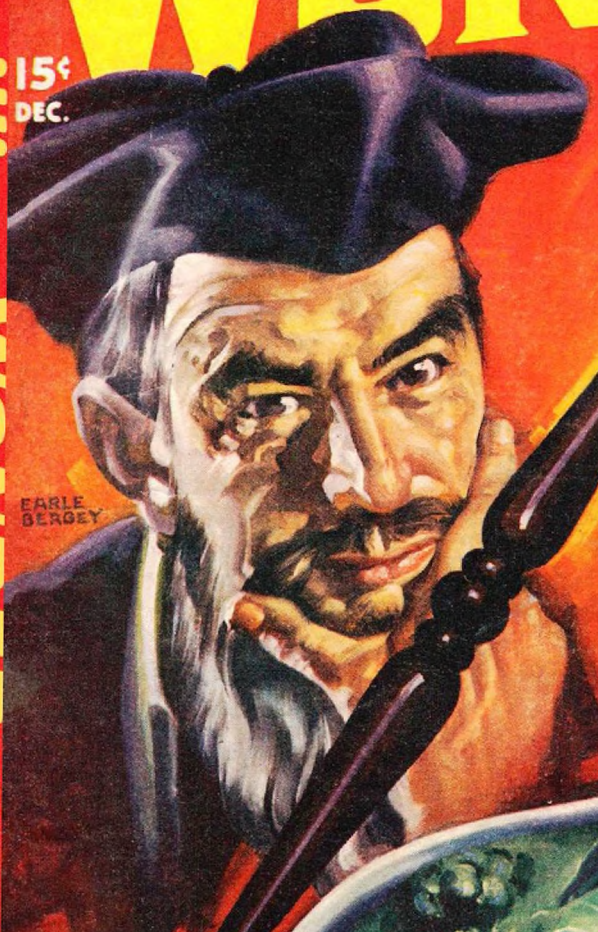


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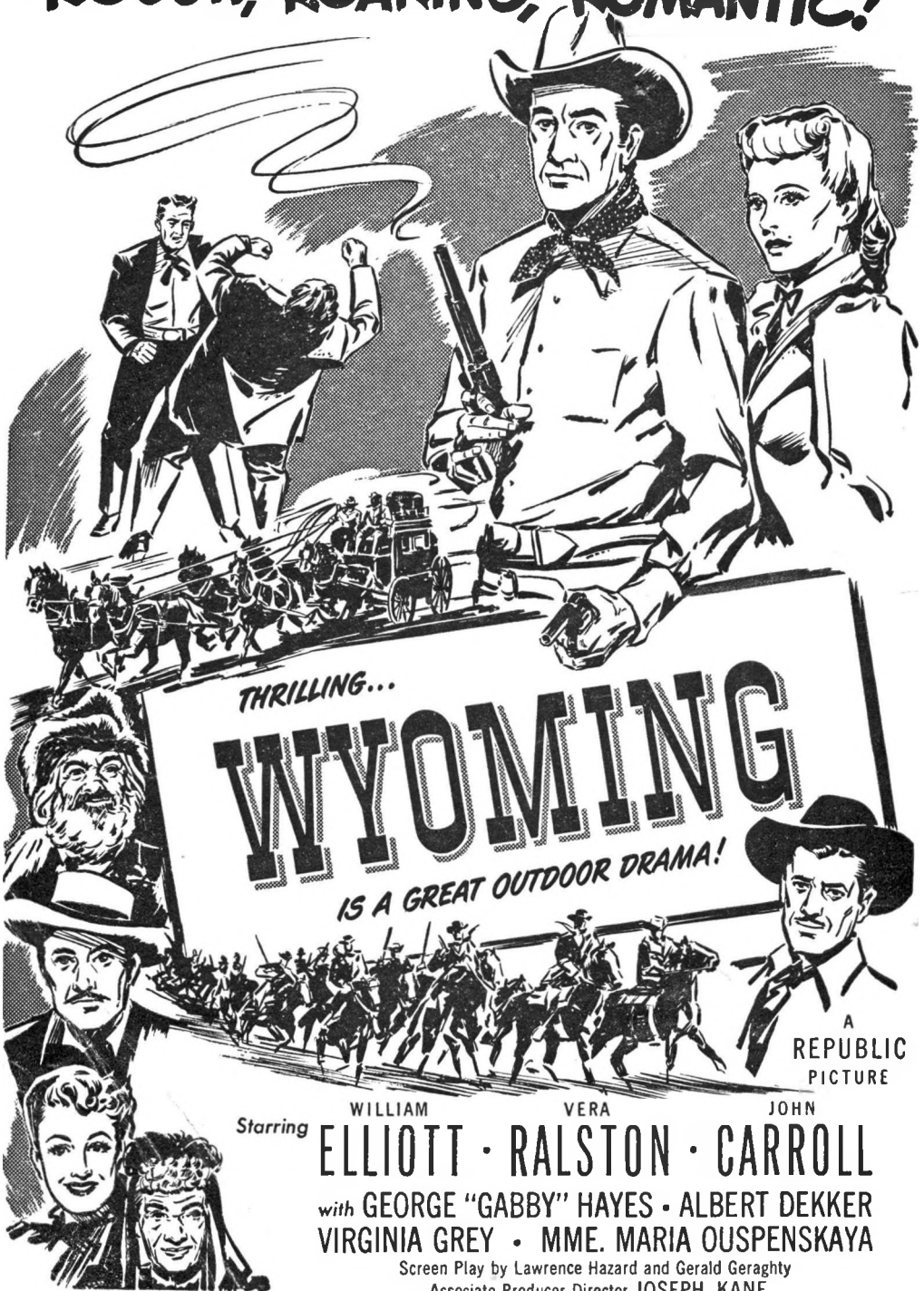
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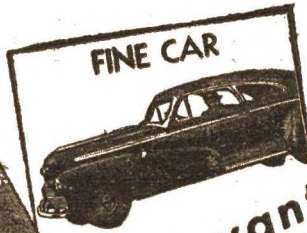
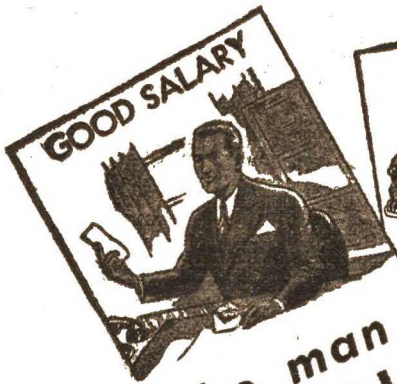
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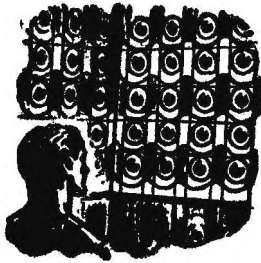
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Vol. XXXI, No. 2

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- THE IRRITATED PEOPLE**.....Ray Bradbury 90
This was war—grim, deadly war—but not a shot was fired

A Department

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Cover Painting by Earle Bergey—Illustrating "The Timeless Tomorrow"

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WITH mankind's first journey to the planets if not the stars apparently set for the very near future, his preoccupation with the heavenly bodies over a minimum of some five thousand years is a matter of grave interest. Astronomy is beyond doubt the oldest of all sciences, is one which antedates historical records and may well be much more ancient than the five thousand years assigned it in the previous sentence.

Indeed, if the adherents of Atlantis and Mu are to be believed (personally we salt well before using) astronomy was an established and formalized science at the time when the only hallmarks of European civilization were those crude color sketches of buffalo, cattle and the like which our Cro-Magnon forebears delighted in putting on the walls and ceilings of their cave apartments.

Even more interesting is the fact that astronomy was so widespread—not only the Chaldeans and the Chinese practised it with amazing rationality and understanding, but it was a large part of the cultures of the ancient Egyptians, the Melanesians and the more recent but equally primitive Mayans of Central America.

The Shu King

According to the Britannica, the Emperor Yao of China issued an order about 2300 B.C. re-regulating astronomical practises, thus suggesting that the science not only existed but had existed long enough to have fallen into considerable confusion before that time. The *Shu King*, a collection of documents, records the incident, and the *Shu King* was regarded as ancient stuff in the time of Confucious (540-478 B.C.)

Although Chinese study of the stars was based on the illusion that the world was flat, yet thousands of years ago Celestial star gazers established the full year as being $365\frac{1}{4}$ days long and promulgated the circle upon a like number of degrees. They took cometary records as far away as 2296 B.C. and constructed instruments which, built in

1280 for Kublai Khan, were still in operation at Peking in 1881. Damned clever, these . . .

Such development in so many parts of the world seems to indicate that man, from his earliest intelligent days, has been preoccupied by the heavenly bodies and by their apparent effect on his life, as exemplified by the seasons. In his effort to interpret their apparent immediate causality of earthly conditions, he developed astrology, whose kingly belief is that everything that happens is predetermined or at least influenced by the position of the stars and planets.

The tenacity with which this premise has lingered in the human credo is attested to by the recent successes of astrologers Evangeline Adams and Myra Kingsley and their colleagues and successors, who have provided through their "charts" the determining factor in many a modern big business deal.

Quest to the Stars

But astrology is a minor phase of man's quest to the stars—a quest that only now seems to be approaching fulfillment. And, backed by so many centuries of universal interest, it is easy to understand how the conquest of space exerts a magnetic pull for the adventurous minded beyond any other quest of history.

Not only will the first successful traveler to other worlds find awaiting him on his return a welcome which will make those accorded Columbus, Magellan, and Drake seem puny by comparison—but as well as power and riches he will have the intense satisfaction of having put an end to the speculations of mankind since he first tended flocks at night in the fields and watched the miracle of the firmament above him.

Beyond Prophecy

What the completion of such a voyage, the discovery of another world which will support humanity, either with or without artificial aids, will have upon this sadly disorgan-

(Continued on page 8)

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THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 6)

ized globe of ours is beyond prophecy. The discovery of the Americas at the end of the fifteenth century was as nothing beside it.

Such a voyage may very probably come within the next two decades or so—which makes this era, for all of its self-inflicted horrors, a pretty fascinating time to be alive. Perhaps some of us involved in the writing or reading of this column may meet on Mars or Venus in days to come. We may even quaff a draft of corrosive and insidious liquor called Xeno. Stranger things have happened!

OUR NEXT ISSUE

WHEN next we appear it will be in the inaugural issue of 1948—which we profoundly hope will be a year of further progress in the not-always-easy effort of combining the fantastic, the prophetic and the definitely human with what is sometimes referred to as reader entertainment. At any rate, we'll be in there with the old college try and, if our authors support us as worthily as they have done in the year just past, we shall not have occasion to worry about you who read their efforts.

Bryce Walton, whose work is not unknown to readers of this and other sf magazines, opens the book with a fine short novel of time to come, **THE SLEEPER IS A REBEL**. This is the story of Deker and his effort to find in the future a civilization and way of life better than that in which he finds himself.

Deker is put to sleep rather than to death in a commutation of the death sentence he has received and, after a slumberous millennium, awakens to find the regimentation to which he objected has been supplanted by superstitious barbarism—a barbarism which worships him as a god.

Defeated, he re-enters his sleep and awakens to find—but what he finds is the crux of this fine story, one which should attract considerable attention from science fiction fans the world over. An engrossing tale by one of the ablest of the newer crop of sf authors.

Edmond Hamilton, the old master himself, has come up with a brilliant novelet of nuclear experimentation on the moon, entitled **TRANSURANIC**, which is the narrative of future scientist Drummond, one of a small group of physicists whose study of atomic transmutation has been transferred to the moon for the safety of Earth.

Element 144 was the source of the trouble. A new element, it developed alarming potentialities, including a personality whose strength made pressure gauges run wild and produced a sort of catalepsy among those

(Continued on page 10)

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THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 8)

who ventured too close to its radiations.

It had other qualities as well—and upon these hangs this ingenious tale. Hamilton is in top form in TRANSURANIC—which is enough said.

Bucolic genius Bud Gregory, our not-so-old friend, is also on hand in THE SEVEN TEMPORARY MOONS by William Fitzgerald, climactic fourth novelet in what has become a classic series. And this time he is battling, aided by Dr. Murfree, enemies so fantastic that officialdom is unable to conceive of them much less to combat them, when their work of destruction on Earth really gets under way.

Fitzgerald has, in our not-so-humble opinion, come up with the best story he has ever written in this one. There will be short stories, of course, fully up to our recent high level of quality in this regard. And we ourselves will be on hand to give you a look into the TWS future and to trade punches and embraces with detractor and favorable fan alike. Better get aboard when we hit the stands with the February, 1948, issue.

LETTERS FROM READERS

THE letter crop is not only large this time, but seems, on first perusal, to be more packed with interest than usual. Praise, paddlings, puns and poems are liberally sprinkled with ideas, suggestions and controversial comment. But the proof of this particular editorial pudding lies in the reading, so let's get them into print.

First letter is from an overseas friend who is well-known to most of you by his previous missives.

WORLDWIDE RESPONSE

by L. Michael Gould

Dear Sirs: In the May issue of TWS you printed a letter of mine, as a result of which I have been getting letters from all over the world. One sent me the address of your British representatives, from whom I have just received the August TWS. I have just finished reading it and felt that I had to let you know what I thought of it.

DARK DAWN, IN THE CARDS and ATOMIC were very good—Kuttner had few superiors before the war and now they seem either to be dead or not to write. What has happened to Williamson, EandO Binder, Coblenz, Ed Earl Repp, Wellman, Kummer and all the rest?

THE DEADLY DUST and NOON were good but the first would have been better if it had explained more fully how some of Gregory's devices worked. A story can have too little or too much explanation—this was definitely of the first type.

THE JET JOCKEYS and THE STROLLER were fairly good. The second saved itself by its ending. The other story, DONKEYS TO BALD PATE was, well—?!?!**%½!?! terrible.

(Continued on page 97)

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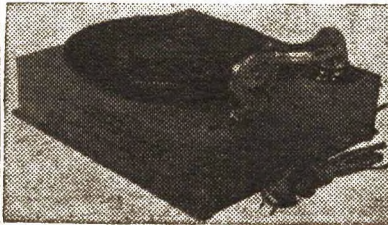
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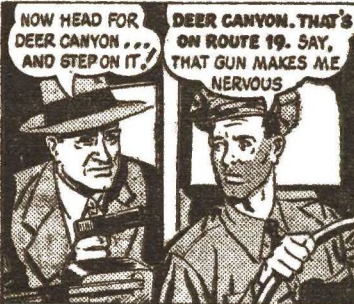
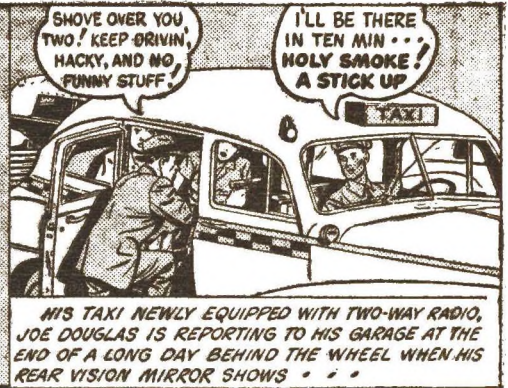
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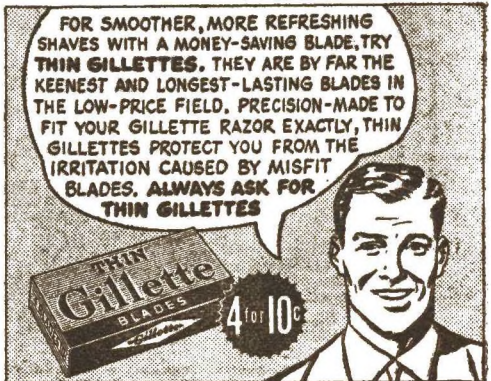
IT LOOKED LIKE TROUBLE UNTIL . . .

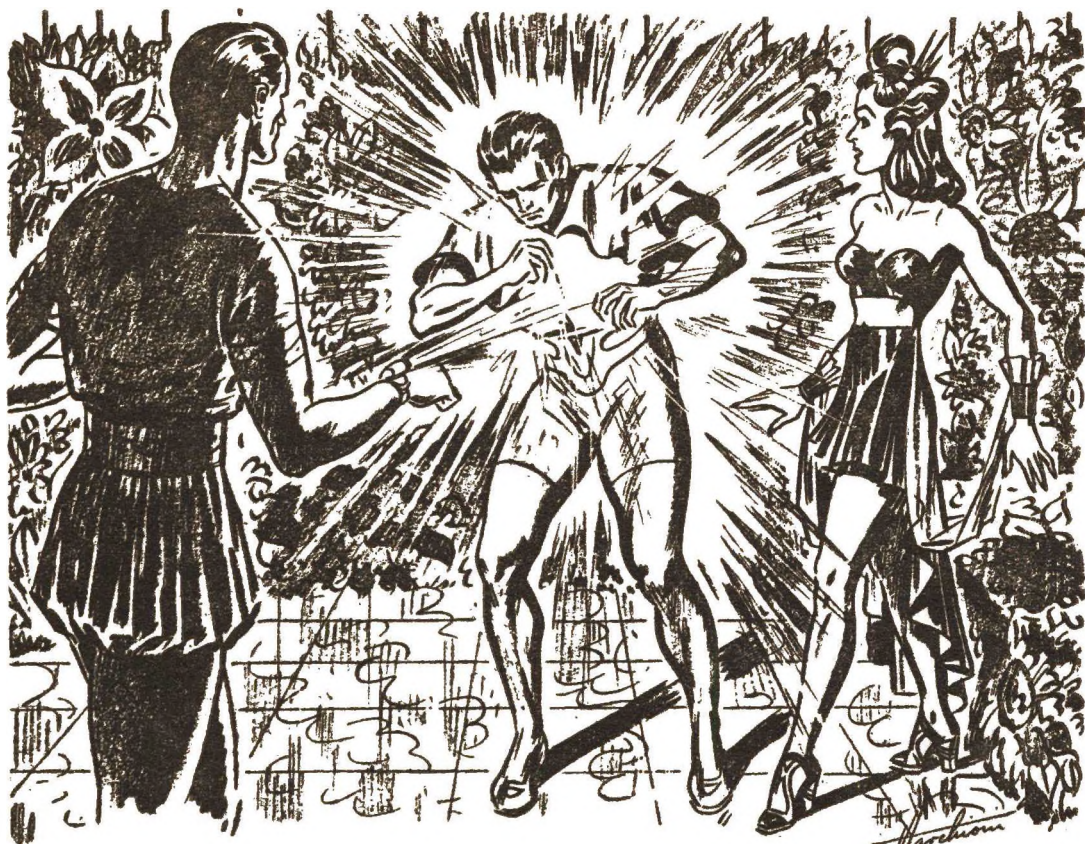


LEAVING THE OPEN RADIO MIKE ON HIS LAP, JOE REPEATS THE UNSUSPECTING THUG'S INSTRUCTIONS . . .



. . . TO HIS GARAGE, WHERE THE SUPERINTENDENT RELAYS THEM TO THE POLICE





A rush of white-hot fire seemed to burst in a blinding gush from Miller's wrist (CHAP. IV)

The Power and the Glory

By HENRY KUTTNER

The earthly magic Miller sought in the strange fairyland atop an Alaskan peak turned to nothingness in his hands, but his journey brought him a treasure beyond imagining!

CHAPTER I

Transmutation

CARRYING the coffee-pot, the Belgian shuffled out of the room. The door thumped behind him. Miller met Slade's inquiring stare and shrugged.

"So he's crazy," Miller said.

Slade drew down the corners of his thin

mouth. "Maybe he is. But I've got other sources of information, remember. I'm sure there's—something—up on Peak Seven Hundred. Something plenty valuable. You're going to find it for me." His teeth clicked on the last word.

"Am I?" Miller said sourly.

"Suit yourself. Anytime you feel like it you can go back to the States." There was a threat in the way he said it.

AN AMAZING COMPLETE NOVEL

Miller said, "Sure. And then you send a few telegrams . . . It was a sweet little frame you fixed up on me. A murder rap—"

"Well," Slade interrupted, "that happened to be a frame. I've got to protect myself, though, in case you ever want to turn State's evidence."

"I've done your dirty work for ten years," Miller growled. "It's too late now to try crossing you up. But we're both guilty of one particular murder, Slade. A guy named Miller who was an honest lawyer, ten years ago. I feel sorry for the poor sucker."

Slade's strong, implacable face turned away from him.

"The man with the gun has the advantage. Up on Peak Seven Hundred there's the biggest gun in the world—I think. Something's sending out terrific power-radiations. I'm no scientist, but I've got men working for me who are. If I can get that—weapon—from the Peak, I can write my own ticket."

Miller looked at him curiously. He had to admit Slade's strength, his powerful will. Head of a slightly criminal and completely unscrupulous political empire for a decade now, Slade was growing restive, reaching out for new worlds to conquer.

Word of this power-source on the peak in Alaska had sounded fantastic even back in the States but it seemed to fascinate Slade, who could afford to indulge his whims. And he could afford to trust Miller—to a certain extent. Miller was in Slade's hands and knew it.

They both looked up as the Belgian came back into the room, carrying a fresh bottle of whiskey. Van Hornung was drunk and well aware of his own drunkenness. He peered at them from under the huge fur cap he wore even indoors.

"*Could man be drunk forever with liquor, love and fights—*" he murmured, hooking out a chair with his foot. "Ah well, it doesn't matter now. Have another drink, gentlemen."

Miller glanced at Slade, then leaned forward across the table.

"About Peak Seven Hundred, now," he said. "I wish you'd—"

The Belgian slapped a fat hand on the table. "You ask me about Seven Hundred. Very well, then—listen. I would not tell you before—I did not wish you to die. Now I am drunker and, I think, wiser. It does not matter whether a man lives or dies.

"For twenty years I have been neither

alive nor dead. I have not thought nor felt emotion nor lived like a man. I have eaten and drunk and tried to forget. If you wish to go to the Peak I'll tell you the way. It's all quite futile, you see."

He drank. Miller and Slade exchanged glances in silence.

"If you go," Van Hornung said, "you will leave your soul behind you—as I did. We are not the dominant race, you see. We try to achieve the summits but we forget that there may already be dwellers on the peaks. Oh yes, I will tell you the way to the Peak if you like. But if you live you will not care about anything any more."

Miller glanced again at Slade, who gestured impatiently.

"I'll take a chance on that," Miller said to the Belgian. "Tell me the way."

* * * * *

In the dim twilight of the arctic noon Miller followed his Inuit guides up the snowy foothills toward Seven Hundred. For many days they had traveled, deeper and deeper into this dry, sub-zero silence, muffled in snow. The guides were nervous. They knew their arctic gods, animistic, watchful, resented intrusion into sacred areas like Peak Seven Hundred. In their fur-hooded Esquimaux faces oriental eyes watched Miller mistrustfully.

He was carrying his gun now. Two of the Innuits had deserted already, in the depths of the long nights. These two remained and hated him, and went on only because their fear of his gun was greater—so far—than their fear of the gods on Seven Hundred.

The Peak lifted great sheer cliffs almost overhead. There was no visible way of scaling it. But the Innuits were hurrying ahead as if they had already sighted a clearly marked trail. Miller quickened his steps, a vague uneasiness beginning to stir in his mind.

Then the foremost Esquimaux dropped to his knees and began to scabble in the snow. Miller shouted, hearing his own voice come back thin and hollow from the answering peaks. But when he reached the two, one of them looked up over his furclad shoulder and smiled a grim smile. In his native tongue he spoke one of the strange compound words that can convey a whole sentence.

"*Ariartokasuaromarotit-tog,*" he said. "Thou too wilt soon go quickly away." There was



In the center of the room, hanging in a filigreed framework, which it did not seem to touch, a clear transparent cube floated free (CHAP. VI)

threat and warning and satisfaction in the way he said it. His fur mitten patted something in the snow.

Miller bent to look. An iridescent pathway lay there, curving up around a boulder and out of sight, rough crystal surfaces that caught the light with red and blue shadows. Here in the white, silent world of the high peaks it looked very beautiful and strange. Miller knelt and ran a gloved hand over it, feeling even through the leather a slight tingling. . . .

"Erubescite!" he murmured to himself, and smiled. It meant copper, perhaps gold. And it was an old vein. The color spoke of long exposure. There was nothing strange about finding a vein of erubescite in the mountains—the interpenetrating cubes twinned on an octahedral plane were common enough in certain mining regions. Still, the regularity of the thing was odd. And that curious tingling. . . .

It looked like a path.

The Inuits were watching him expectantly. Moving with caution, Miller stepped forward and set his foot on the path. It was uneven, difficult to balance on. He took two or three steps along the iridescent purple slope, and then. . . .

And then he was moving smoothly upward, involuntarily, irresistibly. There was a strange feeling in his feet and up the long muscles at the back of his legs. And the mountain was sliding away below him. Peaks, snow-slopes, fur-clad men all slipped quietly off down the mountainside, while at Miller's feet a curving ribbon of iridescence lengthened away.

"I'm dreaming!" was his first thought. And his head spun with the strange new motion so that he staggered—and could not fall. That tingling up his legs was more than a nervous reactions, it was a permeation of the tissues.

"Transmutation!" he thought wildly, and clutched in desperation at the slipping fabric of his own reason. "The road's moving," he told himself as calmly as he could. "I'm fixed to it somehow. Transmutation? Why did I think of transmutation? I can't move my feet or legs—they feel like stone—like the substance of the road."

The changing of one element into another—lead into gold, flesh into stone. . . . The Inuits had known. Far away he could see the diminishing dots that were his guides slide around a curve and vanish. He ges-

tured helplessly, finding even his arms growing heavy, as if that strange atomic transmutation were spreading higher and higher through his body.

Powerless, one with the sliding path, he surrendered himself without a struggle to that mounting glide. Something stronger than himself had him in a grip that seemed purposeful. He could only wait and . . . it was growing difficult to think. Perhaps the change was reaching to his brain by now. He couldn't tell.

He only knew that for a timeless period thereafter he did not think any more about anything. . . .

THIN laughter echoed through his mind. A man's voice said, "But I am bored, Tsi. Besides, he won't be hurt—much. Or if he is, what does it matter?"

Miller was floating in a dark void. There was a strangeness about the voice he could not analyze. He heard a woman answer and in her tone was a curious likeness to the man's.

"Don't, Brann," she said. "You can find other—amusements."

The high laughter came again. "But he's still new. It should be interesting."

"Brann, please let him go."

"Be silent, Tsi. I'm master here. Is he awake yet?"

A pause. "No, not yet. Not for a while yet."

"I can wait." The man sighed. "I've preparations to make, anyhow. Let's go, Tsi."

There was a long, long pause. The voices were still.

Miller knew he was floating in nothingness. He tried to move and could not. Inertia still gripped his body but his brain was free and functioning with a clarity that surprised him. It was almost as if that strange transmutation had changed his very brain-tissues to something new and marvelous.

"Transmutation," he thought. "Lead into gold—flesh into stone—that's what I was thinking about when—when I stopped thinking. When that sort of change happens, it means the nuclear charge in the atoms of one substance or the other has to change too. The tingling when I touched the road—was that when it happened?"

But he paused there, knowing there was no answer. For when had a man ever before felt the shifting from flesh to crystal take place in his own body?

If it had happened that way, then it must have been a force like the coulomb forces themselves that welded him into one with the moving road—the all but irresistible forces that hold the electrons in their orbits and rivet all creation into a whole.

And now—what?

"There are two methods of transmutation," he told himself clearly, lying there in the dark and groping for some answer to the thing that was happening to him.

"Rationalize it," his mind seemed to say, "or you'll go mad with sheer uncertainty. Reason it out from what you know. A chemical element is determined by the number of electrons around the nucleus—change that and you change the element. But the nucleus, in turn, determines by its charge the number of electrons it can control. If the nuclear charge is changed, then this—this crystalline state—is permanent.

"But if it isn't, then that must mean there's constant bombardment that knocks off or adds electrons to whatever touches that road. The change wouldn't be permanent because the original charge of the nucleus remains constant. After awhile the extra electrons would be dropped, or others captured to restore the balance, and I'd be normal again. That must be the way of it," he told himself, "because Van Hornung came this way. And he went back again—normal. Or was he really normal?"

The question echoed without answer in his brain. Miller lay quiet a moment longer and then began to try once more to stir his inert body. This time, a very little, he felt muscles move. . . .

What seemed a long while later, he found he could open his eyes. Very cautiously he looked around.

CHAPTER II

Tsi

HE WAS alone. He lay on something hard and flat. A dome of crystal arched overhead, not very high, so that he seemed in effect to lie in a box of crystal—a coffin, he thought grimly, and sat up with brittle care. His muscles felt as stiff as if the substance of the iridescent roadway still permeated his flesh.

The dome seemed to have strange properties, for all he saw through it was curiously distorted and colored with such richness it almost hurt the eyes to gaze upon what lay beyond.

He saw columns of golden trees upon which leaves moved and glittered in constantly changing prisms of light. Something like smoke seemed to wreath slowly among the trees, colored incredibly. Seen through the dome about him the color of the smoke was nameless. No man ever saw that hue before nor gave a name to it.

The slab on which he sat was the iridescent purple of the road. If it had carried him here, he saw no obvious way in which it could have left him lying on the crystal coffin. Yet, clearly, this was the end of the moving roadway and, clearly too, the forces which had welded him to it were gone now.

The unstable atoms created in the grip of that strange force had shaken off their abnormality and reverted to their original form. He was himself again but stiff, dizzy and not sure whether he had dreamed the voices. If he had, it was a nightmare. He shivered a little, remembering the thin, inhuman laughter and its promise of dreadful things.

He got up, very cautiously, looking around. As nearly as he could tell through the distorting crystal there was no one near him. The coffin stood in a grove of the golden trees and, except for the mist and the twinkling leaves, nothing moved. He put out a tentative hand to push the crystal up.

His hand went through it. There was a tinkling like high music, ineffably sweet, and the crystal flew into glittering fragments that fell to the ground in a second rain of sound. The beauty of it for a moment was almost pain. He had never heard such music before. It was almost more beautiful than any human being should be allowed to hear, he thought confusedly. There are sensations so keen they can put too great a strain upon human nerves.

Then he stood there unprotected by the dome and looked around him at the trees and the mist and saw that the dome had made no difference. These incredible colors were no distortions—they were real. He took a tentative step and found the grass underfoot so soft that even through his shoe-soles he could feel its caress.

The very air was exquisitely cool and hushed, like the air of a summer dawn, al-

most liquid in its translucence. Through it the winking of the prism-leaves was so lovely to look at that he turned his eyes away, unable to endure the sight for more than a moment.

This was hallucination. "I'm still somewhere back there in the snow," he thought. "Delirium—that's it. I'm imagining this." But if it were a dream, then Van Hornung had known it too, and men do not dream identical dreams. The Belgian had warned him.

He shook his shoulders impatiently. Even with all this before him he could not quite bring himself to believe Van Hornung's story. There was a quality of dream about this landscape, as if all he saw were not in reality what it seemed, as if this grass of ineffable softness were—and he knew it was—only crusted snow, as if those cliffs he could glimpse among the trees were really the bare crags of Peak Seven Hundred, and everything else delirium. He felt uneasily that he was really lying somewhere asleep in the snow, and must wake soon, before he froze.

That high, thin laughter rang suddenly through the air. In spite of himself Miller felt his heart lurch and he whirled to face the sound with a feeling of cold terror congealing him. It was odd how frightening the careless voice had been, talking impersonally of its pleasures.

A little group of men and women was coming toward him through the trees. He could not guess which of them had laughed the familiar laughter. They wore brilliantly colored garments of a subtle cut that hung like a toga or a sari, with a wonderful sophistication of line. The colors were incredible.

Miller blinked dazedly, trying in vain to find names for those shimmering hues that seemed to combine known colors into utterly unknown gradations and to draw from the range of colors above and below the spectrum as we see it.

A woman said, "Oh, he's awake," and a man laughed pleasantly and said, "Look how surprised he is!" All of them smiled and turned bright, amused faces to Miller.

He said something—he never remembered what—and stopped in sheer shock at the harsh dissonance of his own voice. It was like an ugly discord tearing through smooth, lilting arpeggios of harmony. The faces of the others went blank briefly, as though they had concentrated on something else to

avoid hearing the sound. The woman Miller had first noticed lifted her hand.

"Wait," she said. "Listen to me, for a moment. There is no need to speak—*aloud*." A faint distaste was in her tone. Her . . . tone? That could not be right. No voice was ever so sweetly musical, so gently harmonious.

Miller looked at her. Her face was a small pale triangle, lovely and elfin and strange, with enormous violet eyes and piled masses of hair that seemed to flow in winding strands through one another. Each strand was of a different pastel hue, dusty green or pale amethyst or the yellow of sunshine on a hazy morning. It was so in keeping, somehow, that Miller felt no surprise. That bizarre coiffure fitted perfectly with the woman's face.

He opened his mouth again, but the woman—it shocked him a little, and he wondered that it did not shock him even more—was suddenly beside him. A split-second before she had been ten feet away.

"You have much to learn," she said. "First, though—remember not to speak. It isn't necessary. Simply frame your thoughts. There's a little trick to it. No—keep your mouth closed. Think. Think your question."

Her lips had moved slightly, but merely for emphasis. And surely normal vocal cords could not have been capable of that unearthly sweetness and richness of tone, with its amazing variations and nuances. Miller thought, "Telepathy. It must be telepathy."

They waited, watching him inquiringly.

The woman said, silently, "Think—to me. Frame the thought more carefully. The concepts must be rounded, complete. Later you may use abstracts but you can't do that yet. All I can read is a cloudiness. . . ."

Miller thought carefully, word by word, "Is this telepathy?"

"Still cloudiness," she said. "But it's clearer now. You were never used to clear thinking. Yes, it is telepathy."

"But how can I—where am I? What is this place?"

She smiled at him, and laughter moved through the group. "More slowly. Remember, you have just been born."

"Just—what?"

And thoughts seemed to fly past him like small bright insects, grazing the edges of his consciousness. A half-mocking, friendly thought from one of the men, a casual comment from another.

Brann, Miller thought, remembering. What about Brann? Where is he?

THERE was dead silence. He had never felt such stillness before. It was of the mind, not physical. But he felt communication, super-sensory, rapid and articulate, between the others. Abruptly the rainbow-haired woman took his arm, while the others began to drift off through the prism-leaves and the golden trees.

She pulled him gently away under the tinkling foliage, through the drifts of colored mists. Brushing violet fog before them with her free hand, she said, "We would rather not mention Brann here, if we can avoid it. To speak of him sometimes—brings him. And Brann is in a dangerous mood today."

Miller looked at her with a frown of concentration. There was so much to ask. In that strange mental tongue that was already coming more easily to him, he said, "I don't understand any of this. But I know your voice. Or rather, your—I'm not sure what you'd call it."

"The mental voice, you mean? Yes, you learn to recognize them. It's easy to imitate an audible voice but the mental one can't be imitated. It's part of the person. So you remember hearing my thoughts before? I thought you were asleep."

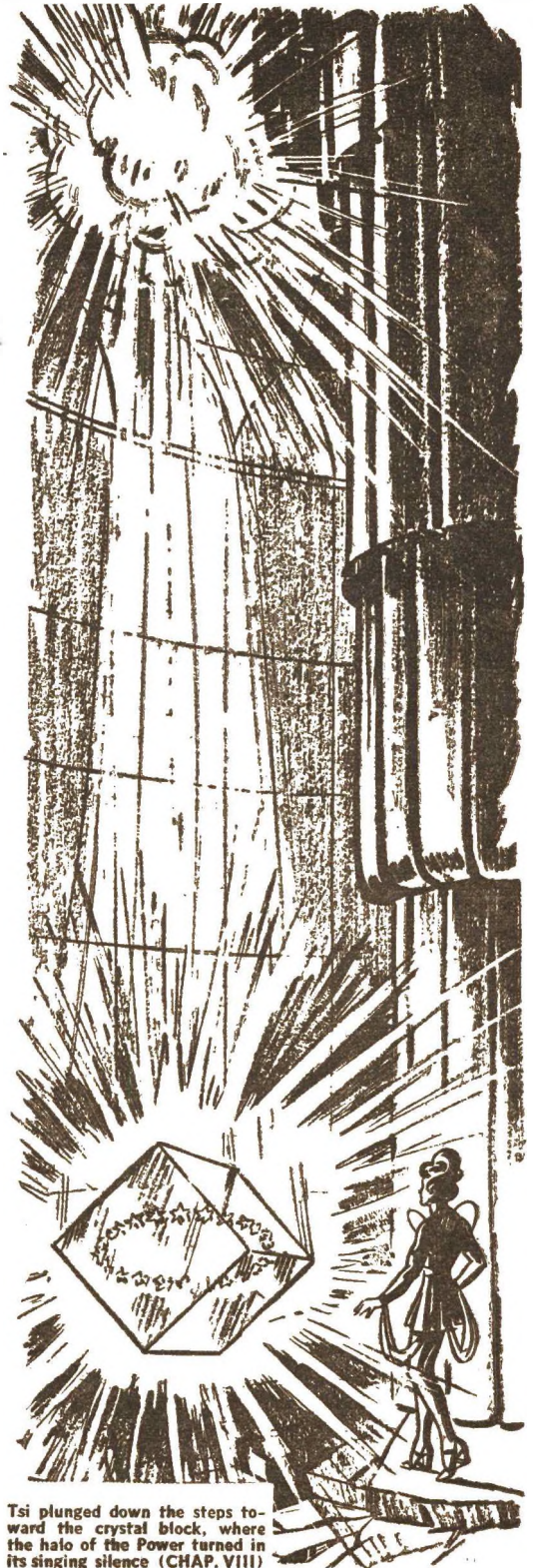
"You're Tsi."

"Yes," she said and pushed aside a tinkling screen of the prisms. Before them stood a low rampart of light—or water. Four feet high, it ran like liquid but it glowed like light. Beyond it was blue sky and a sheer, dizzying drop to meadows hundreds of feet below. The whole scene was almost blindingly vivid, every lovely detail standing out sharp and clear and dazzling.

He said, "I don't understand. There are legends about people up here, but not about—this. This vividness. Who are you? What is this place?"

Tsi smiled at him. There was warmth and compassion in the smile, and she said gently, "This is what your race had once, and lost. We're very old, but we've kept—" Abruptly she paused, her eyes brightening suddenly with a look of terror.

She said, "Hush!" and in the mental command there was a wave of darkness and silence that seemed to blanket his mind. For no reason his heart began to pound with nervous dread. They stood there motionless for an instant, mind locked with mind in a



Tsi plunged down the steps toward the crystal block, where the halo of the Power turned in its singing silence (CHAP. VIII)

stillness that was more than absence of sound—it was absence of thought. But through the silence Miller caught just the faintest echo of that thin, tittering laugh he had heard before, instinct with cold, merciless amusement.

The prism leaves sang around them with little musical tinklings. From the sunlit void stretching far below bird-song rippled now and then with a sweetness that was almost painful to hear. Then Tsi's mind relaxed its grip upon Miller's and she sighed softly.

"It's all right now. For a moment I thought Brann . . . but no, he's gone again."

"Who is Brann?" Miller demanded.

"The lord of this castle. A very strange creature—very terrible when his whims are thwarted. Brann is—he cares for nothing very much. He lives only for pleasure and, because he's lived so long and exhausted so many pleasures, the devices he uses now are not very—well, not very pleasant for anyone but Brann. There was a warp in him before his birth, you see. He's not quite—not quite of our breed."

"He's from the outside world? Human?" As he said it Miller knew certainly that the woman before him was not human, not as he understood the term.

But Tsi shook her head. "Oh, no. He was born here. He's of our breed. But not of our norm. A little above in many ways, a little below in others. *Your race*—there was faint distaste and pity in the thought, but she let it die there, unelaborated.

"You can't understand yet," she went on. "Don't try. You see, you suffered a change when you came. You aren't quite as you were before. Were you ever able to communicate telepathically?"

"No, of course not. But I don't feel any different. I—"

"A blind man, given sight, wouldn't realize it until he opened his eyes. And he might be dazzled at first. You're at a disadvantage. I think it would be best for you to get away. Look there, across the valley."

She lifted an arm to point. Far off across the dazzling meadows hills rose, green in the sunlight, shimmering a little in the warm, clear light. On the height of the highest a diamond glitter caught the sun.

"My sister," Tsi said, "has that palace over there. I think Orelle would take you in, if only to thwart Brann. You aren't safe here. For your sake, it was a pity the port of entry

you reached was here in Brann's castle."

"There have been others, then?" Miller asked. "A man named Van Hornung—did he come here?"

SHE shook her head, the rainbow hair catching the sunlight. "Not here. There are many castles in our land and most of them live at peace within and without. But not Brann's."

"Then why are you here?" Miller asked bluntly.

She smiled an unhappy smile. "Most of us came because we felt as Brann does—we did not care very much any more. We wanted to follow our pleasures, being tired of other pursuits after so many thousands of years. All except me."

"Thousands of . . . What do you mean? Why are you here then?"

Her mouth turned down at the corners in a rueful smile.

"Well—perhaps I too was warped before birth. I can't leave Brann now. He needs me. That doesn't matter to you. Brann's dangerous—his heart is set on—on experiments that will need you to complete. We won't talk about that."

Miller said, "I came here for a purpose."

"I know. I read part of your mind while you lay asleep. You're hunting for a treasure. We have it. Or perhaps I should say Orelle has it." The violet eyes darkened. She hesitated.

"Perhaps I'm sending you to Orelle for a purpose," she said. "You can do me a great service there—and yourself too. That treasure you seek is—should be partly mine. You think of it as a power-source. To me it's a doorway into something better than any of us knows. . . ."

"Our father made it, long ago. Orelle has it now, though by rights she and I should share it. If you find a way to get that treasure, my friend, will you bring it to me?"

Long-grooved habit-patterns in Miller's mind made him say automatically, "And if I do?"

She smiled. "If you don't," she said, "Brann will have you sooner or later. If I can get it I think I can—control Brann. If I can't—well, you will be the first sufferer. I think you know that. You'll do well to persuade Orelle if you can. Now—I've made a bargain with Brann. Don't ask me what. You may learn later.

"Go to Orelle, watch your chance and be

wary. If you ask for the treasure you'll never get near it. Better not to speak of it but wait and watch. No one can read your mind unless you will it, now that you're learning telepathy, but watch too that you let nothing slip from your thoughts to warn her."

"You want me to take her hospitality and then rob her?"

Distress showed in Tsi's face. "Oh, no! I ask only what's mine, and even that only for long enough to control Brann. Then you may return the treasure to Orelle or strike a bargain with her over it. Five minutes with that in my hands is all I ask! Now here is something I've made for you out of your own possession. Hold out your wrist."

Staring, he obeyed. She unclosed her hand to show him his wristwatch in her palm. Smiling, she buckled the strap around his arm. "It isn't quite as it was. I changed it. If you need me concentrate on this and speak to me in your mind. I'll hear."

There were countless questions still unasked. Miller took a deep breath and began to formulate them in his mind. And then—Tsi vanished! The earth was gone from underfoot and he spun through golden emptiness, dropping, falling. The water-wall hung beneath him. He floated in midair a hundred feet above the crag-bordered stream at the cliff's bottom!

Panic struck him. Then Tsi's reassuring thought said, "You are safe. This is tele-transportation."

He scarcely heard. An age-old instinctive fear chilled his middle. For a million years men have been afraid of falling. He could not now control that fear.

Slowly he began to drop. He lost sight of Tsi and the golden trees and then of the water-wall.

Under him the stream broadened.

He sank down at an angle—and felt solid ground beneath his feet.

There was silence except for the whispering murmur of the stream.

his cheeks and he raised his face to meet that satisfying chill. It seemed to rouse him. He began to realize that he had been half asleep during the interview with Tsi, as though the mists of his slumber had still blanketed his senses. Otherwise he would scarcely have accepted this miraculous business.

Or was there another reason?

He felt a desperate impulse to see Tsi again. She could answer his questions, if she would. And she had been the first friendly face he had seen in this terribly strange land.

He looked up and willed himself to rise.

Impossible, of course. *My own bootstraps*, he thought, with a wild sort of amusement. Were his feet pressing less heavily on the rock beneath him?

And then, from above, came a high, thin laughter that was not truly audible—Brann!

Even before the mental voice came, that malicious, slow thought sent its familiar radiations before it. Something as recognizable as sound or color—more so!—fell down the cliff and crept coldly into Miller's brain. He knew that unheard voice.

"You had better not come up," it said.

Miller stood motionless, waiting. Instinctively he had fallen into the fighter's crouch. But how useless ordinary precautions would be against this super-being!

He tried to close his mind.

"Go to Orelle, then," it said. "I've made my bargain with Tsi and I'll keep it. But she's a fool. She always tries to close her mind to unpleasant things. She'll never really admit we're at war with her sister. As long as she doesn't name it *war*, she thinks it's something else."

Again the high laughter.

"Go to Orelle," Brann said. "I'm winning too easily. Perhaps they can use another fighter. Then they may be able to give me more of a battle. Though, if I chose, I could crush you with a thought—turn the air itself into a weight that would flatten you in an instant. But Orelle may think of a use for you. I can't, except to divert myself with your reactions to certain experiments."

The unheard voice grew carelessly casual.

"Too easy a victory is no victory at all. Go away."

