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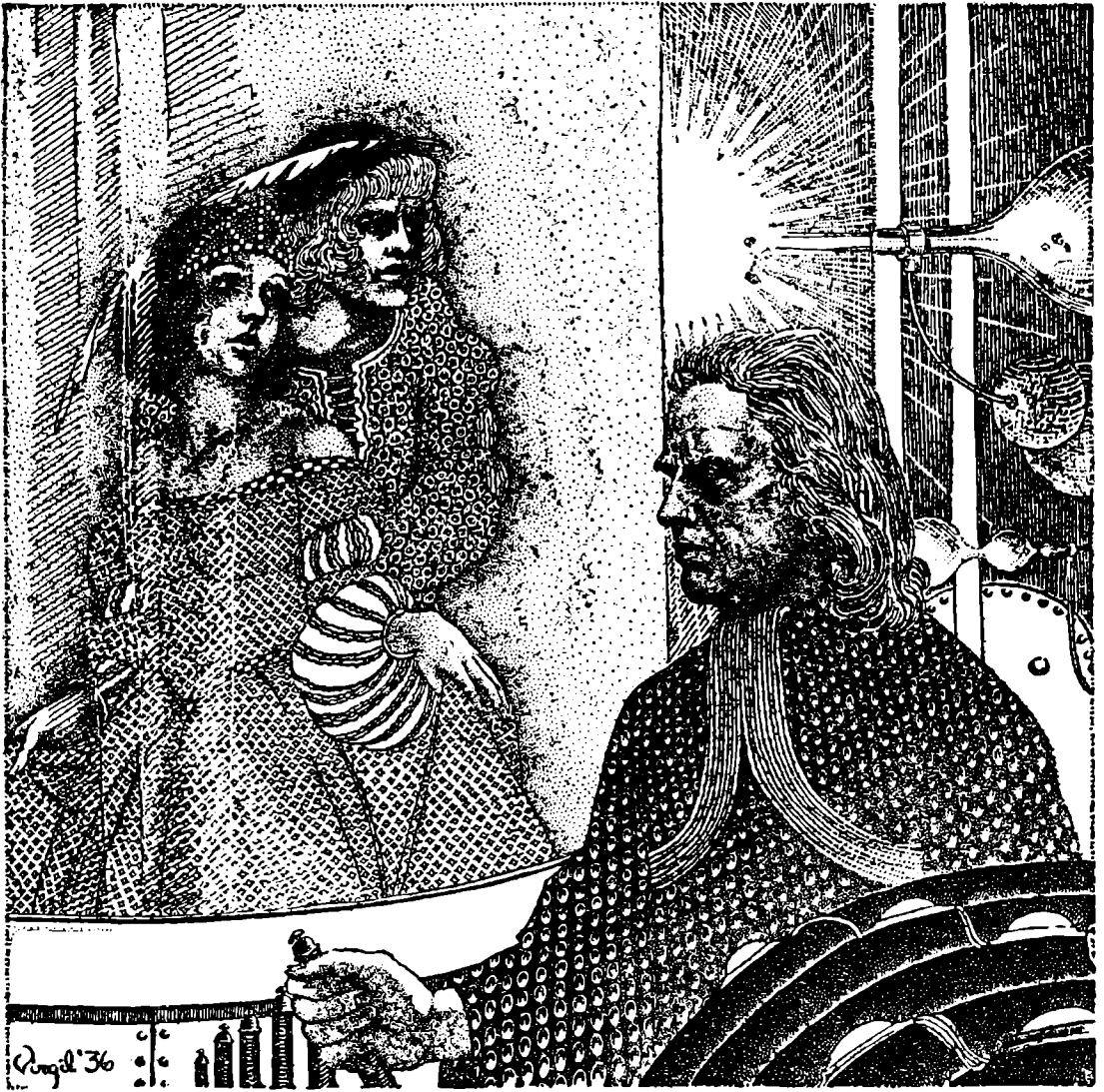
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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

"The brain of Galos Gann had triumphed over time and place."



