during Hitler's rise to power were the mechanizations of the Devil, worked through me. Hitler owes his success to me, but he does not know that or I would be much higher in office than I am now."

"In one minute," Alex warned impatiently, "I'll give you an urge to crawl out of my window and jump. Why did Satan fire you?"

"As I said, I became too ambitious. I guess he was afraid I'd try to usurp him. That was when we marched into Poland and I led a Gestapo unit. We cracked heads—gray or black-haired. We shot them down in droves. Nobody ever bothered to count the victims. Ah, a man like you would have been proud of us."

"I'm beginning to see the light," Alex said softly. "Yes—the light. You became so damnably rotten that even Satan himself couldn't stand you. Therefore, rather than be blasphemed with men like you, he administered the well-known bounce."

DINGLE gave a sickly grin. "Exactly," he admitted.

"Well, well," Alex grunted. "Imagine that. Dingle, you loved seeing innocent blood flow. I'll even bet you crowned a few women and children with a rifle butt or maybe used a bayonet on them. Fun, wasn't it, sticking them like butterflies."

"Yes." Dingle leaned forward eagerly. "I knew you'd enjoy that. I'll give you details. There was one woman—maybe sixty-five. She at-

tacked me with a broom. Imagine that! A broom. I finished killing her fool of a husband and then I—"

"Shut up!" Alex shouted. "Dingle, I'm going to let you meet the Devil again. I'm quite certain he'll have some particularly nice way of torturing you. I could think of many ways. Maybe I will. Maybe—"

"No!" Dingle threw both hands against his face and cowered. "No—not yet. You promised to listen!"

"I don't like your brand of humor," Alex answered tartly.

"But it's about my offer. If you don't listen, you'll be sorry. I recognized you as the Devil's own this afternoon at the wedding. I happened by and when the church doors closed of their own accord, I knew the truth. It was easy to find out who you were, so I came here. But before that I wrote the whole story and deposited it in a safe place. If I do not return, that statement will be made public. Perhaps no one will believe—yet. They will eventually when they see how trouble follows you around."

"Why, you skunk!" Alex began.

"You must listen. You will listen. If not, I die—for my Fuehrer I die. That is my duty, but you will die a million more deaths. You will have no friends. People will shun you. The power you have will create troubles, yes, but you won't enjoy it. If you walk into a restaurant, everyone will leave. Even the lowliest dish washer. If you enter a theatre, it will be cleared. None will talk to you. They'll run at the sight of you. How then, will you remain the great actor? The good fellow? Alex Craig, the famous? You will become Alex Craig, the Devil."

"I'll listen," Alex said with ominous calm.

Yet he knew this man had the upper hand. That brief description of things to be, made his blood run cold. It was true, every word of it. He knew that now. Even Bill Parker was afraid of him and Valerie had walked out of his life. If the world did that, he might as well die and—he wouldn't be able to. He was immune.

CHAPTER IX

Outcast

HERR DINGLE lit another cigarette, blew smoke toward the ceiling and smiled as broadly as though Hitler had just taken London.

"I was sure you'd see it my way," he exulted. "As the Devil's deputy, your mission is to create trouble. That I know from experience. Sometimes you have control of that trouble—you can actually make it by wishing it to happen. Mostly though, it just happens."

"Get on with it," Alex warned, "or I'll start experimenting with you."

"No, you wouldn't do that," said Dingle, half-fearfully. "If you hadn't been evil the Devil would not have marked you for his own. So I know you will join me and my organization. Frankly, it is composed of spies. Some were landed by submarines, some have been here for many years. All are prepared to strike for the Fatherland. You will help us."

"Exactly how?" Alex queried.

"Your mere presence will enable us to do a great deal of damage. Essentially, our orders are to cripple defense plants, but of course if we could sink a few ships, destroy a convoy, we are certainly not against that. Another thing—we frequently need information. From my experience in your present position, I know that people will talk when you are around. They will talk despite themselves so long as what they say helps to create mischief. Do you follow me, Mr. Craig?"

"I'm way ahead of you," Alex grunted. "The answer is nothing doing. I'd rather be exposed as Satan himself than help you rats commit murder. Now get out of here. Get out before I turn you into a fence post or something. Get out!"

Dingle arose hastily and all but rushed to the door. There he paused a moment, still frightened, but daring enough to risk Alex's wrath.

"Tomorrow morning I will be back. Think it over. Think hard, my illus-

trious successor. Imagine how you will feel when streets empty as you appear, as murder is committed because of you, as people die in fires because of you, as they are killed by auto accidents, trains, subways. How mines will cave in, buildings tumble. That will all happen. I know, for I have been through it."

"And loved it," Alex roared. "Every moment you enjoyed it. I don't but I'll be doubly damned if I'll permit myself to be used against the United States. Dingle, in something less than ten seconds, I'll—"

Dingle slammed the door and fled. Alex sank back into his chair with a wry smile. He wasn't afraid of Dingle. Not with the Satanic powers he held. Whenever he chose, a plan would pop into his mind about how to outwit this vicious little Nazi.

Dingle might carry out his exposure threat, of course, and if it ever succeeded people would laugh at him for a time. But not for long. Someone would be bound to listen to his revelations and watch Alex Craig. After a dozen incidents Dingle would be believed and then—the calamity.

Alex knew he'd be alone in a world of billions, shunned like a leper, blamed for everything that happened. Perhaps they couldn't kill him, but he'd suffer much worse than death. He'd begin to court death and always in vain.

IT MADE Alex shiver to think of it, but he rested secure in the fact that the evil essence within him could find a scheme to outwit Dingle. It was better to let the Nazi believe he'd frightened the Devil's new deputy. Let him think Alex was amenable to any orders. That way Alex knew he could worm his way into the midst of the Nazi ring, find out what their plans were and blast them to bits.

Dingle worried him a bit, but Alex realized he was anything but helpless against the little rat's plans. Alex glanced at his watch. It was early morning, but he still had a few moments before the bar across the street closed up. Alex decided to test his problem of how people might react if Dingle did manage to expose him.

He needed someone else's slant on things.

The bar was empty except for the sleepy bartender and a bus boy who was busy cleaning up. Alex ordered a drink, sipped it and then leaned across the bar.

"Phil," he said, "know I play the part of Satan on the stage, don't you?"

"Sure, Mr. Craig. Fact is, I sent my wife over to get some tickets. Best she could do was seats six weeks from now. That play is something all right and just because of you, too."

"Thanks, Phil. I've been worried though. They say I'm such a good Satan on the stage that sometimes I wonder if I play the part too enthusiastically. Suppose there is a Satan and he decides I'm so good he makes me his assistant."

"Yeah, Mr. Craig." The bartender gave him a fishy glance. "I gotta close up now and I think you had enough somewhere else, anyhow. Better go home and get some sleep."

"I'm perfectly sober," Alex insisted. "All I want is your unbiased opinion, Phil. You see, I'm thinking of writing a play along those lines. I wish you'd tell me how you'd feel if I was associated with Satan and everywhere I went, there was nothing but trouble."

The bartender picked up a thin champagne glass and began polishing it. The glass shattered in his hand. He cursed softly, threw the pieces away and picked up another. This one slipped through his fingers and smashed on the bar.

"I'm telling you, Mr. Craig, there's trouble here already. The boss makes me pay a buck and a quarter every time I bust one of these. I—oops! Damnation! There goes another one. What's the matter with me? I'm all thumbs."

"Phil," Alex said sharply, "suppose my presence were responsible for what has just happened. Just imagine that I carry around an aura of evil that makes you drop glasses. Just how would you feel about me?"

The bartender shivered and poured himself a drink. He slid the bottle across the bar toward Alex. He gave

it just a little too much steam and the bottle kept on going to plunge over the bar and smash on the floor.

"Another couple of bucks. I won't get no pay this week," the bartender groaned. "One thing though, Mr. Craig, all this shows me just how I would feel if you were responsible. Know what I'd do? I'd beat it the minute you walked into this place. I'd even quit working here because you live across the street. Yes, sir—you'd never lay eyes on me again. Not if I saw you first."

Alex finished his drink in a gulp. "Thanks, Phil. That's what I wanted to know. Here's ten dollars. Pay for the breakage out of that and keep the change."

ALEX turned and started to walk out. The bus boy was standing on a table dusting a huge chandelier in the middle of the room. Suddenly, the table caved in. The boy grabbed the chandelier with both hands. His weight pulled it from the ceiling. Bared wires crossed. There was a blue flash and all the lights went out. The bus boy fell heavily and lay still. Laths beneath the ceiling plaster started to burn.

The last thing Alex saw was the bartender with a blackout lantern in one hand a seltzer siphon in the other, sending a stream of seltzer toward the fire. Alex decided to get out before the building caved in.

He walked the streets for a few minutes and unconsciously discovered that he was headed for Valerie's apartment house. He looked up. Her windows were all lighted. He had to know how she felt about all this. Why she had fled from the theatre without waiting for him?

He didn't ring the bell, but walked up to the big glass door. It was locked and he cursed. Mysteriously, the door opened of its own accord. He shrugged, went in and stopped in front of the elevator. On second thought he decided to walk. The lift would probably plunge to the cellar if he got into it, doing damage without hurting him.

Valerie opened the door and stepped back a few paces, one hand

against her lovely throat.

"You're afraid of me, Val," Alex accused. "That's it. That's why you didn't wait after the show. May I come in—or won't you take the chance?"

"Come in, Alex. I—I'm sorry about tonight. Honestly I am, but you did frighten me. I watched you playing the role of Satan. It wasn't human, Alex. Everyone in the audience believed you were Satan and you were. That was not acting."

Alex nodded. "I know. Val, I'm in trouble. Something almost as bad as being Satan's deputy. Right here in New York is a man who used to be like me until Satan fired him. He's a Nazi spy and he threatens to expose me unless I obey him."

"Expose you?" Valerie gasped. "How did he find out? Who will believe him? Even now, I'm not sure but this is all a dream. You look the same, you act the same."

Alex shuddered. "You should have been with me tonight. People will believe all right. Bound to when things happen and I'm always around. Dingle—that's the name this spy goes under—has me all wrapped up ready to be put on a platter and served to Schickelgruber. Boy, could he use me though."

"This is no time for joking," Valerie said severely. "Alex, I've told no one, of course. They'd have thought me mad. But I do believe you are possessed of the Devil. And you're perfectly right about what a spy organization could do with your help. Alex, where is this going to end?"

"In Hell, probably," Alex groaned. "You're trying to be brave, Val. You are brave, but who can stand up against the evil I represent. You keep moving away from me. I don't blame you. There's no telling what will happen at any moment, just because I'm here. So—I'm going. I won't bother you again. Good-by, Val. I'm quitting the show, too."

HE HEARD her gasp as if in pain. "Alex, you can't!"

"Listen, darling, if I keep on playing the show, some night, that theatre

is going to catch fire, or the roof will fall in. Something is bound to happen. No, Cartwright will have to get someone else. You tell him that for me. Say I'm ill—anything. Just don't make me see the Cartwrights. Every time I show up, Alicia bops Cory with an encyclopedia."

He turned and walked out. Valerie started after him, one arm outstretched. She dropped it slowly, closed the door and wept bitter tears into her slim hands. At last she wiped her eyes, and then she uttered a little cry. She was looking at a luxurious fern she'd raised for years. It was mottled, shriveled, its fronds trailing the floor, and the brass ornamental base from which the plant grew had developed a wide crack.

Valerie shivered, hastily slid home the extra bolt on the door and then began to cry openly.

Alex walked home. He hadn't slept much lately, but somehow he felt no fatigue. Possibly, as the Devil's deputy, he'd require no sleep. After all, things couldn't happen during the time he slept.

He knew though, that Dingle had him with his back against the wall. The bartender had given an outspoken idea of how people would feel about it. Valerie knew what he was and shied away from him. He had to keep Dingle from publicizing what he knew!

Others would die. He'd bring horror and violence wherever he went. Yet, by joining forces with Dingle, perhaps even worse things would develop. Alex made up his mind. He'd join the spy ring—with a lot of those mental reservations their members kept when they became United States citizens.

That would do it. He'd stall, even try to bring disaster upon the spies, while waiting for the opportune moment when he'd get Dingle where he wanted him. Then he'd take his secreted document of exposure away and kill him. He'd have the man fall and break his neck.

Alex glanced into a darkened store window which, nevertheless, reflected his image. He was smiling, all teeth showing in a nasty grimace of Devil-

ish mirth. He liked the idea of killing someone. Sounded good, especially where Dingle was concerned. He'd have to watch his step though, doing it only after he had Dingle's papers.

Alex's steps were lighter, his shoulder squared, head high. He found that he actually wished someone would come along so he might demonstrate his powers.

Soft wind blew through the branches of trees that lined the street. Alex thought it sounded like a low, unpleasant laugh. Like one he'd heard before, coming through the floor of Bill Parker's laboratory. No matter, let the Devil laugh. Alex would give him plenty to laugh about.

CHAPTER X

Make the Man Talk

ALEX didn't sleep. He felt as fresh and alert as though he'd just risen from an untroubled rest. He changed clothes, put on a blue suit and when the doorbell buzzed at mid-morning, he knew it was Dingle coming for his answer.

Dingle entered hesitantly. He knew only too well what Alex might do if he chose.

"Sit down, Dingle," Alex said. "I've thought it all over. You're perfectly right. As Satan's assistant I have to carry on. Make trouble, mischief. I'll help you and show this town what a nuisance I can really be."

"You went out after I left this morning." Dingle was more at ease. "You experimented and found out I told the truth? Now you will join us? Good. We shall provide opportunities to bring terror down upon these fools here. They will hear you laugh clear down to Hades itself. You must come with me at once. We have urgent need of you."

Alex put on his hat and walked down to the lobby with Dingle. There the wily spy stopped him.

"I must go alone. You see, anyone who rides with you risks his life. Proceed to Nine-o-one Belvedere

Boulevard. You will be expected."

"Run along," Alex said. "I just happened to think that there's a bank cashier down the street who refused to cash a check for me last week. I'm going to arrange things so he bets on the horses, loses his shirt and takes home a few samples from the bank. Just a bit of clean fun. I'll contact you within half an hour."

Dingle laughed and hurried away. Alex stayed in the lobby, praying the building foundations would stay up. After half an hour he stepped to the curb and hailed a taxi.

The address turned out to be a mansion in one of the fashionable sections. Alex opened the gate, walked to the porch and the door was opened instantly. The beetle-browed Heinie stepped aside with alacrity as Dingle rushed forward to greet his guest.

"I knew you would not fail me, Mr. Craig. Come downstairs to the cellar and meet the others. I am second in command. *Herr Zellman* is our leader. He waits for you."

Alex followed Dingle into the big cellar. He heard a groan while descending the steps, but had no time to wonder about it. Lights were turned up. In a far corner a man was strapped in a heavy wooden chair. His lips were sealed with tape and a blindfold was drawn over his eyes.

Zellman came forward, a tall man with a ramrod spine and Prussian manners. He spat on the floor, looked Alex up and down a few times and spoke in a particularly nasty voice.

"Dingle, I think you are crazy. You have always been crazy—insisting you were once related to the Devil! Now you say this man is the Devil's aide. What nonsense! But, if he wishes to work for money, we can use him."

"*Herr Zellman*," Dingle insisted. "I am telling the truth. This man does have strange powers. I can prove it."

"*Ja?* How, idiot?"

"For hours we have tried to make this stupid pig of a defense worker tell us about the new plane design. He prefers to die rather than talk. Let *Herr Craig* ask him questions. Then you will see."

"Nonsense, but to make you stop

talking these crazy things, I consent. Out with the light except the spot which you will keep in the prisoner's eyes."

THE lights were snapped off. A spot turned on and focused on the prisoner's face. Alex saw that it was puffed badly. Blood oozed from the corner of the man's mouth. He was stripped to the waist and there were the marks of a heavy lash across his back.

Ordinarily, Alex knew he would have revolted at the sight. Instead, he found himself very much interested. They removed the prisoner's blindfold and gag. Dingle gave Alex a respectful nudge.

"Ask him to draw you the plans for the new plane. He knows them."

Alex stepped closer. The prisoner looked up, opened his mouth and uttered a scream.

"I'm not going to hurt you," Alex said softly. "Why should I, when you are about to help us? Now I'll have you untied. There is paper and pencil on that table. Go over there and draw the plans for this plane. Go ahead."

"All right," the prisoner said. "I'll do it for you because—what am I saying? I won't . . . yes, I will. I'll do it. I can't stand any more of this punishment. Let me loose."

Herr Zellman watched all this and very slowly his jaw dropped and his eyes bulged. The prisoner drew the plans clearly. Zellman folded the papers and handed them to one of his men, who was ashen and trembling.

"*Ach*—this is coincidence or hypnotism. No matter, we have what we wanted. Take the papers to the address you know of. Have them sent quickly to Berlin by the usual channels and on microfilm. Well . . . move, swine!"

The spy to whom he gave orders, clicked his heels and saluted. "*Ja*, Excellency. I am sorry, but that man—I am afraid of him. Never have I been afraid except the day when our *Fuehrer* inspected my company. I felt the same way then."

"You dare put *der Fuehrer* in the

same class with this—this— Fool, take these papers and obey orders!"

The man headed for the stairway and stopped. Alex stood there, leaning against the wall and smoking a cigarette. The spy licked his lips, sidled toward the steps and without taking his eyes off Alex, started to climb them.

"Good luck," Alex said very softly. "Just be sure you never reach that address with the papers. In fact, never reach anywhere, and say hello to my boss when you meet him."

"Your boss?" the spy quavered. "I do not know him. Therefore, how should I meet him?"

"You will," Alex smiled. "Don't worry."

Dingle heard nor saw none of this. He was talking enthusiastically with *Herr Zellman*. The head spy nodded and gave some more brusque orders.

"The prisoner will be taken to a quiet place and disposed of. I do not wish him killed here and litter up my cellar. Dingle, you will see to it."

"I take *Herr Craig* along," Dingle said. "Soon you will be convinced, Excellency, and meanwhile he must be kept happy. I always enjoyed watching something scream with pain when I was in *Craig's* position. He will enjoy it, too, and learn to like us."

ZELLMAN shrugged, but decided not to cheat himself of some of the fun. He stepped up to the groggy prisoner and slugged him half a dozen times until he fell unconscious. Then he kicked him, turned and walked upstairs.

"Man after my own heart," Alex said. "He's really been trained to punish people, hasn't he?"

"We are all trained," Dingle admitted. "*Ach*, but you should be able to teach us much more. That will come later. Now we take this pig away and dispose of him. Do you prefer the knife, or perhaps a gun? Silenced, of course."

"Oh, a gun by all means." Alex followed Dingle out the cellar door to where a car was parked behind the house. "Let him think he has a chance to escape and then—plop—let him have it in the back. You will

do the shooting?"

Dingle's face fell. "No. It is not my turn. Hans must do it because he is next to have that privilege. Get in the car. Watch out now, the prisoner is bleeding. Do not get any blood on your clothes, my friend. The police might ask questions—*ach!* What could the police do to you?"

Alex didn't know, but he had a pretty well-set idea of what he could do to Dingle, Zellman and all the rest of this mob. He'd doublecross them, of course. That came easily because Satan was the smartest doublecrosser in existence, and Alex was his aide.

"How come," Alex queried, "you're no longer afraid to let me ride in a car with you, Dingle?"

"Because you are one of us now. You will hardly wish us bad luck. Of course, things do happen sometimes whether you wish it or not. I will take the chance."

Dingle raised one foot and brought it down hard on the prisoner's neck. He sighed contentedly and waved a hand to the driver. The car headed toward a large public park a mile away, stopped in a very dark spot and Dingle got out.

Alex said, "Isn't this risky? Parks are well patrolled. The shot might be heard."

"No, the gun is silenced. Hans—attention! Let the prisoner go a short distance and then—do not miss."

They all got out of the car. The prisoner was hauled to his feet, slapped back to consciousness and Dingle made a handsome speech about letting him go free. The prisoner stumbled forward, hardly able to

walk. Hans raised the silencer-equipped gun, smirked and drew a bead on the man's back.

"Hey—you!" he called.

The prisoner twisted his head, saw what was coming and tried his best to duck. Hans pulled trigger. There was a terrific roar. Hans stared at what was left of his hand and then he began to whimper. This rose to a scream of pain. He turned toward the car, took a couple of steps and tripped over a rock.

"Let him stay there," Dingle gasped. "The gun jammed. The explosion will have been heard. We must get away quickly."

ALL piled into the car and the driver raced away. He pulled off the road and hid behind a thick tree as two police cars went whizzing by. Dingle wiped sweat off his face.

"*Ach,*" he groaned, "what will *Herr Zellman* say? I should not have left Hans behind. They will capture him and he is weak. He will talk. The prisoner also still lives. They will know he gave up the secret of that plane. I—it is you, Craig! You who are responsible."

Alex grinned. "I guess there's no doubt about it, Dingle, but, as you said, things will happen."

Dingle groaned and slumped low in the seat. The car pulled up in front of the big house. Alex got out, walked slowly toward the entrance and stopped a moment. He reached up, easily pulled down a thick branch of a tree. A branch he couldn't have moved more than an inch or two

[Turn page]



normally. He snapped twigs, let the branch go back into position and grinned.

Behind the tree was a street light. It threw the shadow of the bent twigs against the big house, creating in shadow, a gigantic swastika.

"If the cops miss that," Alex told himself, "it certainly isn't my fault."

Herr Zellman was pacing the floor when they entered. Dingle drew himself up and made a report. Zellman cursed, glared at Alex and then vented his full fury on Dingle.

"Always, you bungle things. Not like you used to be, in Berlin when we built up the party. There you were superb. Get a grip on yourself, Dingle. Forget this nonsense of having been associated with the Devil."

"Ja, Excellency," Dingle breathed normally again. "But what of the plans you sent? The ones that prisoner gave us? The *verdamt* F.B.I. will get a statement from the prisoner and know we have the plans."

"It makes no difference," Zellman snapped. "The man who took them away was killed in an accident. The car he drove caught fire. He was destroyed by the flames and so were the papers. Let's get out of here. Hans is bound to talk."

CHAPTER XI

Sabotage in Reverse

THE next night Alex and Dingle were driving well out of the city and along a newly laid highway. Alex had no idea where they were going nor what Dingle had up his sleeve. A new spy headquarters had been established, but half of the organization had fallen into the F.B.I. net. Alex had read all about it in the evening papers before Dingle arrived.

Hans had talked, but lied about the location of the spy nest. The defense worker gave the G-men a general idea where it was located and they secured the vicinity. Oddly enough, they'd found a big house with the shadow of a huge swastika across it. Inside, they found part of Zellman's spy

mob, frantically trying to pack equipment and get clear.

"Dingle," Alex spoke at length, "you blame me for what happened last night, don't you?"

Dingle gave him a crooked smile. "Of course. But you cannot help it any more than I could when I was in your place. The fact is, I am very happy about the whole thing."

"About losing that swell hideout and half of your spy ring?"

"What is that? We have other places, more men. It did not do *Herr Zellman* much good. When the High Command hears of this, they might see that Zellman gets an attack of pneumonia or something. Then I shall be in command and, with you working by my side, there is nothing I can't do. Nothing."

"What about tonight?" Alex asked. "Where are we going?"

"Three miles ahead is a very large army camp. From this point many units prepare for a trip abroad. It is almost time another convoy starts for England with many troop ships. We must find out about that."

"How?"

Dingle laughed. "You are very new, Mr. Craig. You forget the powers you possess. All that is necessary is to ask someone who knows these things. He cannot refuse to talk. There is a tavern where officers congregate. We go there."

Dingle pulled up about five hundred yards from a tavern ablaze with light and merriment. They got out, and Dingle seized Alex's arm.

"You will go alone. They will recognize you, but that doesn't matter. Get the highest ranking officer you can find. Pretend you are here to talk about putting on your show."

"It will never work," Alex said. "I quit the show this afternoon and the papers have the story."

"Take a chance," Dingle urged. "If you are questioned, lie. What difference does it make? You have the power to convince anyone of anything. I know. I did some convincing myself, just before Munich. Go now. If I can slip in, very well, I shall. If not, you get the information."

"Right you are," Alex grinned.

"Say, 'm beginning to like this. Fits me very well, gives me great satisfaction. Troopships, eh? To be sunk by subs, I suppose? Nice going."

DINGLE nodded in deep satisfaction. "You are learning much faster than I did, my friend. It took me almost six months before I could reconcile myself to the idea of taking on more than Satan had in mind for me. I was afraid of death at first, but then—like you right now—I wanted to see how far my power would extend."

"And did it go as far as sinking troopships with thousands of men aboard?"

"No," Dingle answered sadly. "But the mischief I created sometimes developed into beautiful things. Satan gives you only the right to do mischief, yet when properly handled this more or less minor item can be built into large ideas. Like troopships."

"See you later," Alex said brusquely, and walked toward the tavern. No wonder Satan had fired Dingle. The man was mad with a lust for power, that typical Nazi trait. He would murder for it a thousand times over and laugh cheerfully as the thousandth man died.

Alex knew what would happen if he didn't break this spell which chained him to the Devil. He'd get like Dingle, plotting to build up the mischiefs into larger things. Things Satan himself might have hesitated to perpetrate. He'd come to look upon trouble and crime and murder as part of his work. This had to end soon—or it might never end. Alex patted his damp face with a handkerchief and turned into the tavern.

There were thirty of forty officers seated around the place, talking quietly. No one paid much attention to Alex. Civilians were not barred and inquisitive ears would have heard nothing from any man in the room.

Alex sat down at a corner table and ordered a sandwich and a drink. He looked around, saw oak leaves on a major's shoulders and waited until the man looked up.

"Come over here," Alex said very softly. "Come on, whether you want

to or not, and sit down at my table."

The major arose, frowning heavily. He crossed the room and stopped beside Alex.

"Haven't I seen you somewhere before? Wait— I've got it. The theatre! Why, you're Alex Craig."

"That's right, Major," Alex said. "Sit down, won't you? Have a drink. Waiter!"

They talked about the play for ten or fifteen minutes. Then Alex leaned across the table, looked squarely at the Major and asked him a question which should have meant a trial for treason.

"Major, when does the next convoy of troop ships leave for Britain and from what port? You know. Officers of your rank are usually advised ahead of time."

"Why, of course I know, Mr. Craig. I'm happy you are so interested in the armed forces. Thirty thousand troops are sailing tomorrow night from Hoboken. Twenty miles at sea we pick up a big convoy of plane carriers, destroyers, cruisers and a battle-wagon."

Craig's fingers almost crushed the glass in his hand. He hadn't really meant to ask that question nor to listen to any answer like this. His intentions were merely to be seen with an officer and then relate some pure fiction to Dingle. Now he'd have to force himself to forget what he knew. Under no circumstances could Dingle have this information.

BUT why not? Craig's other self asked this question. His mission was to act as Satan's agent, promulgate mischiefs. Mischiefs, yes, but not wholesale murder, rank treachery. Craig's eyes were open and staring. He saw nothing. An idea developed in his mind—one crammed with horror.

Dingle had been Satan's emissary, too. He'd gone too far, tried to handle things too big for him. To usurp Satan's power. That was why he'd been removed. Now, if a convoy like this one was blasted, certainly that would be a big item even as Satan looked at things. Perhaps he'd fire Alex as he had Dingle.

"What a price," Alex groaned. "No—I'll never do it."

The major finished his drink. "Sorry, Mr. Craig, I've really got to leave. Important things to do. These are important times, you know. Wish I could help you arrange that camp performance of your show, but it's impossible. Thanks, anyhow."

He walked out of the tavern. Alex drank a glass of water and felt a bit less feverish. The major hadn't the vaguest recollection of telling about that convoy. He'd received the impression that Alex Craig had come to arrange a camp show.

Again, Alex told himself that Dingle would never learn this information. Satan might have him by the coat tails, but not by the neck. Alex still retained his self-respect. He was definitely not a traitor.

Then someone dropped into the chair vacated by the major. It was Dingle, smiling in approval.

"Excellent work, Mr. Craig. Better than I did in my heyday. I was at the table right behind you and I heard every word. Thirty thousand men sailing at midnight tomorrow. Many supply ships will accompany such a force. And—this is what makes it so very fine—there is a submarine flotilla lying just off New York waiting for orders from us."

Alex showed none of the consternation that raged in his brain. He had to make Dingle believe he was co-operating. Force him to go ahead with his plans and then use Satan's powers to blast them wide open.

"It was very easy," Alex smiled. "Meanwhile, what's in the wind? I want action."

Dingle explained while they walked back to where the car was parked.

"We have a couple of things in mind. First, though, we'll meet Herr Zellman. It is necessary that I bow to his judgment, but that will not be for long. The convoy business I shall handle myself and take all the credit."

They stopped at a farmhouse, replete with cows, tractors, barns and a huge silo. A slattern-faced woman let them in. Zellman was there, rather impatiently waiting.

"You two are very late," he said

suspiciously. "After what happened last night, I am not so sure about this man Craig. You may trust him, Dingle, but I happen to be the leader here and I tell you I am not satisfied."

"Why not?" Alex asked quickly. "You refuse to believe I have certain powers. Perhaps I could demonstrate them on you. For instance, suppose I make you tell just what is planned for tonight?"

"Even Gestapo methods could not make me tell if I did not choose to," Zellman snapped. "This is all foolishness."

"Is it?" Alex looked straight into the spy's face. "Tell me—what is planned for tonight?"

ZELLMAN answered promptly. "Two things. First of all, we intend to really show our hand by blowing up a small munitions dump at a testing ground for big guns. Two men will handle it. I, myself, and the best of my men are going to perform a daring task. If it succeeds, we shall all be decorated. The Iron Cross with oak leaves, for me. The F.B.I. has picked up a number of Bundists. They are being held here in New York at a secret spot which I know about. Those fools are ready to talk and they must be exterminated."

Alex moved back and sat down, smiling. Zellman glared at him suddenly.

"As I have been saying, I do not trust you. Dingle is a fool for taking you in!"

"But you just told him everything," Dingle cried. "Things even I did not know about tonight's plans."

Zellman arose slowly and faced Alex, his features paling. "I . . . told you what . . . was to happen tonight? *Ach*, what nonsense!"

"Two men are going to bomb a small ammunition dump," Alex said. "You are going to liquidate a number of Bundists who are under arrest and in danger of revealing too much information. Now, do I know what's in your mind, Herr Zellman?"

Alex grinned at the man's consternation. For a moment Zellman looked ready to draw a gun and start shoot-

ing. Then he relaxed a bit.

"It was hypnotism or mind-reading," he snapped. "But very good because no one here knew this information but me. Very well, I concede you may become a valuable man, *Herr* Craig. Now to work. Dingle, bring two men here at once. There are eight of them hidden in the silo. Hurry!"

Zellman opened a wooden box and drew out two compact bombs, arranged with a trigger mechanism like that used on grenades. Two men reported, stood at attention and heard Zellman tell how to draw the pin, hurl the bombs and then get away quickly.

