

# THE ORIGINAL SCIENCE FICTION

STORIES

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# Author, Author!

TOM GODWIN will probably be associated for years to come with a fine story that John W. Campbell used for the purposes of illustrating his ideas of science fiction in an article he wrote for *Saturday Review*, in 1956. You remember "The Cold Equations", and we hope you'll remember, "The Wild Ones".

★ DICK HETSCHEL and NICHOLAS G. LORDI have one thing in common, besides their debut in SFS, this issue. Before we'd read their stories, we had never heard of them before. But I think we'll be hearing more from them.

DONALD FRANSON could be found in the "Science Discussions" departments of leading science fiction magazines, back in 1937. His last appearance with us was in a short story on language reform, called, "Comes The Revolution".

★ CALVIN M. KNOX is a great admirer of Robert Silverberg, and seems to follow Bob around in the magazines. Latest news is that Knox expects to follow Silverberg into the pocket-book novels market,



## dangerous weapon

by Donald Franson

"If you fear it, you don't have to fear it; it's the danger you don't fear that you have to be afraid of!"

**T**HE SOUND of a hammer driving a nail—knock, knock, knock, bop, *bap*. It always appealed to Brockton as a sound of something being accomplished, as the nail is driven in on the last blow. A satisfying noise, he thought.

It was going to be a nice shack.

Then he thought of the house on Yucca Flat, smashed to the ground before it had a chance to burn.

Oh, forget it! This was vacation! He was building a shack in the woods, and he was going to live here for a few months and hunt and fish and forget all about the atom tests.

Starting *now*.

Brockton began hammering in another nail, and now it sounded like five, four, three, two, one, *zero*.

Sweat broke out on his forehead, and he put the hammer down on top of the unfinished wall, reached in his pocket for a handkerchief. His car keys fell out and he stooped for them, and he must have nudged something, for the hammer came tumbling down on his head, *bam*.

That *hurt*. He put his hand on his head, and it felt as if a bump was starting. That could have knocked him cold. Fortunately the hammer hadn't fallen very far. He picked up the keys and handkerchief, and mopped his brow.

If he had conked himself proper, the next atom project would have had to get along without him. Maybe that would have been to his liking. He didn't much care for playing with fire anymore, especially the kind of fire that could get out of hand some day and consume its makers. When would they stop testing, he wondered, and start using?

"That's a fine weapon," said a voice.

**B**ROCKTON turned around, and he saw a big man standing near. The man wore what looked like fur swimming trunks, but then no outfit is unusual in the wilds of California. The stranger had a full beard and long hair; yet he didn't resemble the fanatic nature-boy or hermit type. He seemed intelligent and amiable, as well as muscular. Brockton looked around for the weapon he was talking about, but all he could see was the hammer and a few nails lying in the dust. "Weapon?"

"That hammer there." The man pointed. "It seems to be more efficiently made than this." He drew a stone hammer from his belt. It was the grand-daddy of all prehistoric implements, realistic, even to the thongs tied around the rough wooden shaft, securing the stone head. This caveman get-up was complete, thought Brockton, as the man went on.

"The strings keep loosen-

ing and the stones keep slipping. I have to make replacements too often. And quality control is the chief bottleneck; it takes a long time to make a good one. I can't possibly keep all our warriors supplied, even with my three apprentices."

"What are you, a prop man?"

"Prop man? I'm a weapon-maker. I'm looking for better weapons. That hammer there, seems to be just what I want. That is, if it's not too difficult to make. I would prefer it a little larger—but then, you're small; maybe it's easier for you to swing when you're bashing your enemies."

Brockton looked puzzled. "Bashing? It's only a hammer." Was this fellow a lunatic?

**T**HE MAN spoke again, a little bewildered. "Don't you use these hammers for fighting?"

There was something charming about this preposterous stranger; if he was a nut, he was a new sort. "Very rarely," said Brockton.

"Oh, I see. You don't have too many of these hammers, then." Was this character practicing for a play or something? But he seemed so honest, so sincere, that a feeling came over Brockton that this was really a serious conversation. It passed, but he thought he'd carry on with it, anyway.

The bearded man repeated, this time as a question, "These hammers, then, are rare and expensive?"

Brockton smiled. "Oh, no. Why, I've got, let's see, three or four of them all told. I guess every family in America has a hammer or two. In workshops, garages, factories. Hardware stores are full of them. You know, supply caves?" He could go along with a gag. He picked up the hammer and knocked the dust off it. "No, I guess hammers are not very rare; you could find them lying around most anywhere."

The man looked shocked. "Lying around? How can your people survive? Don't they constantly pick up these weapons and kill one another?"

"Oh, now, my people aren't such a bloodthirsty lot," protested Brockton, laughing.