Anger stirred in Miller at that calm assumption of superiority. Brann was thoroughly justified, of course, yet no man likes to be discounted utterly. With all his power Miller willed himself to rise, to float upward as easily as he had floated down—and this

CHAPTER III

The World That Couldn't Be

MILLER sat down on a rock and held his head in his hands. His thoughts were swimming. Cold, fresh air blew against

time he was certain that his feet lost contact with the earth.

Then a weight like a great stone crushed down on him. Only for an instant did that frightful, unbearable pressure continue, while the veins swelled on Miller's forehead and he heard his breath coming in deep, rasping gasps as he tried to resist the onslaught.

He went to his knees—down till he lay on his back, prostrate, helpless beneath that furious assault of the air itself. A screaming river of wind thundered down and the thin bushes in the gorge stirred and small landslides began as the air-river rushed in hurricane force from above.

Brann laughed idly again and obviously lost interest. The pressure vanished. Sweating, breathing hard, Miller struggled to his feet. He did not try teleportation again. For a moment he stared up at the cliff-rim. Then he turned and began to walk up the gorge in the direction of Orelle's palace. His mouth was thin and his eyes held an angry glow.

So Brann was winning too easily. Well—perhaps something could be done about that!

Far off across the glimmering valley a green hillside rolled high against the sky. The diamond twinkle that was the castle he must reach grew larger as he walked—grew larger with abnormal speed. Miller looked down and was surprised to find that measured by the pebbles and the flowers underfoot he was taking increasingly long steps.

Seven-league boots, he thought, as he found himself striding like a giant through the softness of the grass. The earth slid by beneath his feet with dream-like fluidity. Now the diamond glitter of Orelle's palace was dividing into hundreds of tinier glitters and he saw the walls of pale-colored glass rising fantastically upon the green height of the grass-clad mountain. A palace of glass—or ice.

"Ice," he thought suddenly. "Ice and snow and rocks. That's all there is here. This is a dream. There's no such world—there couldn't be."

And then reason, stirring in his mind, argued, "Why not? How do we know the limits of possibility? Out of the few simple building blocks of the universe—out of neutrons, protons, electrons—everything we know is made. How much else may there be we can't even perceive—unless transmutation takes place and the structure of a man's nuclear patterns change to let him see. . . ."

"After all, you aren't the first. There was

Van Hornung and who knows how many before him? There was Tannhauser in the magical mountain of Venusburg—there was Thomas the Rhymer under the hill in fairyland. Paradise itself sounds like a distorted tale of just such a land as this. Legend remembers. You aren't in any new world. You're only exploring a very old one, and—"

WITHOUT warning the world dropped away under his feet and all logical progression of thoughts ceased abruptly. The sky was beneath him now and the shining world whirling dizzily over and over around him. But something firmer than gravity clasped him close so that there was no vertigo, even though the earth had forsaken him. Green translucence cradled him. There was a sensation of great speed, and then—

Glass walls flashed past, spun, righted themselves gently. A solid pavement fitted itself against his soles and leveled off to the horizontal. He stood in a small, high room whose walls were row upon row of lenses, like bull's-eye panes, all looking down upon him with—eyes? Black mechanical pupils that moved whenever he moved, following him as he walked toward the nearest wall. For an instant he felt stripped and naked under that multiple scrutiny.

Then a telepathic voice said, "You come from Brann."

Miller looked around wildly. He was alone. Almost automatically he said, "No!" aloud, so that the air shivered to the harsh sound. He wasn't sure why he denied it. Brann had spoken of war.

"Don't lie," the voice said coldly. "I can see the dust of Brann's mountain on you. Do you think we can't identify a simple thing like dust from a given mountain? It streams off you like purple light in the fluorescents. You come from Brann. Are you a spy?"

"Tsi sent me," Miller said. "Take me to Orelle."

"Orelle speaks," the telepathic voice told him without emotion. "My sister loves me—but Tsi is no woman to trust. No one on Brann's mountain is worth trusting or he wouldn't be with Brann at all. What Tsi finds distasteful she denies existence. What do you want here?"

Miller hesitated, glancing around the walls at the impassive, watching eyes of the—machines? Power, he wanted to say. Give me that power-source and I'll go. But he was silent, remembering Tsi's warning.

How much of it he could believe he didn't know now but it was second nature for him to keep his own counsel until he was sure enough to act. Orelle could not read his mind. Tsi had confessed that would be impossible once he began to master telepathic communication. He would be safe enough as long as he could give the right answers.

"I'm from the outside," he offered hesitantly, thinking that hesitation and uncertainty might be his best defense until he learned more about this place. Exaggerate them, play up even more than was really genuine his bewilderment and confusion. "I—Tsi said you'd help me get oriented here."

The disembodied voice was silent for a brief, considering moment. Then it said, "I think you lie. However—are you willing to accept our search? Only after you've been proved weaponless can we admit you here."

What could he say but yes? For an instant he remembered the watch Tsi had strapped to his wrist and what she had said of it. But it was for communication only—she had said—and surely she knew that a routine search would probably be made. She wouldn't have branded him with something that would give him away to the first inspection. Or would she? What he had heard of Tsi did little to increase his confidence in her. Still . . .

"Search if you like," he said.

The room went dark. Miller, blinking in the sudden blindness, felt something like the vertigo he had not suffered in flight seize him relentlessly now he was on solid flooring. The air spun around him in a shrill diminishing vortex and it seemed to him limitless gulfs were opening underfoot and sucking him down, tight, tight, into a crushing spiral of darkness. . . .

Out of the dark lights suddenly sprang into being, cold, blue lights that struck him like cold water—struck and penetrated. Looking down, he was aghast to see his own blood coursing red through transparent veins, to see his bones stand out cleanly white in their lacings of muscle, moving startingly when he bent to stare.

The lights went out again. The darkness ceased to whirl. And then for one instant he felt all through his body an indescribable shifting, a terrible motion of inconceivable multiplicity. And in that flash of the instant he was changed.

The atoms went back into their normal pattern. That unstable isotope which was himself shed its changed form and he was as he

had always been, solid, human, normal.

It was a hideous feeling. Until that moment he had not realized how much he had changed already, what nascent, nameless senses had begun to open up in him, pushing back horizons upon glories beyond glories. It was like deafness and blindness suddenly closing in about a normal man. It was worse—it was like having all the properties of death itself imposed upon the living. Miller held his breath, closed his eyes.

He felt the shift again as the isotope form renewed itself within him. The shifting stirred in the unthinkable myriads of the nuclei that formed him. He was whole again.

Once more the vortex whirled and roared in darkness. Then the dark lifted and he was standing beside a bank of thick yellow flowers under an arched vault of glass. The floor was tiled in brilliant colors, resilient to the foot. The flowery bank rising from it might be real earth and flowers or it might be a skillful imitation. For it was also a divan.

Orelle lay upon it, smiling at him. He knew it was Orelle. He was aware, though he could not have explained how, of the telepathic emanation from her mind to his, individual as the pattern of the brain. She was beautiful—as everyone in this world seemed beautiful.

HE SAW something of Tsi's features in hers but she was not dressed with the extravagance her sister affected. She was very slender, and her graceful body was sheathed tightly in something like clear satin that covered her to the wrists and ankles and flowed in long smooth lines over the flowers she lay on. She was pulling them idly and twirling the blossoms between her fingers.

"Well, you are welcome," she said, almost reluctantly, eyeing Miller with a smile that had wryness in it. "We found no weapons, though we searched you down to the very structure of the protons. To tell you the truth, we have no reason to trust you.

"But Tsi must have had some reason for sending you here and I think we're safer coping with her schemes at first hand than goading her on to try something more subtle still. Be sure you're watched, my friend. Be careful what you do."

Miller said wryly, "I'm not likely to do anything. From what I've seen of this place, I feel helpless. Do you all have the same powers as Tsi? How many of you are there? And what—"

Orelle shrugged. "We're not used to hurry. Of course we have all the time we need. Your race doesn't—even here. I can see your curiosity. And I'll satisfy it, too. Yes, everyone here has the same powers, though naturally some are stronger than others. There is the telepathic factor, and—other things."

"Bred into your race? But what about me? I'm not your kind."

She said slowly, "A million years ago your ancestors were, though. Since then your people have gone down. It took eons to reach the peak when Atlantis and Mu were great cultures, and it will take eons more for your race to regain what they have lost. Only here, on this secret mountain, have we retained the strength of the old civilizations."

Miller said, "But what happened?"

"Oh, the usual thing. Men took weapons they weren't ready to use. In that time—try to understand this—the atomic structure of the world itself was different. You know that? That the atom can change—"

"I do indeed," Miller told her grimly. "If electrons change, or if the nucleus changes, the structure changes too."

She said, "Well, that was what happened. All earth is dull and dead now. Only here does the old special type of matter still exist. It throws off a certain radiation that makes it possible for us to be born and live as we are. In Atlantis there was experiment with nuclear structures, and transmutation."

"We have atomic power now," Miller said.

"The beginnings of it. You're merely beginning. It will be a long, long time before you stand where Atlantis once stood. First you must change the very structure of your world! Only then will you change, will the radiation-caused mutation alter you and give you the powers and senses you lost when a world went to war a millennium ago.

"The fires of matter itself moved across the planet, and where it passed, structure altered and what was bright and shining and glorious became a dull, empty thing. Men lost their specialized, hard-won powers then. But the seeds remain latent in their bodies, recessive, characteristics. Here, on the mountain, the recessive can become dominant for a little while. It is unstable, of course. . . ."

"Then—I'm like you? Tsi told me but I couldn't believe it. I'm a—a sort of super-man?"

"Every gift has its price," she said oddly. "There is beauty here but there is terror too.

You must have noticed that you see with clearer eyes—the eyes of the mind."

"Yes," he said, "I've noticed that. Things are—shining, somehow."

"It would be well if you remembered your own world," Orelle said, after a little pause. Her eyes were troubled. "Your own atomic structure has altered but that can take place only once."

A man came into view through a glassy wall that melted at his approach, and solidified again behind him. He looked no older than Orelle, a firm-fleshed, smiling man whose vari-tinted hair lay smoothly across his scalp. But his eyes were old, grey and cloudy with the mists of incalculable centuries.

CHAPTER IV

The Bomb

"O RELLE—" he began. And then the aeon-misted eyes fell upon Miller, and a look of bewildered recognition seemed to grow in them. "This man," he said uncertainly. "Should I know him, Orelle? Has he been here before, or. . . ." Suddenly the mists cleared from his eyes and he looked old no longer but resolute and certain.

"I know him!" he said in a crisp voice. "His face was in the Time Pool. It meant danger. But the likelihood was so remote that—well, I dismissed it. I didn't believe."

"What was the danger?" Orelle leaned forward anxiously, her satin skirts moving with a gentle rustle over the flowery bank where she sat.

The man shook his head. "You've seen the Time Pool, child. There are so many possibilities of the future—who can say in what ripple this man's face floated for a moment before the bubble burst? But it was danger. I remember that."

They turned in one motion and looked at Miller with wise, wary, thoughtful eyes, astonishingly alike in the two faces. He realized they must be closely akin, and both akin to Tsi, whom no one trusted far.

He said quickly, "If you can read the future you must know I'm not a man to break my promises—and I swear to you both I mean no harm."

The man made an impatient gesture. "The

future is never that clear. There is no 'must' in time—only 'perhaps'."

"Tsi sent him," Orelle said. "She must have had her reasons."

"She sent me because of Brann," Miller declared. The two nodded.

Orelle said, "Well, sometimes she's moved to save one of Brann's victims. Sometimes I think she helps him in his—call them experiments—on those he captures. She'd like us to think only whims move her. But we know the thing that lies behind all she does. Llesi and I—we know." She smiled grimly at the man beside her.

"She wants the Power," the man called Llesi said.

Miller thought to himself, "So do I," but aloud he said only, "The Power?" in a voice of innocent inquiry.

Llesi nodded, his eyes fixed speculatively upon Miller as if he gazed through the mists of incalculable years.

"A toy my brother and I once made that became far more than a toy before we were finished. Now Tsi claims her share in her father's treasure. These two are my brother's children but sometimes I think Tsi has no blood of mine in her veins."

Orelle said, "No, Llesi, she's only weak. If Brann didn't rule her so completely—"

"She'd be welcome to her heritage. But we know that to give her what she asks is to give it straight into Brann's hands. And there'd be an end to this castle and all who live here."

"Who is Brann?" Miller asked impatiently. "I've heard so much about him, I've even heard him speak. But I've never seen him. What does he look like?"

Orelle shook her head. Small bells she wore in her ears tinkled at the motion, and even the tiny sounds they made were vividly

beautiful to Miller's increasingly keen new senses.

She said, "No one has seen him except Tsi. No one but she can tell you what he is. He receives his friends only in the dark or from behind curtains. Ever since he built that castle, centuries ago, he's kept his secret hidden—whatever it may be. I should like to see him dead."

She said it without passion. "Brann is true evil, perhaps pure evil in its most flawless form. He's very wise and very powerful. I'm not sure why he chose us for his enemy but I only know now we must fight or be killed."

Miller made up his mind suddenly. "As I left his castle," he said, "Brann spoke to me from beyond the wall. He said this was a fight he would win too easily. He told me to come to you as another fighter, to make the battle more interesting."

Orelle leaned forward quickly on the flowery bank, her earrings tinkling musically. "He said that? You know, I'd have guessed the opposite.

"I'd have said Tsi sent you here knowing Brann would covet you for his experiments—knowing that with you here, he'd redouble his efforts to conquer us and drag you back. If his interest were flagging, that might be the best way to revive it against us and force her entry here. Because she'd do anything in the world to get her hands on the Power."

Llesi interrupted her in a thoughtful voice. "She might send an envoy here armed with some secret weapon Brann could devise—something that could pass even our careful searching. Remember, Orelle, I've seen this man before in the Time Pool—this man's face, and danger!"

"I've given you my word I didn't come to

[Turn page]



... ITS QUALITY

HITS THE SPOT! ★

harm you," Miller said, realizing that though he sailed close to the wind of truth in saying that, at least it was accurate as far as it went. "Still, I'd like to know more about this Power. Unless you—"

He never finished. For suddenly there was a blast of appalling sound in the room, and a rush of white-hot fire that seemed to flow down his arm and burst in a blinding gush from his wrist.

When he could see again, what he saw was stunning. For Llesi was collapsing where he stood, his knees buckling, his face strangely drained and empty as if he were dead before he struck the floor. There was a curious shimmering glow bathing him, sinking inward like a devouring acid.

Orelle was on her feet, stumbling forward, and from all around figures were closing in through the glass that melted at their approach.

Blinded and deafened by a sound that he knew was not truly audible, Miller tried to spring back.

He could not move. The white dazzling flame still poured from him upon the falling Llesi. Louder and louder that unheard, cataclysmic shout roared through the room. Now Miller felt energy of some strange sort pouring from Orelle and the others—mental power, a silent, tremendous flood that beat upon the white flame and—snuffed it like a candle.

The fire was gone. But Llesi had fallen.

A dozen men and women had crowded into the room by now, bright in their sleek rainbow garments. Two men fell to their knees beside Llesi.

Orelle had swung toward Miller. Hot rage blazed tangibly from her—tangibly, for Miller's mind winced beneath that telepathic red fury. Through the scarlet twisted a black thread—the thought and intention of death, cold black against crimson.

"Orelle!" he cried desperately. "I didn't—it was some trick!"

He could not speak, even telepathically. For he could see nothing now but Orelle's dark eyes, and they were expanding, growing into luminous pools that chilled him, and effectively paralyzed muscle and nerve and mind.

Eerily a thought that was not his own moved suddenly in his frozen brain—moved and reached out toward Orelle.

"Wait, child, wait!" the thought said. "This is Llesi speaking."

ALL must have heard it, for every head in the room turned sharply. The blinding pools that were Orelle's eyes began to fade and dimly Miller could see again. In his mind that voice of another brain said, "The bracelet on his wrist—take it!"

No one stood near Miller but he felt a violent tug at his wristwatch, saw it torn free. It sprang through the air to Orelle as if thrown by an invisible hand. She spread her fingers and received it. But she was looking at Miller.

"Llesi?" she said uncertainly, still staring into Miller's eyes. "Llesi—you hear me?"

"Yes. Wait. I must speak with this man . . . Miller . . . wait."

Orelle gestured. Llesi's body was lifted without support and floated toward the bowery couch. It sank down gently. One of the men came forward and made a quick examination.

"He isn't dead. It's stasis, of a sort. But I can't communicate with him. Try it, Orelle."

"Llesi?" Orelle's thought arrowed out. "Llesi?"

Miller roused from his stupefied amazement. That fantastic voice in his brain was speaking quietly to himself alone.

"Don't fight me. They'll kill you unless you obey me. Empty your mind, Miller. Let me speak through you. Now. . . ."

Miller listened to the thought that was not his, riding on the waves of his own telepathic mind, speaking to Orelle and the others. But he believed it spoke to himself as well.

"This must be Brann's doing," Llesi said. "The bracelet—when I guessed at a weapon the man Miller could have brought Tsi must somehow have been listening. Even our tests failed to find it, but a weapon that bracelet must have been. Well, Brann failed but only thanks to you for smothering the weapon so soon. I'm not destroyed but I think it may be a long while before I can think or move in my own body."

"But you can hear us, Llesi?" Orelle's voice was soft.

"Through this man—yes. This is a telepathic rapport with him. There must have been electronic contact at the crucial moment. Without Miller I would be cut off completely until my body mends again. I think it will in time. I know the sort of weapon Brann used. My body will have to absorb vital energy, to overcome the in-

relaxation of atomic stasis the weapon threw about me.

"Now listen, because my strength is going. The mental must draw on the physical and my body's an ember now. I must sleep and gather power. Brann will know what's happened here—depend on it, he'll strike while I'm still helpless. I must think—and rest."

Orelle said, "We can handle Brann!"

"We can handle him if I can lead you. Otherwise . . . Take no risks. Remember, my only contact with you is through this man Miller. Brann will destroy him if he can. But the sword is two-edged. Through Miller I can fight if I must. Now let me rest. I must gather my strength, and think."

The thought trembled on the air—faded—and was gone into an enormous stillness. Miller was alone again in his own brain.

Orelle stared at him, anger still bright in her mind but leashed anger now.

"How much of this have you passed on to Brann already?" she demanded.

Miller said, "I swear I didn't know I was carrying a time-bomb like that. Tsi told me it was only a communication device she'd built into my watch. I can only say I'll help you fight Brann in any way I can."

Orelle came forward with quick steps, her satin robes rustling, and took Miller's shoulders in a tight grip, reaching high with both hands to do so. Her eyes were close to his. She stared compellingly up at him and he felt the warm force of her mind probing his with angry emphasis.

"Tell me one thing—the truth," she demanded. "Are you Brann?"

CHAPTER V

The Signal

THE stars were glittering rayed circles of colored fire in the night sky. Miller lay staring for what seemed a long while, wondering vaguely what had wakened him. The wall before his bed was clear glass through which the night sky seemed to look in at him with its countless silver eyes. He had never seen the stars before, he knew now.

With his other eyes, they had been only dots of brilliance, without pattern. Now he could see that there was indeed a pattern to

their arrangement—one too vast for even his augmented mind to grasp but something he could recognize as being there, even though it lay outside the range of human understanding.

He could see colors change and glitter in the discs of light that had been only points without dimension to his old sight. He could even make out dimly the shapes of continents on one or two of the planets. And there was a strange, distant, ringing music, almost inaudible, circling through the dark vault above.

He knew now that it was no legend which told of the music of the spheres and the stars that sang together. Light-waves and sound-waves blended into a melody that was neither one nor the other, neither sight nor sound, but a beautiful medley of both.

"Men in the old days must have heard it," he thought to himself, half-asleep. "Maybe in ancient times they were still close enough to—this state—to catch the echoes of the old music. . . ."

Deep in the center of his drowsing mind a thought stirred that was not his own. "*Miller, Miller, are you awake?*"

He framed the answer with an eerie feeling of double-mindedness. "Yes, Llesi. What is it?"

"I want to talk to you. I've gathered enough strength now to last me awhile. What's been happening? Are you safe?"

Miller let a ripple of amusement run through his mind. "Thanks to you. Can you tell from my thoughts that I didn't know what I was bringing into your castle? I didn't mean to attack you."

"I believe that—with reservations. Does Orelle?"

"She thought I was Brann. She may still think so though I hope I've convinced her."

"I can't read your mind. But I must trust you—no more than I can avoid! Get up, Miller, and look toward Brann's castle. I have a feeling of danger. I think that was what roused me. Something evil is coming our way."

Conscious of a slight chill at the gravity with which Llesi spoke, Miller rose. The floor was ineffably soft to his bare feet. He stepped out into the little glass bay that formed one side of the room. From there he could look down over the valley he had traversed that day. Far off lights glimmered at the height of a sheer cliff—Brann's castle.

"Why—I can see in the dark!" he ex-

claimed in surprise, staring out at the soft, dim landscape that seemed to be lit by a sort of invisible starshine so that details were delicately visible as they had never been before.

"Yes, yes," Llesi's mental voice said impatiently. "Turn your eyes to the left—I want to see that wall of the valley. There—now right. . . ."

The commands, couched in mental terms that took only a flashing fraction of the time words would have taken were almost like reflex commands from Miller's own brain.

"I think you'd better dress and go down to the Time Pool," Llesi said at last. Miller could feel the profound uneasiness stirring in the disembodied mind that his own brain housed. "Hurry. There's no guessing what unnatural thing Brann may have shaped to attack us. He wants you, Miller. Your coming brought our war to a climax and I know now he won't stop until he gets you—or dies. It depends on you and me which thing happens."

There was a guard at Miller's door—or the glass wall that melted like a door when he approached it. Llesi's mental voice spoke and the guard nodded and followed down the long sloping ramp of the glass castle, through great, dim, echoing rooms, along corridors behind which the people of Orelle's dwelling slept.

They came out at last into a garden in the heart of the castle. Circled by glass walls, it lay dim and fragrant around the broad shallow pool in its center. Starlight shimmered in changing patterns on the water that rippled slightly in the wind.

Miller found himself glancing up toward the wall-top without being sure whether the impulse was his own or Llesi's. In a moment he knew, for there was a whispering rush and in obedience to some command from his own brain—and from Llesi's—a domed roof of glass moved across the garden, closing it in.

Now the starlight fell in prised rays through the dome. It struck the pool in somehow focused patterns and the water seemed to respond to that unimaginably light pressure.

Circles formed where the rays struck, formed and spread outward in interlocking rings that seemed to gather momentum instead of losing it, so that they were seething together in a very short time, breaking over

one another in tiny waves, tossing up bubbles and foam. The pool boiled in the cool starlight.

AND among the boiling rings there were reflections. Pictures moved chaotically through one another, so rapidly and so bewilderingly that Miller grew dizzy as he watched. Once he thought he saw Tsi's face with the rainbow hair disordered, streaming in the wind.

Once he had a glimpse of himself, seen confusingly from the back, struggling against something that seemed to tower and stoop above him but the vision rolled under again before he could focus on it and the faces of strangers floated among bubbles to replace it.

"Is it real?" he asked Llesi inaudibly. "Is this the future?"

There was an impatient movement in his own mind. Llesi, who had been studying the pictures in the profoundest silence, said, "No—yes—partly. These are the likeliest futures. No one understands fully, but the theory is that somewhere in hyperspace all possible futures work themselves out from any given point.

"And the light-rays—the pictures of all that happens—move on out into space endlessly. When the glass dome is closed starlight, falling through the moving rays, projects these pictures back into the pool for anyone to read who knows how. Men from time everlasting have tried to read the future in the stars but you can see from this how difficult it is and how unreliable even a trained mind can be when it has only this to work from.

"One decision may alter all probable futures. And those are unstable, shifting and changing—no man can know the future with any certainty. But it's possible to see dangers, sometimes, and prepare for them—though that may mean facing a worse peril later on. Wait—"

In the pool a ripple took form at the impact of a reflection and began to spread. It showed the picture of a shifting, cloudy mass moving against the translucent water—but moving with a directive purpose, Miller thought. The background took form. He saw himself and Orelle in miniature with the cloud no longer shifting but swooping purposively above them.

Another ripple collided violently with the first and the picture vanished in a burst of

bubbles. But it took shape again in the next moment, though different now, with a shift in background. The ripples raced over that image and washed it out with another, like a not-quite-identical copy. Then he saw the castle in which he stood and it was, he thought, collapsing into ruins.

That changed. He saw himself in tiny reflections, facing Tsi— And then a ripple washed across the pool in which he saw his own face and Slade's and there was something inexplicably terrible about both.

Shaken, he asked Llesi a mental question. Llesi answered him briefly.

"If part of what you just saw happens, other parts can't happen. But you saw that cloudy pillar? It appeared too often against too many backgrounds to be very far off in space or time. Brann is sending a warrior against us. Not a human warrior. I think we can expect the cloudy thing we saw quite soon, in one or another of the versions we've been watching."

"But what is it?"

"I don't know. Something dangerous—that much you can be sure of. I think we can defeat it, once we discover what it is. So far we've always been able to defeat Brann's warriors, no matter what form they had."

"So far?" Miller asked. "And then someday—what?"

Mentally Llesi shrugged. "Who knows? I, who read the future, realize better than most men that I have no way of guessing what is to come. I can see the possibilities here in the pool, I can foresee the worst dangers and prepare against them—but beyond that I can't go. No, I don't know what the outcome will be between Brann and me."

Miller said with abrupt decision, "You've looked too long in the Time Pool! You've been depending on what you see there to tell you what to do. Why not take the future into your own hands?"

There was a curious stillness in his brain at that, as if Llesi were suddenly wary and watchful. Finally the voice that shared his mind spoke cautiously.

"What do you suggest?"

"Someday, if I understand you, Brann may succeed at last in creating a kind of warrior you can't overcome. I saw this castle falling in one of those pictures in the pool, so I know it's possible—no, even probable, that this thing he's sending, or maybe the one after it, will be the one to destroy

you. It that right?"

Still caution and distrust ruled Llesi's mind, but there was reluctant interest in the mental voice that said, "Go on. What are you thinking about?"

"Brann wants one thing—the Power. Is that right?"

"The Power and yourself, now. Yes," Llesi answered.

"So he'll keep on attacking until he gets one or both. Why haven't you attacked him first?"

"Do you think we haven't tried? Brann's castle is invulnerable. We've failed and failed and failed again to force any entry by any means we know. But Brann's failed, too, against us. It's stalemate."

"It needn't be. I have an idea." Miller hesitated. "I won't tell you now. You wouldn't accept it. Later on, if things go wrong, maybe you'll be willing to listen. Maybe—"

FROM across the Time Pool, in the dimness of the garden, Orelle's mental voice said clearly, "Don't go on, Miller. Or are you really Brann?"

Miller had the curious sensation in his brain that both he and Llesi had actually moved in the center of his skull, as he spun toward the dark tree where she stood watching.

"How long have you been here, child?" Llesi said.

"Long enough. I saw the cloudy thing coming in the Pool. I know what we've got to face—but not with treachery to make it even worse than it is. Oh, Llesi, won't you let me kill him?"

"Not yet," Llesi said with a deadly sort of practicality. "Not yet, because you need me in the fight, and I'm helpless without this man. Nor am I wholly sure he can't be trusted, Orelle."

"I heard what he was trying to suggest. Something treacherous—some way to help Brann win at last. Llesi, I'm afraid! This isn't safe. I—"

A flash of soundless white light without warning illumined the garden and the whole castle around it, so that every figure stood out in abrupt silhouette against the whiteness. As suddenly as it came, it went out, leaving momentary blindness behind it.

Orelle caught her breath and said, "The signal! Llesi—hurry! Whatever it is, it must be almost here!"

CHAPTER VI

Invasion

THEY saw it first far off on the plain, moving toward them through the clear darkness. At first it seemed only a mist that drifted with the wind but, when the wind shifted, the grey fog came on. Its heart was thicker and dimly the eye could glimpse intricate matrices of light far inside the cloud, glittering patterns like diamond cobwebs arranged in lattice formations.

Miller and Orelle, with Llesi a bodiless awareness beside them, stood at a glass wall looking out over the plain toward Brann's castle.

Llesi breathed softly, "I know that pattern. It's a bad one. The thing's brain and control and energy-source are in the bright matrix you see. Watch, now."

The lattices shifted into new geometric formations and out of the cloud rippling, soft grey tentacles thrust, thickening as they moved.

"That would be stronger than iron once it took shape," Llesi was saying. "The pseudopod principle, of course. It will be a hard thing to fight."

They stood watching in silence while the grey cloud flowed forward with increasing speed until it was nearly within reaching distance of the castle. Far off, across the valley, the lights of Brann's walls watched like eyes. Miller spoke impatiently.

"Aren't you going to do anything? Can't you stop the thing?"

"I could. But I want to see what new ideas Brann has incorporated into this. It's better to know than to guess. If I destory this he'll just send another. I'm going to let it try the gate."

The cloud flowed up to the outer wall . . . paused . . . seemed to be considering the massive glass barrier before it. Then the lattices rearranged, glittering. A finger of greyness reached out, seeped through the crack between gate and wall.

Metal groaned in the quiet of the night. That tiny pseudopod was expanding with monstrous force. The gate shivered, crumpled—gave way.

Radiant shimmers of color flared down

from the walls upon the cloudy thing as Llesi's batteries went into action at last. In his own brain Miller could feel Llesi's tense watchfulness as he waited to see how the creature would meet them.

Its lattice-work heart shifted like a kaleidoscope. The clouds thickened, grew dark. It shrank—expanded again—and moved on into the castle, a wreathed thing of velvety blackness that swallowed up the attacking lights and ignored them.

Now they lost sight of it but they could hear, partly through the vibrations of the castle walls themselves and partly through the confused mental cries of the people below them, the progress the machine was making. A transparent wall gave way before it and the crash of the collapse sent a terrible, ringing music all through the castle. There was the silent voiceless cry of a man caught in its unimaginable grip—a cry that shivered up to an unbearable peak in the brains of all who heard, and then went silent with a suddenness that made the listeners reel.

Orelle seized Miller's arm in a tight grip. "Come with me," she said. "Hurry!"

She was half-running as she led the way through the dark castle which was yet so clearly visible to the sight. The confusing halls were strange to him but before they reached their goal Miller was leading the way, Llesi in his brain sending out the mental orders that guided him, so that the corridors and doors and sloping glass ramps seemed to swing around and to fly open before him without the need of knowledge on his part.

There was pandemonium below. Miller could feel the tension in Llesi's mind and in Orelle's as they raced toward the breached wall of their fortress. Llesi was unsure.

"Maybe this is the one," he said, half to himself, as the translucent walls spun past. "Maybe this one we can't fight."

More than one wall had been breached by the time they reached the scene of the fight. The castle was filled with the jangling, musical crashes of shattered glass and the cries—some of them vocal cries now—of the defenders. But from the attacking machine itself no sound came.

Miller saw it through jagged walls and over the heads of the castle's men—a great coagulated cloud, velvet-soft and iron-hard, the colored lights of the defenders' strange weapons beating upon it in vain. There were

colors in the weapons such as Miller had never seen.

"Photon showers," Llesi told him briefly. "Very high-frequency light waves with an energy increase great enough to utilize the mass of the light. Those latticed patterns would be smashed by the impact—if we could reach them.

"When you deal with anything as delicate as this you need a delicate weapon. The lattices would be impervious to heavy weapons but the mass of light itself could crush the patterns if I had some way to penetrate the cloud."

"The photons should do it," Orelle said in a worried voice. "Always before—"

"Brann has something new this time."

The cloud rolled on. Through the shattered walls they saw it engulf the men in its path, moving like a velvet-soft juggernaut that crushed all before it. It pressed its misty surface against another wall—there was a surging all through the mass and, briefly, a pattern of clouded lights glimmered deep in the smoky bulk.

The castle rang with the jangled music of another falling wall.

"It's making straight for the Power," Orelle said, quietly now. "Llesi, you've got to stop it."

MILLER felt in his own brain Llesi's rapid, orderly thoughts, marshalling the facts and measuring against them his varied resources. Then, decisively, he spoke.

"We must get to the Power first. I can stop it, but we'll have to hurry."

To Miller it seemed as if the castle spun around him again as, in obedience to the orders in his brain, he whirled and ran with Orelle at his heels. The corridors opened up before them, unfamiliar pathways looking strangely familiar to the double vision in his mind. Another wall smashed into ringing fragments behind them as they ran.

With his new night-sight Miller could see a long way through the translucent walls of the glass castle. Lights had been kindled through the building now so that the glimmers, far and near, reflecting beyond intervening barriers, made the whole castle glow bewilderingly.

But ahead of them, growing larger as they neared, was one part of the building that even this new sight could not penetrate. It was a great cube whose walls gave back the vision opaquely, as it loomed before them.

Orelle pushed past him as they reached it, spread both hands flat upon the dark surface. It parted before her, melting away as the other walls melted to admit entry, and she pressed through into the hidden room. Miller followed her, his brain spinning with his own curiosity and the complicated planning of Llesi who shared it.

Afterward Miller could never remember clearly what he had seen in that great dark room. He had only an impression in retrospect of an immense number of delicate shining things that might have been instruments—of countless rows of containers over which light seemed to ripple and play from within the colored holders, like votive lights seen far off down the aisle of a cathedral—of things without name or recognizable shape. . . .

In the center of the room, hanging in the heart of a filligreed framework which it did not seem to touch anywhere, a clear transparent cube three feet through floated free. Within it a tilted halo of—of stars?—rotated slowly through the solid substance of the block. And very faintly, Miller thought he could hear music as it turned, the same music he had caught from the night sky, subsonic but still perceptible to his new senses.

"The Power," Orelle said, nodding toward the cube.

Miller went forward slowly until he stood by the delicate framework within which the block floated. He could feel a slight pressure constantly beating out from the rotating stars, and at the same time a slight, equal suction—an impossible sort of double force that did not equalize itself but kept him in a continual state of muscular readjustment to balance the opposite pulls while he stood within its range.

He was trying to control the excitement that poured through him at his nearness to this unimaginable thing he had come so far to find. Slade would give all he had to possess it for, inexplicable as it was, there was a harnessed power in the mysterious thing unlike any power at man's disposal in the lower world beyond Peak Seven Hundred.

Then, in his brain, Llesi said impatiently, "Later you can examine it. I need you now, if we're going to stop Brann's beast. Turn around—go to the far wall, reach up to that container of blue light and. . . ."

Miller's conscious mind ceased to make sense out of the orders Llesi gave it but his

body was obedient. He did not try to resist. He relaxed his own will and allowed Llesi full control, so that he was only dimly aware of what his body did in the next few minutes. His hands were busy, and there was an intense, quiet activity in his mind.

An activity that gradually began to slow. Lights swelled and sank beneath his busy fingers. Heat and cold and other stranger sensations he could not name bathed his hands and arms, beat against his intent face bent above them. But into his mind slowly a sense of frustration crept.

He made an effort to bring his own mind back into focus and asked Llesi a quick mental question.

"I don't know," Llesi's mind replied. "It isn't easy. I think I can stop the thing but at a cost we can scarcely afford. And I could only do it once. Brann will know that. He'll have only to send another just like it and—" The thought blanked out as if even in his subconsciousness Llesi did not want to shape the end of that idea.

Miller put forth greater effort and shrugged off the inertia of his mind which had been necessary while Llesi worked. He was keenly alert now. He had a job to do.

"Will you listen to me?" he asked. "I think I've got an answer—if you'll trust me."

Llesi's reply was wary but there was eagerness in it too. "What do you want us to do?"

"Tell me first—can you duplicate this Power source?"

WITH a double accord both Llesi and Miller turned to gaze at the floating cube with its lazily rotating halo of glittering light.

"I can, yes," Llesi said. "Why?"

"Easily? Soon?"

"Not in time to stop Brann's creature, no. It would take several hours."

"Then," Miller said, bracing himself for the storm he knew must follow his suggestion, "then I think you'll have to let the thing downstairs take your Power and carry it back to Brann."

There was a mental explosion of fury and refusal.

After it had died down, while Orelle still gazed at him with burning dark eyes full of distrust and hatred, and Llesi still smoldered angry thoughts in his brain, Miller went on.

"I know—I know. In your place I'd feel

the same. But look at it dispassionately if you can. Brann has you where he wants you now. You can only drive off this mechanism downstairs once and Brann can send another to take the Power source anyhow. If you stay passive you're beaten. But listen to me—and maybe you can still win. Attack! Let the Power go—but follow it."

There was silence for a moment, while the two others digested this idea. Then Orelle said, "We could only follow to Brann's walls. We've never been able to get into his castle and—"

"Don't you see, this is the only way! He'll have to make room for the cube of the Power to enter. If we follow, there ought to be a way for us to force an entry too. Especially if he doesn't suspect. Oh, I know—you think I *am* Brann. I wish there were some way to—wait! Could you read my mind if I opened it to you? Would you believe me then?"

Slowly Orelle said, "I think it might be possible. Are you willing to let me try?"

Miller hesitated for a moment. There is a curious reluctance in the human mind to strip aside the last dark barrier that separates each individual from the world he lives in. The privacy of the mind is so jealously guarded a secret that not even if a man wills it can he wholly bare his thoughts to another. But unless Miller let Orelle into those innermost chambers there was little hope of success for any of them.

"If I don't," he thought, "Brann will win, in the end. And if he wins—well, I have more to lose than anyone here." Aloud, in his mental voice, he said to Orelle, "Yes—try if you're able."

She smiled a little. "Let your mind go blank. Don't offer any resistance—no, none at all—you *are* resisting me, Miller. Let me have the truth. Brann—Brann . . . are you Brann? I must know. . . ."

Her eyes held his and, as they had done once before, began to grow larger and larger until they blotted out the room and were a dark pool in which his consciousness was sinking. . . .

"Thank you," Orelle said quietly. "I'm sorry. You were telling me the truth all along—unless you're more cunning than I think you are and know how to hide your secrets even deeper than the unconscious mind. I see that you mean us well. I see another thing, too—why you came here."

"Yes. You had to know that anyhow. It was why I asked about duplicating the

Power cube."

"He wants to take it away with him, Llesi," Orelle said and for the first time Miller realized that Orelle had been in even closer communion with his mind than Llesi himself, who dwelt in its very center. For Llesi had not seen the depths of it—he did not know what Orelle knew now.

"To take it away?" Llesi demanded, incredulity in his thought. "But—"

"Yes," Orelle said quickly. "We could arrange for that, Llesi. If this plan works we'll owe him more reward than that."

"But Orelle," Llesi persisted, "doesn't he understand? Doesn't he know that—"

The thought ceased abruptly, and Miller had the uneasy feeling that the two were communicating on some higher plane of silence where he could not follow them. He was suddenly uneasy. There was something here he didn't understand. The two of them knew something—about himself?—that he did not yet know, something that affected his future intimately.

"What is it?" he demanded. "If I help you, I've a right to know."

Orelle turned to him, her dark eyes gentle now, the hatred and mistrust gone out of them. "There isn't time," she said. "Listen."

Far off, but audible through the opaque walls, the tinkle of falling glass came clearly to them.

"It's the machine," Llesi said. "We haven't time to waste now. If we follow your plan we mustn't let it win too easily or Brann will suspect. Do you have any ideas of what to do after we enter Brann's castle?"

"Not yet," Miller said almost absently. He was thinking hard about the strange little passage just ended. Until this moment he had not dared offer to open his whole mind for their inspection, because he had had nothing to bargain with. Inevitably Orelle would have seen that he wanted the Power and he had nothing to offer in return—until now.

Well, it was a success in one way, but in another—failure? He couldn't be sure. Oddly the balance had shifted and it was he who mistrusted his companions and they who believed at last that he could be depended on. Certainly they were hiding something vital from him.

"Not yet," he said again, forcing his mind to take up the immediate problem as the jangle of another falling barrier came more loudly through the walls. "I only know it's

easier to work on inspiration when you're on the offensive—and once in Brann's castle, we'll need inspiration!

"Brann's—unbalanced. We know that. Push him farther off balance by attacking and maybe we'll have an advantage. You know, there must be something important he's hiding or he wouldn't operate from the dark as he does. If we can see him face to face—well, who knows?"

"When you say 'we,'" Orelle interrupted, "Whom do you mean?"

"Myself. Llesi and me."

"And Orelle," the girl said quietly.

"Of course not! It's going to be dangerous. Besides—"

"No more dangerous to go than to wait for Brann's vengeance if you fail. Tsi is my sister. I think I can control her and that should be a weapon you may need. You can't take more than one or two with you if you hope to get in secretly so an army would do no good. But one companion—I think I could be useful to you, Miller."

"Llesi," Miller said to the voice in his brain, "what do you think?"

There was silence for a moment. "Let her come," Llesi said. "What she says about Tsi is true enough. We may need her."

In the quiet a musical ringing of more breaking glass sounded clearer than before.

"It's coming," Llesi said. "Now we have work to do. Are you ready, Miller? Take down that lens mounted on the tesseract and do as I tell you. We mustn't let the machine win without a struggle. . . ."

CHAPTER VII

Battle of the Titans

IN THE light of earliest dawn they could see it rolling toward them far off across the plain. Crouching under the loom of Brann's castle walls, Miller and Orelle waited almost in silence. It had seemed wisest to hurry ahead by teleportation and take shelter while Brann was presumably occupying all his powers with the direction of his mechanical warrior as it broke down the walls of the Power chamber and seized at last the thing he had sought so long.

Now the two watchers—three, for Llesi waited in Miller's brain—saw the lazily

turning halo of pointed lights which was the Power glowing through the cloudiness of the machine that carried it. Faintly the soundless music of its turning floated to their ears.

"We'll have no time to waste," Llesi warned them. "Brann's wanted the Power for a purpose, you know. Once he learns how to use it there'll be no hope of controlling him. Whatever we do we must do fast."

"Can he learn quickly how to operate it?" Miller asked.

"You're thinking of yourself." Llesi sounded amused. "Yes, it can be mastered without too much difficulty. But don't think about it now, Miller. You have our promise. Be content with that."

Miller stirred restlessly. "You're hiding something. I've opened my mind to you. Orelle. If I deserve any reward for what I'm helping you do I deserve the truth from you. What is it?"

Orelle shook her head. "Don't ask us now. I'll tell you if we come out of this alive. But it will only distract you now. I promise you it's nothing that will affect our plans to conquer Brann. You need all your thoughts to do that. Afterward there'll be time to talk of other things. Look—it's nearly here. I wonder where Brann means to let it into the castle."

The music of the turning stars was clearer now. Miller could feel remotely that extraordinary attraction-repulsion action which the Power constantly exerted—it was so near to them as they crouched in hiding. The machine rolled its cloudy bulk past them, almost brushing their faces with the periphery of its mist, and moved up over the jumble of rocks that bordered Brann's castle.

It pressed close against the surface of the wall. Light glowing down from that extraordinary barrier which ran like water and shone like fire cast colored shadows upon the mist, so that it was like a cumulus of sunset-lighted cloud as it flattened itself against the wall.

Miller could see Orelle's anxious face lighted with strange hues from the water-wall as she watched. He held his breath.

Within the sunset cloud patterns of latticed diamond moved and shifted. The wall surface dimmed as if a breath had blown upon it. Darkness grew where the dimness was—and suddenly a door had opened in the streaming water-light of the barrier.

"Now!" Llesi breathed. "Now—follow it

in!" She rushed forward.

There was one breathless, heart-stopping moment when the rocks turned beneath their feet and Orelle, stumbling, nearly fell. The darkness of the opened door was already beginning to mist over with solidity when they reached it.

"Dangerous." Llesi's thought flashed through Miller's brain, lightning-like, far faster than it takes to express in words. "If we miss the turn of the wall-substance we'll be caught in the solid mass. Hurry! Never mind making a noise. Hurry!"

It was like pushing through a thin jelly of darkness that gave way readily enough but thickened perceptibly even as they moved. "Don't breathe!" Llesi warned them. "Hold your breath if you can—I think you'll be through in a moment."

The substance of the wall was a stiff, scarcely yielding stuff by the time they pushed free into clear air. They had made it with nothing to spare. Orelle reached back to touch the surface with a wondering hand as soon as she caught her breath, and the way they had come was already a solid resilient surface that lost its resilience as she pressed it and became hard unyielding wall again.

They stood in a steeply sloping corridor that echoed with the thin voiceless music of the Power. Ahead of them the slowly spinning stars were visible through cloudy grey, moving rapidly up the ramp away from them.

Silently they followed.

They were far down under the main floors of the castle. On their left, as they climbed the steep ramp, the wall of flowing light moved ceaselessly, tracing their shadows in the inner wall of the corridor.

"Somewhere there must be guards," Orelle said.

"I'd feel better if we'd seen some before now," Llesi told them uneasily. "I have a feeling Brann may be more omniscient than we know."

The ramp came to a steep end and turned back upon itself in a second long zig-zag rise. They toiled up in the wake of the cloudy robot that carried the Power. Still no guards. . . .

The ramp zig-zagged twice more and then there was a great open area, like a spacious chimney, rising overhead. The ramp had ended. Lightly, like the cloud it was, the robot left the ground. Teleportation carried

it out of sight with startling swiftness. From high above the sound of voices drifted down the well, laughter, music.

Without a word Orelle put out her arm and clasped Miller's hand. A moment later the ground no longer pressed his feet. The light-wall slid down past them like a Niagara of colored water.

THE hall in which Brann held court was a vast domed circle. In the center of it rose a dais—and over the dais a curtain of darkness hung in straight columnar folds from the great height of the ceiling, veiling the platform. On its steps a woman was sitting, a stringed instrument on her knee. Rainbow hair swung forward about her shoulders as she bent her head and swept a hand across the strings. Wild, high music rang through the room.