Alex idly wandered out of the place, wondering where Dingle had gone. He leaned against a car and lit a cigarette. The two spies hurried toward the car. Alex held the door open for them.

"Remember," he warned, "when you pull the pin, throw the bombs slowly. It would be terrible if you didn't. Just give the pin a yank—never mind removing it entirely. That's not necessary."

"Ja, ja," they nodded and grinned.

"And the very worst of luck to you," Alex murmured after them. "May those bombs go off long before you reach the munitions dump and may you meet my employer on his own threshold very soon."

Dingle was heading for the house, followed by six more men. He veered off, came up to Alex and grinned crookedly.

"While *Herr* Zellman gives the orders to those men, I will be in the silo. It is equipped with a short-wave radio and I shall contact the submarine flo-tilla."

"Very good," Alex approved. "It's too bad we can't actually see them sink those ships though. Takes all the kick out of our work."

"We shall witness it," Dingle vowed. "This will mean promotion and honor for me. Therefore, I plan to return to Germany for a short time. You will come along. One of the submarines can pick us up at some lonely beach. If there are guards patrolling, you can take care of them very easily.

Now you had better go into the house before Zellman gets suspicious."

ALEX was eager to comply. He had to find out what was planned, every last detail. He did, because Zellman suddenly decided to make Alex part of the murder squad.

"In one hour," Zellman explained, "a party of eight newspaper photographers are being allowed to take pictures of the arrested Bundists. However, the authorities insist that these newspaper men arrive in one party. They are not going to arrive. An accident will delay them. I shall provide each of you with cameras and clever duplicate identification papers. You will be most careful, reach the traitors and . . . shoot them with guns I also will provide."

Ten minutes later everything was all set. Alex knew how a murderer felt as he started on his bloody mission. Two cars were made ready. Dingle stayed behind and gave Alex a confident wink as Craig clambered into one of the cars beside Zellman.

The chief didn't speak very much until they were close to their destination.

"Once we are inside, do not be too eager to get busy. Pretend to take pictures. In fact, do take some so that we may send them to our superiors in the Reich. They will be excellent propaganda showing how we handle these stupid Americans."

"Zellman," Alex said, "are you sure the real photographers won't show up?"

Zellman smiled. "I would stake my life on it. Arrangements were made that they meet at a tavern which is run by someone friendly to us. They will be treated to drinks, and when they recover, this will be all over with."

"I thought you said those real photographers were going to have an accident," Alex persisted.

"You ask too many questions for a newcomer," Zellman grunted. "Yes, there will be an accident. The two cars containing the photographers will then smash into a truck. The drivers will be quite intoxicated. Naturally, the affair will be hushed up, but not the eradicating of the Bund-

ists. The whole world will know about that."

The two Nazi cars pulled up before the city jail. Alert men began at once moving toward them. These were F. B. I. men who wouldn't even trust a cabinet officer unless he was equipped with passes and properly identified.

"One more thing," Zellman whispered. "Do not speak unless necessary. Then be very sure there is no accent. Here they come. On your toes."

Alex drew himself as far back in the car as possible and pulled down his hat brim. One of the F. B. I. men opened the car door.

"Identification papers and passes please," he said. "Also, tell me what newspapers or syndicates you represent."

"Ja," Zellman nodded and spoke—in German, without the vaguest idea as to what he was doing. His men chattered in the same language. Ahead, the first car was similarly engaged.

Alex saw two F. B. I. men haul one spy out bodily. Someone had fired a shot.

Zellman gave the F. B. I. man who was staring at him a hard shove, barked a command and the car darted away. Bullets were fired at it, bullets that smashed into the back of the vehicle, scaring everybody out of his wits except Alex. He knew there was no bullet manufactured that could touch him.

"The fools in the first car must have betrayed us," Zellman growled. "We did nothing. Did we, now?"

He bent a stern glance on Alex who shrugged and said, "You were there, Herr Zellman. I heard or saw nothing amiss. You must be right—someone who was traveling in the other party queered us."

"Back to the farm," Zellman grunted. "We have lost them. If I only knew why that Federal man seemed so surprised when I spoke to him. Do we look like German spies? No! I take pride in the fact that my men have been here long enough to pass as Americans. We speak English perfectly."

CHAPTER XII

Perhaps a Solution

DINGLE was waiting inside the farmhouse. By the quick return of half the spies he knew something had gone wrong. He flashed a look at Alex who just grinned back at him and made an expressive gesture with his hands.

"We are beset by bad luck," Zellman said. "Ever since this Alex Craig joined us, we have had nothing but trouble. One more incident and—well, I shall make up my mind later. Where are the two who went to bomb the munitions dump and that gun-testing grounds?"

Dingle took a few backward steps, a precautionary measure.

"Excellency, it just came over the radio before you arrived. Two men were blown to bits near the proving grounds. The authorities say they must have intended to hurl bombs at the munitions dump, but somehow the bombs went off in their hands."

Zellman threw up both hands and exploded into three minutes of cursing in German. With a great effort, he calmed himself and sat down.

"We cannot stay here. My men who were captured will face a firing squad, of course. These Americans have suddenly become tough. It is hard to get good agents without importing them. We must break up and remain quiet for some time. Take cover temporarily."

"We must then have money," one of the spies said.

Zellman nodded. "This is quite simple. We sold many *Ruechswanderer* marks to our people and received, in return, good United States money. Of course, the people who bought our marks were not cheated. Some day, when we invade this country, those marks will be worth a great deal."

"If you win," Alex put in judiciously and drew a harsh glance from the spy leader.

Zellman went into the next room. They heard him rummaging around.

Then he yelled for the slattern-faced woman who was the front for this hideout.

"The money," Zellman cried. "What happened to it? I kept it concealed between the pages of many magazines which were in the living room. The magazines are gone."

The woman turned pale. "Herr Zellman," she said tonelessly, "you did not tell me there was money in those magazines. Boy scouts came asking donations of reading matter for U. S. O. canteens. I gave them the magazines."

"*Ach, du Lieber,*" Zellman moaned. "The United States Army has just gotten another raise in pay. Fool! Idiot! You should be shot. You should be—no! No, I am wrong. It is not your fault. Dingle is right. This man Craig is possessed of the Devil. I thought Satan was on our side, but he seems to be fighting us, too. Seize him!"

Alex put up no fight when two men gripped his arms. Zellman walked up to him and slapped him across the face.

"There we have the swine responsible for all our troubles. 'The work of the Devil,' Dingle says. Bah! This man is a counter-espionage agent. He informed those F. B. I. men that we were spies by some signal. He talked to the two men who were sent out to bomb the munitions dump. Therefore, he also tampered with their bombs. He must have discovered the money in those magazines and sent Boy Scouts to trick the stupid woman. Everything points to Craig, and we have but one method of preventing him from interfering with us again."

ZELLMAN stepped back and drew a knife from a hidden scabbard. Dingle rushed up to him.

"No, Excellency. Do not try it. He cannot be killed."

"He cannot be killed?" Zellman repeated with disdain. "Is there a man or beast that lives and breathes that we Germans cannot kill? Stand aside, Dingle. I shall deal with you later."

"I warn you," Dingle shouted. "You will die by your own blade if you try to stab him."

Zellman rubbed his chin dubiously. "Of course, there is no use taking chances. I was once very good at knife throwing. That is it! I do not have to approach him. Stand away from the swine. I shall show you a new Nazi method."

Alex's captors let go of him and moved away with considerable alacrity. Zellman took the point of the blade, raised it and smiled confidently. Alex reached into his pocket, took out a cigarette and put it between his lips.

The blade flashed as it hurtled across the room. There was a blaze of flame. The knife vanished and Alex stood with a lighted taper in his hand. He calmly applied this to his cigarette as he smiled at Zellman.

The chief spy almost collapsed. His men started moving farther and farther away from Alex, their eyes bulging in terror. Only Dingle remained calm, probably because he'd been through similar things.

"A trick!" Zellman yelled. "A trick like the way he read my mind. He was very quick, caught the knife and concealed it. He cannot catch a bullet."

Zellman produced a gun, aimed very carefully and fired. A man slightly behind the chief spy gave a scream, wobbled forward a few steps and fell heavily. There was a bullet wound through the side of his head.

Zellman screamed in terror, dropped the gun and plunged through the door. He didn't bother to take the car, worried none at all about his men. They were running for it, too, following Zellman as he raced up the highway. One mile farther on, a State Police posse, looking for the car which had escaped from the F. B. I., corralled them.

In the farmhouse, Dingle smiled contentedly.

"Very good work, Mr. Craig," he said. "We are rid of Zellman and his men for good. Of course, we cannot remain here. The F. B. I. is bound to locate the place. Wait only a few moments while I contact the U-boat flotilla again and tell them to send a boat ashore for us at eleven tomorrow night."

"You go ahead," Alex said. "I'm not

waiting here until the F. B. I. shows up. Tell me where to meet you tomorrow and we'll make all the arrangements."

"Good. Do you mind if I tell you something, Mr. Craig? You are an American citizen and quite patriotic and yet you help me, an enemy of your nation. Why? That is easy to answer. You cannot help yourself. It is Satan within you. Your duty is to create mischief and you cannot pass up a single opportunity. That is very good for me—for you and for Satan himself. I shall be at your apartment tomorrow morning."

Alex felt like flattening the runt's nose. Maybe Satan was controlling him, but at no time had he felt the slightest desire really to help Dingle or any of the others. In fact, tricking them had been very pleasant.

ALLEX got his car out of the barn and drove away. He passed Zellman and his aides, all handcuffed with a horde of state police surrounding them. Alex felt even better. Cars were being stopped for investigation, but somehow the police let him go through unchallenged.

He reached the city, drove straight to his garage and put the car up. It was only a short distance to his apartment and he walked rapidly. Quite some time had passed since his evil aura had exerted itself upon innocent people.

At any moment, a passerby might stumble and break his legs. Two taxis might find a great attraction for one another and crash. Fires might break out. Anything could happen, and Alex was thoroughly tired of those events now. He wanted time to relax and think. There had to be a way out. Perhaps Bill Parker was progressing better with his odd oscillator tube than he expected.

Then, too, there was Valerie. Alex felt lost without her quieting influence. He didn't blame her much. Being with him was like deliberately looking for trouble and pain. Maybe, when he managed to get rid of his Satanic power, she'd take him back. One thing he did know—there was no one else to take her place.

He walked up the stairs to his floor, turned a corner and stopped short. Valerie was standing outside his apartment door. She saw him, gave a low cry and hurried into his arms.

"Alex," she half-sobbed, "I don't care what has happened. I'm in love with you and nothing can break me of it. I've been so unhappy."

He kissed her gently and then opened the door. They went inside and Alex mixed a couple of drinks. He sat down opposite her.

"This is all very well," he said cautiously, "but you know I am possessed of Satan's influence. The ceiling may cave in on you, that glass may break in your hand—anything may occur."

"I don't care," Valerie said happily. "Not one thing matters except that I'm completely lost and miserable without you. The show was terrible tonight. Jim Warner took your part and was almost as bad as you were the opening night. The Cartwrights are furious."

"Val." Alex took one of her hands and held it tightly. "I'm not going back. There are much more important things to be done. I'm part and parcel of a Nazi spy ring."

"Alex!" She pulled her hand free. "Alex, you can't be!"

"But I can. Now don't get me wrong, darling. I've had the time of my life smashing this spy ring and I succeeded, too—all except for one thing. A man named Dingle is now the spy leader. Once he was also an agent of Satan. He has a scar on his wrist similar to the one I am afflicted with."

"Then he has the same powers as you?"

"No. That puzzles me, too. Dingle is one of the meanest, doublecrossing little rats I've ever met. A typical Nazi who likes to hit below the belt. Seems that after he got this power he helped to build up Hitler. Imagine that!"

"Imagine nothing," Valerie said. "That's the most logical thing we've so far uncovered about this crazy business. Satan *had* to be behind Hitler."

"Guess you're right. Well, anyhow, Dingle started pulling things

too important for a mere agent to handle, so Satan got sore at him. Fired him. Actually withdrew that power so that Dingle couldn't create more trouble than Satan himself."

"More logic," Valerie said. "Alex, not to change the subject, but I'd like my drink diluted a bit more. You made it too strong."

"Maybe you'd prefer champagne?" Alex smiled.

"Have you any?"

"Go ahead and drink," Alex chuckled. "Your highball has turned into champagne. Good vintage, too. I learned that trick from the boss himself."

VALERIE marveled at the change and then plunged back into her serious discussion.

"Tell me more about this man Dingle."

"He thinks he's got me over a barrel," Alex said cheerfully. "It hasn't occurred to the little punk that I can get rid of him any time I choose. It must be done carefully though because he knows my secret and has taken steps to expose me if I refuse to follow his orders. He's written the whole story of himself and me, hidden the document and swears it will be made public if anything happens to him."

"Who would ever believe him?" Valerie scoffed.

"They'd think he was crazy, at first," Alex said. "Then, as my presence causes more and more trouble, they'll begin to believe. Can you imagine what will happen once people are convinced I am the storm center of evil?"

Valerie nodded sympathetically. "No matter what does happen, Alex, how much every other person on earth shuns you, I'll not desert."

"You're tops, Val," Alex said. "Now I've got to scrape this devilish mind of mine and find some way to stop Dingle. He must be removed because he is not only dangerous to me, but to thousands of American troops."

"Maybe," Valerie said thoughtfully, "I'm absorbing some of your evil influence, Alex, because I just got an idea. Use your powers on Dingle in

a way that he doesn't recognize or suspect. Even scare him to death if necessary, but make him go after those hidden papers, get them and then—the rest is up to you."

"Val," Alex cried, "you've hit upon the solution. Dingle is looking for the glory which will be his when the convoy is sunk. If I renege, refuse to help him, he'll get sore enough to try and expose me. That's it!"

"But here is another point," Valerie said soberly. "We still have to deal with the Devil—or your condition—or whatever it is."

Half an hour later they were both slumped in their chairs, trying to figure some angle which would make Satan release Alex. It almost seemed as though Satan knew all about this plot against him and was dulling their minds.

"Dingle was given the boot," Alex said for the tenth time, "because he went over Satan's head. Plotted something more than mischief. Maybe I could do that, too, but—suppose Satan is so busy he doesn't care? No, Val, I must locate him. It's absolutely essential."

They had accepted the idea of a very real and tangible Devil, by now. It made the problem easier to approach, somehow.

"Tell me," Valerie urged, "just what he said to you about being so busy."

"Not much. Just that he couldn't take care of everything himself. The petty things, that is. He was required to be somewhere else. That means he is on earth, Val. He's somewhere, posing as an ordinary human being. But where could he be?"

"Wherever the most trouble exists for this planet," Valerie said promptly.

"Berlin! Berchtesgaden! Adolf!" exclaimed Alex. "Of course!"

"You've hit it," Valerie cried. "Alex, that must be it. Where else could Satan be arranging matters to populate Hades any more than if he was behind Hitler, egging him on?"

Alex lit a cigarette with fingers that shook. "Dingle is arranging for a Nazi U-boat to pick him up. I could get rid of Dingle, join the

U-boat and see to it that our convoy of troops escapes them. I could easily persuade the U-boat commander that I must go to Germany. Val, I'm going straight into the camp of our enemy. Satan is there. He must be! And I'll find him. I'll find him or I'll make things so damnably hot for the Nazis they'll wish Mussolini was their leader."

CHAPTER XIII

Dingle Should Dangle

ALEX was shaving the next day when Dingle appeared. All during the night Alex and Valerie had plotted and planned. Alex required no sleep and he was quite alert.

"I have made all arrangements, my friend," Dingle announced. "You are coming with me to Berlin. Ah, it will be a great sight to see *Der Fuehrer* himself decorate me and promote me to head all our activities in this country. Then, when we have won the war and conquered the United States. I shall take full command and you shall be dealt with as a friend."

Alex picked up his shaving brush, well-loaded with lather. He walked over to Dingle and shoved the whole thing into his mouth. Then he pushed the cocky Nazi into a chair.

"Dingle," he stated, "you have an odor worse than all the brimstone in Hell. You'd pollute the place. No, you won't go back to Germany. You'll stay here until after the court-martial and then they'll swing you from a rope. Shooting is too easy for a skunk like you. Dingle, you'll dangle."

Dingle writhed in surprise and fear. "I'll expose you," he shrieked, when he could speak. "I'll tell everyone you are the Devil's right-hand man. I'll make mankind run when you appear. I'll—"

"Go ahead," Alex shouted. "I'd rather take a rap like that than let you injure anyone. Expose me. A fat lot of comfort it will be when the noose tightens around your own filthy neck."

Dingle gave a bleat of terror, jumped up and raced madly out of the apartment. He took the elevator down, bolted out of it and yelled for a taxi.

Alex was already across the street. He wasn't exactly certain how he'd got there. The last thing he remembered was wishing he could beat Dingle to the street and—there he was.

Dingle's taxi pulled into the traffic. Alex hailed another cab and followed him. Dingle's cab suddenly seemed to fall apart. A fender dropped off first, then a door fell off. Finally one wheel broke from its axle and the taxi almost crashed into a street light pole.

Dingle knew what this meant. He started running. Once he looked over his shoulder and saw Alex grinning at him. Dingle darted into an alley only to find it was blind. He retraced his steps and passed within two feet of Alex.

Then Dingle found that he could no longer see this man who could be anywhere and everywhere. He seemed to have vanished and Dingle felt a bit more secure. He'd outwitted Satan's agent.

Dingle entered a bank, proceeded straight to the safe deposit vaults and was admitted. He opened a box, stealthily transferred several fat envelopes into his pocket and finally drew out a letter addressed to one of the largest newspapers. He affixed a stamp, closed the safe deposit box and hurried upstairs.

He ran out of the bank, saw a mail box on the corner and went to it. There was a waste paper basket just below the mail box and it was heaped high with discarded newspapers and junk.

Dingle peered around carefully, saw no signs of Alex and pulled down the metal slot of the mail box.

He raised the envelope toward it. Suddenly the accumulation of papers in the rubbish basket caught fire. A tower of flame shot upwards. Dingle felt flames scorch his extended hand. He gave a yell of alarm, stepped back and the sealed letter fell out of his hand.

IT DROPPED squarely into the blaze and was consumed in two seconds. Dingle knew why. This time, when he looked around, he saw Alex leaning against a light pole and applying a match to his cigarette. Dingle gave one screech of terror and fled.

He made up his mind to go home, write another letter and try again. If that failed, he'd go personally to some editor. But Dingle spent seven hours trying to find the brownstone front house in which he lived. All the houses on his street suddenly looked alike in every respect and they all bore the number of his house.

Two or three times angry housewives put a broom to him. He became more and more frantic. It was getting dark. He had to meet that U-boat. Alex Craig or no Alex Craig, Dingle was going to reach Germany. Once there, he'd be out of Alex's reach. That was it! Run away.

Make some excuse to remain in Germany. Offer his services to the Gestapo. Of course, he would insist upon being assigned to the home front. To keep the residents of Berlin, for instance, toeing the mark and *heiling* their heads off at the proper moments. Dingle didn't care much about the idea of active service.

He didn't dare spend any more time finding where he lived. Alex would see that he'd never locate his own home. So Dingle unlocked a door of one of those brownstone front houses, knowing it was not his. Strangely, though, his key fit them all.

He made his stealthy way through the house without being seen, reached the back door and darted out. He climbed a fence with considerable effort, reached the street behind the house and hurried away.

Nothing happened and he became more and more sure he'd fooled Alex Craig. He even went so far as to risk hiring a taxi which took him to within a mile of the desolate beach where he was supposed to meet a rubber boat sent out from the submarine.

Dingle made his way to the beach, crawled beneath a row of bathhouses and rested. He felt as though a six months' rest wouldn't be too much.

He'd earn it when those American troopships dived beneath the water. Dingle was boiling with rage against the United States and everything American. He hoped the submarines would surface and shell and machine-gun the life-boats.

Dingle knew he didn't require the services of Satan's agent to sink those ships. The U-boats carried their own devils, poised in torpedo tubes. The fat envelopes occupied his attentions for a short time. They were lengthy documents pertaining to his exploits as a Nazi agent. They included everything—even the fact that he'd murdered the second officer of a United States freighter while it was still on the high seas.

Dingle shuddered as he recalled that. It had been a close squeak. His shudders became even more violent as he remembered Alex's threat. That pun on his name. Dingle would dangle. He would, too, if he was ever caught with those papers on his person. He'd be revealed as a killer. The fact that he'd committed the murder on the high seas meant a federal trial and a rope around his neck.

DINGLE consulted the luminous dial of his watch. It was time. He crawled out of his hiding place, looked around and saw no one. The night was quite dark, which helped a great deal. If any foolish Coast Guardsmen happened to stumble onto him, they'd never live to tell the story. Dingle had an automatic in his fist.

He reached the water's edge and scanned the sea. There it was. Faintly outlined, he saw the dark bulk of the sub. It was a mile out and there was a small boat coming ashore for him. Dingle felt like cheering.

There was a crunching sound to the left. He twisted his head and saw two men, rifle-armed, coming his way. Dingle rushed across the beach and did a nose dive under a bank.

The men were coming closer, but they hadn't seen him, the sub nor the small boat. Dingle determined to leave American shores with a trail of blood behind him. He raised one arm, rested the automatic against it and drew a bead on the two guards.

As his finger started to squeeze trigger, Dingle found himself possessed of a terrific urge to sneeze. He tried to silence it, but the sound shattered the silence.

The Coast Guardsmen wheeled, rifles came up. Dingle arose and tried to shoot. The gun refused to work. He started running. He wanted to reach the small boat now almost beached, but something kept him running in the opposite direction. He heard someone shout a warning, but he couldn't stop. Rifles blazed. Dingle gave a leap and slid on his nose along the sand. He'd left United States shores with a bloody trail behind him all right. The sand was well-stained and Dingle was dead.

Alex came striding out of the darkness. He stopped and watched the Coast Guardsmen examine Dingle and nodded in complete satisfaction. The treacherous little Nazi deserved what had been meted out to him.

A fog had strangely materialized over the sea. Thick enough so that it concealed the submarine and the small boat coming in toward shore. Even when the boat broke through the big fog wall, a blob of moisture-laden atmosphere obscured it.

Alex moved toward the water and part of the same fog quickly enveloped him. The Coast Guardsmen saw or heard nothing.

Two Nazi sailors in the small boat saluted and helped Alex aboard. Though Alex's schooling had never included German he found that when he tried he could speak the language fluently.

They rowed him out to where the U-boat was surfaced. Alex returned the salute of the commander and discovered he was in charge of the whole flotilla of six subs.

The sub dived immediately. Alex explained how Dingle had fumbled. The captain asked no questions. He was convinced that his duty lay in first sinking the troopships and then heading home with a very important guest aboard.

FOUR hours later the six U-boats were surfaced and signaling one another. Alex, on deck, saw them

scatter to take up positions of attack. Not long after, he knew the convoy had been sighted.

One of the U-bats dived, but somehow her conning tower remained opened. She dived—straight to the bottom. Another developed mysterious engine trouble and couldn't move. A destroyer's searchlight picked her out and shells began to hammer into the sub's sides. There was a gigantic explosion and she went down.

For some unaccountable reason the commander of a third sub decided to spread a row of mines across the path of the convoy. The first mine that was sent overside, slipped somehow and one of its prongs hit the side of the U-boat.

A fourth sub got below the surface all right, but the crew of a heavy bomber saw it, outlined as if with phosphorescent paint. Bombs dropped and the fourth sub disappeared.

Alex knew what was happening. He was a hundred feet below the surface, but something told him that only this U-boat and one other was left. He was willing their destruction with all his might, and that not so much as a sliver of paint be scraped off the hull of any American ship.

The U-boat's commander knew nothing of this. He figured that it was time to strike. With clipped orders, he maneuvered the craft until her periscope showed for a second. There was a huge troopship squarely in the center of the cross hairs.

"Fire," he snapped.

Two torpedoes went hissing into the sea. They were properly aimed and couldn't miss that huge target. Halfway toward the mark, both torpedoes crashed into the side of the fifth sub which had risen almost to the surface.

"That," the Nazi sub-commander told Alex, "did it. By now, half a dozen troopships are sunk. We shall surface and watch the fun."

The sub nosed up. Suddenly her lights went out and she rolled dangerously to port.

"A depth charge," the commander yowled. "Crash dive! Get away from here. Something has happened. None of the ships were sunk, and I saw

no signs of our flotilla."

Alex sat down on a tiny bunk. He wasn't afraid. There were no depth charges made that could sink this submarine so long as he was on it.

CHAPTER XIV

Satan's Paradise

DAYS later, Alex went ashore at Nantes, in Occupied France. A big car was waiting for him. As he was driven through the city, he had a chance to see the pinched faces of the conquered, the arrogant attitude of the Nazis. There were long lines of women in front of food stores. Streets were mostly deserted except for the Germans.

Alex sat beside a Gestapo major who kept chattering gayly about his exploits. It seemed he'd had charge of a company which rounded up all relatives of a Frenchman who was suspected of sabotage and had run away.

"We have an excellent law here," the major explained. "When a wanted man escapes, we arrest all his relatives. Even the in-laws. This particular swine had seventy-two relatives. Imagine that. Thirty were men, and I supervised their execution. A lovely evening that was. The women were sent to till the fields. One old woman got sick. Naturally, she was of no use to us, so—"

"What about the children?" Alex asked.

"Oh, them? They were sent to a camp. Those who show a willingness to adopt our ideals, will be well-fed and raised into good Nazis. The others—well, we cannot be responsible for everyone in this land, can we?"

"Obviously not," Alex agreed. "Is it permissible for me to ask where I'm going?"

"To the airport. A plane will take you to Berlin. Naturally, before you are permitted to go about the streets of Berlin, you must get rid of those clothes. They are real wool, eh? We have seen none of it. The civilians,

I mean. Naturally, the army has almost all we need."

The car turned into a narrow street and came to an abrupt stop. A horde of soldiers were slowly converging upon a fairly wide square in which men, women and children were huddled in terror.

Other troops were smashing windows and doors, howling for all occupants to hurry to the square or be shot. An old man tottered from one house, reeled past the car and a Nazi soldier gave him a nudge with a bayonet. The old man half-turned around, his weatherbeaten face still proud. He opened his mouth and the soldier promptly closed it by bringing down the butt of his rifle on the old man's head.

The old man swayed, fell to his knees and then dropped flat. There was an ugly wound in his head. His hands were clenching and unclenching, but not a moan escaped his lips. Then the hands ceased to move. He was dead.

"That," Alex said icily, "was the work of a coward. The man who did it ought to have his neck broken."

The soldier turned around to get the appreciation of these officers in the car. As he did so, his legs became strangely twisted. He did a crazy loop, came down and there was a sinister cracking sound.

"*Gott im Himmel!*" the major cried, aghast. "He really broke his neck."

"He did," Alex said slowly. "But you did not hear me hope that he would. Is that clear?"

The major gave Alex a puzzled frown. "Ach, I could have sworn—but no. My ears are hearing things. Come, we shall drive on."

"Wait a minute," Alex told the driver. He faced the major again. "Just what is all this about, anyhow?"

THE major shrugged. "Just one of those things, my friend. Twelve men from this particular district were ordered to guard a certain stretch of railway against saboteurs. There is much sabotage lately. These stupid French do not appreciate what we have done for them."

"Stop lying and keep on with your

story," Alex ordered brusquely.

"Of course," the major nodded. "A train was wrecked and six troops killed besides a score injured. The twelve guards had been told that if anything happened they would die and that every male member of families in this section would be arrested."

"You can't lock up a crowd like that." Alex remonstrated.

"No. But it will not be necessary. There is a barbed wire enclosed field where they will be held. Now all are to be tried before a military court. Besides the twelve guards who will be shot, every fifth man in the district also dies. Tomorrow, if the saboteurs are not caught, every fourth man of those left will be shot, and so on until all the swine are eliminated."

"*Hmm*, an interesting phase of justice," Alex mused. "Suppose we attend this trial, Major."

"But I am ordered to get you to Berlin."

"And I prefer to remain for the trial," Alex snapped. "We stay."

"We stay," the major groaned. "Yes, of course. Come with me. Court is to be held at the City Hall. You shall see how we arrange things so that we do not have too many mouths to feed."

By the time Alex and the major reached the City Hall, perhaps a third of the prisoners were inside while the rest were herded into one group on the street. They were being tried, but it made little difference whether or not they heard the proceedings. They were doomed, anyway.

The crowd parted as Alex and the major entered the big court room. On a dais were four Gestapo officers seated in comfortable chairs. One sucked on an orange and kept spitting the skin and pips in the direction of twelve men lined up before the bar of Nazi "Justice."

A Gestapo colonel arose, sighed and patted his paunchy stomach. He burped and cursed the champagne he'd had for lunch. Then he spoke in French.

"You twelve men are to be given a fair trial. You were warned of the consequences if anything happened

along that railroad you were supposed to guard. A train was wrecked through sabotage. Therefore, you are all guilty and it is the sentence of this court that you be shot as soon as the rest of the trial is over. Corporal, form the other prisoners into line and march them before us. Tap every fifth man on the shoulder. Tap him with a rifle butt, perhaps, so he will know. Each man so tapped will also be shot."

The twelve doomed men were led away after this very "fair" trial during which not one had uttered a word. The line of citizens was started moving. Alex and the major sat down at a table.

Alex leaned close to the major. "This is a slaughter house, not a court. Major, you must defend those men. You must get them off."

The major looked startled. "I? Why, that is nonsense. I—but perhaps I had better. You are right. Why should these innocent people be condemned?"

QUICKLY the major arose and yelled for attention. The Gestapo colonel bent a stern glance on him, but the major stepped forward and began an impassioned speech.

"Excellencies, we are making a grave mistake. These people are guilty of nothing. We have brow-beaten them enough. It is time to change things and give them some real justice."

"What?" all four Gestapo officers yelled. "This is treason."

"Perhaps," the major went on. "You are dooming innocent people. I cannot sit by idly. A court goes on evidence alone and none has been presented. Not one of these poor victims were near the railroad. They do not know the identity of the saboteurs. The twelve guards were warned—they should pay, yes, but the others—no. Never!"

Alex leaned forward slightly and beamed a mental message at the major. He urged him to plead for the twelve guards, too, but somehow Alex knew his message wasn't getting across. There were influences here stronger than his own. Powerful influences

which only Satan himself could wield.

The major kept talking, pleading. Tears ran down his cheeks. His eloquence was enormous. Finally he sat down slowly and bowed his head. The Gestapo colonel held a quick conference with his co-judges and then arose. He cleared his throat and bent a benign gaze upon the stunned men who had already considered themselves doomed.

