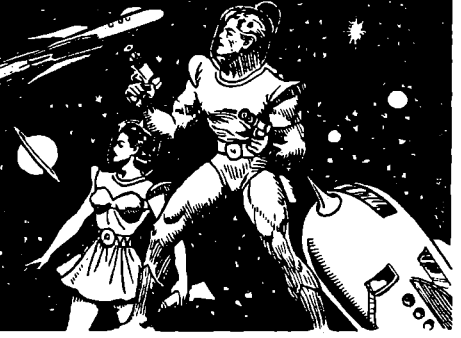


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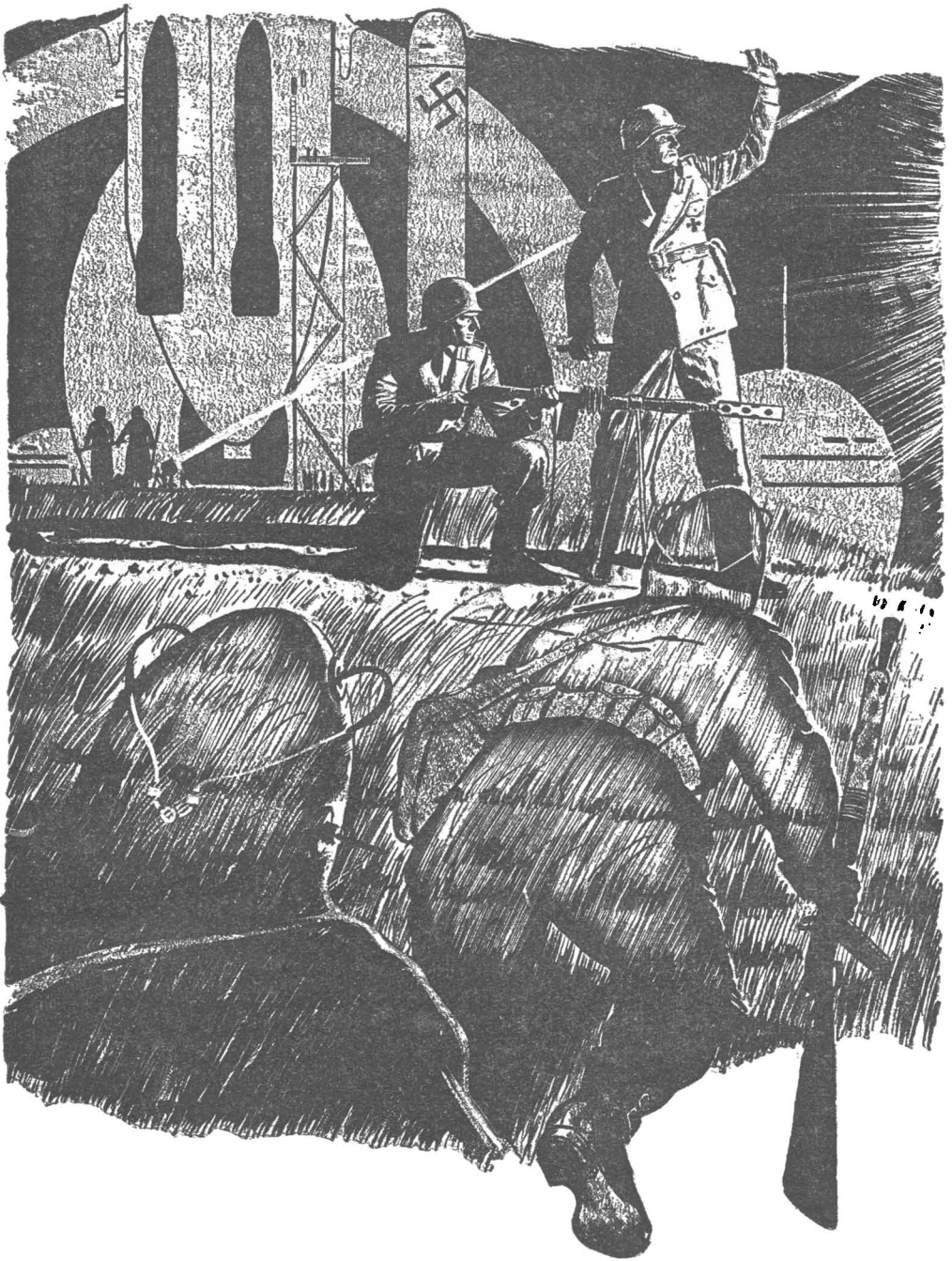
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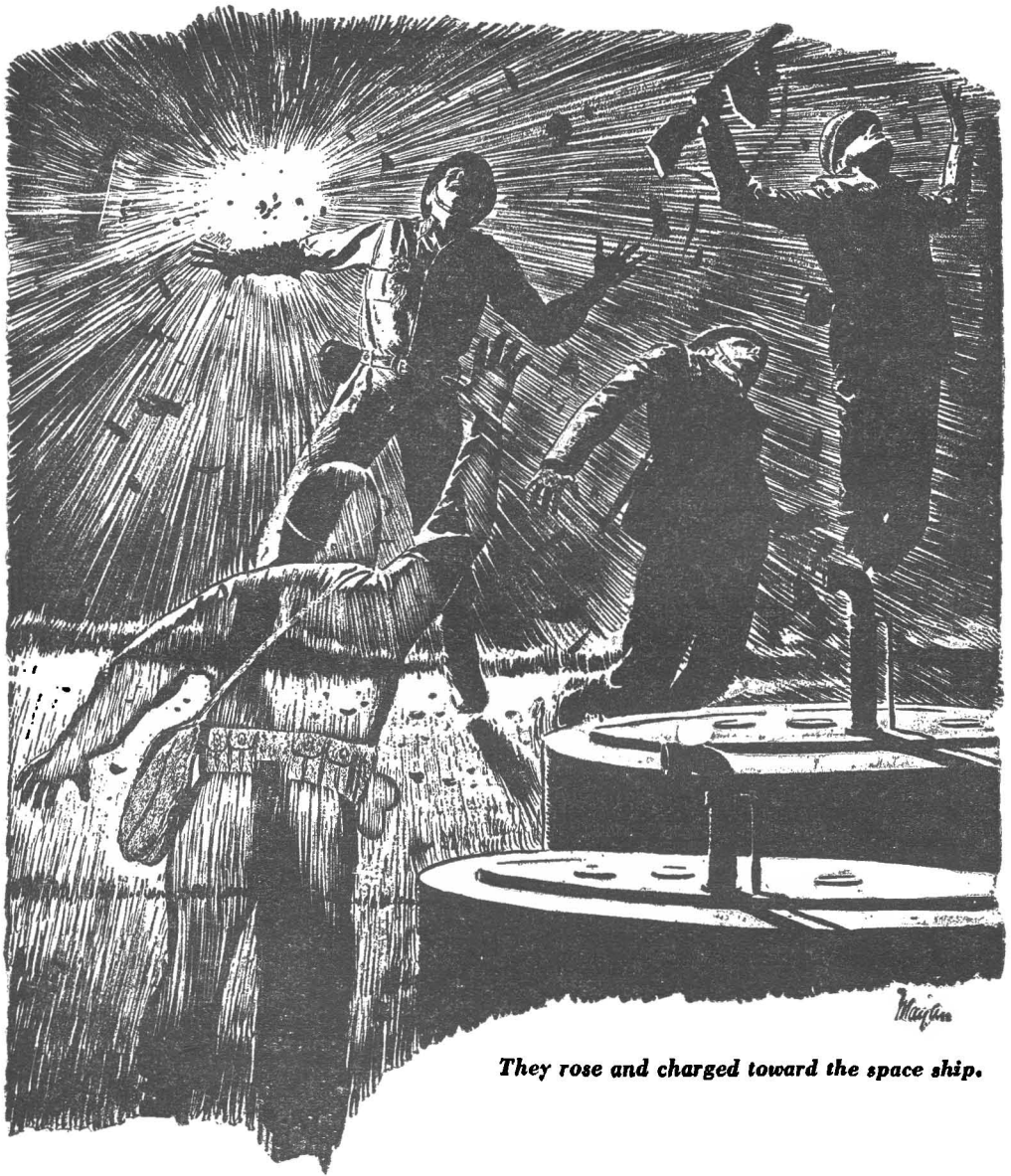
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Hostage of Tomorrow

By **ROBERT ABERNATHY**

Was Earth on the wrong time-track? Ray Manning stared as nation smashed nation and humans ran in yelping, slaving packs under a sky pulsing with evil energy—and knew the answer lay a hundred years back. Could he return?



They rose and charged toward the space ship.

IT WAS THE END OF MARCH, and the wreck of the Dritten Reich lay in colossal ruin across Europe, where people were only beginning to crawl out of their burrows to face the job of rebuilding a world for better or worse. In Germany itself, the Allied Armies, driving forward behind the iron spearheads of their aircraft and their armor, were closing in to smash the still-defiant nucleus of the old world that had been for worse.

One column consisted of two jeeps and a canvas-backed truck, bounding and

swerving at reckless speed over a rutted road that wound upward and deeper into the fir-shadowed Schwarzwald.

"Reconnaissance," grunted Ray Manning, between lurches of the transport truck. "They might have called it treasure hunting."

"Huh?" said Eddie Dugan, planted solidly and insensitively beside Manning on the jolting wooden seat. He took his eyes off the knees of the soldier opposite and searched his buddy's face. "What's the treasure?"

"Brains," explained Manning succinctly. "While the rest of the Seventh goes on handing body blows to the enemy, we're going after his gray matter. Brains are about the only article of value left in this bombed-out country. And Dr. Panraz Kahl has one of the best."

"What's he keeping it in these woods for?" Dugan glanced out at the receding park-like scenery, green now with spring.

"Unless the jerk they picked up back in Freiburg sold Intelligence a fairy story, the Herr Doktor had some kind of a hide-out here, where he was doing experiments—something that impressed the Nazis enough they were willing to finance him and leave him alone."

Dugan looked properly impressed. Of course, he had learned to expect such knowledge from Manning, who had been at M.I.T. and had managed to stay a combat soldier only by the grace of God and a lot of blarney . . . Dugan was still looking impressed when the truck scuffed tires to a halt. Then he was first man out, and the rest of the troops followed in seconds—they needed no telling to get out of a stationary vehicle.

"Road ends," somebody remarked. It did, in a loop that took it back the way they had come. The lieutenant in charge of the detachment swung out of the lead jeep and called them together under the trees.

"We'll have to spread out," declared the lieutenant. "Groups of three. That hideout ought to be within a mile of here. If you find it and there's resistance, keep shooting at intervals and wait for the rest. Remember, we've got to make captures this time, not kills."

The sergeant rattled off names and the groups formed swiftly and took off. Manning and Dugan, naturally, were two corners of one trio; its third was a corporal named White.

WITH Dugan as point, they advanced up a brush-grown ravine, using caution and cover, skirting the path that curved up the hill. They topped a saddle, and saw the house—a sprawling mountain lodge, built of logs by somebody with a passion for privacy, its roof well camou-

flaged now with synthetic greenery—not a hundred yards away up a slight slope rankly overgrown with grass. It looked deserted. Dugan had taken a few steps into the open before something—perhaps a far-away tinkle of breaking glass—warned him, and he went down smoothly in to the grass and rolled sideways toward a clump of young evergreens.

From the house came a splitting crack and a bullet hit the ground where he had been. Behind him, Manning jumped behind a comfortably thick tree-trunk, unslinging the automatic rifle he carried. But White was a moment too slow. The second bullet caught him as he turned, and he stumbled to his knees; two more shots rolled echoes down the ravine, and White collapsed on his face.

Manning sighted his automatic and gave the window from which the fire had come a short but intensive burst. The house was silent. He fired again at a venture; in answer, a bullet snapped past, coming from a different spot. There was more than one marksman up there, or one was moving fast.

From ahead came Dugan's voice, low-pitched but carrying. "Cover me, Ray. I'm gonna crawl around to the back."

"You damn fool, you don't know how many there are. Our guys'll be along in a few minutes."

"Hell with them," said Dugan. "Just cover me." He didn't mention White. But there was a compressed fury in his voice.

Manning sighed. "All right."