"Neither are mine. But put weapons like *that* in their hands..." A look of fear was in his eyes. "Supply caves full of them!" But he quickly controlled himself. "I can't let this interfere with my purpose. This weapon would be safe enough, in the right hands. I'd like to borrow one of these hammers, learn how to make it."

Brockton thought a while, then decided the man was harmless. So he said, "Here, you can have this. I got another one in the car. Bring it back when you're through

with it." He held out the hammer, handle first, and the other stretched out his hand.

THE STRANGER looked disappointed at what followed, but as if he should have known it.

Brockton was dumbfounded.

The hand and the handle did not make contact; they passed through each other. Brockton tried to pass the hammer to the stranger without success, then felt foolish and dropped it at his feet.

"You—you're a ghost?" Brockton felt suddenly weak in the knees.

The stranger, who still looked solid as ever, said, "I'm intangible, I think. That is, I'm intangible to you—to your world. You're intangible to me. That's why he said *learn*, not *bring*, I suppose."

"You're in another world?"

"I don't know where I am now; a few minutes ago, I was in the hut of the sorcerer. Now I'm apparently somewhere in a forest." He looked down at the ground. "The same world, though. Another time."

"The past?" Brockton was coming out of his daze.

"No, the future. Oh—*your* past, yes. The sorcerer said a thousand generations." He spoke the word *sorcerer* with not awe but familiarity, as one would say *doctor*.

"This—*sorcerer* sent you?"

There was awe, however, in Brockton's tone.

**T**HE PREHISTORIC man squatted down, began idly chopping at the dirt with his ancient stone hammer, making no impression. "Yes. He's the finest sorcerer in all Mastodon Land."

"Why didn't he come himself?" Brockton found himself asking.

The man looked up. "I'm a weapons expert; I'm skilled in making and designing weapons. I invented the criss-cross lashing." He held up the stone hammer to illustrate. "The sorcerer thought I would learn new methods easier."

"A technician?" Brockton had a feeling of kinship. "A thousand generations—why, that's thirty thousand years! I didn't know there were men in America at that time." He looked again at the stone hammer the man was holding. "You really must be from the stone age. Do you have iron, or any other metals? If not, you probably can't make a hammer like mine."

The caveman was studying Brockton's hammer, placing his own beside it. "Iron?" He groped for the word, apparently didn't recognize it. How did he know English anyway? "We only have stone and wood. Where can I get iron?"

"It's a long story," said

Brockton doubtfully. Should he tell the stranger anything, even if he remembered exactly what the process was?

Let's see—you take the red rocks and heat them, and coal, black rocks, or was it charcoal? Yes, the burning of charcoal would reduce the iron ore. But he thought of some science-fiction stories he had read, of changing the past and ruining the present. Wasn't this a little bit too important a thing to be monkeying with? Let sleeping dogs lie; let the past affect the future, not the future the past.

"It's a pretty complicated process, making iron," Brockton said. "Too hard to explain. You haven't the technology, the know-how."

**T**HE MAN from the past looked glum. "I was afraid of that. It took many generations to acquire our stone-chipping know-how. But we've got to have some improvement on our present method, sooner or later. This iron would be just the thing, if we could shape it the way you have. How do you do that?"

Brockton was deliberately vague. "Oh, we get it very hot and it becomes soft. Then we put it in the shape we want it, let it cool, and it becomes hard again."

"Like the stone from the smoking mountain? That would take a great deal of

heat—I guess it's beyond us." He frowned as he made an attempt to tighten the strings on his weapon. "Our biggest trouble is in the stone-to-shaft joint. I see that you've licked it—with iron. This grooved-stone and split-stick method of joining is not very secure. The hole in the iron and expansion of the wood by a wedge that you use is much better—but how can you make such a hole in stone without weakening it? I've tried it—ninety-nine percent rejects. But the method I'm using now." He sighed unhappily. "Our warriors and hunters are always complainin' of wobbling stones—and if they come off and are lost, they claim the right to hit me once with the shaft. I get more lumps that way. Sometimes I feel like going back to being a hunter—but the tribe insists I stick to research and manufacturing."

**B**ROCKTON felt sorry for him, but he couldn't go giving away things like this. There was a lull in the conversation, during which Brockton did some thinking. "How is it you speak English?"

"Your language? The sorcerer said I would be able to converse with anyone I met."

"I'm sorry there's no one else to meet around here for miles."

"I can't leave the sorcerer's hut; that is, I can't leave this

spot, where the hut is located."

Brockton found himself believing whatever the man said, without question. "Then you're lucky you at least met me. Sorry I can't help you, but—well, to be perfectly frank, I don't like the idea of introducing new weapons into an unsuspecting world."