"It is fitting that we honor a courageous foe," he said. "Our accusations against you were unfounded. If the saboteurs are not discovered that cannot be your fault. Go back to your homes in peace. For the anxiety we have caused, I shall repay you by having a food ship unloaded at once and its contents turned over to you."

The men filed out, their thin shoulders hunched as if they expected the culmination of this obvious trick to take the form of bayonets. Nothing happened. Soldiers moved respectfully out of their way.

The Gestapo colonel spoke again. "Much as it pains me, the twelve guards are ordered shot at once. That is all. I am in no mood to hold this court in session longer. I am overcome by grief for those poor innocent men whom we so nearly executed. Come, gentlemen, we shall try to regain our composure as soldiers by witnessing the executions. They should be good."

The major raised his head and looked around like a man who'd just had a frightful nightmare.

"What has happened?" he asked. "I must have been asleep."

"They're going to shoot twelve men," Alex said.

"Oh, a minor event. We shall go at once to the airport."

"We shall witness the executions," Alex said tartly. "By the way, how do I reach the airport—in case I have to go alone?"

"Merely take the next right turn and go straight. You cannot miss it, but of course I shall go with you. Why not?"

"It's just a hunch," Alex said. "Only when four men who call themselves judges finally wake up, as you did just now, there's no telling what

might happen . . . to you. Let's go before the guns start blazing."

The major shook his head as though he thought Alex mad. They walked through a side door and into a walled-in area that looked something like a playground. The twelve prisoners were lined up against the farther wall. They stood rigidly. A boy of no more than sixteen had his back firmly planted against the wall and he was whistling softly. Not one shred of fear showed in his eyes.

DIRECTLY across the cleared area four soldiers were busy feeding ammunition belts into a pair of machine-guns. The four Gestapo officers stood to one side, chatting amiably.

"Why machine-guns?" Alex asked.

The major shrugged. "It is too late for single executions by rifle. We prefer them, of course, but well, there are only twelve doomed men. Two or three bursts. Then the sergeant will draw his pistol and finish off those who do not die quickly. It is not worth waiting for, frankly. I can show you some rarer sport in Poland later on if you wish."

Alex said nothing. He could still feel those more powerful influences prevailing, but somehow they didn't seem quite as strong. He looked squarely at the machine-gunners, crouched behind their weapons. A sergeant stood to one side with his hand raised. He brought it down.

The fusillade should have started, but instead, the gunners all rose, faces livid, eyes bulging. One spoke, motioning toward the twelve victims.

"No, we cannot do it! My Uncle Hans is there. And my father and my brother Sigfried. We cannot shoot them. They are my people. Our people."

Another Nazi wailed that two of the men were his brothers. The other pair identified more of the stunned Frenchmen. The sergeant stared in amazement at his men and then barked a harsh command. Other soldiers, drawn up to the rear, marched forward and took the four men prisoners.

The sergeant, red-faced with fury, drew his pistol and advanced toward

the twelve condemned. He raised the gun to point it at the first man in line. He drew a bead on his head. Then he cried out in horror, dropped the gun and covered his face.

"No. My brother I will not shoot. I cannot do it. Impossible!"

"*Lieber Gott,*" the major cried, "what has happened to the fools? Those are Frenchmen—not Germans. Why do they recognize them as relatives?"

"Maybe," Alex said gently, "they've become afflicted with a disease known as 'conscience'!"

"Nonsense," the major roared. "Now even the sergeant will not shoot. Wait, I'll show them. I'll take a machine-gun and carry out the order of the court."

CHAPTER XV

Hitler's Familiar

THE major hurried over and knelt behind one machine-gun. He swerved the weapon so that he might rake the row of doomed men from one end to the other. Alex raised his left hand, his brow wrinkled in concentration.

Then, with a fraction of a second, the yard was hemmed in by a deep fog. It swirled over everyone and everything. The major was not even to be stopped by that. He yanked the trigger of his gun.

There were hoarse screams from the fog. The major nodded in satisfaction and kept on shooting. Finally he considered the job done. Certainly not even fifty men could have withstood the blasts from that gun.

The fog lifted as suddenly as it had come down. The major's look of combined pride and satisfaction changed. There were no Frenchmen lying on the ground. In fact, there were no Frenchmen at all. Just the Gestapo colonel, standing amid the other three members of the court. Those three were dead—riddled. Only the colonel had been spared.

He yowled an order. Soldiers moved forward and the major was

promptly seized and lined up against the wall. A firing squad moved into position and the colonel took command of it.

"Utter fool," he berated the shivering major, "you let the prisoners escape over the wall and when we tried to stop them, you shot at us."

Alex sighed and walked toward the door. He looked over one shoulder.

"Remember Warsaw, Major? Remember those heads you cracked, those firing squads you have commanded?"

As Alex climbed into his car and drove away, the rattle of rifles announced the death of a Nazi. Alex smiled grimly and considered his work well done. Twenty minutes later he was in a military plane on his way to Berlin.

No one asked any questions. They just accepted him and showed all respect. The powers of Satan were working beautifully although Alex recalled the more evil influences which had sent those twelve Frenchmen to face a firing squad. Only because the greater evil influence had somehow passed off had Alex been able to exert his own powers.

He was really beginning to enjoy himself here. The more trouble he caused, the better.

In the early evening, his plane landed and he was transferred to a car which whisked him to the Hotel Adlon, Berlin's best. They served him a meal of ersatz sausage, some evilly black, soggy bread and coffee that wasn't even a tenth cousin of the stuff that grew in Brazil.

Alex turned down the food temporarily and asked to have it sent to his room. There, at a wave of his hand, the sausage became beefsteak, the bread turned into soft, white rolls and the coffee gave off an appetizing aroma.

"Not bad," Alex commented as he wiped his lips. "I wonder just who these rats think I am? I wonder how I can find Adolf? But I'm in no hurry. Before I meet him, I'd like to have some nice, little scheme cooked up to bother him. Ah, this is something. I'm not even envious of Satan himself."

A GESTAPO colonel arrived with considerable pomp and ceremony shortly after. Alex didn't bother to return the salute.

"You have done excellent work in the United States," the colonel applauded. "We are proud of you. Therefore, tomorrow morning you shall be honored. You shall be permitted to form part of the honor guard when *Reichsmarschal* Goering is decorated for his bravery in visiting the front last week."

"That was brave," Alex commented dryly. "Goering is one beautiful target."

"That is not all," the colonel went on. "You shall also stand beside our Minister of Propaganda while he delivers a speech to the residents of Berlin. He will tell them what you have done for us. You will listen to a million voices cheer."

"Are you sure they'll be cheers?" Alex asked.

The colonel looked very stern. "I promise it. There will be cheers or firing squads. The brave people of the New Germany always obey. Now, is not that a glorious finish of your work? The present stage, I mean. We shall send you out again, of course. In the service of *Der Fuehrer* there is no rest."

"I know," Alex said. "The wicked never get any. Take it from me, I know. Say, have you seen anything of the Devil around here?"

"Ach, no. Heinrich Himmler is busy in France just now. I shall arrange a meeting later on if you wish."

"No, thanks," Alex rejected the offer. "Himmler is just a junior devil. I'm looking for the real thing. Good night, Colonel. May you descend the steps rapidly."

Alex listened at the door and heard the colonel fall head over heels down the steps. He grinned, and went back to a comfortable chair. Nothing seemed strange to him. The fact that he was here, in Berlin just because he wanted to be, seemed quite natural. He was getting used to being Satan's agent.

Then Alex frowned. Satan had assigned him to only one portion of the world and that had not included

Germany. Yet the powers he held worked here, but Satan might not like it. Alex fervently hoped he'd put in an appearance. Satan's hand must be forced, he must be tricked into showing himself. Alex had given up hope that Bill Parker would duplicate his strange machine in time to be any good.

If only Valerie were right. She had maintained that, as Dingle had been fired because he'd taken on a bit too much power, the same thing would happen to Alex. Otherwise, Alex would have to seek out Satan somehow, corner him and demand his release. That might prove very difficult.

Alex decided to take a walk. After all, he might as well see what Berlin was like. A sentry posted at the hotel door barred his way with a rifle.

"It is not permitted to go out during the blackout."

"For me it is quite permissible," Alex said.

The sentry brought his gun to present arms. "*Ja*—for you it is permissible," he repeated woodenly.

UNMOLESTED Alex roamed the blackout streets. He was able to see everything, however. Gestapo men were abroad in great numbers and all armed with submachine-guns. It was a very peculiar way to guard their own principal city. Alex got the notion they were really guarding themselves.

There was work to be done though. If Alex couldn't summon Satan, he'd have to ferret him out and that meant asking countless questions. He turned into a night club that was going full blast. All occupants were officers and Gestapo men. Average citizens were *verboten* such pleasures.

There was an officer in the uniform of a general and he was very drunk. Alex sat down at his table. Three aides gasped and reached for wine bottles.

Alex said, "Beat it, bums."

All three arose quickly, came to attention, saluted and wheeled. They walked out. The general eyed Alex fishily.

"Do you know me?" he demanded.

"No. I've never been so unfortu-

nate as to meet you."

"A clever answer. I am the man who led the advance into Warsaw. My men killed off fifteen thousand pigs who lived there. We did it in one hour flat. Great work, wasn't it? Say, there is something about you I like."

"I know just what it is," Alex answered. "One of these days you'll get a bit closer to others like me. You'll like them even better. Hell is crammed with their kind. General, you're going to answer some questions."

The general waved his glass, slopping liquor on his uniform. "For you, my friend, anything."

"Hitler hasn't been showing himself much lately. However, you run across him now and then. Has he taken any new man in hand? Made someone outrank you, for instance? Someone who has not earned his promotion on the field of battle?"

"Ach, yes. An especially good-looking swine named Ludwig Zehnfennig. No one knows where he came from nor who he is. Adolf adores him."

"What does he do?"

"How do I know?" the general barked. "Whenever I have seen him, he stands around posing like a love-sick girl. What does he do? Nothing! Yet he gives me orders and I have to obey or—I get pneumonia. It has become a very contagious disease here, especially among high officers."

"I know," Alex said. "Frequently has complications, too. Lead complications. Well, thanks for the information. Oh, yes—where is this Ludwig Zehnfennig now?"

"Find Hitler and you find him," the general answered. "I do not keep track of them. Or wait—I just happened to think. There is a battle going on now. We are annihilating the enemy. Killing them by the millions. Of course, we retreat some, too."

"It is my policy that when you wish to locate Hitler, look for a battle that is being won in reverse and he will be there. Ach, he is such a clever man. Heil Hitler!"

THE general made a weary salute. "Yeah," Alex muttered. "So he's promoted a nice-looking fellow to be an aide, eh? General, I'll wager this man has blond, wavy hair, blue eyes and a peaches and cream complexion. I'll bet he stands about six feet high and is built like an Adonis."

"How did you know?" the general marveled. "I thought you had not met Ludwig Zehnfennig."

"I met him all right," Alex grunted. "Only he didn't look quite like that. You see, he knows what Hitler likes. Thank you, General. You have been most helpful. *Vive la France!*"

"Indeed." The general smiled. "Yes, indeed."

Alex scowled as he walked out of the place. Coming into contact with these over-dressed, over-arrogant, over-murderous men rankled in his heart. Not even the influence of Satan could make him like them.

On the street again, he looked into darkened windows and stared at empty tins labeled chicken and ham. Saw the dummy coffee cans, dummy bottles of milk and huge, luxurious looking loaves of bread—made of solid wood and a little paint. At least, the Germans could look and remember what real food used to be.

A patrol marched toward him. Alex moved directly into their path. The patrol stopped short, sidestepped and then goosestepped forward again, avoiding him. Not even the lieutenant in charge knew why he and his men had done this.

Alex went back to his room and wondered what the citizens of Berlin did during the blackout. They couldn't eat or drink because food and even beer was lacking. If they talked and forgot to praise the war effort that gave them a few marks a week, no food and no rest they'd be reported and shoved into some concentration camp.

Grimly, Alex determined to create as much confusion here as he possibly could. He'd exert every effort, use that Satanic power of his. It would be a pleasure worth millions of dollars. Perhaps, in the morning, he'd find a good chance to cause some trouble. Goering was to be decorated.

Goebbels was to make a speech.

Alex grinned broadly and started making plans. He knew this Ludwig Zehnfennig offered possibilities of being Satan, but if that hope petered out, he'd take Valerie's suggestion and start things humming to such an extent that the Devil's own works would be subordinated. He'd bring Satan into the open and this time he wouldn't get away with any slick talk.

CHAPTER XVI

Trouble in Berlin

NEXT morning Alex was ushered across a huge, cleared space in front of a great public building. Legions of soldiers, sailors and Gestapo agents were drawn up at rigid attention. Behind them were thousands upon thousands of people, packed closer than they are on a Broadway subway during the rush hour. All the children carried flags and the men wore glum faces.

Alex's guide was a high Gestapo officer trailed by a squad of rifle-armed men. Alex felt as though he were being led out to be shot. They entered the big building between rows of soldiers at stiff attention.

Alex decided this had gone on smoothly just about long enough. Suddenly, the soldiers all dropped their rifles. The ensuing clatter and scramble turned officers' faces pink with rage.

Alex calmly walked out on a broad, long veranda used for reviewing troops. A parade started, headed by a band that played the *Horst Wessel* song. Alex grinned tightly and the band started to play *God Save the King*, while a frantic bandmaster yelled and cursed.

Then a few tanks rumbled along. Very few. When they got opposite the reviewing stand, four of them broke down. Finally squads of men pushed them off the right of way.

The parade took about an hour, but Alex enjoyed every moment of it, especially when a closely packed regiment switched from the goosestep

to the arm-swinging march of British soldiers.

"What is the matter with the fools?" Alex's guide snarled. "They will be punished for this. Tonight they start for the front. *Ach*—now comes Goering. What a car? And he rides all by himself in the back seat."

"He needs lots of room," Alex commented dryly. "What happens now?"

The guide pointed to a small, individual reviewing box built high above the steps.

"Goering insists upon being decorated there, as our brave Fuehrer always does. Goering gets another medal, but where are they going to pin it? He is covered with them now."

The big car came to a smooth stop. Goering arose, raised his hand and the crowd yowled. He smiled, saluted the officers who stood waiting to receive him and then got out of the car. He waddled up the steps, disappeared inside and then trumpeters sounded a flourish on their brasses.

Goering walked out onto the high individual stand. A colonel-general saluted and bowed. An aide brought out a plush pillow on which rested a brilliantly sparkling medal. The colonel-general made a speech, the crowd *heiled* obediently and then the medal was pinned on the fat man's chest.

Goering walked to the railing, all smiles. Alex held his breath and raised his arm as though *heiling* the air marshal. Instantly the stand began slowly sagging. A great chunk of concrete slapped down on the steps as the railing gave way. Goering gave a wild shout. Just in time two men grabbed him, but it took eight more to haul him back to safety.

Someone in the crowd started to laugh. It was taken up, but lasted only a few seconds. The horde of Gestapo men turned around slowly and reached toward their guns.

ALLEX'S guide stifled his own laughter.

"Do you know what caused that?" he asked. "Three years ago the platform was built very carefully so that even if Goering gained weight, it

would still hold him up. It did, too—even four days ago when he got another medal. But this time it collapsed. The last medal was just too much.”

“Yes,” Alex grinned, “I know. Isn’t it almost time for Goebbels to show up? All these people can’t waste time standing there. Not with a war going on.”

“It makes no difference,” the officer said. “If they remain there four hours, they work six hours overtime. We count the time it takes them to assemble and then return to their factories. Yes, Goebbels will deliver one of his impassioned speeches. This one is supposed to be especially good, but I have my fingers crossed.”

“Why?” Alex queried.

“After what has happened, it seems the day is cursed by bad luck.”

They waited about half an hour for the arrival of the Minister of Propaganda. He arrived, in state, like Goering. He swaggered up the steps and walked to a row of microphones. Alex nudged his guide and went over to stand almost beside Goebbels. Nobody tried to stop him. It was as if he couldn’t be seen, or that the guards had no power to challenge him.

The band played for a minute or so, and very poorly. Alex saw to that. Then the trumpeteers blasted another commanding note, and Goebbels cleared his throat.

Into the microphone, he said, “My fellow comrades of Greater Germany. We are here to honor our great soldier, Hermann Goering. He is the living example of what all Germans should be. We honor him and we honor you. Every one of you who fight to drive back the nations that oppress us. Some day your reward will be great.”

That was what Goebbels said. Out of the amplifiers came Goebbels’ voice, but not his words.

“My fellow comrades of Greater Germany. Greater? *Ach*, no. It is at its peak now. We are here to honor Goering. I don’t know what for. He is honored so often it gets to be a habit. Another medal, another pound of fat. Our great soldier grows mightier each day. We honor you,

too, for being so meek. For working for wages that a ten-year-old boy could make in America. For working hours decent rulers wouldn’t require of their horses. If you are rewarded at all, it will be in blood. Hitler loves blood baths. So do I.”

The crowd *heiled* frantically, and Goebbels bowed low. He waved his hands and went on. Words came from his lips and were mysteriously changed in meaning when they emerged from the loud speakers.

“If Germany wins the war, you will be the rulers of the earth. Of course, you will keep on working just as hard. For the same money. Governing the world requires a lot of cash. We’ll get a lot from the other nations, but that will not affect you. No—so much money it takes. Goering, for instance, has millions tucked away. *Herr Ribbentrop* thinks money is like the champagne that he used to sell—it must be hoarded. Hitler, our beloved *Fuehrer*? He is a frugal man. He lives frugally and he saves. It should be an example to you—if you ever have anything to save.”

SOMEONE, aghast, tapped Goebbels’ arm and whispered into his ear. Goebbels shook him off and started to speak again. The roar of the crowd blotted out his words. The people were pressing forward and the Gestapo had to give ground.

Troops came pouring into the square with bayonets fixed. Gradually, the crowd was dispersed. Alex’s guide mopped his face and suddenly sat down on the steps.

“This is a bad day for the Reich,” he moaned. “For once, Goebbels told the truth and the people liked it. They will never believe his lies again until a few thousand of them are shot as examples. What could have come over him? Why did he say such things?”

Alex didn’t reply. He was watching a sleek car drive up. It carried two flags, a chauffeur and a footman, but the tonneau was empty.

“Isn’t that Hitler’s car?” Alex asked.

His guide nodded. “That makes it worse. He will know about this. The

whole lot of us will be put on the Russian front—in the winter.”

Alex walked away. He'd created his confusion and mischief. Enough for the moment at least. There were more important things to do. The presence of Hitler's car indicated he was back in town. It also indicated that Ludwig Zehnfennig was here, too.

Alex approached the car and spoke to the driver. Anyone else would have been promptly shot, but no one disturbed him. The driver talked, amiably and casually, as if Alex was one of his closest friends. Hitler had returned, but was busy at the Foreign Minister's office. His entourage was camped at the Adlon, Alex's own hotel.

Alex hurried there, more eager than he'd been in days. Upon this newcomer, Zehnfennig, depended everything. If he was Satan, staying close enough to direct Hitler's movements, then Alex could corner him. He'd make him reveal himself no matter what it cost.

The next few moments might mean the final test. If he failed now, he'd be doomed, with but one chance left to summon Satan. He must duplicate Dingle's efforts and outdo Satan himself.

A clerk, who was very gracious for some reason he never did figure out, gave Alex the room number of Ludwig Zehnfennig. Alex went to the sixth floor, paid no attention to the automatic salute he got from a row of guards lining the hallway and walked straight up to the door.

He didn't knock, just twisted the knob and stepped inside. A strikingly handsome young man turned around. He'd been busy applying comb and brush to his blond, curly hair.

“What is it?” he snapped.

“Hello—Satan.” Alex smiled grimly. “Don't tell me you can't remember Alex Craig?”

THE blond young man's lips slowly parted in an amused smile.

“Congratulations,” he said. “I didn't think you'd ever catch up with me. Business, that's my alibi.

Couldn't keep track of you although I knew you were coming here. Nice work with those submarines. You bagged a couple of sub captains I'd already selected for a special niche in Hades.”

“And what did you think of my little gesture this afternoon?” Alex dropped into a chair. “Rather good, wasn't it?”

“I didn't see it,” the Devil said. “Though, of course, an inkling of the procedure did come to me. Heard enough about it though. You certainly made an awful donkey out of that blabber-mouthed Goebbels. Of course, you know I don't like such goings on. You are trespassing, my dear fellow. It is my privilege to upset the plans of great murderers. I delegated to you only the right to create mischief.”

“Now see here,” Alex argued, “you gave me a promise that I was to be released upon request. I'm asking to be released now, and I don't want any alibis about your being such a grand liar.”

“I'm afraid not.” Satan began to comb his hair again. “Like me this way, Alex? Adolf does. I'm staying right beside him until I'm ready to pull my final coup.”

“While thousands die,” Alex groaned. “No wonder you were banished to Hell. I thought that what these men represent would turn even your stomach.”

“Oh, but it does. And what a select crowd I'm getting. You see, Alex, old boy, I'm rather tired. I want to quit chasing around for a few hundred years. But I must be kept amused, of course. When I'm not happy, I brood. When I brood, terrible things happen.”

“Boy, you sure have been brooding lately,” Alex commented.

The Devil laughed. “Then you see what I mean. Now with enough clients standing in line, with special problems for people like those who govern this nation, I shall be content for a long time. The world won't have to experience any of my works.”

Alex looked up quickly. “Then you don't intend to have Hitler win this war?”

"Did I ever, Alex? My badness, I was beginning to think you were quite clever. Of course, Hitler won't win. Suppose he did, now. What would happen? I'd not only have a rival Satan here on earth, but also a rival Hell. People in my bailiwick would start praying they'd never be sent to earth. Can't have that. Oh, no—I'm just giving Hitler a build-up so his fall will be all the harder. That's part of my policy. It's worked for thousands of years. Let a man visualize himself the master of the world and then—bingo—I rub his nose in the mud. A little preview of Hell, Alex."

"Rub Hitler's snoot extra hard for me," Alex said. "But you're evading the subject. I came here to get my release. You must keep your word."

"I think not. You see, I don't have to keep my word. What's honor to me? You've done much too well. I'd miss you, Alex. Maybe some future day. Remind me about the turn of the century. I'll think it over then." "That is final?" Alex asked.

"Final."

Alex drew a deep breath.

"Then I'll fight you with every ounce of power you've bestowed upon me. I'll wreck this country and every nation associated with it. I'll turn Goebbels into a bigger blabbermouth than he is. I'll make Goering twice as huge. In fact, I'll cause Mussolini to attend Hitler every moment from now on."

"Hades forbid," the Devil grimaced. "Keep Benny where he is now. By the way, I've done rather handsomely for Benny where he is concerned, haven't I? Made quite a bum out of him."

Alex arose, suddenly tired for the first time since he'd encountered Satan. Valerie had been wrong. Satan refused to abide by his promise. Alex was sentenced to a life of everlasting trouble.

"Good-by, Alex," Satan said without looking around. "Sorry I'm so busy right now. Got to make myself presentable. Hitler is extremely observing, you know. I'll be seeing you around somewhere."

Alex half-stumbled out of the suite

and somehow made his way to his own quarters. He sat down on the edge of the bed and groaned. Satan didn't even seem to worry if he usurped some of his powers. Maybe he was even pleased.

CHAPTER XVII

The Devil Cornered

ALEX recalled the events of the afternoon and despite his personal trouble, he laughed. That really had been fun. With more time, he could have thought of even more devastating ideas and he regretted that Himmler, who headed the Gestapo, should have been absent. Himmler should come in for some special treatment. And there was Ribbentrop, too—and all the lesser officials of the Reich.

There was some excitement out front. Alex went to the window. He saw Ludwig Zehnfennig, otherwise the Devil, climbing into Hitler's car. Satan looked up and waved cheerfully. Alex let go of the curtain and sat down again.

This meant the end of all things. The theatre, his friends—Valerie. He couldn't allow her to associate with him any longer. It was too dangerous. Anyway, Val deserved better things than an agent of the Devil.

Alex brought both hands slapping down on his knees.

"All right," he said aloud. "If that's how it is to be—I'll do the best I can for this world. I'll stay here and drive these Nazis mad. I'll have them running around in circles. I'll break the morale of the entire country, make the people see what kind of an ideology they are worshipping. If I can do it, I'll even stop this war and drive Germany into a defeat that will ring through history books for generations. I'll bring ruin and fire and pestilence. I'll—"

"You'll do nothing of the kind," a voice snapped.

Alex jumped to his feet. In the center of the floor stood Satan. Not as Ludwig Zehnfennig, but in the

likeable personality of the suave man whom Alex had originally encountered.

"Alex," he said, "you've really broken my heart. The very thing I hoped you'd never think of just escaped your lips. Naturally, I came right back. You will not stop this war until I am ready to have it stopped! Is that clear?"

"You make it sound that way," Alex countered, "but the fact remains that I still possess the power you delegated to me. I can create enough mischief to stall these Nazis in their tracks, cause an internal upheaval, confuse the leaders and make these people see just exactly what is happening."

Satan sat down on the edge of the bed. "Alex," he said slowly. "Why not be reasonable? I need you. Of all my deputies you have done the best work. And I like you when you impersonate me on the stage. After all, even Satan enjoys being flattered."

"I'll never go back to the stage," Alex said. "Not as long as you refuse to keep your promise."

"But if I release you, audiences will laugh again as they did that first night."

"What do I care? There will be more plays, more theatres, other audiences."

Satan spread both hands in a gesture of despair. "You're impossible. Really, Alex, I don't know what to do with you. Most mortals would relish this chance you have. Perhaps I should—no, damned if I will! You'll remain my deputy, but I'll control you a bit more, that's all."

"You may control me," Alex admitted, "but so long as I possess any part of those powers to create mischief, I'll work hard at doing just that. I can't urge men into a hail of machine-gun bullets as you do. I can't start great holocausts by simply commanding them to start. But, with my lesser power, I can control minor things that, if carefully planned, will result in those other events."

"Oh, Alex," Satan chided, "don't be so foolishly stubborn. What do you want, money?"

THERE was a flash of light and Alex stared at what was probably the largest amount of cash he'd ever dreamed of. Currency of all nations, gold and silver. Sheaves of bills. They almost filled the room.

Alex shook his head. "There isn't enough money in the world to tempt me, Satan."

"Then perhaps it is power you wish?" Satan gestured again.

The money vanished and in its place was a line of men. Premiers, kings, potentates, sultans, nabobs. They all bowed low to Alex and one by one vanished.

"Where's Hitler?" Alex demanded suddenly.

Satan laughed, raising one leg and clasping the knee with both hands. "Oh, no, my dear fellow. Hitler was not among those because I know what's in your mind. You'd have torn him limb from limb. So even power and glory won't tempt you. Alex, I haven't been the Devil these ages for nothing. I know that every man—no matter who he is—has a price. What's yours? I'll listen quite sympathetically."

Alex paced the floor for a few moments. "All right," he turned suddenly and faced Satan. "I do have a price. You want me as your deputy. That lasts forever, I suppose, so this is no great bargain, understand. However, I'll consent in return for one thing."

"Now, that's being reasonable," Satan smirked. "Name your terms, my dear fellow."

"You will stop this war at once. End it with the utter and permanent defeat of Hitler and all his satellites."

Satan jumped up, his face twisted in hatred and surprise.

"I most certainly will do no such thing," he snarled. "Took me long enough to get this thing started and I will not put an end to it until I have what I want."

"What is that?" Alex asked.

"A well-populated Hell. The world has become too civilized. I don't get my quota any more unless I start wars. And as for amusement—why, I haven't had any really good subjects

for ages. However, they are beginning to accumulate now. No, I can't do it, Alex. Not even for you."

"Then there is no deal," Alex snapped. "Those terms were final. I'm willing to sacrifice myself if by doing so I can stop this slaughter. I'll act as your deputy and do a good job of it even if I become the most hated man on earth. But only under those conditions which you have just rejected."

Satan eyed him narrowly. "You know I could make your life a hell on earth if I choose. I could even take you!"

"Admitted, but you can't make me exert your delegated powers in any manner except as I wish."

"Perhaps not," Satan frowned. "Come now, think it over for a little while. Have fun here taunting these Nazis. Just lay off starting riots and creating incidents that may cause rebellion. You'll soon find it so amusing. Take a side trip to Italy. I'll even permit you to go to work on Mussolini. After all, he doesn't amount to much, anyhow. Or Tokyo—no. No, I take that back. You can't go to Tokyo. I'm reserving those Japs for myself."

Alex said, very firmly, "I made my offer and I refuse to bargain further. Take it or leave it."

SATAN changed to a wheedling tone. He threatened, begged, pleaded and Alex stood there, impassive, unimpressed. Satan stepped closer and his eyes burned into Alex's.

"I could stow you away below, you know. Keep you for those years when I'll be content to remain in Hell and let the earth live in peace."

"You couldn't do that, either," Alex challenged. "I'm just not your type, Satan. For once in eternity, you are licked. I've got your back against the wall. There isn't a thing you can do."

Oh, can't I?" Satan barked.

"No. Not unless you take away all my powers and release me from your influence. Nothing short of that will do and you know it. So I'm to remain your mischief maker, am I? Very well. If you are afraid that

Hitler and his satellites will create a rival hell on earth, imagine what I'll do. No one can harm me. I'm invulnerable and therefore I have no fear. Believe me, Satan, I'll give you something to think about. I'll begin immediately. Right in my room at the Adlon in Berlin. At the Adlon—the Adlon—hey, what's happened? The room has changed. This isn't the Adlon. It's—"

"Your own suite in New York," Satan said. "I've lost, Alex. You and that girl have been too much for me. Oh, I know how you plotted, but I didn't think anyone would ever wish to give up these powers as you just did."

"Then I am released? Roofs won't cave in when I walk by? People won't start fighting or break their legs?"

"You are now as you were before you called upon me. Just as you were, Alex. Wait and see. Perhaps you'll be sorry. I rather think not though. But you should be thoroughly ashamed of yourself."

"Why? Because I wanted to be merely human again?"

"Yes, exactly. Now I have to go to the bother of finding another mischief maker. Meanwhile, Adolf waits. Impatiently, too. But I forgive you, Alex. Shall we shake hands on that?"

"Oh, no." Alex backed away slowly. "One grip of that paw and I'll find myself whisked right downstairs to where you hang out. I'm not sore at you. What I did in Berlin repaid me for any anxiety I had during this service as your mischief maker. I'm just being very, very careful, now."

Satan smiled. "Good man. Proud of you, my boy. Well, I must be running along. Good-by—for now."

A sudden gust of wind swept through the room so powerful that it overturned chairs and made heavy rugs flutter like bits of silk. Then an eerie peace descended.

Alex made a dive for the telephone and dialed faster than he'd ever done in his life. Someone at the theatre called Valerie to the phone for him.

"I'm back, Val! Back and free. I defeated Satan. Val—I'm free!"

She answered in a voice choked by

a sob. "Alex, I'm so terribly happy. But are you sure? Remember Satan promised to free you before and didn't. He said he was the greatest liar in history. Perhaps he is taunting you again."