In the World's Dusk

By EDMOND HAMILTON

A gripping tale of the last survivor of the human race and his attempts to repopulate the world

THE city Zor reared its somber towers and minarets of black marble into the ruddy sunset, a great mass of climbing spires circumvallated by a high black wall. Twelve gates of mas-

sive brass opened in that wall, and outside it there lay the white salt desert that now covered the whole of earth. A cruel, glaring plain that stretched eye-achingly to the horizons, its monotony was broken

by no hill or valley or sea. Long ago the last seas had dried up and disappeared, and long ago the ages of geological gradation had smoothed mountain and hill and valley into a featureless blank.

As the sun sank lower, it struck a shaft of red light across the city Zor into a great hall in the topmost spire. The crimson rays cut through the shadowy gloom of the dim, huge room and bathed the sitting figure of Galos Gann.

Brooding in the ruddy glow, Galos Gann looked out across the desert to the sinking sun, and said, "It is another day. The end comes soon."

Chin in hand he brooded, and the sun sank, and the shadows in the great hall deepened and darkened about him. Out in the dusking sky blossomed the stars, and they peered down through the portico like taunting white eyes at him. And it seemed to him that he heard their thin, silvery star-voices cry mockingly across the sky to each other, "The end comes soon to the race of Galos Gann."

For Galos Gann was the last man of all men. Sitting alone in his darksome hall high in somber Zor, he knew that nowhere around the desert globe did there move another human shape nor echo another human voice. He was that one about whom during anticipatory ages a fearful, foreboding fascination had clung—the final survivor. He tasted a loneliness no other man had ever known, for it was his to brood upon all the marching millions of men who had gone before him and who were now no more. He could look back across the millioned millions of years to the tumultuous youth of earth in whose warm seas had spawned the first protoplasmic life which, under the potent influences of cosmic radiation, had evolved through more and more complex animal forms into the culminating form of man. He could mark how man had risen through primeval savagery to

world civilization that had finally given men mighty powers and had lengthened their life-span to centuries. And he could mark too how the grim, grinding mechanism of natural forces had in the end brought doom to the fair cities of that golden age.

Steadily, silently, inexorably, through the ages the hydrosphere or water envelope of earth had slowly dwindled, due to the loss of its particles into space from molecular dispersion. The seas had dried up as the millions of years had passed, and salt deserts had crept across the world. And men had seen the end close at hand for their race, and because they saw it they ceased to bring forth children.

They were weary of the endless, hopeless struggle, and they would not listen to the pleadings of Galos Gann, their greatest scientist, who alone among them yearned to keep the dying race alive. And so in their weariness the last generation of them had passed away, and in the world was left no living man but the unyielding Galos Gann.

In his dark hall high in Zor, Galos Gann sat huddled in his robes brooding upon these things, his withered face and black, living eyes unchanging. Then at last he stood erect. He strode with his robes swirling about him onto the balcony outside, and in the darkness he looked up at the mocking white eyes of the stars.

He said, "You think that you look down on the last of men, that all the glories of my race are a story that is told and ended, but you are wrong. I am Galos Gann, the greatest man of all the men that have lived on earth. And it is my unconquerable will that my race shall not die but shall live on to greater glories."

The white stars were silent, wheeling with cynical imperturbability over the deserts beyond night-shrouded Zor.

And Galos Gann raised his hand to-

ward Rigel and Canopus and Achernar in a gesture pregnant with defiance and menace.

"Somewhere and somehow I will find means to keep the race of man living on!" he cried to them. "Yes, and the day will come when our seed will yoke you and all your worlds in submissive harness to man!"

Then Galos Gann, filled with that determination, came to a great resolve and went to his laboratories and procured certain instruments and cryptic mechanisms. Holding them inside his robes, he went down from the tower and walked through the dark streets of the city Zor.

Very small and alone he seemed as he wended through the dim starlight and glooming shadows of the mighty city's ways, yet proudly he stalked; for unconquerable defiance to fate flamed in his heart and vitalized his brain with unshakable resolve.

He came to the low, squat structure that he sought, and its door opened with a sighing sound as he approached. He entered, and there in a small dark room was a stair down which he went. The coils of that spiral stair dropped into a great subterranean hall of black marble illuminated by a feeble blue light that had no visible source.