Dugan crawled like a weasel. Manning lost sight of him. He waited with humming nerves, firing spaced shots into the enemy's log fortress.

Then he noticed he had stopped drawing any return fire. That might mean things had started happening inside the house, if it wasn't a trick— He discarded most of his caution and darted into the open, zigzagging from scanty cover to cover—something must have happened inside—and flattened against the rustic wall beside one shattered window, just in time to hear a voice beyond it exclaim hoarsely, "*Gut!*"

That was all he wanted to know. If anything was going *gut* in there, it was

time Ray Manning got into the picture. He cleared the window-ledge with automatic level.

There was a big, raftered room, and in the middle of the floor Eddie Dugan was struggling groggily to get up, while behind him stood a white-goateed civilian with a wrench, and in front of him a tough-looking younger man was lifting a rifle.

The two Germans saw the gun in Manning's hands and made a tableau as they were. It was broken as the burly one's grip relaxed and his Mauser clattered on the floor.

Manning motioned toward the goatee. "Dr. Kahl? Better drop that," he advised in German.

The little physicist looked down at his wrench and let it fall with an expression of disgust. Then he glared at Manning and called him a couple of names culled from biology rather than physics. "If your man hadn't caught Wolfgang reloading—As it is, you have interrupted my work at the most crucial point imaginable—a work that might yet save the Reich—" He woke up to the nature of his audience, and finished lamely, "And which is in any case the greatest scientific advance of all time."

Dugan got shakily back to his feet, scooped up his dropped Browning, and trained it on Wolfgang. "Is that Kahl?" he inquired sourly. "If I'd known this guy wasn't the one we had to capture, I'd have let him have it when I first got the drop on him."

Manning didn't answer. His eyes roved rapidly about the interior, alert against another surprise entrance; but anybody else on the premises was lying pretty low. One, in fact, was doing it just under the window Manning had first fired at. He was no longer a factor.

One end of the room was storage space for the overflow of Kahl's electrical equipment. Manning recognized some of the articles there and read the labels on a couple of crates, but they gave him no clue to the Herr Doktor's world-shaking research. The door behind Kahl was ajar on a room that, from what showed, might be his laboratory . . .

THEY'D taken the required prisoner, and all duty called for now was a short wait until Intelligence took him off their hands. But Manning's curiosity was needed. Kahl wasn't modest about whatever he'd done—but his wrath at the "interruption" was genuine, and there might really be something here. The soldier in Manning fought a brief battle with the student, and lost.

"What is this work of yours?" He made his voice authoritatively crisp, over the automatic's steady muzzle.

Kahl glanced momentarily toward the open door, then glowered at the American for a long ten seconds. "It is not for barbarian eyes."

"So there's something worth seeing—or a booby trap, maybe?" said Manning to himself. Aloud he snapped, "Suppose you show us what's in that room. Ahead of me—no, let Wolfgang go first. Keep him covered, Eddie!"

Dugan hadn't been able to follow the conversation—his German was limited to "*Komm heraus mit die Hand in die Luft!*" and a few other useful expressions from the American Tourists' Phrase Book, 1945 edition—but he didn't question Manning's wisdom. He did a silent and highly efficient job of shepherding Wolfgang through the doorway, and stood well aside as Manning followed, preceded by a cowed-looking physicist.

Manning was all eyes for Kahl's invention; his first impression was that the room was disappointingly small and bare. There was nothing that looked like a rocket motor, a guided missile, or even an improved submarine periscope. But then the American's eyes narrowed as they took in what was there.

There were no windows, and walls, floor and ceiling were metal or sheathed with metal. Around them ran what looked like medium-thick pipes, without openings or discernible use. The only furniture was a table, supporting a rather fantastic electrical setup—stuff in the thousands of megacycles, judging by the heavy dielectric tubes and coils that were just a copper twist or two; that was what Manning had glimpsed from outside.

Then a movement jerked Manning's

gaze back to the prisoners—and he almost shot the Herr Doktor. For Kahl had contrived to halt near the apparatus-laden table, had taken one quick step and thrown a switch.

The damage—if damage there was—was already done; that thought stayed Manning's trigger finger. But nothing seemed to have happened; only when the contacts had touched the light had flickered briefly, and something had made a deep humming sound that rose in pitch like an electric motor starting under load—rose and snapped off in an instant.

But something stayed wrong. The unconscious faculty of observation that had been sharpened for Manning in shell-smashed towns where the ability to notice small wrongnesses might keep a man from touching off a hidden mine told him that . . . He tried to read the expressions of the two Germans. Every wrinkle on Kahl's face beamed crafty triumph. But his helper's look made Manning blink. Wolfgang's Aryan-blue eyes bulged with panic. And they were staring past Manning, at the door.

Eddie Dugan broke the tense silence. "Ray—where's the light coming from?"

That was it! "Watch them!" rasped Manning, and whirled to face the door.

It was ablaze with green-gold sunlight.

II

AND BEYOND IT WAS NOT THE gloomily rafted feast-hall of a Nazi baron, with gray March outside its windows—but a woodland rich with high summer. A breeze stole in from that preposterous outdoors and brought warmth and scent of firs, and of something else . . . Suddenly there was a crashing in the thicket, a thud of racing hooves. "A deer," said Manning stupidly. "Something must have scared it." Dugan, sweating with his back to the door, relaxed slightly.

Like an echo from behind Manning came a dry cackle of laughter. He faced about again; his glare stilled even the Herr Doktor's hysterical glee.

"All right, how'd you do it?" he snapped in English, then, with returning control: "*Erklaren Sie das sogleich!*"

"Gern," grinned the scientist. "This room, all of it, is my invention. It was built into the house, but when I closed the switch, it moved, and left the house behind."

"Where are we, then? No riddles!"

"It is simple enough. What you see outside is the world of the future—no longer future to us, but present, though about a hundred years removed from the 'present' which we have just left. This room is my time traveler—*der Kahl'sche Zeitfahrer!*"

Meantime Dugan had taken a look out the door. He said nothing, but his eyes grew larger and larger in a paling face. Manning told him, tersely and without comment, what Kahl claimed to have done; in his own mind he had already accepted it as truth, the only possible explanation for the seeming impossible. He said stonily to the German: "The demonstration of your invention is very interesting. But now we must deliver it to American Intelligence, who will appreciate your genius. Set the machine to take us back where we came from."

"I could not if I would," retorted Kahl. "Because of your interference, I had no opportunity to make adjustments. I merely threw the activating switch, and the *Zeitfahrer* exhausted its power before coming to a stop. You see, the switch is still closed. Only the field has collapsed as the batteries went dead."

There was a sound like a sob. It came from the hard-faced Wolfgang. The man's patent terror was more convincing than Kahl's assertions.

Manning eyed him coldly, inwardly surprised at his own reaction to the news that they were stranded. Perhaps he was still dazed by the incredible—but his chief emotion was a waxing excitement and wonder at the thought of seeing with his own eyes that world of the future about which people dreamed and speculated, cursing the shortness of their lives . . .

Dugan had guessed more than he had understood the meaning of Kahl's words. But to him the situation suggested more routine concerns.

"Say, Ray," he inquired, "do you suppose we're AWOL?"

"I don't think so," Manning choked down an impulse to wild laughter. "No more than a guy that's blown off his post by an 88. Anyway, I don't remember any General Order that says you've got to be in the right year. But our program now will have to be: get oriented in this place, this time, I mean, and dig up some fresh batteries to send this thing back to 1945. In the twenty-first century batteries shouldn't be scarce; we'll just have to be careful about contacting the natives, so we don't get tossed in jail or the booby hatch . . . To begin with, let's get out of here. This damn traveling vault is getting on my nerves." He motioned at Kahl and Wolfgang. "Outside."

Kahl didn't stir; his eyes narrowed slyly. "There is no sense in your treating us as prisoners, now. The war is ancient history."

"Until further notice," said Manning, "we'll continue as of 1945. Move!"

Grudgingly they moved. Kahl growled over his shoulder, "One thing does not seem to have occurred to you. This is *Germany* of the future, where Wolfgang and I are much more likely to find friends than you are."

MANNING did not answer. He had halted, stiffening, on the time machine's threshold, and sniffed the air critically. To him came sudden recognition of the scent which mingled, strengthening, with that of spruce and fir: a heavy, tarry odor of burning. He looked upwind. Through the rifts of the treetops were clearly visible clouds of black smoke, boiling upward against the blue sky. Flames flickered angrily beneath, and to Manning's ears came the faint but subtly all-pervasive crackling of the fire. It was drowned out briefly by the alarmed croakings of a flight of ravens that circled overhead and then flapped away, and in the relative stillness that followed another sound was audible—that of human voices, raised in shouts and commands.

"Looks like the local fire department's on the job," remarked Dugan.

"The fire!" exclaimed Kahl hoarsely. "It is blowing toward us—If it reaches the *Zeitfahrer*—"

"Guess the man's right," said Manning. "If that is the fire department, we'd better get in touch with them." All four started to run, quartering across the visible face of the blaze toward the voices' source.

They had covered a hundred yards when from ahead, sharp above the snapping flames, a shot spanged. The two Americans instinctively hugged the ground; Kahl and Wolfgang, in advance, froze and stared at the screen of firs. From just beyond exploded a violent fusillade, with the hasty clatter of automatic fire setting the tempo; and in the midst of all the shooting was the noise of a racing motor and a rackety whir that could come only from spinning propeller blades.

The sound rose and seemed to hang overhead. Manning looked up and thought for an instant that he glimpsed the dark moving shape of a flying thing; but when he looked straight at the spot there was nothing. A moment later he was conscious that the roar of the engine had ceased and with it the noise of firing. The crackle of the forest fire came as from far away to deafened ears.

Dugan and Manning looked blankly at one another. They got to their feet and stood in indecision.

"Damned if I know," said Manning bewilderedly. "For a minute I thought we'd landed in the middle of another war. Now I don't know whether it was real or—"

"*Halt!*" barked a keyed-up voice on their right. "*Still-gestanden, oder ich schieesse!*"

The man who had appeared from the bushes, despite the unfamiliar uniform he wore, was at least real. So was the tommy gun he trained on the group, and the look of vicious eagerness that twisted his face.

"*Das Gewehr fallen lassen!*" he shouted.

"Better drop it," said Manning quietly to his companion. "We don't know what the score is yet. And that guy *wants* to shoot."

Other uniformed figures appeared behind the first man. All of them were armed and looked excited and dangerous. But surprising was the caution, amounting to anxiety, with which they fanned out and kept their weapons leveled; they

seemed to expect some formidable and disconcerting counterattack from the disbanded and outnumbered captives.

The first arrival jerked a thumb toward the way he had come; his manner didn't encourage protest. And Manning, who had read science fiction stories, reflected that a time traveler's best bet was to keep his mouth shut.

Beyond the fir grove a meadow-like clearing opened up. Smoke was drifting across it and the fire licking at its edges, but that didn't seem to be what was bothering the men who swarmed about it. Some of them were squinting into the bright summer sky, nervously fingering guns, others arguing in loud groups. A crowd clustered about a helicopter which perched on the grass with slowly revolving vanes. Toward it the four prisoners were marched.

UNDER the intermittent shadow of the helicopter's blades a big man in curiously patterned civilian garments stood with arms akimbo, facing a soldier who was ramrod-stiff and obviously embarrassed before him.

"There was no chance, Herr Schwinzog," the latter was insisting. "They wore *Tarnkappen*, and they were inside the machine and had the engine going before we knew that anything was wrong. We fired on them as they rose, and they made the helicopter invisible. Of course, then it was too late to stop them—without shutting off the power over the whole district, and that would mean chaos—"

"Of course it was too late," said Herr Schwinzog biting, "since it was already too late when you started thinking. You may as well put your report in writing, Captain, and hope that your superiors don't see fit to demote you. For my part, I shall use my influence to see that they do."

He pivoted, grinding his heel into the turf, and snapped at the man at his elbow: "What is it?"

The soldier saluted jerkily. "Unauthorized persons, Herr Schwinzog. We apprehended four of them about two hundred meters to the northwest. Two were armed."

"Hum!" grunted the big man explosively. His eyes narrowed, coming to rest on the group of captives. His scrutiny was chillily penetrating. He held it on them while the shadows of the helicopter vanes swept across his face a dozen times. Then he said flatly, in slightly accented English: "You, no doubt, are Americans?"