"How much longer before the performance starts?" Alex shouted.

"Half an hour."

"I'm coming over. In thirty minutes I'll know. Pray for me, Val."

CHAPTER XVIII

The New Deputy

CORY and Alicia Cartwright looked up as Alex burst into their office at the theater. Cory immediately placed both hands atop his head and gave his wife a worried look.

"No encyclopedia?" Alex asked, and hardly dared to breathe.

"Alex," Alicia said, "when you came in before, I struck my husband, but I couldn't help it. Some—some devil inside me rose up and made me do that. I don't feel that way, anymore. Cory, darling, don't look so unhappy. I'm not going to hit you."

"Never mind that now," Alex said. "I'm going on tonight."

"Alex, that's wonderful," Alicia Cartwright said.

"Maybe you won't think so in about twenty minutes," Alex said, and grinned.

He hurried to Valerie's dressing room and pounded on the door. She let him in, whisked her maid outside and for two or three minutes they didn't speak.

"I read about what happened in the Atlantic," she said. "Alex, was that your doings?"

"Every bit of it. Nice, eh? I should be decorated for it, but we'll just pass that up. The main point is, I'm free, Val. Just a moment ago I walked in on Alicia. She never made a move to lambast her husband. That's point number one. We've just time to demonstrate point number two. I want a cigarette."

He lit one, took a deep breath and held the match near his finger. He

gave a howl of pain and dropped the match.

"Fire burns me," he chortled. "It was the most beautiful pain I've ever experienced. Shortly, I'll demonstrate point number three. There goes the overture. See you on-stage, honey."

Alex hurried to the wings, adjusted his clothes and when his cue came, he walked out before the audience. He wore none of the props, but the instant he appeared, they recognized him and a wave of applause went up.

Alex paid no attention to it. His part called for a grimace. When he faced the audience and grimaced while he was under Satan's spell, the audience all but cowered back in their seats.

This time, someone laughed. It was taken up until the theater rang with it.

"Thank you," Alex yelled. "Thank you very much. The part is no more hammy than I. From here on, my understudy will carry forth. You have made me completely happy, my friends. You have proven point number three."

He waited in Valerie's dressing room until the play was over. She came back in a great hurry.

"Alex, they're still laughing at you. They wouldn't laugh if the Devil was inside of you. They'd sense it and believe you the greatest actor to cross a stage."

"I know that, darling. Now, while I formally quit this play, you change. See you at the stage door."

When he entered the Cartwright's office, Alicia was phoning.

She said, "Oh—just a moment. He walked in. Alex, it's for you."

ALLEX took the phone and Bill Parker's voice reached him. Parker was highly excited.

"Alex, I've tried to reach you at every bar and night club in town. I rang your apartment until the phone bell must be worn out. Then I thought of the theatre and at last I've found you."

"What's up?" Alex queried. "You sound as if you'd uncovered a vein of gold in your backyard."

"Better than that Alex. Much better. I've prepared a new tube. I tried it and the thing works, Alex. It works. I took all kinds of short cuts because we were in such a hurry, but I succeeded, anyway. Come right over. You can contact the Devil any time you wish. Don't be long."

He hung up before Alex could explain that he no longer needed that method of communicating with Satan. For a moment he hesitated, in doubt whether or not to call Bill Parker, and decided against it.

This was a night for celebrating, without having bartenders break glasses or bus boys trip and hurl platters of food into the laps of astounded guests. Bill Parker should share in the celebration. He'd helped, too, even if he was a bit late with his new thought intensifier.

Alicia took both his arms and swung him around to face her.

"Alex," she chided, "you were particularly lousy out there tonight. What happened to the old spark that made audiences go mad with delight over you?"

"It's died out," Alex told her. "Gone completely. Don't get me wrong though. I'm still a good actor, but I need a new play. That's why I'm resigning as of right now. See you later, good folks, and don't think too harshly of me because of what has happened. It really wasn't my fault."

He bolted out of the room, saw a few stage hands titter at him and grinned. The greater the razzberry he got for that performance, the better he liked it. Applause that would shake the rafters would never sound as sweet as those gusts of derisive laughter out front.

Valerie hurried to meet him and they started away from the theater. An elderly man passed by. Alex stopped.

"Hey, you!" he called.

The man turned around.

"Come here," Alex said. "Whether you want to or not, come here."

The man didn't move. All he said was, "Are you nuts?"

Then he turned and resumed his walking. Alex threw both arms around

Valerie.

"Remember how they used to obey my commands? That's point number four. Now for the next one. Where's a street light that casts a shadow?"

They almost ran around the corner and then decided to walk to Valerie's apartment where Alex's shadow had originally refused to appear. It didn't take long—not the way they walked.

VALERIE stepped up to the wall and her shadow was clearly thrown. Alex, smiling happily, stood beside her. His smile died. Valerie gave a gasp of horror. There was no second shadow!

"Alex," she cried. "Oh . . . Alex . . . you're not free."

"Something must be wrong," Alex said, shaken. "I—Val, look! Look, quickly!"

A shadow came sweeping across the wall and stopped exactly where Alex's shadow should be silhouetted. It froze there. He moved his arms. The shadow moved, too. Then a second shadow came along. Alex gave a sharp cry of fear as he recognized the silhouette and looked around wildly and in vain for the caster of that shadow.

"Sorry, Alex, old boy," said the familiar voice. "I really forgot. Your shadow is back and won't go away again. Oh, yes—Valerie, don't believe those fairy tales. I do cast a shadow. See! Only, when I cast a shadow, I don't appear, do I? Perhaps you are right. Just another thing to worry about. Good-by."

The shadow drew erect, an arm snapped to a salute and then it was gone, as if wiped clear by a sudden ray of moonlight.

"You *are* free, Alex," Valerie said. "He did keep his promise."

"Sure he did. I made him. If he hadn't, so help me, I'd have turned Germany upside down. That's the only part of this I regret. I could have done great things there. Great things."

Valerie took his arm and held it tightly. "Only one more point, darling. Flowers had a habit of wilting when you were near. There's a florist

shop two blocks away. It's still open. Let's go there and find out."

"Why not? I'm no longer afraid. Though I will confess my heart dropped clear to the sidewalk when my shadow didn't appear. Look now—it's trailing me. I'll bet my shadow was lonesome for me. Hi, there, pal."

The shadow obediently waved back in unison. They kept walking briskly until they reached the florist's shop. Alex looked at the bright blooms in the window and remembered how they dropped and wilted. If these remained fresh, he was completely free, not one semblance of a taint remaining. He had to be sure of this.

They walked in and a clerk came up to greet them. Valerie gave him a

and tell him the good news. Did you know he built another of those intensifiers and it works?"

"Alex." Valerie halted abruptly. "Alex, do you think we should risk it? That's how Satan got you the first time. I'll never forgive Bill Parker for that."

"I have two reasons for visiting Bill," Alex said. "One is to thank him for co-operating and the other is to bust that new machine into atoms before someone else gets into trouble. Step on it. I can hardly wait."

PARKER'S house was brightly illuminated behind the shades drawn in obedience to the dim-out laws. The butler let them in.

ONE OF SCIENTIFUNCTION'S GREATEST CLASSICS



THE IDEAL

By

STANLEY G. WEINBAUM

NEXT ISSUE'S "HALL OF FAME" SELECTION

sales talk while Alex wandered over to a big display of roses. He leaned close and sniffed their fragrance. He even stroked the petals and they kept their heads upright, their stems erect.

"I want just one flower," Alex told the clerk. "Only one, but I'll pay you five dollars for it. Get me the biggest flower in the store that will fit into my buttonhole. That's all I ask."

The clerk brought a huge chrysanthemum and pinned it to his lapel. He stood back and shook his head dubiously.

"It's not your type, sir. Much too big. Looks awkward if I may say so."

"A sunflower wouldn't be too big." Alex whacked the man on the back as he gave him a banknote. "Come on, Val. We're going to Bill Parker's

"Mr. Parker is upstairs," he explained. "He told me you were to go straight to the lab."

They walked up the stairs side by side. Alex spoke humbly.

"I'm free again, but, Val, it was really you who did the trick. I only made Satan release me by following your suggestion."

The lab door was closed. Alex banged on it. There was a click and the door opened. Alex held his breath lest that infernal intensifier hum be resounding through the place. There was only silence and he felt relieved.

Bill Parker came toward them, hands outstretched. "Alex, I've done it! When I finished, I was ready to collapse from fatigue, but accomplishment of my task perked me up. I feel great. I even look great and so do

you. You, too, Val. Come on in."

"Oh—that machine," Alex said. "I'm going to smash it, Bill."

"Smash it?" Parker gasped. "But I thought—"

"I've licked Satan. I beat him at his own game," Alex explained. "I won't need the thought intensifier any longer, but I am grateful to you for—Val! What's the matter? What are you staring at?"

The girl, face gone dead white, backed out of the room, turned and fled downstairs. The butler, carrying a tray of drinks and canapes, stopped and stared. Alex and Parker hurried down after her.

"Alex!" she almost screamed, pointing at him. "Alex—the flower. In your buttonhole!"

Alex looked. The huge bloom had

quietly folded up into a limp, dejected-looking mass. Alex turned quickly toward Parker.

At that moment, the butler moved forward, fell over his own feet and landed in a mess of broken glass and gooey canapes.

"Bill," Alex cried in horror. "Bill—you!"

Parker nodded gloomily. "Yes, me. I tried out the machine—and I met Satan. He told me if I became his new deputy, I'd invent astounding things. Already great ideas are forming in my mind, but—I'm afraid, Alex. I know what happened to you and I'm afraid. Alex—*what shall I do?*"

Alex stepped very close.

"Bill, there is only one thing you can do. Go to—Germany!"

NEXT ISSUE'S COMPLETE NOVEL

WINGS OF ICARUS

By RAY CUMMINGS

The man who's conservation-wise
Says Thin Gillette's the blade he buys!
It's thrifty, longer-lasting, keen—
You sure look slick—shave fast and clean!



Easy Way To Get Even
More Shaves With
Every Gillette Blade



1. WASH FACE thoroughly with hot water and soap to soften beard and eliminate accumulated grit that dulls shaving edges



2. APPLY LATHER or Brushless Shaving Cream while face is wet. If lather is used, dip your brush in water frequently



3. TWO EDGES double blade give. Marks indicated above identify edges, enabling you to give both equal use and get extra shaves



4. CLEAN BLADE in razor by loosening handle, then rinsing in hot water and shaking. Wiping the blade is likely to damage the edges



This STARTLING WAR

*News and Notes from the
Science Front*



TO BOMB BOMBERS—Inventor Lloyd J. Martin of Beverly Hills, California, has come up with an ingenious device which threatens to make the air over target areas a hot place for would-be bombing planes. It is a small balloon with skirts and a long train—said skirts being a parachute and the long train a cable which terminates in a grappling hook with a bomb attached.

Thousands of these balloons can be released when an alert sounds, performing economically and ultra-efficiently the job of cumbersome barrage balloons. If a bomber fouls one of the cables, it's good-bye bomber, as the bomb will blow it to bits.

If this air mine fails to explode, the parachute is released after a certain length of time and floats to earth so gently that the bomb is not exploded and can be used again.

THEY DON'T HATCH—Dried hen-fruit now sent abroad for our soldiers, sailors and allies, takes up exactly 25% of the space the ordinary moist cackleberry occupies in shipping, and there are no shells to break. The product can also be kept longer and in far more savory shape than the pickled eggs dear to our friends in China.

And while we're at it, the new cellophane wrapper on the Army's emergency ration keeps it fresh as fresh for at least a year from the Arctic to the Torrid Zone.

BACK TO THE MIDDLE AGES—Soldiers of today are going to look more than ever like men at arms of the age of chivalry if the invention of M. J. O. Lobelle of Langley, England, is generally adopted. It is a visor to cover the faces of steel-helmeted soldiers, made either of a perforated metal plate or of a veil-like curtain of chain mail mounted on a hinged frame.

The purpose, of course, is to protect our warriors from face wounds caused by shell splinters or flying debris.

SUB SPOTTER—A new type of underwater detector was invented by the late Vladimir S. Goloviznin of New York City just before his death. It consists of two hollow spheres which float in contact side by side and are connected with a ship or shore observation post by cable.

A constant current is maintained through the circuit, and when a sub approaches, its motion disturbs the inter-sphere contact, causing fluctuations in the circuit which reveal the pigboat's presence.

The device can be anchored to the bottom or suspended from the hull of a ship as needed.

RESOURCEFUL AMERICA—The United States is blessed with a huge share of the basic sinews of war. We produce one-third of the world's iron ore, 40% of its iron and steel, two-thirds of its oil, 40% of its copper, 29% of its zinc and 24% of its lead. Hitler's got to do a lot more conquering to match that, as has brother Tojo.

ROBOT SNIFFER—A device for spotting fires in airplanes before they start has been patented by F. J. Schirm of Hoboken, New Jersey. An electric multiple nose, it consists of a suction pump from which slender tubes lead to all parts of the plane where gasoline or other inflammable vapors are apt to accumulate.

If any of them are approaching the combustion point, their heat changes the conductivity of a wire inside the tube, causing a warning lamp to light up on the dashboard.

PLASTIC GUNBELT—A machine-gun belt composed of plastic links is the offering of L. L. Berry of Erie, Pennsylvania. The linked belt is nothing new in itself, but heretofore all such belts have been made of metal. Berry's invention promises to save a lot of steel and other alloys for other uses.

PROPELLER IN A WELL—Ships of the much-discussed "sea otter" type and similar vessels in which the propellers are directly under the hull instead of astern and approximately at keel level have trouble getting into some harbors because of their increased draft. To remedy this, Washington Inventor Warren Noble has devised a propeller that can be lifted into a well rising through the hull.

The propeller is carried at the lower end of a piston-like drum that fills that well and can be raised and lowered by means of long screws operated from the upper end. Changes can be effected while the ship is in motion. In the raised position, the propeller blades project just enough below the ship's bottom to keep her on her way in shallow water.

GERMAN CITIZEN INVENTS RANGE FINDER—A. U. S. patent has just been issued to Frederick Wilhelm Gehrke of Munich for a compact and simple artillery range finder which is a great aid to accurate gunfire at short and medium distances from the target. This device, however, is being produced for Uncle Sam instead of dear Adolf by the General Aniline and Film Corporation of New York. And dear Adolf can't do a thing about it. Tsk, tsk!



Jane was sitting on the floor, a ruby-red cluster of crystals encircling her brow

THE GLORY FLIGHT

By **FRANK BELKNAP LONG**

*Jim Scott Takes a Strange Ride Through Saturn's
Crepe Ring and Unearths a Mind Long Dead!*

THE Doc's words were ominous: "You understand, of course, that you may never return?"

He had finished taking my blood pressure, and was removing the business end of a stethoscope from my chest. He seemed annoyed because I wasn't dying on my feet.

The Doc wasn't a sentimentalist. He could watch the Crepe Ring blot

out a ship and a pilot, light a cigar, and mutter around it: "It seems sort of wasteful, doesn't it?" Not tragic, or hard on the poor guy's family. Just wasteful.

The Doc believed that only tottering human wrecks should undertake a Saturn Ring flight. The sound lads should conserve their energies for jobs which were less hazardous.

It burned me up to realize that the Saturn Company was getting incurable human wrecks instead of men. Was getting them by twos and threes, and all because there was an ice-hearted old walrus in the examiner's office who should have been given his walking papers.

Well, the Company was getting a sound man this time.

"Sure, I see your point," I told him. "Ring pilots sit down most of the time, and the controls are easy to manipulate. Why not let a Johnny Fallapart handle the job?"

He looked straight at me.

"Well?"

"Look, Doc," I said. "I'm not claiming that the Johnny Fallaparts can't hold a ship to its course. But if you knew you had a month at most to live would you fight to stay alive inside a dark flame whorl?"

"I wouldn't want to come out of a whorl alive," was his grim rejoinder. He handed me a card, with a hole punched through it. "This will pass you," he grunted. "Good-by and good luck."

I walked out of his office feeling as though a quart of nitroglycerin had been brought to a boil in my chest. I'd show him what a six-foot-seven giant could accomplish inside Saturn's Crepe Ring. So help me, I would!

BUT under the wheeling constellations I cooled down in slow stages. Glancing up at the pylon-shaped bulk of the recruiting station, and then down through a translucent sky ramp at the tiered hangars of the Phoebe City spaceport my resentment took wings, and went flapping off over the berthed ships like a Rhean bladder-bird with its tail feathers quivering and its talons tucked in.

Saturn's wide, flat, golden rings filled a third of the sky above me, aureoling the immense bulk of the little moon's primary in concentric bands. From Phoebe the Dusky Ring resembled a crudely welded circlet of base metal uniting the glowing plaques of the planet's great yellow crown.

Company men don't talk about the Dusky Ring much. Astronomers who

think they know why it looks dusky would get a jolt if they could see the logs of ships which have passed through. At Yerkes and on Mount Wilson they still call it the crepe ring, and claim its dusky color arises from the transparency of the particles which compose it.

But lads who have piloted ships through say it doesn't look dusky at close range. Why does the Company keep its ship logs under lock and key, and sneer down its administrative nose at Mount Wilson? Well, I know now, but I didn't when the Doc passed me, and finding out nearly cost me my life.

The Company was sending its fastest ships through and rushing the returning pilots to conferences from which they emerged with bulging wallets and sealed lips. I'm speaking, of course, of the handful that got through. Those that didn't were unsound men who had disappointed the Doc.

I was plenty robust, still in my twenties, and had a senior pilot's license tucked in my skyjacket. Feeling as reckless as a punch-drunk bull moose I descended to the hangars in a pneumatic lift, and was caught up in a milling press of new pilots as eager as I was to pass under showers, line up for uniforms and get measured for ships.

Vigorously I shouldered my way to the outfitting station on Level V 5, a thousand feet above the hangars, and padded down a humid, cold-lighted corridor to the peel-off room.

Stripped to the buff in a sizzling curtain of steam, I found myself borrowing a cake of soap from the lad in the shower next to me, and parrying his questions with exuberant wise cracks.

"Sure, I'm going through the ring. But a guy my size should have a better than even chance of not wearing crepe."

"Before you blast off they'll hand you sealed instructions," he grunted. "You won't feel so all-fired sure of yourself when you scrape the wax off, and read what John McNulty thinks you should know. If you ask me, he's an unscrupulous old buzzard."

"Yeah?" I countered belligerently.

"You seem to know a lot about it."

He grinned at me through the shower slats.

"I ought to," he said. "I'm McNulty."

The soap slithered from my hand and went careening over the tiles between us. The president of the Saturn Company didn't look his age. I happened to know he was thirty-nine, but in the dim cold light, with suds covering the gray patches on his temples, and a rubber cap over his thinning hair he looked almost like a kid.

"Holy smokes!" I said.

"I felt like a shower," he explained.

"And I wanted to see if we were getting lads with hair on their chests. You seem to have plenty of lean meat on you. You'll need a lot of pilot room space, though. Good Lord, but you're tall. Six-foot-six?"

"Seven," I said.

"Hmm, seven. Well, your co-pilot won't take up much room. Good luck to you, lad."

He thrust his hand through the shower slats, and clasped mine in a steely grip.

"A swell guy," I thought, descending to the hangars in a shiny new uniform. It was a little short at the knees and the supply room clerk had looked daggers at me, but the bootmaker had fixed me up. Ascending to above my knees was a pair of rust-colored solar boots into which my just-long-enough breeches had been tucked.

I stood for an instant looking down over myself. From the toes of my polished solar boots to the silver pilot stripes on my sleeve I was a trimly outfitted sky officer, if there ever was one.

My only regret was that I couldn't walk through the streets of Phoebe City clad in that uniform. The girls would—oh, heck. There'd be time enough for blondes, brunettes and red-heads when I brought the ship they would assign me back with her rocket jets flaming.

AS I stepped off the lift, my eyes were drawn straight ahead. The airlock yawned on a golden glow, and her name was *Lyra II*. Boy, was she a ship! Trim and wasplike, and with-

out a seam showing.

Striding along the platform toward her, I told myself that I could never have another such moment in my life. My first command, and I not yet twenty-five, and capable of enjoying everything that came my way in life.

Tightening my anti-grav belt I lowered myself to the lock float, and stretched out at full length. There was a sudden, vibrant droning, and the buoyant half-cylinder—some lads call 'em mummy cases—began to rise. Set in motion by my weight, it swung in through the complicated lock mechanism on a rising tide of ozone and settled down in a grooved cradle on the deck of the lock chamber.

When I arose to a sitting position the cold lights of my new ship were winking down at me from a corrugated metal overhead. I'll skip the fifteen or twenty minutes I spent looking over *Lyra II*. Not only was she a soundly constructed vessel, built for speed, but everything about her was shipshape, and no pun intended. The lock chamber was studded with cold lights, the passageway luminous from deck to overhead, the galley spacious and equipped with a magneto-range, and the rocket rooms a joy to contemplate.

I didn't ascend to the control room immediately, because little indications here and there—a crushed-out cigarette butt in the little sick bay, and a thin ribbon of smoke on the between-deck stairway told me that my co-pilot had preceded me into *Lyra II*.

He had preceded me in and would of course jump to attention when I entered the control room, snapping his hand to his ultra-violet ray shield with a crisp: "Yes, sir. What are your orders, sir?"

If you think that, you'd better douse your head in cold water, and take another look at me. Sure, I was a three-stripe pilot, and I wasn't supposed to share my command. I wasn't supposed to because the regulations stressed that a space-officer with a lesser number of stripes was a co-pilot in name only.

But when two skymen share the dangers of a ring flight the one with a seniority rating either drops the

regulations, or his self-respect out through a gravity port. I didn't think I'd have much trouble getting across to him that my stripes didn't count for the duration of the flight.

I didn't burst right into the control room, but rather opened the door a Scotch inch, and peered in, squinting against the cold light glare, and moving my head to right and left.

McNulty had said something about my co-pilot not taking up much space, but the figure sitting before the controls wasn't just a featherweight. I've seen some little lads I'd hate to square off against, and usually they make better pilots than big lugs like myself, because lightness is no negligible factor when you're piloting a suicide crate and have to adjust to gravity shifts in double quick.

No, he wasn't just a featherweight. He looked downright delicate and—holy suffering cats! I waited a little time to make sure I hadn't burst a blood vessel. Then with strides that jarred the delicate control instruments like the final crashes of an avalanche I crossed the chamber, grabbed her by the shoulders, and swiveled her about till our eyes met.

"All right," I said, steadying my voice with an effort, "you've had your fun. I don't know who you are or how you got into my ship. But you're not staying, understand?"

Her lips whitened, and her chin came up.

"Stop shaking me," she choked.

"You're not staying," I raged. "I'm carrying you straight out!"

"No you're not," she protested, tugging at my wrists. "I've a perfect right to be here. This is my ship too. I'm your co-pilot!"

Did you ever see a sturdy oak, firmly rooted, confident of itself, shrivel to the dimensions of a dwarf fern and begin to quake? Neither did I, but that's how I felt.

A shudder took hold of me. She was slender and lovely, with large, accusing eyes, blue-black hair, and lashes that threw long shadows over her pale, girlish face. A girl hardly out of her 'teens, and the Company was sending her on a Ring flight!

"For two months now the Company

has been giving all qualified pilots a break," she said, holding her head defiantly high. "You've got to expect revolutionary changes from now on. If your vanity is hurt, you know what you can do."

I did, but unleashing the kind of profanity the situation called for was prohibited by the regulations. Besides, a Company pilot would no more think of using profanity in the presence of a woman than he would of looking startled when a rocket tube backfires.

IN UTTER silence I did what I had to do, freezing the controls for initial acceleration with fingers that felt like fungus-growth sprouting from my palms.

She stood so close to me, her hair brushed my cheek.

"You'll need more acceleration than you're allowing for when you hit the heavy side," she interfered coolly.

I remained grimly silent, keeping my gaze averted and adjusting the controls to suit myself. I was still fuming inwardly when we blasted up from Phoebe City into the black night of space.

If a slim girl could pilot a ring crate no wonder the Doc was passing men with one foot in the grave. All the pride which I had taken in my first command, all the zest, had gone out of me . . .

I was alone in the control room when I broke the seal on my instructions. She had gone to her sleeping compartment, probably to powder her nose. No doubt she'd be setting her cap for me when she returned. Her name was Jane something-or-other.

"You call me Jane and I'll call you Jim." Just like that. "Jane, old girl, there's a meteor ahead. Tuck in your skirts and put away your knitting."

The instructions had been typed out. Skipping three paragraphs of official rigmarole I read:

Do not for an instant allow yourself to forget that you will not be alone inside the Ring. The crystals are alive, perhaps intelligent.

Crystals? I thought, a cold dread tightening about my heart. I glanced

back over the paragraphs I had skipped. Yes, there it was—a summary of the hazards the Company wanted me to know about. That it didn't make pleasant reading goes without saying.

Hazards one and two were old friends. Dark flame whorls and ether twisters were not confined to the Saturn system, but moved in eccentric orbits about all of the outer planets. Flame whorls were seething vortices of infra-energies with fiery cores, ether twisters thin ribbons of space curvature which moved snakelike through the void.

The third hazard was seemingly *alive*. Just reading about it was worse than—well, if you've ever visited a place you've never seen before, and found yourself remembering it you'll know how I felt when I read the third paragraph of my instructions. Otherwise I can't get the feeling across to you. No pen could even suggest it. It was too terrifyingly strange.

Sweat had broken out on me and my spine felt like a dissolving icicle. The Company was sending pilots into the Crepe Ring to collect ruby-red crystals. Men were risking their lives for crystals glowing in solitary splendor, and swarming over the controls of ships derelict in the void.

Crystals swarming in through solid metal bulkheads from the fringes of the Crepe Ring and encircling the brows of pilots too terrified to scream. Crownlike clusters of crystals on brows streaked with perspiration, above faces distorted with horror. Crystals tightening nooselike about human throats—

I leaped up with a startled cry. My mind was forming images not suggested by the paper in my hand. It was as though the terse Company instructions had opened up obscurely remembered vistas too horrible to contemplate.

But how could I have remembered? I had volunteered my services knowing that some tremendous challenge awaited me inside the crepe ring, but I had been given no hint as to its nature.

Solely to steady myself I clicked on the stern visidisk at the base of

the control board. Instantly the screen brimmed with light and I saw a full little moon swimming in a sea of haze a million miles behind the Lyra's belching rocket tubes. Phoebe moving around her primary in the opposite direction from all the other moons!

Well, I was still seven million miles from the crepe ring, and hazard three. Dark flame whorls, of course, were another matter. I hesitated an instant before clicking on the fore-view disk.

I thought I knew what I'd see. The wide, glowing rings, and on both sides of them three or four inner Moons, and Japetus. Japetus with his bright face. There is no other Moon in the System with so great a reflecting power.

I clicked on the disk, and caught hold of the instrument with both hands, my eyes riveted on what appeared to be a terrifying gap in the firmament. Darker than a coal sack it seemed, a black and spectrally coronated disk which was sweeping toward the ship with a velocity which chilled my heart like ice.

Something seemed to shriek in my brain: "Throw the gravity stabilizer off center! Damp out the auxiliary jets and cut your radial velocity by two-thirds!"

The flame whorl was filling two-thirds of the disk when my hands tore across the control panel, realigning its glowing units, and ripping out an entire cluster of coils low down on the board.

FIVE minutes later I sat bathed in clammy sweat, staring at a visidisk in which Japetus shone brightly, dimming the more distant glow of Saturn's great golden crown. I was trembling in every limb when we passed the little moon, and the disk brimmed with a radiance so fiery it flickered on the overhead, and bathed the control room in an unearthly refulgence.

I was trembling because I had obeyed an impulse that wasn't rational. I had skirted the whorl and saved my command when the experience of a thousand pilots had screamed at me from the Navigator's Manual

that it couldn't be done. "God, man, don't try it. You'll telescope your ship and yourself along with it."

My temples were pounding, and my spine felt like a dissolving icicle. I knew that when a whorl filled the disk a pilot's instructions were to increase his velocity and try to blast through. Chances were he would emerge blind or crippled, but no sane pilot would attempt to skirt a whorl.

There was a tightness about my skull, and my mouth felt hot and dry. Had I skirted a whorl before? I had no conscious recollection of having done so, and yet through crumbling dykes deep within my mind there had gushed a flood of memories. Again that inexplicable feeling returned of having visited a place I had never seen before and recognized certain ghastly landmarks.

It was as though I were walking along the edge of nothing searching in vain for signposts that kept receding before I could reach them and suddenly I felt the need of talking to the slim girl whose cool defiance had filled me with rage.

Another insane compulsion, but so overwhelming it sent me reeling across the control room, and along a cold-lighted passageway to the officer's cuddy.

Some instinct told me I would find her there. The ship was still lurching from a too swift deceleration, and the passageway along which I lurched was a maelstrom of flashing lights and spiraling seepage fumes. A fit of coughing seized me just as I reached the cuddy, doubling me up. For an instant I stood with my hand pressed to my mouth, groping with the other for a knob that seemed suddenly to sprout from my palm.

Still coughing, I flung open the cuddy door.

She was leaning against a swaying bulkhead on the far side of the chamber with her head thrown back, her white throat pulsing. But what froze me in the doorway was not her terror-contorted face. It was the tall, white-lipped man standing by her side.

John McNulty no longer looked like a kid in his twenties. His face was haggard with strain, the crows' feet

below his temples etched so deeply they had a stippled-in appearance, as though a red-hot needle had been dipped in acid and passed in and out through the puckers around his eyes.

He had thrown one arm about the girl's sagging shoulders and was trying to calm her.

"Go steady, Jane," he was pleading. "We're in no danger now. The ship won't—"

His voice faltered, as though my sudden appearance had startled him with a strange dread. His shoulders jerked and he took a swift step backward.

A sudden, terrible rage had welled up in me. His duplicity in saddling me with a girl pilot and stowing away like a skyport gamin until her beauty had demoralized me set off a fuse of rage and jealousy which blasted every shred of sanity from my mind.

Cursing, I lurched across the cuddy and flung myself savagely at him, beating him over the head with my fists, ramming my knee upward into his stomach. A red mist filmed my vision, and I saw his startled, pain-contorted face as though in a dark glass.

A red glass filmed with light, a maddening crystal which seemed to pulsate and expand till it filled the cuddy, blotting out the bulkheads and Jane's white face.

"Kill him! Kill him!" a voice screamed in my brain. "He's trying to take away your mind!"

I FOUGHT with all my strength, but John McNulty seemed to have wrists of iron. He had seized my arms and was pinning them to my side, bruising my chest with his skull. It was a fierce and savage struggle for an instant. I tore one arm free, thudded a hard fist against his jaw. He cursed, released his hold on the other, and started chopping away at my head with short, vicious blows.