WHEN Galos Gann stepped at last on its tessellated tile floor, he stood looking along the oblong hall. Upon its far-stretching walls were a hundred high square panels that bore in painted pictures the story of mankind. The first of those panels showed the primal protoplasmic life from which man had descended, and the last of the panels displayed this very subterranean chamber. For in crypts set into the floor of this hall there lay the dead people of the city Zor who had been the last generation of mankind. There was one last empty crypt that

waited for Galos Gann when he should lie down in it to die, and since this was the last chapter of mankind's story, it had been pictured in the last panel.

But Galos Gann disregarded the painted walls and strode along the hall, opening the crypts in the floor one after another. He worked on until at last before him lay the scores of dead men and women, their bodies perfectly preserved so that they seemed sleeping.

Galos Gann said to them, "It is my thought that even you who are not now living can mayhap be used to keep mankind from perishing. It seems an ill thing to disturb you in the peace of death. But nowhere else save in death can I find those I must have to perpetuate mankind."

Then Galos Gann began to work upon the bodies of the dead, summoning up from his mighty resolution superhuman scientific powers which even he had hitherto never possessed.

By supreme chemical achievement he synthesized new blood with which he filled the wasted veins of the bodies. And by powerful electric stimulants and glandular injections he set their hearts to beating convulsively, and then regularly. And as their hearts pumped the new blood through their bodies to their perfectly preserved brains, the dead regained slow consciousness and staggered upright and looked dazedly at one another and at the watching Galos Gann.

Galos Gann felt a mighty pride and exultation as he looked at these strong men and fair women whom he had brought back from death. He said to them:

"I have recalled you to life because I have resolved that our race shall not come to an end and be forgotten of the universe. It is my determination that mankind shall continue, and through you I shall effect this."

The jaws of one of the staring men moved stiffly and from between them came the rusty accents of a voice long unused.

"What madness of yours is this, Galos Gann? You have given us the semblance of life but we are still dead, and how can we who are dead prolong the life of man?"

"You move and speak, therefore you are living," insisted Galos Gann. "You shall mate together and bring forth sons, and they shall be the progenitors of new peoples."

The dead man said hollowly, "You strive against the inevitable like a child breaking his hands against a door of marble. It is the law of the universe that everything which exists must come some day to an end. Planets wither and die and fall back into their parent suns, and suns strike one against the other and are transformed into nebulæ, and the nebulæ last not but in turn condense into other suns and worlds that in their own turn must die.

"How shall you hope amid this universal law of death to keep the race of man for ever living? We have lived a fair life for many million million years, we have struggled and won and lost, have laughed in the sunlight and dreamed under the stars, have played our part in the mighty drama of eternity. Now it is time we pass to our appointed end."

As the dead man finished speaking, a hollow, low whisper of assent went up from all the other staring dead.

"Aye," they said, "it is time the tired sons of men rested in the blessed sleep of death."

But the brow of Galos Gann was dark with resolve, and his eyes flashed and his form stiffened with unchangeable will.

"Your words avail you nothing," he told the dead. "Despite your icy counsels of surrender, I am determined that man

shall live on to challenge the blind laws of the cosmos. Therefore you shall obey me, for well you know that with my powers and science I can force you to my will. You are not dead now but living, and you shall re-people the city Zor."

Galos Gann with these words walked to the spiral stair and started up its winding way. And helplessly, dully submissive, the dead men and women followed him up the stair, walking stiffly with a confused, heavy trampling up the steps.

A STRANGE spectacle it was when Galos Gann led his silent host out into the starlit streets of the city. And by day and by night thereafter was Zor a weird sight, peopled again by those who once had peopled it before they died. For Galos Gann decreed that they should live in the same buildings in which they had lived before. And those that had been husbands and wives before should be husbands and wives now, and in all things they should dwell as they had before their deaths.

So all day beneath the hot sun the dead went to and fro in Zor and pretended that they were truly living. They walked stiffly in the streets and gave one another greeting in their grating, rusty voices, and those that had had trades in old time followed those trades now, so that the cheery sounds of work and life rang in the city.

By night they thronged into the great theater of the city and sat in stiff immobility while those who had been dancers and singers performed with heavy clumsiness on the stage. And the dead audience applauded, and laughed, and their laughter was a strange sound.

