

# FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

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passage  
to  
anywhere

by . . . Sam Merwin Jr.

The scientists were riding high in the saddle with U N backing. But it took a touch of genius to win the teleportation battle.

THE MOMENT Park Hamilton sat down behind his desk and saw the shocking pink envelope lying atop the neat little rectangular tower that represented his morning's mail, he felt a distinct sense of foreboding. For, while Hamilton was not psychic,<sup>4</sup> in the course of his six-year tenure of the difficult office of executive operations director for Science Projects Research, he had become highly sensitive to the tumbler fallings of small events as indicative of larger patterns.

Reaching slowly for the shocking pink envelope, he tried to tell himself that it was his job that was making him jumpy. Keeping SPR together and afloat on the swirling tides of politics and opinion in a far from united world was a job that would have caused Atlas to throw down his burden in despair and face willingly the wrath of the gods. Or so Hamilton had more than once told his familiars in moments of despondency.

SPR had been born in the disturbed 1950's as a modest revolt among scientists—first in England,

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*Have you ever wondered what would happen if man's inventive genius should abandon space rocket construction for a more daring approach to the conquest of space? Suppose—just suppose—you could step into a matter-transmitting machine and be instantly teleported to Venus or Mars? Concede the possibility and bear in mind that a battle of political titans would have to be waged first, and we predict you won't be able to lay this story down. For Sam Merwin Jr., with his customary brilliance, has actually dared to fire the opening gun.*

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then in the United States—against the nationalistic restrictions imposed upon them by governments inextricably involved in the Gilbertian paradoxes of the so-called Cold War. And, as a divided world somehow worked its way toward peace, it had grown, little by little, to include most of the truly able scientific brains on Earth.

Dedicated to the pure research few governments or industries could afford, it supported itself on a sort of ASCAP arrangement, by which its members turned over to SPR all of their royalties and were paid in return a guaranteed income according to the earnings of the more practical results of their work. Oddly enough, the plan was liked.

Ultimately, SPR had grown so unwieldy, and so rich, that Hamilton's predecessor had managed to put it loosely under the aegis of the United Nations, thus protecting the fiercely independent organization, at least in part, from nationalist pressure. The great SPR Proving and Testing Laboratories in Antarctica had been set up when the UN took mandate over that much-claimed and almost uninhabited continent.

But winning agreement to his great plan from the individualistic and anarchic SPR members had proved almost more difficult than putting through the UN and Antarctic projects. Jacques Swanson, the man responsible, had died shortly after the first ground—or rather ice—was broken south of

Ross Sea. And Park Hamilton was his successor.

He had never allowed himself to believe that the job was a sinecure. But he was firmly convinced that if he had been aware of the endless problems to which it would give rise he would have shot himself before considering it. Which, as his personal assistant, Miss Alderman, invariably reminded him, was so much blather.

"You thrive on it," she told him when this mood was upon him. "You look five years younger."

"That," was his usual reply, "is because, in a Freudian sense, I'm trying to work my way back to the womb. But one of these days you'll come in here and find me quite literally curled up in a foetal position. Then what will you do?"

"Buy you a lollipop," had been her most recent retort.

All in all, a thankless business—and, opening the shocking pink envelope, Hamilton had a definite hunch that the day ahead was going to be even more thankless than usual.

His foreboding was based on a number of things. Each of them was small in itself, but in toto, they shaped up to a pattern he disliked. First, for several days, everything connected with SPR had been running far too smoothly. No member scientist had come up with a demand for a half billion dollars to build a machine that would take him under the Earth's crust.

Moreover, no greedy power had

been plotting in the UN Assembly to subvert to its own use the discovery of one of its nationals, solely to avoid paying SPR patent royalties. And no major industrial cartel had been stirring up trouble, charging scientist-slavery, from the same motives.

What was even more suspicious and disturbing, the reliable Miss Alderman had not yet arrived at her office—and had not phoned in an explanation. Shirley, the Eurasian receptionist, had given him this information quite casually on the way in.

And on top of that, Hamilton had walked under a ladder coming off the high-level ramp, where some rim repairmen had been fixing a warped edge on the helicopter roof. This last occurrence was the most annoying, because Hamilton *knew* it was foolishness and superstition. Yet he could not help feeling as he did.

Now—the shocking pink envelope. Its color alone indicated two things. One, that it was an emergency message from Antarctica too vital to be entrusted to the usual coding channels. And two, that it must have come in during the past half hour—since he had left his apartment uptown. Otherwise it would have been relayed to him there. He was sure it could only mean trouble.

It read: SRYAN OFF HELIJET CIRCA 2200 EDST. VACATION TIME. HAMESSAGE RESTRAINING TOO LATE. WHEREABOUTS UNKNOWN

—CANTSPR. Translated, it meant that S. Ryan had taken off in a helijet about 10 p.m., New York time, on an overdue vacation. A message from Hamilton asking that he delay his departure had arrived too late. Ryan's present whereabouts was not known. Chief, Antarctic Science Projects Research.

Hamilton said, "Damn!" in very forcible accents. Then, deciding the oath was still too mild and too trite for the occasion, he added a few more lurid expletives in several languages, including the Portuguese. These last he had picked up while doing a job as consulting biologist on the Amazon Delta Reclamation Plan—where his work had won him admission to SPR, class AAAA, and had led directly to his present job.

He flipped the visicomunicator switch to Miss Alderman's office, and received in return nothing but a blank screen. He next switched over to Shirley, the receptionist, and was instantly rewarded with a view of her flowerlike Eurasian face. She said, "Miss Alderman's apartment does not answer. And she has not called in."

He flipped off with a scowl and lit a cigarette. His foreboding had been justified. He wondered just how his message to Ryan had been bungled in Antarctica. Or had Ryan simply defied restraint and taken off, and were Cantspr, Witherspoon and the rest down there covering for him? Exhaling wearily, he decided he could hardly

blame either Witherspoon and his able staff, or Ryan himself.