I tried to put both arms about him and lock them over the small of his back. Despite the punishment I was taking, I knew I could make my strength felt if I could get a lung-squeezing grip on him. But he seemed to know all the tricks, including the vicious ones. He side-stepped

every time I tried to close in, raining lefts and rights to my temples, and crouching like a panther as he circled me.

He had abandoned grip and twist methods, perhaps sensing I was good at them too. I soon found that bigness could be a handicap, making a man unwieldy in a slugging match. I couldn't seem to rock him, despite my long reach. He was fighting now like a maniac amuck, driving wicked punches into my stomach, and ducking when I swung at him.

I was gasping for breath when he aimed a blow at my solar plexus which sent me reeling back against the bulkhead. I groaned, clawed at my stomach, and started to slump to the deck. But the instant my knees sagged strength seemed to flow back into them.

Abruptly I swung back toward him, my elbows jerking. Swung back, but didn't lash out at him. Instead my body seemed to move against his fist, and a blow that should have doubled me up straightened me out. I saw his fist shoot backward from my stomach, saw my own arm come up.

The next instant he was side-stepping furiously and crouching like a panther as he circled me in reverse. A panther walking backwards, dodging my efforts to move away from him. To move away instead of closing in, while he kept *withdrawing* blows from my head in short, vicious jerks.

Suddenly he had moved in close and was pinning my arms to my side with wrists that seemed abruptly to melt. My temples began to pound and a red mist filmed my visage. For an instant I saw his startled pain-contorted face, and then I kned him. At least my knee descended from beneath his ribs where it had found lodgement, and I leaped backward toward the door.

For a terrifying instant I stood with cold fury welling up in me, watching his arm return to Jane's shoulder and hearing his voice quaver: "Now we're in no danger. Jane, steady go . . ."

Then out into the passageway I backed as if propelled by an unseen force, my body bending sharply at the waist. Just outside the door a spasm

of coughing seized me, straightening me up. It started as a mild attack and ended in a fit so violent I thought my lungs would burst. I moved along the passageway in erratic backward jerks, like a puppet on a wire. Into the control room, and across a lurching deck over a tangle of ripped-out coils to the pilot's seat, my knees flexing as I heaved myself up.

The fore-view-vidisk was brimming with radiance, and as I stared down at it transfixed Japetus swam into view, dimming the ring glow behind him. Japetus that I had watched sweep past scarcely fifteen minutes before, trailing clouds of light and leaving the chamber bathed in an unearthly refulgence.

Suddenly a shadow seemed to fall upon the disk, obscuring the little moon, darkening a third of the instrument. My mouth went dry with horror. Slowly, so slowly it seemed as though an eternity was consumed while I stared, a dreadful, light-rimmed smudge encroached on the edge of the disk.

The dark flame vortex was creeping back toward the center of the screen when I sat bolt upright, a cry rasping in my throat. Sweat was running down my face and my heart had begun a furious pounding, but I was no longer groping in darkness, appalled by something I couldn't explain. Deep within my mind another dyke had been shattered.

WITH a certainty transcending vision I knew that wrapped around the *Lyra II* was an ether twister, its vibrating bulk warping time-frames inside the ship. Throughout the vessel the space-time continuum was contracting, and I had just relived fifteen or twenty minutes, moving backward like a puppet through a sequence of events which had already transpired.

I had recoiled from McNulty and returned to the control room in erratic jerks, like a player in an ancient American cinema film being run off in reverse. I was a younger Jim Scott, watching a peril I had but recently surmounted creep back across the disk.

But though I was fifteen minutes younger I could remember everything that had occurred in the short interval of time which had been blotted out by the most terrifying phenomenon in space. It did not surprise me that I could do so, for a memory once implanted cannot be erased and a mental image can survive even the backward flow of external events.

But what chilled me to the core of my being was my certain knowledge that long before there had been any reversal of time inside the ship, I had destroyed an ether twister. The short interval of time which had come unraveled could not explain that strange remembrance of events long past which had come to me now for the third time.

DEEP within me a voice screamed I had struggled once before to resist the backward wash of time which was sweeping me to destruction. The voice screamed that the backward sweep would soon become a raging torrent which would suck the *Lyra II* into a maelstrom of dissolving time-frames, and vibrate it out of the physical universe.

"An ether twister can be dislodged, Jim Scott. Other pilots have freed their ships. Force remembrance from your brain out through your hands, Jim Scott. Resist. Fight the time flow!"

"Encircle the ship with a chain of electrons, and apply heat to the enveloping circuit till it gathers speed and flies off into space. A mass of protons will remain, a positively charged secretion on the rocketing hull.

"Don't you remember, Jim Scott. You freed your ship. A ribbon of space-curvature writhing like a snake, breaking free and hurtling away, dislodged by a weaving mass of subatomic particles. Resist, Jim Scott. Fight the time flow!"

Suddenly my hands were moving back and forth across the vibrating panel. As I manipulated dials and rheostats I knew that two huge cathodes were arising on the hull of the *Lyra II*. I knew that I was creating a stupendous spark gap in the vacuum

of space, encircling the ship with a blanket of force which might tear it asunder.

There would be no resistance out there on the naked hull. The flow would be accelerated till the electrons flew off and a weaving energy brush remained, as volatile as the gaseous incandescence at the Sun's limb.

It would be spread out thin, and if the charged particles did not overlap the twister might be dislodged, and the energy blanket sucked into its receding maw. But if the force blanket buckled . . .

With trembling fingers I ripped out an infinity plug, rotated an Arago disk.

"John, he's come back!" Jane's voice broke in a scream over my head. I had slumped jerkily to the cuddy deck, and was lying with one leg bent under me, the other spread out. My heart was thudding dully, my mouth choked with blood.

I had no recollection of returning to the cuddy, only of bending over the control board with my hands a confused blur of movement. But seemingly I had returned, for McNulty had dropped to one knee beside me, and was lifting me up.

"A Saturn twister," I choked. "I went back in time—"

"Easy, lad," he cautioned. "You don't have to tell me what happened. We've returned to where we were before we went back, apparently. There's a second or two missing, but lads who ought to know tell me that when you dislodge a twister, time shoots ahead to where it was before it started back and then spills over into the future a little, like a stretched rubber band.

"When I landed that last punch you reeled back, and started to slump. Now you have slumped. But we won't worry about the missing two or three seconds, will we?"

He was grinning at me and I was grinning back. I felt like grinning and I guess he did. I didn't know how he felt, but I knew how I felt, and—well, sometimes a grin relieves tension no matter how ghoulish it looks.

"I'm sorry I almost had to cripple you," he grunted. "But I had no choice. Jim, why did you try to kill

me?"

"I don't know," I groaned. "I can't understand it."

He stared at me steadily. "Jim Scott, don't you remember your first flight? Jimmy, don't you?"

COULD a man remember and yet stare, tight-lipped, and shake his head, confused? The answer came with unexpected suddenness. Even as my gaze locked with his, tiny pin-points of red jelly formed on the portside and bulkhead and descended glisteningly to the deck.

Jane leaped back with a startled cry and a sudden horror flared in McNulty's eyes.

"The crystals, Jim," he muttered, hoarsely, his fingers tightening on my wrist. "Get up, man, for Heaven's sake. Get the tubes."

I understood. Very deliberately I arose. I was still groggy, but I shook my head to clear it, and walked out of the chamber with my whole attention concentrated on what I had to do. I had never felt so calm, so sure of myself.

I went straight to the supply room, removed two vacuum tubes from an insulated container, adjusted the suction filaments and returned to the cuddy, my mind a whirl of returning memories.

Jane was sitting on the floor with her back to a cushioned bulkhead, a ruby-red cluster of crystals encircling her brow. McNulty was standing by her side, swaying unsteadily. He was pressing his hand to his forehead where a double diadem rested—a double-diadem of glowing, many-faceted crystals which was tightening like a whipcord about his skull.

The red crystalline flood covered the entire deck now and was glowing from a thousand facets as it poured through the portside bulkhead, solidifying as it spread. Memory had returned like a huge wave of the sea, sweeping away my terrified gropings. I knew that the crystal clusters did not always contract. Sometimes they clung loosely to human brows, bringing strange dreams, driving men mad.

Like most living things their behavior was erratic. Living they were,

fearfully alive, though they could increase or decrease their density at will, and were composed of energy concretions as unstable as the radiant matter at the core of suns. Concretions which enabled them to penetrate solid metal bulkheads, and solidify with the speed of light.

Jane had begun to moan. Her eyes were unmoving, and she was staring with unwavering intensity at the crystalline flood.

"Get them off," she pleaded. "My mind—"

"I know darling," I said, falling to my knees beside her.

"Please," she sobbed.

"They took away my memory," I said. "But not immediately. They can't—immediately."

The tubes had begun to vibrate in my hand. Into them had crept a red radiance, a fiery glow. "They took away my memory," I said, my voice deathly calm. "But I can remember now, darling."

I looked down at my hands, saw that they were trembling. "I love you," I said. "I have always loved you. I have never loved anyone but you."

She did not speak, but I knew she heard me. She did not speak even when the cuddy was no longer filled with the weaving crystalline life which had seeped in from the crepe ring. In each of the tubes there now reposed a single huge gem, ruby-red, but lusterless, drained of all life.

Staring down at my suddenly steady hands I knew that the Company had met the crystal challenge and surmounted it. Knew that from deck and moist flesh the blood of crystals had been drawn into the two small cylinders which I was clasping tightly now.

Moisture from my hands clouded the glass a little, but I could see the two huge, gemlike concretions in the depths of the glow. So intense had been the amplification of force within the tubes that the swarm had condensed into just those two aggregates, with tumultuous pulsations which had suddenly ceased. Burnt out by a flow of energy through the meshes of glowing vacuum grids the great, lifeless gems reposed now in—"Company coffins."

I stared down at the stripes on my arm, and then my head came up. The Company had won through again. The Company couldn't be licked.

As though from a distance I heard a voice say:

"Jim, lad, if you'll help me bring the crate around we'll be back in Phoebe City at the crack of dawn."

HOURS later we were sitting by an open window in McNulty's private office on the third floor of the Company Administration Building, with the distant lights of Phoebe City shimmering in our coffee cups. I was drinking my coffee black, but Jane had poured cream into hers, and was stirring it with hands that trembled a little.

"I knew you'd come back to me, dearest. I knew. I was sure," her eyes said.

"When you saw the crystals you remembered?" McNulty prodded, crushing out a cigarette.

"Yes, everything," I nodded. "My first Saturn flight, long ago, when the Company was pioneering in the field. They called it a "glory flight" in those days, I believe."

"They still do, lad," McNulty smiled. "But as I was saying, the Doc had to humor you. You kept insisting

he was sending invalids, cripples through the crepe ring. Subconsciously you felt yourself to be—well, mentally ill, and you took it out on the Doc. He says you were furious when he examined you."

"Was I very bad?" I asked.

"You were simply suffering from amnesia, Jim—space-shock amnesia. There were bad months, of course, and you slept at the Phoebe City Institute. But most of the time you were completely rational. So rational, Jim, that you've been a flight instructor for twelve years."

"And Jane?" I asked.

"You refused to see her, Jim. And I'm afraid you subconsciously hated me because my signature on your instructions had sent you through the ring. It was tough on me, Jim. We were buddies in the old days."

"I don't hate you now," I said.

"I'm glad, Jim. You see, Jane and the Doc and I planned it together. We felt that if you could go through the Crepe Ring again you might be cured. Shock therapy, you understand? We felt another shock, going through all that again, might restore your memory and in a very real sense bring you back to us."

"So that's why there were new pilots
[Turn page]

MEET THE PIONEERS OF A STRANGE NEW WORLD

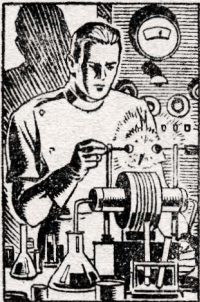
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swarming to the lockers and an air of expectancy hovering over the spaceport. You arranged all that?"

"Add myself talking to you in the shower, Jim," McNulty continued. "I talked to you through the shower slats the first time, remember? We were opening up the pitchblende diggings on Saturn, Jim. Those early pilots took tremendous risks."

"It's funny," I said. "I thought all the time the Crepe Ring was to be my objective. I had forgotten that the challenge was Old Man Saturn himself."

"The crystals took away your memory," McNulty said. "Naturally your subconscious ire was directed against the Crepe Ring and the hazards you encountered on your first flight, before you reversed your course and brought the ship back with the devilish things clinging to your brow. You emerged babbling."

"You got them off?"

"Yes, we got them off with a vacuum tube. But when I talked to you you just kept muttering over and over: 'I'm going back, you hear? The Company isn't licked yet.'"

Jane was looking at me with shining eyes.

"Darling, when we decided to accompany you we knew it would have to be in one of the old ships, in one of the little suicide crates. The new, fast ships are much safer, but if we had made the flight in a new ship you mightn't have remembered you had worn a glory crown."

"A glory crown?"

She nodded, her hand creeping into mine.

"When one of the old pioneers would return," she said, "with the crystals imprisoned in vacuum tubes the kids at the hangar used to beg for them. They called them glory crowns."

I didn't say anything. Couldn't. I felt choked up, but not because I had worn a crown. No, I was remembering I had looked down over my new uniform not twenty hours before, and thought about blondes, brunettes and redheads. And all the while the most loyal, sweetest little wife a man ever had was waiting inside *Lyra II*—waiting to lead me out of the deep dark into a bright new dawn.



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IN the city of Alexandria about 130 B.C. there lived an inventive scientist by the name of Hero who made a scientific toy which he called an aeolipile.

This was a hollow metal globe pivoted between a pair of trunnions, and supplied with steam through one of them which was hollow. The steam escaped from the globe through a pair of vent pipes facing tangentially in opposite directions at the ends of a diameter perpendicular to the axis, imparting a spinning motion to the globe by its escape.

A far, far cry from the heavy steam locomotives so recently landed on the shores of the Mediterranean in Hero's own neighborhood by the invading Allied armies in their all-out African offensive to defeat the Nazis. But the aeolipile of Hero was the true forefather of the mighty steam engine of today.

The bread cast upon the waters of time by one of the ancient democratic and freedom-loving Greeks had indeed returned a thousandfold.

To no one man belongs the credit for the invention of the steam engine, one of mankind's best servants. The list of men who had a hand in its development is long and illustrious, from Hero to Sir Charles Parsons of steam turbine fame. But perhaps the greatest of them all was the young Scot who arrived in Glasgow in 1756 at the brash age of twenty.

Fresh from an apprenticeship in London to a philosophical instrument-maker — an apprenticeship which hard work and frugal living prevented him from completing — young Jamie Watt found that the city guilds would not recognize him as a master craftsman.

"You're nothing but a hot-air merchant," they told him in derision. "If you have so much steam, why didn't you finish your apprenticeship?"

This sort of talk flicked young Watt in a raw spot, because, all of his life, he had been interested in the possibilities of steam. The only steam engine then known was the Newcomen piston engine used for pumping water out of mines, made a practical success by Thomas Newcomen by his separation of the boiler from the cylinder and the

use of a jet of cold water into the cylinder to condense the steam artificially.

Unable to open an instrument shop in Glasgow, young Watt succeeded in getting on at the city's university as instrument-maker. He became very friendly with Joseph Black, the discoverer of latent heat and the university's lecturer on chemistry. With Black he discussed the possibility of improving the Newcomen engine which wasted so much steam and fuel.

Watt made a number of experiments in 1761 and 1762 with no direct results. He



James Watt

was still called the hot-air merchant by members of the guild which had repudiated him. Until the year of 1764 when a model of Newcomen's engine which formed part of the college collection of scientific apparatus was turned over to him to repair.

In putting the model in order Watt made several unsuccessful attempts to remedy its wastefulness. This defeat caused him to begin a scientific examination of the properties of steam, learning the relation of its density and pressure to its temperature. He studied the improvements Newcomen had made over the Savery model — and the great idea struck him.

If Newcomen could divorce the cylinder from the boiler, why couldn't he go a step further and divorce the cylinder from the condenser? He had already made two deductions that were essential to the eco-

conomic use of steam in a condensing steam-engine.

One was that the temperature of the condensed steam should be as low as possible, and the other that the cylinder should always be as hot as the steam which entered it.

"I'll show them that I'm a good hot-air mechanic," he vowed as he set to work.

The result was all that he had anticipated. To maintain the necessary vacuum he had to invent a new organ, namely, the air-pump, the function of which was to remove the condensed steam and injection-water along with any air gathered in the condenser. But one change and improvement only meant another condition which had to be cared for.

Before he was done, James Watt had to supplement his great invention with several less notable but equally important additions. In Newcomen's engine a layer of water over the piston had been used to keep it steam-tight.

Watt had to invent a tighter packing lubricated by oil. Newcomen's engine had the upper end of the cylinder open to the air; Watt covered it in, leading the piston rod through a steam-tight stuffing box, allowing steam instead of air to press on the top of the piston.

In Newcomen's engine the cylinder had no jacket to reduce loss of heat by radiation and conduction; Watt not only cased it in non-conducting material, but introduced a steam-jacket between the cylinder proper and an outer shell.

When he had finished making improvements he no longer had an engine that re-

motely resembled the Newcomen model from which he had started.

He had at last produced a steam engine which had flexible power and which was economical of operation. He had vindicated his name as a hot-air merchant and had put steam to work in the most practical way the world had yet known.

In 1768 he formed a partnership with Matthew Boulton, who owned the Soho engineering works at Birmingham, and from there on the Watt steam engine began to make itself felt by the entire nation. During the ensuing ten years James Watt developed the steam engine by improvement and invention after improvement and invention, introducing the crank, the fly-wheel, the double-action cylinder, the parallel motion, as well as the centrifugal governor.

His crowning achievement was the indicator, an instrument which is to the steam engineer what the stethoscope is to a physician.

Prior to Watt's time the steam-engine was exclusively a slow-working and cumbersome pump. The Scottish lad who was called a hot-air merchant added so many improvements that it became adapted to drive machinery of all kinds. From this stage to the steam-driven ship and the steam locomotive it was just a step.

James Watt had given flexible steam power to the world. And in November, 1942, the American Expeditionary Forces took the powerful modern descendant of Hero's aeolipile back to Africa with them to move trainloads of supplies destined to preserve the freedom of the world!

THE DURABILITY OF STONE

How John Smeaton Developed "Portland Cement"

TO THE average citizen the term "Portland cement" vaguely means a brand of concrete which is manufactured in or near Portland, Oregon. Nothing could be more erroneous.

Like the steam engine, the binding material itself has a long and illustrious history—from the powdered gypsum used by the ancient Egyptians and Assyrians on down to the high-grade product of today which requires a huge plant and a battery of production-line machines to bring it into existence.

From the time of the earliest caveman who learned how to daub wet clay in the chinks of his rocky den to keep out the wintry blast man has been familiar with the use of bonding material in one form or another. But he never really understood what cement was until the wooden lighthouse on Eddystone Reef at Plymouth, England, was destroyed by fire in 1755.

At this time an energetic member of the Royal Society of Engineers, a young man just turned thirty-one, had returned to England from an extensive study of the canal works of engineers in the Low Countries. The properties of cement scarcely interested John Smeaton; his head was filled

with designs for stone buildings and bridges and dams and retaining walls.

So this fellow of the Royal Society was somewhat taken aback when he was asked to go to Plymouth with the idea of drawing plans for the erection of another wooden lighthouse.

Nevertheless, John Smeaton clapped his hat onto his head, bundled up well against the March gales that battered Plymouth, and made a thorough examination of the reef in spite of the wind and the pounding sea.

And he reached a strange conclusion on that March day in 1756.

"A lighthouse is highly essential here," he told his associates, shouting to make his voice heard above the roar of wind and sea. "A beacon light should be installed here higher and more securely than in a flimsy wooden structure. I'd say its light ought to be at least sixty feet high."

"But, Mr. Smeaton," protested an aide, "what will you build the house of? A wooden structure that tall would be carried away by the first storm."

"Exactly," agreed the engineer. "So I propose to build the lighthouse of Portland stone."

His companion gaped at him in amazement. He knew that the Oolitic limestone from the Isle of Portland was one of the finest building stones in the world, but—but—

He voiced his perplexity. These were the days before structural steel and concrete forms.

"But, Mr. Smeaton, how will you bind the stones together? What sort of cement or mortar can we use that sea water won't affect? What kind of lime mixture can we use that will even set under water and in continual moisture?"

Which was a cogent question. It opened John Smeaton's mind to the fact that mankind knew practically nothing about the qualities of cement. His studies as an engineer and as a member of the Royal Society had told him little about binding material. It was high time somebody started an investigation into what stuff made the best cement under various conditions—and why.

"We will dovetail the stones," decided Smeaton at once. "And, as Portland stone is the best building stone available, we will grind up the fragments and use them as a binder. But first I must make tests with this—er—Portland cement."

And John Smeaton did just that. He was the first man to make serious attempt to grapple with the question of the cause of the varying hydraulic properties of different lime cements.

The result of these experiments taught John Smeaton that the best hydraulic limes were made from limestone containing an appreciable amount of clay. He arrived at a mixture of cement that would set in from ten to twenty minutes, either in or out of water.

The Eddystone lighthouse was started in August, 1756, and completed in June, 1757.

It rose to the full height of seventy feet with about forty courses of dovetailed Portland stone, firmly cemented with Smeaton's "Portland cement." It stood successfully against the wind and weather for more than a hundred years—until it had to be removed to another section on the reef in 1877, because of the undermining of the reef by the angry seas.

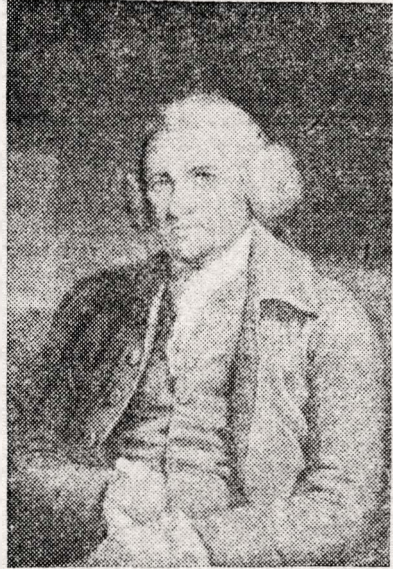
This engineering feat excited such widespread admiration that the impetus given by John Smeaton to the study of cements and binders and concrete went on apace.

Although his "Portland cement" was, of course, different from modern Portland ce-

ment, nevertheless the color and properties of Smeaton's cement were similar to native Portland stone.

With research into the subject, it was now just a matter of time before special machinery to grind and calcine and mix stone and clay into the finest cement came into being.

In 1845, Mr. I. C. Johnson, manager of the Messrs. White & Sons' works at Swanscombe, produced a cement of the modern



John Smeaton

type by burning the raw materials with intense heat until the mass was nearly vitrified and then grinding this clinker into a powder which, to use John Smeaton's own words of nearly half a century earlier, produced a cement that would "equal the best merchantable Portland stone in solidity and durability."

Today, the world cannot progress without cement and the added structural steel. Used in thousands of works of construction, Portland cement has become the fourth largest industry in the world. In the United States alone there are some 150 great plants turning out thousands of tons daily of this powdered mixture of silica, alumina, lime and magnesia which, thanks to John Smeaton, rivals the durability of Portland stone.

SPINNING LIKE A TOP

Leon Foucault Invents the Amazing Gyroscope

IT WAS really a lovely Christmas—Noël, to little Léon. His father had given him such a splendid present. It was a Chinese top, a pretty thing of polished wood, shaped like a section of a cylinder with a free-spinning top handle and a pointed base. It stood as straight as a soldier of the line when it was spinning. And the amazing thing was that its hollow

inside was filled with a number of slightly concave discs, each with a central point something like the bottom piece of the top.

When Léon lightly grasped the little red handle of the spinning top and lifted it quickly, the entire upper part of the top came off, and the inner discs showered to the table from the spinning bottom piece, to continue spinning themselves.

Little Léon was delighted, and he spun his top by the hour, never failing to be amazed at the deluge of inner discs which spun for themselves upon release. Galileo had long ago discovered the secret of the pendulum, and Sir Isaac Newton had long ago propounded his Law of Motion—but little Jean Bernard Léon Foucault in Paris that Noël of 1824 when he was five years old knew nothing of this. He was just a small boy with a Chinese top.

But the gods of science and wisdom must have smiled when Léon received his gift. For young Foucault became deeply interested in the mysteries of his top. Why did the outer top impart its motion to its tiny progeny? Why was it difficult to twist or turn a spinning top? And when Léon grew older and learned to spin a solid, more conical-shaped top at school, he became quite expert in making his top do tricks.

One that always amused and surprised his companions was the trick of picking up the spinning top in a loop of the cord and making it spin around on its point in the loop while remaining rigidly at right angles to the earth and with no other support save its own speed.

Why did a top do this? What good was it? How could this queer phenomenon be reduced to mathematical law and then applied to some sound working principle or machine?

Queer thoughts for a young French boy whose father wanted him to become a physician. But Léon Foucault was no ordinary boy. With a mind which had a natural trend for physics and mathematics, by the time he was a young man he gave up his medical schooling and turned to experimental physics.

By now he had discovered Sir Isaac Newton, and many of his questions were answered in theory if not in practice. And still Foucault dreamed dreams about his top and the principle that a spinning body tends to maintain rigidity in space and carry forward its motion in a straight line.

Until finally the great idea came to him. If nothing more, he could prove directly the rotation of the earth. The tops which had spun in his hands and in his mind had spun out a rhythm of thought which was to bear fruit reaching far down the centuries.

In 1852 Foucault built an utterly new style of top. It was a queer-looking thing, like a skeletal globe or a working model of the planetary system rather than a top.

The idea was simply that of mounting a heavy, rotating wheel in such a way that it was free to rotate about any axis, carrying on its original straight line of moving force regardless of the action of any person holding the top—regardless even of the axial rotation of the earth.

Known by sight to almost every child of today, Foucault's top was such a little wheel mounted in a metal circle which in turn was mounted within another outer circle at right angles to it, and the outer circle was mounted at right angles between

the arms of a larger half-circle set upon a base.

Thus the top when at rest could be moved freely and easily in any direction, having three dimensions, or degrees, of freedom. When Foucault wound a string around the main shaft of his top and whipped it free to set the top spinning, the top became rigid in the position it assumed, apparently defying the natural laws of gravity.

In actual fact, it was following Isaac Newton's Law of Motion—rigidity in space and precession. Now Foucault set his top in a perpendicular position and set it spinning. To his amazement it seemed, as the time sped by, that the top was changing its position. In twenty-four hours of tests the top made a complete circuit around its base.

This was really false motion. What was happening was that the top maintained its original plane of motion while the room and the earth turned beneath it, indisputable proof of the revolution of the earth on its own axis. Had the top been large enough it would have halted or at least greatly affected the spinning of the earth itself.

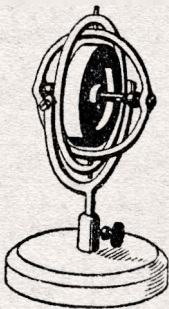
To this global top Foucault gave the name "gyroscope," or stabilizer. For this unique invention and its subsequent demonstration Léon Foucault received the Copley medal from the Royal Society in 1855, and the gyroscope was brought to the attention of a marveling public, becoming one of the most popular scientific toys of the age.

It remained a toy while Foucault went on to other notable achievements in science which bear his name. However, in the latter part of the nineteenth century a man by the name of G. M. Hopkins introduced an electrically driven rotor which could impart to the spinning gyroscope a constant impulse of steady power. This addition put the gyroscope to full practical use.

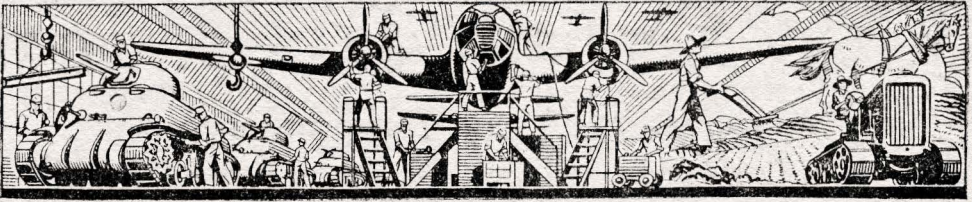
It could now be used as a stabilizer for ships in stormy weather. It became the steadying influence in gyroscopic compasses, the underlying principle of robot steering devices and robot controls, because it never varied from the rigid plane in which it was set.

Today several manufacturers of scientific instruments build them with integral gyroscopic parts for a thousand purposes and uses. Man now rides the ocean, flies the skies and operates myriad pieces of intricate machinery by the use of that scientific toy with the inflexible will to maintain its original plane of motion.

The gyroscope, stabilizer of the world, built upon the very spatial design and motion of Mother Earth herself, is a precision instrument of science invented by that French lad who dreamed of spinning tops.



More THRILLS IN SCIENCE in the Next Issue



THE SINEWS OF VICTORY

A Tribute to America's Heroes of Production

By **MAJOR GENERAL E. B. GREGORY**

Quartermaster General, United States Army



Photo U. S. Army Signal Corps
MAJOR GENERAL GREGORY

THE production side of this war will be won by Americans who do the small things well, whether it is making a rivet for a tank or sewing a sleeve in an Army uniform.

The casual onlooker is too apt to think of war production just in terms of big tanks, giant bombers, long-range guns and fighting ships.

These are vitally necessary. But in this war, as in every war, the men who fight are human beings. They must have food, clothing and shelter before they can be expected to fly their planes, fire their guns or sail their ships.

Throughout America today, there are millions of workers turning out clothing and tents, growing and processing food-stuffs, building barracks, raising horses and mules—all absolute necessities to the Army, all direct contributions to ultimate victory.

When historians write down the heroes of production in this war, they will spotlight those who served faithfully in the production of necessities that keep our fighting men and equipment in operation. The heroes will be the men and women who did their duty at every place in the production line.



The Great Invasion

By WILLIAM MORRISON



On That Dread Day Strange Beings Descended from the Heavens to Paralyze an Entire World with Fright!

THERE was a full-sized riot going on in the classroom when the teacher walked in. At first the noise was so great that no one heard him. But once Hari had accidentally looked up and caught a glimpse of the stern face, the rest of the pupils realized their teacher's presence soon enough. They quieted down with a suddenness that was startling.

He stared at them grimly for a moment.

"What is the meaning of this uproar?" he demanded.

Only Hari had the courage to attempt an answer.

"We're being invaded by a race from another planet, Teacher, and we're defending ourselves."

"Invaded by a race from another planet? Where did you ever hear such nonsense?"

Hari hesitated, and then blurted out the news hurriedly.

As Hari switched on the Hyper-Light Ray, the invader reached out and lifted him from the ground

"It was in the newspapers. An astronomer saw some objects hurtling through space, and he thinks they're spaceships, and I had an idea for a game—"

"Oh. So all this noise was your idea?"