And at night when the stars peered curiously down at Zor, those of them who had been young men and maidens walked apart and with stiff and uncouth gestures made pantomime of love, and spoke

words of love to one another. And they wedded one another, for that was the decree of Galos Gann.

In his high tower, Galos Gann watched as moon after moon was born and waxed and died. Great hope was his as the months passed one by one in the dead-tenanted city.

He said to himself, "These are not wholly living—something there was that my powers could not bring back from death. But even such as they are, they will serve to give mankind a new start in the universe."

The slow months passed and at last to one of the dead couples living in the city, a child was born. High flared the hopes of Galos Gann when he heard, and great was his excitement as he hastened through the city to see. But when he saw the child, he felt his heart grow cold. For this infant was like the parents of whom it was born, it was not wholly living. It moved and saw and uttered sounds, but its movements and cries were stiff and strange, and its eyes had death behind them.

Not wholly yet did Galos Gann give up hope in his great plan. He waited for another child to be born, but the next child too was the same.

Then indeed did his faith and hope perish. He called the dead citizens of Zor together and spoke to them. He said:

"Why do you not bring forth wholly living children, seeing that you yourselves are now living? Do you do this but to thwart me?"

Out of the gaunt-eyed throng a dead man answered him.

"Death cannot bring forth life any more than light can be born of darkness. Despite your words we know that we are dead, and we can give birth only to death. Now be convinced of the futility of your mad scheme and allow us to return to the peace of death, and let

the race of man come peacefully to its destined end."

Galos Gann told them darkly, "Return then to the nothingness you crave, since you cannot serve my purpose. But know that not now and not ever shall I relinquish my purpose to perpetuate the race."

The dead answered him not, but turning their backs upon him moved in a silent, trampling throng through the streets of the city toward that low, squat building which they knew.

They passed without any word down the spiral stair to the blue-lit chamber of the crypts, and there each lay down once more in the crypt that was his. And the two women who had given birth lay down with their strange, dead little infants at their breasts. Then each drew over his crypt the stone lid that had covered it, until all were covered once more. And again there was solemn silence in the pictured burial-chamber of Zor.

UP IN his high tower Galos Gann had watched them go, and there for two days and nights he brooded over the again-silent city.

He said to himself, "It seems my hope was vain and that in truth humanity dies with me, since those who were dead cannot be the progenitors of future men. For where in all the world are there any living men and women such as alone will serve my ends?"

This he said, and then of a sudden a thought struck him that was like a dazzling and perilous lightning-flash across the brooding darkness of his mind. His brain well nigh reeled at the audacity of the thing it had suddenly conceived; yet such was the desperation of his purpose that he seized quakingly upon even this unearthly expedient.

He muttered to himself, "There are no living men and women in the world today. But what of the trillions of men and

women who have existed on earth in the past? Those trillions are separated from me by the abyss of time. Yet if I could somehow reach across that abyss, I could draw many living people out of the past into dead Zor."

The brain of Galos Gann fired to that staggering thought. And he, the greatest scientist earth had ever possessed, began that night the audacious attempt to draw across the gulf of ages living men and women who would father a new race.

Day after day, as the sun blazed on silent Zor, and night after night as the majestic stars wheeled above it, the withered scientist toiled in his laboratories. And gradually there grew up the great cylindrical mechanism of brass and quartz that was to pierce time.

At last the mighty mechanism was finished and Galos Gann prepared to begin his unthinkable daring attempt. Despite the inflexibility of his resolve, his soul quaked within him as he laid hand upon the switches that controlled the great machine. For well he knew that in attempting to thrust an arm across the awful gulf of time he was so outraging and rending the inmost frame of the cosmos that vast cataclysm might well result. Yet Galos Gann, driven by his unshaken determination, closed the switches with a trembling hand.

There came a crash of cosmic thunder and a hissing of blinding white force that filled the cylinder, and all the dead city Zor rocked strangely on its foundations as though shaken by a mighty wind.