The stranger guessed this was the real reason for Brockton's reluctance, and made another try. "I realize it's a dangerous weapon; but we weapon-men would keep it a secret, only use it in defense and open battle."

Brockton shook his head. "No weapon seems to ever be kept a secret. Take it from me, after a thousand generations of history. It wouldn't be long before your whole world would have it. This weapon..." It was hard to think of a *hammer* as a weapon. Hammer and tongs, hammer and sickle... "We have our own troubles, you know, with new weapons."

"I thought you didn't have wars."

"Oh, we have wars," said Brockton. "Bigger wars than you have ever seen."

**T**HE CAVEMAN'S imagination was stirred. He stood up and waved his stone hammer in circles, as if fighting off imaginary hordes. "Great armies with iron hammers flashing, bashing..."

Brockton laughed. "No, no,

we don't use hammers in wars. We use them mostly for carpentry, you know, making useful things out of trees? We have other weapons. We have..." He hesitated. What would the man believe, anyway? What was the saying, *wonder soon passes into disbelief, then scorn?* "Knives—spears—arrows."

"What are arrows?"

"Oh-oh. Never mind. They're complicated weapons, better than spears." The man evidently didn't recognize some English words if they stood for things not familiar to him. Brockton decided not to go into too many details. "Then we have guns, they kill at a distance, like when you throw a hammer."

"*Throw a hammer?*" shouted the caveman, astounded.

Brockton was frightened. What had he said? Didn't the man know about throwing? Hadn't they learned this simple thing yet? This was ridiculous! Even monkeys throw coconuts, or did they? But he was greatly relieved at the next words of the prehistoric man.

"We never throw a valuable hammer. The enemy might get hold of it and turn it against us. They're very hard to replace, so we hold on to them. We don't have mass production—I think I told you; I suppose you don't value them so highly, at that."

"Oh," said Brockton, "I

see. I meant something cheap and plentiful, like stones. You throw stones, don't you?" He was glad to hear that the man was familiar with this. He would have to be more careful. "Guns throw stones, iron stones, far and fast. Machine guns throw many stones almost at the same time. Cannons throw large boulders, for miles. So you see, we don't bother with hammers in battle."

THE CAVEMAN'S look was a mixture of wonder and respect. "And it doesn't matter that you have hammers lying around for the picking up. That's something to think about. A whole country full of hammers, but you refrain from using them, when you could overnight bash each other's brains out." He made one last appeal. "Won't you give me the secret of the iron hammer then, *and* the knowledge to use it wisely, as you do?" He looked hopeful.

But Brockton still refused, he didn't know exactly why. "We're not so wise ourselves in the control of our own newest weapon. I have no good advice to give you on that score."

"What is this new weapon, new to you, that you're talking about?"

Brockton looked unhappy. "Well, it comes in several sizes, but their effects are somewhat the same. A flash of lightning, many times



brighter than the sun. Then a great fire and cloud, a tremendous blast, and very many people die. It's something we fear very much. Yet it comes from a small thing. Men drop it from the sky. They ride on birds." He felt silly, saying it this way, but the caveman showed he understood.

"Is it an enemy tribe that has this weapon, is that why you fear it?"

"No, all major—er, tribes have it now."

"That's funny," said the caveman. "A new weapon is advantageous if one tribe uses it; no advantage if they all do. The reason I came here to get a new weapon, was to help my tribe. The iron hammer, mass production, would have been just the thing, to make my tribe respected over all Mastodon Land. But then you say all tribes would eventually have the hammer." He looked troubled.

**"I BELIEVE** you're right," he went on. "It can't be kept a secret for more than a few generations. Then we'd be right back where we started, and nothing accomplished, *and we'd live in a world of fear, with terrible hammers all over the place...*" He seemed wrought-up. But a new thought came to him.

"No, that isn't right!" he exclaimed. "You have the hammers, but you're not terrorized by them. You leave them lying around. You use

them for carpentry. Are you *sure* people don't use them to murder one another?"

"Oh, I'll admit there are a few hammer murders, once in a while. Sometimes a poor devil goes crazy and kills somebody with one."

The caveman waved this aside. "Berserk. That's not what I meant. Stones and fists would serve his purpose, as well as hammers. I mean, no common desire to kill, just because the hammer is there? And your other handy weapons—I suspect *they're* not in constant use, either, are they?"

"Well, no, sometimes in crimes, but most of them only in wars."

"If these other weapons don't worry you, why are you afraid of this new weapon, this lightning-cloud?"

Brockton scratched the bump on his head. "Well—a few of them can cause great damage. It's worse than other weapons in that respect. It annihilates everything for miles around, and poisons the atmosphere. A lot of innocent bystanders get killed. We haven't used it much yet, for that reason. We're afraid it might get out of hand—beyond our control."