Manning was silent, feeling the dream-sense of unreality overcome him again. That question tangled time and space—it and another thing: around the left arm of Schwinzog's oddly cut coat was a broad band, and in a circle on it sprawled a stark black swastika. A hundred years ago—if a hundred years *had* passed—American armies had been trampling that emblem in mud and blood.

But Dr. Pankraz Kahl burst out, "*Wir sind keine Amerikaner! Wir—*" including himself and Wolfgang with a sweep of the arm, "*sind Deutsche!*"

Schwinzog regarded him expressionlessly. "And you?" he turned abruptly on Manning and Dugan.

"We're Americans," said Manning steadily, in English. Schwinzog's face did not change. But something in the look with which he had received Kahl's statement had jangled an alarm in Manning's brain. And he was still determined to keep his mouth shut and his ears open as much as possible.

Immediately he knew he had been right; for Schwinzog turned again to Kahl. "You say you are German. Your citizen's card, then."

The Herr Doktor started automatically to fumble at a pocket, then paused and made a wry face. "I—we have no such papers as you want. Naturally, since we—"

"Since you are spies?" Schwinzog folded his arms and the fingers of his right hand caressed his swastika brassard.

"That is ridiculous!" shouted Kahl. "I am trying to explain to you that we are visitors from your past! We come from a hundred years ago!"

For the first time Schwinzog looked interested. "And how do you explain your presence in the year 2051 *nach der Zeitwende?*"

The scientist was soothed. "I am Dr.

Pankraz Kahl, member of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft, inventor of the world's first *Zeitfahrer*."

"A time traveler? A machine of some sort?"

"Of course."

"Then where is this machine?"

"Back there in the forest—the forest! The fire! It may have reached it—" Kahl plucked at Schwinzog's coatsleeve. "You must save my invention—"

The other shook him off. "When I see it I will save it."

"Come, then! Quick!"

THE FIRE had rolled farther into the forest; everywhere the evergreens were burning like torches. Sparks rained down from overhead as they approached the time traveler's resting place, and directly ahead the thicket was a sheet of flame. From Kahl came a wounded cry; he broke from the guards and dashed forward. Then he stopped as if he had run into a stone wall.

The soldiers closed up, weapons thrusting.

"But this is the place!" Kahl was muttering feverishly. "It was right there—" He pointed at the bare, smoldering grass.

The ten-foot metal cube of the time traveler had burned to feathery ash and drifted away on the breeze—or it had in some no less unbelievable fashion vanished utterly.

Schwinzog's smile was not good to see. "Of course there is nothing there," he nodded satisfiedly. "Lieutenant Kramer, arrest these men. They are American saboteurs, and will be tried as such tomorrow by the *Volksgericht*."

"We," Eddie Dugan summed up the situation, "are up the creek without a paddle."

"And we don't know where the creek is," added Manning. "Only that this is 2051, and the Nazis evidently either won the war or staged a comeback somehow after losing. Neither idea seems possible, but here we are. Item, America is still fighting Nazism—at least, there are 'American saboteurs.' Item two, we landed smack in the middle of a wasp nest stirred up by those same saboteurs. They must have

scored a success; did you see that building in the woods beyond that field?"

"What building?"

"I noticed it just as they were loading us into their armored paddy wagon. It had been a big place—already fallen in; the fire must have started there. And the boys that started it must have been the ones that German captain was talking about—the ones that wore Caps of Darkness and flew off in an invisible helicopter."

"I'm getting a headache," groaned Dugan.

"I'd like to meet them," said Manning thoughtfully.

They could not see each other, but they could talk between the adjoining cells. Kahl was in the cell on the other side of Manning's; he had raved most of the night at the guards and the equally responsive steel walls. The two Americans had slept long and refreshingly; they had long since learned to sleep under any and all conditions. There were no windows to show daylight, but they must have been there most of twenty-four hours.

They hadn't seen much of the world of the future, thought Manning ruefully; only the glimpse of a street filled with shiny silent automobiles and oddly garbed pedestrians, as they had been hustled from a rolling dungeon to a stationary one. But if the town was Freiburg, it had changed a lot since they had last seen it—a skeletonous waste of ruin, with nothing left standing that the American bombers had wanted to flatten.

"We shouldn't of let that go. Kahl talk so much," resumed Dugan gloomily.

"How could we stop him? Anyway, I have a feeling he talked himself in even deeper than he did us."

Their discussion was ended by a clatter of boots, the arrival of a bristling escort. They were being honored with treatment as danerous and important prisoners—a distinction less flattering than ominous.

THE "People's Court" before which they were being taken was obviously not the extralegal supreme court which Hitler had made into a bogey-man for scaring grown-up consciences to sleep; this was

a local affair, in the same building that housed the jail. All four prisoners were herded into a rather small chamber, innocent of audience or jury. Opposite the entrance, beneath a huge hooked-cross banner, three men in black robes sat behind a desk. Two of them were old men who regarded the defendants with dull, incurious eyes; between them, his bulk dominating and shriveling them, sat Herr Schwinzog.

Into the deathly silence a hoarse voice cried, "*Heil Hitler!*"

It was Wolfgang, his conditioned reflexes spurred by sight of the swastika flag. The Americans stared at him; it was the first words they had heard him speak—perhaps they were the only ones he knew. Herr Schwinzog raised his eyebrows.

"What did you say?"

"*Heil Hitler!*" repeated Wolfgang mechanically.

"What does 'Hitler' mean?" asked one of the old men curiously.

"I don't know," said the other old man. "Perhaps he is feigning insanity."

Kahl found his voice. "But this is monstrous nonsense!" he shrilled. "Is this not the *tausendjahrige Reich* that Hitler promised us—"

"Silence!" snapped Schwinzog, and the scientist quailed. "You are not here to plead or talk gibberish, but to hear sentence. Your case has been decided after thorough investigation." He fixed all the prisoners with a frigid gaze. "You Americans are capable of more cunning than most Germans give you credit for; I know that well, for I was a colonial administrator in your country for ten years. Your attempt to masquerade as 'time travelers' shows originality in the conception and thoroughness in the execution. Needless to say, nothing directly incriminating was found among your effects. The experts report that even the metal identification tags found on the two who call themselves Ray Manning and Edward Dugan are authentic reproductions of those used by the American army at the time of the Conquest.

"However, you made the mistake of using too much imagination in the effort to

confuse. Your story is too preposterous to be taken seriously, especially since our best scientists have declared time travel impracticable. Accordingly, we could sentence you to death for unauthorized presence inside the Reich and for evident complicity in the attempted sabotage of a German experimental station.

"In view of the absence of direct evidence of subversive actions, we have decided on leniency. The two prisoners, real names unknown, alias Pankraz Kahl and Wolfgang Muller—your claim to German citizenship has been checked with the central archive in Berlin and found to be false. Therefore I sentence you for the crime of imposture to five years in a concentration camp."

Kahl burst into a desperate, unheard babble of protest. At a wave of Schwinzog's hand the guards closed in. The Herr Doktor was dragged away bodily, shouting disjointedly about the blindness of the Philistines and Hitler's thousand years.

"As for you two," Schwinzog eyed Manning and Dugan with an oddly speculative air, "since you have admitted American nationality, your punishment is limited to immediate deportation—back to America."

They were more staggered than they would have been if he had said they would be executed for failure to wear monocles.

As the guards surrounded them, Schwinzog raised his hand, his face adorned by a mocking grin. "One more thing. You will be interested to know that the raid on the Black Forest experimental station missed its objective; the building destroyed was an unimportant storehouse. The actual refining plant is nowhere in the vicinity. The project of which your organization seems to be so well informed goes on as before and will be completed inside a week. You may carry the message to America: *One week to live.*"

III

THEY HAD LITTLE opportunity, during the airplane flight to Hamburg, to exchange impressions or theories; they were constantly under the eyes of

two nondescript, expressionless men who sat unblinking, with hands in the pockets of their civilian jackets.

Nor was it better after that; at Hamburg their watchdogs delivered them to another pair apparently shelled from the same pod. One of the first set passed the word laconically: "Two American spies. To be released in Neubebersdorf, by order of Gestapoleiter Schwinzog." And the new guards saw Manning and Dugan aboard a great transatlantic rocket.

It was from the rocket over Hamburg that they got their first real look at a twenty-first century metropolis. Only from twenty miles high could it be appreciated—the immense sweep of city in which straight-line highways connected innumerable village-like centers interspersed among the soft green of parks and woodlands, covering the broad plain of the Elbe mouth and sprawling away to the eastward to join with Lubeck across the base of the Danish peninsula. While they watched it, spellbound, in the mirror-ports, the fairy city sank away and vanished in the mist and shadow of evening; and the rocket ascended steadily and almost soundlessly into thinning layers of stratosphere, and the sun rose up in the west before it.

Manning fell covertly to studying the Germans who filled the seats of the pressure-cabin. Most of them were civilians; they had the subdued worried faces of suburban commuters on a train, and they looked quite oblivious to the wonder of their age, even to the miracle of the machine that was hurling them so swiftly and surely across the ocean. They didn't look like a *Herrenvolk*. Here and there were the color and brass gleam of uniforms, and with them went a tawdry arrogance, an overconscious effort to dominate and impress directed at the gray civilians and most of all, Manning observed, at the half-dozen nondescript women in the compartment.

Had these people conquered the world and planted themselves atop it?

And if so, what had they done with the rest of it? With America, for example—a German colony, Schwinzog had indicated . . . Defeated, enslaved . . .

Then Manning remembered that he had seen with his own eyes evidence that America had not been wholly defeated, even after a hundred years; that someone, somehow, was still fighting on. His heart leaped up.

He addressed one of the guards for the first time: "Where are we bound?"

"Neubebersdorf," said the man curtly. He glanced at his watch, and in lieu of further explanation, leaned forward and twirled a knob beneath the port beside them; the scene mirrored in it shifted and swung to straight ahead, and they could see the coast line that had appeared in the west and was sweeping rapidly nearer. There was a great island and a sound, and at the latter's narrowest point was concentrated a smudge of city, almost as vast as the Hamburg of this time, but dark and jumbled beneath the afternoon sun, lacking the German seaport's ordered spaciousness.

"Hey!" exclaimed Dugan. "That's New York!"

The Gestapoman looked at him in silent contempt.

"It is—or was," amended Manning sorrowfully. As the rocket plunged closer, they see that much of the city was in ruin. The downtown district, in particular, showed an unrelieved prospect of devastation, empty windows in walls standing or fallen, and fields of shattered blocks and debris, testifying to a tremendous destruction and an even greater neglect. Something had toppled the towers that had stood there, and no one had come to clear away their wreck.

MANNING turned from the window. Later on he would be curious to learn more of what German rule had meant to America—for the moment a sick feeling in his stomach told him he had seen enough.

On Long Island, however, where the ship landed, the desolation of New York was not in evidence; where Brooklyn had been was a German settlement, and there were fair dwellings, broad green lawns and trees, and smooth-paved streets along which shining traffic moved with the whisper of electric motors.

They saw this last outpost of the master race briefly as they were whisked through in a chauffeured car that had met the rocket; their destination lay across the river, where eroded heaps caricatured the skyline of Manhattan. Guards with machine guns passed them onto a narrow span that had replaced the vanished Triborough Bridge; and inside five minutes the car halted on the American shore. It stood with motor running, and one of the Gestapomen ordered, "Get out."

Manning and Dugan got out, feeling numb in mind and body, and looked at the waterfront. From the air nothing had been visible except the colossal ruin of the world's once greatest city; but from close by could be seen that which was far worse—the dwellings of its present inhabitants, sprung up among its rubble like the grass through the cracks of its pavements. The houses were less than peasant huts, built of stone and concrete fragments and rotting lumber, sometimes against the still-standing wall of a shattered building.

Some distance away a small crowd had collected and stood dumbly watching the activity about the gleaming vehicle that had come over the guarded bridge. Others peered from the doorways of the nearer huts. All were ragged and soiled and in their faces was the dull resignation of a beaten inferiority.