Someone called, "Brann! Where is Brann?" and the woman looked up, smiling. It was Tsi.

"He'll be here. He's coming. He expects guests," she said and looked straight across the room toward the far wall where, in an alcove, the robot stood motionless, enshrouding the Power in a misty cloud.

Behind the robot, huddled against the alcove wall, Miller felt Orelle's fingers tighten upon his. So long as the robot stood quiet, they were hidden behind its foggy outlines. When it moved—

"She means us," Orelle whispered. "I know Tsi. What shall we do?"

"Wait," Llesi counseled. "Listen."

In the great room beyond, where Brann's court of brilliantly robed men and women lounged on divans that seemed cushioned with substance as immaterial as mist, a discontented cry was beginning to rise. Many mental voices blended in the clamor now.

"Brann! Call him up, Tsi, call him up! Tell him the robot's here. We want Brann again!"

Tsi swept the strings musically. "He's still asleep, down below," she said. "I'm not sure if I dare wake him yet. Shall I try?"

"Go down and call him," someone urged, petulance in the voice that spoke. "We've waited too long already. Call him, Tsi!"

Tsi smiled. "His visitors must be here by now," she said maliciously. "Yes, I'll go down and waken Brann." She laid the harp on the steps and rose.

At the same moment Miller felt a surge of force suddenly burst into blinding violence in the center of his brain. For an instant he was stunned by the power that seemed to pour tangibly forth from him and through him. . . .

The robot that had screened them from view rose from the floor, lightly as a cloud, drifted forward over the heads of the gaping audience and turned suddenly incandescent just above the dais where Tsi stood.

Miller knew it was Llesi's doing, even before the quiet voice in his brain said, "This is the best way, after all. Attack. You were right, Miller. Now watch."

The robot was pure flame now. With a detached part of his mind Miller understood that it must have been deactivated once its mission was completed, so that any mind which teleported it now could do with it as it would. Llesi chose to destroy it in as spectacular a manner as he could contrive.

Out of the blinding cloud of its dissolution the cube of the Power fell, the singing halo in it turning with slow, indifferent steadiness. The transparent block struck the steps a yard from where Tsi stood. It struck—and crashed through, splitting the white marble from top to floor. Tsi staggered.

[Turn page]

Many Never Suspect Cause of Backaches

This Old Treatment Often Brings Happy Relief

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights,

swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, a stimulant diuretic, used successfully by millions for over 50 years. Doan's give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills. (See.)

The crash rang from the high vaults above, rebounding from arch to arch in distant, diminishing echoes that came slowly back to the watcher below, long after the dais had ceased to vibrate.

Tsi recovered her balance, turned on the shattered steps, looked straight across the hall to the alcove where Miller and Orelle stood.

She was shaken but she had not lost her poise.

"Sister!" she said, "Welcome to Brann's castle. Shall I call him to greet you?"

From Orelle a strong steady thought went out, compelling and quiet.

"Tsi, sister, you must do as you think best. Is it best for us that Brann be called?"

The woman on the dais hesitated. Miller could see that the quiet confidence in Orelle's mental voice has shaken her a little. He knew now what Orelle had meant when she said she could control Tsi.

It was a simple matter of sister speaking to sister with the voice of authority, calling back to mind the precepts of conscience and childhood training. Tsi was not, he thought, evil as Brann was evil. She was weak, certainly—and perhaps the weakness would stand them in good stead.

She said uncertainly, "Orelle, I think perhaps—" But the voices from the audience around her, rising with sudden violence, drowned out whatever it was she meant to say. Miller was reminded of Roman audiences clamoring for blood in the arena.

"Brann, *Brann!*" the voices howled. "Waken Brann! Go call him up to meet his guests! *Brann*, waken from your sleep! Brann, *Brann*, do you hear us?"

Tsi hesitated a moment longer. Miller was aware of a desperate stream of thought-waves pouring out from Orelle beside him but the noise of the assembled people was too strong for her. She could not get through to her sister. Tsi turned suddenly, putting both hands to her face, and stumbled up the broken steps toward the dais.

The long curtains that hung a hundred feet or more from the height of the ceiling trembled down all their dark length as she put them aside and vanished into the big tent they made, hiding the platform.

There was a moment's profound silence.

Then Miller said quietly to Orelle, "Come on," and, seizing her hand, strode forward across the floor. He had no idea what he meant to do but if he had come to attack

then attack he must—not stand waiting for Brann to make an entrance on his throne.

HEADS turned avidly to watch their progress across the great room. No one made a move to block their way, but eager eyes watched every motion they made and searched their faces for expression. This was the audience, Miller thought grimly, that would have watched Brann's terrible "experiments" upon him if he had not escaped from the castle—with Tsi's help. It was the audience, he realized, that might yet watch, if he failed.

Llesi was silent in his brain, waiting.

They were almost at the steps when the curtains stirred as if a breath of wind had blown through the hall. Tsi's voice came weakly from the hidden place, "Wait, Brann—you mustn't—"

But drowning out the feeble protest another voice sounded clear. Miller, hearing that thin, sweet, sneering pattern which was the mental voice he had heard before, the voice of Brann, felt a chill sliding down his spine and a tightening of all his muscles. It was a hateful, a frightening voice, evoking a picture of a hateful man.

"Come out, Brann!" Miller said strongly. "Unless you're afraid of us—come out!"

Behind him in the hall two or three intrepid voices echoed the invitation. "Come out, Brann! Let us see you. You aren't afraid, Brann—come out!" He knew from that how high curiosity must run even in Brann's stronghold and he realized that not even here, then, had Brann ever yet showed his face. It made him a little more confident. If Brann had so much to hide, then there must be weaknesses behind that curtain upon which he could play.

He said, "Here's the Power you wanted, Brann. We broke your platform but here it is waiting. Do you dare come out and look at it?"

Brann said nothing. But his thin, sardonic laughter rang silently through the hall.

Miller felt it rasping his nerves like something tangible. He said roughly, "All right, then—I'll come and bring you out!" And he set his foot firmly on the lowest step.

A breath of excitement and anticipation ran rippling through the hall. Llesi was still silent. Orelle's hand in Miller's squeezed his fingers reassuringly. He mounted the second step, reached out his free hand for the curtain....

There was a deep, wrenching sound of stone against stone, and under his feet the steps lurched sickeningly. And then he was falling.

The walls spun. The floor tilted up to strike him a solid blow—that did not touch him. For some firm, supporting mind closed its protection around his body and he floated gently a dozen feet and came to solid footing again, dazed but unhurt.

The marble block of steps lay upturned upon the floor. Teleportation again, he realized. Brann had uprooted the steps he had climbed to prevent him from reaching the curtain. And someone—Llesi or Orelle—had reached out a mental beam to teleport him to safety.

Brann's cold clear laughter rang silently through the hall. He had not yet spoken. He did not speak now but his derision was like vitriol to the ears and the mind. Brann was waiting. . . . Somehow Miller could sense that, as he waited, an eagerness and impatience went out from him toward that block of transparency on the broken steps, where the halo of the Power revolved on its singing axis.

Llesi realized it in the same instant and Miller felt in his brain the beginnings of some plan take shape—too late. For now there was a strange heaviness in the very air about him—a familiar heaviness. . . . This was the weapon Brann had used on him once before, turning the air itself to a crushing weight that had all but smashed his ribs in upon the laboring lungs.

He felt his knees buckle under that sudden, overwhelming pressure. The air screamed around him and the vast hanging curtains of the dais billowed with a serpentine motion as displaced air moved with hurricane suddenness through the great room. Miller's breath was stopped in his chest by that unbearable pressure. His ears sang and the room swam redly before him. Brann's careless laughter was a distant ripple of sound.

Power from outside himself gathered in Miller's brain, gathered and spilled over in a wave like molten flame. He felt it gush out toward the platform where Brann sat hidden. But he was blind and deaf with the crushing weight of that suddenly ponderable air.

Even above his own deafness and the shriek of the unnatural wind in the room he heard the scream of riven marble. And the weight upon him lessened a little. He could

see again. He could see the great block of stone uprooted with jagged edges from the broken floor at the foot of Brann's dais.

It seemed to tear itself free, to leap into the air of its own volition—to hurtle toward Brann's curtains as if Brann's castle itself had suddenly turned upon him with great jagged stone fangs. In his brain Miller could feel the tremendous, concentrated effort of Llesi's teleportation, balancing the marble weapon and guiding it on its course.

The weight upon him ceased abruptly. The release was so sudden that the congested blood drained from Miller's brain and for an instant the great room swam before him. In that moment of faltering the hurtling marble fragment faltered too and Llesi and Miller together struggled with the faintness of Miller's overtaxed brain.

BRANN seized the opening that brief hesitation gave him. He could not stop the flying weapon but he could block it. . . . A broken segment of the marble steps flew up in the path of the oncoming boulder, grated against it, deflected its course.

The two struck together upon the dais steps and thundered down them with a ponderous sort of deliberation, bounding from step to step, their echoes rolling from the high ceiling. They went crashing across the floor, ploughing into the divans where Brann's court had lain watching this unexpected sight.

The screams of the watchers as the great marble blocks rolled down upon them added a frenzied accompaniment to the echoes of thunder wakened by the stone itself. The room was a tumult of sound re-echoing upon sound.

Miller felt a renewed outpouring of Llesi's power move in his brain. He saw a gigantic marble pillar across the room stagger suddenly on its base, crack across, lean majestically outward and fall. But it did not strike the floor. Instead it hurtled headlong, jagged end first, toward the dais.

Above it the ceiling buckled. There was a terrible shriek of metal upon stone as the vaulted roof gave way. But the falling debris, in turn, did not strike the floor. Deflected in a rain of shattered marble, it moved to intercept the flying pillar. Column and broken stone together crashed to the ground at the very foot of Brann's dais.

The great hall was full of the shrieks of the scattering court, the cries of men caught

beneath the falling ceiling, the uproar of echo upon echo as Brann's throne room collapsed in thunderous noise upon its own floor.

When the thunder ceased all who could flee had vanished. Half the ceiling lay in fragments upon the floor and Miller stood dizzily looking up at the dais whose long curtains still billowed in the wind. Brann was silent for a moment as if gathering his resources for another try. And Llesi was whispering,

"My strength is failing, Miller. I can't keep it up much longer. I'm going to try one last thing. I've got to know what it is Brann's hiding. Help me if you can—and watch!"

For an instant there was silence. Then, from far overhead, a long shudder began and rippled down the length of those vast hanging curtains which shrouded Brann's dais. Stone groaned deeply upon stone in the ceiling.

From the hidden platform Brann shrieked a soundless, "No!" as the block from which the curtains hung tore itself free of the vault above and came crashing down to rebound from the shattering pavement.

The curtains themselves fell far more slowly. Like smoke they wavered in the air, collapsing softly, deliberately, parting to one side and the other. . . .

Miller could see Brann trying to stop that fall. Invisibly the forces of his mind seemed to claw at their drifting lengths. But there was something wrong now in Brann's mind. Even Miller could sense it.

A dissolution was taking place that the mind felt and shrank from. Something worse than hysteria, more frightening than fear itself. Llesi was suddenly intent and Orelle caught her breath.

Like smoke the last fragments of the curtains parted, lying to left and right along the broken floor, far out, in long swaths of shadow.

On the platform stood Brann. . . .

The figure that had terrorized such a multitude for so long stood swaying, clutching a black cloak about it as if to hide the shape of the body beneath. The face was contorted into a terrible grimace of anger and cold grinning hate. But the face itself was one they had all seen before.

It was the face of Tsi.

Her eyes were closed. She did not look at them nor speak nor move. And, Miller thought to himself, as Brann perhaps she had never opened her eyes. As Brann per-

haps that grimace of chill hate always distorted her features. For it was clear to them all now that Tsi was mad.

"Schizophrenia," Miller thought automatically. "Split personality." But there was no answering thought from Llesi or from Orelle. Stunned amazement held them both frozen.

Tsi turned her unseeing eyes to Orelle. In Brann's thin, cold, high-pitched voice-pattern she said, "Now you know. Now you've seen Brann. But before I kill you both, tell me—Orelle, *where is Tsi?*"

Miller felt a cold shudder ripple over him.

CHAPTER VIII

The Consuming Fire

AT THE same moment he realized that Orelle and Llesi could not help him against—Brann. Their thoughts came into his mind with a stunned, incredulous tinge of astonishment, a blank bafflement that, strangely, seemed to leave them helpless. And Miller thought he knew why.

Orelle and Llesi and all their race had been conditioned to mental perfection. Never before in their history, he sensed, had there been any case of mental aberration. The race had been too perfect for that. And now, faced with the pattern of schizophrenic split-personality, they were utterly unable to comprehend its meaning. It was too alien to them.

Insanity had never before existed in Orelle's race.

Miller sent a frantic message to Llesi—inchoate confused memory-pictures from his scant knowledge of psycho-therapy. But Llesi did not understand. Instead he suddenly closed his mind. And, beside Miller, Orelle, too, closed her mind against a concept so shocking to this race that worshiped mental perfection that they could not consciously face it.

The blind figure on the dais bent forward. "Orelle. . . ." it said.

So Brann did not know that the other half of his mind beonged to Tsi. Naturally! Brann would not know that he was a half, an incomplete split personality. Nor would Tsi know that Brann was part of herself. What curious warp in the inherited genes

had brought about this cleavage Miller never knew, but he did not think about that now.

He stepped forward.

"Brann!" he called.

"So you are back." The thought came coldly into his mind. "Well, the machine I tricked you into carrying failed to kill Llesi but I'll remedy that soon enough. As for you. . . ." Thin mental laughter mocked Miller.

He felt sweat crawling down his forehead. "Wait," he thought urgently. "I can tell you where Tsi is."

He sensed a hesitancy and then an urgent, straining question.

"Where? *Where is she?*"

"You are—"

Miller felt the mind on the dais close swiftly against the thought. Brann would not let himself listen to the truth. He could not.

Brann thought, "Well? Answer me?"

Troubled, uncomprehending, Orelle and Llesi waited and listened. And suddenly Miller knew the answer. He unbuckled the wrist-watch from his arm. Orelle had returned it to him, the deadly lightning-machine removed. As a timepiece it was useless but habit had made Miller keep the watch.

"Take this," he said.

Brann—Tsi—waited.

Miller held it up. "It's not dangerous anymore. Can't you tell that?"

"A trick. You know nothing of what I wish to know. Why should I waste time on any of you?"

"If you want to find Tsi," Miller thought, "you must take this thing. Unless you're afraid to find her."

The watch spun from his hand and shot glittering across the room. It was in Brann's hand.

Miller drew a long breath. "Turn it over. That's it. Hold it up before your face. Yes. Now . . . open your eyes."

"My eyes will not open."

"Open them!"

"They have never opened."

Tension sang through the still air. Miller felt Orelle's sudden movement toward him.

"If you open your eyes you will find Tsi."

That was the gap in the armor. That was the one thing that could pierce Brann's insane half-mind. The blind white eyelids quivered . . . the long lashes lifted, slowly, slowly. . . .

Brann's eyes looked into the polished steel

back of the watch. In that tiny mirror Brann's eyes looked into—Tsi's!

Tsi's eyes—wide, horrified—stared into Brann's!

There was no protection against the mental avalanche that roared out from that rocking, screaming mind—the two minds—in the single body of Tsi. For the first time Brann saw the girl he had searched for since his strange birth. And for the first time Tsi saw her own face twisted, distorted, into the grimace of chilly hatred that was irrevocably stamped on Brann's features.

But what Miller felt was—pity. It was the basic principle of mental therapy—making the patient face his problem squarely. But no ordinary human schizophrenic had ever thus had the curtains of his brain ripped away with such sudden violence. The normal human brain has automatic safeguards against such intrusion.

Tsi was of another race—a race mentally developed to a tremendously high standard. She had been warped before birth though the madness had remained latent for a long time—but her mind was nevertheless powerful enough to be able to face the shocking incredible truth.

SHE had never been evil, as was Brann—weak, yes, but incapable of that cold cruelty her alter ego loved.

Face to face, for a thunderous, eternity-long instant, the two stood—good and evil mated, monstrously wedded in one body and one brain. The silence roared.

Then the hand that held the mirror dropped. The face of Tsi swung round so that her mad, wild, terrified eyes met Miller's—and he read destruction there. The double mind looked out of those eyes into his and for an instant it was as if both Tsi and Brann spoke to him—as he had first heard them speaking when he woke in this incredible world.

But then they had not known the truth. It had been a split mind talking to itself, good and evil debating together and not guessing they were housed in a single brain. Now they knew. At some point in the past the evil inherent in Tsi had lost its battle with the good in her—and pulled free of the control of her conscious mind. It had called itself by a new name, given itself a masculine identity to disguise its origin still further, grown so strong that not even Tsi could control it any longer.

Brann was abhorrent to Tsi. And to Brann the knowledge that Tsi was himself was a thing he could not face. The split mind, rocking on its foundation, reached out into Miller's mind with a mad destructive violence.

"You brought ruin on me!" cried the double voice. "You wrecked my castle and my life! You must die and all your kind with you!"

The eyes caught Miller's in a drowning stare. He could not look away, and the eyes were growing larger and larger, engulfing him in darkness and in the darkness the madness of two minds swirled terribly, carrying away his own sanity on those dreadful, reasonless vortices. . . .

Miller could no longer see Orelle but he heard her moan, a soft whimper of helpless terror. "I can't—help you," she was saying from far away. "I can't fight the two of them. Llesi—Llesi—where are you?"

For a moment there was no answer. The mad twin-mind buffeted at Miller's from both sides at once, pulling it asunder, spinning in two opposite directions and straining him apart between them. No single mind could withstand the doubled strength of that split brain dragging him down to madness. . . .

And then, suddenly, he was not fighting alone. Out of the darkness Llesi's mind came swiftly, intangibly, yet with a strength as if the man himself had set his shoulder against Miller's, bracing him against the whirlpool whose vortex led down to insanity.

Perhaps no other mind in existence could have stood against the riven mind of Brann-Tsi. But in Miller's brain too a double mind had been housed—his own and Llesi's. They had learned to work together. And now they could fight. . . .

There was a voiceless scream of fury—Brann's thin, high, sweet-toned rage. And the buffeting redoubled from two sides at once. But now there were two minds to meet the attack. Miller drew a deep breath and set himself stubbornly against the whirling drag that was pulling him down to darkness. He could feel the strong resistance of Llesi's mind, fighting beside his own, struggling hard against the double pull.

For a timeless moment the vortex held them both. In that roaring silence, while madness raved about them, neither side seemed able to shake the others. Attacker and attacked stood matched so perfectly that the balance might have held forever with

the fury of the split mind screaming its soundless cry in infinity.

Then the scream shivered up to a peak of madness that no sane mind could sustain. And while the vortex still rang with it. . . .

The robed figure on the dais moved suddenly. Miller's blindness lifted again. He could see the dark robe stream back from Tsi's rainbow garments as she plunged down the steps toward the crystal block, where the halo of the Power turned in its singing silence.

A bolt of the mind reached out before her toward the halo—a summoning bolt. One quivering thought shook the air of the room. Death was the thought. Tsi and Brann could not live together in the same brain and face the knowledge of their oneness. There was no choice but death for them now.

The bolt of white lightning blazed up to meet that plunging figure in answer to its summons. Blazed up and swallowed Tsi—and Brann.

There was a shimmer in the air where the body and the twin mind had hovered. And then—nothing. . . .

CHAPTER IX

Fairy Gold

MILLER found himself sitting on the broken marble steps with his head in his hands. How long a time had passed he had no idea. Orelle's touch on his shoulder made him look up at last. She was smiling a little but her eyes were grave.

"Are you all right now?" she asked. "You're safe. We're all safe, thanks to you. I'm glad I've never known your world if you could understand a thing like that—that madness. But I'm glad you did understand it—for our sakes. You saved us, Miller. You can ask your own reward."

He looked at her groggily, thinking with incongruous steadiness that he was probably suffering from shock now and not really responsible. But he glanced involuntarily toward the crystal block of the Power.

Orelle's smile was sad. "Yes," she said, "we can make you a duplicate if you ask us. But it would be effort wasted in the end."

He stared at her, not understanding. Then his eyes went beyond her to the shattered

wall and the beautiful shining day outside. New senses were burgeoning in him and he could sense in that glittering sunlight colors and sounds and glories beyond anything words could tell.

The air was a tangible thing against his cheek, velvet soft, sweeter than perfume. He was beginning to perceive new shapes moving dimly on the edge of vision, as if there were a whole unknown world just now slowly unveiling before his freshly opened eyes.

Miller laughed suddenly. "I know what you mean," he said. "I must be stupid, not to have seen it until now. Of course I won't want a duplicate of the Power. Why should I? I'm not going back to Slade. I'd be crazy if I left a paradise like this. What good would a duplicate do me when I'm staying on here—forever!"

Orelle shook her shining head. Her eyes were very sad. In a gentle voice she began to speak. And Llesi's voice, gentle too in the firmness of his mind, spoke with her.

Very quietly they told him the truth.

* * * * *

"So you know now it was fairy gold," the Belgian said, sliding the bottle across the table. "Well, I could not have made you believe. You had to experience it yourself."

Miller looked at nothing.

Van Hornung glanced toward the fire, shivered and reached out a stubby finger toward the dull cube on the table between them.

"Drink," he said.

Slowly Miller obeyed. There was a long silence.

Finally Van Hornung said, "It is—still the same up there? The castles and the wonderful people and the—colors? But it would be. The colors—I was an artist once. I think the colors meant most to me. There were so many we do not know."

"Orelle told me," Miller said dully. "I wouldn't believe her. I didn't want to believe her."

"There are the legends, Miller," Van Hornung said. "You and I aren't the first. We won't be the last. There have always been stories of humans who visit Paradise for a little while—and leave again. I'm no scientist. I never knew why—"

Miller glanced up. His eyes brightened a little.

"It was an unstable compound," he said. "There was an atomic change, you see. The Path does that. Your atomic structure shifts to something quite different. When you're like that you can talk with your mind, without words."

"I know," the Belgian said. "I do not talk much any more. It is never the same, after that."

"Will it ever . . . ?"

Van Hornung said quietly, "We were like gods for a little while. We ate the food of the gods. Can we expect mortal food to please us after that?"

Miller nodded in silence. To go back to his old world, to live his old life would be meaningless now—like going back to blindness after knowing sight in a brighter world than this. He had had a taste of this once, in Orelle's castle, while they searched him with piercing electronic eyes for the weapon he did not know he carried. That had been an illusion and a foretaste of this death-in-life which he must live now until he died—as the Belgian had been living.

HE REMEMBERED how the mountain-top world had begun to fade around him, Orelle's pitying face growing ghostlike, the glass walls of her castle turning to mist and the wonderful nameless colors of her gardens thinning away to nothingness while the snow-covered peaks took shape solidly behind them.

There had been a little time longer, after Brann's defeat, for him to enjoy the last days of Paradise. He had refused to believe it could end at all. He had shut his mind to the instability of his change, to the fact that he had been himself an isotope created by a temporary radioactive atomic shift so that, when the quantum energy was released, the atomic pattern must revert to its former state. And in one terrible, fading instant the familiar prison of his own senses closed around him once more as the lovely world of Peak Seven Hundred went volatile and vanished.

The last thing to go was the little cube Llesi had made for him with the singing halo of the Power turning in miniature within it. When the waste of glacial ice was all that remained of the invisible castle he went slowly down the mountain again, walking, he knew, through fields of glowing flowers he could never see again. And now it was the ice and snow that seemed illusion—the van-

ished summer world the only real thing in life.

He kept taking the cube out and looking at it as he descended the lower slopes. After awhile it seemed dimmer than he remembered, the singing fainter. When he reached the valley the glow was gone entirely. The cube was non-radioactive lead, inert and useless. Fairy gold, the legends said, was glittering in your hands when the immortals put it there—but when you looked again it had always turned to leaves and pebbles.

Van Hornung said, "What will you do now?"

Miller shrugged. "Is anything worth doing?"

"Not for me, any longer. After you have seen the colors and used your mind to its fullest, there is nothing worth the effort of doing in this world below. Stay with me if you like. It does not matter."

Behind Miller the door opened quietly. Slade walked into the room. When he saw Miller his jaw dropped slightly.

"Miller! What's the matter with you? When did you get in?"

"Just now."

"Did you get it?"

"Get what?" Miller said dully.

"The energy-source!" Slade thrust his face down to Miller's, the feral eyes narrowing, the thin lips tight. Seeing him, Miller thought suddenly of Brann. The same irresponsible power, dangerous, hungry, admitting no discipline but its own desires.

He was glad, in a casual way, that Slade could never use the Power. Slade could do harm enough, had done more than harm enough, with only his own driving unscrupu-

lous brain to guide him. Once armed with a thing like the Power. . . .

"I left it where I found it," Miller said indifferently. "Up on the Peak."

"How can we get it?" Slade demanded urgently. "An expedition?"

"You can have it for the asking—up there." A slow idea took shape in Miller's mind. Sardonicly he said, "Look for the red path at the foot of the cliff. Follow it. Go on up and you'll have no trouble finding your energy-source. That's all I'm going to say. We're through, Slade. Get out."

And he would say no more though it was ten minutes before Slade exhausted his threats and arguments and left. Miller smiled wryly at the Belgian.

"He'll go. You couldn't keep him away. And you know what will happen."

"What happened to us. But—why did you send him?"

MILLER stared out the window at the snowy cone of Peak Seven Hundred, white and empty against the sky.

"I hated Slade once," he said. "That doesn't matter how. But where men like Slade go there's cruelty and misery and suffering. I can at least spare a few other men what I've gone through from him. He'll come back—as we are. As for the Power—yes, it's fairy gold."

The Belgian said softly, ". . . amid such greater glories that we are worse than blind."

Miller nodded. "The Power and the Glory. Some day our race may achieve it. But it has to be earned."

He reached for the bottle.



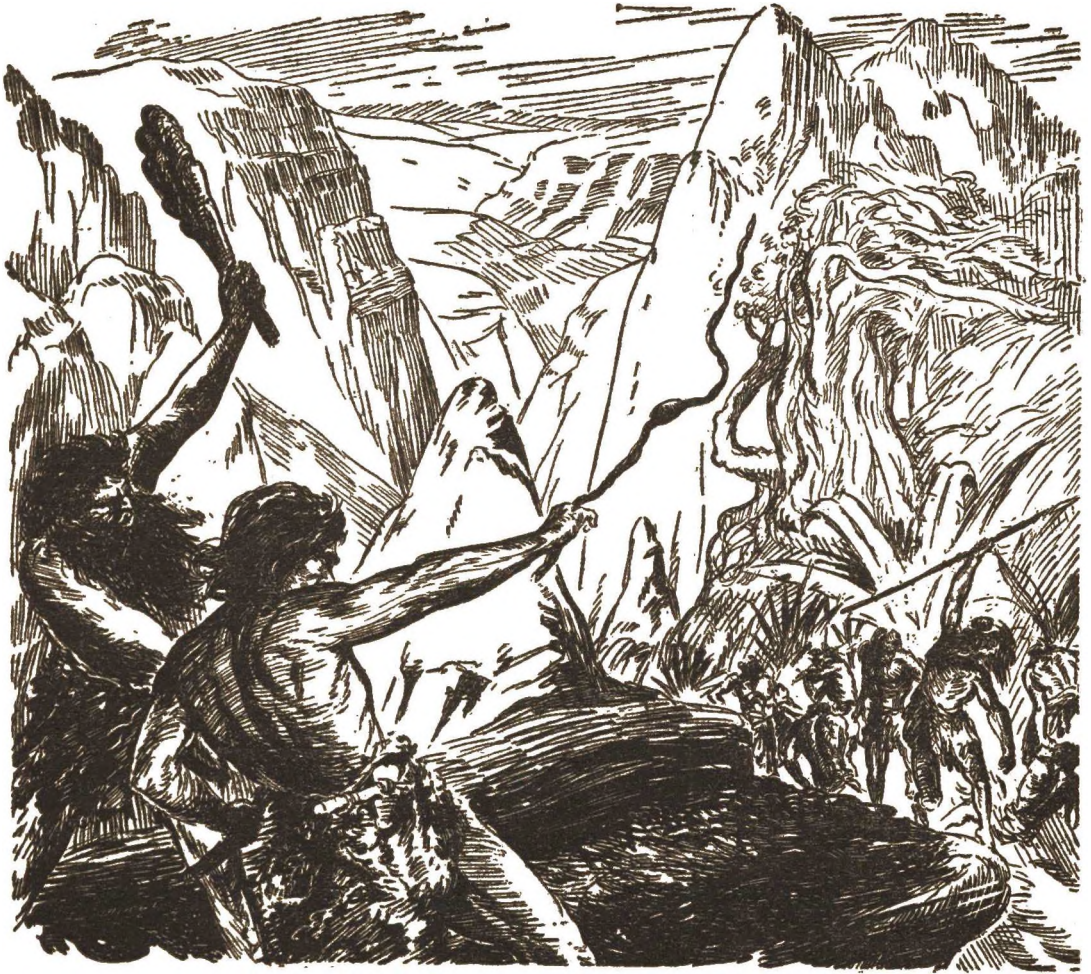
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The stone whizzed from the sling, took terrible toll

They Wouldn't Dare

By SAMUEL MINES

John Bartok had discovered a weapon far more deadly than the atom bomb—was it indeed the weapon to end all wars?

DR. JOHN BARTOK replaced the test tube carefully in its rack with fingers that shook a little. His pleasant, plump-cheeked face had the blank look of a man who has had too great a shock to assimilate, so that for the moment he feels nothing.

He got to his feet. Absently he ran stained, spatulate-tipped fingers through his thinning

blond hair and groped for a cigarette. The liquid in the test tube caught a pinpoint of light from the fluorescents and thin fumes escaped upwards from its surface. Dr. Bartok shuddered slightly and turned toward the broad plate glass window that spread clear across the front of the chrome and enamel lab.

Behind him the swinging door squeaked. A hearty voice boomed greeting. "Well, John!"

Dr. Goodwin, head of the Nelson Foundation, thought it part of his duties to boom heartily. He was a plump man in morning coat and striped trousers with the inevitable pince-nez on a black ribbon. He was a greeter, a hand-pumper, a speech-maker and a born politician. He was also a surprisingly able physicist. His work on gamma and beta particles, publicized by his own skilled hand, had won him the directorship of the Nelson Foundation. He gave his men a free hand in their research, but he thought it his right to snoop into their work at all times so that few of them had any illusion of freedom.

John Bartok did not turn. "I've got it, Dr. Goodwin," he said and continued to look out the window.

The manicured lawns of the Nelson Foundation were a well ordered green in the spring sunshine. A marble wing of the building rose to his right. Through the slits of partly-drawn blinds he could see laboratory workers at their jobs. Below, a girl assistant walked briskly along one of the curving paths that wound through the flower beds, her white stockings and shoes twinkling under the crisp blue of her cape.

"Got it? You've got it?" Goodwin repeated.

BARTOK turned and placed his back to the window, releasing his grasp on the sanity of sun and grass.

"The new weapon," he said flatly. "The final—the irresistible weapon. The thing we've been searching for ever since the stalemate of the atom bomb."

Excitement flamed in Goodwin's round face. His color mounted. "Where? What is it?" he demanded. "I'll phone General McComber!"

Bartok jerked his cigarette towards the test tube, which still gave off faint white fumes.

"This?" Goodwin stared at it fascinated. "It's—"

"It's the deadliest thing a man's imagination could ever hope to conceive," Bartok said flatly. He was not boasting. He was stating a simple fact. "Beside it the atom bomb is like a child's pea-shooter."

Goodwin edged back instinctively.

"Oh, it's harmless enough by itself," Bartok said. "It's a catalyst. Add it to something

else, and—" He drew a deep breath. "Remember the scare the atom bomb threw into the world? And the menace of radioactive dust? And germ warfare? Remember people talking about the end of the human race as though it were just around the corner?" He nodded gloomily at the test tube. "Well, there it is, the real thing, if that stuff ever gets loose."

The uneasiness had fled Goodwin's face. His jowls were alight with excitement. He seized Bartok's hand, pumping it like a driveshaft.

"Congratulations," he beamed. "This puts us at the top of the heap again. It'll mean a lot to the Nelson Foundation, John. And to you. I've got to call the War Department!"

On his way to the door he stopped, turned back. "By the way," he asked. "What is it you add that stuff to, to make it the potent weapon?"

Bartok shifted his eyes and looked unhappy. "I'd rather not say," he muttered. "Not till I think this out a little more."

"Think what out?"

"I'm afraid of that stuff," Bartok said reluctantly. "It's—it's far more dangerous—well, sir, this time it's not just scare talk. It really could mean the end of man, the end of the world!"

"Nonsense," Goodwin said. "That's not for you to judge, John! We've got to turn it over to the War Department! It will make us the strongest nation on earth, give us control! Just the threat of having it will be enough. We won't have to use it!"

Bartok gave him a cynical glance and said nothing.

"Look." Goodwin's plump finger pointed to a newspaper lying open on a lab bench. Headlines flared.

ATOMIC WEAPONS NOT TO BE USED REPRISALS FEARED

Top ranking military men believe atomic weapons will not be used in future wars because belligerents will fear reprisals, it was revealed today by a confidential source close to high officials in the War Department. The one way to victory and the best hope of avoiding war is to maintain the nation's war machine in a state of immediate readiness.

"You see?" Goodwin said. "Anything as terrible as you say this is could never be used. Just having it—and letting other nations know we have it—is insurance against anybody jumping on us. Keep them scared to death."

He beamed upon the silent Bartok. "I'll call General McComber to come down at once." The swinging door squealed and flapped behind his confident exit.

Dr. John Bartok took his cigarette and himself into the chair in front of the lab table and slumped down to stare at the gently fuming test tube. He was tired and he was confused. He was a little afraid of the responsibility thrust so suddenly upon him.

There was no simple decision to be made here. He could not deny his country a weapon it might possibly need desperately in some unknown future emergency. To withhold it might mean destruction. And to give it—to turn it over to some thick-necked general who thought of war principally as a road to promotions and glory? Bartok was

sun. Somewhere there was a guttural, familiar chanting. The smell of woodland was in his nostrils. Under him the foam rubber cushion had grown suddenly hard and uncomfortable. His vision cleared and amazement froze him.

He was squatted on a ledge in the face of a rough cliff-like slope. Before him a red sunset blazed over a wild, jungle-thick forest. Behind him was a cave mouth in which a fire flickered. From its depths came the chanting which was so strangely familiar.

Bartok looked down at himself. His limbs were all but naked, only a wolfskin draped about his hips served as both garment and belt. Arms and legs were hugely muscled, thick with furry hair. A beard spread its bushy length upon his hirsute chest.

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under no illusions as to the average military mind, American or otherwise.

Yet he shrank from the thought of making so great a decision himself, of bucking the Foundation and the War Department by himself. Perhaps Goodwin was right, the weapon need never be used. Its threat alone might be enough. In any case, perhaps Congress or the people, or the professional trouble shooters, should decide, not John Bartok, laboratory man.

Miserably he rubbed his hair until it stood up in wild disarray on his pink scalp. He leaned forward to stare into the sauterne colored fluid. The fumes rose to his nostrils, they tickled and made him want to sneeze. Suddenly he was dizzy, the lab began to heave unsteadily about him.

Alarmed, Bartok pulled back, tried to climb to his feet. The movement made his head spin wildly. The whole lab floated up into a narrowing funnel above him and the darkness contracted about him like overlapping layers of a blanket.

He was neither alarmed nor frightened. He was Krug of the Cave Dwellers, and this was his home. Behind him was a bustle and Ngeel, the chief, came out on the ledge. He was a stocky, powerful man, wearing the leopard skin of authority, plus a bustling official manner, plus a belief that his tribesmen were his by right.

Ngeel squatted down beside Krug and chuckled deep in his throat. "They come, the Forest Men," he grunted. "They think to kill. We shall kill many and there will be much feasting."

Krug stared, troubled, out over the sea of waving branches. A dim thought struggled for expression in his mind.

"Always there is fighting," he said. "Always killing. We are men, not beasts. There is food for all. Must the women always weep for the dead, must children always wail for mothers and fathers slain?"

Ngeel's bushy eyebrows drew down. "In my father's day," he said, "men were truly wiser. Now we breed a race of fools. The world is very old, my father told me, and there has always been war. Men will always kill. Do you think to stop it with words? If

AFTER a long time there was light. He opened heavy lids to see a red glow of

we kill more of the Forest Men than they kill us, there will be no more war."

Krug shrugged massive shoulders. He leaned back against the rock and began again to twist and plait some strips of skin.

"What is that?" Ngeel asked.

"Something I am making. I had thought if I took—"

"They come!" Ngeel rose suddenly, began to roar a warning. "They come!"

Out of the forest shadows streamed a broken mass of men. They were armed with clubs, spears sharpened and hardened in the fire, and stones. They charged the cliff front.

Stones hurtled down upon them, and they gave ground momentarily, leaving one or two dark forms stretched out. Then Ngeel and the men of the Caves swung down the steep slope to give battle.

There was the snarling shock of combat, vicious but short. The Forest Men broke and fell back to the trees. Ngeel called back his blood-maddened warriors, who would have followed. The chief was canny, he knew the Forest Men held the advantage in the shadowy aisles that were their home.

From the fringes of the wood, the Forest Men shouted taunts, flung an occasional spear or stone which fell short. The Cave Men huddled at the base of the cliff, licking their wounds.

Up above, Krug worked busily at his plaiting. Ngeel climbed to his ledge.

"This is bad," said the chief. "They keep us from hunting, even from water, if they stay."

"They will not stay," Krug said.

He stood up. In his hand he held the cup-like piece between them. Krug searched about until he found a round stone about the size of his fist. He placed it in the leather cup.

As Ngeel watched, hairy mouth agape, Krug began to swing the loaded contraption round his head. Faster and faster it went, until it whistled through the air and dissolved into a blur. Then he let one of the thongs slip from his fingers.

Sheer luck played its part that day as it so often does. Had the stone fallen harmlessly, the effect would have been lost. But the astonished cavemen saw the missile scream through the air with a force that no hand-thrown rock could match. Out, out, it arched, far beyond any man's throwing distance.

A Forest Man, staring, slack-jawed, was slow to duck. The stone took him full in the

face with sodden crunch. There was a horrid, strangled scream, he tossed wide his huge arms and fell dead amidst his terror-stricken fellows.

With howls of dismay, the Forest Men fled into the shadows of the wood.

Krug was a little astonished himself at the appalling success of his first attempt. But the effect upon Ngeel was even more striking. Always the politician, he recovered swiftly.

"This is magic," he said. "It makes us the most powerful tribe in the land. The Forest Men shall fear us and the men of the marshes and the river tremble at our name!" Shrewdly he added, "There will be no more wars, now, Krug. Your magic is too strong. None shall dare stand against us!"

Musing, he stroked his beard. "Man is old, my father said," he muttered, "and always there has been war. But now is an end to war, for with magic that kills at such a distance, war is too terrible. There will be no more wars!"

And looking down at him, Krug wrestled with the astonishing idea that by inventing a terrible weapon of war, he had made war impossible. The weapon was too terrible to use.

SO THERE was peace. The tribe hunted in the fringes of the forest and along the river bank and others fled before their approach. There was peace for the space of a moon.

Then a hunter came racing with the word that the Forest Men were coming.

"Coming?" Ngeel's bushy brows drew down in stupefied disbelief. "They have forgotten so soon? They need another lesson!"

Confident, Krug stood upon the rocky shelf and waited. And alongside him stood a dozen warriors of the tribe, all armed with slings, all trained by him. Each carried smooth round stones in a pouch at his belt. They were the most terrible fighting force the world had yet seen.

Shadows moved at the edge of the wood, broke free and slid out into the sunlight.

"They come!" Ngeel grunted.

At Krug's word, the slingers reached for stones. The slings began to whirl overhead, rise in pitch to a whistle. Then the missiles arched out into the air. The Cave Men and their women shouted as the stones flew. They heard the heavy thump as the projectiles landed. But there were no screams from the

Forest Men, there were no crushed and bleeding forms stretched upon the grass. The invaders came on.

And now, as they came closer, the Cave Men saw why. Each of the Forest Men carried before him a round leather shield stretched on a tough green sapling bent into a hoop. The strong rawhide took the full shock of a flung stone and let it rebound without harm. Safe behind their moving forts, the Forest Men came swiftly on, to reach and climb the wall. And now again came the snarling shock of combat, as men met and strove hand to hand with club and knife and teeth.

Krug flung down his useless sling and snatched up his club. A Cave Man rushed upon him with mighty bludgeon upraised. It wavered in the air and then melted away. Layers of darkness unwrapped about him. Shining white walls swam and flowed into place to settle solidly. Dr. John Bartok opened his eyes upon the familiar sights of his laboratory.

He raised his head. The test tube rested as before in its rack. The thin white fumes curled lazily upward. He drew back in be-

lated alarm. He could still hear the snarling roar of that savage battle, still smell the blood and heat of war and death. Good heavens, was it the fumes? Had they anaesthetized him? Had he dreamed it all?

He found a cigarette and sat back, away from the test tube, brooding. Snatches of words floated through his mind.

"Too terrible to use—"

"This will end wars—"

"All will fear us. Just having it will be enough. We will never have to use it."

The cigarette burned down. He got up. His face was pale and set.

The swinging door squeaked and Dr. Goodwin bustled in, face glowing with excitement.

"John, here's General McComber. He came right down by helicopter when I told him—John, where is it? John, what are you doing?" His usually controlled voice rose to a shriek.

Dr. John Bartok turned from the sink. He shook the last few drops of water from the glass.

"I'm just rinsing out this test tube," he said.



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QUARANTINE

A Novelet by GEORGE O. SMITH

Super-hardness in metals seemed like a boon to all mankind—until it proved to be contagious!

CHAPTER I

Tempalloy

TONY MORROW looked around the bench for a piece of brass and found a proper-sized chunk handy. That saved him a trip to the stockroom. He chucked it up in a vise, picked up a file, and set the teeth of the file against the chunk of brass to shape it. He pushed.

The file slid across the bit of brass as though there were no teeth. The end of the file went past without resistance and the vise jaws took a chunk of skin off Tony's knuckles.

He made appropriate and unprintable com-

ment, inspected the file curiously and tried again—but with restraint. This time he skinned another knuckle but not so badly. He tried another file and even more restraint.

The result was the same. The file skidded across the bit of brass without touching it.

It was like—Tony Morrow remembered his first day in the machine shop as a kid—like trying to file a wrist pin.

He picked up a center punch and a hammer. He set the punch against the brass and belted the top a good whack with the hammer. The top fudged over a bit—that was intentionally soft. The point blunted—that was intentionally hard. The brass did not even show a bright spot beneath the





The bomb flared incandescent and blasted a solid beam of light into the sky

point of contact. He tried a hacksaw with a new blade. No result. Swearing, Tony Morrow took the bit of brass and placed it between the jaws of a power shears. He pressed the button and the shears came down—hard.

The knife shattered—a huge chip sprang out of the cutting edge where it struck the bit of brass. The heavy motor ground to a shuddering halt and the frame of the shears gave slightly.

"Mur-der!" he breathed.

Andy Cleve was watching this from the other side of his lathe.

"What have you got there, Tony?" he asked.

Tony shook his head. "Brass," he said doubtfully.

Andy grunted. If that bit had been brass any of Tony's machinations would have been successful. Nothing could touch the bit of metal, ergo it could not be brass.

Andy looked on, permissibly forgetting his lathe. The tool had run out beyond the work, coming inexorably toward the four-jawed chuck. Finally it touched. The jaw came around as the tool moved to the left and the area of contact was less than five one thousandths of an inch.

Normally, this would have produced a cut on the jaw of the chuck and a hoot of derision from any machinist who saw another scar a lathe chuck.

But the scant contact stopped the lathe. There was a foul screech from the series of belts that turned the lathe, the back gears complained, the motor grunted once and stalled. The lights went dim until a fuse blew, taking the power off of the stalled motor.

Andy looked at the hung-up chuck and saw the scant interference that had stopped the lathe.

"I've got it too," he said in an awed voice. "Something has made this chuck harder than a pawnbroker's heart!"

Andy Cleve and Tony Morrow headed for the front office on a dead run. . . .

JAMES GREENE held a match for the girl's cigarette and then applied the flame to his briar. He leaned back with a puzzled smile and started to tell the girl what he knew.

"We think we may have it licked," he said. "We'll know later."

Leona Holden smiled graciously. "I hope

so," she told him. "Though I know all too little of this sort of thing. Dad talks as though everybody knows all the answers—leaving out far too much of the uninteresting detail that tells the history of the thing. Mind going over the minutiae?"

"Not at all," said Jim. "You know what Tempalloy is?"

"A hard alloy, isn't it?"

"Tempalloy is more than that. Tempalloy is, so far anyway, the ultimate in hard alloys. It is practical only because of its hardness characteristic. Tempalloy when first processed is about as soft as mild steel. With time, it grows very hard—a thousand times harder than tungsten carbide. That's due to the radioactivity."

"Radioactivity?" asked Leona Holden. "I'm more puzzled now than before."

"Tempalloy is an alloy composed mainly of chromium and cobalt. The remainder consists of two of the transuranic radioisotopes that are manufactured in the uranium pile. Alloying the stuff cold—a physicist's word for non-radioactive—results in an alloy metal that one can touch with any tool.