Sven Ryan was an inventor and a man of genius. As an inventor he had just successfully tested what might well prove the most important single development in human gadgetry since the long-haired discovery of the wheel. And, as a genius, he had to be given *some* leeway. But Ryan, free-roaming and talking just now—Hamilton tried but failed to suppress a shudder at the thought.

The visicommunicator hummed and he flipped it on again, hoping it would be the sorely needed Miss Alderman. Instead, it was Shirley. Impassively she announced in her sweet, thin voice, "Mr. Harris of the UN is here to see you, sir."

"Dammit, I *know* Mr. Harris is from the UN!" Hamilton exploded. Then, noting her hurt look, "I'm sorry, Shirley. You're not the target of my wrath. Send him in."

Ian Harris, as SPR high-level liaison man for the United Nations, had been working closely with Hamilton for almost five years. They had traveled together, wined and dined together both in public and private, golfed together, and explored each other's minds and opinions in the closest harmony for hundreds of hours. And yet, at moments such as this, Harris had the knack of putting Hamilton on the defensive.

Hamilton knew he was the better looking. He had viewed himself too many times on too many color

projection screens to have any doubts on that score. But his gray-tipped brown hair looked faintly theatrical when contrasted with Harris' cropped black head, and his upper lip looked naked beside the other man's neat black mustache. What was even more disconcerting, his features looked looser and more florid, his clothes not nearly so well fitting.

As usual, when Harris entered with a brisk nod Hamilton was annoyed to find the refrain of *There'll Always Be an England* running through his head. He said, "Hello, Ian," waved him to a chair and offered him a cigarette with a defensive geniality.

The Englishman shook his head, settled back with a sigh and regarded his host with an I-say-old-man-is-this-exactly-cricket? expression. It occurred to Hamilton that Harris looked at the moment as sad as a Georgia hound dog whose master had eaten up all the steak.

The silence lasted until Hamilton said, with a trace of irritation he hated himself for revealing, "Ian, if you came over here to put the evil eye on me, I earnestly suggest that you go back to your own office? Let *me* be *your* guest."

The UN representative regarded Hamilton as if he were some animal of a rarely photographed and inexplicable new species. Then he said, mildly, "Park. I find it difficult at times to convince certain regrettably backward branches of our organization that SPR is not a

malignant wild growth upon the human social organism—a growth primarily dedicated to the development of disruptive discoveries without regard to their probable effect upon the structure of our society as a whole.”

“For heaven’s sake, get to the point, Ian,” said Hamilton. “We’ve been over this a thousand times before. It’s the job of SPR’s scientists to invent what comes bubbling up to the surface of their perhaps oddly constructed minds. It’s my job—and yours—to fit them into the socio-economic pattern.”

Harris regarded him with a mute disapproval that made Hamilton feel like a small boy caught cheating in a grade-school test. The UN man said, “Do you really think you’re doing your job, old man?”

“I’m doing my best,” said Hamilton, knowing that the toreador capework was about over and the moment of truth about to arrive.

“I’m sure you are.” Having made his point, Harris was disposed to be conciliatory. “But what about this Ryan business?”

Hamilton sighed, and pushed the shocking pink envelope across the desk. “There it is,” he said simply. “Somebody goofed. I sent out a restraining order under special code the moment I heard that Ryan’s tests were successful.”

Harris glanced at the message, frowned, and tossed it back on the desk. “Rough luck, Park,” he said. Then, “Has it occurred to you what it could mean if word gets out gen-

erally that this mad genius of yours has developed an instantaneous matter-transmitter?”

“How did *you* hear of it?” Hamilton asked, instantly suspicious, and remembering that it was absolutely against the UN-SPR pact for the UN to have an informant in Antarctica.

To Hamilton’s amazement, the usually imperturbable Harris countenance turned a bright pink. He thought, *If I’m not skinned alive over this it will have been worth it—just to see Ian blush. But what is he hiding?*

The UN man said, with seeming clairvoyance, “It’s not what you think. I—er—picked it up quite inadvertently. I happened to stumble across your man Ryan late last night.”

“If you did,” said Hamilton seriously, “why in the name of heaven didn’t you clamp on to him?”

“I tried to,” was the reply. “But the circumstances were not exactly propitious.”

“Ryan at complete liberty in New York!” Hamilton groaned. “Was he talking?”

“If he was keeping silent,” said Harris, his face resuming its normal pale tan, “would I be here now? I tell you, Park, this may be more serious than you think. I’m qualified to understand his ravings—an ability not shared by many, thank God. But there’s no way of telling how much harm has been done.”

“Have you taken steps?” Hamilton asked, wishing he had looked

up before walking under that ladder.

Harris nodded. "I've put our UN force on the job. But what can they do? There are only a few score of them. Even if they locate him, they have no real jurisdiction outside of UN territory. All your man has to do is tell them to push off." He paused, then added, "I came over here to discover your attitude and what steps *you* are taking."

"Thanks, Ian," said Hamilton. Harris didn't have to detail what it could mean if word got out that a successful instantaneous matter-transmitter had been discovered. It could mean world-wide financial and economic catastrophe. It could mean disaster for every other form of freight and cargo transportation on Earth, from the great rocket airliners with their chains of freight-gliders to the humblest obsolescent tramp steamer plying the ocean waves.

Hearing of it prematurely, people wouldn't wait to learn its limitations, or the bugs that would have to be worked out before it could be put into operation. They'd dump their stocks and property investments and gilt-edged bonds and the result might well be world-wide chaos.

"We'll do our very best, never fear," said Hamilton, accompanying Harris to the office door.

But, returning to his desk, he wondered just what they could do. To put either the New York City police or the Federal Authorities on

the job would be an iron-clad way of opening up a leak. It was one hell of a mess. He sat down behind his desk, put his face in his hands, and tried desperately to think of something. Nothing came.