Galos Gann was aware that the titanic forces he had loosed were tearing through space and time itself inside that cylinder, and riving the hitherto inviolate dimensions of the universe. The white force flamed and the thunder crashed and the city rocked until at last he convulsively opened the switches again. Then the glare and rumbling and rocking died, and

as Galos Gann stared into the cylinder he cried in shrill triumph:

"I have succeeded! The brain of Galos Gann has triumphed over time and fate!"

For there in the cylinder stood a living man and woman who wore the grotesque cloth garments of ages before.

He opened the door of the cylinder and the man and woman came out with slow steps. Galos Gann told them exultantly:

"I have brought you across time to be the fountainhead of a new generation. Be not afraid! You are but the first of very many people I shall bring out of the past in the same way."

The man and woman looked at Galos Gann, and suddenly they laughed. Their laughter was not of mirth but was a maniac shrieking. Wildly, insanely, the man and woman laughed. And Galos Gann saw that they were both utterly mad.

Then he understood. By dint of super-human science he had contrived to bring their living bodies across the gulf of ages unharmed, but in so doing he had destroyed their minds. Not any science beneath the sun could draw their minds over the abyss of time without wrecking them, for the mind is not of matter and does not obey the laws of matter. Yet Galos Gann was so possessed of his mighty plan that he refused to relinquish it.

"I will bring more across time," he told himself, "and surely some of them will come through with minds unharmed."

So again and again in the nights and days that followed, he operated the great mechanism and with its potent grasp snatched many scores of men and women out of their proper time and brought them across the millenniums to Zor. But always, though he brought their bodies through unharmed, he could not bring

their minds; so that it was only mad men and women who came from the cylinder, out of every age and land.

These mad people dwelt in Zor in a most frightful fashion, roaming its streets so that no corner of the city was beyond the sound of their insane shrieking. They ascended the somber towers and raved and gibbered from them at the dead city and at the barren desert beyond it. It seemed that even the insensate city grew fearful of the crazed horde whom it housed, for the city of the mad was more awful than had been the city of the dead.

Finally Galos Gann ceased to draw men and women out of the past, for he saw that never could he hope to bring them through sane. For a time he strove to replace the minds of these crazed people which had been destroyed. But he saw that that too was beyond the power of any material science.

Then in that shrieking city of madness which was the last city on earth, Galos Gann grew afraid that he too was going mad. He felt a desire to scream with the others through the dark streets.

So in sick disgust and fear he went forth and destroyed those mad people down to the last one, giving them the release of death. And Zor again knew silence as the last man solitary walked its ways.

FINALLY there came a day when Galos Gann walked onto his balcony and looked fixedly out over the white and barren desert.

He said, "I sought to bring new men out of death, and then out of time, but neither from death nor time it seems can come those to prolong the race. How can I hope to produce men in a little moment of time when it required millions of years for the forces of nature to produce them? So I shall produce the new race in the way that the old was

produced. I shall change the face of earth so that new life may spring from it as it did long ago, and in time that life will evolve once more into men."

Animated by that colossal resolve, Galos Gann, the last and mightiest scientist of earth, began an awesome task that would hitherto have never even been dreamed of by any man.

He first assembled all the forces of which his race had had knowledge, and many of which he himself had discovered. And he devised even mightier forces such as even a god might fear to unchain too lightly.

Then Galos Gann loosed his powers and began to bore a shaft down into the solid lithosphere of the earth. Down through sandstone and granite and gneiss he bored until he had passed down through the rock crust and was deep in the mighty core of nickel-iron which is the heart of the planet.

In that iron core he constructed a great chamber which he fitted with the equipment and the mechanisms that he would require for the task ahead of him. And when everything he needed was in that deep chamber, he retired down to it and then collapsed and closed the shaft that led up to the surface.

Then Galos Gann began to shake the earth. From his deep chamber in the iron core he loosed small impulses of force at exact intervals. And the period of rhythm of these impulses was timed with perfect accuracy to the period of rhythm of the earth.

At first the little impulses had no effect upon the vast globe of the planet. But little by little their effect accumulated and grew stronger, until finally the whole rocky crust of the lithosphere was shaking violently. These stresses and strains produced immense pressures and heats within the rocks, melting much of them into lava. And this molten lava burst

upward in fiery masses all around the globe, as it had done when the earth was in its first youth.