Those were the American natives of Neubeersdorf, which had been New York, U.S.A.—*magni nominis umbra* . . . Manning wondered, with a surge of horror and pity, what made them grub here to construct their dens on the edge of the desolate city, whence they could look across the water and see the abodes of German pride and power and luxury—was it merely envy, or the need to nourish an undying hatred? The blankness of the watching faces gave no answer.

The car door slammed. The machine swung about and purred swiftly away up the bridge approach.

Dugan stared after it and said softly, "What the hell!" And when Manning failed to answer: "Well, Ray, what now?"

The other passed a hand across his forehead. "I don't know. But maybe we'd better start looking for invisible men."

"Fine," said Dugan. "When I see one, I'll yell."

Manning glanced toward the ragged crowd that had watched their arrival; it was already beginning silently to disperse, losing interest. Most of the two soldiers' clothing had been given back to them, but minus such items as leggings and steel helmets their 1945 combat dress looked sufficiently unmilitary and nondescript.

"No use just standing here," said Manning. They started to walk, turning at random into a narrow street that crooked among the ruins. Then Manning began to talk in a lowered voice. "If I'm not badly off, we're going to be followed and watched. Obviously the Germans have taken us for somebody else, and they didn't ship us across like ambassadors out of the kindness of their hearts. They think we belong to an American underground, and what we do now—they figure—is lead them to it. I wouldn't be surprised if—Uh huh." He pulled a hand out of the pocket of his field jacket with a small bundle of paper—money. It was marks, stamped *Ausland*. "They even slipped us a stake to make sure we didn't have any trouble in getting to underground headquarters—with the goon squad on our heels."

"Well, at least we can eat. And I guess we can wander around, looking as ignorant as we are, and lead them a wild goose chase . . . That sounds like a hell of a life," Dugan appended glumly to his own description.

"You and me both. Sooner or later we've got to get in touch with whoever's still carrying on the war. Because the war's still going on, in spite of—this." He didn't gesture, and Dugan knew he meant more than the broken buildings around them—the broken look they had both seen in the eyes of the people.

"Sure we've got to," said Dugan fiercely. "But how?"

MANNING shrugged. Their footsteps echoed, died away, echoed again in the deserted street, which here, in what must be the heart of the destruction, was hardly more than a tunnel between leaning walls where tons of masonry still hung in the twisted steel frames. From

behind them the trick echoes brought briefly the sound of other footsteps. They were being followed, all right.

"If the Gestapo just knew it," muttered Dugan, "they'd come nearer what they're looking for if that guy was leading us."

Manning nodded somberly; then he drew sharp breath and looked at his companion with kindling eyes. "Maybe that's the answer to our problem, Eddie."

"What answer?"

"Just an idea—maybe there's nothing in it. But if I'm right, we'll meet the underground—and soon!"

"Okay," said Dugan. "Anything you say. But what do we do?"

"I think we can concentrate on digging up something to eat," said Manning judiciously. "The sun's still up here, but it's been all of eight hours since we had dinner."

They emerged at last, tired and hungry, from the labyrinth of total devastation into a more populous district—a squalid village sprung up amid the ruin of New York. Along the edges of its dusty main street, where no lights were lit against the descending dusk, stood or squatted the people, talking listlessly in low voices or merely staring at the passers-by. Before one of the larger groups Manning halted.

"There's a joint down the street says 'Eat'," Dugan nudged him.

"Wait." Manning faced the bunch of idlers and raised his voice. "Were any of you folks ever in Germany? It's a wonderful place. We just got back from there. They have beautiful cities with paved streets, millions of automobiles and helicopters and airplanes, with broadcast power to run them—"

"What are you giving us?" demanded a deep voice, its owner a blur in the twilight. "We know all that. And who the hell are you, anyway?"

"I know," insisted Manning. "I was in Germany only this morning."

A little, wrinkled man scurried out of a doorway and laid a protesting hand on Manning's arm. "You'd better shut up," he said sharply. "That's inflammatory talk, and it can get you in bad trouble."

"He's crazy," suggested another voice.

"I'm crazy," agreed Manning affably, and turned to go. Out of the tail of his eye he saw the little man go back inside, and he felt unreasonably optimistic.

"Now we can see about that chow," he told Dugan.

IV

THE INSIDE OF THE "EAT" WAS not attractive, nor was the food the slovenly waiter brought them. Dugan ate fervently. It didn't matter to him that America was no longer America, or that American coffee was no longer coffee.

But Manning dawdled. He had sat down with his back to the wall, so that his eyes could rove freely over the whole cramped interior; and he was all taut expectation. He was waiting for a sign.

Within ten minutes after their entry, three men had come in and sat down, two of them together. They might have been ordinary customers, but to Manning's covertly searching gaze they did not look sufficiently undernourished to be twenty-first century Americans. They looked like Germans.

The next arrivals were a youthful couple, and then for a while no one came in. Manning ordered another cup of "coffee." Then he got a shock.

For when he looked down, reaching for his cup, it was gone. He blinked, and it was there, solid, chipped and stained. He glanced briefly up at the unnoticing Dugan, then back to the cup—and there was no cup. And then there was, and he sat and squinted at it, struggling with a glimmer of understanding that this was what he had been waiting for.

Their table was for four. Out of the corner of his eye Manning thought he saw somebody sitting in the chair at his right. He turned his head quickly, and there was no one. The chair was empty. Too empty. His brain tried to crystalize that intuitive conviction, but failed.

He glanced sidelong at the suspiciously well-fed men. They sat morosely over glasses of what looked like beer, and paid no attention. But Manning knew that there was an invisible man in the room.

He sat hesitating over his next move,

when a voice screamed in his ear. It was a tiny thread of voice, not a whisper; it sounded like someone shouting frenetically over a bad telephone connection.

"Don't move," it commanded urgently. "I see you know I'm here beside you, and that you're being followed. Are you willing to follow instructions? If so, lay your right hand on the table."

Manning did so. The gnat-like voice shrilled, "All right. You leave here, turning left. Follow your nose and don't look back. About five minutes' walk will bring you to a bridge. Further instructions then. Act natural!"

Despite the final injunction, Manning hardly knew how they got out onto the street. Out of possible earshot of their shadows, he explained hurriedly to Dugan. "I thought they'd try to contact us. We have the Gestapo itself to thank for that, I'll bet. Even if it can't put the finger on the underground, it must know enough about them so that we were dumped off here for bait, it could let the word go out so that the underground would hear about us and grab at the bait right away. They didn't lose any agents on that raid in Germany, so they must have been pretty curious to learn that a couple of their men had been picked up on the scene and sent to New York! Now things are going to break."

The bridge loomed out of the darkness ahead. It was a wooden structure, crossing a narrow creek. Midway of the echoing span, they paused, and Manning pricked up his ears. He was not disappointed. The invisible presence said, "Good. I trust you can both swim? All right—drop over the railing, and swim straight back to the shore you just left, only come out under the bridge. I'll meet you there. Good luck!"

They looked at each other. "I heard him," Dugan said, and without more words placed a hand on the rickety railing and vaulted out over the black water. Manning gave him a few seconds to get clear, and followed. He came up clinging to his orientation, and struck out; when he splashed ashore, Dugan was already shaking himself on the narrow strip of sand below the bank.

AND a third man emerged abruptly from the shadow of the bridge piles. He was an ordinary-looking man in a worn leather jacket and patched trousers, but his face was masked by a dark hood, blank save for eye-slits, and on his back he carried something like a small pack with two small levers protruding. In his right hand was a pistol, and in his left a bundle; he dropped the latter on the ground and stepped back.

"Put those on," he hissed. "Quick, before they get here!"

The bundle was two outfits such as the stranger wore. They donned them as instructed; the hoods were stiff with wire, and connected by a flexible cord to the packs. Manning eyed the gun speculatively; the masked man explained softly, "It's not that I don't trust you, but those gadgets are too valuable to take *any* chances with. They're invisibility units. Start them by pressing here." He pulled down one of the levers on his pack; he seemed to blur slightly, but they could still see him. "The headgear insulates you pretty well from the effect. Go on, start those units!" Heavy feet were thundering overhead on the bridge planks.

They obeyed; the packs made a faint hum. The stranger relaxed visibly. "Now we're okay," he said in a normal voice. "By the time they catch on, we'll be a long way from here."

Directly above, an angry snarl: "*Sie sind grade ins Wasser gesprungen! Wer hatte erwartet—*"

Somebody else answered, "*Vielleicht wird ein Boot dort unten gelegen haben.*"

"Good guessing," approved the masked man cheerfully. He motioned Manning and Dugan toward where a small skiff lay beached between the piles. "Help me launch this. First, though, turn your units up to full power—like this—so they'll cover the boat.

Manning was startled at the man's bravado; as all three laid hold of the boat, he whispered anxiously, "Won't they hear —"

"Not if we shouted our heads off," the other answered. "With these units going, we're not only invisible, but inaudible and practically intangible. I've walked through

a cordon that was closing in on me with linked arms." He sprang nimbly into the bow of the boat. "Grab an oar, you two, and make yourselves useful. I've been through a lot of trouble on your account." He seemed to decide that introductions were finally in order. "My name's Jerry Kane. At any rate, it's my favorite alias."

Manning and Dugan named themselves and fell to rowing. "Downstream," said Kane, and he gazed back at the bridge with interest as they pulled away. Manning glanced back over his shoulder; there were dark figures swarming on the bridge, and lights, and a car had stopped there; even as he looked a searchlight beam swayed out across the water, moving systematically back and forth. For a moment it fell full upon the rowboat, and Manning ducked involuntarily; but the light passed on and there was no outcry, no shots came.

Manning said hoarsely, "That light was on us! It didn't go through us, or anything of the sort. A body that reflects light is visible. So how the devil——"

"We're not optically invisible," answered Kane amusedly. "So far as I know, that's a physical impossibility. Actually, those Germans saw us, but they didn't notice us. Ever catch yourself looking right at something and not seeing it, because it was too familiar or because you were thinking about something else? That's the effect the field has. Anything in the middle of it hides behind a psychic block in the mind of whoever looks at it. That's why it works on hearing, too, and even on touch. It's not perfect; if you set off a magnesium flare in front of somebody, or punched him in the nose, he'd notice something was up—but hardly before. When you get acquainted with the effect it makes you feel like a ghost. Back in that cafe, I had to shout in your ear till I deafened myself before I could make you hear."

THEY glided down the current, and the lights and voices around the bridge receded rapidly. As Manning bent to his oar, his imagination was busy with the first item of twenty-first century technology which went completely beyond his twentieth-century knowledge. In Germany he had seen the evidences of a

mighty and advanced civilization, but everything had been the logical perfection of inventions already known . . .

Kane seemed to read his thoughts. "Working like we do, we can't compete with the Germans in things that call for a lot of resources and equipment. They have all the big weapons—the rockets and tanks and atomic bombs. For anything to be useful to us, it has to be something that can be invented and built in a cellar. So we've had to open up brand-new lines of development—and in fields like psychoelectronics we're miles ahead of the Germans, because they didn't have to . . . Better pull over. We don't want to get rammed," he interrupted himself.

A blinding eye was bearing down on them across the water. In its stark glare Manning felt nakedly visible again. But they veered sharply toward the bank, and the launch went past in a swish of foam, still scanning river and shore ahead.

"Where we going?" Dugan asked practically.

"We're about there," answered Kane. "Easy now." He pointed to where a jumble of ruins projected like a pier into the stream, the ripples lapping and gurgling in the spaces between the great piled fragments. "In there—the only space big enough for the boat. Better duck." Their craft slid with scant clearance into an opening like the mouth of a cave. Kane produced a flashlight, and they saw that a timbered tunnel ran back into the bank at right angles to the entrance.

"Up to the end," ordered Kane. They poled with oar-thrusts against the tunnel sides for a score of yards, until the boat bumped against a wooden platform at the end of the shaft. Kane sprang ashore and made fast, and the others followed. The flashlight beam searched out a trapdoor; below it were stairs that led downward. At the bottom they trod on cement, and there was another door, on which Kane knocked in a deliberate pattern.

Presently a bolt was shot back, and the door swung open. The man who opened it was hooded and it was a little hard to keep him in sight, even for those likewise protected. When he saw Kane, however, he switched off his invisibility unit. The

new arrivals did likewise, and all of them slipped off their stifling hoods with relief.