"*That's what I thought would happen with a world full of hammers.* But you've apparently mastered the desire to hammer one another. Why don't you think you'll also control the desire to kill

by lightning? You are much ahead of us. Tell me—are these lightning-cloud makers lying around loose, like the other weapons?"

"NO, THEY'RE too expensive. They're only to be used in wars between nations, great tribes."

"Then it's wars that you're afraid of, not the weapon."

Brockton had to admit this was true. Who was this fellow—Socrates' ancestor?

"Well then, if your people don't pick up hammers and bash one another, then your leaders aren't likely to pick up lightning-clouds and annihilate one another's tribes, are they?"

"That's what bothers me," said Brockton, frowning.

The man showed some disbelief. "That isn't consistent. *Aren't your leaders as responsible as your people?* In our tribe, if the leaders don't do what the people want, they are overthrown. We have a handy cliff for that purpose."

Brockton couldn't help smiling. "Our leaders—in my country anyhow—seldom do anything the people don't like. We don't have the cliff method, but one just as good."

The other probed further. "How about all the other great tribes; aren't their leaders afraid of their people, too?"

Brockton considered. "Well, if you put it just that way, yes—even the worst ones.

They're always talking peace, whether they mean it or not. They could be planning war for all I know."

"You see, you are far ahead of us. Even your most war-like leaders have to please their people by *talking peace*. It's a long step forward from *glorifying war*."

Strange philosopher this, for a caveman.

"IT SEEMS to me this new weapon you fear is not much more dangerous, in your hands, than the hammer. I think it's only fearful to you now, because it's new, bigger than anything you have ever had before. To me they all seem marvelous, and dangerous. Maybe it's a good thing you fear it just now, so you can guard against its misuse. In Mastodon Land, we have a saying: '*If you fear it, you do not have to fear it; it's the danger you don't fear that you have to be afraid of.*'" He put his stone weapon back in his belt.

"The hammers, the bird-riders, the stone-throwing machines—each weapon brings a new challenge, but it doesn't matter any more. You have learned—*control*. You leave the weapons lying around but seldom use them except for war, and reluctantly then. Maybe we are on the road to it in our time. We weapon-men don't massacre our own tribespeople, though we have the opportunity. But with us,

only a few are responsible—your whole tribe, maybe your whole world, seems to be responsible. You shouldn't worry about this new weapon—you'll control it. You'll use the lightning for carpentry, as well as the hammer."

He looked longingly at the metal hammer, shook his head in resignation. "Perhaps it would stir up trouble, ahead of its time. I can't argue with the future." He sighed.

"I'm afraid the sorcerer will be even more disappointed than I am. This must have cost him a fortune in magic powders. I'll just have to tell him the science of a thousand generations in the future is too much for me. I talk with a user of lightning, brighter than the sun, yet he can't—or won't—show me how to make a simple iron hammer. The sorcerer will be sadly disappointed. But he's a wise man, and a kind one; he'll understand.

"I'll have a harder time convincing him of the other fact—that you have many fine and terrible weapons but leave them lying around. Many opportunities to get them, in every home, workshop, supply cave, get them and bash in each other's skulls, but you *don't*. He'll have a hard time believing such utopia exists, this side of heaven."

**B**ROCKTON was thinking hard. He started to say,

"I'm sorry I couldn't help you," but the caveman was gone.

The stranger was there, then he wasn't there. It was almost as if it were a dream.

Maybe it was a dream.

He had seemed to talk English, yet was from an age that could scarcely have known speech. He had a ready explanation, that the sorcerer had said he would be able to converse with anyone he met. No explanation at all. No explanation for sorcerers either. Or time-traveling cavemen who disappeared into thin air.

But the man had seemed convincing enough in character. He had talked sensibly, perhaps only on one subject, as in dreams. It always seems you are talking seriously about the craziest things, in dreams. It never seems inconsistent. Dream stuff. Yet...

It sounded mighty sensible.

Even if he *had* dreamed it, and it had come from his own subconscious mind. He could have been knocked out by the hammer falling, been unconscious without realizing it. He did have a sizable bump to show for it.

His eye rested on the hammer, lying in the dust where he had dropped it, and he picked it up.

He hefted it. He made a few whizzing swings with it. "Bash!" he said.

Then he laughed. He laughed loud and long, better than he had laughed since—

oh, it must have been years.  
He wasn't afraid of this  
weapon.

Or *any* weapon.

If man could control hammers, he could control the atomic bomb and all its train.

He picked up a handful of nails, found the board he had been nailing on, and reached up. Knock, knock, knock, bop, *bap!*

*Carpentry.*

Yes, we *will* use it for carpentry.

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