The visicommunicator hummed its little tune, and wearily he turned it on again. Miss Alderman's trim, competent face appeared on the screen. He said, "Just where have *you* been?"

She said, "I only this minute got home—and I've got the mad Minnesotan with me. *Chief*, are you okay?"

## II

HAMILTON's first reaction was one of utter disbelief. He said, "You've *what*, Nancy? If by any chance this is a joke—"

"It's not," Miss Alderman assured him crisply. "How do you think I got these rings under my eyes? Sven Ryan is sleeping it off right here in my apartment. I didn't dare turn on my communicator until he passed out."

"But where, and how did you ever get hold of him?" asked Hamilton, still half-incredulous.

"Maybe you'd better come right over here, *Chief*," she said. "I'll explain when you get here. Do you know where I live?"

"I do—and I'm on my way." When Miss Alderman switched off, he flipped Shirley's switch, and informed her he was leaving the office. "Call Mr. Harris and tell

him everything is under control," he directed.

He left by the private door, thus avoiding the reception room and any potential holdups in the outer office. Emerging on the high-level ramp, he looked about warily for the rim repairmen and their ladder, and was relieved to discover that they had finished their work, and gone elsewhere.

Since Miss Alderman, like everyone on SPR except its few top echelon members, lived within a mile of the Zeckendorf Plaza offices, Hamilton hopped a ramp-conveyor that carried him with gratifying celerity and an equally gratifying smoothness across the bottomless canyons of the incredible city.

In less than fifteen minutes he had arrived at a high-level port in her own building, close to the lean green rectangle of Central Park. About him, unnoticed, passed the ever-changing kaleidoscopic vista of Manhattan with its familiar but fantastic metal and glass complexes of polychromatic spires, pyramids, ziggyrats and domes.

Although the trip had been incredibly brief, Miss Alderman looked as crisply and as trimly brunette as she had on the day when she had first stepped into his office to take up her difficult assignment as his personal secretary. Evidently she had found time to do a quite miraculous repair job on the circles under her eyes.

He put an arm around her shoul-

ders, and gave her a quick squeeze. He said, "If I forgot to say thanks over the communicator—thanks now, Nancy." He stood back, looking at her with open admiration. "How?" he asked her.

"Have some coffee," she suggested, flushing with pleasure.

She poured him a steaming black cupful from a glasspresso living-room machine which was one of SPR's most profitable patents. As they sat down, Hamilton could hear the faint sound of snoring from behind the closed bedroom door. He lifted an eyebrow, and nodded toward the sound. Miss Alderman nodded in return.

"I'm waiting," said Hamilton.

"Well," she began, marshalling her thoughts and words with care, "I was sound asleep in my beauty-pad when I got a call on the communicator. It must have been just about three a.m. It was one of the girls in compo-filing. She was watching a night club mike-jockey and she told me that Sven Ryan had just appeared on the screen, and wasn't he supposed to be in Antarctica? It seems she filed your restraining message yesterday afternoon."

"Good girls, both of you," said Hamilton warmly.

To his surprise, Miss Alderman choked on her coffee. For some reason, her reaction reminded him of Ian Harris' inexplicable embarrassment in his office earlier.

When she had recovered herself, Miss Alderman said, "I'm sorry,



Chief. But I think you'll understand when I tell you that by the time I got myself together and over to the club our crazy genius was sitting at a table swathed in three of Molly Sadler's choicest items—one blonde, one redhead, and one brunette. You never saw such—er—figures."

Hamilton could not help smiling. His use of the phrase *good girls* in even remote connotation with any of Molly Sadler's justly renowned Cyprians was more than amusing. He said, "You underestimate me, Nancy. How did Ryan react when he saw you?"

"It was odd." She told him. "Mind you, he was very drunk, and by the time I managed to get him halfway reassembled he couldn't remember any of it. But I'd be willing to swear he said, 'Lord! Another vulture! And I fled Antarctica to get away from all of you. But where's your black mustache?'"

She stroked her perfectly smooth upper lip, looking faintly troubled. Then she said, "I don't have a mustache, do I, Chief?"

He replied, "No, of course not, but Ia—" He caught it barely in time. And, in spite of himself, he grimaced, envisioning what must have happened. Evidently Ryan, loaded and ready for "tiger hunting," had headed for Molly Sadler's famous non-home and discovered the impeccable, imperturbable, and immovable Ian Harris already there.

"What's the matter, Chief?"

Miss Alderman stared at him with curiosity snapping in her wide-set black eyes.

"Nothing," said Alderman. "Tell you later. How did you manage to get him away from the bevy? From what I've heard about Molly's girls—" He let it hang.

"Chief, all I can tell you after last night is that everything you hear isn't half the truth," she said solemnly. "If I had a quarter of the—well, I'll just say that if I had a certain kind of glamor I'd never have wasted a fourth of my life becoming college-trained to spend the best years of my youth behind a desk—even a very nice desk."

"You'll do—anywhere," he told her. Then, frowning, "Among the interesting things I've heard about Molly's girls is that some of them have college degrees too. Was Ryan talking?"

"He certainly was," said Miss Alderman promptly. "He was beguiling his harem with promises to ship each of them an Antarctic rock-diamond every week, by instant teleportation."

"Oh, God!" said Hamilton. "Let's hope these particular girls have extremely low IQ's. They could be the exact opposite of the intellectual type."

"I wouldn't bet on it, Chief," was Miss Alderman's reply. "Though it doesn't seem quite fair, when you come right down to it."

"How did you get him away from them?" he asked.

She shook her close-cut dark-

haired head. "If I hadn't been full of outraged righteousness, if I'd stopped to think twice, I'd never have made it," she admitted. "I just marched in and led poor Sven out by the ear. It was a high-handed, somewhat unworthy trick—at least he seemed to think so once I had him under wraps. I'm beginning to think so myself."

"Get hold of yourself, Nancy," said Hamilton, rising. "You've done a SPR a very great service. How'd you keep him here?"