Jerry Kane had a surprisingly youthful and unlined face, topped with curly blond hair which women must have loved to run their fingers through. He didn't look much like an underground plotter. The man who had opened the door fitted the role better; he was gaunt, blue-jawed and dour.

The room they had entered had begun life as a basement; it was big, concrete-walled, ill-lit by an electric bulb dangling from the low ceiling, its furnishings a long table and a number of chairs which indicated its use as a gathering-place for a good many people. The only other person in it now was a massive man who sat at the table, an open book spread out before him, and stared unblinkingly at those who had come in.

"Most of our regular agents are out—looking for you," Kane remarked. He waved them to seats, and sat down himself on the table's end. "However, we have here Harry Clark"—the blue-jawed man—"and Igor Vzryvov, one of the Russian members."

Clark nodded noncommittally. The big Russian rumbled in faintly accented English: "Pleased to meet you. I have never met any time travelers before."

They stared at him. Manning turned on Kane: "You know about us?"

Kane grinned. "You told the Germans you came out of the past. At least, that's what was reported in the camera session of the court which passed on your case this morning. One of our friends happened to be there—and at your trial, later on."

"Was there an invisible man *there*?"

"No, he was visible and you saw him. Remember two elderly jurists who served as a sounding board for Gestapoleiter Schwinzog?. One of them is a friend of ours. We have a good many, even inside Germany."

"He calls them friends," growled Igor Vzryvov. "I say no German can be a friend."

"So——" Manning was numbed by surprise. "So you've had your eye on us from the start."

"Just about."

"And you believe our story?"

"Since the Germans didn't, I'm inclined to," admitted Kane. "We know that more things are possible than German imagination can swallow; we've got several such things here. Of course, it's always just possible that you're German spies, using a crazy wheels-within-wheels stunt to get on the inside. I don't think so, though, and fortunately I don't have to guess." He turned to Vzryvov. "Got the apparatus set up?"

"Since an hour ago," said the Russian.

Kane slid off the table top. He became brusque. "If you'll just step into the next room, we'll read your minds and settle all doubts."

FIFTEEN MINUTES later, Igor Vzryvov switched off the psychoanalyzer. Manning glanced up under the spidery hemisphere of wire that gathered the faint broadcasts of the brain, and met Kane's warm smile. The underground leader tossed aside the graphs he had been studying, and extended a welcoming hand.

"You're genuine, all right. No need to examine your friend—your mind says he came with you out of the past, and that's enough and to spare."

"Swell!" said Dugan. "I didn't much like the idea of having that thing poking around inside my head."

Kane caressed the machine affectionately. "This is one of the best achievements of cellar science. Thanks to it, we've got the only leak-proof organization this sinful world has ever seen. The Nazi party is one of the tightest setups ever created without benefit of the psychoanalyzer, and we've got men inside it—but we *know* that all our members are loyal and stable." His expression darkened. "Of course, if this and our other psychoelectronic developments got into German hands, we'd be sunk. With their resources, they could exploit the field a lot more thoroughly than we can. For example, Igor here has invented a death ray that kills by just convincing a man he's dead—but to make it an effective weapon would take a lot more power. We get a good deal of leakage here from the Long Island station, but we have to be careful about antennas."

The four of them sat around the table in the outer room. Harry Clark had disappeared—literally, and then gone out to pass the word to the agents scattered around New York that the men they sought had been found.

"Now," said Kane, "since you're really time travelers, I'm on fire to hear how you did it. A time machine might be a useful addition to our arsenal, though it sounds like a tricky thing to use . . ."

"I'm afraid we can't help on that score," said Manning, and related the whole story of their experience with Herr Doktor Kahl's *Zeitfahrer*.

Kane rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "So you're stranded in our time. I feel for you! At least the Germans didn't get the machine, either—though they have got the inventor. We may have to do something about that. And what about you? Have any plans?"

Manning met his eyes squarely. "A hundred years ago, we were fighting a war. It seems we lost it—how or why, I don't know. I don't think we lost it in the fighting, but probably before it ever began, when we were complacent and let the Germans get a head start in preparation and invention. Anyway, for us that's still unfinished business."

"And we'd like the chance to finish it!" stated Dugan bluntly.

Kane smiled with a touch of sadness. Vzryvov said explosively, "The end may be soon!" and his eyes burned.

In Manning's memory flashed the vision of a mocking face. He asked abruptly: "What did Schwinzog mean: 'A message for America—one week to live'?"

The shadow on Kane's face deepened, but he did not show surprise. "I guess he meant just that. That the Germans are about ready to do to America what they did to Russia fifty years ago . . . But of course you don't know anything about the history of the last century. If you want to catch up on the missing chapters, I've got a fair-sized collection of books on the subject. All the ones dealing with events since the War of the Conquest are German, of course—English has just about stopped being a written language—and you'll probably find they don't even agree

on what you know. You said, didn't you, that you were with an American army advancing into Germany?"

"That's right—and it was only one of several."

Kane grinned wryly. "The books don't even whisper that Germany was ever invaded in that war. They must have been a lot closer to defeat than they've ever admitted since. But—" he shrugged, "they won in the end, so what's the difference?"

"How could they win?" scowled Dugan. "Hell, we had them on the run!"

KANE gave him a pitying look. "You must have left some time before the Germans suddenly rose from the ashes and struck back at us. They attacked us with a new weapon—a radioactive dust, by-product of several big piles—atomic power plants—they had secretly got going by 1949. The occupation forces were wiped out—along with a million or so of their own people. In no time Western Europe was overrun again. The whole of Soviet Russia seems to have collapsed about the same time." He looked down at his hands, clasped on the table in front of him; his voice went on with the dispassionate recital of the dead past. "There was an attempt to defend England that folded up when London was dusted off the map. I haven't been able to find much information on the war in Asia, but I think they had a long tough fight putting down guerrilla resistance in Siberia and later on in China.

"Then came the attack on America, and for that they used the dust in combination with another ace in the hole—their own atomic bombs. The first one was dropped right here, on New York. It flattened five or six square miles and killed about half a million people. The defenses that we'd devised against the dust—inadequate as they must have been, because there isn't any real defense—were neutralized by the bomb. America fought for just one month, and after that there wasn't any United States—just a disorganized mob of survivors, dazed by the cities' destruction and the sterilization of big stretches of countryside.

"Germany proclaimed the New Order over the face of the whole Earth—humanity to submit to the leadership of the Ger-

man Volk, its highest evolutionary type. Everywhere the nations surrendered without a fight.

"Since the Conquest there's been only one serious, organized rebellion in this country; that was in the year two thousand, fifty-one years ago. The Germans put it down with bombs and poison; a lot of innocent people were killed, and for a long time after that it was impossible to organize any resistance. Since our movement got started twenty years ago, we've been damn careful not to goad the Germans into making a wholesale slaughter. "Now——" His face twisted in pain

"They've decided to anyway?" asked Manning with studied calm.

"As a matter of policy, not revenge. You see, for a while after the Conquest they had a lot of use for slave labor, so the subject peoples were valuable to them; but now that they have plenty of atomic power, running nearly automatic factories and mechanized farms to supply all their needs and luxuries, the rest of the Earth's population looks to them like so much excess baggage. All they have use for is land, *Lebensraum* for their own growing people. They've calculated that the whole Earth could be covered by Germans by 2500 A. D. As far as they're concerned the rest of us can rot or starve—and we do; but we don't die out! So—they murdered Russia fifty years ago—that was what touched off the rising here—and we're next!"

Manning said unbelievably, "What do you mean—'murdered'?"

"The technical term is 'genocide.' They did it with guns and gas and, when necessary, the atomic dust. It's quite a job to wipe out a whole nation, and the Germans bungled Russia pretty badly and met a lot of stiffer resistance than they expected, and a lot of people—such as Igor's parents—got away to other countries. But since then they've made improvements in the method.

"Sometime soon, in a few days, maybe—a rocket will take off for somewhere in Germany and proceed to a point in space about fifty thousand miles from the Earth. There it will discharge fifteen hundred metric tons of radioactive dust—a new mixture of ingredients having a few days' half

life, for initial devastating effect, and of others with a period of about a year—to take care of anybody that tries to sit it out underground. The dust will drift toward Earth in an expanding cloud, whose size and shape they've calculated down to the last decimal, and which, when it falls on Earth's surface, will cover an area a little larger than the United States. It will be spread thin by then—about one gram to the acre—but that will be enough."

MANNING sat silent. The idea of these new ways of all-compassing destruction was too much for a mind that had learned to regard high explosives, machine guns and flame throwers as adequately murderous. And the plan for exterminating a nation was too monstrous to think about, unless in the same light as it must be seen by the minds that conceived it—as something like dusting a field of grain to kill off insects whose only crime is that they eat what men want to eat.

"And you've known about this, and haven't stopped it?" he asked at last.

"They've been busy making and refining the dust for a year now, and we've known about it almost that long. And we've tried to stop them.

"We've tried to assassinate the men responsible for the plan. But the ruling clique, like your acquaintance, Schwinzog, aren't under any illusions and they aren't going to yield any power. We've tried to get them and mostly failed.

"Finally, one of our men got inside the Reichministerium fur Raumschiffahrt and learned that the space ship *Siegfried* had been assigned for conversion to the uses of the project. The raid you stumbled into was trying to locate and destroy it, but they didn't find it and blew up a building instead. That's our last chance even to gain time—if we can't wreck the dust ship, I don't know what we can do."

Igor Vzryvov broke his brooding silence. "You will do as we did," he proclaimed with flat conviction. "Save what you can of your organization by flight to other lands, whence you will carry on the fight—to the death, without the crippling reservations imposed by millions of hostages."

Kane looked at him with smoldering

eyes. "What would be left to fight for?"

"Wait and see," insisted the Russian implacably. "You will really begin to fight when there is no more America to be saved, only Germany to be destroyed."

Manning put in hastily, "Your men didn't locate the—space ship. How do you know it's even in the Black Forest?"

Kane frowned, then shrugged. "We don't. But there's nowhere else it can be. We've checked every spaceport in the Reich."

"Maybe it's outside Germany."

"There aren't any ports in the subject countries. And if one had been built, and the *Siegfried* landed there—well, it simply couldn't have been done inconspicuously. We have psychoelectronic communicators scattered over the whole world, and what's more important, the best grapevine connections. We'd have heard."

"What about the polar regions? Antarctica?"

"I guess it would be technically possible—though enormously difficult and expensive—to build a spaceport there. But it just isn't reasonable. They aren't that scared of our interference."

Manning bit his lip. "One little thing," he murmured, half to himself, "makes me think that ship isn't in the Schwarzwald at all. Herr Schwinzog gloated that your raid missed the refining plant; he must have forgotten for a moment that you're supposed to believe the space ship is there too . . ." Abruptly he raised his head. "Listen—maybe there's one part of Germany you didn't investigate."

"What do you mean?"

"Where Eddie and I were just this afternoon. Long Island."

KANE and Vzryvov looked at him with wild surmise. "You might be right," Kane said jerkily. "There's a field there that would do. But a space ship landing would have been seen for hundreds of miles—" His eyes widened with a sudden idea. "They needn't have landed it there, though. They could have brought it down in the ocean, and towed it in!"

"Sure," said Manning, though he hadn't thought of that. "An amphibious operation. The island's well-guarded?"

"Suspiciously so, now that you mention it. We don't have a single agent there—we've been concentrating on the expeditionary force in Europe, of course, and we've supposed the additional Long Island defenses were merely installed in fear of an attack on the German colony, when the people hear— But that could be it! They could have hidden the ship under our noses!"

He sprang to his feet; he wore a look almost of gaiety, but his eyes held feverish lights. "If we could only start after it tonight! But this things calls for preparation. They'll be ready for anything, invisibility units included . . . But we've got to try tomorrow night. If the ship is there—it may not be much longer."

Manning and Dugan exchanged glances. Manning said pointblank: "Are we in on this deal? We were soldiers in our own time, and—Americans . . ."

Reading Kane's face, he realized he hadn't needed to ask.

V

THE BOAT SLIPPED silently, impelled by muffled oars, toward the shore that lay dark and seemingly lifeless a furlong away. The underground in New York had a couple of motor launches—but there might be sound detectors on that shore, which would not be fooled by the powerful invisibility unit that purred quietly, clamped to a thwart amidships. So they rowed.