"We mix it with a metal—not the right one, but one which is radioactive. Then the radioactivity causes the transmutation of the element into the one we want. In other words, the original alloy is soft, but the emission of the radioactive particle causes the alloying element to change so that it is a hard alloy. Follow?"

"Vaguely," answered the girl with a slight smile.

"Well, Tempalloy starts off soft and hardens swiftly in a matter of about eight hours. The trouble is, Miss Holden, that Tempalloy as a prefabricated material—for a gear, it is made in a blank and machined into the final product—is fine, but it must be worked before it grows hard.

"Now it is almost impossible to come out even, and there is either a wastage because the machinists run out of material before their workday is over and then can loaf the rest of the day or the Tempalloy stockpile is too great and when the workmen are finished, there is still a quantity left that will harden and become waste. Understand?"

"But surely that cannot be great," objected the girl.

"Not for any one day," agreed Jim. "But take it for six months. Then it becomes a problem. Also, what to do with the scrap. Nice paperweights, anchors, or something to

crack nuts on. Anyway," he said with a grin, "it is important enough for your father to award Greene Metallurgical Laboratory a contract to develop an alloy that will cut Tempalloy."

"And you think you have it?"

"We have a very strange alloy, but I'm not too sure of it," said Greene. "And you can tell your father that. You see, we discovered an alloy that was the reverse of Tempalloy. It starts off very hard—hard enough to cut Tempalloy—but softens with time. Takes about eight hours. Now that might be fine, but there is atomic interaction between tool and work as it is used to cut Tempalloy. We gave it a name, Miss Holden, and call it Fool's Alloy. We found that when it is used, everything goes to pieces."

"Just how?"

"Well, Tempalloy approaches a stable hardness when left alone, just as Fool's Alloy approaches a stable softness. These curves are exponential curves. But when Fool's Alloy is used to cut Tempalloy, the Fool's Alloy goes dead soft in about a half hour and the Tempalloy starts to harden linearly, even though it has been in a stable state of hardness for months."

"But how can that be?"

"We're not too certain. But remember, every time you cut anything, even butter with a knife, you leave some of the tool on the work and some of the work on the tool. And it takes only a few ten thousandths of a percent of Element Ninety-Seven to make Tempalloy what it is. Ergo, a minute quantity of the important part of Fool's Alloy is all that is needed to make the Tempalloy get much harder."

Leona Holden nodded brightly. "But look," she said, "wouldn't using the superhard Tempalloy serve as a tool-edge for cutting normal Tempalloy?"

"Yes, for a time," admitted Greene. "But the trouble is, Miss Holden, that the hardness-creep passes from the superhard Tempalloy tool to the normal Tempalloy work and eventually the work is too hard to cut again. There is—"

THE door opened violently and Tony Morrow and Andrew Cleve came in on the dead run and skidded to a stop as they saw the girl.

"What's up?" asked Greene.

Tony dropped the piece of brass on Jim's desk.

"This is supposed to be brass," he said. "And it is harder than the hinges of Hades. You can't cut it with a file. I wrecked the shear-blade, and when I tried it on the stone, it made an excellent grinding-wheel dresser."

"Brass?"

"Unless someone has regained the secret of hard copper," said Tony Morrow uncertainly.

Leona Holden looked interested. "They claim there was such a secret," she observed.

Jim Greene laughed. "Nope," he said. "It wasn't that, but just a part of the search for a harder edge that has gone on for twenty thousand years."

"Twenty thousand years?"

Greene nodded. "It started when Cain slew Abel and discovered that a hunk of flint was harder than a human skull. The next man wore a leather helmet. That was fine until someone discovered bronze which cut leather. Alexander carved himself an empire with bronze swords.

"Then someone got some carbon mixed with iron and the Age of Chivalry was heralded in on the clangor of mild steel. The bronze sword turned its edge against the steel armor. The old timers immediately claimed that their fathers had bronze swords that would cut anything—that these modern bronze swords weren't as hard as in the good old days. They forgot to mention that in the good old days, the ability to cut anything could not possibly have included the new alloy, steel. Well, people have been hunting for newer and harder alloys ever since."

"I see," she admitted uncertainly. "But this piece of brass?"

"I hope you'll pardon me," said Jim. "But we've got work to do. There's something afoot that is far from good. Tell your dad I'll let him know in a few days whether we can stabilize the superhard Tempalloy."

"I'll be back in a few days," she said. "I'm interested enough to want to watch this!"

CHAPTER II

Contagion

ACCORDING to law, any building that housed a self-reacting nuclear pile employing uranium or any other fissionable

material, must be not less than ten miles from the nearest dwelling. Green Metallurgical Laboratory was, therefore, ten miles by the best surveyor that the State of Indiana could supply, away from the outward corner of the last house in Ramball, Indiana. Greene Metals was connected to civilization by means of a road made of metal-alloy paving locks, a third-rail interurban trolley-line that took workers to and from, a railroad spur, and a series of tall towers that carried high tension lines.

The lines were used to carry power to three outlying cities—the power generated by the uranium pile was a by-product. It was used to generate the radioisotopes and transuranic elements used to make special alloys for special jobs—at a very special price.

It was along the metal-surfaced road that Leona Holden drove her sixteen cylinder Holden Special back to Ramball. Her story was none too clear; yet she conveyed to Gregory Holden the one fact that somehow, strangely, Greene Metals had discovered a means of making any metal super-hard. Whereupon Gregory Holden called in his legal staff.

Deane Mawres heard the tale again, produced the Holden contract with Greene Metals and ran through it with a practised eye. He had written the contract himself and he knew where to find what he was after. He nodded with self-satisfaction.

"Go on," beamed Holden. "How does it tie in?"

"It states in effect that any developments made under this contract shall belong completely to the Holden Enterprises," he said. "Now it is a fact that Greene was attempting to find an alloy capable of cutting Tempalloy. Therefore if, due to by-product of this search, any other discoveries of a valuable nature are made, they shall also become the property of Holden Enterprises."

Gregory Holden selected a large cigar and lit it with a flourish.

"If what my daughter says is true," he observed, "I can see automobiles with super-hard bodies. We'll give Greene a week, and then we'll close in."

Leona looked puzzled. "Will that be necessary?" she asked. "Mr. Greene seems to be an honest man."

Her father looked tolerantly at her. "My dear," he said, "when something like this is in the wind, no man is too honest. Greene

will be inspecting this contract with a microscope to see if there are any flaws that will permit him to keep his discovery."

"Well, I don't believe that of Jim Greene."

"I do. And we'll prove it to you."

Leona left the office. She did not think it of Jim Greene, but there was no sense in arguing with her father on the subject. As she left, Deane Mawres looked up.

"Can you squeeze 'em?" he asked.

"I think so," replied Holden. "Tempalloy is a Holden product, you know. And you should know."

Mawres nodded complacently. Then he said:

"Greene has Tony Morrow working for him, you know."

"Morrow is a has-been," replied Holden roughly. "All he can do is to stand in the way and make nasty remarks."

"I'm inclined to worry about Morrow. When he was head of the Morrow Alloy Company, he was no man's fool, as you very well know."

"He was our man's fool, though perhaps no other man's," laughed Holden. "He developed Tempalloy. And it was you that convinced the judge and jury that his act of shipping us the hard metal was a cover-up."

"That wasn't too hard," smiled Mawres. "All I did was to show them that the cost seemed too high, after which I used Morrow's own figures to show that Tempalloy was as easy to shape as mild steel. They assumed themselves that Morrow was shaping the stuff soft and charging us for the job of shaping the hard stuff. The kicker in the contract was the thing that gave us Morrow Alloys and that's what put Tony Morrow out of a job."

"Well, find a kicker in the Greene Contract."

"No kicker is needed. When and if it's needed, we've got Greene where we want him. I wonder if there's any truth in the thing at all. It seems outrageous that a hardness-factor could creep from metal to metal like that."

"Well, we'll find out," said Holden, relighting his cigar. "And maybe we'll own Jim Greene by his soul, too."

"Fact is," continued Holden after a moment of thought, "I'd prefer that he does try to weasel out of it. Then we can really move in."

JIM GREENE nodded at the electronics specialist. "Sure, I've got a moment. What is it?"

"Superhard Tempalloy is a superconductor."

"Superconductor? Are you sure? I've never heard of one existing at normal temperatures."

Edwin Wright produced figures and a multi-curve graph. "These curves show the hardness creep of the superhard stuff," he said, pointing to one of two. "versus normal Tempalloy. You'll notice that the superhard curve is incomplete but extrapolated. The specific resistivity of both are shown too—and that's how I extrapolated the hardness curve."

"There is a definite mathematical relationship between the hardness of Tempalloy and its ohmic resistance. Therefore when the superhard stuff starts to get beyond the range of our high-test Rockwell machines, I took the liberty of making the mathematical extrapolation. It approaches a perfect conductor. It is also nonmagnetic, which hasn't changed. Its heat conductivity is something terrific, too; like liquid helium."

"I can see the development of high-wattage microwave generators out of it; you can make the tube elements very small and the radiating fins large and out of the circuit so long as you connect them with Tempalloy. Then any heat generated in the elements themselves will also be communicated instantly to the fins."

"I've tried it with a long filament of the stuff. You take a Tempalloy rod about six feet long and twenty thousandths in diameter and hit one end with an oxy-hydrogen flame. It gets white hot all along the wire at the same time—and you can cool the whole thing by sticking the far end in water. When you dangle one end in water and heat the other end with a torch, it's just like pointing the torch itself into the water."

"Uh—that's some metal, then. Well, Wright, you go to work on it and see what we can do."

Ed Wright nodded. "I'm working with Otto."

Greene nodded. Otto was the theorist; the mathematician, the abstract thinker. Confronted by facts, Otto Lindstrom had an untrammelled mind with unlimited imagination. He had, however, no use for fiction. His world discounted any fiction until it became fact.

Otto Lindstrom and Ed Wright made a good pair, for Ed was inclined to take any situation or set of facts and extend them a bit beyond fact so that he could build a fantasy about them. While Jim Greene was considering this, the telephone rang and he reached idly for it.

"Mr. Greene? This is Joe, down in the cafeteria. I thought you'd like to know that we're having trouble opening the cans."

"Hold it," said Jim, wondering. "I'll be right down."

He went at once. Joe handed Greene a can and indicated the can-opener on the wall. Jim Greene slid the can under the knife and tried to clamp the handle down. It would not go; but stuck just as contact was made. That told Greene volumes. He called Tony Morrow and Andrew Cleve and three other workmen and set them to checking the metal building with center punches and hammers. Within an hour he knew all he needed to know.

It had started with the lathe upon which the test cutting of the first Tempalloy by the first Fool's Alloy had been done. Now it was spreading through the building.

As he returned to his office, one of the girls called his attention to the fact that her stapling machine no longer worked. The staples came out, and they punctured the paper, but they did not fold over on the underside. Tony Morrow, tapping on the floor, lost his balance and fell against a stenographer's desk. The typewriter toppled, and the girl wasted no time in fading back out of the way. The typewriter hit the metal floor with a crash—and bounced, unharmed.

"Now," muttered Greene, "if we could control this, we'd have that glorious postwar world!"

An hour later, Jim Greene had every member of the plant assembled. He told them what was going on. Then he concluded:

"This must be stopped. You all can see the result, if it is not. Contamination by a piece of treated metal will spread indefinitely, so far as we know. It takes but a minute contact. Now, we cannot be responsible for the death of this civilization and that is what it amounts to. Those of you who prefer to stay may do so. Those of you who prefer to leave may do so, providing you leave with absolutely no metal on you."

"All production work is suspended; all facilities will be put on the job of figuring out

how to confine and control this contagion of metals. When we have it licked, we'll see to it that all of you are repaid for your discomfort. Okay?"

There was an uncertain roar that greeted this but the result was gratifying.

CHAPTER III

Countermove

IT WAS midnight when the special train came down the siding. It was laden with canned goods in jars and other foodstuffs packaged without metal. The men set to work with a will to remove a certain quantity, but the bulk of the stuff in the mechanical refrigerator cars seemed to be ignored. The engineer and train crew broached the subject to Jim Greene.

"I am impounding the train," he said.

"You can't!"

"I am. It is necessary." He explained the hardening of metals and then said: "Can you understand the decline of civilization that would take place if no metal could be worked? We had to order supplies because we couldn't open a tin can. We've unsealed your cars only because we couldn't break the metal seal once it got superhard. We've had to open all candies and other stuff wrapped with tinfoil because superhard tinfoil cannot even be bent! Every watch in the place has stopped because the hairspring has such a violent strength that there is not enough energy to flex it."

The engineer thought for a moment.

"How about the tracks?" he asked.

"It's creeping along them, too. We're cutting them. Right now."

The engineer looked at the brakeman.

"We're stuck," he said. "Let's help!"

At the edge of the plant yard, just inside the metal fence, a workman was plying an acetylene torch. Another man was sitting astride the rail, tapping it with a center-punch.

"Better hurry, Tim," he said, moving along a few inches. He tapped again, nodded, and kept trying the rail. Three minutes later he muttered something and moved again. The hardness was creeping along the rails swiftly. In fact, behind him, Otto Lindstrom was making calculations as he moved. Lindstrom

turned to Jim Greene as the latter arrived and said:

"The hardness is creeping swifter now. It is accelerating rapidly. Unless the man with the torch hurries, he will not be quick enough!"

The man testing the rails moved again. "Better give up, Tim," he said.

Tim grunted and watched the rail for a moment before shaking his head. He applied the torch again and the sparks flew.

"I can beat it, Larry," he said confidently.

Then as he spoke, the sparks died from the rail and Larry leaped from his seat with a cry of pain. The hardening-creep had reached the cut before Tim was finished and the heat had swept along the rails burning Larry.

"Look," said Greene, "calculate how far it travels before you can cut in and then go out and do it without test. Darn it, Larry, you've got a contaminated punch there that's helping the spread along!"

A roar of sound and a belch of flame came from five hundred feet away. Greene's men had just cut the metal surfaced roadway with dynamite.

GREGORY HOLDEN snorted angrily and flung the telephone back at its rest.

"No communications," he said. "That means that Greene has something."

"Trouble, perhaps," said Leona. "Something must have happened."

"You're darn well right it happened!" scowled Holden. "What happened was that Greene did turn up with a means of hardening metal. Now he's hiding behind a wall of secrecy until he can figure out an angle."

"I don't believe it."

"Maybe not," grunted Holden, "but you can bet it's true. He—yes, Alice?"

"A Mr. Morrow to see you," his secretary told him.

"Morrow! Well, by all means send him in! Tony Morrow, Leona. Greene must think I'm guileless. Or he must be stupid. He should know that sending Tony Morrow with any cock-and-bull story wouldn't convince me of anything—Hello, Morrow. What's going on out at your place?"

"It's bad," said Tony. "And quite dangerous."

Holden tossed a quick what-did-I-tell-you glance at Leona and then selected a cigar from his humidior.

"Tell me," said Holden leisurely, "did Jim

Greene really discover a way to harden all metals?"

"In a sense, yes."

"And what does he intend to do with it?"

"Try to keep it safe until we can figure out how to handle it."

Morrow didn't know, of course, that he was almost echoing Holden's previous words. Morrow disliked Holden immensely, and would have given years of his life for a chance to get back at the tycoon.

Regardless of the opinions of jurors and judges who were misled by brilliant oratory glibly describing the machinations of a technically complex process, it was a fact that Holden's grab of the Morrow Alloy Company was more than sixty percent cold-blooded steal.

"Tell me, Morrow, why did you come here?"

"Because Jim wanted you to understand. You see, Jim Greene is quite a responsible person, Holden. Far more honest than either you or myself. He knew you would expect his answer when he said he'd have one, therefore I am here to explain."

"I see. And Jim Greene hopes to keep this affair a secret?"

"Hardly a secret. That I fear is impossible. But at least we can keep the terrible truth out of the public hands until it is safe."

"Terrible truth, huh?" asked Holden.

Morrow grinned. "You can have your hard metal, Holden, so soon as it is not dangerous to society."

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning the so-called nuclear safety clause that is included in each and every contract dealing with any product or by-product of the uranium pile. If it is not baldly stated in the contract, it is still in force by Act of Congress as of nineteen forty-eight."

"Just what is this danger?" asked Holden.

"We cut the telephone lines, the high-wires, and the railroad to prevent the spread of metal-hardness," said Tony. "Likewise we blasted the metal-surfaced road. We're impounding all incoming metal whether it be automobile, railroad, or belt buckle."

"And you have not a stitch of metal on you?"

Morrow laughed. "An excellent tribute to my dental equipment," he said. "But I state proudly that there is not the trace of a filling in any of my teeth. I happen to be the only living soul at Greene Metals that can step

outside of the fence without contaminating the rest of the world."

"Yeah," drawled Holden, "how about the earth?"

"This is Indiana. We're situated on a bed of Indiana limestone, surrounded by a sea of alluvial sand and moraine, and there isn't a pocket of natural raw material within a good many miles of us."

"You actually claim that this hardening follows all metal?"

"We had trouble cutting the railroad tracks," said Morrow. "We had to abandon our cut three times before we got it cut through. Each time the hardening raced along the tracks and caught up with the torchbearer."

"Rather hard to believe," said Holden.

Morrow smiled slightly. Inwardly he was bubbling. Often he had heard it said that there is nothing so subject to doubt as the absolute truth. He had a fair idea that Holden was suspicious of any statements from Greene—especially any coming through himself as spokesman.

Putting himself in Holden's position, Morrow could see Holden's supposition that Greene had made a monumental discovery. And that Greene was trying to employ the nuclear safety clause to suppress the discovery until he could develop some means of handling it himself.

If Holden were really convinced of this, he would act. If he managed somehow to acquire a sample, the fat would really be in the fire. Morrow had a good witness to testify that he had warned Holden, and the chances were that Holden had this conversation recorded anyway. So Morrow was sticking to the truth.

"What does Greene hope to do with all this?" asked Holden.

"If it can be worked out, everything will be all right," replied Tony, picking his phrases carefully. "If not—Greene will call in the government."

"Government?"

"The resources of the United States Government are large enough to find the answer to this new feature. Excepting that Jim is afraid of it, we'd already be calling it the Greene Effect."

To Holden, visualizing the ramifications of a super-hard metal, the word 'Government' meant armed forces. The Navy would leap gleefully to accept armor plate that could not be touched with anything up to and includ-

ing oxy-hydrogen. The army would take it as quickly. And if it meant anything at all, the skies would be filled with superhard dural, magnesium, and aluminum metals.

That was not too good. If Greene offered it to the Navy, they would accept it as a sideline issue from the original contract and Holden would lose. Holden might appeal to the courts, but if he did so, he would be condemned as one who would obstruct the security of the nation. Also, if Greene did give it to the armed forces, Holden might consider the process a military secret. If that happened, he would not be permitted to speak himself.

"Okay," he said quietly. "You tell Greene that so soon as he figures out which angle to follow, we'll get together and work something out."

"I'll tell him that," Morrow said thoughtfully. Tony Morrow left, wondering just what course Holden would take. Also how long it would be.

CHAPTER IV

Atom Bomb

THE car that drove up to the breach in Jim's metal road paused only long enough for the driver to throw in the front-drive gears. Then it proceeded across the rough spot. It drove up to the front door and uniformed men got out, looked around, and then entered boldly, ignoring the weak protests of the guards at the portal.

The leader identified himself to Jim Greene.

"I am Major General Langley."

"Yes, General Langley? I'm sorry you came; at least so far in."

Langley waved away the concern and came to the point of his visit.

"I'm given to understand that you have a process for making a superhard metal here."

"We have—but it is not that simple."

"Why?"

"Because the process is in violation of the nuclear safety clause. It is not safe to permit its use in civilized places."

The general nodded easily. "We of the armed forces operate under the 'calculated risk,' in times of possible danger. Fact of the matter is, a bomber crew with a full load

flying over friendly territory is operating under 'calculated risk' because anybody who handles dangerous explosives does."

"This is not a matter of personal risk," objected Greene.

"No?"

"It may mean the death of civilization itself."

"Come come, Mr. Greene. That's what they said about the atom bomb. That's what someone probably said about the bow and arrow."

"May I ask who put you on this trail?"

General Langley nodded. "Gregory Holden," he said. "As he explained it to me, you are holding secret one of his processes."

"In a sense we are," admitted Greene. "But Holden should be aware of the possibilities of this. I sent Tony Morrow in to tell him everything."

"I was told that there would be talk of danger," said the general quietly.

"Well—there is danger!" snapped Greene.

"Perhaps I should insist that the armed forces laboratories investigate. I'll ask you for a sample of your hard metal."

Greene stood up and banged the desk with a hard fist.

"No metal is leaving this plant. Not even your car!"

"Come now, Greene. You cannot impound Army equipment."

"No? It will not leave!"

"May I point out that my men are armed?"

"I'll ask you to have one armed man sent up here," said Greene quietly. "But tell me, meanwhile, just what did Holden tell you?"

The general looked at Jim Greene in puzzlement. He went to the window and called one of the armed soldiers before answering Jim's question.

"Holden says this hardening process is rightfully his by virtue of a legal contract. According to Holden, the value of this process is such that you would go to any lengths to void the contract. Even to the point of offering it to the armed forces. However, Holden offered it to us first."

"Holden, then, is using the United States Army to pull what he thinks is a chestnut out of the fire," said Greene bitterly. "The fool!"

General Langley grunted. "Holden knows that the Army will deal properly with those who help it. You are hindering, Greene. Had you made the offer, we would have dealt with you."

Greene was shaking his head when the soldier came in. "General, I'm going to demonstrate to you my superhard alloy. And then its danger. May I ask your permission to direct the soldier?"

"Corporal Hadley, this is James Greene. He has my permission."

"Yes, sir."

"Hadley," said Greene, "fix your bayonet and lunge through that window screen over there."

The corporal looked at Greene as though the man were crazy. Shaking his head, Hadley fixed his bayonet and made a dilatory poke at the screen. The screen stopped the bayonet and did not even bend. Hadley rammed it hard but the heavy rifle stopped cold. Putting his entire weight and muscle into it, Hadley stabbed at the screen, and nearly lost his footing due to the complete and solid stoppage.

"You'll notice that the screen is not even deformed," said Greene. "Now, quickly, soldier, fire a shot at the screen."

HADLEY raised his rifle and fired. The bullet hit the screen and would have ricocheted save for the screen itself. The cupro-nickel jacket of the bullet parted under the fine-wire mesh, and strained or extruded itself through by almost a sixteenth of an inch. It hung there—hot.

"When that cools down," said Greene, "You'll find a crisscross thread on the bullet. Now, Hadley, I think it is time to fire once more."

The soldier pulled the trigger. There was a sharp click but no report. The soldier re-cocked his rifle and tried again. Then he levered the shell from the chamber and tried another. That, too, misfired. Greene picked up the outcast shell and handed it to General Langley.

"Note the primer," he said to the general. "The spread of this metal contagion is so swift that by now the corporal's rifle has become hardened from its contact against the screen. Obviously, the metal primer cannot be dented to fire the shell."

"We could put a plastic primer in," said Langley.

"And kill your own soldiers?"

"How?" snapped the general angrily. "I doubt that you have the experience in firearms—"

Greene held up a hand. "When a shell is fired, it expands slightly. The holding ferrule

widens to permit the bullet to leave, the bullet is deformed as it hits the rifling-lands of the barrel. With superhard metal, General Langley, the shell would not expand, the holding ferrule would not permit the exit of the bullet, and if it did, the bullet would stop when it hit the rifling lands. The net result in any case is the fact that the exploding gases can only escape back through the primer-hole, fighting their way through the gas-closures and finally ending up by hitting the soldier in the face." Greene smiled. "Of course," he said with the tolerant air of a man speaking to a child, "you could design a rifle so that the escaping gases would blow out easily."

The corporal blinked. "Why," he said, "this makes all rifles obsolete." He thought a moment. "In fact, all firearms. We're back to the knife."

Greene turned to the general. "And if you want your army to be equipped with this superhard metal, do it quickly, General Langley. Because once all metal on earth gets hard, you won't be able to machine any of it. . . ."

Leona Holden bumped across the breach in the road and ran to Jim Greene's office, but found him missing. The girl in the front of the office enclosure idly pointed out at the back door that led from the office room to the laboratory, and Leona went there. She found Jim Greene working over an analytical balance measuring powders of metals.

"Leona!" he said. "You shouldn't have come here."

"I had to find out," she said simply.

"Find out?"

"The truth of this. Dad says you are trying to steal his process. Tell me honestly Jim, what is it?"

"What Tony Morrow told you is the truth," he said.

"But what are you doing?"

Jim laughed bitterly. "The obvious," he said. "Whatever nuclear reaction caused this all-embracing total hardening of all metals, it was started by the contact of two radioactive alloys. We know why each of the alloys behaved as they did alone, but not why they should have touched off this contagious metal disease. Therefore I am trying to develop another alloy that will reverse the process."

"Then it is bad," breathed the girl. "I'm glad."

"Glad?" exploded Greene.

"Not glad for the trouble of course," she

said quietly and sincerely, "but definitely glad that my father is wrong. But Jim, just how bad is it?"

GENERAL LANGLEY came from the window and faced the girl.

"Miss Holden," he said, "it is bad enough to convince me that I must stay here—because of the silver fillings in my teeth! Until Greene gets his answer we are stuck."

"And what are your chances?" asked Leona.

"I don't know. This looks like a hopeless case. We don't know what to look for in the first place and the permutations possible in making alloys out of a hundred-odd elements are approaching infinity. I—Hey, that's a plane!"

General Langley turned to the corporal who was sitting near the portable radio removed from the general's command car.

"Contact them," he said.

"Yes, sir." The pilot called and was answered.

"This is General Langley. What are you doing here?"

"Major Howes to General Langley. Your report via radio as of this morning has been considered by the Master Board of Strategy. It has been declared a first class national emergency. We have orders for you to evacuate the premises."

"Don't be ridiculous. We can't."

"You must. I have orders to destroy the plant."

"Destroy it?" snapped the general. "You must not—and that is an official order from me."

"You outrank me, sir," came the reply. "However, I am under formal order from the President of the United States and responsible only to him. You are also. You are to evacuate the premises."

"We cannot."

"Why?"

"Because we carry with us the contaminated metal. There is no man or woman present who has a silver filling in his teeth that does not stand an excellent possibility of being contaminated."

"Then if you leave you may cause the spread of this contagion?"

"Precisely."

"Then hold on a moment. I must contact my superiors."

Minutes passed. Then Major Howes returned to the radio contact. His voice was

very strained.

"Since you are all contaminated," he said, "I have orders to destroy you all. This is a matter of sacrificing you for the benefit of humanity."

"Can't you give us time to work this out?" demanded the general.

"The National Board of Strategy fears that the contamination may spread if it is not taken care of instantly." The major's voice broke again as he said, "I am sorry, sir. But I have orders—"

Greene whirled from the window. "What's he doing? He just dropped something."

"A-bomb," grunted the general. "to destroy us and save civi—"

"No!" screamed Greene.

The general faced Greene sarcastically.

"You're not afraid to die, are you?" he asked bitterly.

"No," said Greene. "But I am against dying for no good. Look, general, if the Eastman Kodak people had trouble with straw-paper made from a field in Illinois that was contaminated by the explosion at Los Alamos, what chance do you think there is that this will be really destroyed?"

The general blinked. And at that moment, the bomb landed on the ground below.

"Time fused!" yelled the general.

"We have one chance!" cried Greene. He unsnapped the catches on the window screen with one hand and grabbed a handful of small superhard Tempalloy samples with the other. Then he leaped out through the window, raced to the pit where the bomb lay ticking, and liberally sprinkled the monstrous bomb with the contaminating metal. Then he ran back, to meet the others who were coming through the door.

"Get away!" he screamed at them.

"If it works," said the general, "we'll not need distance. If it doesn't, we can't run that far anyway."

"But—"

There was a sharp cracking report as the internal gun fired non-critical masses of plutonium together and fused them into a supercritical mass, followed by a hard roar as fission took place and the expanding energy filled the cavities in the bomb. Trapped, the mad energy roared in confinement and dissipated as heat.

The bomb, hidden by its own pit, flared incandescent instantly, blasted a solid fan-wise beam of light into the sky that paled the sun, and then sank out of sight as it melted

the very ground beneath it. Sand, dirt and rock flowed into the bubbling pit and were hurled into the sky in a mad geyser. The ground grew hot beneath their feet and the molten pit spread wider, its edges eroding into the bubbling mass. The spot in the center above the bomb gurgled and hurled spouts of molten earth into the air.

Jim Greene shook his head and mopped his brow.

"I am—beat," he said weakly.

General Langley was still staring at the molten pit.

"Licked," he gritted, and those who heard him knew he meant the atomic bomb. He turned to Greene and said: "Jim, this is an order. Lick this hardening disease somehow, but keep it handy." Then he turned to the still increasing puddle of molten earth and muttered: "Tis truly an ill wind that blows no good!"

CHAPTER V

Cost-plus

GREGORY HOLDEN stopped his big car at the metal gate. Puzzled, he leaned out of the car and snapped:

"I'm Gregory Holden, soldier. I want in."

"Mister," said the soldier snapping the bolt on his rifle, "I don't care if you are Geronimo himself. No one goes in without General Langley's permission."

"What's going on here, anyway?"

The soldier smiled. "No man who goes in can come out. That's why we're restricting the clientele to the cream of society. We want no overcrowding."

"Don't be insolent. Tell Langley I want in!"

"Don't be hasty. General Langley is in command and he is a busy man."

"I'll enter anyway. I'm Gregory Holden."

"You enter without permission and that name will look well on your tombstone," gritted the soldier. "Now be a good corpse-intended and I'll see if you have the proper qualifications for entry."

Fuming in rage, Holden respected the rifle of the sentry and of the other guards that ringed the premises. He waited for a full half hour before the guard returned and opened the gate.

"Walk," he said.

"That's a full half mile," objected Holden.

"It'll take some of that pot off of you," suggested the soldier. "No metal goes in that can't be stopped. Remove all coins, belt buckles, fountain pens, keys and everything else of metal and you may enter. As soon as you're clean, we'll know it by the induction balance here."

Fuming, Gregory Holden removed metal bits. He was amazed to find out just how many bits of hard metal he carried. As he started down the road, the officer smiled at him.

"Lucky you're wearing trousers with buttons instead of a zipper," he called. "One guy went in wearing seven-striped shorts."

Holden grunted angrily. When he reached the laboratory, he snapped: "What's going on here?"

Langley turned. "We are keeping this secret from society," he said in a scathing voice. "We hope to keep it for ourselves."

"But—?"

"Stick around and watch. Mr. Greene is making an experiment."

Holden dropped into a chair. No one paid any attention to him, and he finally called Leona over and asked her what was going on. Quickly, and while watching the operations at the laboratory table, Leona brought him up to date, including the atom-bombing.

Holden blinked. "I daresay we started something," he said in an awed voice. "I never suspected that every metal would get hard!"

Idly he picked up a cube of metal and hefted it. "What's this?" he asked.

"One of Jim's samples," Leona told him. "But you shouldn't have moved it. It is supposed to stay in contact with that superhard Tempalloy plate there."

"Sorry," said Holden. He dropped the cube of metal on the Tempalloy plate again and then reached over to square it up. As he turned it, one corner scratched the plate below. The sound caused all of them to turn.

"What was that?" demanded Greene.

Holden showed him. Then Greene picked up the tempalloy plate and scratched it deliberately. He tried the plate against another tempalloy plate and scratched it easily. He tried his sample alloy against the other plate and scratched that.

"Lacking any means of measuring hardness at this level," he explained, "we can arrive at this assumption. This is Alloy

Seventeen in this series of tests. Seventeen, in contact with tempalloy, hardens. Tempalloy softens. Seventeen will scratch hard tempalloy, which will scratch the tempalloy softened by Seventeen."

He tried the bench beneath the samples. It scratched. Even with the end of a pick, it scratched. Then like a geologist marking a contour map, Jim Greene started to plot the spread of softening. Like a widening pool, it spread; out across the bench it went, spread to the legs, started across the floor.

"Out of here!" he yelled suddenly.

"But why?" asked Leona.

"Because the ground around the yard is filled with tiny metal scrap," he said. "And I'm still worried about that A-bomb!"

From the edge of the ten-mile sterile area, they watched the terrible mushroom cap billow towards the sky. The thundering roar buffeted at them and the ground shook beneath their feet. Upward went the cloud to

be blown away by winds of the upper air.

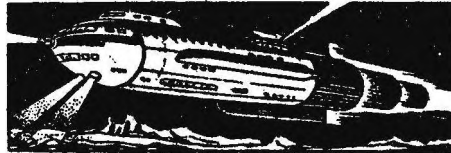
"You see," said Jim Greene, "the confinement of the explosive was such that only enough plutonium exploded to provide restraining pressure for the rest. Then when the casing returned to its sensible hardness, that restraining pressure permitted the rest of the explosion." He turned to Holden and handed him the notebook.

"Here, Gregory," he said, "is the means to make superhard alloys—and the means to control them. I want no part of it."

Holden smiled. "The cost-plus rider in the contract can be constructed to include the plant as an expenditure," he said.

Greene shook his head. "I never want to see another alloy as long as I live."

He was wrong. It took eight months to prove it, because it was eight months before they could rebuild the Greene Metallurgical Laboratory on the plains ten miles from Ramball, Indiana.



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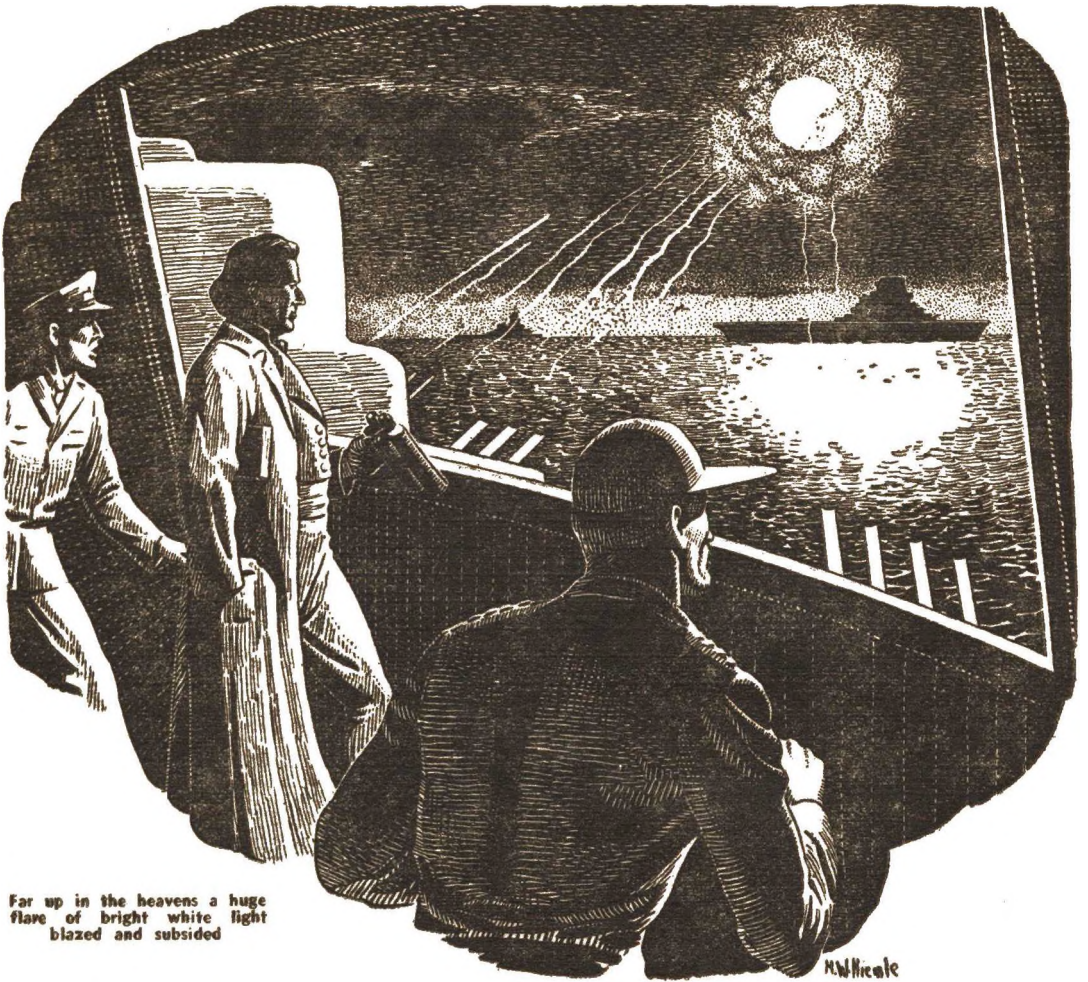
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Far up in the heavens a huge
flare of bright white light
blazed and subsided

R. W. H. H. H. H.

THE ADMIRAL'S WALK

By SAM MERWIN, JR.

*On the eve of Trafalgar, Horatio Nelson is thrust into
the dark coils of Time to face the challenge of destiny!*

THE THIN LITTLE man in the blue coat with the tarnished gold braid sat at the desk in his cabin and wished for fatigue to overwhelm him. He was tired, tired with a fatigue which had been creeping slowly upon him in recent years—and had come on apace in the past few months. Now it was in his very bones.

It was the cold fatigue of an old man—

and he was far from old as the world counted years.

He eyed the gleaming bottle of black West Indian rum that stood in its barricaded tray on the table to his left, and his blue eyes lit with a gleam of purpose. Forgetfulness, even sleep, lay in its turbid depths.

But such sleep was not for him with the night already so far spent. The morrow lay

close upon him, the morrow toward which his every faculty had been sternly impelled for so many long and unrewarding months. And behind those months lay the many weary years.

Actually, until the issue was joined, there was little he could do. To show himself on deck would reveal a nervousness that might result in a disastrous echo among the men who relied upon him for victory.

His senses hyper-acute, he heard the slap of brine against the waterline, its rhythm never twice the same, yet never varied, so that a man could pick out the difference. He watched idly as the swaying cabin lamp made the shadow of the bottle on the table dance a minuet.

All around him was the wakeful dormancy of a mighty ship asleep—as other ships lay in similar unreal quiescence fore and aft, ships whose commanders were bound by oath to obey his every whim, bound by oath and the fealty his reputation inspired.

It was terrible to hold supreme command on the eve of battle; terrible and frightening. The light supper he had eaten lay heavy on his stomach.

Despite the battles he had fought, the victories he had won, such malaise had never failed to visit him when action loomed close. It was twenty-five years since he had first felt it.

Then he had led a malaria-ridden crew against the well-fortified defenses of San Juan in Nicaragua. It was a comparatively minor mission, one suited to a twenty-two-year-old commander on his first independent assignment. He had thought never again to be troubled with it once the victory was won.

But it had been present fifteen years later when the combined fleets had chased him to the haven of Genoa; and again, two years thereafter, when he had planted the *Captain* between two enemy vessels and blasted them both to defeat.

Four times more he felt its sickness seize his vitals—at Cadiz, where he had first been wounded in a disastrous combined operations assault; in Aboukir Bay, where the foe had let him sink their warships one by one, like sheep awaiting helplessly the wolf; in the Kattegatt, and at Kronstadt, where for once no shot had been fired.

NOW he felt its grip and his restless fighter's soul demanded some sort of action to prevent it from controlling him en-

tirely. It was odd that he should feel it so keenly, for once action was joined, only icy water flowed in his veins.

He rose then, adapting his motions to the roll of the Atlantic beneath his ship like the veteran sailor he was. A short, angular, indomitable figure, he strode across his cabin to the admiral's walk aft. He was an admiral, was he not? Who had a better right to use it?

The sky was cloudy above the restless black velvet of the sea, and the shipboard sounds were clearer. Somewhere below one horizon lay the coast of Spain and the port of Cadiz where he had suffered the anguish of a shattered elbow. And somewhere below the other horizon lay the foe, the elusive foe he had pursued so long and so vainly.

It was a chase that had begun in January, just nine months before to the day. It had crossed the ocean twice, from Toulon to Cadiz, from Cadiz to Martinique, from Martinique to Cape Finisterre, from Finisterre back to Cadiz.

And now at last that he was within reach of his quarry, he feared their strength, for they outnumbered him by twenty-five per cent in capital ships alone. He wondered how best to overcome this advantage, for if he let them slip he might never get another chance as good.

He saw then that the ship behind his own was out of line and frowned. Were blunders by individual commanders, the bane of all fleet admirals, to begin already? And then he saw that not only the next ship but those behind it were well to starboard as he stood.

His own ship must be in disorder. He lifted his head before turning back to go on deck and give the necessary orders, heard the yaw of the ship beneath him as it swung a few degrees to get back in position. He smiled, issuing a self-reprimand for taking it upon himself even in thought, to correct the proper captain of the ship. An admiral, after all, was merely a guest on the flagship.

Lightning played through the clouds above him and he watched it, listening for the rumble of thunder that would inevitably follow. It sounded like the man-made thunder that was sure to roar and rumble on the morrow. Even the gods. . . .

Suddenly, the whole sky seemed to light up in a blinding, terrifying glare. He thought it must have struck the ship, as his frail body was picked up and tossed through the air like a wisp of straw. And then his senses failed him and he no longer saw anything at all. . . .

When he recovered consciousness he was lying in a corridor so strange that it might well have been heaven or hell. It was definitely not of any world he knew.

It was shining white and utterly bare of decoration. Light came from curious glowing rods set at intervals where wall and ceiling met. The floor, of some curious composition substance, was hard beneath his sorely bruised body.

Silently he cursed to himself, aware only with the ingrained habit of years of stern discipline, that he was not on his ship when he was needed most. Not until he had managed to stand upright by supporting himself against the wall did he reflect that he might no longer have a ship or a fleet to be needed upon.

He was surely the victim of some inexplicable catastrophe. Standing unaided, he rubbed his aching forehead.

Then, because to stand still was not in his nature, he began to walk along the corridor. He ignored the round-cornered doors, painted white like the walls, that appeared at intervals. At the end of the passage was a companionway and its steps offered escape, or at least observation.

Slowly he climbed it and then another stairway and nowhere did man appear to stop his progress or to offer information as to his whereabouts. Beneath the white paint the wall was hard, unyielding, metallic to the touch of his left hand. He climbed still another companionway, came to an open door and entered it.

He was in a medium-sized, square chamber, furnished with strange chairs and tables of shining metal and leather. Though he needed urgently to rest himself, he glanced at their proffered comforts only briefly. His keen blue eyes had spotted a bookcase against the far wall.

HIS light brows drew together as he studied the titles on their backs. They were in English, but the titles were as unfamiliar to him as were the bindings upon which they were printed. There were a book on navigation by a man named Bowditch, a set of volumes on sea power by an Admiral Mahan, a nest of volumes on something called radar by a man with an unpronounceable name.

From them, alien as they were, he derived some satisfaction. He was either on a fantastic sort of a ship or in some place

where ship lore was a topic of discussion. He looked further and his blue eyes bulged. His own name stared back at him in letters of gold leaf.

Plucking the book out, he leafed it open incredulously, sat down on the nearest alien metal and leather chair—which proved surprisingly comfortable as it gave just enough beneath his weight. Using his left hand dextrously, he turned to the contents page.

It was then that voices at the open doorway caused him to look up abruptly.

“. . . no actual damage done beyond what we have already suffered, sir,” said one of them. “But it was close.”

“We should be out of the pattern, Smithers,” said another, deeper voice. “Once we’re out of the area we may be able to dock her ourselves. So at least our mission has been accomplished.”

“Then we’re definitely doomed, sir?” the first voice inquired. Like the other, he spoke incisive English, but in accents unlike any the listener had ever heard.

“The Geiger counters tell the story and it’s all bad,” came the reply. “It’s all right for you and me—but when I think of the men . . . well, I’m not sorry we gave the devils what we did. They had it coming to them.”

“They did indeed, sir. It’s odd about the men. Mass hysteria is the last thing I’d have figured on, even under the present circumstances.”

“Such things are not new to the sea, Smithers. But the men who reported it didn’t seem hysterical.”

“But reporting sight of a fleet of square-riggers, sir—square-riggers under full sail—twenty or thirty of them. It’s way beyond me, sir.”

“Beyond me too, Smithers. Good night.”

Retreating footsteps sounded outside and then the door was shut as a tall, burly man with a heavily sunburned face stepped into the room and closed the door behind him.

He moved to a wall shelf behind whose gleaming twin rails stood a carafe and glasses and poured himself a drink. He wore khaki trousers, a khaki shirt, open at the neck, with four little stars at the collar, and a strange headgear, like a skullcap with a long crimson brim.

He poured himself a glass of water, drank it with relish, put the glass down, turned—and saw his visitor.

“Omigosh!” he exclaimed, passed a hand over his eyes and looked again. He came

halfway across the room, staring as if at a ghost.

"Omigosh!" he breathed again. "Are you real?"

"I begin to wonder," said the little man, rising from his chair. "Who are you?" The unconscious arrogance of years of command was in his voice.

"Since this is *my* cabin, who in hades are you?" Then, after a silence that endured while the burly man in khaki studied the pale face of the man before him, the stringy ash-blond hair, the tarnished blue coat with its white facings and pinned-up right sleeve he muttered. "Don't tell me. I know."

"I have not the honor," Horatio Nelson replied. "And if you were in any way responsible for plucking me from the admiral's walk of the *Victory* on the eve of battle, I should greatly appreciate an explanation."

