

A NOVEL OF THE FUTURE COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE!

STARTLING STORIES

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JULY



A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

GIANTS FROM ETERNITY By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

• THE BEST IN SCIENTIFICTION •

STARTLING STORIES

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JULY, 1939

A Complete Book-Length Scientifiction Novel



GIANTS FROM ETERNITY

By **MANLY WADE WELLMAN**

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The Metal Man Was on Trial for His Life—But the State Claimed He Didn't Have One!



A policeman fired at the Tri-octopus, but the shot had no effect

ROBOT A-1

By **OSCAR J. FRIEND**

Author of "Of Jovian Build," etc.

THE judge's gavel thumped three times in the ghastly quiet. The voice of the court clerk rang out nervously.

"Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! The case of the Commonwealth against the Forsythe Mechanical Man is now opening by order of Judge McElvery. Are the attorneys for plaintiff and defendant ready to proceed?"

Three grave-faced men stood up at the counsel table for the State.

"We are ready, Your Honor," said the spokesman.

Thump went the judge's gavel, and all eyes in the crowded courtroom turned toward the defendant's table.

Nothing was there save a queer-looking contrivance. It was, as compared to the color and form and curves of a human being, a crude caricature of a man.

Some seven feet tall, made of a glistening white metal and with a pair of jewel-like compound eyes of special optical glass, with two hinged arms and two sturdy legs, with a row of buttons up and down its cylindrical body front in lieu of shirt or vest buttons, as rigid and lifeless as a column of stone, stood the incredible invention known as the Forsythe Mechanical Man, or Robot A-1.

The whole procedure smacked of the

pompous legal trials of the middle ages when inanimate things or unreasoning lower animals were seriously tried by due process of law for their so-called crimes and sins. Was this a court trial in the days when frogs in the town were ordered not to croak so loudly, when rats were tried for eating grain, when swine were tried for killing a person? Not at all! This was a sober and serious trial in the Criminal Courts Building of New York City in the year 1940, A.D.!

"Well," said the judge testily. "Is the counsel for the defense invisible or not prepared?"

There was at last a response to this acid inquiry. The many-faceted eyes of the robot lit up with a dull gleam as though they were twinkling. Then a hollow but perfectly articulate voice spoke from the amplifying cone just behind the metal lips.

"If it please the Court," came the words, "I will conduct my own defense."

A woman shrieked as she saw that nobody was at hand to operate the robot. Another fainted. And the judge rapped again for order.

"This is highly irregular, Your Honor," cried one of the three lawyers for the State. "I move that the Court appoint—"

"It is part of the legal code of this country and this state," interrupted the perfect voice of the robot, "for an accused person to conduct his own defense without having been admitted to the bar, if such is his or her desire. It is my desire."

"Proceed with the case," ruled the judge.

Without any noise save the slight whirring of his gyroscopic motor which functioned for Robot A-1 like the cerebellum and the canals in the ears for human beings, the mechanical man moved his rubberoid-covered metal feet and walked over to the judge's bench.

"I ask only permission to conduct my defense in my own way, Your Honor. First, may I hear read the charge on which I am being tried, for purposes of the record?"

The judge ordered the charge read. The clerk obliged in his nervous voice.

"The State versus the Forsythe Mechanical Man, hereinafter called Robot A-One, indicted June twenty-first for the manufacture of deadly machine known as the Tri-octopus, a seven-foot tall mechanically motivated machine which stands on three multi-joined legs and has eight cabled arms, and which was used to kill seven persons on the lower subway level at Times Square before it was fortunately knocked off the platform in front of an express train and destroyed. How do you plead, guilty or not guilty?"

FOR a moment there was silence in the courtroom. Then:

"I plead guilty of making the Tri-octopus, and not guilty of operating it to take human life," answered the voice of the robot.

"Where are your witnesses?" demanded the Court.

"I will use the witnesses for the prosecution, Your Honor."

"Gentlemen of the prosecution, proceed with your case," ordered the judge.

"Call the first witness," said the senior lawyer to the clerk.

"Robot A-One!" called out the clerk, reading from a list in his hand.

The mechanical man stiffly turned his head toward the table for the prosecution and then actually made a convulsive movement which could have been interpreted as a shrug. He walked firmly to the witness chair, a marvel of smoothly coordinating parts, and held up his right hand with its blunt but powerful looking rubberoid-coated fingers.

"Swear me," he said to the dumb-founded clerk.

"I object!" cried one of the lawyers. "You can't administer an oath to a mechanical gadget! I don't care how human it acts."

Robot A-1 turned to face the speaker.

"Mr. Martin is your name, I think. You are refuting your own carefully compiled argument by such a statement, sir. In trying me for this crime you must recognize me as an entity. I advise you to withdraw your objection without waiting for the Court to overrule it."