The boat was laden with men, weapons, and explosives. The men were monstrous-headed shapes, for they wore gas masks under the featureless hoods; but the poised alertness of Kane's figure, upright in the bow as he scanned the black shore and called soft directions to Vzryvov at the steering oar, expressed all their eager anxiety on the threshold of decision. Manning and Dugan sat side by side; in front of the former was lanky Clark, and beside him a chemist named Larrabie, who clasped between his knees a box full of bombs of his own making—canisters of a versatile compound which with a detonator had the violence of TNT, without one was an excellent substitute for thermite.

Manning had to remember that he had once taken part in another landing on a conquered shore—Normandy in 1944, when the air had been full of planes and the sea of ships, and the invasion had rolled ashore like a resistless juggernaut . . . If those millions had failed, what could six men in a rowboat do?

The night before, in the room Kane had given them, Manning had lain long sleepless, and passed the time turning through Kane's books of history—titles like *Aufstieg Deutschlands zur Weltherrschaft*, *Eroberung der Erde*, *Das deutsche Jahrhundert*. One thing about the oddly twisted story they told had piqued his curiosity, and he had sought earnestly before he found mention—in a footnote—of the fact that one Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) had occupied the civic office of Reichskanzler (later abolished) at the time of the Conquest. But the leaders of that period, according to the histories, had been the generals and military men such as Rundstedt, Rommel, Keitel and Doenitz.

The future had obviously not gone according to anybody's plans made prior to 1949. A new factor had come in—the monstrous reality of atomic weapons, which had suddenly made it possible for a few men in one nation to hold the threat of death over all life on Earth. America had had them first and had used them to subdue Japan. But the German onslaught had been too swift; the combination of atomic dust and atomic bombs had paralyzed the U. S. A. before she could strike back.

"Up oars," whispered Kane. The boat glided forward the last few yards as the dripping oars rose over the water, then sand crunched under the keel.

Cautiously they sloshed ashore. Vzryvov knelt in the boat for half a minute, working with wires and one of Larrabie's compact bundles of death—booby-trapping the priceless invisibility unit against possible discovery.

Each man carried a slung automatic rifle, three bombs, and a long knife. An invisible man could kill with a knife in the midst of a crowd and walk away before anyone noticed.

They started moving without time wasted

in consultation or casting about. All had studied the available maps of the area until their eyes smarted; and the moon was up, which for them was a special advantage.

THIS stretch of shore was occupied by the sea-side villas of the German masters; it was a good hour's walk from the main colony and the rocket port. The Germans could hardly have protected the whole coastline with automatic alarms.

As they topped the seaward slope, though, from not far distant, where a house bulked in the shadow, exploded the barking of a watchdog. The raiders froze; Kane swore perfunctorily and said shortly, "Push on. Dogs can see us, or at least scent us. That one doesn't seem to have raised anybody yet—"

They pushed on, tramping across meadows and through woods, steering clear of the roads that might be watched by electric eyes—as the rocket port must be without doubt, if the dust ship was there.

Half a mile from the German colony, in sight of its lights and their glimmering reflection in the water of the East River, a high fence barred their way. It was plain wire, stretching to right and left out of sight—probably across the whole island.

"That wasn't on the map," said Dugan. "Of course not," responded Kane. "That's the first line of defense. Touch it, and you'd alert the whole place." He didn't look unhappy about it, judging by the flash of his grin in the moonlight. "Brother, I think we've come to the right address!"

Vzryvov remarked imperturbably, "The road must pass through it yonder." He gestured to where an occasional moving light picked out the highway.

"Right," said Kane. They set out along the fence, keeping at a respectful distance from the wire.

The highway entrance was floodlighted and visibly protected by movable arms like those used at grade crossings. These, together with the sleepy squad of German soldiers that stood guard beyond the fence, would not have given pause to the invisible men. But there had to be invisible defenses too.

They waited on the shoulder of the incoming traffic lane. Manning and Dugan could scarcely quell the jittery feeling of being exposed in plain view of the enemy, but the others were unconcerned.

"We've got to hitch a ride," explained Kane softly. "Just passing through behind a vehicle wouldn't be good enough, you can bet . . ."

A car came rushing out of the darkness and swooped to a stop with screaming tires. It was a gleaming pleasure machine, transparent plastic top flung back to let the night air cool the heated faces of three young couples that occupied it, evidently on their way to continue in town a party that had outgrown the facilities of the countryside.

"Get a good look at their admission procedure," said Kane.

The guards bestirred themselves; one operated the gate mechanism, the rest surrounded the car, grasping shining steel blades on long shafts, barbed like medieval halberds. They swung their archaic weapons around and over the car, hacking the air viciously. The girls in the car squealed and snuggled as the driver eased forward under an interlocked arch of steel.

Manning said, "They're watching for us, all right!"

Kane nodded, then tensed as another automobile rolled up and stopped. "This one's O. K." he said aloud. "Quick, now—get inside it!"

They went forward in a pellmell rush. Kane eased open a back door of the car—a sedan with a lone man at the wheel—and all six of them squeezed themselves into the back seat, pulling the door quietly to after them. They held their breath, but there was no cry of surprise or alarm. The soldiers went routinely but thoroughly through the ritual of halberds! any invisible man clinging to the outside of the vehicle would have had to drop off or be dragged into the wicked blades.

THE CAR rolled through the gate and picked up speed with the violent surge of an electric motor. The man hunched in the front seat drove with businesslike concentration, oblivious of his six unwanted passengers. The raiders grinned

at each other, shifted their cramped positions a little and waited.

Presently the town's lights began to swim past. Kane, in a position to see out the left-hand window, muttered: "We're passing the rocket field—they've thrown a brand-new wall around it. If this guy would just slow down—well, we've got to stop the car." He wriggled up until he could lean over the front seat—and stiffened. All of them heard, the moan of a siren closing up behind..

"*Donnerwetter!*" growled their chauffeur, and clamped on the brakes. A few feet behind loomed up a pair of headlights and a searchlight helped bathe the car ahead in a merciless illumination.

"Out!" said Kane sharply, flinging open the left-hand door.

They sprawled out and ran, stooping instinctively, through the patch of brilliance. Uniformed Germans were climbing out of the other vehicle and starting to form a cordon.

Dugan, the last man out, halted a moment to close the car door, then sprinted after the rest. They huddled against the forbidding wall that had been built around the rocket port. Larrabie, eyes on the brightlit scene, nervously hefted a bomb. Kane shook his head.

"Time enough to make big noises when we get inside," he advised. And to the whole party, "I spotted an entrance a couple of hundred yards back. Come on!"

They ran in single file under the frowning face of concrete. It might have been possible to form a human chain and get over the wall; but there was unquestionably alarms atop it, and ready guns.

Beyond the wall, a whistle began hooting. The field was being alerted.

Kane panted, "Don't know what tipped them off—but probably we were photographed at that gate."

The entrance to the field was solidly blocked by a massive iron grille. Beyond it, they could see men running and springing into position behind a concrete redoubt, through which a machine gun thrust menacingly, covering the opening in the wall.

"Damn!" said Kane. "No more time to be subtle. We'll have to knock that out."

Eddie Dugan was already unhitching

one of the home-made grenades from his belt. "Stand out of line with the gate," he said grimly, "and I'll get it for you." He gauged the distance and the weight of the bomb and threw with trained precision. The missile rose in a high arc like a mortar shell's, and hit the ground almost as Dugan did in his drive for cover. Fragments of shattered concrete and metal clanged against the grillework and whistled out into the street. A crash of glass and frightened screams came from the houses across the way; and down the street the patrol-car siren wailed suddenly into life again.

Kane sprang to his feet, verifying with a glance the emplacement's destruction, and hurled another bomb at the gateway. Its explosion was blinding, but a moment later they saw the way clear, the grille blown off its hinges and twisted like spaghetti. Simultaneously a rattle of shots, insignificant-sounding after the deafening blasts of high explosive, told that the patrol car, racing its motor up the street, had opened fire on the entrance.

Clark was down on one knee, finger closing on the trigger of his automatic. The oncoming car skidded and spun half around. Two men spilled out and fled for cover; Clark dropped one and missed the other.

THE big noises had begun, and speed was the big thing now. The raiders dashed headlong through the wrecked gateway.

"Get clear!" shouted Kane, and on the heels of his cry came the sputter of machine-gun fire, first from one side of the entrance and then from the other. Puffs of dust sprang out of the wall and ricochets whined plaintively. Other guard posts were covering the breach, but the German gunners must have hesitated before firing without a target, and they were seconds too late.

The Americans crouched, half-sheltered by the ruined emplacement. To the right from a cluster of buildings, the warning whistle shrieked hoarsely on, and they heard through the incessant gunfire the noises of excited voices. Ahead of them stretched the wide, seared waste of the

rocket field, its boundaries invisible in the darkness.

"We're in," breathed Kane, "and there's the ship!"

Out on the field, far from all structures, it towered upright, its blunt nose five hundred feet above the blackened earth. Even though no light shone on or from it, they could recognize its lines as those of the vessel whose stolen plans they had gone over point by point—*Siegfried*, the dust ship.

"They must have raised it to launching position only tonight," said Kane harshly. "Otherwise we could have seen it from across the river. So—it must be loaded and ready to go!"

A thousand feet of open and empty field separated them from the space ship. With straining eyes they could see tiny human figures scurrying about its base in the moonlight, forming a protective circle. Then floodlights went on all over the field and left not a shadow anywhere. The Germans knew, or feared, that the invisible attackers had slipped inside their citadel.

The rain of steel on the gateway had stopped; instead came dull thudding concussions, and a creeping haze obscured the entrance. Gas.

They had prepared for that. But now a more formidable threat made itself known; from near the buildings came a frenzied barking of dogs.

"We've got to get across the open," snapped Kane. "Better stick together and run for it. If we can get among that gang around the ship—neither dogs nor instruments can tell the difference between visible and invisible men!"

They rose from their cover and pelted grimly across the endless-seeming field. To the right, parties of men with dogs were fanning out, too slowly to intercept the raiders. But they were only halfway to the ship when the lights suddenly snapped off—for a moment they stumbled, blinded, in darkness, and the lights flashed dazzlingly on again. A couple of seconds later the puzzling action was repeated—

And from the cordon about the ship, so near now, a voice screamed hysterically, "*Da lauft einer!*" On its heels came a

thunder of shooting, and bullets snapped past the hurrying Americans.

They flung themselves flat on the scorched ground. The lights flashed again and again as if an insane hand were at the master switch. "What's happened?" gasped Manning. "Did they see us?"

"They've learned or guessed one of our weaknesses," said Kane in his ear. "When the whole field of vision is suddenly illuminated, the brain may register an invisible object, especially if it's moving, for a moment before it melts into the background." Something whimpered in the air and burst with an ear-splitting bang only a few yards away, showering the raiders with earth. "They've got our position. Get going—*now!*" as the lights flashed on.

Kane's fingers had been busy fusing a bomb, and as he rose erect he threw it straight into the cordon. The crash of the explosion was followed by shrieks and then, as the lights flashed on again, by a prolonged volley of shots.

Larrabie spung around in midstride and

rolled on the ground. The long-legged Clark flung out his arm and pitched forward. "Get the——" His voice choked off.

THE survivors charged at the gap where the bomb had wrought bloody havoc. The Germans were closing it from the sides. Manning caught a glimpse of sweating faces, staring eyes glazed with fear of an enemy they could not see; and he saw also the vast loom of the space ship above him. He fumbled woodenly with a detonator cartridge.

Kane's fingers bit into his arm. "Into the ship!" he rasped. "You'd never dent it." Nothing was between the invaders and the hull, where an open airlock, high overhead, showed as a black disc.

Manning glanced over his shoulder, and in the nightmarishly flashing illumination saw Larrabie's body sprawled in a frozen convulsion, and standing over it, head thrown back, a huge hound. A black mass of yelling men was closing in . . .

Then the four of them were clambering up the ladder that rose dizzily to the space ship's lock forty feet above ground. Every flash of the light silhouetted them so nakedly against the great hull that it seemed impossible they should not be seen and picked off as they clung helplessly. But Manning saw Dugan above him, disappear into the lock; he heaved himself up and stumbled into the saving blackness, followed by a panting bulk that must be Vzryvov.