The big man with the stars on his collar came swiftly forward, put a hand on Nelson's shoulder as if to make sure that he was real, and stared at him. As an afterthought he pinched himself hard.

"Square rigged ships in the light of the blast—and Horatio Nelson in my cabin!" he muttered.

"Since you know my name, why do you persist in doubting my reality?" the one-armed admiral asked with a trace of impatience.

WITHOUT answering the other went to a wall cupboard, opened it and took out a bottle. He got the pitcher and glasses from the railed shelf and put the collection down on the table in the center of the room.

"Say when," he said. "I think we both need this. I'm Admiral Edward Kirkham of the United States Navy. Your health, Admiral. And don't bother to drink mine. I haven't any, you see."

"United States Navy," said Nelson, accepting the glass gratefully. "You have a brilliant man in Stephen Decatur, and your new frigates trounced the French soundly. But what do you in these waters since the Tripolitan pirates have been defeated?"

"Admiral," said Kirkham, sitting down and motioning Nelson to take the seat across from him, "explanations seem to be in order from both of us. How to begin?"

"At the beginning, perhaps," said Nelson with the ghost of a smile. However mad the circumstances, he could not but like this

bluff flag officer. American or no, he was one of his own kind.

"That would take years," said Kirkham. "We have a saying at home which goes, 'The time, the place and the girl.' Its implications should be understandable to a man like yourself."

"Entirely," said Nelson with a faint smile.

"Well, Admiral, consider yourself the girl for the purpose of metaphor. We are roughly a hundred miles southwest of Cadiz, so the place and the girl are right—remember, you're the girl. It's the time that's cockeyed."

"Cockeyed?" said Nelson. Then, "Oh! And just why is it cockeyed, Admiral?"

"Because, dammit, you've been deader than a doornail for more than a hundred and fifty-five years. Look at that book in your hand. It tells the story, if you're man enough to take it! You died at Trafalgar on October twenty-first, eighteen hundred and five."

"And this is the night of October twentieth, nineteen-sixty!" mused Nelson. He shuddered briefly.

"Eh?" said Kirkham. He looked apologetic. "Sorry to give it to you so brutally, Admiral, but you're on a ship of men who have little longer to live. We've been washed by so much radioactive water our only hope is to get her back to port before we become derelict."

"Radioactive water?" said Nelson. Then he dismissed the question as of no account. He laid the book on the table without opening it and looked earnestly at his host.

"Tell me, Admiral, did we win?"

"You knocked them to pieces," said Kirkham. "Your twenty-seven ships of the line hit Villeneuve's thirty-three so hard, you forced eighteen to strike without the loss of a ship yourself."

"Tell me, Admiral," said Nelson. "What tactics did I employ to gain so signal a victory?"

"You smashed their line by attacking in double column. They failed to employ low raking fire and aimed as usual at your rigging. Once through, you had them."

NELSON sighed, but it was not with relief.

"Thank you, Admiral. You say it's all in here?" He tapped the book with his left hand.

"All there," said Kirkham.

"One thing troubles me, Admiral. How am I to fight this battle if I am not with my fleet?"

"Good heavens!" Kirkham stared at him open-mouthed. The enormity of what had happened seemed just to have sunk in upon him. "Then the ships my watch and radar-men reported must have been yours!"

"Exactly," said Nelson. "And perhaps you would be good enough to tell me how I was plucked from my own admiral's walk to the decks of this very strange vessel?"

"I'm no Einstein," said the American. Then he laughed. "I'm no scientific wizard, Admiral. But that last atom blast that nearly got us must have kicked the Earth right back on its own time trail for a second. It certainly made enough of a fuss. And we may get more any minute."

"What sort of war is this?" Nelson asked, disturbed. "You say you and your men are dying, you talk of earth-shaking 'atom' blasts, yet you fight in sealed cabins."

"Not sealed tightly enough," said Kirkham. "By the way, you are aboard the United States Battleship Kentucky, first capital ship in the world to mount major guided missiles instead of heavy guns. Perhaps this will help you."

He moved quickly to the bookcase, pulled out a few volumes and laid them on the table. They were illustrated histories of sea power, and in them he traced the development of warships from the sail-driven four-deckers of 1805 through the first steam frigates, the early breastwork monitors, the dreadnoughts and the mighty superdreadnoughts of World War Two, to the semi-submersible ships of the new conflict.

"We have them too," he stated, pointing to the last-named. "But we've had all these old-style ships like this wagon we're aboard, built and ready. So they sent us out as a raiding force to plant guided atomic missiles on the enemy's vitals from close inshore.

"There were only twenty-four of us to begin with—the Kentucky, the Missouri, the New Jersey, battleships; the Midway, the Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Coral Sea, carriers; the Alaska, Guam and Hawaii, large cruisers; three San Diegos, small cruisers; and a dozen of the big new destroyers.

"Our main attack is coming over the North Pole—airborne, and we were merely a diversion. We had luck and launched our missiles successfully. The troop landings are coming off almost without opposition according to the latest dispatches. But the enemy isn't through by a long shot. There's a lot of him and he's out to finish us."

"I can understand that," said Nelson, "though I confess much of your terminology is beyond me. But how can an incredible steel floating fortress of more than fifty thousand tons be damaged?"

"The answer to that lies in the fact that only this battleship, the Midway, the Alaska and Guam, one of the light cruisers and seven of the destroyers are still afloat. And of these, only the crews of one cruiser and three destroyers have not been doomed by radioactivity."

"What is this radioactivity you speak of, Admiral?"

KIRKHAM told him, crisply, graphically. At its conclusion his listener's face was even paler than its wont. He rose and saluted the American gravely.

"You and your crew deserve the salute of every sailor who ever lived"—he stumbled a little over the phrase, caught himself and went on—"and I am proud to salute you in their behalf. War has become a terrible thing."

"It always was," said Kirkham. He had reached for the glass to pour another pair of drinks when a buzzer sounded and he flipped the switch on a box at his elbow.

"Enemy plane sighted and destroyed fifty miles off port bow," came the report. Kirkham swore and closed the switch. He rose, looked at his strange visitor.

"Care to come up and see the fireworks?" he asked. "We've just been spotted by another plane."

Nelson rose quickly. His host started toward the door, then checked himself and came back.

"Better cover that costume of yours, Admiral," he said. "Since they saw your ships, the boys are a bit jumpy and they're in no mood for what they might think were gags. Here—put this raincoat on. It will cover you."

With the book clutched under his left elbow, Nelson followed Admiral Kirkham up through a bewildering series of corridors and companionways to an armored gallery high on the conning tower of the battleship. He stayed close to his host as suggested by the latter.

The Englishman's eyes widened at the spectacle that greeted him. From where he stood he had a view of the entire immense foredeck with its huge rocket launchers and tier upon tier of lesser weapons. Like a great steel monster it cut through the dark waters

at incredible speed.

"Take these," said Kirkham, thrusting a pair of binoculars with complex attachments into his hand. "They're infra-red. You'll see the Midway off to starboard. Her night fighters are taking off now."

Without asking for explanations, Nelson stuck the book under his right armpit and handled the heavy binoculars awkwardly with his one good hand. Once he had them focussed he forgot their awkwardness and weight.

Through their lenses, which displayed the night as if it were daylight, and brought the horizon close, he saw the amazing sight no man of his era could ever have witnessed.

A mighty flat-decked vessel with a huge superstructure stood into the wind as Admiral Kirkham had predicted. From her deck, a small machine rose, dipped below the level of her towering square bow and then rose through the air with incredible speed. Another, another and another appeared, to vanish in the clouded heavens above.

"A lot of good they'll do," someone muttered close beside him. "The yellowbellies won't send over bombers and trying to stop their guided missiles with planes is like trying to stop a leak with tissue paper."

Nelson smiled faintly to himself. Though they were talking of weapons he had yet to understand, he understood the simile. He was glad he had not compared "iron men in wooden ships" to "wooden men in ships of steel," a paraphrase that had been on the tip of his tongue. These seamen were worthy of any navy in history—girding themselves to fight on, although their doom had been already sealed by some devilish mechanism devised by man to come.

He became aware that Kirkham was issuing rapid orders, that men were moving quietly about jobs they well knew from long practise. And though this monster under his feet was not a ship at all as he knew it, he yet rejoiced in the sense of discipline, of command, of power. Somehow he felt at home, almost as if he were on his own *Victory*.

So huge was the ship that at first he was not aware it had changed course. But the mighty flat-topped vessel to port was swinging about, as were the two lesser vessels within the range of the binoculars. The entire squadron was doubling back upon its course. Oh, to have ships so maneuverable without recourse to whim of wind and weather as these beneath him!

"They'll not be apt to drop a pattern where they've already sought us," Kirkham said in his ear. "So we'll move northeast before we swing back toward the west."

"Where is the British fleet?" Nelson asked. "North of Scotland with our main body," said the American. "They're supporting the main troop landings to follow the airborne in. Those devils will wish they'd never driven us to fight them before we're through."

"I am glad we are allies," said Nelson.

IT WAS then that a frightening voice came through a sort of horn overhead, announcing that missiles had been detected on their way. Kirkham barked terse orders. Suddenly the ship all around them blazed with fire.

Hundreds of rocket projectiles shot upward into the darkness, picking up speed as they rose. Seconds passed and then, far, far up in the heavens a huge flare of bright white light blazed and subsided.

"Got that one," said Kirkham tersely. "But there'll be more, never fear."

Again rockets rose from the *Kentucky* and from the other ships of the squadron. Again, seconds later, they hit their target and again the skies were horribly bright. That man could cause such colossal explosions was terrifying and splendid at once. Nelson forgot about his own task, his own imminent death, his own victory, in the tautness of the strange battle being fought around him.

And then, once more, the world shook and an unbelievable brightness blazed and the Briton found himself flying through the air before his senses were blotted out.

* * * *

He was lying once more on the admiral's walk of his flagship and the familiar creak of rope and mast and the slap of waves against wooden hull were the first sounds that registered through the numbness of his senses.

A considerable portion of the railing of the walk had been torn jaggedly loose and a corner of it slanted ominously downward, but it was still supporting him. He got to his feet unsteadily, passed a hand over his forehead and leaned against the woodwork for support.

Something pressed against his ribs on the right side and he looked down to see that the book from Admiral Kirkham's shelf was still lodged between the stump of his right arm and his ribs. He shook his head to clear

It, but the book was still there. Staggering a little, he went on into his cabin, closed the door after him. Someone was knocking at the door, calling his name.

"Come in," he said wearily.

The lieutenant in charge of the watch entered and saluted fearfully. "We seem to have struck some sort of floating object twice within the last hour," he said.

"Is she filling?" Nelson asked sharply.

"No, sir," the younger officer replied.

"Then resume your watch. And keep this ship in line hereafter."

"Yes, sir," said the officer. He saluted and went out.

Nelson stared after him, then reached for the bottle of rum, poured himself a stout tot and opened the strange volume before him. Battle eve or no, he needed the reinforcement of alcohol just then. The very sight and reality of the book made it necessary. He opened it to the chapter near the end—frighteningly near the end—entitled *Trafalgar*.

He was still studying it when, hours later, a subordinate came in to inform him that the French and Spanish fleets had been sighted and seemed disposed to have it out.

"Very well," said Nelson. He rose, picked up his spyglass and started toward the door. Then, with a muttered excuse, he turned back into the room, picked up the volume, and tossed it over, into the South Atlantic.

THE skies were blue and the thirty-three ships of the line of the enemy lay in perfect array ahead of him. Nelson studied them briefly through his spyglass.

He had a curious feeling of having been through this before—like a lad in school who has taken his Latin translation into class with him to cover his lack of talent for sight reading in the ancient tongue.

He gave crisp commands and, ignoring the expressions of surprise on those who obeyed them, watched the signal flags flutter to the mastheads, waited for the answering pennants to fly from Collingwood's flagship and the others.

Yes, he was outfoxing his own tactics with a vengeance, employing the bulldozing, line-smashing, headlong technique that the drunken Rodney had used to defeat de Grasse in the Battle of the Saints.

"Have no fear," he said to a trembling lieutenant at his elbow as they moved closer to the enemy. "We'll have broken him before he tries raking fire below our fore-

masts. He has no stomach for this style of war."

He stood, almost carelessly, on the quarterdeck as his fleet moved relentlessly in, ignoring the enemy's rigging fire and holding their own until they were in his midst. There would be time enough for gunnery in the ship-to-ship combats sure to follow.

Once or twice, although he knew it was folly, his eyes turned upward toward the sky—as if seeking a sign of some explosion beyond man's comprehension, or some strange, noisy object that carried men like birds. But no such sign was vouchsafed him.

When, as the huge French ship *Redoubtable* loomed up through the cotton-white smoke of her own broadsides, a mizzentop sniper's bullet struck him in the chest, he stood almost as one braced for the blow—as, in his heart of hearts, he was.

They carried him below and the battle roared on around him, a comforting lullaby for a man of war and the sea. He felt little pain, relapsed into a semi-coma that was not sleep but was wonderfully restful for all that.

Then, later, he emerged from the cloud to hear the surge muttering to a tearful junior officer who stood by him.

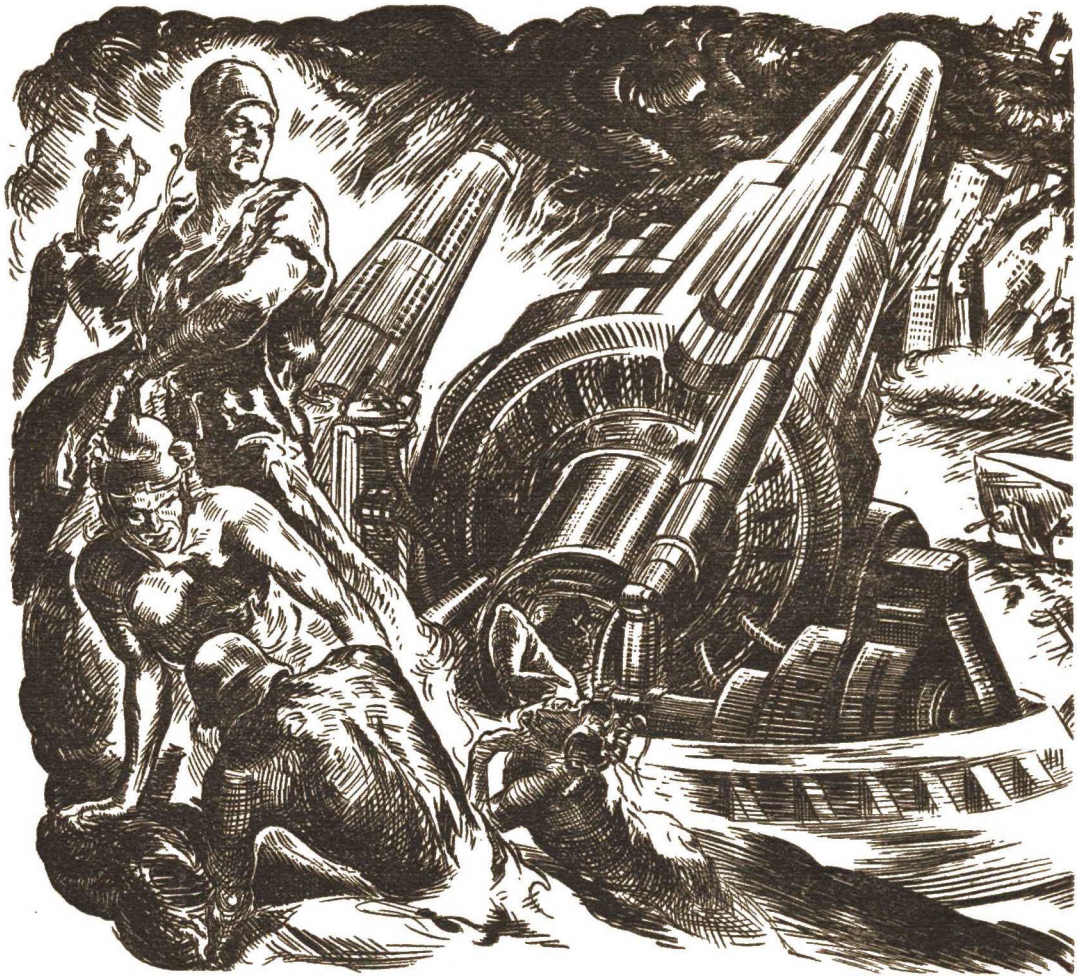
". . . can't understand it," the surgeon said. "The wound itself is not serious. The bullet was deflected from the sternum and pierced no vital organ. But I can't stop the bleeding. It's as if the blood vessels themselves had broken down.

"Faith, I'd say the bullet was poisoned if I could name a poison that produced such curious results. The very cells inside the body seem to have collapsed."

Nelson heard him and turned away. The surgeon had never heard of radioactivity. He knew he was going, but he had an idea he'd have company wherever he went—company a man like himself could talk with, and drink with, and pass the time of day with.

He cared no longer about this battle which was already won—and then he thought of that sterner fight in which English sailors would be standing beside sailors from the new United States of America, sailors who had already proven their mettle. That was when they'd have to step to keep up—but England would expect every man to do his duty.

He sensed that his lips were moving and wondered if he had spoken aloud—and then, for the third time in less than twenty-four hours, darkness descended upon him. And this time it was absolute.



"Atoma divisa—the atom divides.

A Complete
Novel

THE TIMELESS

CHAPTER I

He Who Sees

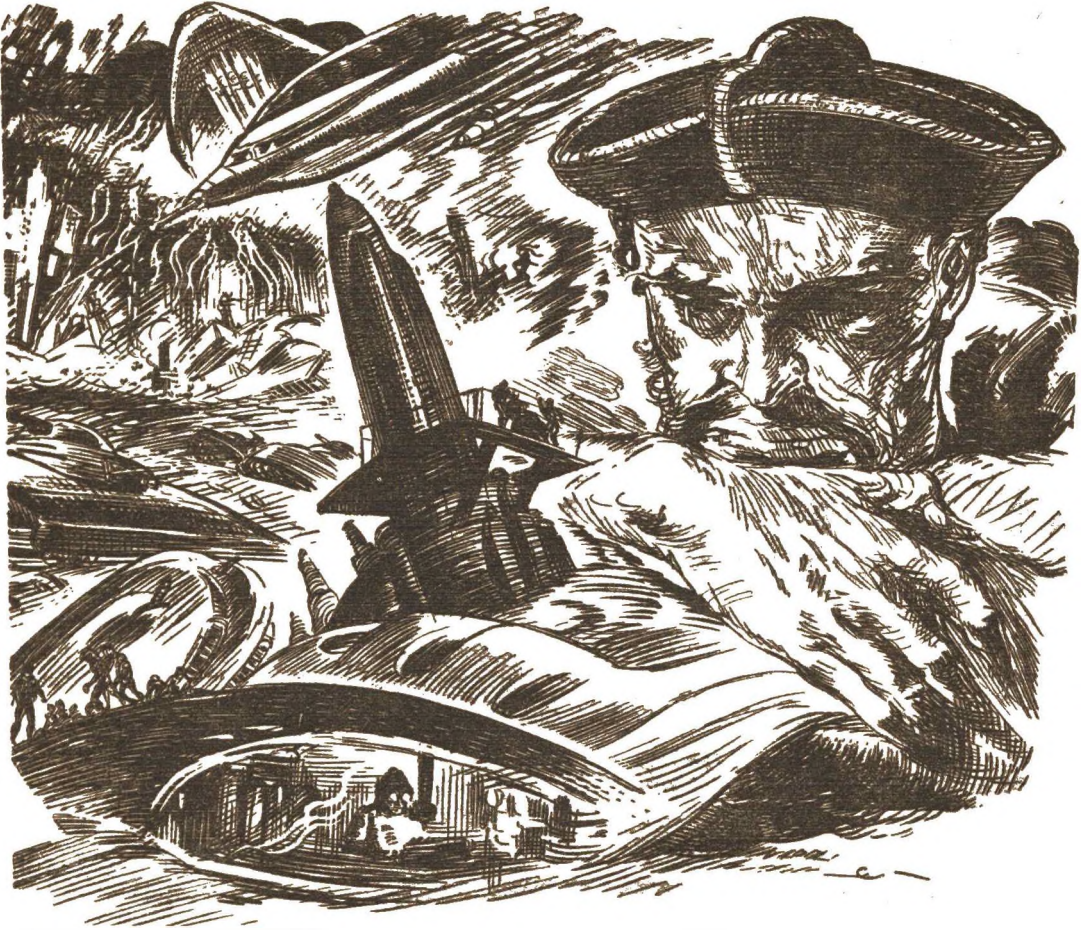
BLESSED or cursed, the moment of sight was coming again.

The light was stealing back into his room curtained so thickly against the coming dawn, stealing back, blue and ghostly from wherever that strange light shone. His twoscore experiences of it were not enough to

quiet his trembling. Familiarity with the fringes of that strange land of the soul bred anything but contempt. He could barely hold the two forks of the laurel rod in the tight grip of his hands. His eyes felt wide and strained, as though their lids were bereft of power to open or close.

The mist thinned, so that figures could be seen stirring in it, first dim shadows and then sharp silhouettes. Two horsemen faced each other some yards apart. He caught the

In Terror and Wonder, the Seer Nostradamus



to shake the walls of heaven itself!"

TOMORROW.

By **MANLY
WADE WELLMAN**

gleam of metal. They were armored jousters, on chargers richly mailed and caparisoned.

Beyond them a master-at-arms sat his own mount, with a baton lifted ready to signal, and still beyond him sat spectators in a gallery. It was a tournament of great folk.

The horseman nearest his point of view wore on his surcoat the device of a lion, and his tilting helmet's lowered visor gleamed like fire-new gold. The opponent wore a lion, too, but in a different heraldic pose, and

his armor was less ornate. He was of gentrice, perhaps nobility, but not equal in rank with the gold-visored one. That gold visor meant royalty.

Voices made themselves heard, barely, as if from a distance. Ladies were cheering, and the voice of the master-at-arms rang out. He lifted his baton. The two powerful mailed steeds sprang forward at each other, the lances of the opponents dipped their blunt points into position, the armed riders settled

Inscribed the Things that Were Yet to Be!

their shields into place. Then—

A splitting crash, as of broken timber. The less gaudy rider's tilting lance broke on his adversary's shield and glancing upward, drove its splintered end full into and through the golden visor. A moment later the stricken man spun writhing to the ground. More cries, of dismay.

The victorious rider sprang from his saddle and flung up his own visor. His young face showed dark and concerned as it bent above the fallen one. He loosened the clasps of the gilded helmet and pulled it clear of a bloody, bearded face, more mature than his, with gleaming teeth clenched in pain and the eyes terribly torn away.

Then the mists were gone, and the witness sat alone in the dark, remembering who he was, and where he was, and what he had been doing.

Rising, he dropped upon his brazen tripod stool the robe of strange embroidery with its dampened fringe. Carefully he laid on his desk the forked rod of laurel, and stepped back out of the faint fumes, acrid with strange herbs, that rose from the basin. He went to a window and pulled aside the tapestry that hid it. Dawn was gray out there, and he would be given no more visions tonight. The sun of southern France would be up betimes, warm and cheerful. But he, Michel de Nostradame, physician of Provence, had meditations of the gloomiest.

What had he seen? The face of the young victor in that shadowy tourney-scene was familiar to him—from another vision. Where and when had these things happened—or were they still to happen?

He should burn his books, he told himself. Even if scrying and spying into the future were lawful—and throughout France of this year of 1547 it was a hanging, burning felony—he did not feel that he could endure much more. Better to apply himself to his profession of medicine. Since his visit earlier that year to Lyon, he had come home to little Salon de Craux to find he had lost in popularity, with fewer patients and silver coins than before.

Even a solitary man, with one servant, needs work and money. Michel de Nostradame remembered the days when he was not alone, remembered the wife and children who had died so young in Agen. Too, he remembered his friend, Caesar Scaliger, poet and doctor, who had loved him like a brother and then on a trifling argument grown to

hate him like an enemy.

The solitary life here in Salon was a breeder perhaps, of the deep thoughts and the wandering dreams that impelled his spirit across the misty fringe of another time, showing him the wonders and terrors that are not lawful for men to know.

SITTING at his desk, he laid out a sheet of white paper, and dipped a quill pen into ink. He began to frame a verse, quickly but thoughtfully, to record his glimpse. That tag of a joust he had seen:

The younger lion shall overcome the old,
In single combat on a field of war.
He will destroy the eyes through a cage of
gold—
Two thrusts will bring a cruel death and dour.

He shook sand upon the little quatrain to dry the ink, and slid it under a sheaf of other verses.

An inner door opened, and his old servant brought him breakfast. He ate a roll of bread and drank from a cup of mingled white wine and water. When he was finished, the servant returned to say that two ladies waited in his front chamber.

Patients, perhaps wealthy. Nostradame hoped so. He washed his hands and glanced at his face in a polished metal mirror. It was a pleasant enough face, with brilliant eyes, a brow wide and high, ruddy cheeks and a firm jaw showing through a fine brown beard.

He walked into the front chamber, a sturdy but not ungraceful figure in his long physician's gown. He bowed to the two ladies who sat there in his best two chairs.

"Messire Nostradamus," the taller and older of the pair greeted him.

Nostradamus—that was his title as a scholar or author, not as a simple man of medicine. He bowed again, studying her quickly. She did not seem in need of healing. Almost as tall as he, with a fine full figure in lordly plum-colored velvet and black hair elaborately dressed and coiled beneath her cap, she looked like a duchess, or perhaps like an ambitious wealthy commoner's wife seeking to be taken for a duchess.

"Madame?" he prompted her.

She smiled in a way she must have known well to be pleasant.

"Messire Nostradamus should know my name without my telling. I know your reputation, fair sir, from my kinsman, the *Size de Lorinville*, who entertained you two years back."

"De Lorinville, yes," he remembered. "In Lorraine, he holds the chateau at Faim. I was there at dinner, yes."

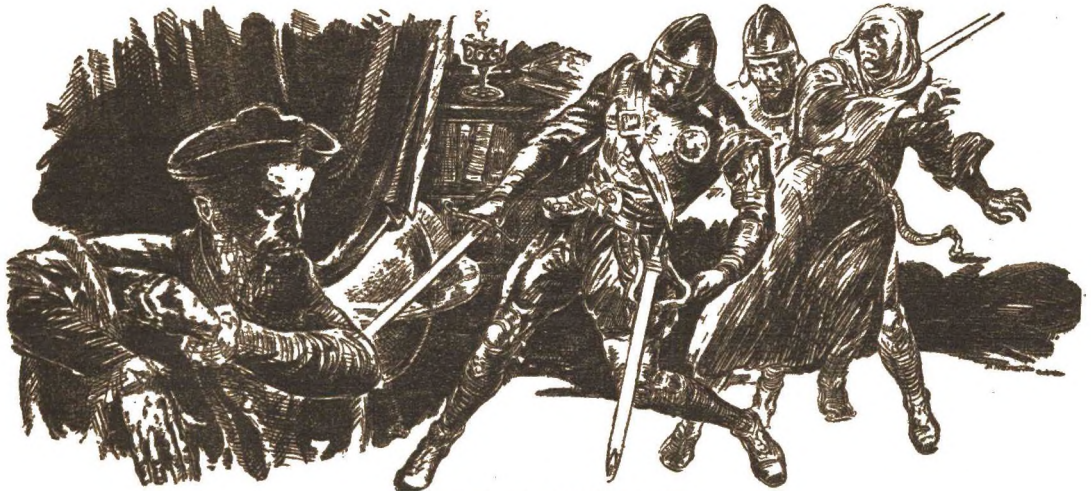
"Modest!" she cried, and turned to her companion. "You hear, Anne? Here's a very apostle of humility. He was at dinner with my kinsman, and says so—but nothing of the wonders he did by his magical mind."

So overwhelming was the personality of the taller lady, so insistent her manner, that Nostradame had not found the time to look, even at the smaller. Now he turned his head and met the gaze of her eyes, wide and gray in a thin, earnest face under a dark hood. Her cloak she kept draped effacingly about her, but Nostradame, the trained anatomist and physician, diagnosed through its

our soothsayer foretold would be eaten by a wolf. But in the kitchen was a tame wolf cub which gnawed on the pork brought thither, and going for another pig the cook chose the one which Messire Nostradamus had said would be at dinner." She broke off, and smiled on the doctor. "But I am behind-hand in courtesy. I am the Lady Olande de la Fornaye—"

"Enchanted," said Nostradame politely. He had heard of this noblewoman, twice wed and twice widowed, holder of great estates above the town, and storied for her charm and pride.

"And this is my little cousin, the Demoiselle Anne Poins Genelle," said Lady Olande, gesturing with graceful condescension at



The men-at-arms drew their swords

folds a slim little body, with such bones as connoisseurs then took to mean good and gentle blood; with not half an ounce of spare flesh, but such flesh as there was sweet and tender. She was young, and becomingly restrained, but her eyes wanted him for a friend.

"Madame is kind," said Nostradame, "and I would study to deserve such kindness. But her kinsman's tale is no marvel. He but asked what would befall a certain pig in his pens. I said it would make our dinner, and so it fell out."

"Modest!" cried the tall lady again. "Thus was the miracle, Anne, as all Lorraine tells. When de Lorinville heard Messire Nostradamus say that a certain pig would be at the dinner table, he privily bade his cook slay and roast another of the herd—a pig that

the maiden in the hood.

"Enchanted," said Nostradame again, musing this time that he could learn to mean it. "Now, which has an ailment and of what sort?"

"I," said Lady Olande, "and my ill is curiosity, of the saddest and sorest. You, sir, shall say my fate for me."

"Your fate?" echoed Nostradame, and fixed her eyes with his. He sat down suddenly. "You ask to know—"

"What will befall me in years to come. My next marriage—"

"My lady," said Nostradame, rapidly and assuredly, "you will not marry again."

"Hélas!" she cried. "Then a sad and pitiful love affair—"

"Nor that. No love affair, sad or glad, is in your future."

"No love affair!" The Lady Olande's voice was strident with protest. "By heaven's gate, am I not made for love, and for love of the best knights in Christendom?"

"I tell you your future, as you bid me. You will live without husband or lover."

"Perhaps to travel through France and to other lands—"

"Your travels are over. Madame, your life is not long to run. I foretell as I glimpse it, and not as you must wish."

"Sir, sir, you are a churl and a charlatan." Lady Olande was sweeping to the door. "If you dare expect pay for—"

"Not a stiver for so unwelcome a service," Nostradame said.

"Come, Anne."

They went out together, the little maid glancing back once. Alone, Nostradame smiled to himself, a smile of gentle pity. Perhaps he had done wrong to obey at all that sudden impulse to speak of Lady Olande's fate—it had been no more than a whisper to his inner ear. But he had done so, had angered her. Let her anger be her own reward for insisting.

Others came to his house. An old drover with an infected toe cursed as the doctor's lancet pained him, then called down the blessings of the saints when he was able to set the drained and bandaged foot to earth again. The wife of the town's saddler brought her fevered little boy, and gaped uncomprehendingly as Nostradame advised rest, a liquid diet, and frequent bathing. A blind beggar tapped and whined for alms, and Nostradame gave him a denier and a merry word.

It was almost noon when the door burst suddenly open. Anne Poins Genelle burst rather than stepped in. Her cloak fluttered, her hood had fallen from her disordered brown hair.

"Sir, sir," she gasped, "there is danger—I could not but warn you, for that I saw you at sight to be good and godly—"

"Take breath, child," said he. "There, that is better. Now tell me calmly to whom the danger turns, and in what way I can serve."

She glanced back through the door that swung half open.

"Saints, for your mercy! It is too late, they come! My cousin, the Lady Olande, burns with fury at the prophecy you made her. She has gone to the witch-finder who visits here and named you as sorcerer and ill-

doer and agent of the devil—even now they are at your door!"

CHAPTER II

The Time Stream

LOOKING past her, Nostradame saw three men striding across the street, the foremost in a black robe like a friar's, the other two with steel-faced jerkins and serviceable swords dangling at their belts.

"Into my study, child," he bade his visitor, pointing to the door. "Thence go into the kitchen and so out the back way to safety. If these are witch-finders indeed, and would accuse me, you must not remain, lest you, too, suffer unjustly."

She hurried where he bade her, and he turned to face the three as they entered.

"And well, masters?" he prompted them genially.

The man in black, for all his clerical-cut robe, had a fierce sharp face and a fiercer, sharper eye.

"To business," he said. "I am Hippolyte Gigny, commissioned by church and king to seek out the rogues and destroyers who, not having the fear of God before their eyes, traffic with the fiend and do sorcery and witchcraft."

"Yours is a good trade," nodded Nostradame. "And how may I, a doctor of medicine, help you to your findings?"

One of the men-at-arms cleared his throat, and Hippolyte Gigny sneered.

"Here's a cool one, and shrewd! How if I say that I know you yourself are a wizard, and as such gallow's-meat in this world and hell's-meat in the next?"

"I would say back that you are sadly wrong," said Nostradame, "and that the layer of the information is sadly a liar."

Gigny's teeth and eyes gleamed mockingly. "You mischief your case when thus you insult the informant—"

"Who is the Lady Olande de la Fornaye," finished Nostradame for him.

"You know, and a demon's voice must have told you, for but now did she accuse you," cried Gigny. "Knaves, you are undone. Now shall we search your house. If you prove to have books of black art, charms and instruments—"

He took a step toward the study door, beyond which Nostradame had all three of the articles Gigny had named as damaging. Nostradame shifted position to bar the witch-finder's way, and when Gigny would have persisted, shoved him back so that he staggered and almost fell.

"I am a scholar and a person of gentle blood," said Nostradame. "I will not be treated like a rabbit-poacher or a thief of handkerchiefs. Bring a writ of law before you think to search here."

"My writs of law are of steel," snarled Gigny. "Aho, you two! Draw on this saucy challenger."

The men-at-arms drew, and Nostradame leaped quickly to the wall where hung his own straight sword with its cross hilt and brass mountings.

"Lies the wind at that door?" he said, with sudden gaiety. "Come, then, both of you. I ask only a fair stage and no favor."

His own blade rasped out of its sheath. In a trice he had parried the stroke of the first man to reach him, then a darting threat from his point caused the second to give back. At once the pair saw that they had their hands full—Michel de Nostradame had been a strong swordsman from his student days at Montpellier, and had not let his skill rust for want of exercise.

A little of the stout German cut-and-thrust was in his method, and more than a little of the Italian school, which makes the blade both attack and defense. Two though they were against him, and mailed where he was but gowned, they strove their best and could no more than hold him in check.

But Gigny had rushed past the three bat-tlers, to the door from which Nostradame had thrust him. He tore it open and stepped through. A moment more, and he yelled aloud in coarse laughter, then turned to emerge.

"Cease!" he cried. "A truce, a truce! Put up swords, I pray!"

Obediently his servants gave back, lowering their points, but Nostradame remained on guard. His brilliant eyes were hard and angry.

"God's wounds, I see now this gentleman's wizardry, and would we all could learn from him," sniggered Gigny. "Messire Nostradame—that is your name? You had all good reason to deny us our searching. I have been precipitate here, and a little offending—"

"More than a little," growled Nostradame.

"Then I cry pardon, and do you cry forgiveness." As Nostradamus, too, grounded his sword-point, Gigny came close, nudging the doctor as though to say they shared a pleasant secret. "I am a man of the world, sophisticated—I can see why the charge was placed. One lovely lady ousted from your favor by another—forgive me, I beg again, and also again—send us all such wizard powers, and eke such familiar spirits!"

And he walked out, with a last leer over his shoulder, waving his servants along with him. Nostradame leaned a trifle on his sword, so that the good steel bent springily, and frowned. Then he turned toward the open study door, to see what matter had so changed the tune of the witch-finder.

OF HIS books, the bronze tripod stool, the water-basin, the forked rod of laurel, his robe with the strange symbols, nothing showed. These had been gathered under his desk, over which had been thrown the cloak of Anne Poins Genelle. And on a couch in a corner she half reclined, the low-cut collar of her gown twitched down so as to reveal a bare shoulder—slim but not bony, Nostradame saw at once. She was the picture, most skilfully posed, of a luresome lady surprised in an intrigue.

"From my heart's depth do I thank you, child," said Nostradame earnestly. "They are gone—"

She rose, twitching her gown into place again.

"It was all I could think to do in that short time. To hide the things they must not find, and to appear to be your reason for secrecy. You are not angry with me?"

"I dread only that you may have brought undeserved shame on yourself. As God is my judge, I am no wizard or devil-companion. But how could you know, and be moved to help my helplessness?"

"That." She pointed to the sword he still gripped. "Its hilt—a cross, and set with a holy name. I read it cut upon the brass as it hung on your wall. And in here—" She pointed again, to the crucifix on the wall, the Madonna on a shelf. "In the presence of the true faith, how could black magic work? Surely, messire, you seek knowledge, but not evil. If you work miracles indeed, right so did the holy saints. I would be your friend."

"You are my friend and my rescuer." He laid the sword on the couch, and stooped to

kiss her little hand. In France of 1547 that was a gesture no more than well-bred and admiring, but her fingers stirred in his. The heart of Nostradamus, mature and mentalized scholar, was touched. "And how," he continued, "may I serve you in some small way to pay in part my great debt?"

"Be only what you are," she said.

"What do you know of what I am?"

"Perhaps," murmured Anne Poins Genelle, "I, too, have more senses than five. Perhaps I am aware of things beyond this small space and time in which we huddle."

"Child!" In his sudden blaze of feeling, he clutched her forearms. They were small in his grasp, like the forks of the ceremonial laurel rod. "Are you telling me that you, too, know the hour of sight?"

The suddenness of his cry and movement made her shrink in his clutch, and he let go and stepped back.

"Indeed, I cannot say what I meant," she said, recovering. "I only felt what you tried to say to my cousin, Lady Olande, and could understand when she could not or would not. I'll stay a moment, if you talk to me, mes-sire."

He smiled at her. He had not felt so comradely toward anyone in years. Standing over her in his gown of dignity, he was taller than one might think, so broad was his body and so easily did he carry its breadth.

"I think the more, and speak little," he temporized. "Would that speech were as free as thought. Some day it may come to that."

"A prophecy."

"A hope." He led her to the desk, and lifted from it her mantle. There lay his papers. "You deserve my trust, Lady Anne. And, faith, perhaps I need one to listen and believe and understand. Here. Read this first of my quatrains."

He handed the sheet to her. She read aloud, softly:

Seated within my study-room at night
Alone upon a tripod stool of brass,
I saw from out the silent dark a light
That mirrored magic scenes as in a glass. . . .

"That explains how visions come to me," he told her. "Thus I begin my record. How came I thus to study and work? Perhaps by way of my fathers—my grandfather read white magic, and urged me to the like. When I went to Montpellier, to the university founded long ago by fugitive wise

Arabs, I learned foreign languages and foreign arts, along with medicine. Books of wisdom did I con in the library—Roger Bacon of England, Albertus Magnus, and certain scrolls by Eastern magi. Yet I did hesitate over their teachings. I think," and he sighed, as if weary a little, "that the hour of sight forced itself upon me."

"It came whether or no?" she suggested; and when he nodded, "When?"

"Within this year. I had returned from my last intention at public honors—I had been invited to Lyon, as once before to Aix, where I did some service during the plague year. Coming back, I thought to consider worldly wealth and fame a vanity, and to live and study quietly. Then, it began. By chance, or by another will than mine, I did as the verse tells, after the manner of the soothsayers of the ancient Brancchi."

He explained that classical formula of action—the forked rod, the basin redolent of herbs, the moistening of the robe's hem, the tripod stool such as once accommodated the oracle at Delphi.

"By heaven, the ancients knew rare and curious things. Who can say that this wonder is not science? We once would have thought printing sheer magic, and eke gunpowder. Five hundred years gone, my medical studies would have seemed witchcraft. In any case, a vision came, of another time and place. Then others—but read."

HE HANDED her another quatrain:

The coffin sinks within the iron tomb
Where dead and still the King's seven children
lie,
While ancient ghosts rise from the hellish gloom
And weep to see their withered fruit thus die.

"A dubious mystery," said Anne, giving the paper back.

"Because I dare not set down plain what I see, or how," he replied. "What would be my shrift, if witch-finders like that vagabond Gigny should read a true account? I made the verse for my vision of an iron-grilled tomb, marked with a lion for coat-of-arms—"

"The lion of the Valois," said Anne at once. "Of our comely king, the Second Henry. I have been to court with my cousin, only three months gone, at his coronation. Henry is a stout rider and weaponer. He tilted bravely against the best of his nobles, wearing the lion upon his surcoat, and on his

head a gold-visored helmet—”

“Gold visor!” interrupted Nostradame in his turn. “Heaven’s grace, it is what I saw, and indeed only the king may wear such brave armor. Lady Anne, read this. I saw it at the dawn just past.”

She read the quatrain he had written that day, and he told her more fully what the mist had drawn away to show him. Anne’s slim young face was grave.

“Now, here’s a sad wonder,” said she when he had done. “It was foretold the king in his childhood that he would die in a duel. His mother scorned the word, for who would dare challenge a royal prince? But if it falls out as you say, in a joust or tourney—when will this happen?”

“I cannot tell. The visions come not in any order of time, though I see and set down things that help me decide. Perhaps the stars in the heavens are shown me, or I hear a word. For this one, I should say the king seemed older than now—a good forty years turned.”

“And he is twenty-eight,” supplied Anne. “Twelve years hence, or thereon. The year of 1589? And your other vision was of the death of his house of Valois. Will you tell him these sad things?”

“I would need to know him well before making so baleful a prophecy. Remember your cousin’s rage at me. I have no fame or position—”

“But you will gain both,” Anne told him, with an earnestness so great that it seemed to take her breath.

“You have prophecy for me.”

“No, only faith. It is you who see everything and of every time. I am not skilled nor wise in magic. But I feel sure of your future.”

“Child, your words make me feel sure, too.” He took her hand, in an honest impulse of inspired comradeship. “Happy the man whom you love.”

“I love none, messire. My father was gentle, but poor. On his death I came to live with the Lady Olande. Think you she listens to any talk of love save for herself?”

That was enough to sketch for him the life-picture of a poor relation in the home of a woman who ruled her dependents like a tyrant. Pitying Anne, Nostradame spoke of other glimpses he had caught into the future, and of what they seemed to tell of the world to come. Her interest was for France, and he spoke of the rise and fall of powers,

of rebellions and defeats and triumphs; in particular of a strange little ruler, a sturdy short man who wore a great three-cornered hat, who for a time would hold all Europe but whose bloody rule would bring the world into arms against him, and finally cause his downfall.

“You speak of other centuries? How clearly do you see distant times?”

“Clearly. Too clearly. Child, it is a horror to see the wars of that far future. Fire from heaven, wasting away cities, the march of great engines and vehicles, guns as large as giant trees, the advance and retreat of armies as numerous as the generations. *Hélas*, that man cannot learn!”

“Man shall learn,” said Anne, with her air of confidence. “Your prophecies shall teach them.”

“How? The future is as rigidly set out as the past.”

“Is it so? Perhaps you see but moments, and if men take warning they will be able to change other future moments, for the better.”

The two of them could have talked for many hours, but Anne feared what her absence at the house of her cousin might bring. She told him good-day, and again he kissed her hand, which this time did not tremble but squeezed his. And when she was gone, the house and the study seemed to tremble in an afterglow of her presence.

Nostradame grinned ruefully in his beard. Was he falling in love, and with a slender girl, little more than a child? He had thought himself past such things, since the death of his wife. He had mourned her sincerely, that lost wife. She had been kind, loyal and loving, for all she had not once shown interest or even curiosity over his studies of magic and future-reading. Anne Poins Genelle, in two brief hours, had proven herself more understanding and sympathetic.

The afternoon occupied him with another series of patients. He fared out to visit two sick merchants, and found one of them surly, the other depressingly quiet and complaining. He came home to a simple evening meal, and with the fall of night repaired to his study. From the hiding into which the Lady Anne had thrust them he dragged stool, basin, divining rod and robe. Quickly he made preparations for the hour of sight.

He confessed himself weary from the day’s adventures. Indeed, he sagged rather than sat on the tripod, but a vision was coming.

In his ears rang a faint cry, the cry of a child, and then he saw Anne, as she might be a year or two older, holding in her arms a swaddled infant. She smiled and whispered, and the cries ceased. Then she turned her face upward, and lifted the baby to show it to someone. A figure stood beside her chair, and bent tenderly over mother and child. It was himself, in his doctor's gown and his mood of happiness—he, Nostradame, with a hand out to Anne's child in the gesture of a father, proud and joyous—

He started. That had been a dream, not a vision, for he had dozed on the tripod. For an instant he pondered that the ancients had found truth in dreams, too. And then the forked rod was trembling in his hands, and his every fiber grew taut and tense as, in the darkness, a screen of mist made itself.

This time he heard before he saw, a voice muttering a single word, muttering it again. He spoke the word in his turn—"Atoma. . . ." Greek, ancient Greek. *Atoma* signifies that which does not divide. But the voice spoke again, adding another word, this time Latin: "*Atoma divisa. . .*"

The mist was clearing, and Nostradame shuddered with a prescience of terror, he knew not what. And then it was gone, mist and voice and all, before completion. His mind had been snatched back to his study by the loud staccato of a knock from the front of the house.

Quickly he rose, doffing robe and laying down rod, and walked into his consulting chamber and to the front door.

CHAPTER III

Pattern of the Future

ANNE POINS GENELLE was at the door, smiling from her hood.

"I am no soothsayer," said Nostradame. "You are the last person I thought to see."