"Not the way you think," she said promptly. "By the time I got him here he was running out of steam. He wanted to talk—and go on drinking. He's a pretty nice guy, you know. It took me all the rest of the night to get him folded up." She paused, then added, "Chief, is this new item of his as hot as he claims?"

"Ian Harris was in my office just now, having catfits over it," said Hamilton. "Potentially, it's the hottest potato SPR has ever come up with. And we've had to handle some pretty sizzling ones, remember?"

"I remember," said Miss Alderman.

Hamilton rose. He said, "I think we'd better wake Ryan up. We can't let him sleep here indefinitely."

"Why, Chief!" asked Miss Alderman, standing to reveal a trim if not opulent figure.

"I'm not, at the moment, concerned about your reputation," he

told her, inwardly damning all women for their tendency to coyness at the wrong moments. "What I am concerned with is Ryan and his—"

The doorbell chimed sharply. After a swift, silent interchange, Miss Alderman answered it. Rather expecting Ian Harris to have run them to earth, Hamilton was not wholly surprised at the appearance of a huge, burly man with bushy black eyebrows and a ruggedly handsome face.

Face and body belonged to Charles Forsythe, Undersecretary of Science and Industry in the Cabinet of the President of the United States and one of the world's wealthiest and most powerful individuals. It is perhaps needless to add that he was, incidentally, SPR's deadliest foe in the name of private enterprise.

Miss Alderman turned to stare at Hamilton, her expression bewildered and uncertain.

Hamilton said, quietly, "Come in, Charlie. Come in. I'm glad to see you."

"Glad to see you, too, Park," said Forsythe. The two men eyed each other with the restrained wariness of polite jungle cats. Then Forsythe's mouth twitched and Hamilton found himself laughing with the intruder. *Confound the man!* he thought. It was a hell of a note when you couldn't stay mad at your enemies.

Actually, Forsythe's sudden emergence in the already complex

problem of Sven Ryan and his matter-transmitter was an element Hamilton had been hoping they could avoid ever since Ian Harris had told him Ryan was at liberty in New York and talking his head off. But, since Forsythe was already here . . .

Hamilton said, "Let Miss Alderman pour you a cup of coffee. It's excellent, I can assure you."

"Thank you, I could use one," said the industrialist, flinging himself in a rollachair that creaked ominously under his by no means inconsiderable weight. "I didn't get much sleep last night."

"I don't imagine you did," said Hamilton, shaking his head faintly at Nancy, who was giving him a shall-I-put-something-in-it? look. "You must have been pretty busy."

"All in the night's work," said Forsythe, yawning and extending his legs. His voice, like the rest of him, was big and deep. Charlie Forsythe looked like a gigantic, old-fashioned steel puddler who had come up in the world and was not quite adjusted to its social niceties—a bull in a china shop instead of the expensively-reared son of vast inherited wealth that he actually was. He was a throw-back to the industrial-pirate era of the late nineteenth century—human, tough, limited, determined, likeable, and always dangerous.

He was, in fact, that most dangerous variety of anarchist—the sort that believes in absolute freedom for himself and stringent reg-

ulation for others. He was a dinosaur, a three-decker man of war. He was obsolete but he didn't know it. All of which, with his strength of personality and immense resources, made him doubly dangerous.

The cup of coffee Miss Alderman handed him looked like a child's piece of doll-house china in his immense hairy hand. He drained it at a draught, nodded his thanks, and said, "Well, where's the boy?"

"In there," said Hamilton, nodding toward the bedroom door. "He's sleeping it off."

"I've got an order here," said Forsythe patting his breast pocket. "I've also got operatives outside. We're picking up Ryan under the Security Act of nineteen fifty-six."

"You *have* been busy," said Hamilton, really worried. "But that Act has been superseded by a whole flock of subsequent legislation."

Forsythe grinned lazily, like a satisfied sabre-tooth tiger. He said, "Maybe—but it's still on the books. And by the time the courts get through arguing out the pros and cons of it we'll have all the juice out of the boy." He glanced at Hamilton, and added significantly, "All of this is on the level, isn't it? I'd hate to think I'd wasted the entire night for nothing."

Hamilton longed to lie, but knew it would gain him nothing. They'd simply pull Ryan in anyway and find out about his invention for themselves. He said, "It's on the level, Charley. But the whole thing

is so new—so untried. It may take years, even decades."

Forsythe lit a cigar—a cigarette would have looked like a lady-cracker stuck in that enormous face. He said, "That may be so. But we can't afford to risk it. The Wrights invented the airplane at the turn of the century, and ten years later they were using it to bomb targets in the Second Balkan War."

That, thought Hamilton unhappily, was one of the things that made Forsythe dangerous. Underneath the bullyboy exterior lurked a first-class brain and a vast storehouse of knowledge in unexpected fields. It was, he decided, time to take steps.

"Charley," he said, "I think you know what I am empowered to do if you try this with Ryan. It is clearly stated in the SPR charter that infringement by a national government, or any subject or citizen of such a government, upon the rights of either SPR, or any member thereof, permits us to apply sanctions, either limited or total, according to our judgment. That's a UN General Assembly provision."

Forsythe looked sleepily amused. "Quite the lawyer, aren't you, Park? Too bad you aren't as good an American."

With difficulty Hamilton restrained the sudden surge of anger within him. He said, "Not today, Charley. But if you pull this kidnapping merely to save your own bank account SPR *will* take action

—and we'll have no trouble getting UN backing."

"Of course you won't," said Forsythe, smiling. "But we can't afford the risk of matter-transmission at this point. We're willing to fly by the seat of our pants. The UN can't afford to have you people withdraw your patents from us and put America out of business." He blew a perfect smoke ring.

Miss Alderman emerged from the bedroom. "He's still out like a light," she said.

"We have an ambulance downstairs," said Forsythe quietly. "We were going to use it anyway."

Hamilton said, "Naturally, we wouldn't put America out of business. But we could withdraw your rights to all SPR patents employed in your international carriers. That would hurt *you*. It would force American exporters to use foreign carriers. But it wouldn't put America or the world out of business."