"Yes, sir." Hari lowered his eyes.

"Well, I'll think of your punishment later. Meanwhile, to the other credulous members of this painfully ignorant group of would-be scholars, let me say a few words."

Everyone was absolutely quiet, listening.

"Most of you are too young to remember any other occasion on which a hullabaloo was raised about an invasion from another world. My memory, however, stretches back a little further than yours. I recall that many years ago there were similar rumors, followed by panic and turmoil."

A voice interrupted eagerly.

"Did it really happen, Teacher? Were we really invaded?"

"Of course not. The whole story was a hoax, just as this story is a hoax. That is the point I wish to make. Accordingly, in the future I advise you to pay less attention to sensational headlines and more to your studies.

"How do you expect to be intelligent, well-informed adults if you don't study now? Invasion from another planet is a complete impossibility. That has been proved time and again. Do you understand that? It is a complete impossibility!"

A row of heads nodded in agreement.

"Now," their teacher ordered, "go back to your work."

Fifteen minutes later, the first news of invasion came.

Every head was bent studiously over a difficult problem in physics when the keen ears of Lorin, Hari's best friend picked up the faint noise of a loudspeaker a considerable distance away. He raised his head abruptly.

"Something's happening!" Lorin shouted. "Something important!"

The teacher scowled. His own hearing had become dulled with age, and he regarded Lorin's remark only as an

impertinent attempt to destroy discipline.

"Young man—" he began.

A loudspeaker in the school itself suddenly began to blare out its message.

"Bulletin! Strange spaceship lands at unknown point north of equator! Race from other planet leaves trail of ruin and destruction! Thousands feared already dead! Stand by for further news!"

"But invasion from another world has been proved to be impossible!" the teacher protested blankly. "It has been proved— Order, order, come to order!"

No one paid any attention to him. The loudspeaker was repeating its message, and from all over the school came the voices of excited students.

The announcer interrupted again.

"Flash! Another spaceship lands approximately a thousand miles north of first! Others feared coming! Trail of invaders marked by death! Toll of victims mounts into hundreds of thousands! Invaders destroy means of communication, leaving blasted areas isolated!"

The teacher began repeating to himself in a hollow voice.

"It's impossible, it's impossible, it's impossible." His face was a mask of fear. "It's imposs—" He fell over in a dead faint.

HARI was surprised to discover that he himself was not afraid. He felt instead a sense of exhilaration and adventure. No more dull classes, no more useless learning, no more stupid punishments!

Some of the students were almost gibbering in their fright. They didn't know what to do, or where to go. Hari knew. He would set out to fight the invaders—

A voice cut into the first announcer's speech.

"Official government order. Martial law declared. Every available able-bodied man to report for immediate service to fight against the invaders. Women and children to leave occupied areas at once. Reinforcements being rushed—"

"Suppose they come here!" Lorin whispered excitedly. "Where shall we go?"

"We'll stay and fight them!" Hari declared stoutly.

"But you heard what the announcer said about women and children—"

"We're no children," replied Hari proudly. "We know how to handle guns. We'll stay and do our share."

The mass of students was moving, carrying Hari and Lorin with them. Outside the school, the pressure of the crowd diminished, and the two boys shook themselves free.

"Where shall we go first?" Lorin asked.

"We'll see if another ship lands near here. If it does, we'll stay. If it doesn't—"

The loudspeaker was blaring again, a third voice now speaking. The tones were no longer firm and smoothly modulated, but anxious, even frightened.

"All men, as well as women and children, urged to leave areas attacked. Invaders have powerful new weapons unknown to our science. Ultra-sound ray produces paralysis in thousands simultaneously over wide region."

Hari and Lorin listened, and a tremor of fear swept over them as the voice went on.

"Hyper-light ray produces almost immediate blindness. Other weapons not yet used, but seem to be held in reserve. Government admits helplessness, knows of no means of defense."

"The best way to defend is to attack!" Hari said fiercely.

"Suppose they do kill some of us—"

There was no question of the announcer's fright any longer.

"All our own weapons have proved useless. Explosive devices can not get near enough to operate. Hand to hand combat out of question. I repeat, all men, as well as women and children, to leave areas attacked. Do not try to fight back. It is useless."

Hari and Lorin stared at each other.

"Did you hear that? There's nothing we can do."

The announcer was speaking again, but his voice had become unintelligi-

ble, and he was replaced.

"Government experts are working on a plan which at present is shrouded in secrecy—"

"That's what they always say," commented Lorin.

"They always say, 'Working feverishly,'" Hari agreed. "Listen."

"The government will put its plan into operation at the earliest possible moment. Meanwhile, here are further facts learned about the invaders. They seem to have made complete preparations for taking over our planet. They are accompanied by powerful hunting animals, presumably to track down individual men and women who momentarily escape their death rays.

"Men who have seen the invaders and escaped report that they are twice human size, and completely inhuman in form. They seem to be capable of no emotion other than that of cruelty."

"W-what do they do?" Lorin asked.

IT WAS almost as if the announcer were answering him personally.

"Several refugees report individually that they have seen the invaders devouring dead men. These reports are doubted by officials, who do not believe the invaders would stop to eat in the midst of their task of subjugating our planet.

"Nevertheless, the theory that the invaders regard our race as food-animals has already gained wide credence, and confirmatory facts are known."

"Cannibals!" Lorin shuddered.

"They're not," replied Hari. "Cannibals eat their own kind. They eat us!"

"Don't be technical," Lorin said. "Look, you can do what you want, but I'm not going to run to see these cannibals! I'm going to hide!"

"You're a coward!"

"I'm not! I'm sensible! The government orders even men to run away. And I'm not a man, I'm only a kid!"

"Since when?"

"Since I found out they're cannibals, that's when! We can't do anything to hurt them."

"We can fight," Hari declared.

"It wouldn't do any good. What about yourself?" Lorin demanded. "Do you want to be eaten?"

"No, but—they won't get me!"

"You can't escape from their death rays if you're close to them. The best thing is to get as far away as possible. We're lucky the first two ships landed so far south. We'll just have to hope there aren't any more."

"You are a coward—"

There was a noise like a vast peal of thunder, and then a light that seared their eyes. The voice on the radio ceased abruptly.

"Can that be—" Lorin stammered.

"I don't know. I hope not!"

"It's a third spaceship! And it landed close by! If they start the death rays—"

They both began to run. Hari caught himself, stopped and held on to Lorin. The latter boy struggled to get away.

"What are you stopping for?" he demanded.

"Because I don't know which way to run. In what direction did the ship land?"

"I don't know."

"Then where can we run to?"

Lorin's eyes grew moist.

"I'm scared!" he said.

"Don't be a baby! Be brave like me! Be brave—"

A low rumbling sound seemed to rise up out of the ground and penetrate to the very marrow of their bones. For a moment Hari felt as if his brain were on fire. The noise continued for fifteen seconds, twenty, twenty-five.

Hari dug his fingers into his ears, but the torture was becoming intolerable, when the noise suddenly ceased. The ringing in his ears died away slowly.

"That must be the Ultra-sound ray," Lorin gasped. "If we had been closer, we'd be dead now. What can we do?"

"Which direction did it come from?"

"Over to the east."

"Then we run west!"

Five minutes later, while they were still running, the sound came again,

but this time from further away, weaker, and not so painful. It was a full half hour before the boys were beyond its reach.

HARI looked helplessly about him. He and Lorin had stopped running because they were tired, not because they felt they were out of danger. Everywhere about them, people were moving with feverish haste, some merely scurrying back and forth aimlessly, others keeping steadily in one direction, as if they knew where they were going.

A few of these seemingly intelligent folks, Hari noticed, were headed straight for the invaders.

The people in flight were of every kind. Men, women, children; all of them had fear in their eyes, and in their faces. Even the infants who know nothing else knew enough to be afraid. They had caught the feeling of panic from their mothers.

One man had a bundle filled with all sorts of valuables, as well as unnecessary and absurd objects he would be sure to throw away later. He had packed everything he could lay hands on, unreasoning in his fear.

Another was wearing several suits of clothes at the same time, in the hope that if he lost everything else, he could at least keep his body clad. A third, with a fierce expression on his face, carried a tiny weapon that might have served to kill a small animal, but would have been useless against a man.

"I'll show them," he was mumbling. "I'll sell my life dear." He was most scared of all.

Hari noticed that there were government officials in the crowd, men of the highest dignity, still distinguishable by their uniforms, but otherwise no different from the rest. If possible, they seemed even more panic-stricken. They had forgotten all their duties in their desire to flee from the invaders.

Lorin stared at his companion.

"I'm tired," he said suddenly. "I can't go any further."

"We'll sit down. Nobody's stopping us."

"I'm hungry."

"Me, too. We'll get something to eat."

"But we haven't any money."

"We won't need money. It's no good at a time like this."

They went into a shop. The contents were scattered about in wild disorder, and the owner was gone. They glanced quickly at the shelves. There was nothing but expensive jewelry.

"What good is all that junk?" exclaimed Lorin.

"People keep the craziest things. Let's try some place else."

Further on they discovered a food store, but others had discovered it too, and they had a struggle before they could eat.

"What'll we do now?" Lorin asked when they were finished.

"Keep moving, I guess."

"Where to?"

"Away from the invaders. They can't be everywhere. So far as we know, there are only three of their ships on the whole planet."

"As far as we know," agreed Lorin. "But we don't know very much. The first thing they do is cut the means of communication. The announcer said so. There could be a dozen space-ships, and we wouldn't know it."

"No use worrying about that. I wonder what happened to our teacher."

"The sound ray must have got him."

"I suppose so." Hari nodded. "And just about two hours ago, he was saying that an invasion was impossible."

"That just shows how much good it does you to learn something in school."

There was a short silence. Lorin broke it.

"I wish I knew what happened to my father and mother."

"I wish I knew what happened to mine. But there's no use worrying. They must be all right. They can run faster than we can. A lot faster."

"Yes, but suppose they stopped to look for us?"

"Then they'd be out of luck. But I'll bet they're safe. The only thing that bothers me is that they're worried about us."

Hari stood up.

"Do you want to get started again?" he suggested.

"We may as well."

A LOUDSPEAKER unexpectedly came to life.

"A fifth ship has just landed at some unknown spot to the west. Further details are not yet at hand. All inhabitants are warned—"

There came a further repetition of the dangers to be expected from the Ultra-sound ray, and the Hyper-light ray. "To the west!" Hari exclaimed.

"That's where we were going!"

"It seems that we can't run away from them, no matter how hard we try!" Lorin said desperately.

"It seems so. Notice that the announcer said this is the fifth ship. That means there's another one unreported some place, in addition to the one that landed near us."

"They must have sent a big army. Maybe they intend to wipe us all out right away."

Hari shook his head slowly.

"Not if they want to keep us for food animals," he said.

"I'd rather die now than live to be eaten later!"

"Not me. I'm going to stay alive as long as I can."

The crowd around them had grown thicker, but people were not moving so rapidly. The trouble was, no one knew where to go. And everyone was afraid to stay where he was.

Babies were squalling, and that made it hard to think, but Hari was thinking nevertheless. He had heard one of the announcers say something about government experts having a plan of defense. He wondered whether it was true. Did someone really have a plan that might possibly work, or was the announcer just trying to calm the people with soothing statements?

He spoke to Lorin about it. Lorin shrugged his shoulders helplessly. He couldn't guess.

For a whole hour, Hari consoled himself with the hope that the government had a plan to save them. In the end, it was a government spokesman himself who taught him better.

The news came over the broadcasting system.

The government's plan had been to send a committee to the invaders, proposing complete surrender, provided the people's lives were spared. The committee had been greeted by both the light and the sound rays, and its members had been lucky to get away with their lives.

Hari and Lorin slept that night in an enormous empty house that had been deserted by its owners. In the morning, Hari felt courage returning, but Lorin was more frightened than ever. The noise of people moving and yelling during the night had kept him awake. And once he had heard—or imagined that he had heard—the distant noise of the sound ray.

They ate in silence. And then there came the perpetual question.

"What shall we do next?" Lorin asked.

"Let's go back," Hari said abruptly.

"Go back? To be eaten?"

"Just go back. There's no place to run to. And the invaders will be coming here soon. If we go back, we'll fool them."

"Some way of fooling them! By running right down their throats!"

"They won't even see us," Hari declared.

"Suppose they turn on the sound ray?"

"We'll put something in our ears. But maybe if they don't expect us, they won't turn it on. And then, maybe—"

"What?" demanded Lorin expectantly.

"We might learn how to conquer them. The trouble is that so far, nobody's got close enough to learn their weaknesses. Well—there's a job for us."

"You're crazy," scoffed Lorin. "If the government couldn't do anything, what hope is there for us? We're only a couple of kids."

"That's a fine way to talk!" Hari chided him. "But suppose it's true. Maybe we'll be able to succeed where men have failed. If the invaders see us, they may figure the way you do—we're only kids, and we can't hurt

them. We'll see about *that!*"

Lorin hesitated.

"Well, are you coming with me?" Hari prodded.

"I don't want to, but—I don't want to be left alone, either. All right, I'll go along."

THEY started on the way back, slowly and cautiously. Practically everyone had deserted the invaded area by now. As the boys walked along they met only a few people who had been stunned by the sound ray and had recovered. After an hour's walking, they no longer met even such people as these.

They had been proceeding steadily for several hours before they realized a peculiar thing. Despite the invasion, nothing had been touched. Houses, fields, roads, all were unharmed. Only the people had been affected by the destroying rays.

It was Hari who pointed this out. Lorin stared about him.

"You're right," he admitted. "What does it mean?"

"It may mean that they'll want to live here themselves. Or else, after they've won mastery, they'll let us come back. In either case, they must be great scientists, to be able to direct their weapons so skilfully."

"It isn't good sense for us to get too close to them," Lorin said nervously.

"Oh, they're not worried about *us*. They don't even suspect that we exist."

They kept on, more cautiously than ever. And then, unexpectedly, they saw the invader.

It was evident that he hadn't seen them. Hari shuddered to think of what would have happened if he had. As the broadcasts had reported, the invaders were giants, at least twice the stature of an ordinary man, and between three and four times the height of Hari and Lorin.

This one had a face that was a horrible parody of human countenance. There were two cold and glittering eyes, a cruel slit of a mouth, and a jaw so firm that it seemed to be made of some hard rock.

Hari thought he could feel Lorin trembling at his side. Then he realized that it was he himself who was shivering.

The invader was walking with giant strides in their general direction. Suddenly he paused and seemed to be listening. Hari, afraid to move for fear of attracting his attention, held his breath.

Then the Hyper-light ray flashed on. It was the first Hari had seen of it. It swept in a vast circle in which the invader's body occupied the center. As it hit his eyes, Hari, with difficulty, suppressed a cry of pain. He dropped to the ground, Lorin beside him.

The light ray swept on over them, to cease as unexpectedly as it had appeared. The invader turned and strode gigantically away.

Hari began to rise to his feet and thought better of it.

"Let's get out of here," Lorin said.

"We've gone this far, we might just as well go a little farther."

They crept forward. In the far distance, a gigantic silver object reflected the sunlight from its gleaming sides.

"The spaceship!" Hari exclaimed.

"Let's go back!"

Hari paid him no attention. Lorin was afraid, but he would get over that. In the meantime, they would be learning about the invaders, picking up bits of the information needed to overcome them. Hari already had an idea. If they could get close enough without being discovered—

"Stop!" Lorin whispered with sudden fierceness.

"What's the matter now?"

"We're being watched! Those eyes—"

Two great eyes were staring out at the boys from the underbrush. Hari made out vaguely the doglike body behind the eyes; black, muscular, and with an appearance of supple power that frightened him more than he would let Lorin know. But this animal was certainly no giant.

"It looks dangerous, but— Why, it isn't nearly as big as we are! If it attacks us, we can fight it off—I hope."

"Don't you remember what the an-

nouncer said? It's a hunting animal! It won't attack us. It will point us out to the invaders. They'll be sure to get us now!" Lorin gasped.

"Don't be so scared, and don't give up yet. The first invader went away. Maybe there aren't any others around."

BOTH boys stared back at the two great eyes.

"I can't stand this," Lorin whispered, his teeth chattering. "In another minute I'm afraid I'll run."

"I feel the same way," Hari gulped. "There's only one thing to do."

"What's that?"

"Run toward it, not away from it. Maybe it's scared of us, too. Come on!"

Together they rose from the ground and dashed at the miniature monster, just as if they hadn't been ready to die of fear. It backed up slightly, roared unexpectedly, and then turned and ran.

"We're in luck," Hari said, panting. "Now let's get away from here, before it can return, bringing the invaders with it."

To Lorin's dismay, he pressed forward again.

"You're too brave for your own good— and mine," Lorin muttered angrily.

There was a distant rumble, as of an Ultra-sound ray far off. They put their hands to their ears, but that didn't help at all. The vibration seemed to penetrate their bodies, piercing its way to every bone and muscle.

Then the paralyzing vibrations died away. The boys kept on moving until Hari froze to the ground.

"More invaders!" he exclaimed.

There were half a dozen of them this time. The group of giants was more frightening than anything Hari and Lorin could have imagined. The overwhelming effect of all those cruel faces together was something that had to be seen to be appreciated.

A sound ray played over the boys, torturing them again. The invaders looked up as it was trained on their own great bodies, and then disregarded it.

"Did you notice that?" Lorin whis-

pered. "It doesn't seem to hurt them."

"That's bad. I had an idea for something, and now it's useless."

"What was your idea?" Lorin quavered.

"I planned to steal their sound-ray projector and turn it against them. But if they're not vulnerable to it—"

"Maybe we can hurt them with the Hyper-light ray."

"We'll have to see if we can steal a projector from the spaceship. Perhaps it isn't well guarded."

The giant invaders had turned and were walking toward their ship. And then Hari came face to face once more with the hunting animal he had previously frightened away.

It roared at him, and opened a mouth in which huge teeth glistened with terrifying effect. But Hari wasn't so much afraid of the teeth. He was frightened lest the invaders hear and approach.

Apparently, they were too far away. Hari took a step forward, and the animal leaped at him.

Hari sidestepped, and as the black body went hurtling past, the boy turned and threw himself upon it. The animal squirmed out from under him, roared again and leaped once more.

This time it grazed Hari's shoulder, throwing him off balance. He staggered aside, but as he did so, his fist caught the animal a blow between its huge eyes.

It drew back, roared this time as if in pain, and slunk away.

Lorin shook his head with awe.

"You've got more nerve—and more luck—"

"Come on!" ordered Hari. "Don't waste time talking." And they pressed forward again toward the ship.

It loomed a short distance ahead of them, growing larger with every step they took. They could see an opening in its side, and the figures of the invaders walking in and out. A beam of light shone from the opening.

Hari had apparently lost all sense of fear. He approached so close to the giant figures that he could see the expressions on their faces. But he didn't dare look at them for very long. They were too frightening. Instead he

turned his attention to the Hyper-light ray projectors that each of them carried at his belt.

If he could only lay his hands on one!

HARI was sorry as he watched that he had not brought a weapon along. The invaders wore very little armor, and as far as he could tell they would have been easily vulnerable. It was just as he had imagined. If everybody hadn't been frightened and run off, the government might have found a way to deal with the invasion. All the officials would have needed was a few brave men.

Lorin was tugging at Hari's arm. He was more scared than ever, and wanted to get away. But Hari kept his eyes on the light-ray projectors. If only he could secure one—

Then, as if by a miracle, it happened. One of the projectors slipped from an invader's belt and fell softly to the ground, where it lay disregarded. The invader turned carelessly and walked away.

"Don't let them see you!" Lorin whispered desperately.

But Hari no longer felt the need for caution. He ran forward and dived for the projector. It was a compact instrument, small but heavy. There was a metal stud at one end. A slight pressure on this, and the light ray would spring into existence.

Hari heard a low cry of alarm from Lorin. The invader had discovered the loss of his projector, and was returning to look for it. Hari glanced up, saw the expression of surprise on the cruel face, and almost fell to the ground. The invader had caught sight of him!

There was a fraction of a second in which the invader stood motionless, as if stunned. Hari pressed the stud, and the Hyper-light ray caught the giant in the eyes. He staggered back, as if blinded. Hari turned off the light and sprang away.

He and Lorin went racing through the tangled paths in a mad effort to escape. As long as the sound ray wasn't turned on, they had a chance. After them came the invader. The blindness had been only momentary.

And then to their ears came the sound of other invaders joining in the search, and a long-drawn roar—

It was the hunting beast. Even before they saw it, they recognized the sound. The beast bounded ahead of them, its great eyes blazing, and roared again. The two boys came to a frightened stop. They turned, and saw the invader almost on top of them. Lorin screamed, and ran straight at the beast, which moved aside.

Hari had foolishly turned to fight. He had switched the Hyper-light ray on again. But this time the invader was prepared for it. With one arm he protected his eyes. With the other, he reached out and seized Hari around the middle.

In one horrified glance, Lorin saw Hari being lifted from the ground, his face contorted with terror. He saw the cruel mouth of the invader open, caught sight of the glistening teeth, the slavering jaws—and ran as he had never run before. Behind him, urging him on, came the roars of the disappointed invaders.

* * * * *

How Lorin got away, he never knew. The hunting beast must have been unable to follow his trail on this unfamiliar planet. Besides, even for a boy, Lorin was moving very rapidly. Two hours later, his pace had slowed down to a feeble walk, but he was still fleeing. He was taking no chances.

Later that day, he encountered familiar faces. They were those of the schoolmates he had known in that long-gone time before the invasion—one whole day before, in fact. Lorin told them of how he had seen Hari eaten alive, and they all shuddered. One or two of the most venturesome had played with the idea of sneaking back and taking a look at the invaders. They gave it up quickly enough.

Some semblance of order was beginning to appear out of the confusion. The government was making plans, not for surrender this time. The invaders were apparently unwilling for some reason to venture out of the territory they had already occupied. The government was willing to leave

them there, while it prepared slowly and methodically for a counterattack.

LORIN passed the days in aimless fashion. With no school to attend, and no duties to perform, he didn't know what to do with himself. He poked his nose everywhere, saw everyone, listened to everything—and was bored.

He missed Hari. If his companion had been less reckless, he would have been still alive. Lorin's eyes misted over whenever he thought of him.

It was a week later that Lorin heard a voice. It came over a broadcasting system, and that in itself was not surprising, for the government had rapidly restored the means of communication. But this was not a government broadcast. And the voice was something Lorin had never expected to hear again. It was Hari's voice.

"Hello, everybody," Hari said. "Especially Pop and Mom, and Lorin. I am broadcasting from the invaders' camp.

"I should explain first of all that they are not really invaders. They are just visitors here, and they are surprised that we got into such a panic about them. They didn't destroy our communications system. The broadcasting people just got scared and ran away.

"I was captured a week ago, and have been busy learning to understand these visitors ever since then. I do not know all the words of their language yet, but I have learned enough to realize that we were wrong in what we thought.

"They tell me that I have picked up their language quickly. That, I have explained to them, is due partly to the fact that with our people, children are almost as intelligent as adults, although much smaller. Partly it is due to the fact that I am exceptionally bright."

("That's Hari, all right," thought Lorin. "Conceited as ever.")

"I must explain first about the Ultra-sound ray. They had no intention of hurting us. They set it up merely as a loud speaker system, to communicate

with us. But it seems that our language is at so high a pitch as to be inaudible to their ears—and their language is so low as to seem to us like unpleasant and dangerous vibrations.

"They understand the difficulty now and will not broadcast the sound ray any more. When they speak to us, they will raise the sound pitch as they have done in my case.

"As for the Hyper-light ray, that wasn't meant to be harmful, either. It appears that the light on our planet is too dim for the visitors to see by. Besides, it is mostly at wavelengths below their limits of vision. A strong light in what they consider the visible range happens to blind our sensitive eyes. They will be careful not to blind us in the future.

"They tell me that these rays of theirs may have paralyzed or blinded our people temporarily, but that they have not come across one case of death. That should prove to any doubtful persons that they are not really trying to invade our planet."

Hari paused, to let his words sink in.

"The reason they came in five ships is that they have already had experience in space travel. They have investigated the planets nearest them, those closest to the sun. As it is a long trip from their home planet to ours, they were anxious not to waste time in shuttling back and forth, so they sent five ships on the first expedition.

"If my friend, Lorin, is listening, I want to let him know that he made a terrible mistake in thinking that the beast we ran across was a hunting animal. It is only a pet, and our visitors brought it along for purposes of companionship. I myself was never deceived about it for a moment."

("Liar!" exclaimed Lorin.)

"The visitors do not eat our race. That is another mistake that some people made about them, but I did not. They brought their own food.

"If Lorin thinks he saw one of our visitors about to eat me, that is because Lorin was too excited to think straight. The visitor was merely bringing me closer, to get a better look at me in the dim light. He had his mouth open in a grin, and what seemed to be a roar was just a laugh of amusement at finding me unafraid of him."

("Oh, what a liar!")

HARI went on imperturbably.

"I have learned the names of many things in our visitors' language. The supposed hunting animal is actually a type of cat. The visitors themselves are remarkably like *Homo sapiens*, which means 'men.' It is true that they have very big features and great, powerful bodies, and they differ in other ways also.

"But they do not seem so horrible in appearance, once we get rid of our false ideas about them. In fact, they are not altogether unpleasant looking. We seem to them like midgets. Their planet is Venus, ours is Earth."

("Why don't people stay home on their own planets, where they belong?" Lorin muttered.)

"I shall tell a great deal more in my next broadcast. Right now, the visitors want to talk to me, because they rely a great deal on my judgment. Meanwhile, I want to say only that we have been the victims of a very foolish misunderstanding, and that this wouldn't have happened if everybody had been brave and clever like me, and hadn't given way to panic. Lorin can tell you that I wasn't frightened."

("What a liar," said Lorin bitterly. "What a liar!")

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CHAPTER I

The Mail Robberies

SUPERINTENDENT HAMILTON reached for his telephone.

"This is Conductor Burton, of Number Twenty-eight, speaking from Bradford. The mail car was robbed somewhere between here and

Ridgedale. Registered mail gone. Am holding car for your orders."

"Sidetrack and guard the car," came the order. "Call the Bradford police. I will be right over on Number Thirty-one."

Superintendent Hamilton banged the receiver at the hook and glared at the offending telephone. The third mail robbery in two months, and neither the local police, railroad detectives, nor the postoffice inspectors had found a single clue.

Number Thirty-one was a fast mail, making only two stops in the run from Ridgedale to Bradford. Registered mail placed on the train at Ridgedale had somehow vanished into thin air before reaching Bradford.

At neither of the two intermediate stops had the Bradford mail been handled by the clerks and the train had pounded out her average of fifty miles an hour between stops with not even a slow-up.

After the first robbery, a mail clerk had been arrested as the only one who could possibly have handled the mail. At the second robbery the clerk alternating with him was in charge of the car. Pursuing their thought that the mail clerks must be the culprits, the inspectors arrested him as the perpetrator of the second theft and a possible accomplice in the first.

Thus it stood when Hamilton reached Bradford, where he found the mail car sidetracked and the police on guard. He was greeted rather brusquely by the inspector in charge:

"Isn't it a rather high-handed proceeding to order the United States mail held up. I have taken the responsibility of forwarding the mail, transferring it under police inspection. I am confident no clues were destroyed by so doing."

"Have you found anything?"

"The car itself is being examined now. But so far we have found not a scrap of evidence except a bit of mud on the side

sill, as though someone had climbed into the car with muddy feet."

"That may help."

"Maybe. Maybe not."

AFTER a consultation between Hamilton, the inspector and the police, the clerk, who had been put through a severe grilling, was released. The other two clerks also were exonerated, as they were obviously innocent of the series of robberies.

Perplexed and not a little disturbed over the situation, Hamilton returned to his office. By the time he reached his desk his decision was made.

"There is only one man who can handle our end of this case—Detective Crane, of New York."

A telegram was promptly sent and a reply as promptly received. Two days later Detective Crane walked into Superintendent Hamilton's office.

"I've heard of you, Mr. Crane, and believe that with your wide experience you can help us out on a mighty tough proposition."

"I'll be glad to do what I can, but cut

EDITOR'S NOTE



Some stories are forgotten almost as soon as they are printed. Others stand the test of time.

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this test, it has been nominated for SCIENTIFUNCTION'S HALL OF FAME and is reprinted here.

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Those in the car were looking straight before them, revealing not the slightest sign of motion, or breathing



out the 'Mr.' To most of my friends, I'm just Crane."

"All right, Crane," laughed Hamilton, "we'll get down to business."

Hamilton went over the situation briefly, but there was little he could really tell. For some time Crane stared thoughtfully at the floor.

"Now let's sum up. Three times your mail car has been robbed. In every one of the three robberies there has been a specially valuable shipment. Mail clerks arrested, with no effect on robberies. No one entered the car who didn't belong there, and no chance between stations to board trains. Absolutely no clues except a bit of mud. That sums it up."

"Just about. I can think of nothing else."

"All right. Now let's get a little more detailed information. Exactly what were these valuable shipments?"

"All I know is that the registered mail was unusually heavy."

"Did you know, beforehand, this heavy mail was coming?"

"No."

"Humph! And the robbers did. Some-

thing funny there. Any special guards?"

"No."

"And with two robberies, one after the other, you mean to say you took no special precautions against a third?"

"Well, both clerks were in jail and they brought another from a distant division. The first two might have been in it, together, but hardly the third, who was on the car at the last robbery."

"That may be true. Got the men shadowed?"

"No. They have all been transferred to other divisions."

"How about the car, itself? What type is it, blind ends?"

"It's an older-type car, platform and doors at each end."

"Doors locked?"

"No. The end doors were unlocked, and on the trip when the last robbery occurred the clerk says the side doors were open for ventilation. It was a hot day."

"And that's the trip when you found mud on the side sill?"

"Yes."

"How about that mud? Find where it came from?"

"It's been analyzed by a chemist and several geologists have examined it. All agree it is a common clay that occurs all through this section. It might have come from anywhere."

"Clerks didn't have mud on their shoes, did they?"

"No. And they all swore up and down that no one entered the car who didn't have a right to be there. There were no stops between stations and, anyway, an outside gang couldn't hold up the car without some show of force."

"No? Well, apparently, they did. And now then, when is the next robbery coming off?"

"When is the—WHAT?"

"Well," laughed Crane, "let's put it this way: When is the next big shipment due? The next robbery will occur right then."

"If they stick to schedule, there won't be another for a month. But in two weeks the First National Bank of Ridgedale will make a special shipment of money. They will furnish their own guard."

"Good! Can you get the chief of police over here?"

"Yes, I'll call him now."

FIFTEEN minutes later the chief had arrived and the introductions were over.

"Now, Chief, I have evidently pumped Superintendent Hamilton dry, but there are a few little points which maybe you can clear up."

"Fire ahead."