Kane's voice came, surprisingly steady, from deeper in the tunnel-like lock, where as their eyes adjusted a faint glow was evident, seeping no doubt from a passage beyond. This was the main loading lock, and I guess still is. They've apparently torn out all the freight decks and replaced them with a lead-lined tank for the dust, bin and they've been loading it through a hatch just across the peripheral walk. But eth hatch is sealed now." He did not need to add what that meant. The *Siegfried* had its deadly cargo and was ready to take off.

"Then," said Vzryvov matter-of-factly, "let us blast open the tank and scatter it with our remaining bombs. That will make it impossible for the Germans to salvage the ship, or even use this field, until the dust had burned itself out in a year or so." When Kane did not answer, the Russian growled impatiently, "We *must* do it, and quickly. Our comrades' bodies are out there, and with them the secret of invisibility. We must make this area unapproachable!"

"Wait," said Kane with a curious tense urgency. Manning wondered fleetingly if the underground leader recoiled from the suicidal action which the other urged; then he realized that Kane was listening, and listened too.

The babble of voices from the ground outside had fallen to a mutter; and through it cut an incisive voice of authority.

"Es waren ihrer nur zwei?"

Another voice answered, "*Ja, Herr Oberst—wenigstens haben wir nur einen oder zwei bei der Blitzbeleuchtung gesehen—*"

"Ihr habt gar nichts Verlässliches gesehen. Aber wieviel zeigen die Photos?"
"Zwei, Herr Oberst."

They could almost hear the commander's gusty sigh of relief. "*Nun, so haben wir sie vor uns liegen, und die Sache ist erledigt. Noch dazu werde ich ein schönes Geschenk nach Deutschland schicken können . . .*"

"You see," said Kane, "they think they've got us all. Evidently their cameras never caught more than two of us at once, and hooded we all looked alike. So we're reasonably safe."

"Safe!" stormed Vzryvov. He clambered awkwardly to his feet in the curved mouth of the lock. "If you have gone crazy or have got cold feet, I will go and blow up the dust compartment alone."

"Wait!" snapped Kane. "Listen, Igor. You don't seem to realize that luck—and the sacrifice of two of our best men—have given us a better chance than we ever hoped for. The *Siegfried* is just waiting for the crew to come aboard. If we lie low until the ship's in space—then take care of the crew and seize control—Well, the invisibility unit will be in German hands, sure. But what good will that do them if there isn't any Germany?"

THEY could hear each other's breathing in the airlock. Then Vzryvov said, "I see. Forgive my stupidity."

Manning asked carefully, "You mean to turn the dust against Germany? Wipe out the whole country?"

"Certainly. It'll be easy, once we take over the ship; a few degrees change in course—"

"Even your allies there?"

"Germans are Germans," growled Vzryvov. "At best, they are confused dreamers who think they could repay their debt to the world with a gesture."

Manning could not see Kane's face; but the other's voice held solemn earnestness. "We'll only be doing to them what they're trying to do to America . . . Oh, hell, that's no valid argument. But, Manning, you come from an age when there weren't any atomic weapons, and such things were unthinkable because they were impossible. You can't think as we do, who've lived all our lives with the knowledge of what is possible—of how little human life is worth.

"And you don't have a hundred years of

slavery behind you. We were as great a people as the Germans in your day, I think, but we've been trampled into the mud until we've not got much civilization or pride or decency left. And we won't have, for a long time, even if Germany is destroyed. But if it isn't we, and the other nations of the world, will never have those things again—the things that make human beings worth something.

"I sometimes wonder what would happen if history had taken a different turning—if we, instead of the Germans, had been the ones to discover atomic energy. Would we have been any better than they were? Or would we have used the power to make ourselves the masters of Earth and to monopolize civilization, just as Germany did?"

"You would have," snorted Vzryvov. "Russia would have. Any nationalism of that time, given such a power, would have behaved the same."

"I don't know," faltered Manning. "You may be right, but I can't imagine . . ."

"Anyway," Kane's tone grew bitter, "the Germans have made the world into what they wanted, and they've made us what we are. And now we're going to smash their world. Maybe something better will come out of its destruction. Maybe not. If not—revenge will have to be enough for us."

VI

THE CAPTAIN OF THE *Siegfried* squinted at the tables the navigator had handed him, mentally translating their figures into acceleration units. The ship was only an hour from the assigned point in space, and it was necessary to make a final, ultimately correct alignment, in which seconds of arc meant miles of displacement in the dispersion of the dust on Earth's surface.

The captain's concentration was disturbed by the nagging conviction that something was amiss—or had been amiss a minute or so earlier—about his familiar control room. For a moment he had fancied that the door to the sternward-descending stairshaft was standing open; but it was obviously closed . . .

He put the doubts angrily out of his mind, frowned at the papers, and ordered

the expectant pilot: "*Fünf Minuten sech-sunddreissig Sekunden dritter Geschwindigkeit dem Backbordgetriebe!*"

They were not very inspired last words, but he had no chance to make additions, for in the next instant Kane's sharp knife sank between his ribs. The captain gurgled in an oddly muffled fashion and would have fallen, save that invisible hands caught and lowered him.

The navigator, looking straight at him, finally realized something had happened. He opened his mouth to cry out, but his throat was cut from ear to ear and no sound emerged.

The pilot, about to press the buttons that would wake the portside rocket bank, was stupefied to see that his hand hung over the controls and refused to move as if paralyzed. Enveloped in the mind-numbing field of an invisibility unit at full power, he did not feel the grip that held him or the knife-thrust that killed him.

The four Americans switched off their units and indulged in the luxury of removing the metal-stiffened hoods. They had no more to fear aboard the *Siegfried*; two other members of the crew had already been disposed of in the cabins below, and now even if all Germany had known of their presence aboard the dust ship—no method had ever been devised for attacking a ship in space.

But they did not exchange many words. There was work that desperately had to be done as the *Siegfried* drove toward its rendezvous. Kane flung himself into the navigator's seat, and glancing ever and anon at the figures for the original course, began to punch keys on the calculator. Manning hunched over the controls, continuing an intensive study that had begun over the German pilot's shoulder. And Vzryvov stationed himself before a black box fixed to the wall beneath a large clock and conspicuously sealed with a *Hakenkruz*.

Dugan was left without a job; but he was content to slump into an unused seat and think queasily of Earth thousands of miles below. He was out of his element here—but so were the others. None of them had ever been into space before; only Kane had a theoretical acquaintance with rocket navigation.

So they worked like men inspired to alter the course of the ship. It would have been utterly impossible to make all the needful calculations from the beginning; but Kane was able to work from the course already laid out and the dead navigator's correction tables, making small changes, which would mean life for millions of people and death for other millions.

Five minutes before the revised zero-time, Manning, his face like iron, shut off the engines. There must be no expanding rocket gases to interfere with the dust's dispersion. The sudden silence and weightlessness were like a bad dream. Dugan gulped, floated into a corner and was sick. Even Kane's face looked green under the unchanged light of the control room. But Vzryvov had broken the swastika seal on the black box and eyed the switch inside it greedily, between frequent glances at the clock.

WITH the second-hand sweeping into the last minute, he grasped the plastic handle, and at forty-five seconds pulled down. Instantly the stifling silence of the ship was broken by a muffled roar. The dust—not dust really, but exceedingly fine shot, heavy enough that it would not be carried away by winds in Earth's atmosphere—was being flung into space through many nozzles in the *Siegfried's* hull.

"That's that," said Kane in a flat voice.

Vzryvov swung about in his seat, facing the others, but he did not look at them. His eyes were far away and his teeth bared in a ferocious grin as he listened to the escaping storm of death.

"*Dostalos' sukinyim synam,*" he muttered to himself. "*Za Ameriku i za Ros-siyu!*"

Manning said nothing.

They suffered through ten minutes of weightlessness while the dust was discharging, and waited another ten before they dared start the engines again and swing the ship—careless now of fine points of navigation—on a great arc toward Earth.

"It'll be forty hours, plus or minus, before the stuff hits the atmosphere," said Kane. "The Germans are going to real-

ize something is wrong before then—pretty soon, I imagine, because every observatory will be watching the cloud. We'll do better to stay out here."

Manning shrugged. Kane looked at him with understanding and sympathy. "There's still work for us. By now the general uprising will have started in America, and maybe spread to other countries; it was to be our organization's last effort, in case we couldn't stop the dust ship. And the ship took off . . . Let's see if we can pick up some broadcasts."

They did, after accelerating the ship and throwing it into a low, hastily-calculated orbit. At first the destroyers had no word of their work. The news was all about the fierce flare of rebellion in America; though they didn't say so, it must have caught the few Germans there in the throes of departure before the coming doom. An attack on the Long Island colony was in progress, the bridges blown and the East River aflame with burning oil. Then the insanely desperate rebels had found their way onto the island and overwhelmed the settlement. The air crackled with eye-witness accounts of atrocities against the master race. The German leaders were turning the insurrection to account, using it to prepare the minds of their own people to accept the *fait accompli* of America's extermination.

Then came a pause in the news broadcasts. A German station played music . . .

Somewhere a group of rulers must be sitting in hasty council, staring unbelievably at the astronomers' reports. Having to believe, and trying to make a decision where there was no more deciding to do, because their future was as immutable as the velocity and direction of the dust cloud in space.

They had to make it public, of course, so that there could be an attempt at evacuation. Twenty-first century Germany was a nation of motors, wheels, and wings, and a day and a half might yet be time for a large part of the population to flee beyond the limits of the dust-fall which would cover Greater Germany from the Rhineland to the Volga. If the exodus was orderly, the radio emphasized again and again . . .

FOR the first few hours it was both orderly and successful, according to report. But the announcement that Germany's catastrophe had carried to hidden ears beyond its boundaries, and the word had passed like lightning around the world, telling all nations that the moment of deliverance had come. Four hours afterward, and American station went on the air; and the listeners in the space ship tensed as they heard the English words.

"Three or four thousand air-borne refugees are reported landing on the Florida coast. The local revolutionary authorities have taken steps for their reception . . . A dispatch from France states that a refugee column of about twenty thousand Germans was overwhelmed and wiped out, despite defense by armored vehicles, in the vicinity of Lyons . . . Similarly we hear from Italy . . ."

The transmission was weak and the voice faded out, but it went on, counting up with unholy glee the victories and the massacres. All over Earth, people were digging up the guns that had laid buried for a hundred years, and when those were lacking, seizing scythes and axes, sticks and stones, and going out to meet the fleeing Germans. The German military retaliated by unloading its whole arsenal of atomic and other weapons against the rebelling peoples. But the world was mad with blood and liberty. What if for every German ten of their ex-slaves died? Soon there would be no more Germans . . .

Other radio stations began to be heard, babbling in strange tongues that had not been spoken over the air for a century, but all reciting the same burden of hate and holocaust, glorying in the tales of carnage that they called to each other across the Earth.

Marshaled by leaders who rose to power on the wings of a shout, or with no leaders at all, the hordes poured even across the borders of the Reich, into the doomed area. Such German radio stations as were still operating showed by their frantic and contradictory efforts to direct the evacuation the hopeless panic and confusion that had fallen on the *Herrenvolk* in its last hour. Perhaps they had once been a people of blood and iron, but if so they were that

no longer after a century of security and peaceful prosperity behind their impregnable bulwarks; and the refugees, fleeing those defenses now, were like fat tame rabbits escaping a burning hutch and falling victim, terrified and uncomprehending, to the claws and fangs and primeval savagery of the wild. Germany had sowed the wind for a hundred years, and the storm that had arisen would not soon abate . . .

From time to time during the vigil in the space ship, Kane turned thin-lipped from the broadcasts to attempt contact with a secret transmitter in the New York area. Finally, thirty hours after the dust had started on its way, he got through and talked with an underground leader he knew.

"It's out of our hands," the man on Earth reported tersely. "At first we made some headway in organizing the revolt. We're still trying to influence the mobs in the direction of elementary caution, but it's thankless work and even dangerous. The people are following demagogues sprung from nowhere, following whatever voice promises the most killing. I think they're even fighting each other in some places. . ."