It was the old, hateful tug of war, the civilized man against the jungle barbarian in thought and deed. Not for the first time, Hamilton felt a sense of shame at his country's forbearance. As, he supposed, other internationalists must occasionally feel toward their own.

Forsythe said, "I hardly have to remind you, Park, that there is strong and growing resentment in certain influential circles against your SPR as a world monopoly that gobbles up all of our finest scientific brains and forces us to pay for their use."

"If you'd paid them well enough to begin with, SPR would never have been formed," said Hamilton.

"Perhaps." Forsythe shrugged. "But that's water under the bridge. We shan't repeat the mistake, I promise you."

"You won't get the chance," warned Hamilton.

They were eyeing each other warily when the doorbell chimed again. Miss Alderman hastened to answer it. Ian Harris stood framed in the entranceway, backed by four white-and-blue-uniformed UN police officers. A pair of plainclothesmen, obviously Forsythe's operatives, hovered at a discreet distance behind them.

Harris, looking every inch the Britisher, waited until Miss Alderman had closed the door. Then he said, "Mr. Forsythe, am I right in my interpretation of what Miss Alderman recently informed me via UN communicator? Did you enter this apartment, accompanied by an armed escort, for the sole purpose of removing without his consent an SPR employee to an unknown destination?"

Forsythe shrugged his mammoth shoulders. "Interpret it as you choose. I came here empowered by the President of the United States, operating under law—the Security Act of nineteen fifty-six—to ensure that a citizen of my country does not employ his specialized knowledge to its jeopardy."

Harris said, drily, "For your information, Forsythe, and that of

your government, all SPR property and persons fall under UN jurisdiction according to General Assembly agreement—an agreement ratified by all member nations. That naturally includes their living quarters. Since Miss Alderman is an SPR official her apartment is therefore inviolable by any national police force—except in case of a felony."

Hamilton stepped in. He said, "Gentlemen, we seem to have reached an impasse. May I therefore suggest a way out?"

### III

HAMILTON left Forsythe and Ian Harris sitting on opposite sides of the fore-cabin of the SPR helicopter which was taking them swiftly southward to Antarctica. In the rear cabin were Miss Alderman and an unhappily reawakened Sven Ryan.

Hamilton nodded to his assistant and said, "Nancy, you'd better go forward and keep those two tigers from tearing each other limb from limb. I want to talk to Ryan alone. It's of great importance."

Miss Alderman slipped silently from the rear cabin and Hamilton sat down in the seat she had left vacant and studied the inventor in tight-lipped concern. Despite the fact that he had spent two years under the skin-tanning Antarctic sun and snow-glare, Sven Ryan's face was white. Quite obviously he was the sort of milk-skinned red-

head who does not react to exposure by turning red or brown.

At the moment, his face was a near-pistachio green—a delicate pastel shade that contrasted vividly with the bright red of his hair and eyeballs. He sat despondently on his cot, with his chin in his hands, flanked by an oxygen inhalator and a half-empty bottle of anti-fatigue tablets.

He eyed his chief with resignation. "What are you going to do to me, Park?" he said. "Boot me out of the SPR?"

"For heaven's sake, why?" Hamilton asked, surprised.

"For blowing a couple of million bucks," was the solemn reply.

Hamilton had expected to find Ryan in the throes of physical reaction to his bender, but he had not expected such abject mental misery. He said, soothingly, "Sven, you know as well as I do that SPR funds are primarily for the use of its scientists—for their research and experimentation. The only thing that puzzles me is why you went gallivanting off and spilled your large flannel mouth all over New York last night."

Hamilton was prepared for every answer but the one he got. Incredibly, the inventor lifted his bleary eyes to the other's face and said, "Why shouldn't I drown my sorrows after blowing all that money and work on a miserable failure? And if I chose to talk about it, that's my business."

Hamilton felt as if the heli-

rocket had hit an old-fashioned air pocket. The very breath seemed to go out of him. He said, "But according to the reports, your transmitter was a success. It worked."

Sven Ryan made a gesture of disgust. "Sure it worked," he said, "over one kilometer with a few kilos of dead weight. But you know what I was working for. My whole aim has been to invent some method of transport that will make interplanetary travel economically feasible. But what good is a transporter that cannot send organic life?"

He paused to take a whiff of oxygen and his looks and spirits almost visibly improved. "I must have been out of my mind, Park. I ran a dozen extra tests with white mice." He shook his head wretchedly. "What came out in the receiver was sickening. I felt like a sadist."

"So you took off and got drunk," said Hamilton. "You wanted to drown your sorrows."

Here, he thought, was a perfect example of the creative, scientific mind—a mind so wrapped up in fulfillment of a dream, in the attainment of a single end, that everything else remained in fuzzy focus. Here was that persistent anomaly, the completely dedicated man who would never cease to be a problem to the more scatter-gunned mass of humanity. It was a problem that ranged all the way from the absent-minded professor to the discoverer of new theories and machines that

were constantly threatening to disrupt the balances by which other men lived.

"Seven years!" said Ryan gloomily. "Seven years and almost three million SPR dollars—and it's a tragic bust. Do you wonder I blew my top, Park?" He paused again and for an instant his eyes lighted up. "Chief, do you know who I ran into last night? I'm not going to tell you where, but it was—"

"It was Ian Harris of the UN, and you stumbled over him at Molly Sadler's house of joy," said Hamilton.

"How'd you know?" Ryan asked. Then, before his chief could answer, "Lord, Park, it was almost worth it. But I was in no mood to trade shop talk with Ian Harris then. So I grabbed me an armful of girls and took off. The next thing I remember, Nancy—your girl Friday—was hauling me away from them. And the next thing I remember after that is waking up here with the same face before me. Park, is part of her job tormenting poor scientists out for a little ill-deserved fun?"