"Because I am here on your concern. Your second sight is for others—not yourself." He opened the door for her to come in. "I am thought to be in my bed, but a cook in Lady Olande's kitchen is my trusty friend, and I left by the back door. Messire, my head has rung and whirled all this day with the things you told me."

"About days to come?"

"Aye, that. How think you you manage? Are you there indeed, in a time unborn?"

They sat, and he frowned over her question.

"More than anything, it is this: I move, by some great power, past a border or fringe. My sight and hearing are not clear. I see as one is said to see dead ghosts!"

"For example," said Anne, pushing back her hood, "did you make one of the company at the joust where the king died—where he will die, twelve years hence? Did none look at you?"

He shook his head. "Indeed, had I been visible, would any have eyes for me, when they saw their sovereign lord so sadly stricken?"

"Then you do not know."

"I cannot know. Those moments are full of wonder and dread. I speak to none, and none speaks to me."

"Sir," she said, "how if you had a comrade in those moments? One you can know and trust?" She was eager and shy in the same mood. But again he shook his head.

"I have not dared tell any, save only you."

"Then take me for your fellow—into the times to come."

It was his turn to be mystified.

"How that, child? I have told you how difficult and strange is the ancient ceremony—"

"Could not two perform it as well as one—better? Think!" Now she was bold, insistent. "It is an exploration more wondrous than any in history—more than Marco Polo, more than John Mandeville, than Christopher Columbus himself. Have you read the poems of Dante?"

"Aye, that. He saw amazements in hell and heaven, were he to be believed. But he was guided by Virgil."

"They were friends together. Two may prosper where one dare only linger on the threshold," she rose. "Come."

She led him to the study, as if it were her study and he was the guest. There Nostradame, converted to the spirit of her wish, rummaged in the closet and found for her another brass tripod stool like his, and a figured robe which he had discarded for its tatters a year before. From a laurel branch in a corner he cut a forked stick and showed her how to hold it.

"Now," he said.

They sat facing each other across the herb-

fuming basin. He showed her how to moisten the fringe of the robe. Leaning across, he blew out the taper on the desk. They sat in silence darkness.

"I see light," she whispered, "or is it my fancy—"

"Hush," he bade her, his own eyes fixed on the faint glow that betokened the gathering of the mist.

For once his hands did not tremble, he did not feel the touch of fear. He would have glanced at Anne to see if she, too, faced the adventure with courage, but feared to break the spell. Through the haze came strange noises, a rhythmic clatter of metal and something like a deep, long shout, but also with something of metal in it, like the blast of a great horn. Would this glimpse grant the solution to that two-tongued paradox, *atoma divisa*? . . . The mist was clearing.

He saw a platform, lighted brilliantly but artificially, for it was distantly walled and loftily roofed, a great shed that would house an army. To either side of where he seemed to stand ran a strang metal affair the purpose of which he could not guess—parallel bars of bright iron or steel, in pairs and running into dark arched tunnels at a distance. Each pair of bars was supported upon a series of stout timbers, set crosswise and close together. And foggy figures began to make themselves clear, moving on the platform opposite him, amid a jabber of many voices, shrill and excited and with no joyous note to them.

"Children," said Anne's soft voice beside him. "See to them, herded like cattle. Are they prisoners?"

HER voice helped in some way to clarify the scene. They were indeed children, dressed in the outlandish fashion that Nostradame had learned to recognize as of the far future. They huddled and stared with the blank woeful faces of youth in misery. There were adults, too—two gray-clad women with red crosses on their arms and in the fronts of their caps, and some men in brown, who moved and spoke with authority.

To one side, a woman hugged and kissed two of the smallest and urged them into the group. The children were mounting by steps into a series of long structures with glass windows, structures that stood not upon foundations but upon round wheels that fitted their hollowed rims to the parallel bars

of metal.

"Prisoners?" echoed Nostradame. "No, their mothers urge them forward. But this is a sad thing. They weep, the poor little ones, and their parents withal."

"Surely the brown-clad men are soldiers. They wear weapons at their belts," said Anne. "It is war, and the children are somehow being taken to safety. Heavens mercy, look to the little girl! She runs, weeping."

A child of six had scampered away along the platform, for the moment overlooked by those in charge. Impulsively Anne moved forward, and Nostradame saw her meet the child, not as a watcher from another time, but as an actor in the scene itself. Anne caught the little fugitive in her arms, and spoke insistently, soothingly, tenderly. The girl answered her back, and was comforted, and turned back to join the group. The children were herded aboard the wheeled structures, and some of the adults with them. There was another deep horn-blast, a rush of smoke from somewhere, and the laden train moved away on the tracks. Then Nostradame and Anne were sitting in the dark, the vision gone from them.

"Ah," sighed Anne, as Nostradame rekindled the light. "She spoke another language than I, but she trusted me and lost her fear."

"I heard her speech, and I know some words of it," replied Nostradame. "It was English, but not like the English of our time. She called you 'angel'—she thought you a friend come to her from heaven." Thoughtfully he stroked his bearded chin. "A friend from heaven you are, Anne. To that poor youngling, and to me."

Sitting at his desk, he chose a pen. "I must set it down. There will be a woeful war threatening the islands of England, and the children must be sent to the country in those huge cars, lest the destruction of the cities overwhelm them."

Quickly he wrote:

Within the Isles the children are transported,
The most of them despairing and forlorn,
Upon the soil their lives will be supported,
While hope shall flee. . . .

"But I was there with them, among them," said Anne. "I spoke to the child, touched her. You have not told me of doing that."

"Because I have never done it," replied Nostradame, pausing in his rhyme. "I have been frightened."

"As I was not."

"As you were not. Child," and he laid down the pen, "you bring me greatness and open new gates of the world to come. How if we try again, and both walk and speak in that strangeness?"

"Do it," she begged. "Here, at once."

"Child—" began Nostradame again.

"Must you call me that? Not that you mean harm, but have I not proven myself a woman grown?"

"Far more than that," he agreed gravely. "As the little English one named you, you are an angel proven. But never have I sought the moment of sight twice in a single sitting. You cannot guess the horrors shown me. Wars, the perishing of races, prisoners burned and drowned, rains of fire from heaven—"

"But if we can walk there as well as look there? If we ease an ill, prevent a death, comfort a sorrow?"

"How, in this present time, change a future one?"

"I did it," she reminded him stubbornly. "You saw. The little girl ran, perhaps toward danger. I met her, persuaded her to turn back. A small matter? But next time it may be a great matter. Come with me, Michel de Nostradame. Who can say the future is as unchangeable as was the past? Not I, not you—come!"

He bowed his agreement, and they sought their tripods again. Darkness, silence. . . .

The mist cleared to a scene gorgeous and exotic. The two of them saw, as it were, from the corner of a great open porch of a public hall or palace. Beyond was a square, and beyond that lifted domes and minarets.

"The infidel East?" Anne suggested.

"I think not. Though I never saw Russia, this I know to be their way of architecture. But look! Soldiers—from the west, and come as conquerors."

THE streets were full of them, hard-faced, ready-looking veterans, with long guns that bore stabbing irons fixed to their muzzles. In disciplined ranks and details they ranged the curbs and cowed the staring, thronging townfolks.

Closer, on the steps of the porch itself, gathered a group of men who by the glitter and decoration of their uniforms were surely the high officers of this stranger army. One of them, burly and arrogant, stood listening to a civilian of the town, probably

an official, whose high cheek-bones and deep, brilliant eyes showed him to be of the true Russian blood. They conversed, and Nostradame and Anne caught no words but tones of voices; the official was pleading, the foreign general disdainfully telling him to wait.

"I know these invaders, and what they do here," muttered Nostradame. "Terms must be made with the master of Europe—aye, here he swaggers now."

"I thought they were speaking French," suggested Anne. "This master of Europe of whom you tell is a Frenchman, perhaps?"

"Not he," and Nostradame shook his head. "A foreigner of poor descent, he rises to rule all of Western Europe by might, and now he moves to swallow Russia also. See to him."

A strutting figure approached, neither tall, graceful nor very dignified. He wore a uniform less gaudy than the simplest of the aides who followed at a respectful distance, but he would have dominated the scene had he been in rags. Nor was it his nobility, for he had none; every motion, every feature, bespoke a greed and ruthlessness for power that bristled from him like an aura.

This master of Europe stood commandingly before the Russian official, who bowed timidly and spoke again. Into his speech cut the master's curt replies, sweeping aside suggestions and setting his own terms, with no hint of wishing to hear arguments or appeals. Quickly, unfeelingly, the interview was completed. The pleader moved fearfully away, and the master waved for his lieutenants to follow him. As he entered the building arrogant and assured, he uncovered his head. A lock of hair fell across his brow, dark against the pale skin. His face was set tensely, his eyes gleamed like battle lanterns on a ship's bulwark.

"He is evil," said Anne.

"And all Europe of his day fears him and his plan to rule the world."

"How if we prevent this swaggerer from realizing his dream?"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Nostradame.

Anne glanced at the evening sky, gray and dull. "Surely it is late in the year, with cold weather at hand. And this, you say, is Russia, the land of hard winters. Even if invaders drive back Russian armies, must not they in turn retreat from Russian snows?"

"The master of Europe plans to shelter in this captured town."

"But if it is not left to shelter him? If it be destroyed about him—what, you do not see how? Come, come!"

She moved to and through a great open window that extended from floor to ceiling. Inside was a meeting-chamber, and around a table were crowded the chiefs of invasion, listening while their master harangued them. His shrill commands and statements were emphasized with full-armed gestures and thumpings upon a great map unrolled. The scene was lighted by lamps hung in brackets along the walls, and at one place stood a tall basket full of crumpled and torn paper scraps.

"Thus we deprive the invader of his shelter against the cold," said Anne, and put her hand to the nearest lamp. "Into the basket—"

It did not move. It did not even tremble, though she tugged and struggled.

"Am I then only a shadow?" she demanded over her shoulder. "But the little English girl—"

"Wiser are children than their elders, and clearer-sighted," said Nostradame. "We waste our time here."

CHAPTER IV

Time Travelers

THEY left the hall, and moved down a side-street. One of the townfolk, a simple-faced fellow with a beard and a loose coat, almost bumped headlong into them—then started aside, staring. His big hands twitched up, crossing himself. Nostradame smiled and signed himself in turn with the cross, whereat the fellow stared the more widely, and all but dropped to his knees. They went past him hurriedly.

"And so we are seen, of simple folk at least," said Anne.

"Simple folk?" repeated Nostradame. "Say rather of those whose wisdom is the greater because they do not muddle it with plans for oppression or deceit. Look ahead of us."

It was dusk by now, and lights gleamed from the windows of wooden houses, shabby and old, along the middle distance of the street.

"We enter a quarter of poor men," said Nostradame. "Here we shall be seen, perhaps heard—"

"And these houses will burn like tinder," finished Anne for him. "Look to the building with the dome and spire. Surely it is a church of the Russian kind, and in the little cottage beyond must dwell the priest."

Some children on a doorstep, too concerned at the coming of the invader to play or chatter, watched the pair as they passed. They were too small to wonder or dread, but they were plainly and honestly curious. Anne and Nostradame gained the cottage by the church.

"His door is open, good man," said Nostradame. "He may be a poor priest, but he is a wise one. We will go in."

The priest sat at a table among stacks of old volumes with the strange Russian character, and his walls were hung with icons. He was simply robed and his beard was long, thick and gray as iron. Up he started as the two appeared on his threshold.

"Who are you appearances?" he demanded, or seemed to demand in his tongue they did not understand.

Remembering the citizen on the street, Nostradame made the sign of the cross.

"Do you speak French or Latin, good father?" he asked.

"French—a little." The words were slow and accented, but understandable. The priest's eyes were wide, but the fear in them was under control. "Ghosts—I see through you, to the wall beyond. Yet no evil can you do in this holy place. Have the fear of God before your eyes, and return to your graves!"

"Father," said Anne, "indeed we are not dead ghosts, but messengers sent—it is too long to say how—for your help against the ill-come foreigners."

A moment of silence, and the greater pre-occupation overrode the lesser. The priest shrugged his shoulders—they were broad, peasant shoulders beneath his gown—and lifted his hands to heaven.

"Nay," he said. "What can be done? They have taken our city for their base of war—"

"How if there be not a city?" broke in Anne. "If it be burnt—"

"I know you are devils, both of you," the priest broke in, "or you would not council the ruin of this holy place, ancient beyond—"

"Reflect, Father," interrupted Nostradame in his turn. "Holy you call your town, but its ways and buildings are fouled by the tyrant. Holding it for his base, he may win over all Russia. Left without it, he must fall back, lest he freeze."

The priest was on his knees, praying. Then he looked up, his eyes wide, but this time joyous.

"It is true!" he cried. "Your words are wise and blessed! Say, are you saints or angels?"

"We are as common folk as your good self," said Nostradame. "But haste to what you must do."

The priest was on his feet again. He strode to the open fire and caught from it a brand that blossomed with tongues of flame. Back to the wall, he stripped from it the icons, and caught up such books as the crook of his big arm could hold. Then he held the fire to the hangings at the window. There was a hungry leap of orange flame. The dry wood of the sill caught. A moment more, and the priest was in the street, waving his torch and shouting in Russian. People ran to listen, and he exhorted them, and they answered him with shouts of wild approval and enthusiasm.

"Hark to them," said Anne to Nostradame. "Are they not Russians, Muscovites? Loving their land before all things—"

"Leave this doorway," urged Nostradame. "The cottage burns, and its blaze spreads to the church."

They gained the street, and looked back to the red glow in the windows of the priest's home.

A patrol of the invader troops was hurrying up the street. Its leader gained the door they had left, but shrank back before a great puff of smoke.

"Already the fire is too great," said Anne. "Ha, hear the tall soldier curse, his fingers were scorched. And see to the Russians—that one in the smock catches a brand from the burning and runs to fire his own house. And others also!"

PERHAPS the time of the vision hurried for them. It was as though they saw in moments what might normally take hours. The row of houses blazed up in a score of places. Shouting citizens, inspired to grim action, carried torches elsewhere. A great stable was aflame, horses ran from it. From a public square rose a swirl of conflagration like the throat of a volcano.

"Nought can quench it now," said Anne. "It is brighter than day, though the night darkens. My eyes cannot see—"

And the shouting died, the bustling figures faded. Again the two were in Nostradame's

study. Anne sagged on her tripod, and Nostradame took her elbow and led her into the lighted front room.

Gravely, softly, they spoke of what they had known together.

"'Twas done," Anne said shakily, again and again. "We, from this our Sixteenth Century, went to another time and place, and did a small thing that grew to a great thing—I tremble!"

She sat on the couch, and recovered enough to smile. "I would be an ill comrade to faint now, when—was I not brave?"

"As the archangels are brave," Nostradame assured her.

"You say you know that false master of Europe, with his strut and his forelock. Let the winter not comfort him unsheltered! How is he named?"

Nostradame gestured the query aside. "A name of no account, by descent or virtue. I do not give it, even by implication or anagram, in my writings. See these quatrains, for other visions of him." And he brought them from his study.

Deep in the heart of Europe's Western land
A child of poorest parents shall be sprung,
Whose tongue shall sway and rule great troops
and grand
Until his fame to Earth's last land is sung.

"And here," said Nostradame, offering another, "is my glimpse of his end."

By thunderbolts his flag is driven low,
He shall be struck while shouting in his pride,
His haughty nation yields before the foe,
His deeds shall be avenged when he has died.

"And now we know how he will fall from the point of his highest rise," went on Nostradame. "To think that we—you and I—were the instruments for that fall! I must record it at once."

He sought writing materials, improvising aloud:

"Through Slavic lands a horde moves, dire and great,
But falls the town to which the raider came.
He shall see all the country desolate,
Nor knows he how to stem the burning flame—"

"Do as you will," Anne begged, "leave his name out of your writings, but tell it to me."

"Why not, child, if you are curious? He will be called Napoleon Bonaparte, and when Moscow burns about his ears, the beginning of his end is upon him. . . ."

It was the next night, and Nostradame sat alone in a house that seemed triply lonely and empty because Anne had been there, and was elsewhere now.

She must not, he had told her, endanger her relationship with the proud and dictatorial Lady Olande by slipping away night after night. They would find a way to communicate in days to come, and meanwhile he would scan the future alone. Of that he was stubbornly sure. Anne had almost swooned with the experience. She was not strong enough in body to match her brave spirit.

But, though he would not take her exploring in time again, she had shown him a thing he could do. Here and there he might be revealed to the best men of those coming times, to help them with a word—or revealed, perhaps, to the worst men, and frighten them as a ghost can frighten. And some time he would dare to publish his records, as a warning to the world that would be. Meanwhile, again the strange phrase was groping in his mind. . . . "*Atoma divisa. . .*"

A KNOCK at his door. So late—was Anne disdaining his sober council and coming back? He went and opened.

A slender pranking youngster stood there, the very ideal of a great lady's saucy page. He wore doublet and hose of rich purple, with a gay plumed hat set rakishly upon his carefully combed ringlets.

"Young sir?" said Nostradame, concealing his dislike of the interruption.

"I am from the Lady Olande, worthy doctor," said the page. "At her home I am her most trusted retainer, and by me she sends you a message."

"Give it me," and Nostradame held out his big hand, but the page made a graceful gesture of negation.

"Nay, this message is by word of mouth. The Lady Olande bids me say that she was hasty and ill-mannered early yesterday. She cries your mercy for what she sought to do you in harm, and swears that she rejoices it came to nought."

"And what beside?" demanded Nostradame. "For such talk presages the asking of a favor."

"You are wise as well as worthy, messire. The Lady Olande is taken of an illness—surely, she bids me say, it is a punishment for her sins to you. And she begs you put out your hand to heal her."

"Ill, is she?" Nostradame, the doctor, could not refuse such an appeal from his most deadly foe. "What form doth the illness take?"

"Nay, I know not. You must diagnose and prescribe."

"Wait." Nostradame returned to his study, stowing his gear of mystery away. Into a sachel he put phials and parcels of such remedies as might, one or another, be of service. Rejoining the page, he emerged into the street, where two horses were tied. The page held one for him to mount, then vaulted into the saddle of the other. A moon was coming up, light enough to show them the road to the estate of the Lady Olande de la Fornaye.

The manor house of la Fornaye was a square-built structure of stone, forthright enough in its outer appearance. As they gained its front entry, a dog barked from somewhere, and someone came forward to take the horses. The page opened the heavy door for Nostradame, ushering him into a pleasant hall, its floor carpeted richly and its walls tapestried gaily. There was an open fire against the chill, and a long table on which stood a wine service and a silver bowl of fruits.

From an arched inner doorway came the Lady Olande, dressed as for a ball in a gown of cramoisie, snugly fitted to her torso and bosom but full in the sleeves and the skirt. Jewels gleamed in her hair, at her throat, and on the hand she held out as in welcome.

"Madame, you are better," said Nostradame at once. "I had expected to find you in sorry case."

"True, I am better," she replied, "and now that you are here I am about to be eased forever of my torment."

"What is it?" he asked.

"A grave illness," she said, and her smile was of radiant mockery. "For a whim, perhaps, I made an enemy of you. To have such as you for enemy is such a malaise as one might perish of, sir."

There was a heavy clank behind him. The page had bolted the door. From the arch behind Lady Olande came two armed men.

"Thank you for coming to my request," said the woman. "Here upon mine own lands, I am supreme and peer of all save the King himself. It is my right to dispense the high justice, the middle, and the low. I can kill if so I wish, and at present, Messire Michel de Nostradame, I wish to kill you."

CHAPTER V

The Most Awful Vision

A DAY before, Nostradame had defied stoutly the assault of two men-at-arms as formidable as Lady Olande's servitors, but he had been armed. Here, as Lady Olande reminded him, her power was all but absolute, and undoubtedly there were other men within call.

He turned briefly toward the door, but the page stood there with a savage grin, hand on dagger. Nostradame turned to his captor.

"Have you stopped to think," he said, "that I am not a simple nobody of peasant blood? I am known in the town and elsewhere, and my family is as good, perhaps, as yours. I doubt if you can kill me out of hand and not answer for it."

"I will answer, and have spent some hours in readying the answer," replied the lady. "You have been sent for to come and prescribe for me—your servant can testify as much, if he overheard my page speak to you. Well, sir, you have come, and instead of honest medicines you offer incantations and spells from the very floor of hell. We of la Fornaye are honest folk, and none will blame us for punishing you with death. I can and will abide any questioning successfully."

She looked as if she was confident of herself and her servants. Nostradame reflected again on his own misfortune in giving voice to the whisper that had come, only that morning, of this resolute lady's future. How had it gone? No more love for her, no more travel. A death close at hand. He fixed her with his eyes.

"I, who see the future for others, cannot see it for myself," quoth he, "yet I have it in mind that I will see your death, and not you mine."

"How that?" said the page, coming to his elbow. "You're saucy, you man of physic, in your last hour."

Nostradame gazed upon him with a deep, searching air.

"I pity you, springald. Your limbs should have many years of life. Yet—yes, I will say it—you shall die before this proud and cruel mistress of yours, which means you must die very soon indeed. This very night, mayhap."

"Eh, by Saint Denis," growled one of the

men-at-arms, "this wizard sets curses upon us all."

"I set no curses, friend," Nostradame told him. "I do not see your death, for instance. You will live long, to repent your part in this foul work, mere dog though you be of Olande de la Fornaye."

"I do not stand and hear insults in my own hall. Bring him to the chamber beyond."

The men-at-arms came to either side of Nostradame, and, unarmed as he was, he suffered them to conduct him through the archway, along a corridor and to an inner chamber. After them swept Lady Olande, and the page, bearing a stand of burning tapers.

It was such a small nook of a room as the rich homes of the period afforded for chance private consultations. There was a settee of heavy dark wood, a small table, and a chair. The page set the lights on the table, where they illuminated an open book. Nostradame, glancing at the exposed pages, drew back and made the sign of the cross.

"That is an evil work and a forbidden," he said. "Spells for the raising of Satan himself—it merits to be burned."

Lady Olande laughed. "Yet you know it and what it is, which argues your own evil knowledge. I myself have never bothered to read in it—reading is to me a vain burden. But it has been in the house, and now it will convict you. The authorities, when they question, will learn how you opened it to read—how I sensed the nearness in the air of imps and goblins, blackest and foulest, and how I, in terror and anger, called my servants to slay you before you did ill with your knowledge of it. Seat him at the table, and bury your swords in his body."

"Sit," the page said to Nostradame, who turned upon him so blazing a stare that the pert youngster gave back.

"Order me no orders, youth," said Nostradame. "Lady Olande, you are determined upon my death. I prefer to die standing."

"So be it," she said, and motioned to the two.

Nostradame had never stood in fear of death. Yet now he sighed over the shortening of life, as one might sigh over the close of a happy banquet, or a gay pageant where one holds a pleasant seat. In moments it would be over, did the Lady Olande have her will. He would not know the form of her false evidence, nor how soon authorities would search his house for what they would find. . . .

Suddenly he drew himself tense. Death he

did not fear, no; only dying in vain. Would they destroy his papers, as the vile records of one who worshipped the devil? All his verses of the times to come, the hope he had of warning whole races and nations yet unborn? Could he not protest that, at least fight against it? The man who had spoken in the main hall slid his sword from its sheath.

"This is in a way your own doing, sir," he said, a little diffidently, to Nostradame. "You told me that I would live without hurt after this matter is done."

"Not quite did I say that," demurred Nostradame. "You will live, yes; but you forget that I said you would live to repent, and repentance comes through suffering and sorrow."

AS HE spoke he had sidled, as though timid of the swordpoint, toward the nearest wall. There hung a tapestry worth, perhaps, a hundred gold nobles. Now he shot out his arm, and with a quick clutch and pull wrenched the hanging free. He half-wadded the fabric, and received in it the thrust of the sword. A moment later he had come in close, gripped the guard of the weapon, and torn it from the man's grasp. His other fist, big and brawny as a smith's, darted a heavy buffet, and the man-at-arms fell with a heavy sigh, as though struck by a hammer.

Possessing himself of the captured weapon, Nostradame fell upon the remaining armed servitor, who at the second engage knew that he had met his master in fence. He ran out of the room, and after him the Lady Olande flung a curse so foul that the lowest guard-room of a mercenary company could scarce have matched it.

"Run!" she called to the page. "Run, and summon every male retainer! I'll have this devil hewn in pieces." And she faced Nostradame with eyes in which death stood up. "As for you, with your sleights and subtleties, you fear at least this book which I shall make evidence against you. Hear, while I read something to stun your ears."

She was at the table, picking up the volume. "Here is something, in the name of hell's legions, to confound an enemy! In the very language of demons, sir! I read it upon you—*Sator, Arepos, Tenet*—"

"I could not ask a self-conviction neater and more complete," said a sneering voice that Nostradame knew.

In walked a figure in black. It was Hip-

polyte Gigny, the witch-finder. In the corridor behind him lingered, not a pair of sword-bearing retainers, but half a dozen. The page was struggling among them, and cried out once, then fell bleeding. His death, so lately foretold, had caught up with him.

"As I am the king's servant, I suspected this at the beginning," quoth Gigny. "For a lady to be so glib about witchcraft in charging a neighbor, she herself must be versed in it. When the man she accused stood innocent—well, innocent of wizardry—my suspicion grew. And there came to me now a certain word of what you wrought here, Olande de la Fornaye. I find you at your witch work, book in hand and a black spell upon your lips."

She still clutched the book, and glared defiance at Gigny.

"You would dare charge me with that? I am a noblewoman, the peer of any save the king—"

"And I am the king's servant, speaking with his mouth. Take the book, one of you, and handle it gingerly lest hell blast you. It shall be given to the judges. Another of you, place her under arrest." Gigny spoke to Nostradame. "She was vomiting a curse of hell upon you, and I forestalled her. Are we quits now, sir? This service of mine tonight cancels the false charge of mine today?"

"More than quits," said Nostradame.

"Then I give you good-night."

And Nostradame left the raided home of Olande de la Fornaye, for whom waited a grim judgment and a death of agony under the law that suffered not a witch to live.

HE entered his modest home, and there waited Anne.

"It was you, of course, who saved me again," he said to her.

"Yes. I heard her plan it, as before, and the matter of the false accusation she perfected. When I was too late to tell you, I sought out the witch-finder in his lodging. He went readily to her home." She sighed. "In some way I must think of what I will do hereafter. She was my only kin, and I hers. I have no shelter—"

"If you and she were only kin, then you stand her heir after she is slain by law. Broad lands, wealth, servants." He bowed before her. "My Lady Anne."

"Not yet, not yet," she pleaded. "I cannot go there at once. Suffer me to stay here the night. We are friends—perhaps even—"

"Short hours ago, we were friends and equals. Now you will be of the noblesse, and I am a physician, of small means and simple repute. Lady Anne, my thanks for your kind and saving service twice in a day's space, and I shall live and die your debtor—"

"Oh, have done!" she cried at him, in something of a temper. "You make the gaining of fortune an ill and cold thing. We shall go on as we began—comradely and happy—or I will not touch of Olande de la Fornaye's estate one copper sou."

"Think, child," he bade her. "Think, and then decide. I will leave you to yourself for a space."

He bowed, and withdrew to the study beyond.

The driving urge was upon him, and quickly he groped in the dark for his robe and rod. Dampening the fringe, he sat on the tripod. He remembered the vision that had been interrupted, and the words that had come out of the mist. "*Atoma divisa*. . . ." In a moment, he would know what was meant by that strange paradox in two classical languages.

In the front room, Anne stirred with housewifely care the fire on the open hearth. Obediently she thought as Nostradame had bade her, and her thoughts held not one iota of plan for any drawing apart from him. She was going to be rich—well. Noble—well. Influential—well. Those qualities would do

for him what he modestly would not do for himself. He and his gifts would be called to the attention of the king. In his time he would be great and honored, and in all other times remembered, until the end of—

Then she started up, for from the study had come a scream of mortal terror, the awful cry of a man who, brave and strong, is undone by a horror too great for his courage to compass.

She ran, throwing open the door. The light streamed through the doorway, and she saw Nostradame, half fallen from his tripod stool, on one knee, an arm lifted across his face as though to hide in its shadow.

"*Atoma divisa*—the atom divided!" he cried brokenly. "I have seen its division, and surely the world is shattered by that dividing!"

She ran to him, and knelt at his side. She, whom lately he had so loftily called a child, put her arms around him as a mother might.

"The riving of the atom," he quavered. "It strikes a city, and the city crumbles to powder—a people is wiped out—surely these horrors shake the walls of heaven itself, and I have seen the last awful hour of the world!"

"Do not look," Anne begged him, and held him close. "Do not look."

His eyes opened and met hers, and it was as if he had wakened from a dream of inferno and saw paradise.



"All Our Wonderful Hundred Cities Could Be Destroyed Overnight—by the Anarchs!"

DEKER started, gazed in astonishment at the official who was placing him in suspended animation.

"You're surprised to learn about the Anarchs?" Brenn went on. "Yes, there is actually such an underground organization—and there are others! Destructives. They are heading us toward disaster, but you sleepers may survive it. . . ."

Deker looked around. Eleven capsules hung from the low metal ceiling. Inside each capsule was a body. A body that would live, unaging, through centuries. Because he was "different," Deker was being forced to join this group. And the irony of it was that Brenn himself was "different"—but knew how, to conceal his abnormality!

Your mind will travel far into the future when you read **THE SLEEPER IS A REBEL**, the astonishing novel by Bryce Walton featured next issue. It's an extraordinary tale of distant horizons!



Frost got out a sliver gun from a locker and pointed it at Thor-na'thor

PIETY

By MARGARET ST. CLAIR

No one ever dies in Vardia—at least, not according to the standard that's been adopted by the Vardians!

FROST tossed an avenil wrapper in the space erviser's part reducer.

"These people have found the secret of immortality," he said.

"What a romantic temperament you have," Scott replied softly. "The secret of im-

mortality, it sounds as dated as the philosopher's stone."

"What do you mean? We're not immortal."

"No, we're not—though you may not have noticed that the last report of the committee for India gives the life expectancy there now

as seventy years. And because of consistently good medical care, you and I both look a good ten years younger than our actual chronological age."

Scott was in his early thirties: he had the trim body and resilient skin of first maturity.

"That's not immortality."

"No, of course not. That's what I'm driving at. How do we arrest aging and prolong life? With some mysterious serum, by some dark business with a fantastic ray? Hocus-pocus of a sort which would be the equivalent of the philosopher's stone I mentioned?

"We've increased our temporal range to the point where it's not at all unusual to meet active and alert people who've passed the century mark. Society has done that by a system of care which is pre-prenatal, by seeing to it that every human being grows up in the best possible environment and receives the best possible nutrition, and by prophylactic measures of all possible sorts. In a word, we've eliminated from human life all the stresses and strains which can be eliminated. And that's the nearest to immortality we'll ever get."

FROST raised his eyebrows. "You heard what Thor-na'thor said. How do you account for it?"

Scott went over to the viewing plates and turned them to low power. The mass of buildings that was Tarthal leaped into visibility. "I don't account for it," he said, with his back to Frost. "We don't speak his language very well yet; we may have misunderstood. Or he may have been speaking metaphorically."

"Nonsense! You heard him say, 'And you let him die?' when we were telling him about Kynaston's burial. That wasn't metaphor. He sounded deeply and genuinely shocked. In my opinion, Thor-na'thor was shocked because, here on Vardia, among his own people, no one ever dies."

Scott shrugged and did not answer for a moment. "I might believe," he went on after a pause, "that they'd worked out therapeutic techniques which are more successful than ours in prolonging life, if the Vardians weren't obviously at a low level of scientific progress. Their vehicles are steam-powered, and they light their buildings with carbon-filament electric lights. Their young men and women dabble in science, yes, but for exactly the same reason that they take an interest in music and painting and the dra-

matic arts—because it's cultural."

"Got you there!" Frost said in some triumph. He got up and began to pace the cabin's length. "You're assuming that scientific advances occur evenly and are distributed, so to speak, on a plane. Didn't you take any courses in the history of science?"

"One of the most striking features of terrestrial science has been its uneven development. Man knew the diameter of the earth before he was aware of the circulation of the blood, and it was more than two hundred years after the laws of moving bodies were formulated before the science of psychology was born. First the physical sciences, then biology, and at last sociology and the psychology of the depths.

"What reason is there to think that Thor-na'thor's people haven't reversed the progression and developed the life sciences first?"

"The order of development on earth wasn't accidental, but dictated by the nature of things; physics is an easier science than psychology. And leaving that aside, why is Thor-na'thor so reticent about it, assuming you're right? You've tried to pump him a dozen times since he made that remark about Kynaston, and all he does is look embarrassed and change the subject. Supposing he's understood you, and you him, his attitude is more appropriate to a religious matter than a scientific one."

"I've got a theory about that." Frost ruffled up his hair. "I suppose you mean the way he's so careful to keep us away from that building in the north of the city.

"Would it be the first time a scientific discovery has been taken over by religion? Remember those steam engines and assorted gadgets the Alexandrians invented, and how they were used to produce miracles for the devout? Or there may have been a gradual decadence with religion moving slowly in on science. That might explain the general quietism in the atmosphere, though I admit the Vardians don't seem decadent."

"Um."

"You don't believe me?" Frost said.

"Not a bit of it. Nope."

"Will you help me?"

". . . Yes."

THOR-NA'THOR was a good dinner guest. He held his liquor well, he laughed in the places where laughter was appropriate, he even essayed a mild jest or two of his own.

He was genuinely friendly and amiable.

Nevertheless, Frost and Scott were not pleased. They were too tense and excited to enjoy their guest's social qualities, and his ability to soak up liquor without being affected by it was nothing less than catastrophic. They were both a good deal drunker than Thor-na'thor was, and it was not their tongues the evening had been designed to loosen.

Scott twitched an eyelid in signal to Frost. "Get a Venusian liquor," the latter said feebly to Thor-na'thor. "Like your opinion on it." He got a bottle from the buffet.

"Certainly," Thor-na'thor replied, smiling and holding out his glass. "Delighted, my boy. What generous hosts you terrestrials are!"

"Thanks." With inebriated precision, Frost poured a huge snort of phyteumah into the Vardian's glass, and portions as much smaller as was consistent with decency into Scott's and his own.

"I especially appreciate your invitation," Thor-na'thor went on, sipping at his drink, "since I have been distressed—absurdly, I suppose, but there it is—over the death a few days ago of a pet of mine. This evening has been a welcome distraction for me." He sipped again.

Frost and Scott exchanged quick glances. Was this going to be easier than they had thought?

"That's too bad," Scott said. "What was it, a dog?"

"An animal very similar to a dog. I had reared Lilil from shortly after her birth. One grows attached to them."

Still sipping, Thor-na'thor launched on an anecdote designed to illustrate Lilil's cleverness and quasi-human abilities. It grew into a biography, and still he sipped phyteumah from his glass. When the glass was empty, Frost poured more in it unobtrusively while Thor-na'thor talked on. The glass was refilled twice before the Vardian paused. "I regret her death," he finished.

Scott decided to plunge. "How fortunate you are spared such losses with your own people!" he said, tripping over the consonants. "You Vardians don't die, do you?"

"No." The answer was immediate.

Frost cast a glance of triumph at Scott. The latter scarcely perceived it; Thor-na'thor's open admission had nonplussed him. He halted and tried to cudgel his foggy mind into deciding what to say next.

"What is the cause of that?" he got out at last; he had had too much to drink.

"What boys you terrestrials are!" the Vardian answered, smilingly. He got to his feet. "Thank you for a delightful evening. Good night." He halted at the top of the companionway. "I believe we shall have rain before morning," he said, and was gone.

"The blamed old buzzard!" Scott said. He took a sip of water and another Sobrior pill. "Leading us on, guzzling our food, guzzling our drink, and finally laughing at us! He told us that yarn about that dog of his just so we'd bite and ask him if the Vardians were immortal! The blamed old ape!"

"Yes, but never mind that," Frost replied. He had taken two Sobrior pills and was quite himself again. "The important thing is that he admitted it."

"He only said that to make us look like fools."

"What does he care whether we're fools or not? There's really something there, or he wouldn't be so coy about it!"

"I'll find out what he's up to if it's the last thing I do!"

"Listen, let's try—"

THOR-NA'THOR said, "Yes, this machine would be most useful to my people. We have dramatic entertainments, but nothing like that." He indicated the tiny stereo projector Scott was holding out to him. "We Vardians are a happy folk, but I believe your machine would make us a little happier."

"You could make a lot of money with it," Scott said.

Thor-na'thor gave a slight shrug. "Money—that is not so important on Vardia. But it is true that I should be the object of a great deal of gratitude from my people if I introduced it to them."

"You'd like that?" Scott asked. "You Vardians value that?"

"We value it greatly. I should like it very much."

"It's yours," Scott said, holding out the stereo projector.

An expression of extreme pleasure came over Thor-na'thor's face. "Thank you!" he said, extending his hand. "You are very generous."

"If," Scott hurried on, "you'll tell us why the Vardians don't die."

Thor-na'thor pulled his hand back. "I beg your pardon," he said quietly. "I had thought

it was a gift."

Scott's cheeks began to burn. "Oh, heck," he said bruskiy, "take the th—"

"Shut up, Scott," Frost broke in. And then, to Thor-na'thor, "We'll give it to you, and gladly—and a lot of other stuff, too—if you'll do what Scott said. How can it hurt you to tell us? Why don't you want us to know?"

"You are joking. You terrestrials are always joking. There are things of which one does not speak."

"Then take us to the building we've never been allowed inside."

"You mean the library? No, it would do you no good. I am sorry, my boy." Thor-na'thor always addressed the two earth men as "my boy" though only heaven knew what the temporal relationship between them was. "It is impossible."

"You can have this too if you'll only tell us the secret," Frost said. He brought out a power generator, a model of compactness, less than thirty centimeters on a side, with a sealed-in permanent power source, and added it to the stereo projector.

Thor-na'thor listened politely while Frost explained the generator's working and use, and at the end shook his head once more. "No. I am sorry, there is no secret. No." He nodded good-by to both of them, and started toward the airlock.

"Hey!" Scott shouted after him. And then, when he turned, "take the projector with you!"

"But—"

"It's okay. We want you to have it. It's a gift."

When Thor-na'thor, holding the projector carefully between his hands, had departed, Frost turned on Scott.

"What the heck did you do that for?" he demanded. "Are you crazy? He wanted that projector; it's possible we might have been able to make a deal with him after all."

"You know we wouldn't. And—oh, he made me feel so cussed small when he said that about having thought it was a gift. I could've hidden underneath one of those little blue Martian geckos. And besides, the old buzzard's pretty decent. Likeable."

"Hunh! You'd better get into a different frame of mind before tonight, then. Maybe I'd better try it by myself."

"No. I'll back you up."

Scott whispered to Frost, "Funny sort of library. People go in and people

come out, but none of them is carrying anything. Of course, it could be the books don't circulate."

"It could be Thor-na'thor was lying, you mean." Frost whispered back. "It's not a library, it's the place where the Vardians go for their shots or what. Thor-na'thor must think we're awful fools."

Scott made no reply. He was shivering. The nights on Vardia in this latitude had a penetrating chill, and they had been waiting behind the gelid marble of the monument for Thor-na'thor for several hours. The Vardians were addicted to routine, but Scott was beginning to wonder if something had prevented their official host from taking his regular evening stroll. Scott wished he had worn a heated suit.

"I think—" Frost said at last. "Yes, here he comes. And he's by himself."

As the Vardian moved past the base of the monument to Trj Doteon, the two earthmen fell in on either side of him.

"We've got you centered," Frost said into the Vardian's ear.

"What do you want me to do?" Thor-na'thor answered placidly.

"Go with us to the ship."

When they were inside the *Alceste's* cabin again, Frost said, "You forced this on us. I hope you'll decide to be reasonable. Do you know what a sliver gun is?"

"I have not that honor," Thor-na'thor replied. His expression was peculiar; whatever it expressed, he did not appear to be alarmed.

Still centering the Vardian in his bolter, Frost got out a sliver gun from a locker and pointed it at the Vardian.

"Little but mighty," he said. "Thor-na'thor, this is it. Being shot by a sliver gun is rarely fatal, unless you're hit in a nerve center. But a wound from it produces tonic spasms of all the voluntary muscles. I was shot by one once; I'd rather have a major burn without anesthesia.

"Scott, hold out his hand."

Scott locked the Vardian's wrist in a tight grip and held the member out to Frost.

"Now," Frost said. "Why don't you Vardians die?"

Thor-na'thor laughed. "Torture, my boy?" he said. "It is too bad, I am afraid I shall look ridiculous. But there is no secret. You are too young to understand."

Frost drew a deep breath. His finger wavered on the lever of the sliver gun. Then

he tossed the gun down on the cover of the locker and turned bitterly on his heel.

Scott released the Vardian's wrist. "As I thought," he said. "You'd better go, Thor-na'thor. I imagine we'll be starting back to Terra in a few hours."

"So soon?" the Vardian asked courteously. "We Vardians should like an opportunity to say farewell properly to our guests."

"I'm afraid so. I wish—"

"Would you like me to give you the projector back? You do not need to be ashamed; it is a very valuable thing."

"No, not that. I was wishing that the all-earth Central Committee would decide to send a commission to Vardia to investigate this business about Vardians never dying. But it's impossible; the committee has a great respect for local autonomy."

Handshakes, at Thor-na'thor's request, were exchanged. Their parting was friendly. As the *Alceste* took off on the first leg of the long return, Frost said: "I wonder what it was?"

Scott shook his head. "There might have been something. But we'll never know."

THOR-NA'THOR walked up the broad low steps of the library. He tipped back his head to look at the inscription over the big door; it was in the long-absolute non-phonetic Vardian script, but he knew what it said.

At the threshold an attendant smiled at him and held out a basin for him to wash his hands. The attendants knew him well by sight, since his visits to the library always exceeded the daily minimum prescribed by law; Thor-na'thor was a pious man.

When he was clean, he passed into the enormous adytum. He paused at the entrance to enjoy the deep pleasure which the sight of the vast room always roused in him.

From ceiling to floor it was lined with books; the biographies, lovingly, piously compiled, of every man, woman and child who had ever lived on Vardia since the enormously distant time when the art of writing had come to the race. Two balconies zoned the room, and everywhere were reading desks.

Thor-na'thor approached one of the librarians. He walked slowly, for he was thinking of what he had read above the door, "No one who ever lived deserves to die" and feeling for the thousandth time its deep truth.

The librarian greeted him courteously. "Will you have one of your friends," she asked, "or shall it be a stranger?"

"A stranger," Thor-na'thor replied without hesitation. It was considered far more pious to peruse a stranger's life than that of one of one's friends.

She went to a shelf, handed him a book. "No one has had this for a long time."

Thor-na'thor went over with it to a reading desk. He opened it, savoring to the full his grateful task of rescuing from oblivion one of the honored Vardian dead.

"Habor-binhabor," he read in the second chapter, "was inordinantly fond of the old-fashioned game of matzor. On the ninth of Satatius, 20034, he stayed up until after midnight playing it, and on another occasion."

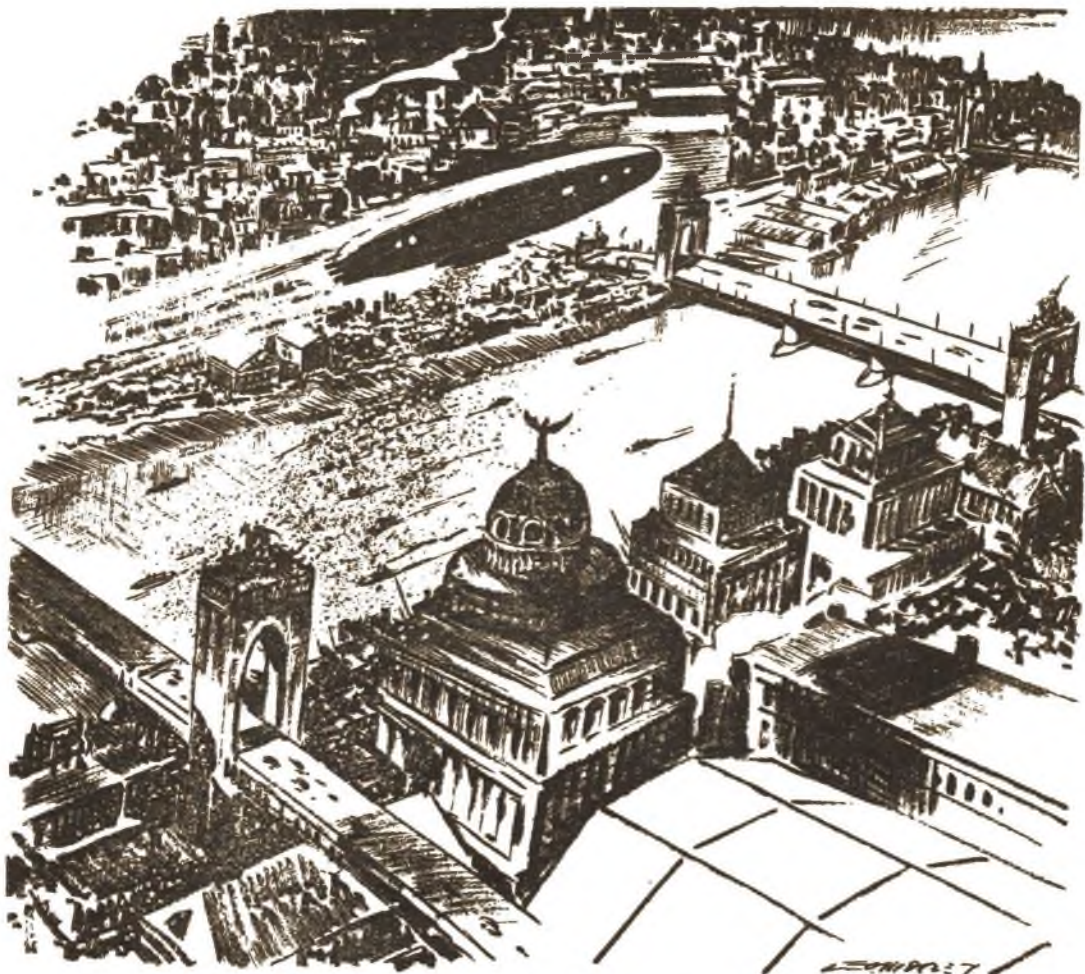
Thor-na'thor closed the volume over his forefinger. How strange the earth people were, he thought, how violent, how crude, how young! Heartless, too—witness how they had let their comrade Kynaston die utterly. There had been not the slightest attempt to write his biography. Perhaps, as their race grew older, they would learn that the whole purpose of man on earth is to keep alive the memory of the honored dead. Perhaps they would learn then that no one who is remembered ever dies.



COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE

TRANSURANIC

An Amazing Complete Novelet by EDMOND HAMILTON



Pink confetti tumbled down through the air

The Irritated People

By RAY BRADBURY

This was war—grim, deadly war—but not a shot was fired, not a bomb dropped, for the World Organization forbade it!

CHARLES CROSSLEY, President of American Jet-Propelled Ships, felt himself spread-eagled in his favorite living room chair. The voice on the television moaned. Europe. Crossley twitched. Secret atomic factories. Crossley jerked. Semi-dictatorships. Crossley sweated. Political pressures. War. Crossley writhed.

His wife shut the television off indignantly. "Nonsense!" She stared at her limp husband. "Tri-Union hasn't any weapons, we haven't any, neither has Russia, Britain or anyone else. That was all settled and forbidden ages ago. When was it? 1960?"

Crossley stroked his receding hairline, sighing. "They're making atom bombs in

secret," he said. He littered the rug with cigar ash.

"Stop that!" cried his wife. "My nice rug!"

"The rug, oh, the confounded rug," he said, and muttered away, closing his eyes for a long minute. Then he opened one eye. He looked at his wife. He looked at the rug, the cigar in his hand, the fallen ashes.

"The rug?" He shut his eyes again. Five minutes later he leaped up with an explosion of sound. "The rug! I've got it! I've got it!" He seized his wife, kissed her. "You are brilliant! I love you! That's it, that is it!"

He rushed madly off in the general direction of Europe!

Thus began the Tri-Union-American war of the year 1989.

The small jet-propelled ship crossed the Atlantic in fiery gusts. In it was Charles Crossley, a man with an idea. Behind it three thousand other ships tore along, putting space behind. They were his ships. They belonged to his company. He employed the men. This was his own private war.

"Ha!" Mr. Crossley laughed quite obviously.

The radio cut in on him. "Crossley?"

Crossley answered. "Speaking."

"This is the President, Crossley." The voice was sharp, and it fairly heated the interior of the ship. "Turn back, in the name of common sense. What are you up to! I'll seize your company!"

"This can't wait, Mr. President. We've been sweating it out for months. The Tri-Union won't admit it's setting up a fascistic skeleton in Europe, we can't find any proof they are, but there are rumors. We've got to get it out in the open. We can't wait. I'm sorry I have to act alone. Bombardiers?"

"Ready!" Three thousand voices.

"Crossley!" shouted the President, far away.

"Here comes Vienna!" Crossley jerked his hand down. "Bombloads, release!"

"Release!" Three thousand voices.

"Crossley!" The President.

"Bang!" said Crossley.

Pink confetti tumbled down through the clear cool summer air. Tons and tons of pink, whirling confetti! Confetti by the bombload, three thousand cargoes of very pink, very fine confetti!

"And to think," mused Crossley happily, as he turned his ship homeward, "to think the entire idea came from spilling ashes on the rug! Hi-ho!"

THE President of the United States shook his fist.

"You bombed them!"

Crossley yawned. "There is no law against dropping waste paper," he said, quietly.

"You attacked the people of the Tri-Union states!"

"No one injured," said Crossley, calmly. "No explosions, no bruises, no fatalities. Did anybody even get a piece of confetti in his eye? The answer is no. A two letter word."

Crossley lit a cigarette. "Fifty thousand housefraus and one hundred thousand children swept sidewalks. Men flooded employment offices in Vienna for street sweeper jobs. But, ah, that clever, devilish confetti! It was electrically and chemically impregnated. It vanished when touched by human hands. It reappeared when humans withdrew from the immediate vicinity. Brooms helped little. When disturbed the confetti had a curious habit of jumping like tiddle-de-winks or jumping beans. Sensitive little things. I dare say it'll be some weeks before Vienna is clean. That is what I have done to the Tri-Union. The World Organization forbids an attack. Was this an attack, sir? Confetti on the wind? Eh?"

"The World Organization forbids war!" cried the President.

"This is not war." Crossley leaned forward, tapped the desk earnestly. "Suppose we dropped confetti every day, causing the Tri-Union population to pluck and curry their lawns 365 days a year? And there are other things we can do, Mr. President. Little, irritating things. Imagine it, Mr. President, will you?"

The President imagined it for quite awhile. Then, slowly, he began to smile.

It was a sweet day, a morning in the Tri-Union state of Bruegher. The sky was blue, the clouds were nicely white. And upon the rolling green hills a picnic was spread, with thousands of tossed paper napkins, hundreds of bread heels, crusts, can openers, sardine tins, dropped eggs and wadded cardboard cartons. The picnic, like a river of several thousand parts, engulfed the park-like hills. One small boy running through the dells paused to leave his semi-digested lunch.

Laughter. Wine bottles gurgling! Songs!

The President of the United States and Mr. Crossley clinked glasses, heading the picnic, drank gustily, refilled, drank again. Others yelled, screamed in delight, played tag, threw away bottles!

And on twenty thousand other Tri-Union hills twenty thousand other small family ships landed. Twenty thousand more picnic riots began. Sixty thousand napkins, well wadded, were dropped from wiped lips! One hundred thousand shattered egg shells were spilled! Sixty thousand shiny soup cans were left gleaming in the sun. Three hundred million ants rushed out to welcome them. And the 30 million people of Greater Bruegher glared at the invasion, knowing not what to do. What was the world coming to?

At nightfall, the last little boy had emptied himself of his brackish contents, the last little girl plucked bawling from a poison ivy nest, the last sardine dispatched, the last beer bottle left a foamy vacuum.

Flying away into the night, the American invaders sent back their war cry which sounded remarkably like, and probably was, a belch.

General Krauss, personal representative of Brugh, the new semi-dictator of Europe, shouted out of the televisor:

"Mr. President, you, *you* were seen, by reliable witnesses, to peel an egg and, bit by bit, throw the shell under a one hundred year old linden tree!"

Crossley and the President stood together in the White House inner sanctum. The President spoke:

"Krauss, the peace laws specify no nation may manufacture weapons for killing, wounding or destruction of another's national populace or property. We are helpless to attack you, therefore. All the while, you, in secret, make weapons—"

"You can't prove that!"

"—make weapons," said the President, grimly. "So, in last recourse, we use weapons which are no weapons at all. We have destroyed nothing and no one."

"Ah-hah!" Krauss' eyes snapped on the visor. His face vanished. A new scene replaced it, showing a green meadow. Krauss' voice crackled behind it, in comment. "Property damage to Greater Bruegher! Listen! Rough estimate! Sixty-five thousand ants, large and small, both black and red, biting and non-biting, were trodden on at your picnic!"

The scene dissolved to yet another.

"Hark! Ten million grass-blades. Approximately. Ten million trampled and crushed. Two thousand pretty flowers. Picked!"

"That was an error," apologized Crossley.

"The children got out of hand."

"Two thousand flowers," repeated Krauss savagely. "Picked!"

KRAUSS took time to get hold of himself. He cleared his throat and continued.

"Approximately thirty billion atomic particles of wood brushed off Great Bruegher sycamores, oaks, elms and lindens by adults playing tree tag—AND—sixty million particles scraped from Greater Bruegher fences by young men escaping angered Greater Bruegher bulls. AND! And—" he thundered. The scene dissolved once more, and a most interesting view was revealed. "And—sixteen thousand cubic feet of A-1, first class forest moss crushed, rolled upon and otherwise malpracticed by young lovers idling in the thickets! There you are! The proof! The proof! This is war!"

The first Tri-Union airships flew over New York a week later. From them, on parachutes, little yellow boxes floated.

Crossley, in his garden resting, preparing new methods of attack on the enemy, was astonished as one of the devices hovered by the red brick garden wall.

"A bomb!" he cried, and leaped into the house, sorry he had started this infernal war.

Edith, his wife, peered from the rear window.

"Oh, come back," she said. "It's only a radio."

They listened. Music. Blues music.

"From back in the Mad Forties, when I wore pigtails," said Edith.

"Hmm," said Crossley.

The music, if such it could be called, concerned a lady afflicted with "—I got those mad about him, glad about him, but I get so sad about him bah-looze!"

"Interesting," said Crossley.

"Yes," she said.

The song ended. They waited.

The song began again.

"Is that all it plays?" said Edith. "I don't see any dials to change the record with."

"Oh, oh," said Crossley and shut his eyes.

"I think I begin to see the light—"

The song ended and started a third time.

"That's what I expected," said Crossley. "Here, give me a hand."

The song flowed into its fourth, fifth and sixth renditions as they poked at the dangling machine. It dodged—like a humming-

bird. "Radar-sensitives," gasped Crossley, giving up. "Oh, pfui!"

Edith covered her ears with her hands. "Oh, Charles," she said.

They went in the house and shut the door tight and shut the windows tighter. Nevertheless, the music penetrated.

After dinner, Crossley looked at Edith and said:

"What do *you* make it?"

She counted on her fingers. "This next time will be the one hundred and thirteenth repeat," she said.

"That's what I counted," said he, handing her wads of cotton.

He worked feverishly that evening. He made plans for war using confetti, toothpaste tubes that refused to function, a chemical that dulled razors with the first scrape, and—mmm, let me see. . .

His young son, age twelve, was doing his homework in the next room.

"Oblivious to that awful music," said Crossley in admiration. "Kids are marvels, can concentrate anywhere." He crept up on his son, looked over his shoulder.

The boy was writing a composition:

"Poe authored The Cask of Amontillado, Masque of the Red Death, and I Got Those Mad About Him, Glad About Him, But I Get So Sad About Him—"

"Blues," said Crossley. He turned. "Edith! Pack the suitcases! We're leaving home!"

They piled into the family helicopter. As the helicopter lifted into the sky, Crossley's small son said, looking down at the music box in the garden, "Two hund-derth time!"

Crossley hit him.

IT WAS useless to flee. The hovering radios were everywhere, bawling. They were in the air and on the ground and under bridges.

They could not be shot down; they dodged. And the music played on.

Edith glared at her husband who was somewhat responsible for all this. His son tentatively eyed Crossley's shins for kicking.

Crossley called the President.

"YOU!" screamed the President. "CROSSLEY!"

"Mr. President, I can *explain!*"

So the war progressed. The World Organization hunched forward tensely awaiting the moment when either side got off bounds, fired a shot or committed a murder. But—

Normal civilized pursuits continued. Imports and exports flowed, foods, clothing, raw materials were exchanged.

If either country had broken relations, made guns, knives, grenades, the World Organization would have leaped in. But not a gun was fashioned, not a knife sharpened. There were no murders, wounded, or bruised. The World Organization was helpless. There was no war.

Well, almost none.

"Heinrich!"

"Yes, my wife?"

"Come look at this mirror!"

Heinrich, chief deputy of the police department in a Greater Bruegher village, came slopping in his easy slippers, holding his clay pipe like a small tame bird in his hand.

Heinrich looked into a mirror that was ridiculous, like at a carnival.

"What has happened to it over night?" he wondered. "Look at me. Ha, I look like an idiot!" He chuckled. "My face stretches like rubber, shivers, is distorted. Well. The mirror is warped."

"You are warped!" shouted his wife. "Do something about it!"

"I will buy a new one. In the meantime, the one upstairs—"

"Is also warped!" she snapped. "How will I get my hat on straight, or see if my lipstick is drawn fine, or my powder neat? Clumsy idiot, hurry and fetch a new one! Go, get, rush!"

Crossley had his orders. Find a way out. Or arrange a truce. If these next attacks by the United States did not produce results the United States must bargain for peace. Peace, yes. Peace from that abominable woman singing the abominable blues twenty times an hour, night and day. The American Public would hold the line as long as possible, said the President, but time was short and puncturing everybody's eardrums seemed a most unlikely way out. Crossley was to get in there, and pitch.

Crossley pitched. His jet plane streaked over Europe in the great offensive. Three thousand bombloads of something or other were dropped, at his order, and then the three thousand company ships curved and shot home. He lingered on, cruising the length of Europe, awaiting results.

He got them.

A large, unseeable beam took hold of his

ship and drew it steadily down into the dark mountains of Greater Bruegher.

"Well," said Crossley. "Adventure."

The entire capture was quiet, convivial. When he stepped from his grounded craft he was politely escorted into a city of ultra-modern buildings and avenues between the mountains, and there, in a small edifice, in a small room, he met his enemy.

Krauss sat behind a desk as Crossley entered. Crossley nodded and bowed.

"Hello, Krauss. You'll be prosecuted for kidnapping."

"You're free to go any time," snapped Krauss. "This is an interview. Sit."

The chair was shaped like a low pyramid. You could sit, but you slid in all directions. The ceiling, where Crossley was expected to sit, was very low. He had to choose between back-ache or slithering around on a pyramidal chair. He chose to slither.

Krauss reached over and pinched Crossley.

"Ouch!" said Crossley.

Krauss did it again.

"Stop that!" said Crossley.

"All right," said Krauss.

Under Crossley, the chair exploded.

GIBBERING, Crossley leapt up. He banged his head on the ceiling. He held his back end with one hand, the head with the other.

"Mr. Crossley, shall we talk of peace?"

"Yeah," said Crossley, bent over. "When you stop making secret weapons. Otherwise, more confetti, more picnics and pigs-knuckles."

"And more music in America, ah, Mr. Crossley?"

Another pinch.

Ow! We can stand the music long enough to use our next weapon. We always did have it over you stuffed-shirts over here. You were the inventors of psychological warfare, but we gave it a few improvements."

"Can one improve over music, Mr. Crossley?"

"We'll find a way. Ouch. Keep that away from me!"

"I'll detail our plans, Crossley. First, an oversupply of mosquitoes, in America. *Hungry ones*. Then, a chemical which causes all men's shoes to squeak with each step. Third, electrical pulses to make alarm clocks ring an hour early each morn—"

Crossley was professionally interested.

"Not bad. All within the Peace Rules. All harmless. Mmm, except those mosquitoes."

"Merely skin irritatives."

"Still, the World Org might rule against it."

"Out with the mosquitoes, then!"

"Ouch."

"Did I *hurt* you? Sorry. Well, let us see if we can hurt you a bit more. This paper on my desk. It is a radio report of your death five minutes ago. Your plane crashed, says the report. I have only to broadcast it, and then make sure you 'live' up to the facts contained therein. You see?"

Crossley grinned. "I'm to report to the President every hour. No report, immediate World Org investigation. Do *you* see?"

"Your plane crashed."

"No soap. The Brindly-Connors motors never konk. And the new reactive-propellants on my ships prevent bad landings. So."

Krauss fidgeted. "We'll think of *some* way."

"It's time for me to phone the President; may I?"

"Here." A phone was handed him.

Crossley took the phone. Electricity shot up his arm, into his chest.

"Jeepers!" He dropped the thing. "I'll report you!"

"You have no proof. We both play *this* irritation game, do we not? Go ahead. The phone."

This time, Crossley got the President:

"Crossley, you've heard the news, have you?"

"What news, sir?"

"The chewing gum, you moron, the chewing gum!"

"In the streets, sir?"

The President groaned. "In the streets, the roofs, the dog's fur, the cars, the shrubs, everywhere! Big as golf-balls. And sticky!"

Krauss gazed, listening.

Crossley said, "Courage, Mr. President. Use the croquet hoops."

"Croquet hoops?" Krauss seized Crossley's arm.

"Invisible croquet hoops," Crossley smiled.

"No." Krauss triumphed. "People will stumble, be hurt, even killed by them. The Word Org would stop you!"

"Oh," said Crossley. His face fell. "Look, Mr. President. About those hoops. Forget them. Proceed with Plan 40 and 45 instead."

Another phone rang. Krauss picked it up, answered it.

Your wife, Herr Krauss.

"All right, put her on."

"I'm okay, Mr. President. Had a little engine trouble."

"What!"

Darling, the most terrible trouble!

"Katrina, I have no time. There is much to do."

This is important, you fool! It's horrible!

"Well, what is it, my liebschen? I'm busy."

"Answer me, Crossley, were you shot down?"

"Not exactly, Mr. President. They're trying to figure out a way to kill me. Haven't hit on one yet."

"Mr. Crossley, please, not so loud, I can't hear my wife talking. Yes, darling?"

Hans, Hans, I have dandruff!

"Say that again, I have so much noise here, Katrina."

"I'll call you again in an hour, Mr. President."

Dandruff, Hans, dandruff. A thousand, five thousand flakes on my shoulders!

"You call to tell me this, woman? Good-bye!"

BANG!

CROSSLEY and Krauss hung up in unison, Krauss on his wife, Crossley on the President.

"Where were we?" said Krauss, sweating.

"You were going to kill me. Remember?"

Again the phone. Krauss swore and answered. "What?"

Hans, I've gained ten pounds!

"Why do you insist on calling to tell me these things?"

Mrs. Leiber, Mrs. Krenschnitz and Mrs. Schmidst, they too have gained ten pounds!

"Oh?" Krauss hung up, blinking. "So." He glared at Crossley. "That's what it is. All right, Crossley, we, also, can be subtle. Doctor!"

A door slid open in the wall. There stood an evil looking rascal, sleeves rolled high, testing a hypodermic on his own emaciated arm, enjoying it. He looked up at Crossley and said:

"Practice."

"Get him!" cried Krauss.

Everybody jumped on Crossley.

Darkness.

"How do you feel, Crossley?"

How was he supposed to feel? All right, he guessed. He lifted himself from a kind of operating table and looked at the doctor and at Krauss.

"Here Doctor," said Krauss. "Explain to Mr. Crossley what he may expect ten years from now."

"Ten years?" said Crossley in alarm.

The doctor placed his thin fingers together, bowing. He whispered daintily.

"Ten years from now you may expect a—ah—little trouble. It will commence one year from now. Unobtrusively. Here or there a slight gastric upset, a cardiac disturbance, a minor intra-irritation of the lung sacs. Occasionally, a headache. A sallowness to the complexion, an earache, perhaps."

Crossley began to sweat. He held onto his knees.

The doctor continued, slowly, pleased with himself.

"Then, as the years pass, a small flicker, like bird wings, of the heart. A pain, as if stabbed in the groin. A twitching of the peritoneum. A hot sweating, late of nights, drenching your bedclothes. Insomnia. Night after night, cigarette after cigarette, headache after headache."

"That'll do," said Crossley bleakly.

"No, no." The doctor waved his hypodermic. "I'm not finished. Temporary blindness. I almost forgot that. Yes, temporary blindness. Fuzzy lights in your head. Voices. Paralysis of the lower limbs. Then, your heart, in one last explosion, lasting ten days, will beat itself into a bruised pulp. And you'll die, exactly—" he consulted a mental calendar, "—ten years, five months and fourteen days from today."

The silence in the room was touched only by Crossley's ragged breathing. He tried to lift himself, shivered, fell back.

"Best of all, there will be no evidence of what we have done to you," said Krauss. "Certain hormones and molecular impurities were put into your body. No analysis now or after death would reveal them. Your health will simply fail. We will not be held responsible. Clever, is it not?"

The doctor said, "You may go now. Now that we have fixed you, like a time-bomb, to die later, you are free to go. We would not want to kill you here, that would make us responsible. But, ten years from now, in another place, how can that be due to us?"

The phone. "Your wife, Herr Krauss."

My hair is falling out!

"Now, now, be patient, my wife."

My skin is yellowing! Do something!

"I will be home in an hour."

There will be no home here, then, YOU!

"We must go on to Victory, my sweet."

Not on a path strewn with my golden, golden hair!

"Yes, my wife, I will say hello to the doctor for you."

Hans, don't you dare hang up on me. Don't you—

Krauss sat down, fluttering his hands weakly. "My wife called me to say all is well."

"Ha," said Crossley, weakly.

Krauss reached over and pinched him.

"Ouch."

"There," said Krauss. "Speak when you're spoken to."

Crossley stood up, laughing. The doctor looked at him as if he were insane.

"I've got it. I'm going to commit suicide!"

"You're crazy," said Krauss.

"Ten years from now I die, so why not commit suicide here, thus bringing an investigation by the World Organization, eh, Mr. Krauss?"

"You can't do that!" said Krauss, dumbfounded. "I won't permit it!"

"I'll jump off a building, perhaps. You can't hold me here for more than another hour or the Organization will come to see what ticks. And the minute you let me go, I'll jump off a building."

"No!"

"Or crash my ship, purposely, on the way home. Why not? What've I to live for? And if it causes your trial, so much the better. Yes, I've decided. I'll die."

"We'll hold him here," said the doctor to Krauss.

"We can't," said Krauss.

"Release him," said the doctor.

"Don't be silly," said Krauss.

"Kill him!"

"Sillier still," gasped Krauss. "Oh, this is terrible."

"Which way," said Crossley, "to the tallest building in town?"

"You go down to the next corner—" said the doctor and stopped. "No. Stop. We must stop him."

"Get out of the way," said Crossley. "Here I go."

"But this is preposterous," screamed Krauss. "Doctor, we must think of something!"

WOMEN sobbed in the streets, their hair trembling in their hands, detached from their heads. Puddles formed wherever women met to weep. See, see, my beautiful hair, fallen! Your hair, you butcher's mate; what of mine? Mine! Yours was hempen rope, a horse's tail! But mine, ah, mine! Like wheat in the high wind falling!

Crossley led the doctor and Krauss along a wide street.

"What goes on?" he asked naively.

"Beast, you know well enough," whispered the doctor fiercely. "My wife, my beautiful Thicket, her blonde hair'll be a ruin!"

"Speak roughly to me again," threatened Crossley, "and I'll hurl myself before this next bus."

"Don't, no!" cried Krauss, seizing his arm. To the doctor: "Fool. Is your wife more important than hanging?"

"My wife is good as your wife," snarled the doctor. "Katrina and her henna rinse!"

Crossley led the way into a building and up in an elevator. They walked on a terrace on the thirteenth floor.

"It is a riot," moaned the doctor, surveying the street below. "The women storm the beauty salons demanding help. I wonder if my Thicket is with them, raging?"

In huge clusters the women of the city held their heads in their hands as if they might topple and fall plunk on the ground. They argued, phoned husbands in high government circles, sent telegrams to the Leader, pummeled and kicked a bald man who laughed at them in their misery.

"Pardon me, Krauss," said Crossley. "There." He flicked a constellation of dandruff from Krauss's lapel.

"My hair," said Krauss, in realization. "My lovely hair!"

"Will you sign peace terms, or shall I jump from this building and let you and your wrathful wife become bald?"

"My wife," sobbed Krauss. "Bald! Ah, heaven!"

"Turn over all secret officers of your plan, admit your guilt in full, and the attack will stop. You will keep your hair," said Crossley. "And cure me of my fatal illness."

"That," said Krauss, "we cannot do. The illness, I mean. But the peace terms, ah, my sweet, balding wife, the peace terms, I reluctantly accept. Peace, it is."

"Fine," said Crossley. "But, one more term." He grabbed the doctor, held him out over the edge, as if to drop him.

"Stop!" Frantically, the doctor squirmed. "I lied! We did nothing to you. It was psychological. You'd have worried to death in ten years!"

Crossley was so surprised he let go.

He and Krauss stared down at the dwindling doctor, falling.

"I didn't really mean to drop him," said Crossley.

"Squish," murmured Krauss, a moment later, looking down.

Crossley pushed his jet-ship homeward.

"Edith, it's over! The music'll be off in an hour!"

"Darling!" she radioed. "How'd you do it?"

"Simple. They thought it enough to irritate people. That was their error. They didn't strike psychologically deep enough.

Their type of irritant only touched surfaces, made people mad—"

"And sleepy."

"But we attacked their ego, which was something else. People can stand radios, confetti, gum and mosquitoes, but they won't take baldness or turning yellow. It was unthinkable!"

Edith ran to meet him as he landed. The radio still hung in the garden, drifting, singing.

"What do you make it, now?" he cried.

She kissed him.

Pulling back she counted swiftly inside her head, glanced at the floating radio and said, automatically:

"That makes two thousand three hundred and ten!"

THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 10)

The cover was good—but good. So were the inside illustrations in general. What happened to the artist when he was drawing the feet of the dame on page 31? And the picture on page 49 looked as though it came from a kid's book of fairy tales. Would it be possible to devote a full issue to pre-war reprints? Or else to begin having one quite long reprint in every issue? If so, let's have a Williamson or Binder story. Anyway, if the next issue is as good as this one—fine!—Glewrose, Bagatelle, St. Saviours, Jersey, Channel Isles, England.

Williamson is writing, but for some reason has not been submitting our way of late. Binder has been trying his hand again at stf (see a recent issue of TWS) but is pretty much tied up with other work. Stan Co-blentz' output has been slim recently, Repp is running his agency-school for writers on the West Coast, Wellman has blossomed out into detective and biographical fields and Kummer is more preoccupied with love stories.

It is gratifying to learn of the response you received from your previous letter published in this space. Makes us feel that all is not wasted. We can hardly afford to turn over an entire issue to reprints, especially when it is proving such a job to keep up the quality of the Hall of Fame reprints we run singly in our companion magazine, **STARTLING STORIES**.

Please continue to write us when the spirit moves you, Michael. We like to get letters from the Other Side.

PACE PRAISE

by Tom Pace

Dear Editor: I doubt if I have read more than one or two better issues of any stf magazine than the August issue of TWS. It has been said that the outlook in this field is improving all the time . . .

and brother, it sure is! With the great quantity of excellent tales coming out, there just does not seem to be room for the mediocre stuff.

For which, thanks be . . .

Fitzgerald's third Bud Gregory novelet, **THE DEADLY DUST**, is the top in the trilogy. Are you sure that Fitzgerald's real name isn't Jenkins?

Kuttner's **ATOMIC** is another example of the eery—and beautiful—Kuttner styling. . . . I'm in favor of more. Many more.

"Hammond's" **DARK DAWN** is the most outstanding short story, with Hastings' **NOON** almost as good. Stockhecker did far better with **THE JET JOCKEYS** than might have been expected . . . the triumph of excellent writing over a fairly common type of plot. **THE STROLLER** is a better-than-good short by Margaret St. Clair, who has a better-than-average style of writing . . . and plenty of plot imagination. This is the best one she has done yet, by a long way.

Even Samuel Mines' **DONKEYS TO BALDPATE** had appealing passages.

The Reader Speaks depresses me . . . all those people, all of them talking . . . me, too.

I am completely lost among the hosts of artists TWS now employs . . . from here on out, rather than risk editorial vitriol for goofing off re Thomas-Stevens-Astarita & Company, I shall merely express pleasure (or pain) and name no names . . . to quote Lil' Abner, Sob!

But I'm pretty sure that Finley illustrated the Kuttner story in this issue, and it was wonderful!

If there's anything in Spiritualism, E. A. Poe's shade will shortly arrive at Pete Leyva's residence!

There *must* be a solution for Wallace Weber's little gizmo about the spring in the unmeltable container . . . Hmhmhm.

Arriving at my letter, I noticed that you mention alligators. I live on the edge of a town stuck deeply into the Florida woods, some thirty miles from a point of the coast of the Gulf just south of Tampa Bay. . . . You've heard of the fellow who had fairies in the bottom of his garden (a sort of James Thurberish nightmare . . .)?

Well, there are gators in the bottom of mine.

Art Rapp presumably wants an egg in this beautiful stein of beer.

To Russ Claggett. . . . You might say that the dream of every research man in any kind of engineering involving power is to rig a giz that gives him back at least as much power as he puts into it . . . 100% efficiency. "At least!" is put in as a bit of wishful dreaming. . . .

Imagine a gadget to send current through a widget which not only returns the full current through an-

other component of the circuit (zero resistance) but also drags some more juice out of the atmosphere . . . ether . . . cosmos . . . subspace . . . (take your pick, or manufacture your own.)

In other words, this is how Science-Fiction is born. By driving engineers crazy.

As for the possibility of traveling faster than light, there doesn't seem to be any reason why a ship in space could not reach that velocity . . . but before supersonic planes were dreamed of, who could have foreseen the "wall of compressibility"?

And it does seem logical that a material body passing the speed of light will become energy . . . but could it be that this energy-form that once was a space-ship could keep on accelerating . . . and when the trip was over, could change back from a collection of wave-lengths (?????) to a material body . . . simply by dropping below the speed of light?

Yes, Editor, I think so too. But only when drunk. Or on hot days.

Seriously . . . if you were to find a way to accelerate a radiation to beyond the speed of light (C^2 , so to speak) would it become matter . . . as the equation states? And if so, why not the converse?

You are going to have to install a gibbering department, Ed.

Edwin Sigler and I were completely unable to agree on a single point from ethics to Religion to the spelling of "psychology". . . . I finally came to the conclusion that our mental patterns were so unlike as to be nearly alien to each other. Maybe that is the reason why Sad Sack Sigler's second paragraph sounds like a confused clubwoman speaking upon the Ethics of the Atomic Bomb. Which I have heard, but not for long.

Also, I thought you "hulled" pecans and "shot holes in" ships. Provided you can hit them, which Sigler's Brownings wouldn't, I'm afraid.

Also, Mr. Sigler, you have the type of mind which can see only one point of view . . . no one else's idea can possibly be right, by your reasoning. Anent the ship traveling at $\frac{3}{4}$ light speed taking off from a planet traveling at $\frac{1}{2}$ C; it's quite true that the ship would be traveling at $\frac{3}{4}$ light speed relative to a motionless, highly hypothetical frame of reference presumably consisting of surrounding space; but the speed relative to the planet would be $\frac{1}{4}$ C only if the takeoff was made straight in the same direction the planet was traveling.

Every degree of difference from such a course would make a difference in the relative speed of planet and ship. A 180° change—giving a slight direction straight back along the course through space the planet had traveled—would mean a relative speed of one and one-fourth light-speed for the ship . . . relative to the planet, that is.

Whoops . . . here's a nice little tangle. Assuming that traveling faster than light will cause your ship to become a bundle of loose radio waves (or something), what are you going to use as a frame of reference? In the case I mentioned just above, as far as the people on that planet were concerned, you would have passed the speed of light and therefore would be energy, viewed from their angle . . . but from another, you would still have several thousand miles per sec to add to your velocity before you "passed over" . . .

Whew!
Some time ago I suggested that you try and get Leslie Charteris to place the Saint in an Stif adventure . . . judging from the short story, THE MAN WHO LIKED ANTS, he would do all right there. Now I am not enough of an egotist to believe that my suggestion brought it about . . . but nevertheless I got a great deal of pleasure at seeing THE DARKER DRINK scheduled for October.

Mr. Sigler, who does not love The Saint, will probably cancel his subscription. You'll get his letter, probably before you get this one.

Oh, well. He's the man who condemned (Horrors!!!) a beautifully written Brackett-Bradbury yarn because he felt it was "dirty".

Back to Stockheker's rocket-racing yarn. . . . I wonder how long it'll be before tales like this are out of the stf mags . . . and into the sports mags along with football and baseball and the other accepted, loved, everyday sports? More and more of the features of Stf have come into being . . . thinking machines, spy rays, experimental rockets (man-carrying, I mean), new plastics, new ultra-high frequency techniques and applications . . . why not rocket races?

I, for one, would like . . . HMMMMM. Know anyone with a hopped-up jet job for sale?—Brester, Florida.

Whew yourself, Tom. That was a long one . . . also interesting. Glad you liked the August ish and that we hit your alligators on the nose as it were. As for your theorem on faster-than-light travel, we are still fanning ourselves with an electric egg-beater. You certainly can unreel them to-the-umpty-ump-power ideas.

Also, we thought the rocket yarn was good and recommended its purchase knowing full well that dyed-in-the-wool orthodox fans would yell bloody murder. But the story had a "feel" to it which made its rather appalling contest seem mighty real to us. That, chillun, not adjectives by the long ton, is writing.

WHY, TEACHER!

by Marion Zimmer

Dear Editor: This latest ish of TWS hit the newsstands in Albany right in the middle of examinations here at State College. As this future teacher still has an academic hangover, here is a new method of rating the stories—rather, new to these columns, for the method is time-honored.

DARK DAWN by Keith Hammond (?) . . . A-plus . . . honor student . . . go to the head of the class, Keith. This is the best since CALL HIM DEMON. A perfect score! Credit to TWS—his Alma Mater.

ATOMIC! by Henry Kuttner . . . A-plus . . . but I think that Henry must have looked over Keith's paper and copied his work!

THE STROLLER by Margaret St. Clair . . . B . . . Miss St. Clair is, with the single exception of Leigh Brackett, the only woman to crash the field of stf. As a rule a woman can't compete, but Miss St. Clair is holding her own nicely. All the fanettes, I'm sure, are behind her. Original, too.

THE DEADLY DUST by Wm Fitzgerald . . . just barely passing. Even the scientific ability of Bud Gregory couldn't raise this mark.

IN THE CARDS . . . George Smith . . . again, just passing. I had expected a great deal of this but was disappointed.

DONKEYS TO BALD PATE—THE JET JOCKEYS . . . this is the "F", the "funk" list. Too bad, but the first was so insane that it wasn't even funny, and the second, despite its futuristic setting, belonged in a Boy Scout magazine.

All in all, not so good an issue as I could wish. Only the Kuttner and Hammond stories compensated for the mediocrity of the rest. However, these two alone were worth seven times the price of the magazine.

Turning the pages to the READER RECITES I find a few covert and not-so-covert slaps at one Howard P. Lovecraft. This is the only thing that I consistently DON'T like about TWS. For my money there has never been a writer like HPL (and don't you dare say "Thank Goodness" and never will be. And I'll cross cocked typewriters at three hundred miles, to the death, with anyone who says me nay. Any takers?

Now Rex Ward suggests a poll for the three favorite authors and artists. Well, that's a swell idea. All teachers have their pets, so here goes with mine. The only thing is, Rex doesn't say whether he means "Classics" or moderns, so I'll list both.

AUTHORS	CLASSICS	MODERNS
1	Robert W. Chambers	Henry Kuttner
		(and all his alter-egos)
2	H. Rider Haggard	Robert Heinlein
3	H. P. Lovecraft	Murray Leinster

And the Artists
1. Finlay (of course)
2. Rubimor (Why not get him to draw for you?)
3. Stevens-Lawrence

One suggestion—let Stevens do a cover, just one for a change? And try Bergery on the interior pics?

Oh well . . . I can dream.—R. F. D. # 1, East Greenbush, New York.

Sorry, Marion. Let's hope you like succeeding issues a bit more warmly. As for Lovecraft, you can take him but we shall very definitely not leave him alone. Even if we wished to, the fans wouldn't let us. For instance. . . .

CONNING THE FIELD

by Wilkie Conner

Dear Editor: Well, after many moons of picking out letters to fan columns, an age old ambition has been filled. I have finally stirred up an argument! A reader has finally written an editor about one of my letters! I am referring to the blast given by Jim Wilson in his letter on page 97 of the Aug. TWS. Mr. Wilson says, "To-day I find a so-called letter from one Wilkie Conner criticizing Lovecraft. . . ." He also issues a challenge—"shotguns at sunrise. . . ."

I know anything I may say couldn't change Wilson's opinion one bit regarding the merits of the late HPL. I suppose you either like Lovecraft or you don't. I don't. I find his stuff dull, drab and uninteresting. His stories wind around and around, then get nowhere. They are filled with a bunch of stuff about so-called gods with names that Lovecraft evidently coined by running his hands down the keyboard of his typewriter at random.

Most of his stuff seems to be a weak imitation of something much better . . . something, perhaps, he envisioned within himself, but which he was unable to put on paper. I am astounded at the people who bow down to him as something higher than the high . . . the holy of holies, so to speak. Francis P. Laney even published a darn good fanzine dedicated to Lovecraft.

Personally, I just can't stomach his junk. I bought a book, *Shadow Over Innsmouth*, which I carried with me to boot camp when I was drafted into the USMC . . . then to Guam . . . it went with me to action on Iwo and back to Guam . . . I still have it . . . yet I've never read more than the first page.

I wouldn't even read it when I was so thirsty for science or fantasy I would dream of Morey illustrations when I was awake . . . yet, I just wouldn't read the thing. I read westerns in preference! That should give an accurate picture of what I think of HPL!

William Fitzgerald has created a fine character in Bud Gregory . . . I only hope he doesn't run it into the ground. We've already had three stories on the same plot . . . almost with the same action. I hope Bill finds a new angle to use for Bud. . . .

(Incidentally, Fitzgerald's style reminds me of Lester Dent and his "Gadget Man" stories.)

All these big names coming soon in TWS have me worried. Is our good ole mag going high-brow? Anyway, congratulations on the improved—greatly!—TWS.

Kuttner still holds his high position, both as to quantity and quality in your present number; I can count two of his yarns in the line-up. How that man writes so much and keeps it all good is beyond me. There never has been an s-f author who can touch Kuttner.—Box 2392, West Gastonia, N. C.

Thanks, Wilkie, for so perfectly expressing our personal views on HPL. To us, he follows Bulwer-Lytton tenaciously. Though why any author in his right mind would select such a verbose, pretentious and generally diffuse model for his works eludes us. His work is much more pseudo-primitive than true classic.

The fourth Bud Gregory in our February issue should give you Bug the Gregory in a new light—and one better attuned perhaps to current stf. We concur heartily in the Kuttner opinion you advance.

BRIEF

by Tom Jewett

Editor: August TWS—first was DARK DAWN. Wonderful! Such beauty in writing is not often seen in a pulp magazine. Viva la Hammond! Tied for second were THE STROLLER AND DONKEY TO BALD PATE. St. Clair is learning rapidly. This is much better than any of her previous stories. Mines blends humor, good writing and mediocre plot very well. The last sentence was a corker.

IN THE CARDS and THE JET JOCKEYS tied for fourth. Smith slow in places but ending brilliantly. Stockhecker is slangy but very clever. Sixth place tied between THE DEADLY DUST and ATOMIC. Fitzgerald talky but excellent. Kuttner good but plot rather foggy. Eighth was NOON, a tale well calculated to keep you in suspense if not a first-rate cloud of heavy-duty smog. Friend Hastings let the writing run away with the plot. Bergey really balled it up this time. Gape at the football shouldered on the dame. Is she a tackle for UCLA? Flame is the only good thing present.

On the whole the issue is good with stories definitely top grade. Gad, that Kuttner fellow sure gets around. Hooray for Finlay.—670 George Street, Clyde, Ohio.

On the whole a friendly letter, Tom. We echo your cheer for Virgil Finlay. He really can churn up a beautiful bubble bath, *n'est-ce pas?*

CHOPPED OLIVER

by Chad Oliver

Dear Editor: Chalk up one rave for Hammond's DARK DAWN in the August TWS—it's your best since the same author's CALL HIM DEMON. The idea is nice, the plotting good, and the writing . . . ahhhh! Beautiful!

Kuttner's ATOMIC! is very good, as might be expected. The development in this one was something less than one would desire, however. Funny thing about Kuttner's work—his characters are not well-drawn, but they seem, instead, to represent a sort of composite of the entire human race, thus lending significance to his work.

NOON is a very unusual little tale. I like Hastings' attempt at very good writing, instead of trying for simply competent work. He isn't wholly successful with NOON, but certainly enough so as to create a fine story. NOON will be long remembered.

Those three yarns are the good ones this time. I see little point in discussing the others—by mentioning the stories I do like, you, as editor, can see what one reader wants in TWS. That, after all, is the main function of a letter such as this, and we may as well proceed from a positive viewpoint as a negative.

I will say, however, that I consider Bud Gregory to be about the all-time low in science fiction. And Margaret St. Clair, despite good ideas and, doubtless, intentions, misses fire completely.

Virgil Finlay's full-pager for ATOMIC! is magnificent; his best in a long, long time. Marchioni and Fitzgerald make a good pair. . . .

The book reviews are a good idea. Your review of van Vogt's THE WEAPON MAKERS is excellent; the comments on Dr. Smith's SPACEHOUNDS OF IPC less so. Though primarily an adventure story, as you state, it is hardly a juvenile. I thought that the characters were well done, and the story itself scientifically plausible. Comparing Smith to Burroughs is about like comparing James Joyce to Sinclair Lewis—it can be done, but it takes devious logic.

That trite cover theme seems determined to stick it out to the bitter end. I only hope that the end is in sight. Bergey is not a bad artist—give him something to draw, eh?

I think you're doing a remarkable job with ol' TWS—it's improving by leaps and bounds. The heartfelt thanks of one weary fan to you, sir!—1311 25th Street, Galveston, Texas.

Your comment on Kuttner's characters is

the most intriguing thing in the epistle, Chad. Come to think of it, it is hard to pin down Hank's people to individuals—yet they do seem human. Think perhaps you have hit the nail on the thumb, and squarely. But then, from story to story, you never know what the talented Kuttner will do. He may turn right around and make monkeys of both of us—which should not be over-difficult.

Sorry you don't like Gregory the Great. Well, it has been an interesting string from an editorial viewpoint. And, praise Allah, plenty of other readers seem more favorably inclined. Personally we don't see where either Joyce or Sinclair the Lewis belong in the controversy anent Smith and Burroughs. But we still find the Skylark and IPC jobs tough sledding.

GRASPING AT STRAWS

by Howard K. Roben

Dear Editor: How about a straw vote in the "Reader Speaks" to name the ten best Science Fiction novels to be published in the past 20 years.

I was an ardent "fan" between 1924 and 1930 and came back into the fold in 1945 when the Atom Bomb brought the world of the future into the present tense. There must have been many well written, worth while, thought provoking stories published in that intervening 15 years.

I notice the different publishing houses are dusting off the old ones and bringing them out in book form. I would like to purchase the best of the lot, but how to distinguish the "worth while" from the "tripe"? On a guess there must be many like myself who have lost touch with this field for varying lengths of time as well as many of the younger readers who could use a standard to judge the old timers.

For a pat on the back I can say that you and your companion magazine have improved tremendously in the past year and are offering better reading at a lower price than several of your competitors.

A plaintive query from a balding oldster—what in H--1 is a BEM?—Box 545, Imperial, California.

A BEM is, of course, a Bug-Eyed Monster—one of those things that are so ubiquitous upon our covers, or used to be at any rate. Personally, we never know what to expect by the time Bergey, the art department and the front office finish getting their heads together.

Your straw vote suggestion seems excellent to us. And we suggest that any readers who wish to submit such a ten-best list should not let themselves be guided by what they have been told are classics. Let 'em call 'em as they see 'em. Perhaps, in that way, we shall emerge with a discovery or two. How about giving new and out-of-touch fans such a lift, all ye faithful?

NON-MUTE EGG

by Gordon Slotsky

Dear Ed: Who says the sun's heat can't be changed to electrical energy? The British Interplanetary Society has formulated a space station using a parabolic mirror to catch the sun's rays, and put them to use forming steam. This steam could drive electricity generating dynamos and generators.

I notice one fan in the August ish said you couldn't

see light in outer space. Oh yeah? There is some belief that there is matter in outer space, called ether. As far as we know, it would be easier to see light in outer space with ether as a medium, than on earth, because there would be no interference from light or moisture and dust in the air. Even if there is no ether, it has been proven that light can travel through a vacuum.

It doesn't matter anyhow whether you can see the light, all that you need is the heat.

So, McDaniel's idea might work, except for the fact that he's only going to use the water once, because he no can keichum to use it again.

What does BEM stand for? Buy Eggs Mutely? I thought it rather funny to see Sprague's letter and then see "Atomic."

With most stf mags printing cheap material you're still putting out the best you can get. Let's keep it up.

As somebody put it, "Friends, fans, countrymen, lend me your ears. I wrote this not to harry T.W.S., but to praise it."—1817 Nebraska Street, Sioux City, Iowa.

Who knows what's in space? Assured knowledge still lies ahead. Perhaps the stars and planets are mere globules in some macro-cosmic tapioca pudding—though we must admit this seems highly unlikely. At any rate, your letter offers a couple of controversial points for the scientific-minded, from whom you will doubtless hear, Gordon—and if you don't we will.

A BEM is a BEM is a BEM is a BEM, but what's with ATOMIC? We see nothing funny at all in the juxtaposition which so tickled your risibilities. In fact, we are currently climbing into our stuffed shirt—which seems to be stuffed with horse hair.

BEEF WITH SWEET SAUCE

by John Van Covering

Dear Ed: I'm going to change my opinion of Earl Bergey if he doesn't stop his sexy trend. No matter if the story calls for a girl or not, he's gotta work an oversexed, topheavy babe-someplace. And more . . . the cover on the August ish is radically, flagrantly incorrect. The only time the woman of the lake was seen at the lake, there was no wrinkled monster being worked over with an over-sized blower.