"Besides the mail clerks, is there anyone you can think of who could have had any possible connection with the robberies?"

"No. In the two months since the first affair we have thoroughly investigated everyone who had anything to do with that car and cannot find a shred of evidence. It's the most mystifying case I ever heard of. Three times that car has been robbed in broad daylight. How?"

"That's what I'm here to find out, Chief. Assume, for the moment, that one of the clerks is guilty. In at least one case the side doors of the car were open. It would be a simple matter to toss a package through the doorway to a confederate at some point along the right of way. Can you think of anyone who could have been that confederate? Now think carefully, Chief. Valuables like that don't disappear into the underworld without showing up again, somewhere."

Brows knitted in thought, the chief drummed with his fingers on the desk.

"I have it! Spider Morgan."

"And who, may I ask, is Spider Morgan?"

"He is a budding young crook who bids fair to become an expert if he keeps on. We have had him up several times, for petty thefts. For the past two or three weeks he has been specially flush with money, but as he hasn't pulled off a job for some time, we have nothing to hold him on. We have, however, kept an eye on him, though he is not being actually shadowed. He could not have been connected with the last robbery, anyway."

"Why not?"

"Because he was somewhere in the city at the time."

"What do you mean—'somewhere in the city'? Don't you know exactly where he was?"

"We know his whereabouts except for one interval of about half an hour."

"What time was that?"

"Between eleven and eleven-thirty."

"Where was the train at that time, Hamilton?"

"Left here on time at eleven-two. Reached Bradford on time, at eleven-forty."

"Where was Spider at eleven? Near the station?"

"No. In a billiard parlor a mile away."

"Humph! That certainly lets him out from actual participation in the robbery. And we don't know that it actually occurred between here and Bradford. But—Spider disappears at the same time the train leaves the city. It may be sheer coincidence—probably is—but the question of his whereabouts is worth investigating. Yes, I have a hunch that Mr. Spider Morgan will bear watching."

"Now, Chief, I have a plan and I want your help. When the First National makes its shipment two weeks from now, I am going on the car with it. Meanwhile I should like to have you put a shadow on Spider Morgan. Start now and hold him day and night, till I give the word to let go."

"Okay, Mr. Crane. We'll do it."

"And you, Hamilton, I'll depend on you to make arrangements with the First National to have me go with the shipment."

And in this commonplace manner was started the most amazing case Detective Crane had ever encountered.

CHAPTER II

The Fourth Robbery

TWO weeks later No. 28 left Ridgedale for Bradford, with Detective Crane in the express car. By agreement with the police chief, known only to the latter and Detective Crane, to prevent any possible leakage, arrangements were made with the bank, at the very last moment before train time, to ship the money in an ordinary day coach of the following train, an "accommodation."

Several plain-clothes men were scattered through the car. A bogus package, with marked bills, was carried from the bank under guard and placed in the safe of the express car. Crane, known to the clerks in the car as the bank messenger, was given the combination of the safe and full authority to take any measures he saw fit.

He decided to take no chances. As the train pulled out of Ridgedale, he opened the safe and personally inspected the package. It had certainly not been tampered with at the beginning of the journey. During the short run to the first stop, the express and mail clerks approached the safe only under Crane's watchful eyes.

He again opened the safe as the train left the station. The package was still intact. The same precautions were taken on the run to Riverside, as during the first part of the trip. Riverside was the last stop before Bradford, and Crane felt that the crisis was approaching. At the station he kept his eyes on the package all the time the safe was open and felt a distinct relief as the door clanged shut.

The train swung out across the switches and he opened the door for his usual inspection. The next stop was Bradford and he knew they would make an average speed of fifty miles an hour till the end of the run.

Leaving the safe door open, he sat down on a box and looked at the package.

The danger points of the two stations were passed and nothing had happened. The theory of tossing the package out of the door to a confederate could neither be proved nor disproved while he was in the car. But it had been only a surmise on his part and he hardly felt it was the right solution.

What other solutions remained? Since the train had not been held up to perpetrate the robberies, Crane was at a loss to proceed for further light on the mystery. Settling back on the box, he leaned against the side of the car, near the open door, letting a cool wind blow across his forehead. The tension was over and he began to relax.

Glancing around the car, he noted that the clerks were busy at one end. Again fixing his eyes on the package, he thought to himself that the whole elaborate plan had been for nothing. The trap had failed to spring and he was no nearer a solution.

But suddenly, with eyes bulging with amazement, he stared at the safe. *The package was gone!*

With the train thundering along at sixty miles an hour, no one near the safe but himself, it had literally vanished in the wink of an eye. One second it was there. The next instant—gone! Before his very eyes the fourth robbery had occurred, and he knew no more of what happened than he did about the other side of the moon!

In one jump he reached the safe, pulling the signal cord to stop the train as he leaped. Carefully, methodically, he examined the safe and the whole surrounding region of the car. The package had vanished as though it had never existed.

By this time the train had ground its wheels to a stop, and the crew were running forward. Swiftly Crane gave his orders. Two men climbed to the roof and searched the train from engine to tail-lights, poking into the overhang of the ventilators and peering down between the cars. Two more went through the cars, searching aisles, seats and vestibules and calming the nervous passengers.

CRANE and the conductor, starting at the cowcatcher, searched the engine and running gear of the train. Then, joined by the rest of the crew, they combed the track and adjoining ground for fully half a mile behind. Exactly what Crane ex-

pected to find by this performance wasn't quite clear, even to himself, but he didn't find it. Finally, calling in the flagman who had gone back when the train stopped, the "highball" was given and the interrupted trip resumed. . . .

Four men were gathered in the office of the chief of police. They were the chief himself, Hamilton, Crane and Post-office Inspector Saunders, who had been following Spider Morgan. Crane felt the tension in the air. Hamilton looked at him coldly, but the only remark he made was:

"It's a good thing we sent the money on the local. It got through."

The chief was sizing him up with a cool, level gaze, and Crane could feel his scorn for the "famous detective" who had allowed a robbery to occur under his very nose.

The chief's voice snapped through the tense stillness:

"Well, Crane, out with it."

Crane told his story from start to finish without interruption. When he ended the chief's eyes were snapping. Suddenly he darted his finger straight at Crane.

"If it wasn't for your well-known reputation, young man, I should say you had been asleep. Inspector Saunders, would you enlighten us by telling what you have found?"

"Yesterday morning Spider Morgan didn't leave his lodging house till ten o'clock. He went to a cheap lunchroom and took his time about breakfast. When he finished, he walked leisurely across the city to Sullivan Park and hung around there till a man came along in a car and picked him up."

"What time was that?"

"A couple of minutes before eleven."

The chief and Hamilton glanced at each other.

"I expected from what information you gave me, Chief, I might have to make a run for it, so I had a car with me. It was a powerful car, but I had the time of my life keeping behind Spider, even though I let her out, good and plenty. They went straight back into the hills, and from the start maintained a fifty-mile speed. They were heading up for that range of hills that runs between here and Bradford, and stopped at an old deserted farmhouse on Panther Mountain."

"Just a minute," broke in Crane. "How far is this Panther Mountain farmhouse from the railroad?"

"It's ten miles from the point where the train was robbed," snapped the chief, "so you can cut Spider Morgan out of your calculations."

"Both men went into the house," continued Saunders. "I timed them and it was exactly eleven-ten. Then minutes later they came out with another man. All three got into the car and started back here. They dropped Spider at the Park and he made straight for a lunchroom. I was hungry myself and went in right behind him. He handed a bill to the cashier. It was a large one and she couldn't change it. She showed it to me, as I was right behind Spider, and asked if I could. I

changed it for her and—”

“Go on.”

“Here it is.”

The chief took the bill and glanced at it. Then his jaw dropped. It was a marked bill from the bogus package!

LIKE a burst of machine-gun fire came a rain of questions from the chief, striving, with all the skill of the trained inquisitor, to penetrate the minds of the two men and get to the bottom of their stories. Through the sledge-hammer blows of his inquiry they stuck to their guns. Finally from sheer exhaustion, he stopped.

Slowly the incredible truth filtered into their minds. During the ten-minute interval while the suspects were in the farmhouse, the train, ten miles away and running at top speed, had been robbed! And Spider Morgan had left the house with part of the loot in his possession!

Hamilton was the first to break the tense silence. With a look of awe, almost of fear in his eyes, he gripped the chair till his knuckles went white.

“My God! What kind of an infernally hellish combination are we up against, anyway?”

The four men stared from one to the other. Finally Crane rose, shaking himself as if to break a spell.

“The only way to fight that combination,” he said slowly, “is from the inside.”

A few days later Spider Morgan was arrested and given a ten-day sentence for vagrancy. Not a word was said about the robberies. He was thrown into a cell with a dirty, miserable bum for a cellmate. It was no new experience for Spider, and the bum was evidently enjoying his chance to sleep in the peace and quietude of the jail.

For some hours Spider regarded his sleeping companion, thoughtfully, but after administering a few tentative kicks in the ribs he gave up his overtures at companionship as a bad job. Throughout the next day and the rest of the ten-day term it was the same. When the bum wasn't sleeping he wasn't talking, either.

In spite of all Spider's attempts at conversation he elicited nothing but an occasional grunt or monosyllable. When his release came, he felt he had never had so uncommunicative a cellmate in all his prison experience.

The day after Spider took the air, the bum was also released. His dirty, ragged possessions, such as they were, had been returned to him and he stood at the gate, an unkempt figure, suddenly eyeing the passersby. Finally, with an inarticulate grunt, he jerked his cap down over his eyes and slunk down the street. And no one could have recognized that slouching figure as Detective Crane.

For many days, several weeks in fact, no word was received from Crane. Then, by some mysterious means of underworld communication, he got through to Hamilton a message that he was making progress, but was being constantly watched and it was very difficult to communicate.

A few days later, as Hamilton walked

back to his office from lunch, a rough-looking man accosted him.

“Gimme a quarter, Mister; I'm starvin'.”

Hamilton ignored him, but the man persisted and finally became such a nuisance that Hamilton called an officer, who led him away, protesting and threatening.

Early in the afternoon Hamilton lifted his telephone receiver and found the chief, himself, on the wire.

“That man you had arrested this noon insists on seeing you.”

“I don't want to see him, Chief. I'm pretty busy. But seeing it's you, I'll come over.”

On arriving at the jail the man greeted him with this astonishing piece of information:

“Spider says I'm the stupidest pal he ever had.”

Hamilton stared at him angrily, then: “By Jove, if it—”

With a quick motion to his lips the man silenced him, and the chief caught on. Motioning the guard to withdraw, he led the way to his own private office.

SINKING into a chair, the man wearily drew his hand across his forehead. The chief stepped to a cabinet and got some brandy.

“Here, drink this, Crane, you're all in.”

“Thanks, Chief. That's better. I've been leading a dog's life, but I think it's worth it. We're up against something big. Don't ask me what it is—I don't know. It seems, as we expected, that Spider is a member of a gang. The head of this gang is known to the members only as ‘The Boss.’ No one knows who he is or anything about him. Spider says they rarely see him, unless a job is being pulled off. Then he takes personal charge.

“The first thing I did after leaving the jail, was to look up Spider. Told him I was a stranger here. Been kicked off a freight train and landed in the cell where he found me. He took me in charge right away and we have been good pals ever since. About three weeks ago he persuaded the Boss to accept me as a member of the gang. I kicked. Said train robberies were not in my line. But he laughed and said it was a dead cinch the way the gang pulled 'em off.

“When I asked him why, he shut up. Said there was some secret about it. No one knew but the Boss. The members of the gang know only enough to make them work together. Anyway”—and Crane laughed for the first time—“he says the Boss wants me in the gang because I can keep my mouth shut. Spider says I'll fit in right there, as I'm the stupidest pal he ever had.

“It's about time we roped 'em in. The Boss smelled a rat when Spider was arrested after the last robbery and that's why they have been laying low. But I think he's only waiting now for another good haul. I suggest we bait a trap with something he can't resist. Stage a shipment of diamonds from some jewelry firm. Suit yourself about whether they are real or paste.”

"Well," laughed the chief, "if you're in the car, I'll make 'em paste."

"So be it. As a member of the gang, I'll take part in the robbery. It's up to you, Chief, to cover us and nab the whole gang on a signal from me. And say, Hamilton, I owe you an apology!"

"Cut it out. I understand, perfectly."

"You don't know the half of it. It seems a would-be member of the gang is under constant scrutiny till he proves himself in the first holdup. That's the only way I could get to you and avoid suspicion. The Boss is running no chances, I tell you."

CHAPTER III

The Boss

AS THE train pulled out of Ridgedale with a shipment of diamonds, three men left Sullivan Park in an auto, and took the road leading into the hills. The three men were Crane, Spider Morgan and a man whom Crane now knew as "Bud" Hanson, an expert safecracker.

Crane looked off across the city to a trail of smoke floating up from the horizon. The mail train was pounding out through the yards on the final stretch of its run and gaining speed with every puff of the big locomotive.

"What's de game, Spider? Thought we was after the mail train. Ain't dat it, down dere? Job musta been called off."

"Called off, nothin'. We just playin' wid dat train like a cat does wid a mouse."

"Humph! Guess it'll take some cat to catch dat mouse."

"Don't youse fret, Bo. Youse ain't seen nothin' yet."

Little more was said as the auto climbed the road that wound up through the hills. Finally the road emerged from the woods into a clearing, and the auto pulled up at an old, deserted farmhouse. This must be the Panther Mountain farm that Saunders had mentioned, Crane thought. The car was left in the weed-grown driveway and the men entered the house.

As they entered, a man stepped forward to meet them, a man whose whole manner and personality aroused Crane's immediate interest. For although Spider and Hanson were typical underworld toughs, the Boss showed every evidence of culture, refinement and keen intelligence. And such a man, with a criminal twist to his brain, Crane knew, is a dangerous antagonist, indeed.

"We have plenty of work ahead of us and I shan't waste words," he said, addressing Crane. "You are here to join the band. No man joins this band without fair warning and a chance—just one—to back out, if he wishes. As a member of the band, nothing you hear, see or feel must be divulged to an outsider. A new member is told nothing in advance. He must find out for himself.

"The real secret behind this band is known only to me. Once a member, you remain one. You leave it afterward under penalty of certain death. And now"—he

pointed to the door—"if you do not wish to accept these terms you are absolutely free to walk out that door and go. Decide!"

"Phew," thought Crane to himself. "I'm letting myself in for more than I bargained for. This Boss must be infernally sure of himself to let me walk out that door scot free after what has already been divulged. All the more reason for getting at the bottom of this mystery."

"I'll join," he said curtly.

The Boss turned to Spider and nodded. Spider and his companions left the room, returning immediately with four curious contrivances. They were metal cylinders, or tanks, each roughly a foot in diameter by two and a half feet long. Attached to each tank was a sort of harness of metal straps, ending in a mask which could be put over the face.

Each tank was securely fastened to the back of one of the men, like a pack, the cylinder standing vertically between the shoulder blades. At first glance Crane thought they were filled with compressed air, or gas, possibly a form of oxygen tank for opening the safe. But, as his own tank settled into place against his back, it felt heavy, as though it contained machinery.

THE weight was taken by two straps curving over the shoulders and connecting in front with a horizontal band passing around the chest just under the arms. The top of the tank, just back of the head, was connected to a band which closely encircled the forehead and the mask fitted snugly over his head. These connections were flexible so the head could be moved freely in any direction. The lower end of the tank, similarly, was connected with a band encircling the waist. The whole thing, though a little heavy, was easy to carry.

Motioning Spider to follow him, The Boss stepped into the next room. A couple of minutes later he appeared in the door and beckoned Hanson, for all the world like a doctor summoning patients.

Then Crane was called. As he entered the room he noted that Spider and Hanson had disappeared, having probably left the room through another door which opened into the hall. In a recess in the wall he saw a small panel, like an electric switch-board. On this panel were dials, a controller handle and two electric cords several feet long.

Seating Crane in a chair, The Boss plugged one of the cords into the machine on his back. Then he slowly started to move the controller handle, but Crane never saw the finish of the movement. A sudden wave of deadly nausea swept over him. His brain whirled giddily and his stomach felt as though he were falling through an elevator shaft at a thousand feet a second. Finally the agony passed, and was followed by a high-pitched humming. This, in turn, quieted down to an almost imperceptible buzzing in his ears.

"Feeling better?" He came to his senses to find The Boss disconnecting the cord from his own tank. "All right, we'll go."

Leaving the house, they joined the other two men in the yard. Immediately a bewildering variety of conflicting impressions forced themselves on Crane's attention. First, to his intense surprise, they ignored their own car and started off down the road on foot, The Boss in the lead.

As they tramped along he was still pondering this strange behavior of the gang when he began to notice another puzzling fact. It was hard to walk. The slightest movement was impeded, as if by a dense medium. He felt as if he were trying to walk under water. Close on the heels of this came a third impression—this time a feeling of uneasiness, a very familiar uneasiness. Glancing quickly at the sky, he noted the narrow strip between the trees was clear and blue; but, looking around him at the trees, he understood.

When the men entered the house a few minutes before, a gale had been blowing; but now not a leaf stirred. The woods, the whole of Nature, seemed suddenly quiet in that ominous stillness that precedes a storm, and he knew a thunderstorm in these hills was something to remember. The blue sky meant nothing. Thunderheads could be rushing down upon them and might not be seen in these woods till directly overhead.

"Guess we're in for it this time," he said to himself.

But this walk was a poser!

"That Boss is sure a wise guy." Crane thought. "He believes in confusing the scent by pulling the job a different way each time. The last robbery was evidently engineered directly from the farmhouse itself; how I cannot imagine. And now, just by way of variety, we are walking to it! Of all the puzzling cases I ever ran up against, this is certainly the ace."

HURRYING a little, he ranged up alongside of Spider.

"What's de big idea in de hike, Spider? The Boss surely don't expect to catch that train by walking! Why don't we take the auto?"

"Auto! Holy mackerel, hear the man! Auto, is it? Look ahead of youse."

"Well, yes, I see a touring car standing in the road up there. Probably a breakdown. What's dat got to do with it?"

"Guess youse ain't blind, at any rate, if youse can see it. But youse don't see the half of it, Bo."

And not another word would he utter as they tramped the half mile separating them from the stalled car ahead.

And suddenly Crane's detective instincts roused themselves. Where were his wits? His brain hadn't seemed to be working right since they left the house. The uncanny stillness of everything in Nature was getting on his nerves. He would see the game through in his role of train robber. But, at the same time, he must keep his eyes open for every scrap of evidence he could get. And a very important piece of evidence was taking shape right now.

The Boss was well ahead of the party and almost to the auto. Was he stark crazy to ignore the four witnesses in that

car—witnesses who could not fail to remember the group of men who passed them with such strange contrivances on their backs? As he noted the number of the car, Crane also noted something else. The Boss stepped to the side of the car, bent over, and looked at the instrument board. And not one of the group so much as glanced at him!

Waiting till the rest of the men came up, The Boss remarked to Crane:

"That chap is reeling off forty miles an hour."

But the detective barely heard the words. He was staring in astonishment at the car and its occupants. On the front seat were a young man and a girl, on the rear seat two girls, and all four were fixed and motionless as wax figures.

"Dead" was the first thought that flashed into his mind. He glanced at The Boss, who regarded him with a quizzical smile. Again he looked at the silent, motionless forms in the car. In his long detective career he was familiar with death in many guises and *that* was not death. The happy laugh on the lips of the girl in the front seat, the glow of the color in the faces of all four, could be nothing but abounding life and vitality. Something wrong here, surely. For the life of him, he could not define the feeling, but he felt something strangely uncanny, unnatural about the whole thing.

Puzzled, nonplussed and more than a little awed, Crane approached the car for a closer inspection. The two on the front seat were looking straight before them. The two on the rear seat were turned toward each other, one with her lips partly open as if speaking, but a prolonged, close examination revealed not the faintest sign of motion, breathing, nor the flicker of an eyelid.

Slowly he reached over and touched the hand of the girl nearest him. The fingers were flexible and the flesh warm. He passed his hand before her open eyes. No response. His glance wandered over the interior of the car and rested on the speedometer. The pointer was at 40 and a shade more. Humph! Speedometer out of commission.

From sheer professional force of habit he walked around the car, taking in every detail.

Something, he couldn't quite understand what, caught his attention and he stopped for a closer look at the front wheel. Then he sighted across the tire to a spot of dirt on the mudguard. The wheel was moving! Very slowly, but steadily and surely, the top of the tire crept forward. Glancing quickly up and down the road, he saw the auto was moving up hill. He placed his hand, then his ear to the hood. The engine was not running.

Turning in incredulous amazement to The Boss, he found he was standing squarely in front of the auto, one foot on the fender and leaning forward with both elbows on top of the radiator.

"Yes, this car is making all of forty miles an hour, and when you have fully observed the phenomena of wheels going

around, kindly get a move on, yourself! Come now, snap out of it!"

AS A MEMBER of the gang, Crane was supposed to obey The Boss." As a detective, it was his duty to find some clue to the meaning of this strange occurrence. The Boss had already turned away and expected him to follow. It was a time for quick thinking and quick action.

Was the strange condition of this party due to natural causes or was it a sham? Natural causes seemed out of the question. One person might possibly have a fit or trance or something, but hardly four at once! Sham had a shade more reason on its side.

The Boss showed no surprise at the situation. In fact, he appeared to expect it. As The Boss was connected with the robberies, anything connected with The Boss even remotely must be investigated. These people might be members of the gang, unknown to him, and the whole a fool stunt to "get the nerve" of a new man. Well, he'd wake that bunch out of their tomfool tableau in short order.

Quick as a flash his hand shot out, just grazing the wide-open eyes of the girl in front of him. Not by the flicker of an eyelash did they move. Quickly he placed his hand over her heart. With a grim suspicion changing to certainty, he carefully felt for the exact spot and waited. The flesh was warm, but under his hand he felt no beating!

With deft quickness he examined the other three.

"Dead, all four, and very recently. The Boss knows something about this."

Hand flashing to his gun, he whirled.

"Hands up!" But the rest of the party were far ahead.

Cursing himself for a premature and foolhardy act that by the grace of Providence had miscarried, he replaced his gun and strode after the others. Never in all his experience had he been compelled to leave the scene of a crime without a thorough investigation, but the explanation lay with The Boss, and The Boss he would follow. If his self-control could be kept and no more fool breaks were made, this was the last holdup.

Controlling himself with a great effort, he tramped along with the rest, trying to appear unconcerned, but his mind was racing. What was the meaning of this whole, mysterious affair? Rapidly he went over the evidence, to date, tabulating the main items in his mind and trying to find some tangible thread on which to string them:

The mail clerks arrested and released.

The mud on the sill of the car.

The mysterious vanishing of the package in the fourth robbery.

The ten-minute interval at the farmhouse.

Finding the marked bill on Spider.

The machines strapped to the members of the party.

Leaving the house on foot to meet a train miles away.

The auto murders.

CHAPTER IV

The Case of a Fly

EXACTLY how were these bits of evidence connected with a solution of the mysterious robberies? Crane couldn't find a single theory to which he could follow even two of these clues, not to say the whole eight! To be sure, he was actually on the way, in person, to a solution of the mystery. But his active mind refused to let go of the problem.

(1) How were the three mail clerks connected with it?

Simply, so far as he could see, because they were the only persons in reach of the mail at the time. Assuming that the first clerk had committed the first robbery, he was safely in jail at the time of the second. The second clerk had handled the car on alternate days with the first, and therefore there was a chance of collusion between the two. The second man had simply carried on when the first was arrested.

This theory, however, was knocked to smithereens by the fact that the third robbery of the series had occurred when both men were in jail, and under another clerk brought in from a distant division, with no possibility of his being in collusion with the other two or with the gang. All three men had been transferred to other divisions on their release, and the fourth robbery had occurred despite everything. Obviously the clerks were innocent, and had no association with the gang.

(2) How about the mud on the door sill?

The police had agreed, without exception, that the mud had been scraped off against the sill from a shoe. Several geologists had examined the mud. It was a clay found very frequently along the whole division and no clue was given as to its locality. The clerk had not seen it at all and it seemed probable that it came from the foot of one of the men loading mail or express at one of the stations.

(3) The mysterious vanishing of the package in the fourth robbery, right under his very nose, simply had him guessing. It had literally vanished as a light does when the lamp is switched off.

(4) And the gang had been at the farmhouse only ten minutes. A careful comparison of time between Saunders and the train conductor had established the fact that the train had been robbed during this ten-minute interval. But it was also known, as an absolute certainty, that not a man had been seen leaving the house, from the time they reached it, to the time they left it and returned to the city.

(5) And yet a bill that had been, indisputably, in the package on the train, ten miles away when Spider Morgan went into that house, was on his person when he left it, ten minutes later.

(6) As to the machine that each man carried on his back, that, at least, could be explained with some plausibility. The mechanism and its actual purpose was wholly a mystery, but it was plainly intended for some use during the robbery. The power had been started by connecting

it with the switchboard before leaving, evidently the only way to do it.

A wise precaution, Crane thought, to prevent possible tampering by the men. That horrible jolt to his stomach was simply the effect of vibration. At a certain critical speed the machine had trembled violently and shaken him with it. The machine was not running to pump up pressure, or charge batteries for use on the train. He only wished the whole problem was as easy of solution as the machines!

(7) On the train? Well, they certainly were never going to get aboard that train by walking to it; that was dead sure. It had pulked out of the yards at Ridgedale as they left Sullivan Park, and its fast schedule was maintained till the end of the run.

And yet Spider had said they were playing with the trains like a cat with a mouse. They had a safe-cracker with them, as though he were intended to be on the car in person, and the sole purpose of this expedition, so far as Crane knew, was to board and rob that particular train.

ALSO, a curious feature of this walk was the resistance he encountered. The most nearly reasonable explanation he could think of was some peculiar atmospheric condition, though the storm had failed to materialize. A thought did flash into his mind that the machine on his back might have a gyroscopic action which, with the complex movement of walking, made it difficult to move. But this failed to explain the distinct feeling of pressure against his body.

(8) And the quadruple murder, if it was a murder, in the car?

His lips set grimly. The Boss could explain that murder when the chief began to sweat facts from him! It had, obviously, nothing to do with the robberies. It was simply an individual crime, a problem by itself. And Hamilton was right! What a devilish mess they were up against!

With a great effort he brought his mind back from its wanderings and focused his attention on a peculiar object in front of his face. The object, in itself, was by no means peculiar. It was simply an ordinary, everyday fly, one of the numerous species that make life miserable for the housewife. Yet Crane stared at it as if he had never seen a fly in his life.

Bringing his acute faculties to bear on this miniature problem that had literally popped out of the air, he noted that the insect appeared to be suspended motionless in space—no ordinary position for even a fly. Then as he observed it more carefully he noted that it was making headway across the road, from which brilliant observations he deduced the not unreasonable assumption that the insect was actually flying. Yet, in all his born days, he had never seen a fly actually on the wing taking life quite so leisurely as this one.

He grinned as the thought struck him that an ant, crawling across the road in the same direction could give this fly odds and beat it! It was a relief to find a problem,

even for a moment, that had nothing to do with those infernal robberies. And this fly certainly had no . . . What was that? Deep in the recesses of his consciousness a thought stirred. "That fly solves the problem!"

What nonsense was this? The thought persisted gradually, taking a little clearer form.

"In the actions of that fly you have the solution to the whole problem."

Confound that hot sun! The band pressing into his forehead was driving him crazy. A fly solving the problem of the train robberies! Stark, idiotic nonsense! A vague, intangible idea was constantly eluding his grasp. Dimly he began to perceive a something, a sinister something he could not define.

Then it came. Out of the chaos of his whirling thoughts, slowly the grim form advanced. Instinct, reason, common sense, all combined to fight back the intruder. Incredibly grotesque, utterly alien to all known human experience, the answer to the problem pounded, pounded, pounded at his tortured mind, beating, smashing its way into his consciousness. Then the unearthly, devilish ingenuity of the whole scheme, with all its hideous menace to society, blazed into his brain.

In spite of his iron nerve, his physical senses gave way to a reeling panic of terror. Staggering like a drunken man, he lurched on. His face under the mask took on the frenzy of fear. With eyes tightly shut, he swayed dizzily. Gradually he calmed down enough to stop and force his reason to take command. Then he ventured on, slowly regaining strength and self-control as he started after the other men already some distance away.

FINALLY he was able to face the matter more calmly. The solution was incredible, impossible, but like all other incredible solutions in his career the acid test must be—did it give a complete and satisfactory explanation of every element in the problem?

Carefully he went over all the points again. Did it clear the three mail clerks? Absolutely. Did it explain the mud? Yes. Point after point was completely cleared. Link after link dropped into its proper place in the chain of evidence. There were a few gaps; but these gaps would be filled and he knew the links that filled them.

"And," he said to himself with a sheepish grin, "no wonder The Boss was enjoying himself at the auto. I was never so fooled in my life. It even solves the quadruple murder!"

"Say you, back there!" The Boss, himself, was striding back toward him. "This is no scenic tour. Wake up!"

Rounding a curve a short distance further on, they were confronted with the familiar sign, "Look out for the engine."

"Now," said The Boss to Crane, "we'll go through the air. I'm running no chances of leaving footprints. The train is only about two miles further on, if my calculations are correct, and on this downgrade she is hitting sixty miles an hour.

Press this button on the tank and you go up. Press that one and you come down."

Crane did as he was told and, to his amazement, his feet lifted from the ground and he began floating through the air in the direction of the train. The other members of the gang were ahead of him, floating like great birds.

Soon they saw the end of the train ahead of them and stopped at the rear platform of the last car. Crane, though he knew by this time what to expect, could not repress a feeling of amazement as he looked along the length of the ten cars toward the engine.

The fireman had just put on coal and the smoke, hanging motionless above the roofs of the cars, looked curiously like a roll of dirty cotton laid along the top of the train. Even at the smoke-stack, where he knew the smoke should have been pouring through into the air, there was little perceptible movement of the black smudge. Just a faint, slow heaving, like the almost gentle upboil of a thunderhead.

With one foot on the rear step, The Boss gave his orders.

"We haven't pulled a job for some time, so we'll make up for it by taking in the passengers. And you"—he pointed to Crane—"this trip you are merely to watch. You'll get your share, just the same. Now, men, go to it."

And go to it they did! In the train was the same uncanny, deathlike stillness as in the auto. Spider took one side of the aisle and Bud the other, and they made a clean sweep. Watches and pocketbooks were easy, but rings and necklaces were a little harder. Some of the rings came off with difficulty, but all eventually found their way into the capacious pockets of the gang.

Many a time they stopped to cut the strands of a necklace from the shoulders of some unsuspecting woman. Even the hand-baggage was searched and, when pockets became filled, a few roomy bags were requisitioned, the contents being coolly dumped outside the train.

Crane, helpless and inwardly boiling with rage, was forced to look on. He had never imagined such high-handed, free and easy looting was possible.