Hamilton chuckled. Then he said, "Didn't she tell you anything, Sven?"

"She tried to," was the reply, "but I shut her up. As it was my ears were ringing in three different keys. Why do you ask?"

"Brace yourself, boy," said Hamilton, deciding it was time to discuss some home truths with a youth who was showing every sign of

rapid recovery. "We're on our way to Antarctica. Did you know that?"

"That I got," said Ryan. "Are you planning to have me flayed alive or merely drawn and quartered?"

"Hardly," Hamilton assured him. "Though there are a couple of chaps up in the front cabin who might not be averse to such a plan. One of them is Charles Forsythe, the American Secretary for Science and Industry. The other is your old friend Ian Harris."

Ryan sat bolt upright on his cot, his clearing eyes wide with surprise. "Good God!" he exclaimed. "How come they're in on this? Are they planning to participate in my court-martial? I'm sorry, Park, if I've made things tough for you. But I don't quite see what I did to—"

"All you did," Hamilton interrupted, "was to invent the first successful instantaneous matter-transmitter in history. In your preoccupation with discovering a way to send men to the stars it evidently didn't occur to you that your little gadget, right here on Earth, can make every other means of transport from a mountain burro to the latest A-rocket obsolete overnight. And then you had to get drunk and spill it all over New York! Charlie Forsythe tried to put you under security lock and key for the United States."

Hamilton went on to explain exactly what had happened. How Nancy Alderman had plucked him to precarious safety, how Forsythe

had attempted protective custody, how Harris had foiled Forsythe, and finally how Hamilton himself, after a prolonged and fruitless argument, had stepped in with a compromise suggestion.

"You mean you want me to run off a test for these characters?" Ryan inquired with amazing perspicacity.

"Exactly," said Hamilton. "You can, can't you?"

"Sure," was the prompt reply. "But it won't prove anything. The ground-level projection range is only a couple of kilometers. Even with towers, it won't transmit far enough to amount to anything. Who wants to haul heavy freight up to the top of a hundred-meter tower to move it a few more kilometers? Park, it just doesn't make sense."

"How far did the first airplane fly?" Hamilton asked the inventor. "A hundred and thirty-seven feet, wasn't it?"

"Hmmp!" Ryan took another whiff of oxygen. "I hadn't thought of the Earth-transport angle. But the bugs in this creation of mine are going to be a hell of a lot harder to work out. Earth-transport—why, it's like using a diecaster to crack a nut." Then, with a look of alarm, "Chief, you aren't giving up on the space-travel dream, are you?"

Hamilton shook his head. "You know better than that," he said. "In fact—" He let it hang, adding quickly, "But forget about your in-

vention being a flop. It's potentially the most important single device any SPR man has ever come up with. I'm sorry we had to cut off your spree in mid-flight, but we couldn't afford an international panic just now."

A brief, boyish smile lent charm to the inventor's almost ugly face. He said wistfully, "I guess it would kick over a lot of applicarts at that. Hey, Park, where are you going?"

"You may not have noticed," said Hamilton drily, "but we're coming in to land. Don't you want to come forward and join the others? After all, you are the lion of this occasion."

Ryan hesitated, then shook his head. "I might embarrass Harris," he said, and winced at the accidental rhyme.

"Impossible," said Hamilton, rising. Then, recalling the Englishman's blush in his office only that morning, "Well, have it your own way. Just remember you're a hero, son."

"I'll try, Father Hamilton," said Ryan, patting his diaphragm and belching vigorously. "Sometimes I don't know what's worse—the hangover or its cure."

"You're cured," said Hamilton from the doorway. "See you at the base. Run these tests off and you'll get all the liberty and girls you want—liquor, too."

"Don't make me ill again," said Ryan. "I've had it for another five years. I'm even looking forward to



seeing the girls at the base again. Thanks, Park—for everything."

An hour later, they were seated at a luncheon table in the CANT-SPR's private dining room, where Jack Witherspoon and his aides had whipped together a remarkable short-notice meal of foods raised or grown on the SPR Breeding and Agricultural Station.

There was a delicious plankton-and-shark-fin soup, followed by filets of musk-oxen that had been so treated by SPR husbandry and food experts that it rivaled the finest Argentine beef. These were accompanied by an astonishing array of locally-grown fruits and vegetables, some out of doors, some under artificial lights, and all of them hydroponically.

When dessert was served Witherspoon—a lean, nut-brown man with a high, near-bald forehead—remarked, "One thing we never have to worry about here is the sherbet. We always have plenty of ice."

The sally brought a chuckle, but it was of short duration. Forsythe and Ian Harris were still locked in their marathon argument as to the rights of the individual nation, and the individual citizen balanced against the stern edicts of a world control.

"You can't go against human nature," Forsythe said for the fifteenth time. "People are people, and they'll always want to take care of their own before they share with others."

"Some people, Forsythe," said Harris drily. "Fortunately or otherwise, there are a number of us who consider loyalty to self and species above loyalty to any institution or set of institutions, however traditional."

"I suppose," said Forsythe in his booming voice, "that the UN is not an institution—and you are not loyal to it?"

"A specious argument, I fear," replied Harris, stroking his neat black mustache. "I'll grant you that institutions are necessary, man being what he is. But it is therefore necessary for us to create and serve institutions that grow constantly larger in scope and embrace more and more people in their pattern of expansion. Should we not instead draw a line and say, 'Here I stop—I go no further.'"

"What will happen when we colonize the planets?" Sven Ryan asked.

Harris regarded the inventor with mild astonishment, while Forsythe looked actually baleful. The American cabinet member said, "I thought the space-dream was halted for the time being, after the last Moon-mission failed. How much did that one-cost you people? Forty-one billions, wasn't it?"

"And the lives of seventeen men and women when the appropriations bill was cut—thanks largely to American influence in the UN," retorted the inventor hotly.

"If they'd come back as ordered, no one would have died," said

Forsythe angrily. "What was the sense of maintaining a Moon station when all they could do was observe conditions there—at the staggering cost of fifteen billion dollars a year?"