"Anarchy," said Kane numbly. "A new Dark Age—"

"What else did you expect?" demanded Vzryvov scornfully. "Surely not that people enslaved so long would promptly proceed to set up orderly self-government as soon as they were free? The Dark Ages have been everywhere, except in Germany, for the last century; you don't imagine that because Germany falls, the rest of the world will become civilized again?"

"No. . . But I must have hoped it; I think we all did. Guess you're the only realist I know, Igor." Kane straightened his shoulders. "We might as well land. Maybe there's still a chance to bring something decent out of this mess when the smoke clears. Anyway, I'd rather get into the thick of it than sit out here listening any longer. We shouldn't have anything more to fear from the Germans."

Manning, who had sat for long brooding silently over the controls, looked up sharply. "Before we start down," he said, "I'd like to ask a last favor."

MANNING smiled grimly. "One way or another. I just want one of those emergency-escape gliders we saw when we were hiding down below. You mean to land in America, I guess, but before you do I wish you'd take a little swing out of your way and drop me off in one of those over Germany. I don't know whether Eddie will want to go with me——"

"Hell, what do you take me for?" asked Dugan aggrievedly. "Maybe you've cracked up—but I'll take a chance."

"I think you *have* gone crazy," said Kane "If the Germans didn't get you, the dust would."

"It's a chance, all right. . . . But I've been thinking about how Kahl's time machine disappeared, back there in the Black Forest. It was powered by ordinary storage cells, and when he turned it on and left it on it used them up in a hurry. But in rapid discharge polarization will stop the flow of current in a battery before the charge is all gone—and after it's rested a little, it'll give out some more. I think that's what happened. We left the switch closed, and when the batteries depolarized they gave another kick. So the time traveler went on—into the future again. Not very far, maybe. Maybe only a couple of days."

"So—you think it may be there now. And if it is?"

"Those gliders have a battery-powered auxiliary motor, don't they? If we land near the machine, we can get it going again and return to our own time, or a few years earlier."

"I don't blame you for wanting to, but——"

"It's not just that." Manning's eyes met Kane's and held them with odd intensity. He asked slowly: "Wouldn't it have been better, Kane, if the last hundred years of history had never happened?"

Kane stared at him, first blankly and then with dawning understanding. "But—that's impossible," he stammered. "A paradox."

"Paradoxes are an occupational disease of time travel, I guess. . . . I don't know just what we can do, if we do get back. We'd have to be careful or we might end up in a

padding cell. We couldn't hope to prevent the development of atomic energy—that seems inevitable, with progress—but we might warn America in time to assure our beating the Germans to the punch.”

Kane said quietly, “It's true that our world has taken a wrong turning. What you suggest, Manning, is quite unimaginable—but it's possible, all the same—an experimental destiny, perhaps. Anyway, I'll help you get the glider ready.”

“Would you like to come with us?”

Kane shook his head. “Whether this world is real or not, I belong to it. And you'll be bucking enough paradoxes as it is.”

THE glider dropped at first like a stone from the great height; then its wings began to find support and it descended in vast looping turns that in the troposphere became at last a tightly circling glide over the Schwarzwald. The air over Germany was empty; now, short hours before the coming of the dust, everyone who could command aerial transportation had escaped from the country. But the roads, from the great *Autobahnen* to the narrowest country lanes, were crawling with traffic, snarled and choked by the fear that drove it.

Manning strained his eyes for landmarks as they lost altitude; he wanted to spare the batteries in the glider.

“Say,” remarked Dugan worriedly, “if we find the thing, how far do you figure on going back?”

“Mmm—say 1935. We'll need a few years to work if we're going to change history.”

“We might meet ourselves!” Dugan voiced his fears.

Manning grinned. “We ought to be able to duck ourselves. We know where we were, don't we?”

Dugan digested that, then advanced another problem: “If we go back to 1935, I'll only be thirty when the war starts. What do they do when two of a guy try to enlist in the Army at once, especially if he's already missing four years later?”

“Maybe there won't be any war.”

“Want to bet?”

“No,” answered Manning soberly. But a moment later his face lit as he recog-

nized, only a couple of miles away, the big clearing on the plateau where the time traveler had rested.

Minutes later, he set the glider bumpily down on the meadow. From on high the sun had been visible, but here only a gray dawn was breaking. Where the forest fire had passed the trees raised black desolate arms to the light, but those still green were greeting the morning with cool balsam scent and awakening bird song, oblivious of the rain of death falling through space to wipe out all life in this land.

They climbed out of the glider—and froze, for in the same moment both saw the two long black cars, one with an official swastika on its sleek flank, that were parked under the trees, and the uniformed men who were springing to their feet around the vehicles and lifting rifles.

“Turn on your invisibility unit and run for the woods!” hissed Manning. The soldiers gaped for seconds at the spot where the arrivals from the sky had vanished, then fired a useless volley at the glider and huddled together in panic.

Both of the Americans were wearing the units Kane had given them, but had tucked the hoods under their belts. Manning stumbled, unable to see his own feet as he ran, and paused on the edge of the woods to cram his hood down over his head. As he did so he saw Dugan a few yards away, doing likewise.

“Somebody's got the same idea as us!” called Manning. “Maybe Kahl convinced them, or— We'd better get there fast!”

They plunged through the fire-cleared woodland toward their goal. From behind a voice shrieked warning to someone ahead: “*Hutet euch! Zwei Unsichtbare!*”

Then they saw among the trees the cubical bulk of the time machine. Its door was open, and around it was a squad of soldiers who gripped their weapons with shaking hands and peered wild-eyed about them.

“Never mind them!” gasped Manning. “There's somebody inside—”

THE WORDS died on his lips. In the doorway of the traveler had appeared a big man in civilian clothes. His face was hidden beneath a hood exactly

like their own, in his hands was a machine gun, and he was looking at them.

"Schwinzog!" Manning recognized the beefy figure.

"*Sie kennen mich? Aber natürlich—* you are the other two time travelers!" The gun's muzzle moved in a peremptory arc. "Remove those masks, please. I want to be sure that it is really you who have come to see me off."

Manning wavered, torn by a suicidal impulse to rush the machine gun and get it over with. But despair lamed him. He thought numbly, "Time is immutable after all, and something was sure to stop us from changing what's already happened. The fatalists are right." He bowed his head and slipped off the wired hood; then he could no longer see it or his own hands. He felt still more like a ghost, impotent to stir reality.

"Now the invisibility units," ordered Schwinzog. "Throw them in front of you." As Manning and Dugan became visible, the goggling soldiers that surrounded them snapped up their rifles to cover them.

Schwinzog pushed back his hood and eyed them with satisfaction. "It is good that you are accounted for—though I was not much worried about you, and I understand you do not know the principle of the *Zeitfahrer*. And you have brought me two more specimens of the invisibility device, which will be useful for study to the German scientists of four years ago—before they were invented in America." He chuckled at the thought. "You realize, the debacle of Germany, the frightful catastrophe engineered by American cunning—*will*—never take place. I will see to that—that this now shall be only the illusion of might have been. . . . As to what will become of you, that is an almost metaphysical problem—I think I will set the Herr Doktor Kahl to work on it, when more pressing affairs have been seen to."

"You will do what?" broke in a weakly querulous voice.

In the entrance of the time traveler had appeared the hunched figure of Kahl. He blinked at the light; his goatee was tattered and his face twitched. Behind him the

massive shoulders of Wolfgang blocked the doorway; he wore a twenty-first century German uniform and an air of contentment that showed him, at least, to have found his niche in the world of the future.

Schwinzog half turned. "What I will do is my own business," he said curtly. "And you—will refrain from asking unnecessary questions. The *Zeitfahrer* is ready?"

"It is ready for a displacement of four years, which you told me was to be only a test—before we return, as you promised, to the twentieth century, and use this era's knowledge to prevent Germany from conquering the world—"

"Of course, said Schwinzig smoothly. "That is what we shall do."

"You are lying!" Kahl glared at him, his fists clenching. "I heard what you told the Americans."

Schwinzog shrugged. "All right, I am lying." He looked contemptuously down at the little physicist. "Do not bring on yourself again the consequences of stubbornness. You have earned the gratitude of the Reich, and I will see that you are rewarded if you are sensible—"

The other had begun to tremble. "I want only one reward. That is to see Germany saved from the curse of world empire! From the hatred of the whole Earth, which almost destroyed our country in my time and has destroyed it in this! Better even that we Germans should be the oppressed, rather than reap the oppressor's harvest of hate. . ."

Schwinzog's lips curled. "The Herr Doktor has lost his mind. I will have to operate the *Zeitfahrer* myself—Muller!"

The tall Wolfgang sidestepped and thrust out an arm, stopping Kahl's stumbling rush for the doorway and sending the old man staggering to sprawl at Schwinzog's feet.

"You would leave without us?" inquired the Gestapoleiter mockingly. "For that, it would be only just to leave you here—but do not fear. You will still be useful. And now we have no more time for—"

WITH a burst of strength that seemed in him incredible, Kahl surged to his feet and flung himself on Schwinzog with an animal scream. The big man,

caught off balance in his negligent pose, was hurled backward and fell clutching; his head thudded solidly against the time traveler's metal sheathing. Kahl twisted free and swayed to his feet, and the machine gun was in his hands; it bucked and spat as he swung it in a jerky arc. Wolfgang, caught in mid-leap, crashed to the ground and rolled, and the German soldiers scattered wildly, firing a few shots that were aimed more away from Schwinzog than at Kahl. One man was too slow and dropped at the edge of the unburned thicket, and a couple of others yelped as they fled.

Dr. Kahl went on raining bullets into the bushes for seconds after there were no more targets; then he stood breathing hard and glaring about him at the bodies sprawled on the scorched turf.

One of the bodies got unhurriedly to its feet and faced Kahl. It was Manning. The fatalistic paralysis that had gripped him had passed off abruptly when he saw Schwinzog fall, and he had thrown himself flat under the sweeping bursts of machine gun fire.

He said coolly, "Good work, Herr Doktor. Now we can get back to our own century."

Kahl did not answer or seem to hear. The muzzle of the weapon he held was centered on Manning's chest, and the eyes above it were mad.

"We must return now, and carry out your plan," Manning urged softly. As he talked he was walking without haste toward the gun. He did not dare glance aside to see what had happened to Dugan, or let even his expression betray his terrible eagerness to seize the moment—before Kahl went completely off the deep end, or before the Germans back there in the bushes collected their wits.

"You are American," scowled Kahl. "One of those who hate us. What have I to do with you?"

"I will help you," said Manning. "Your plan is good. Germany and all the world will revere your name when they know." He halted, almost touching the gun muzzle. In a moment now he had to grab it.

"I do not know—" began Kahl, blinking. Then his eyes widened blankly;

something had plucked at Manning's sleeve, and from somewhere in the thicket came a rifle's crack. The Herr Doktor crumpled to the ground.

From behind him appeared Dugan, straightening from a crouch; without a word he sprang for the door of the time traveler. Manning followed, ducking under another bullet from the woods. He slammed the door shut.

"What'd you take a chance like that for?" demanded Dugan bitterly. "I was sneaking round behind him all the time."

Manning didn't answer. He was surveying the apparatus-covered table, hesitating over its complexity.

Outside rifles began banging steadily. The metal shell of the machine rang and splinters flew from the wooden door as bullets came through to ricochet dangerously inside. Manning's mouth set and with a quick wrist-flip he closed the starting switch.

And there was silence.

DUGAN peered cautiously through a shattered door-panel. "There hasn't been any fire," he said almost without wonder. "The trees are green."

Manning bent tensely over the table. "Four years backward," he nodded. "Now, if I can just find out how much power that took. . ."

Half an hour later for them, it was 1935, an evening with the first chill of fall in the air.

"Too bad we lost the invisibility units," grieved Manning. "There's nothing now to prove we ever travelled in time—except the traveler itself, and we can hardly carry that with us to America. . . And Kahl and Wolfgang make another paradox we didn't think of. They died in a time that never will be."

"Hell, what's another paradox," said Dugan. "We've got our work cut out for us without worrying about them."

Regretfully they smashed the time-traveler's mechanism—lest it fall into still other hands anxious to remodel history—and set out on foot with a good chance of making the Swiss border by dawn.