Galos Gann in his deep-buried chamber watched through his instruments and saw the changes taking place upon the surface of the earth. He saw the upthrust masses of molten magma give off their imprisoned gases, and observed those gases combining to form a new hydrosphere of water-vapor clouds around the planet.

The earth was passing through the same changes it had passed through long ago. As its molten surface began to cool, rain began to fall from the clouds and gathered upon the torn surface of the world in new seas.

Galos Gann watched tensely with his far-seeing, marvelous instruments, and saw complex compounds being built up along the shores of the warm seas, from carbon and hydrogen and oxygen and other elements. And beneath the photosynthetic action of the sunlight these organic compounds combined into the first beginnings of primal protoplasmic life.

Galos Gann said then to himself, "The new cycle of earth's life is started. The sun's radiation calls forth life from the inorganic elements as it did ages ago in the past. That life must evolve upward under the same conditions in the same way, and in time men will evolve from it and will again people the earth."

He calculated the ages that it would take for a new human race to evolve upon the face of earth. Then he took a carefully measured quantity of a subtle drug which he had prepared, one which suspended indefinitely every vital function of the human body and yet permitted it to remain living in a deathless sleep. He lay down upon his couch in the buried chamber inside the earth.

"I will sleep now in suspended animation until the new race of man has

evolved," said Galos Gann. "When I awake, earth will again be crowded with the victorious and undying race of men, and I can go forth and look upon them and then die in peace, knowing that man lives."

So saying, he folded his arms upon his breast, and the drug took its effect upon him, and he slept.

And it seemed to him that no sooner had his eyes closed and his consciousness darkened, than he was awaking again, for in sleep an eternity and a moment are the same.

FOR a little, Galos Gann could not indeed believe that he had slept through the ages for which his drug had been calculated. But his chronometers that measured time by the transmutation of uranium showed him that indeed he had lain sleeping for many million millions of years.

Then he knew that he had come to the moment of his triumph. For in those slow millenniums must have evolved the new race of men that must now people the surface of the earth above him.

His hands shook as he prepared to blast a new shaft up to the surface from his chamber.

"Death is not far from me," said Galos Gann, "but first these eyes shall look on the new race which I have created to perpetuate the old."

His forces pierced a shaft up through the rocky crust of the lithosphere to the surface, and borne by his powers Galos Gann rose up that shaft and emerged onto the face of earth into the sunlight.

He stood and looked about him. He was in the midst of a white salt desert that stretched monotonously to the horizons in all directions, and that had nowhere any hill or valley to break its blank expanse.

A queer chill came upon the heart of

Galos Gann as he stood in the glaring sunlight of the lonely desert.

"Can it be," he asked himself, "that the forces of nature have dried and worn the earth just as they did long ago? Even so, somewhere on earth must be the new races of men that time has evolved."

He looked in one direction after another and finally he saw on one horizon the distant spires of a city. His heart gladdened at that sight and he moved toward that city with quick and eager expectation. But when he came close to the city, he was troubled anew. For it was a city of black marble towers and minarets belted by a high black wall, and in many ways it was very like the city Zor that long ago had perished.

He came to one of its open gates and passed into the city. And like a man in a dream he walked through the streets, turning his head this way and that. For this city was as empty of life as ancient Zor had been. Not in any of its courts or ways did there move one human shape, nor echo one human voice. And now a fatal foreboding and knowledge came upon Galos Gann, and led him into

the highest tower and up to a dim and dusky hall at the tower's top.

There at the end of the hall sat huddled in his robes a withered, shrunken man who seemed very near to death.

Galos Gann spoke to him in a strange voice and said, "Who are you, and where are the others of the races of men?"

The other raised his swaying head, and peering blindly at Galos Gann he answered, "There are no others, for I am the last survivor of all the race of man.

"Millioned millions of years ago our life began in the protoplasm of the world's warm seas, and developed through many forms into man, and the civilization and power of man grew great.

"But the seas dried up, and as earth withered, our race withered and died also, until I alone am left in this dead city. And my own death is upon me."

With these words, the shrunken, swaying man fell forward, and sighed once, and lay dead upon the floor.

And Galos Gann, the last man, looked across his body at the sinking sun.