"I opposed the appropriations cut, Mr. Ryan," Ian Harris reminded him. "However, expenses were running a bit hog-wild."

"Do you think of nothing but dollars?" Ryan asked pugnaciously. His hangover safely buried, he had acquired a new belligerence.

Hamilton broke the embarrassed silence that followed. Laying his napkin on the table, he rose and asked, "Don't you think we'd better be getting on with the test?"

Actually, he was on the inventor's side of the argument, but he dared not risk alienating the others. Leaving the dining room, they were taken underground, where they donned temperature-proof aluminum coveralls. Then they rode a swift, monorail subway to the proving ground. Hamilton wished his chest would stop itching. It always began the moment he found himself unable to scratch it.

Miss Alderman caught his arm for an instant as they left the monorail at the end of their journey. "What have you got in mind, Chief?" she asked him in a cautious whisper.

"Wait and see," was his whispered reply. "We've still got an ace or two up our sleeves."

"I hope so," she said earnestly. "If Mr. Forsythe gets frightened

enough, I'm afraid he'll ask the Americans to drop a bomb on the whole base."

"We can stop a bomb," Hamilton told her quietly. "We've got to stop any effort to put clamps on SPR through UN channels. I'm not even sure how Ian would stand on such a move if your boyfriend's invention looks too good. But that's my job. You concentrate on keeping Ryan in hand. You didn't do too well at the lunch table."

"He's not my boyfriend!" was Miss Alderman's hot retort—a trifle too heated, Hamilton thought.

He replied with his most irritating chuckle.

#### IV

AS THE tests were set up, Hamilton, Sven Ryan and Ian Harris remained at the near transmitter-post, while Forsythe and Miss Alderman journeyed by jet-sled across a kilometer of concrete to the far terminus, with Jack Witherspoon doing the honors as operator at the terminus post. The transmitter, looking somewhat like an old-fashioned circular heater, or primitive radar receptor, was enclosed in a heated dome-hut. With the complex machinery that surrounded it, it rose more than two meters high.

Ian Harris, regarding it with a dubious gleam in his eye, remarked, "It looks rather like an upended warming pan, doesn't it?"

Hamilton ignored the remark. "As I get it, Sven, the principle

involved is that of atomic transmutation—right?" he asked, prowling about the machine as the inventor set about preparing it for the test with quiet efficiency.

"That's the basic idea," Ryan replied. "Actually, it breaks down the cargo into its atomic components, and transmits it over the beam to the terminus, where it is reassembled. The whole process of break-down, like the reassembly, must take place in one-thousandth of a second—or we'd come up with apple tapioca or something. You should see some of the messes we've had. And"—he added with a glance at Hamilton, "I don't mean the mice."

"Int'resting," said Ian Harris, stroking his mustache. "Any chance of an explosion if the timing's off?"

Ryan shook his copper head. "Not a chance," he replied firmly. "There's nothing to trigger a critical mass—and besides, there's no critical mass to trigger. If there were"—He paused significantly. "If there were we'd have been blown to bits, along with a large chunk of Antarctica, months ago. Some of our timing was so far off it was pitiful."

Hamilton said, "What about while your beam is operating. Any time limit on that?"

"None that we know of," was the reply. "Once she's in beam transmission, she's static. It's the breakdown and reassembly stages where every millisecond counts."

He flipped a switch, and a large visiscreen showed Jack Witherspoon preparing a duplicate of the transmitter, with Miss Alderman and hulking Charley Forsythe hovering in the background.

"Ready, Jack?" the inventor asked.

"In a minute," was the reply. "What are you sending us?"

Sven looked at Ian Harris. "Willing to risk your watch?" he asked. "Park will replace it if anything goes wrong."

"You can send a watch without hurting it?" the UN liaison man asked.

"Well, we're going to try," said Sven, his features impassive.

After a moment of reluctance, the Englishman pulled a slim platinum timepiece from his pocket. "The chain, too?" he asked.

"Sure—why not? Thanks." The inventor took the objects and placed them in an adjustable holder in the center of the transmitter. "You spoiled my time last night, Mr. Harris," he said. "Why shouldn't I spoil yours today?"

"*Hab!* Very good," said Harris, looking faintly uncomfortable.

In the screen, Witherspoon said, "Ready here, Sven."

"Coming at you," said the red-headed inventor. He pushed a button. Witherspoon unlocked the receiver on the screen and held the Englishman's watch close to it.

"Jove! It's still ticking!" said Harris, looking relieved. Moments later, it had been sent back and he

was holding it in his hand, an expression of utter incredulity on his habitually impassive face. "Impossible!" he exclaimed faintly.

"But true," said Sven with a trace of mockery. Hamilton frowned at him and shook his head.

After a half dozen other tests, which included transmission and re-transmission of a kilo of butter, a lump of crude iron, a book, a jet-sled, a handkerchief and a bunch of station-grown grapes, the two parties reassembled and rode the monorail back to the main base, where Witherspoon had them served fine synthetic brandy. Hamilton noted that Ryan took a soft drink instead.

There had been little talk during the journey. In Witherspoon's quarters, Hamilton noticed an obviously shaken Charley Forsythe and a white-faced Ian Harris gathered in a corner, where they seemed to be reaching some sort of whispered agreement.

Miss Alderman, regarding them anxiously, nudged her chief's elbow and asked, "Don't you think we ought to break that up before it goes too far? I'm not scared of either of them. But the thought of them together gives me chills."

Hamilton shook his head. "Let's hear what they have to say," he replied, *sotto voce*. "I'd like to get this whole business thrashed out and settled before we get back to New York. Once they're on their own again, I'm afraid to imagine what they'll do."

He chatted with Sven Ryan and Witherspoon, congratulating them on their achievement. But he kept a weather eye cocked on the conference in the corner. When Forsythe cleared his throat like some giant bullfrog, and stepped forward, he was prepared for anything.