When they reached the express car, they simply walked in at the end door. Bud opened the safe with the dial, and they cleaned it out. Then the gang hunted through the express matter for anything worth taking, relieved the clerks of their valuables and went out through the side doors.

THE fifth robbery in the series had taken place—and it was a complete success.

The trip back to the farmhouse was uneventful. Here the procedure was reversed, each man going in to the panel room and having the power turned off the machine. Crane helped them put the loot into the auto, incidentally taking note of the fact that a gentle breeze was once more blowing through the trees.

As the men got into the car he hung back a little. The Boss was leaning forward shifting the gears; the other two

men were busy stowing the loot.

"Hands up!" Crane poked the revolver into The Boss' ribs.

"Hands up!" echoed from the bushes on both sides of the road.

Crane was hurled sprawling as the car leaped forward, taking the curve into the main road on two wheels. Down the road a big police auto slowly backed from among the trees, a literal broadside of rifle fire blazing into the robbers' car. The report of a bursting tire, half-drowned in the roar of the guns, a wild, sickening lurch—and the on-rushing car nosed into the ditch, hung for a moment, precariously balanced almost on end, then toppled over on its side.

Two figures painfully and slowly detached themselves from the wreckage, hands held high. They were promptly ironed. When The Boss was finally extricated, he didn't need irons.

On the way back to headquarters, Crane asked:

"Well, Saunders, how long were we away from the house?"

"Away! What do you mean? You have just come out. We followed your car, as you instructed. We were near enough to see you take the car into the driveway and enter the house. Immediately we threw a cordon around the building. That was twelve minutes ago and not a person left that house till you walked out with that loot. Every man in our force can swear to that."

Crane chuckled. "And, by the way, Saunders, did a car go past while we were in the house?"

"Yes! There was a man and three women in it. They were going at least forty miles an hour."

Crane gazed pensively at a cloud in the strip of blue sky above them.

"Were they dead? I thought they were."

"You—what?" gasped the astounded Saunders. "Why, Crane, that blow you got from the mudguard must have upset you. They certainly weren't dead when we saw them. Not by a long shot."

* * * * *
Once again the same four men were closeted in the chief's office. On the table in front of Crane lay one of the tanks.

"One of the most mysterious crimes in many years has been solved," he began, "and the greatest menace to society in the history of criminology has been nipped in the bud. If you expect a learned discourse on the scientific whys and wherefores, I fear you will be disappointed. I leave all such questions to the scientists themselves. All I can tell you is my own experience and the theory I have evolved to fit it.

"In solving a crime, gentlemen, many theories can be evolved that will fit *some* of the known facts, but the supreme test of the true theory is, does it fit *all* the facts? The true theory will not only explain all these facts, so far as I have observed, but it can be checked and tested by events that turn up later in the case. We have had many puzzling and seemingly impossible combinations in this case, but

the theory I have in mind brings them all together as neatly as do the pieces in a cut-up picture puzzle."

RAPIDLY and clearly he sketched an outline of the robbery, from the time the robbers' car left Sullivan Park till it up-ended itself into the ditch on Panther Mountain. Then he carefully reviewed the whole case, bringing out all the salient points.

"The first inkling I had of the truth was while I was watching that fly—and that, by the way, is the first instance I ever heard of where the solution of a crime was revealed by watching a fly cross the road! You may or may not be aware of it, gentlemen, but some of the species of flies are the swiftest creatures on wings, and I was racking my brains to understand why this insect should be so slow.

"It was not hovering in mid-air, as they often do, but moving steadily forward. I could distinctly see the wings slowly moving on each side of the body and, if you have any idea of the extreme rapidity with which a fly's wings vibrate, perhaps you can imagine how astonished I was. It looked curiously like those moving pictures taken with a slow-motion camera. Gradually I began to see the reason. It seemed too vague and too incredible to grasp at first. Then, as in the burst of a star-shell, the whole truth was revealed."

He paused, looking from one to the other. The proverbial pin could have been heard to fall in the tense silence that followed his words.

"Gentlemen, that fly appeared slow to me because I, myself, was fast! I was thinking, feeling, moving, actually living at such a quick tempo that everything else was practically stationary in comparison. You can probably realize that a man who runs down criminals for a living must have nerves of steel. But I freely admit that when it fairly got into my head that I was probably moving as fast as any rifle bullet, I came as near as I ever did in my life to having a real shock."

Here he patted the cylinder in front of him.

"I cannot explain it, myself. I doubt if it will ever be fully understood. But this machine, in some mysterious way, was generating electric or atomic impulses that passed through my body, the circuit probably being from the band at my forehead, through the body, to the band around the waist. To my own personal senses, everything appeared to be perfectly in proportion and normal.

"Nevertheless, not only were we made invisible by our terrific speed, but the impulses must have accelerated the whole intricate machinery of our life processes till they were functioning at a proportionate rate. And it is that speed, gentlemen, that explains every incident of this case. We walked because the auto would not have been affected by the impulses. The resistance I felt was due to the air pressure caused by the swift movement.

"The quadruple 'murder' was due to the simple fact that, all told, I probably re-

mained near that car for less than the hundredth part of a second. As was proved by my examination of the bodies, I wasn't there long enough, literally, to feel a single heart-beat. And as for the people in the car, how much do you suppose they, themselves, could see, hear, feel and realize during the instantaneous flash of time that we were beside them?

"The same thing applies to robbery—to all the robberies, in fact. The gang found the train stationary with relation to themselves, and simply stepped on board, took their time about getting what they wanted and got off again. The whole thing was over so quickly that nothing was perceptible to those on the train.

"The mud found on the car after the third robbery was scraped from the shoe of one of the robbers, who probably climbed into the car through the side door. The reason you, Saunders, failed to see anyone leave the farmhouse was because we were totally invisible. The shock I received as the machine started was due essentially to the same cause as the sensation you perceive in a fast elevator; except that, in my case, it was greatly intensified.

"It even explained"—and here he smiled—"the coming storm. The trees and bushes around me appeared to be motionless with that uncanny stillness which, as you know, just precedes a heavy thunderstorm. The idea, the feeling, the impression of an approaching storm was simply a natural reaction to the appearance of this familiar condition of Nature."

AGAIN Crane placed his hand on the machine. "I fully appreciate that my explanation must sound as wild and fantastic to you as it would have sounded to me, so I shall close with a little demonstration. After that I am going to bed and sleep a week! The reaction on the physical system from the speed at which I was living, even for those few moments, is something terrible. The starting panel at the farmhouse has been thoroughly examined, as it stood, and then carefully removed from its place. There it is, over there, connected to the electric circuit in this building."

With Saunders' help he firmly fastened the machine to his back. Connecting the cord from the panel, he stood with his hand on the control lever.

"I believe you have a stop-watch, Chief. Will you kindly time me from the instant I move the lever?"

Slowly Crane began to move the lever—and vanished. Almost instantly he reappeared in the same spot.

"Two seconds to the dot," said the chief.

Crane walked to the table and took from his pockets two watches, several rings, three pocketbooks, bills, coins, a cigar lighter, a dozen cigars and three card-cases. These he placed on a newspaper which lay on the table.

"There, gentlemen, you may disentangle your own property. I have finished."

Three men stared in open-mouthed wonder at the table. Then three men began frantically feeling of their own pockets.

They had been robbed! Cleaned out!

Hamilton broke the amazed silence with a laugh.

"And to think I anticipated something like that, and kept my hand on my watch."

"Yes," laughed Crane, "I noticed that. I had to lift your hand up to remove it."

"And where, may I ask, did that newspaper come from?" interrupted the chief.

"Oh, that! Well, after I lifted the goods from you three easy marks I spied that paper on your desk, so I sat down and read the sporting pages."

The chief, with a gasp, sank very suddenly into his chair.

"And all in two seconds!"



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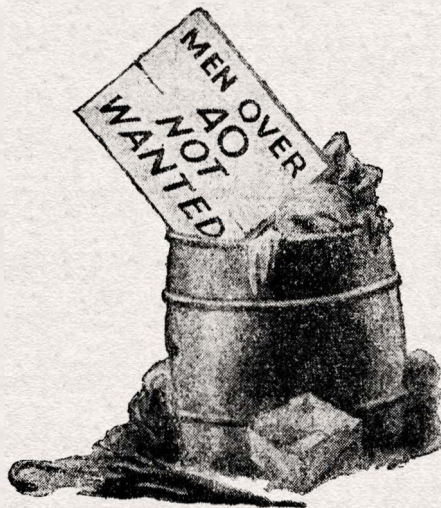
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THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 12)

Peering at the scanner [I carry a portable three-dimensional peerer expressly for that purpose] I find the Nov. issue full of possibilities. Possibly we can make something out of something—we shall see.

It seems we can rarely get to the reading matter without glancing at the cover—usually recoiling in horror. Happily this is not one of those horrific jobs so we can trip lightly on to the lead novel. Are you all tripping?

Barring the fact that "Day Of The Cloud" was founded on the ever-lovin' "Save the World" theme, it was a nice hunk of architecture. I might mention in passing that those unpronounceable names should go out the air lock—just like Zarnak. They might go well in a Compound Cross Word Puzzle but never, never in Stf. I can stomach Jo, Jak, Jon or something equally asinine, but every time I come to a mess like Xrdlo or Vhrw—Ugh, my eyes whirl like a Venusian Gyrocar and my tongue curls up with reader's cramp. Honestly, Sarge, if we weren't already at odds with the alphabet I'd be tempted to launch a new "Society For The Prevention Of Unpronounceable Names In Stf." They may lend atmosphere to some but they merely clog my jets and foul the cyclotron.

I am still chuckling over "The Earth Saver." 'Twas droll. A whole mouthful of complimentary adjectives to Astrogator Joe Millard for that wacky little yarn.

"Death Ray" was anemic and "The Ancient Brain" struck me as being very Burroughish in plot and composition—only lacking half-naked savages flinging death rays to complete the picture. Surely the Hall of Fame merits a more distinctive selection.

And what's all this nonsense about Finlay being strictly a Fantasy man? Certainly his work is out of this world, but so is the greater portion of Stf—fantasy all. He is light years ahead of the pack in style and workmanship. For that matter it really makes little difference who does the garnishing—I am in favor of more stories and less art. Let the art critics turn to *Police Gazette* or *Esquire*—I can take my Stf. raw.

There are certain Kiwis who claim to abhor the old Sarge and his salty repartee. I think they secretly enjoy your patter, Sarge, or they wouldn't continue to read it—and moan. Anyway, what sort of a course would we steer without the steadying influence of the old Sarge to guide us?

Aside to Pahjoir Tuuk: Did you grab that moniker out of a passing hyperbole or win it in a Martian bingo game? Surely no doting parent would do a thing like that deliberately.

I believe a letter contest would inject new life into the old cadaver—though a Xeno Zombie all around would accomplish the same results in true space style.

I haven't been able to lay hands on a copy of T.W.S. what with being in the hospital—hence the gram to S.S. It really makes little difference, anyway, since I have read both impartially for years as have many other loyal fans.

I would appreciate hearing from any other service men who are Startling Story fans—in fact all the Startling Story fans. I will faithfully answer any letters which come my way, so blast off, you space bums, and if you can't write, send me a photo.

Incidentally, Sarge, the blatt column is a perennial favorite with most of us and is really deserving of a better fate than to be deposited willynilly half here and half there.

Here are the Jugeroo ratings:

1. Day of the Cloud—5 Xeno jugs.
2. The Earth Saver—5 Xeno jugs.
3. Death Ray—2 Xeno jugs.
4. The Ancient Brain—1 Xeno jug—empty.

Note to Sarge—Pardon the paper, pen, envelope, etc. This is Wah!—73rd Evac. Hospital, National Military Home, Los Angeles, Calif.

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A salute to you, Sergeant Mace—as from one cracked Xeno jug to another. Hurry up and get out of that hospital and go to work on the Japanazis. If memory doesn't fail the old Sarge, you don't have B.O. and we printed a letter from you not long ago in one of our trilogy of science mags. Don't ask me which one. If you didn't see it, shame on you. It's all the old space dog can do to keep track of the oddities of one department at a time.

There was nothing wrong with pen and paper, kiwi, and the ink was a beautiful hue which corresponded chromatically to the seventh color of the spectrum—red, to you junior pee-lots who haven't kept up with the serial. A nice color of blood for true Americans. Which brings to mind that little gag of a flag manufacturer here in New York who sent a small American Flag to the emperor of Japan with the following note:

"Dear Hirohito, we are sending you this specimen of the American Flag. We guess you have found out by now that these colors don't run."

Nice, eh? Well, carry on, Pee-lot Mace, and write the old Sarge whenever you get lonesome. Everybody doesn't love the Sarge like you do. Look!

STRONG TALK

By R. E. Geis

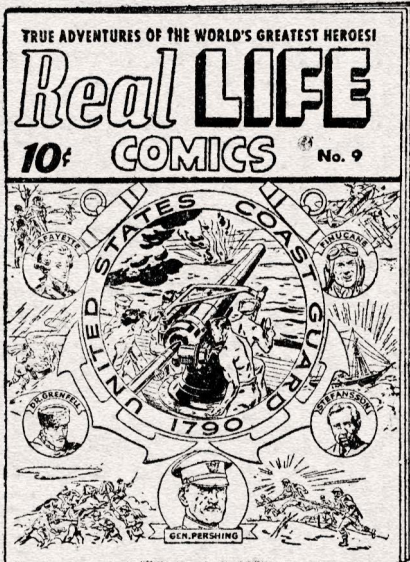
Dear Sarge: I give you fair warning. Either you give up that childlike space talk—or I'll run you off the ether waves with (vocal) static.

Strong talk, isn't it. (Gulp!) Now for your stories and their rating—Xeno jugs, of course.

1. "The Day of the Cloud"—oh, give it four jugs.

[Turn page]

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2. "The Earth Saver"—this was something! Anyway, it was funny; three jugs.
3. "The Ancient Brain"—a Hall of Fame story, too! Anyway, a skimpy two and one-half jugs.
4. "The Death Ray"—the cat must have dragged that one in. One-thirty-second of a jug.—1036 N. Killingsworth, Portland, Oregon, U.S.A.

Whereabouts is this U.S.A., Kiwi Geis? Or where do you think the old Sarge is that you have to tack on a return address like that? Never mind—don't answer that. Just stick your nose in the rocket gears and press the starting switch.

I have now a problem child of an ethergram. A junior astrogator writes in that he just read the November issue of **STARTLING STORIES** and that he, too, is interested in the occult and has had a number of personal experiences in same.

Well, that really baffles the chief astro-gator. If this is a new style of kidding the old space dog—it wins. Junior, give me a sentence out of **STARTLING STORIES**, using the word "occult."

"I stepped out of the airlock without my space suit and caught occult."

Sit back down, junior, unobtrusively. You might better have said that you tried to lasso a Plutonian slug horse and caught occult.

Maybe we'd better drop the subject. If I can puzzle out the signature I'll drop the right party a couple of rocket blasts to straighten him out.

Here comes word from another soldier. These boys talk language the old Sarge can understand.

SOLDIER WITHOUT TYPEWRITER

By Leroy Tackett

Dear Sarge: The last time I wrote you I was a civilian—with a typewriter. Now I'm a marine without a typewriter, so you'll have to excuse the pencil.

Now to the business of the day, meaning **STARTLING STORIES**, Volume 8, Number 3, November, 1942.

The cover: Ah, beautiful, wonderful, marvelous, superb—and a work of art, no less. A case of Xeno to Bergey for getting out of the rut of BEMs, heroes, and ladies in red. It does my heart good to see a change of scenery on **STARTLING STORIES'** cover. In fact, it is the shot in the arm S.S. needed to put it on the road to recovery.

"The Ether Vibrates." Well, I see that you still hold the reins, you jug-sluggo fugitive from a Martian bar. Speaking of bars, did I ever tell you about the time on Uranus when I—but (ahem) that is another story.

Shades of Tucker, can I believe my eyes? For once there is no new can of alphabet soup in the "Ether." Ha! Our campaign is succeeding. Soon we will completely remove these blights on the fact of science fiction.

I second Regan's plea for new blood on the cover. How about Royen? He did an excellent job on CF a while back.

And now we come to Pee-lot Brown. I wonder who left the door open? Koly Klono! Doesn't he realize that fan feuds are as outdated as alchemy?

Before we shove off the yarns, my dear asteroideal poodle, how about that contest? Give originals for the best letters and see how quickly "The Ether Vibrates" and takes on new life. And what's cooking with the annual? Is it, or isn't it?

"The Day of the Cloud." Nice going, Ross. Not only does the cover improve, but the novel also jumps higher. But—ugh—Sarge, try to dig up a new theme, will you? SS has given Telsu an awful beating in the past couple of years. How about giving Mama

Earth a rest for a while and moving on to other parts of the System? Give us anything, but stop destroying planets and moons.

"The Earth Saver." Ah, humor. Good humor, at that. Nice work, Joe. Keep it up.

"The Ancient Brain." Different to say the least. For once, no blood 'n' thunder. Yep, a good Hall of Fame yarn, if there ever was one.

"Death Ray." So sorry, but for some reason it didn't click.

"World Beyond the Sky" sounds interesting. Possibly a planet is not destroyed by some catastrophe, huh? Possibly.

The pic on page 31 was the best in the ish. The others were—That's all, they just were.

That about takes care of it. See you in a couple of months—maybe. Sorry I can't include an address, Sarge, but at the present time I haven't got one.—San Diego, Calif.

Nice letter, leatherneck, and the old Sarge was able to read it without a telescope. Of course, you wax a little fresh with your superior officer. Asteroidal poodle, indeed! But who wants to tangle with a marine? That's one of the last boys in the world a sane person wants to tackle. Ask the Japs who messed around Wake Island. Ask anybody.

I can't give you any new dope of the annual at present, and the chief pilot hasn't given me the go-ahead signal on a letter contest as yet. I'll pass your new blood on the cover suggestion along to our art editor. And I guess that clears you up for this trip, Kiwi Tackett. Better slip on your space scanners and take a watch at the controls.

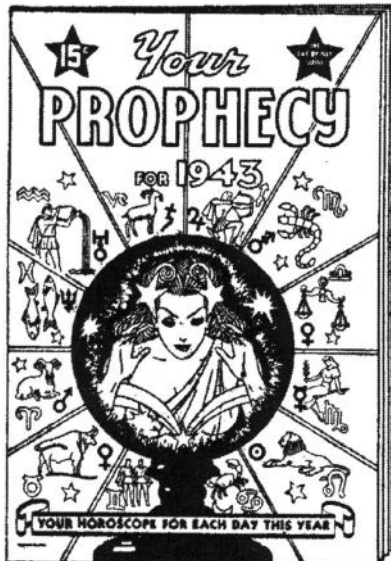
WEINBAUM STILL SUPREME

By Bill Stoy

Dear Sarge: Weinbaum's "The Black Flame" and Wellman's "Twice in Time"...

[Turn page]

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those are two of the main reasons why I can't think much of the novel, "World Beyond The Sky" in the Jan., '43, STARTLING. I admit it would be decidedly unfair to compare Williams' story with those two exceptional yarns (for it certainly couldn't hold a candle to "The Black Flame"), were it not for the fact that so many other good novels—a number almost exceeding the amount to which I can count—have been between the covers of SS. So that "WBTS" and most of the other book-lengthers of the past year or so, show up rather shabbily in comparison with the high level of STARTLING'S novels that once was, and might yet, with a little effort, again be.

Not that Williams' tale was particularly revolting, or anything of the sort. Let's just say that it bore a faint tinge of mediocrity. It might even have made a fair yarn, had the wordage been compressed down to the scope and worth of the plot . . . something about the size of a 20-page novelette, perhaps. As it was, I actually scanned the last few pages instead of reading 'em, a sure sign of dull fiction. *Tsk, tsk,* and when I think of what good stuff RMW has turned out on occasion!

Well, as the novel goes, so goes the whole issue. Ergo the fiction was not particularly notable. Exceptions—"Green Torture" and "Forgotten Past." The Hall of Fame selections seem to be improving. If, as you darkly hint, more of Weinbaum's stories are to be reprinted soon, more power to ya! Imagine some more of the van Manderpootz series are in order—and if I remember correctly, they're quite enjoyable. If you ever get around to publishing an Annual, one all-Weinbaum number might not be amiss.

Cover: Art? Well, that's debatable. Undoubtedly a relapse from the covers of the November SS and December TWS. Ah, weel, years of this luridness have injured me to such stuff as the present cover, and have turned me into a hard-bitten and calloused soul. However, after obtaining a mag from the newsstand, I do take precautions that no one else accidentally sees the cover. It may be unnoticed in the welter of other mags on the newsstands, but, by itself, a casual glimpse of all its blazing glory might do irreparable damage to some innocent bystander. Klono only knows what suffering and torture untold multitudes have gone through . . . and just because some editor or artist thought a few BEMs (plus the usual supermannish hero and the wide-eyed-with-terror bit of fluff) would have a nice effect. Methinks more are repulsed by that than attracted.

Schomburg's work on the interior is very good for a change. Apparently he had plenty of time to work out his pix in detail. Morey and Marchioni are still not so hot . . . an infusion of Paul or some other would be most welcome.

Thrills in Science at usual high level; betcha a book compiled of those thumbnail sketches would sell. The Ether Vibrates good, too, even if it is run by a garrulous yardbird of space. Hmm, next issue novel appears to be attractively off-trail. Well, we'll see—140-92 Burden Crescent, Jamaica, N. Y.

See here, Kiwi Stoy, what makes you think that everybody—including yourself—wants a monotonous succession of cover paintings of planets in space? We have to vary the pictures in order to give you space monkeys something by which to make contrasts. As for BEMs, how in all the holy—space imps can you call the lynx-headed man of Sundra Unuum a bug-eyed monster?

How do you spell your first name, anyway—with a "u" or an "i"? Never mind.

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you wrote a nice letter in a repulsive sort of way and I'm sure the writers and artists will appreciate the bouquet of stinkweed. As for the old Sarge, go ahead and pour it on. I've a fresh case of Xeno.

LICKING MY CHOPS

By Paul Carter

Dear Sarge: The January cover would have been good if almost anyone else but Belarski had painted it. Give it two Xeno jugs.

At long last, Alex Schomburg has again been allowed to decorate the magazine with illustrations. Hooray for A. S. Give him four Xeno jugs. Give Marchioni 4, Morey 3½. At last, a whole issue completely illustrated!

Departments, up to snuff: 4½ Xeno jugs.

Ah, yes, and the stories—

Give Williams four jugs. He's done better, and he's done much worse. Good going. In fact, excellent going.

Give Morrison 2½ jugs. Plot: ancient. Writing: so-so.

Give Hilliard 4½ jugs. Ah, this is more like it. Let's hope the Hall of Fame returns to its high position. It ought to, if your promise about Weinbaum means something and isn't balloon-julce, as was the promise of "Branches of Time."

Give Nitkin 8 jugs. Enough said:

Give "The Gladiators" five jugs and a bouquet. Best thing in the issue, but completely. A bit too short, though.

And so goes another issue of S. S. On the whole, better than last year; it gives promise of what may come in the future. In fact, next month's lead—"Speak of the Devil"—has me licking the proverbial chops in anticipation. This could be better than "Blood on the Sun", maybe? (Gene Hunter, please note.)

As for Cummings's approaching Icarus thing. If that follows the Cummings routine, one novel in S. S. shall be skipped by this correspondent—the first to receive that ignominious treatment. And Cummings can write, after all.—Paul Carter, 156 S. University St., Blackfoot, Idaho.

Well, Pee-lot Carter, you didn't give the old space dog much to bark at this time. Hope the good ship **STARTLING STORIES** doesn't disappoint you in 1943, and, confidentially, I'd like very much to have you write in your reactions to **SPEAK OF THE DEVIL** which is delivered at your spaceport herewith.

You know, the way you talk of giving folks the jug is almost ominous. That expression is current in certain sections of the country as being synonymous with giving a person the sack, the bounce, the brush-off—the stern rocket. But I know you don't mean it that way, and I'll follow your instructions. Only the old Sarge will empty the jugs first.

Okay, all you little ogres climb back into your cages. Seal the port, Frog-eyes, and unseal the Xeno. We're a-going space cruising.

—SERGEANT SATURN.

P.S. Junior astrogators, keep on buying War Stamps and Bonds! We are getting the Japanazis into a tight corner, and every bond you buy puts another wrap around their necks. And don't forget to listen to "The Army Hour", official program of the War Department, on the air every Sunday afternoon from 3:30 to 4:30, Eastern war time. You'll hear many suggestions that will help us all to do our bit to win this war and build a future that is a future.



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REVIEW OF THE SCIENCE FICTION FAN PUBLICATIONS

By
SERGEANT SATURN

OFF again on the mad whirl! Steady yourselves in the control chamber, kiwis, while the old Sarge takes a steady shot of Xeno and puts on his compound microscopic glasses.

What's this, Short-wave? A shortage of



fanzines this trip? Maybe it's the off season, or perhaps the editors are busier in war work or Army Service. Whatever the cause, we'll wade on through the pile of fan mags present and see what we have for this month's inspection.

First comes our old faithful:

FANTASY FICTION FIELD, 1702 Da-hill Road, Brooklyn, N. Y. Editor, Julius Unger. Weekly. 5c per copy.

The subject matter of this little sheet—from one yellow sheet to eight pages, depending on the amount of copy—is improving steadily. There is actually good news and interesting articles. And, of course, the glossy pre-view prints of the covers of coming professional mags continue to be included. At least three full Xeno jugs to Editor Unger.

THE FANTASITE, 2405 First Ave., S., Minneapolis, Minn. Editor, Philip R. Bronson. Bimonthly. 10c per copy; three for 25c.

Well, re-cork my Xeno Jug! Thirty-eight pages—counting the covers—of single-spaced black ink on white, standard stock. A contents page that looks very professional and nicely balanced. Excellent art work and colorful line-drawing headings for articles and departments. And the cover: Shades of Saturn—a griffin roosting on an eight-ball, or maybe it is a spatial bubble dancer in blue. Anyway, an effective cover, and an all-around good job. Even has a neat crossword puzzle. Nice work, boys.

FUTURIAN, Grange Terrace, Leeds 7, England. Editor, J. Michael Rosenblum. 6-weekly intervals. Price 3d. per copy; 2/- per annum.

Ah! Another of those fanzines from across the Big Pond. This one is black on white, 22 pages without a contents page and apparently including a fanzine called THE GALAXY. A bit confusing, not to mention that

some of the department heads look more like doodling than drawing. But, all in all, a newy number and with a couple of excellent black and white illustrations. Also, dope on British fans in the service. Nice going.

SALUTE, Special free number, 2050 Gilbert Street, Beaumont, Texas. Editor, John M. Cunningham. Free on request.

A mighty neat stunt, if you ask the old Sarge. Editor Cunningham launches a brand new publication with a free copy. Six pages of lavender ink on standard stock white. A good editorial, a couple of line drawings, and a lot of single-spaced news items about fans and fanzines here and there about the globe. There is room for make-up improvement and the addition of a contents page, but this new fanzine strikes the old space dog as showing possibilities. Better write for your free copy, fans.

VOM, Box 6475, Met Station, Los Angeles, Calif. Editors, Private 4e and Morojo. Monthly? 10c per copy; \$1 for 10 copies.

The phonetic abbreviation or spatial double talk makes it difficult for the old Sarge to decipher, but in the main, VOM still carries on with legal size format and sharply cut stencils. The illustrations verge a bit on the macabre this issue, what with a Jap-like war mask on the cover and a flying bat gal as a special supplement somewhere inside. And single-spaced type that wellnigh bogs the old Sarge down to his ears. Sure, it's easy reading—and interesting to most of you fans.

Which cleans up the fanzine snowstorm in this section of space for the time being. Maybe we'll have an avalanche of books to report on next voyage. Meanwhile I'll conserve my strength so I can wrestle with Taurus. (Bull, to you proletarians.)

Hand me a fresh Xeno jug, Wart-ears; there are ink spots in front of my eyes as large as aspirin tablets.

And don't forget there's a war on, peevlots. Give the Japanazis he— (censored but comprehensible).


—SERGEANT SATURN.



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Norman A. Daniels

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literature. Yet, none—so far as I know—have treated the subject from a pseudo-scientific angle, so perhaps we have something fairly new here.

“As for me, personally, there isn’t much of particular interest. Writing more than a million words a year for several years keeps a man pretty busy. I’m too fat, too bald, and I have a definite stenographer’s spread. I live in a New York hotel where, if a tack gets loose on the furniture, six men come up to fix it. All of which doesn’t exactly tend to lessen the waistline.

“I’ve written books, radio scripts and reams of fiction. With the same cock-eyed mind that conjured up this story of the Devil, maybe I can think of something even wackier, if the good readers care for this yarn. And I hope they do.”

Well, that’s what Norman A. Daniels reports about himself—and we call it slander. Actually, he’s a jolly, good-looking sort of fellow and one of the most popular fiction writers living. You’d like Norm a lot if you knew him—and you’re sure to warm up to him when you read his swell yarn.

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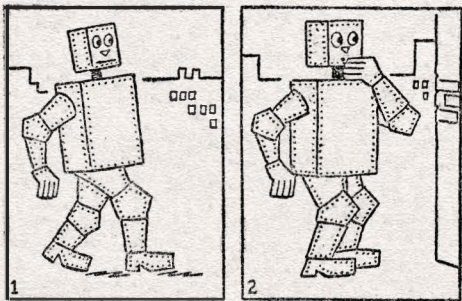
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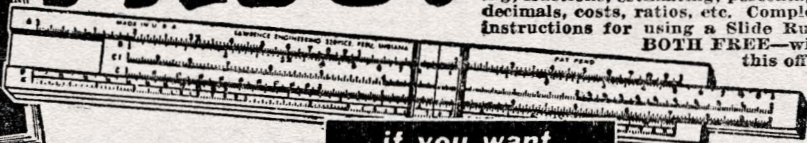
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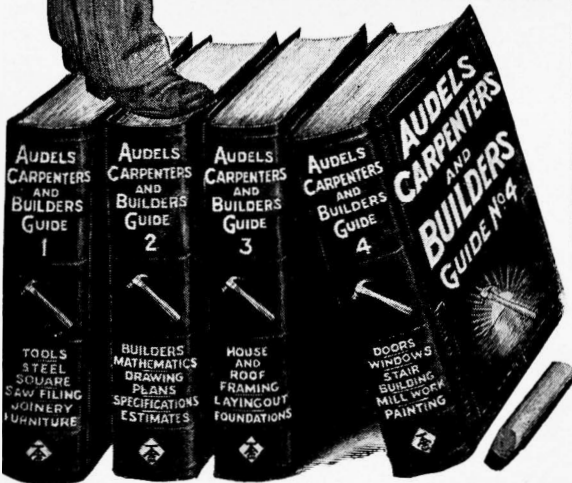
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