That beef off me chest (too bad, I could use a little there) I shamble along to the stories. THE DEADLY DUST was hyper, as are all these Bud Gregory stories. I strongly suspect that George O. Smith has taken on a nom de plume here, though. George did a fine job, incidentally, on IN THE CARDS . . . twas the best interplanetary story fer years, and with a kick like that! Me. I thought he was the inhabitant of the universe they got the zonium out of. Tsh, how stupid of me!

ATOMIC! though not rankly mass-produced as most of HK's are these days, did have too much I'm-in-a-hurry-can't-liven-it-up about it. Not an entirely new plot, but merely compounded out of the mangled remains of a couple ancient ones. JET JOCKEYS . . . wow! Talk about realism! This gem had me comin' goin', and flat on my kisser all the way through! Yummy. . . .

DONKEYS TO BALD PATE . . . whiskers on it yet, but still nicely handled. Rather incredulously in love, tho, wasn't he? Almost overdid it. DARK DAWN . . . beautifully polished, but a few nicks in it. Tsk.

Hey . . . wait a minute . . . I must have left a story out! I didn't have to yell "putrid!" once. I must be getting old . . . but TWS and SS are definitely new in their hyper material. One of the top three now, TWS is, and SS is another. Corngrats, old thing.

TRS wasn't exactly short this time, I admit. Talk about new readers . . . how about the old ones who've just busted out of hibernation and drooled all over your pretty pink pinafore . . . must prove something?

The Reader Shrieks is always good, anyhow, espe-

cially with JoKe, Chad, Sneary, Van Couvering, etc. And letters from fannes are allus interesting reading. Hint . . . put your letter column in one separate seksh of the mag, and with a minimum of ads.

Artwork very good. Almost Marchioni made a good pic on page 17, but maybe that was becuz there were no people or machines in it. Look, I'll tell you exactly what's wrong with your favorite artist. He's too standardized. He has a stock face for the hero, a stock face for the villain, and a stock face for the heroine . . . he can't draw character worth a damn.

On page 13 they could be twin brothers. Apparently the only way to tell 'em apart is the beard. And Gregory's supposed to be a liggerant hillbilly, not a rumped scientist. Also, he has no sense of symmetry. Tries to slide curves into everything, even the axle shafts on Model T Fords.—902 North Downey Avenue, Downey, California.

No comment on your cover ululation. We like 'em topheavy. Did you ever take a good look at Eleanor Holm or Esther Williams? And you are utterly wrong about Fitzgerald being a nom de plume for George O. Smith. Fitzgerald is—well, Fitzgerald.

Where the ads will go, only Providence (not Rhode Island, you idiots) and the advertising department know. Make-up is out of our hands. Alas, poor Marchioni—we knew him, Horatio. . . .

FLEE FOR THE HILLS—THE METRE IS BUSTED!

by Lin Carter

Dear Ed:
One good way to start this letter, is to say he's getting better—
I mean Bergey. This time he was really swell.
Even tho he drew a monster, it may be only for the nonce, sir.
And I'm sure his BEM-less covers really sell.

And I must confess the stories, tho the pics were Mark's and Morey's,
Were all first rate, if you know what I mean.
DEADLY DUST, a yarn by Fitzy, was really pretty ritzy.
And Hank Kuttner's novelet wuz quite a dream!

THE JET JOCKEYS and THE STROLLER, are worth their weight in gold or
Maybe Platinum would be more specific.
DARK DAWN by Kuttner-Hammond, would even please a salmon.
And, oh brother! that ending was terrific!

Samuel Mines' little opus, should be sent to Canopus Without the fuel to get back.
(And if I might break my rhyme for a minute—
—And my rhyme is the limit—)
I'd say it was purely hack.

Now, TRS this time was good, it was about the way it should
Be, and I hope it will continue this swell size.
Good letters from Leyva, Joke, and Sneary—ones like these don't make me weary,
Nor will gems like Rapp's and Wright's—you send me, guy!
865 20th Ave. So., St. Petersburg 6, Florida.

Just when prospects looked so rosy and all letters gently prosy
Frere Carter has to dish up the above
For while his views are kindly he has written his verse blindly
As if the hand that typed it wore a glove.
In frenetic dithyrambic he has summoned

the iambic,
The trochaic, anapaestic and spondee
He has thrown them in together, without regard to whether
They fit or make his rhyming all skew-gee.

If he ever studied scansion in this poetic expansion
He evidently left it with a flunk
With mixed metre that is bobbled his lines are sadly hobbled
And this reader's in an azure-colored funk.

He claims other writers send him when they really should up-end him
And jam his head in Keat's Grecian urn
But at last, my word upon it, he didn't try a sonnet
With which happy thought this meeting we'll adjourn.

VOTE FOR GREGORY

by Hugh McInnes

Dear Editor: You really got out a good issue this time (the Aug. issue, that is). I liked all of the stories, but Fitzgerald's Bud Gregory story is tops for this month.

In regard to a letter on page 98 by Joe Kirschnick: In his letter under point two he says, "The population of the world has increased a thousand-fold since man first acquired his mind, and the quantity of mind has remained the same. This would mean that only one person in every thousand would be able to have a mind."

I would like to take him up on that point, at least as far as the original story is concerned. In the story with which this argument began (Come Home From Earth, in the Feb. issue) the following statement appears on pages 95 and 96. "Always we have supposed that symbiosis with these Earth-creatures must be richly rapacious, since no Aarlan ever returned from here. Aarlan has come in millions for that reason and more will come."

He also says, "How strange that 100,000,000 minds have drifted across countless miles to land on our Terra. Considering that there is only one chance in sextillion multillion that a body could drift from one planet to another many light years away, then there would be only one chance in one hundred million sextillion multillion/one hundred million sextillion multillionths that 100,000,000 of these "minds" could reach Terra. Some chance!

In the first place, I would like to find out how he arrives at those odds of one chance in sextillion multillion that these beings (if any) could drift through the unmeasurable reaches of space. The story (still on page 95) states, "And I was an Aarlan! I was one of the race that had evolved there as individual, intelligent photon-groups—immaterial photon beings living immortally in our radiant, ethereal world! . . . For ages, beating our way out through the cosmos on streams of light, we had visited other worlds."

In the second place, with regards to his statement: ". . . there would be only one chance in one hundred million sextillion multillion/one hundred million sextillion multillionths . . ."

According to all the math courses I have taken in my life, this rather large fraction would cancel out to one, leaving the excellent chance of one chance in one. I wish to say here that I have no personal opinions on this subject but I have merely tried to set Joe straight about the story. I would be interested in hearing anyone else's opinion on this matter, if only for the sake of discussion.—Warren, Arkansas.

In general, your comment expresses in a couple of hundred words what we said in about twenty-five on reading the letter in question, Hugh. It was definitely too much

for us—and apparently you. We ran the letter hoping some fan would have an answer.

THOUGHT DEPICTIONS YET!

by Billie Lee Randolph

Dear Eddy: I'm going to prove the superiority of mind over matter. I'm going to write a little thing depicting my thoughts. It's sometimes called an essay, but I'm not snooty. Just call it a thing.

As I carry my burden, my mind rambles far and wide. I'm mostly speculating whether or not it's time for a certain prozine to arrive. I see the postman driving up (ever so slowly), run to the box, dump the tin cans, run back to the cafe, put the container where it belongs, run through the kitchen, slow down to the sedate pace expected of a lady, walk into the cafe and enquire with extreme subtlety, whether there was any mail for me.

I tear off the wrappers with nervous haste. I look at the cover and begin sobbing hysterically. The old triangle is back again!! A bum, BEM and a female. Even a secret weapon.

On page 11 begins a story. There is also a picture there. Nice. I start reading the story. On page 17 another pic. Not nice. Mr. Fitzgerald distinctly said that it was a globe of gas, not an explosion like that of the atomic bomb. On page 30 the story ended. It takes top place.

On 31 starts another story and there is also a pic. Nice. The story was not up to my expectations of Hastings. I'm going to end my little thing now and just tell you my opinion. There are so many things that I would have to mention that would be better left to themselves.

I liked The Jet Jockeys. Just liked. Atomic was very good and so was In The Cards. Noon was inane and asinine. The Stroller was silly and you can say the same about the Donkeys, even if it was fun to read. Dark Dawn Deserves the Hall of Fame in SS.

In Reader Speaks I was glad to see my letter. I think I am disappointed in Joe Kennedy. Either he is overrated or you chopped all the good parts out. If you did, I'll never, never forgive you (just a figure of speech).

I am going to tell you a secret. My almost favorite artist is Marchioni. That ought to start something. I just love all these debates about space drives and things. May I suggest using some sort of chemical, acting on another and making a lot of speed. I'm no scientist and I expect quite a few demeaning answers. Where, oh, where is the story behind the story?—Rainbow Cafe, Buchanan Dam, Texas.

Okay, we'll deal with your letter backwards, Billie (female). THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY was moved out to make way for the new fanzine contest department which has not yet come to life. We're still giving it—the contest—a little more time and keeping our gnarled fingers crossed.

Your space drive suggestion should draw wails and gnashing of molars and incisors alike from all dabblers in high school physics. Ditto with the opinion on Marchioni. Perhaps we'll hear from others on his illustrations for THE POWER AND THE GLORY, this issue's novel. We think he did a good job on it. Let's hear your opinion, also tell us whom you'd like to have illustrate our future novels.

Your opinions of stories and cover are your own, so no comment thereon. But just how the preamble to your otherwise excellent epistle proves the superiority of mind over matter has us tearing our hair.

We did not appreciably cut Joe Kennedy's letter in the August ish. So it's a direct challenge to the Kennedy, who has been remiss with his letters of late. How about it, Joe!

EPISTLE ON PAUL

by Stan Woolston

TO: Editor, TWS: (Praise him!) For some time—perhaps two minutes—I've been thinking of science fiction art. Does it evolve? Does it improve? Some science-fiction artists have discovered some of the basic subjects of art—such as the portrayal of humans as though they were real living creatures, reasonably exact replicas of Homo Sapiens. This is a comparatively recent development in sf art history. TWS and SS are members of this group.

Some time ago you commented on Paul's work in a rather unfavorable way. His humans aren't the streamlined creatures of the photo-imitators, but they do have the appearance of stepping from the unearthly scenes in which they are placed. Paul's, and many other "fantasy" illustrators' works, breathe an alien air, and each artist has his own individual way of expressing the strangeness.

Bok and Cartier, for example, are unlike Paul in both presentation and subject-matter, but become interesting accessories to a good sf yarn (or their art does). Artists are continually interpreting pictorially, and quite often are at variance with the words of the authors (such as the girl from the lake in the TWS ATOMIC cover pic wearing red dress instead of the author's stated blue).

Perhaps the art editor is to blame for this—for the sake of flash and contrast the color is poured on, or the garment shortened. Unlike many of the sf yarns, the artists continue to drag in the females by the hair. (How's this for feud stuff?)

TWS fiction and the general contents of the mag are improving—and by general contents I include the letter department at the top of the list. I won't pick at the pics—except the subject matter—why not have a few machines for a change (If possible let the pictures illustrate the story. Hmmm?)

The ideas in the yarns are one thing that make imagi-fiction "fun reading" for me—so Noon gets a smile. The Bud Gregory story seemed overwritten, probably because of the repetition of background details common to all three stories in this series—but 'twas worth reading.

More of your stories seem worth re-reading of late—thankee. The coming Saint story sounds like fun. One thing about Charteris—his yarns don't get bogged down like some detective (and some heavy sf) stories. Reviews—books or 'zines—I like.

The war cut off my letter-exchanges with Harry Jenkins, who edited the fanzine Southern Star. Now I can't discover his whereabouts. I'd appreciate any information about him.

Why don't you have long stories in either TWS or SS?

P. S.—Soma is Amos backwards.—214 N. W., Garden Grove, California.

Listen, Amos—I mean Soma—I mean Nats to you—I mean Stan . . . you can have your Paul. He monopolized our covers for years and years and makes nice back-issue pring for those who like.

Cover colors are a matter of so many commercial angles it is amazing they retain any similarity at all to the stories they are supposed to illustrate. As a matter of strict fact, they are not illustrations—but are merely supposed to convey decoratively the theme of the story.

HIDE CLAGGETT'S HIDE

by Henry M. Spelman III

Dear Editor: I've been meaning to dispatch you a vitriolic epistle for quite some time but, up to now, haven't been mad enough. The letters in the August issue were the last straw.

To start off, I guess I'd better try to tack Mr. Claggett's hide to the wall. There are, believe it or not, photoelectric cells that generate electricity. Known as photovoltaic cells, they are used, among other places, in photographers' light meters.

Now to try the editorial hide. Am I to assume from your answer to Mr. Wrzos' letter that you accept ghost-written material for publication? If so, shame on you! Also I would like to raise my typer in protest of your snide remarks about the late great HPL. He may not have been a stf writer primarily, but he was one of the greatest fantasy authors ever.

An addition to Heinlein's letter: I was pleased to note that Jenkins/Heinster made the grade with a not-too-juvenile short in a certain slick. Not quite up to your standards, but a bit above the pseudo-stf that has been flooding the market.

Not that anyone would be interested, but why don't you start giving away originals to the writers of the best letters of each ish, as chosen by the fans, or by you?

At this point I ought to be commenting on the stories, but I haven't finished the ish. Will say a few words about the yarns that I've read. "The Deadly Dust" . . . getting a bit overworked—the characters, that is. B. "Noon" . . . ain't read. "The Jet Jockeys" . . . mmmm, not too bad. C—. "Atomic" . . . Nope. "In the Cards" . . . OK. B—. "The Stroller" . . . Brrrr. A—. "Donkeys etc" . . . ugh. D—. "Dark Dawn" . . . some new ideas even. All right. A. Mag as a whole . . . not so bad. About a B average. Illustrations not so hot, on the whole. The gal on the cover is too well clad, and her face is a bit wooden.—73 Sparks Street, Cambridge 38, Massachusetts.

Your self-read implication that we take ghost-written material—well, words fail us! All we said was that we would run anything suitable Mssrs. Wandrei, Smith, Keller and Long chose to send us. That still goes. Now return to your Lovcraft and leave us in peace.

TECHNICAL STUFF

J. P. Conlon (7½ years an Army Ordnance man)

Dear Editor, TWS: Some gent wrote in suggesting the use of .50 caliber BMG's on space-ships, a suggestion which at first sounds foolish. But Willy Ley once suggested the use of one-inch iron balls as space mines. A rocket striking one would not be in good shape, due to its own high speed.

One item no one recalled about the .50 is that it is the most highly developed aircraft gun, except for the new .60, which saw no combat service. It has been used in all ways a space-ship would require. Remote control, high-grade fire control systems and gun heaters, all were used on 'em in this fracas. A .50 slug does 2200 feet per second at least. Add to this the velocity imparted by the speed of its own ship and the force of impact when it hits the target. Nice, yes? Gravity and air resistance would play no part, so it should have a very flat trajectory.

It has little recoil compared to a cannon. As for its striking power, who knows? This much is known. The higher the velocity, the more destructive the blow. Jerry had a late model .88 which shot a slug 3400 feet per second. The early 88 would often drill both sides of a Sherman tank (about 4" of armor plate). The later 88 was far nastier.

Jerry also had a "gerlich" type "squeeze bore" gun which had fantastic velocity, as high as 6000 fps and equally weird penetration. But it was not practical in the field. So armor wouldn't do much good. Rocket projectiles would be nice, but for pin-point accuracy guns are more useful. Guided missiles can be "taken over" and deceived.

One gent mentions the bazooka shell. The effectiveness of the bazooka is due to a "hollow charge" shell, as its velocity is only 700 fps. This effect in a higher speed projectile should be suitable for any heavy armor. It is my opinion that at space-travel speeds adapted automatic weapons of the present day would be adequate space weapons, due to the nature of the targets presented. When someone invents a "ray" weapon that works, however, there's your real tool.

[Turn page]

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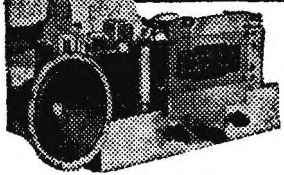
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The information I have here presented should surely be sufficient to start an argument. Let's see what it brings forth.—52 Columbia Street, Newark, Ohio.

Most interesting points in a highly informative letter to us is Mr. Conlon's mention of the fact that guided missiles can be "taken over", presumably by defenders in the target area. This presents a whole new vista of speculation in the field. Let's hope, however, guided missiles are confined to peacetime target areas for eons to come.

HOW GOOD CAN WE GET?

by R. R. Anger

Dear Editor: I have a fond feeling for TWS and so I'm really thrilled at the wonderful things you're doing with it along with Startling. The August issue is one of the kind that you pick up three years later and re-read with amazement to think that a magazine could be that good. And all your issues are that kind these days!

- In the August ish:
1. Dark Dawn . . . As Gresham said "There aren't words . . ." it is lucky for science fiction that Keith Hammond has got enough words to give his readers glimpses of the wonderful things that go on in that amazing mind of his.
 2. Noon . . . Here is another story with that unmistakable stamp of genius. You have made a real find in Hanson Hastings.
 3. Atomic! . . . Don't think because I put it third, I don't recognize what a great story this is.
 4. The Deadly Dust . . . I see some of the fans are starting to get a grudge up against Bud Gregory. Well, don't let 'em. William Fitzgerald really has something here. So far every Bud Gregory story has been tops. Of course if he sends in stuff about other characters, buy it—it's bound to be good, but as long as he keeps up the incredible standard of these Bud Gregory yarns I think he's one of your best authors. This one was wonderfully written, especially the inexorable feeling you got from the descriptions of the murder-weapon's use.
 5. In the Cards . . . George O. Smith has the faculty of being completely original and yet writing very human, very good adventure.
 6. The Jet Jockeys . . . If this is a new author and a first story, you have another find, but good. This was so good I was considering it for first place, but it got edged all the way down to sixth finally—just shows how great an issue it was—the first six stories were all so good that the sixth might have been first!
 7. The Stroller . . . The fans who claim Margaret St. Clair's yarns have no punch are probably very sheepish by now. Among the many things that make her a fine author is the gift of writing along in an easy everyday manner and letting something like the Stroller creep up unsuspected on both characters and readers! This, incidentally, is usually what happens in real life.
 8. Donkeys to Baldpate . . . Several things, including the title, of this story were rather weak, but it was cleverly written and with a large dash of humor. I particularly liked the ending.
- As if the story standard wasn't enough, you have raised the standard of the art way up by the simple method of (a) getting some fine new artists (b) letting up on the use of pin-ups (c) having the artists illustrate the story and not what they think the story was probably like.
- The dear old covers, though, are still . . . ah . . . still . . . Well, on this one I see Veronica Lake (slightly damp) and what looks like Virgil Finlay's version of a grulzak that has taken root, both basking in the warmth of a flame thrower. As drawn, Veronica is getting more heat than the BEM, but then she needs it more (to dry off).—520 Highland Ave., Ottawa, Ont.

Not much we can say—except that we did go for Veronica Constance Oekelman Keene Lake in any and/or all conditions of dress or undress.

McDANIEL IN THE McLIONS' DEN

by S. Vernon McDaniel

Dear Editor: I should like to bring forth a riposte to the overwhelming amount of criticism which blossomed out in the August issue of TWS. . . . To begin with, I really did not want to present my "Wonderful" theory of space-flight as a plausible idea. I had thought over all the angles before sending it to you, and (naturally) come to the conclusion that it was fallacious. But I also realized what a hornet's nest it would stir up. However, there are a few things which I would like to say, if it be permissible.

The first is directed to Patti Bowling. For your information, Photoelectric cells don't take in heat energy. Please, it's light! LIGHT! Oh, thanks, but I don't smoke.

Then we come to Al Rosen. . . . Ah, yes. Yes. NO! What in _____ (deleted) do you mean? I thought I was fairly well read, but this is the first time I have ever learned that space is always dark, and the sun cannot be seen.

Mr. Claggett, I am not pathetic! And who cares whether or not I need more electricity? The source of electricity would be boundless, provided the proper type of Photo cell was used.

All the rest of you who spoke forth are right, absolutely and perfectly so. But don't talk to me about Newton's laws of linear motion. I spent three hours a few days ago, trying to convince a friend of mine that space ships don't "need air to push against."

Harken thee onto this: Supposing you are a tiny elf at a symphony. So small are you, in fact, that you are able to jump right onto the tip of the conductor's baton.

It takes five seconds (he's a legato conductor) for the tip of the baton to travel ten inches. Establish, then, the time-period of five seconds as the amount of time taken for the baton to travel from one end of the beat to the other. Then move your diminutive body down along the blasted stick towards the guy's hand.

That's far enough. Now you are traveling, say, four inches in five seconds. In other words, you are going a shorter distance in the same time it took you to travel ten inches. Keep going down the baton until you are traveling within ten thousands of an inch. Then you will be going almost no distance in five seconds. In this case, time is the constant. The distance is variable. You can write it out in an equation if you want to.

Now, if you could just invert, or reverse, or sumpin', the equation, so that the distance was the constant, then you would be traveling through time! So what. It probably won't work. See what you physicists can do with it. It will come down to a point where you will have to multiply by zero, and—but that's your problem.

TRS good as usual, with a great amount of revived flavor.

And now, for your reading pleasure, I will shew upon you with the true favor of great Ghu, a little poem I was going to put into a fanzine of my making, but decided not to. Mainly because I am lacking sufficient funds to print it. Here 'tis:

The fields are bleak,
Cover'd with snow;
What grief! I'm weak—
Sorry I know!
Deep in my heart—fore'er shall
burn—the Earth's great lass
Mighty Saturn!

Once, great with pow'r
And laughing jolly,
Now deep in grave,
Fringed round with holly.

Great one! Far gone
On last sojourn—
Traversing on,
Not to return?

Come back! Come back!
We raise the cry!
From space so black
To light our sky!

'Tis loss of fun,
And, (so goes rumor).

[Turn page]

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As shot by gun,
'Tis end of humor!

Return! return!
Speak out once more!
Oh, puissant Saturn,
Ne'er a bore!

Grief cries aloud,
And tears roll fast;
When, as a cloud,
We see the last—
End of our friend,
Encased in shroud,
The road's last bend—
We sob,—aloud.—1010 Garcia Road, Santa Barbara, California.

Barbara, California.

Okay, so what?
We've walked the mile
Jehoshaphat!
Say that and smile
Life's not so black
Nor packed with bile
That you must crack
In such sour style.

So Saturn's gone
With rings and moons
Yet still his spawn
Is plagued by goons.

He's well away,
That Monarch gnome
Who once held sway
O'er Terrans' home
We bid you, pray
Your souls he keep
And not foray
In astral jeep.

His regent reigns
Now in his stead
And for his pains
Would stood in bed.

Next please—please!

CLAGETTY CLAG by Russell Claggett

Dear Sir: Now, Wallace Weber wants to know what happens to the energy in a melted spring.

Wally, I'm ashamed of you. After all the nice things I said about you in the August issue, you show everybody that you are an armchair scientist—that you just sit on your piazza and dream. Had you really tried your experiment, you would have found that, when the energy locked in the spring is greater than the molecular cohesion of the spring material, naturally the energy is released. Without the fancy words—wind up a spring of some soft metal and put it in a metal case, as you suggested. (The spring must be soft, else the case will melt first and the experiment will be useless). Heat the spring with a welding torch or any handy flame and OBSERVE! The spring, as it begins to melt, will squirm about slightly. That, my friend, is your energy. Incidentally, where do you get your ideas? You make me so jealous!

As a note of warning, I wasn't joking; I actually did send a photoelectric cell to S. Vernon McDaniel, of water-powered space-ship fame, so all fen can expect a rash of new inventions from Santa Barbara way.

Ten to one, S. Vernon's first invention will be a ray gun, to use on me.

Six to five, Wallace Weber helps him.—7508 Harford Road, Baltimore 14, Maryland.

Well, anyway, spring *was* here—has anyone a welding torch handy? We can think of a few uses for it ourselves.

WHOSE HIDE?

by Gene A. Hyde

Dear Editor: Now that Bud Gregory has a life-time pension of ten-dollars a day, and Dr. David Murfree has a whosis that brings him in all of the gold etc. that he needs, why don't you let them both rest for a long time?

Kutner takes first place this issue with "Atomic," a neat little story. St. Clair was tops in the short story division, and came in second for the issue as a whole. "The Stroller" was different from the usual St. Clair yarn, but good nevertheless and confirms my suspicion that there will be better things to come. However, I hope she doesn't stop writing the Oona and Jick yarns.

"The Jet Jockeys" got third because it was a little different. The others came in in this order: "In The Cards," "Noon," "Dark Dawn," and "Donkeys To Bald Pate." Not too bad an issue, but not as good as the last one. So much for the stories. And now, a word or two to Joe Kirschnick.

Unfortunately, I've gotten no farther in math than calculus, so I'm afraid that I can't throw the law of probability around like you, Joe. Most of my points are based on the story in question, with a few of my own ideas added of course. I'll take your points in the order in which you gave them.

Point one . . . "An Alien race couldn't tell the difference between us and the lower animals," you say. Oh come now, Joe—need I point out that a human being is the only species of animal that is not completely covered by thick hair—or that a human being is the only species of animal that walks upright at all times; or that a human being . . . ? But you get the idea. Remember, Joe, the Aarrians were *highly* intelligent, not morons.

Point two . . . "The quality of mind has remained the same." ??? I take it that by "mind" you mean the Aarrians (if you don't the point doesn't make sense). Let me call your attention to the fourth paragraph on page 94 of the story. "I am Klon, and I am newly come from Aarl." And again to the first paragraph on page 96, "Aarrians have come here in millions for that reason and more will come." I don't know what makes you think the Aarrians stopped coming after the first group got here.

Point three . . . The Aarlian's mode of travel was not an aimless, undirected drifting as you seem to think. They traveled on beams of light, which, you must admit, are probably very plentiful in space. I quote from the story again (paragraph four, page 95): "For ages, beating our way out through the cosmos on streams of light, we have visited other worlds."

I think that takes care of your three points, Joe. Do you have any more tucked away some place?—1807 N. Madison, Peoria, Ill.

Goodness! We hope not . . . somewhere along the line we have lost track of the entire controversy. As for Bud Gregory, Gene, you get him again in the February issue. So good your lins and be warned. . . .

GRIFE AND SNIPES

by Paul Anderson

Dear Editor: Before the gripes, a few compliments. The last few issues have seen an enormous comeback, and TWS now rates first in its particular branch, the type of writing which concentrates on action, humor, and the like rather than the technical background and detailed, rather cerebral study of character and sociology featured by a competitor.

[Turn page]



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Now for a few snide attacks. First, those covers. Like anyone else of my acquaintance who reads your magazine, I buy it in spite of the covers rather than because of them. I'm also for dropping the "Thrilling" from the title, perhaps substituting "Science." It isn't that I don't like a good pin-up, but these aren't even good as such, and the title is puerile.

I also want to take a few sidewise at your scientific background. It's still pretty shaky. Unfortunately, most of the errors are made by authors who genuinely try to build up a good theoretical basis—the space operas hardly ever include enough science to be noticeable, so they can't make such errors.

A case in point is Murray Leinster's recent *Kim Rendell* series. Except for the rather improbable hero, this was a very good set of stories, carefully thought out and well written. But that idea of causing a spaceship to travel indefinitely fast by shrinking its mass while keeping its kinetic energy constant just won't work. Leinster was thinking of Newton's equation $E = \frac{1}{2}mv^2$, in which E stands for kinetic energy and on for the mass of the body moving with velocity v (c.g.s. units throughout).

In this case, v does increase indefinitely as m approaches zero. However, we have to use Einstein's equation—not only is it the true one (as far as known today) but Leinster bases his own idea on the relativistic equivalence of mass and energy, an equivalence rather well demonstrated at Hiroshima and elsewhere. The equation is—

$$E = m_0c^2 \left(\sqrt{1 - v^2/c^2} - 1 \right)$$

where m. stands for the body's rest mass and c is the velocity of light. If we solve this for v we get—

$$v = \sqrt{c^2 - \left(\frac{m_0c^2}{E + m_0c^2} \right)^2}$$

and it is evident that as m approaches zero v only approaches c, so that the theoretical velocity limit still holds. Leinster should have used the *shopworn* but not disprovable "hyperspace" (If you knew how much trouble it was to type those equations you'd appreciate this letter more).

Incidentally, Mr. Claggett, that $E = m_0c^2$ is perfectly correct. I suggest you consult a modern physics textbook. And the increase of mass with velocity has actually been observed for high-speed particles, notably electrons. So it should be pretty clear that interstellar travel will have to involve some effect as yet totally unknown. Considering how little is actually known of the universe, it is very possible that some such effect exists.

The Bud Gregory stories are another melancholy instance of an author's own erudition tripping him up. That transformation of molecular motion into useful energy happens to violate the second law of thermodynamics.

Well, a word on the current issue. Very good. First place to "Dark Dawn" for a really beautiful piece of writing. The same quality of craftsmanship ties the fantasies "Noon" and "Atomic" for second. Smith's clever "In the Cards" takes third. "The Deadly Dust" fourth, and that nifty "The Stroller" fifth—Mrs. St. Clair is going places! The rest were formula, but very readable formula. If every issue is up to this one, I can't complain. Could be the Good Old Days of science-fiction are coming in the immediate future.—c/o Mrs. A. W. Anderson, Carleton College Library, Northfield, Minnesota

Well, we've been asking the science faddists to step into this column and now we've got them. So—no complaints. We wish, however, that we had gone beyond freshman physics in college, which is definitely something new in our life. Sorry you don't like our covers, Poul.

Happy—perhaps the scientific invasion wouldn't have us so badly on our collective uppers if all you-know-what hadn't broken

loose simultaneously in the verse department. Which, come to think of it, we also asked for.

To wit—

BONE PICKING

by Dan Wilhite

Dear Sturs: I get a big kick out of the way Joe Fen picks over the bones of the stories after he has had a full meal of them.

Looks like we have a few first class arguments cooking. Rick Sneary should get a lot of answers. But the question is simple. You come back to the same spot because the machine has only moved along one dimension, time. In other words, instead of it being here-now, it is here-then. It didn't go anywhere just anyhow. As it didn't move it is still subject to the law of gravity which holds it in place while the earth rotates and moves along its orbit, forward or back. Now I don't understand why, when our hero spends two hours on his trip, he gets back two hours later. Why not come back to the same instant or now that he left? Or 15 seconds later so as not to meet himself going?

McDaniel stuck his neck out and look what happened to it! He should have known better. I have a little problem of my own along that line tho. I have devised a perpetual motion machine that produces kinetic energy to a drive shaft in a rotary motion. It will fly a plane, row a boat, or pull a train. But I can't figure a single way to make it propel an object in space.

Re Wally Webber—the energy stored in the spring by winding is infinitesimal when compared with the energy put into it by the melting process. The stress in the spring is molecular and as the spring melts the separate molecules start kicking the gong around until the kinetic energy is given to the container or converted to heat by friction. Any heat produced, with the melting heat, is radiated off.

Claggett fouled out on his water premise. Water can stay liquid at over 212F. All you have to do is put a little pressure on it. Tell him to go look at a steam boiler or a pressure cooker sometime.

I am in agreement on the dangers of speeds faster than light. You could probably see large objects ahead of you such as planets and suns. But how are you going to avoid the little ones? Radar couldn't help you. As you would be there before the impulse would, or would you? There is your piggy-back plane question all over again.

The Editor with pencil red
Puts the "Readers Speak" to bed.
"Out, Damned Spot," he cries with glee.
Of sixty lines are left but three.

Now his eyes are bright and his step is firm
As he makes the Fen and letter hacks squirm.
The Xeno's all poured down the drain
And Wart Ear's left out in the rain.

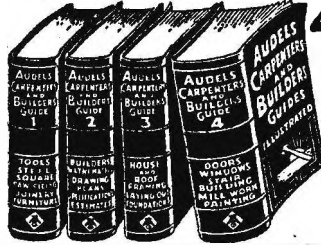
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We speak, Dan Wilhite, just to you
In putting READER SPEAKS to bed
We do our stuff with pencil blue.

Who makes who squirm is question moot
As every line yields up its dross
And from the leaves we pluck the fruit
To save ourselves from total loss.

[Turn page]

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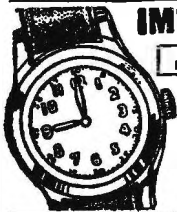
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HULLED AGAIN!

by Edwin Sigler

Dear Editor: You were kind enough to print my second letter in the August issue of the magazine but you are going out on a limb when you insist that a ship would have to have a heavy hull to protect the occupants from dangerous radiation in space. It is obvious that at least a foot of lead would be required to furnish a shield and even then cosmic rays would still penetrate it.

On the ship fifty by three hundred feet I used for purposes of figuring the armor plate weighed over three thousand tons. A foot of lead would equal fifty-one thousand and twenty-six cubic feet or over nineteen thousand, one hundred and four tons. If a ship could not carry three thousand tons of armor plate how could it carry more than six times the weight in lead shielding? Can you answer that question?

There is one thing I would like to know. Just where is there any proof that spatial radiation would be dangerous to humans.

Right now your magazine is considerably better than it was a year ago but it is still below the standard set when you first took over the magazine about ten years ago. It could stand a lot of improvement in the way of stories as some of those plots you have been using lately have sounded rather silly. The magazine could stand some first-class covers instead of the old bug-eyed monster type.

Again I never could believe that parents would turn upon their own children the way they do in those mutant yarns you have been printing lately. By the way it might interest you to know that real scientists are abandoning the cosmic ray and atomic blast mutation theory.—1028 North Broadway, Wichita 5, Kansas.

Given super-power to escape gravity and atmosphere pressures, why couldn't the ship be heavy as you please? It would have little or no weight in space.

Our main concern is in what's behind the covers. As for mutants, we incline to agree with you but there is no proof either way and authors have a faculty for stampeding in case lots in the direction of easy conflict.

WELL DIGESTED

by Jack Clements

Deah Editor: Having digested the August ish of TWS with the usual grain of salt, I have come forth from my hibernation with my noteworthy comments.

The cover was better than average, tho the girl was poorly drawn. Nice theme tho. Didn't care for the Bud Gregory novelett. I seldom do. Kutner was good on "Atomic," stinking on "Dark Dawn." Best story was "In the Cards." Best short was the St. Clair opus. Love that gal.

Finlay takes first place with his two illo's this time. None of the art was really bad, not even Marchioni. Maybe I'm just in a good mood.

Now for the readah speaks. Boy there was a lot of praise this time. Praise, I might add, that you certainly deserve.

Letters are mooch better this time. No Wigodsky. Goody goody. Although Chaddo and Joke are back, they don't seem like the boys of old. I was waiting for Sigler's reply to your unmerciful attack on him a couple of issues ago, and he came through with a darn good letter. Good boy, Edwin. I must write to him. Millard Grimes is right in his statement that Virgil

Finlay is overrated. While he is excellent, his proportion and symmetry are way off. Stevens-Lawrence can do much better when he really tries. Which brings us to Rex Ward's proposed poll. My three favorite artists are, in order of merit:

1. Verne Stevens-Lawrence
2. Virgil Finlay
3. Hubert Rogers (On covers)

Three top authors:

1. Ray Bradbury
2. Bob Heinlein
3. van Vogt

If we counted non-stf writers, Leslie Charteris would be in the number one spot. Maybe some day we'll have a Saint novel in Startling, huh?

Again let me congratulate you on being the editor of the only two mags that have kept up with the times. But don't try so hard for perfection. You passed it two issues ago.—6310 Madison Rd., Cincinnati 27, Ohio.

Thanks, Jack—but you should attain Finlay's skill in proportion and symmetry. At that, he and Stevens are in pretty close to a far-from-dead heat. Hubert Rogers is unknown to us. You picked a good man in Bradbury too. His stuff will be appearing more often in these covers.

Now, Jack, a little surprise.

WHAT? NO WIGODSKY?

by Michael Wigodsky

Dear Sir: The August issue of THRILLING WONDER STORIES is superb, with outstanding stories by Fitzgerald, Kuttner, Smith, Hastings, St. Clair, and Hammond.

THE DEADLY DUST is the third and best story of the Bud Gregory series.

ATOMIC! is a great story of truly alien life.

The ending of IN THE CARDS was the biggest surprise I ever had.

NOON is even better than Hastings' superb BIG NIGHT.

Stockhecker should go back to hecking stock.

THE STROLLER is great, marvelous, wonderful, stupendous, super-colossal, glorious, . . . I'm running out of superlatives.

DONKEYS TO BALD PATE is good, anyway.

DARK DAWN is beautiful.

Whee! Finlay now has a real bubble-bath to illustrate. And in conclusion, Benedict Wigodsky wishes to state that Bergey is actually improving.—306 Evans Avenue, San Antonio, Texas.

Well, thanks, Michael. But since your recent listing of self as aged eleven has stirred up considerable speculation anent your age-group listing, what does that Benedict mean? Benedict as in bridegroom or as in Eggs Benedict?

If the former, Michael, you either told a fib (in which case, tsK tsK!) or have been the victim (?) of a reverse-English hill billy wedding. What, hill billies in Texas?

If the latter, well, the ham on the English muffin under the egg and Mornay sauce is all yours. So be it!

[Turn page]

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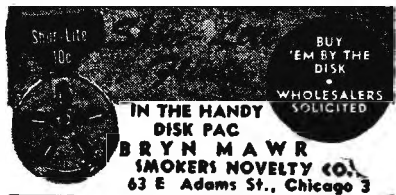
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USUAL SQUAWKS

by Jim Kennedy

Dear Editor: I have kept quiet for the last couple of issues of T.W.S. so I reckon it's time I put in my usual squawks.

The first thing a person usually notices about a book is its cover, so that's where I'll start. For once Bergey put out a good cover.

Henry Kuttner's "Atomic" took first place among the stories with "The Deadly Dust" a close second. "The Jet Jockeys" was in third place with "Dark Dawn" a poor fourth. "In the Cards" came next followed by "The Stroller." Last place was a tie between "Noon" and "Donkeys to Bald Pate."

The Reader Speaks is getting better every issue. As for the Idea of Rex E. Ward, it is one of the best ideas thought up by the readers in a long time.

In my opinion, Edmond Hamilton takes first place above all others. Murray Leinster takes second place with ease and third place is given to Ross Rocklynne with Henry Kuttner close behind. But there is no fourth place so he doesn't count.

Bergey takes first place among the artists (horror of horrors!) with Finlay close behind (Egads!). Third place goes to Paul.

As long as we're all giving out ideas, why not print the first story ever written by the winning three authors as sort of a Hall of Fame Classic. Also the first works of the three winning artists.

Another idea for a poll would be for each reader to send in his choice of the two best novels, the two best novelets, and the two best short stories appearing in T.W.S. and S.S. since 1944. A lot of the readers haven't been reading scientification that long and others will scurry to the closets for back issues but it is an idea.—/o Route # 1 Box 148-G. San Luis Obispo, California.

Okay, Jim, and how about this one—why not have the editor look through his files, find his most devastating rejections, write the authors and tell them he has reconsidered—then run the blasted things. It would be editorial suicide, sure, but no less sensible than the two polls you propose.

If you ever read the average first story, even by authors as excellent as the probable winners of your highly improbable contest, you'd quickly gather what we mean—or would you?

FIRST READER SPEAKS

by Andrew Gregg

Dear Editor: I have just finished my first copy of T.W.S., and have enjoyed it very much, with one exception. That exception is "The Reader Speaks."

My main squawk is the amazing amount of introductory drivel that you permit the readers to inject into their letters. I'm surprised that someone didn't write one in Sanskrit. If I study those letters enough I may even be able to dig up an old record of "The Hut Sut Song" and understand the words. Maybe I should give an example.

"Dear Slur . . . I just received your latest issue of TWS and, after looking at the cover, threw it in the furnace. Don't get me wrong, because I really love your magazine. But maybe I do think it's krummy. When will you stop putting a BEM on your cover and put a NUT on instead of inside. As for the issue before that, this is what I think of the stories.

"The Uranium Thingamajig" by Lois Type rates an orchid, a watermelon, and a whiff of cosmic dust.

"Twelve O'Clock on Mars" by Will N. Testament rates a lemon and a blast from a radioactive Flit-gun.

"The Stolen Cheese" by Bill Collector deserves a plot. The author deserves a dictionary.

"That's all I can write now. I have to go back into my padded cell."

That's what it seems like. But they can go right on writing that stuff for all I care. The Constitution gives me a right to my own opinion of it.

I hope the letters I saw are exceptions themselves.—22½ Stanley Street, Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin.

All we can say is, our dear Gregg, you should have known us when. Get hold of an issue of two years back or so and then be thankful for your blessings.

UNDESPERATE DESMOND

by Blaine Desmond

Dear Editor: Henry Kuttner, the unsurpassable, has written his best story in many years. "Atomic!" held me enthralled, and I hereby proclaim it the best story TWS or any other magazine has published this year. There's a limit to how good an author can get, and if you ask me, Hank has just about reached it! (Congratulations, Hank!

William Fitzgerald has turned out another reasonably good story about the hill billy genius. But, as I said in my last letter, hill billy stories do not appeal to me too strongly. But then, I enjoyed "The Deadly Dust."

"In the Cards," by George O. Smith was a vast improvement over the Kilroy epic of a previous issue. I vote to keep George in the Thrilling Group mags.

The short stories were very good this time. The best of the lot was Hammond's "Dark Dawn"—man, that guy can write!! "Noon" was next followed by "The Jet Jockeys" and "The Stroller." "Donkeys to Bald Pate" was fair.

Thanks for the long Reader Speaks! I rate your mag much higher for just that alone. Your new Book Review Department was very good, but I prefer The Story Behind the Story. If we could have 'em both, all the better, but if we must choose one, I vote for the Author Section.—428 Main Street, El Segundo, California.

And this time we haven't even a book review to our name. Again, tsK tsK!

Well, this seems to be it—and about time too. Thanks, all of you—those whose letters found print and those whose could not be fitted in. Please keep them coming and be ready to duck. See you in the next Issue.

—THE EDITOR.



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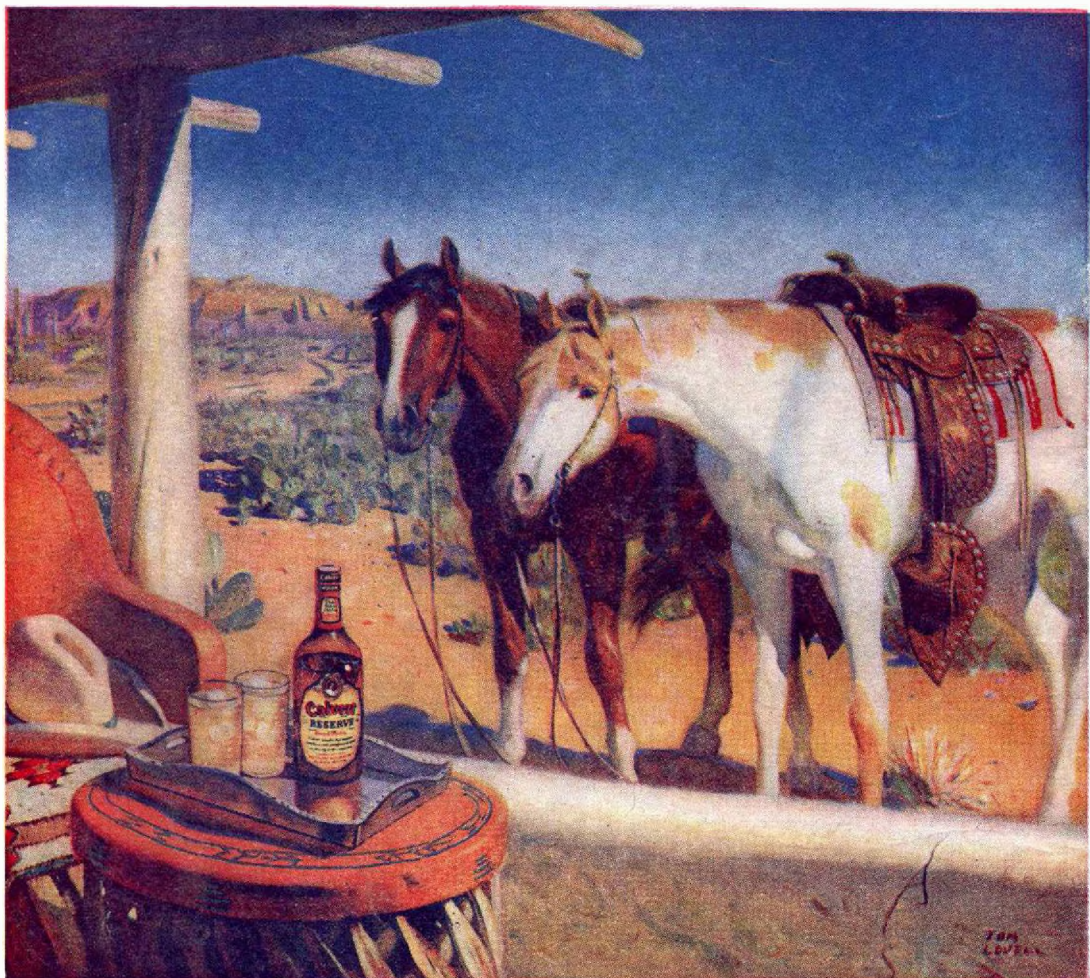
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