"First," said the aggressive financier in his great roar of a voice, "I want to congratulate you, Ryan, and all of you in SPR, for what you have shown us this afternoon. If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I'd never have believed it."

He paused for effect, then went on with, "However, I am sure you are all aware of the momentous consequences of this latest and greatest of human accomplishments. Before I go on, I want to say that Mr. Harris, as the UN representative on the spot, is in full agreement with me.

"As things stand today, if so much as a whisper leaks out that you have accomplished instantaneous matter-transmission, we'll be facing a financial breakdown that will make the Great Depression of fifty years ago look like a boom. Since we have no guarantee that the secret can or will be kept—no offense, gentlemen and Miss Alderman—both Mr. Harris and I feel we are going to have to put the entire SPR Antarctica Base under security wraps.

"Mind you, this is only a temporary fiat, as yet unbacked by either UN or United States mandate. But, in view of the appalling potential

of your discovery, both Mr. Harris and I feel that no other steps will suffice."

Hamilton *shushed* an irate Sven Ryan, who looked ready to do battle with his fists. He stepped forward, wishing fugitively that he didn't have to look up to the financier. Turning to Harris, he said, "Ian, do you really want to clamp down on SPR?"

The Englishman looked miserable—but helpless. He said, "I detest the step and you know it. But what else is there to do, old man?"

Hamilton sighed. "Instead of suppressing knowledge—a step that has never worked for long in all history—why don't you prepare the world to accept this new miracle?"

Forsythe boomed, "It's too big a risk, Park. They'll never adjust to the idea without a bad crash. This is going to take *years* of preparation. It's like asking Australian bushmen to drive helicar in New York overhead traffic."

"Perhaps it's not as big a jump as you fear," said Hamilton quietly. "Charley, you've been looking for a loophole to crack down on SPR—pardon the scrambled metaphor—all your life. You're jumping at the chance to suppress something you can't control. Ian, you're not really frightened—you're being lazy. You are afraid of the work that has to be done."

Stung, the Englishman said, "Possibly, Park. But consider the full implications of the ability to transport an endless flood of ma-

terial across any ocean you wish— instantaneously. Why should any shipper on Earth even consider our present modes of transport?"

"Because," said Hamilton, with a half-wink at an obviously bursting Sven Ryan, "the present modes of transport are the only means of getting their goods where they want them to go."

"What are you talking about?" Forsythe boomed.

"But with our own eyes, we saw—" began Harris.

Hamilton raised his hand. "You witnessed matter transmission, never fear," he told them. Then he went on to detail what the inventor had told him in the helirocket, adding a detail or two he knew himself. "So you see," he concluded, "to transmit matter over any distance would mean the building of immense towers and loading platforms. The transmitter cannot send through the curve of the Earth. And it cannot be bounced off the Heavyside Layer."

Forsythe and Harris exchanged puzzled glances. It was the UN official who said, "Then you mean the device is impractical? If it is, what are we so excited about?"

"Precisely what I was wondering," said Hamilton. "Good artificial jewels have been made for more than a century. But real gems have not lost an iota of their value." He paused to sip his brandy, added, "So you gentlemen have let the mere words *matter-transmission* terrify you."

"If the words alarmed *us*," said Harris, "consider their effect on humanity at large."

"Probably much less than you suppose," said Hamilton. "Remember, humanity at large has much less immediately at stake in the various forms of transportation than either of you."

Forsythe seemed to have lost interest. "You're right, Park, much as I hate to admit it. We're up against nothing a little well-guided public relations campaign won't handle. And you — SPR — have come up with another impractical invention."

"Impractical?" said Hamilton, looking one by one at the others in the room. "I wouldn't say so. Sven Ryan, you set out to develop a means of making space-flight economically feasible. When your transmitter proved unable to send living creatures intact, you thought you had failed."

"What have you got in mind, Park?" the inventor asked.

"Just this," said Hamilton. "What has made any successful establishment of posts on the Moon or any of the planets impossible? It is not the transportation of *men*. It is the transportation of material both ways to maintain them and make their operation profitable—scientifically as well as economically. Sven, there's no Earth curvature between here and the near side of the Moon. Once we set up a transfer-terminus on the near side, the supply problem would be licked."

Ryan leaped on Hamilton, and gave him a bear-hug. "Chief!" he almost shouted. "You've done it! You've got the answer!"

Half-laughing, Hamilton got clear of the inventor and said, "I may have an answer, but *you* did it." He turned toward Harris and Forsythe, adding, "Well, what do you gentlemen think now of our impractical gadget?"

Harris could only nod. From his relieved expression, from the glint of excitement in his eyes, there was no question where his true sympathies lay. Charley Forsythe stepped forward again, grabbed Ryan and said, "By God, when you get it worked out, I want to go up there."

"You're too big—and too fat!" said the inventor.

"Gentlemen," said Hamilton, moving in again, "a toast to the transmitter, and to its inventor—and to the Moon and all the moons and planets beyond!"

"Passage to anywhere," Miss Alderman murmured as she lifted her glass.

Later, riding back to New York with her in the helirocket, Hamilton felt limp, washed out, distinctly sorry for himself. "Why do I have to get back so soon?" he inquired, a trifle peevishly. "Charley and Ian are having all the fun back there in Antarctica, celebrating."

"Duty calls, Chief," she said with an indulgent smile.

He ignored her. "And all I get is a hug from Sven Ryan. For five

bucks, I'd pay Molly Sadler a visit and meet some of those stunners of hers in the flesh."

"Not for five dollars, you wouldn't," said Miss Alderman with a half-smile. "Besides, you're not the type."

"Dammit, do you have to remind me now?" he said. He settled

lower in his seat and wished he had a hat to pull over his eyes. He wished Nancy Alderman weren't so damnably puritanic. He wished . . .

Moments later, Mrs. Nancy Hamilton leaned across him and made sure his jacket would not get rumpled while he slept.

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