Mr. Martin withdrew his objection and sat down in discomfiture. The oath was administered, and Robot A-1 seated himself carefully in the witness chair and faced the Courtroom.

A correspondent for a Washington, D. C., newspaper turned in amazement to his companion.

"What the devil goes on here?" he demanded. "Am I crazy, or is it this Court?"

"Sh-h-h!" warned his companion. "You came here to write up the Tri-octopus murders, didn't you? Well, be quiet and listen. This is just as strange to us as it is to you."

"Do you mean to tell me that that thing is alive?" exclaimed the Washington man incredulously. "And that it's on trial for its life for making another machine which committed murder?"

"I don't mean to tell you a blessed thing," said the New York man firmly. "You just listen and draw your own conclusions."

Mr. Martin had recovered his aplomb, and he advanced to ask questions of the bizarre witness.

"You are a product of David Forsythe, finished by Dr. Forsythe some time in Nineteen-thirty-nine?" he asked.

"I am," replied the witness, his faceted eyes glowing strongly as an inner tube was agitated and then faded almost blank. "I am also aware that a being accused of a crime cannot be made to testify against himself. However, I waive that right."

"You—you claim to be the only independently motivated robot ever created? In brief, you claim to be a thinking entity?"

"I am a thinking entity," answered Robot A-1 clearly.

"And your owner permits you to roam around free to do as you please?"

"I have no owner. True, I have super-mental powers, but I am a free citizen of these United States of America. You have there in your pile of evidence my papers of freedom. They were given me by Dr. Forsythe, in November of last year, and give the registration of my history, my name as Robot A-One, and the Social Security

number that Dr. Forsythe had the goodness to procure for me before we parted."

"Before you parted? Then you are no longer associated with Dr. Forsythe?"

"I am not. I purchased my freedom from him. I approached Dr. Forsythe with a proposition shortly after he created me when it became apparent that I had the power of conscious and abstract thought. Finding Dr. Forsythe despondent over his failure to power and control another invention of his, the Tri-octopus, I offered to construct the series of controls and the radio set that would activate the machine by remote control in exchange for my freedom. Dr. Forsythe agreed. I fulfilled my agreement, and Forsythe made good his end of the bargain."

"YOU claim, then, to have been a free moral agent since November, Nineteen-thirty-nine?"

"I do."

"That will do for the present," said the attorney for the State. "Call the next witness."

Lamkin, the Washington reporter, twisted in his seat.

"This is incredible," he muttered. "I've got to have a drink."

But the clerk called the next witness, and Lamkin forgot to leave the room. Robert Chaldow, a thin-nosed man with the hands of a skilled mechanic, took the stand, looked nervously at Robot A-1, and gave his testimony in a jerky, high voice.

He, it seemed, was an excellent mechanic. He had done all kinds of work at various times for Dr. David Forsythe in the past ten years. Yes, he was acquainted with the mechanical man known as Robot A-1, having first met him in the Forsythe laboratory early the preceding year. As a skilled workman, Chaldow had manufactured and installed the cables and drums and gears that Robot A-1 designed in a freakish looking contraption that eventually became the seven-foot Tri-octopus.

The State's attorneys rested, and Robot A-1 took the witness.

"Do not be alarmed, Mr. Chaldow,"

his queerly penetrative voice said soothingly. "I have no intention of harming you, nor of confusing you in your testimony. I only want to help you make certain things clearer. Being a mechanical expert, you have been called in numerous times by Dr. Forsythe to do special jobs in the past decade, have you not? You even did some of the work on my body, as I recall, did you not?"

The mechanic shivered as though he were having a chill.

"Y-yes," he admitted, his teeth all but chattering. "But how could you have known that? Dr. Forsythe hadn't even installed your radio units then."

"I know a great many things," said Robot A-1, and Lamkin could have sworn he heard a sob in that mechanically perfect voice. "There was a young scientist working with Dr. Forsythe a couple of years ago by the name of Professor John Maynard. Did you know him, Mr. Chaldow?"

"Y-yes, sir," admitted the witness.

"What ever became of Professor Maynard, Mr. Chaldow?"

"I—I don't know. Dr. Forsythe told me he had gone to the Orient on some special job."

"That was recently, Mr. Chaldow?"

"The spring of 'Thirty-nine."

"I see. And when did you last see Dr. Forsythe?"

"The day you and he put the micro-dynamic-control set in the Tri-octopus. As soon as it was seen that my work was satisfactory, Dr. Forsythe paid me off. I've never seen him since. He just disappeared. The police claim his laboratory had been deserted for weeks when they broke in—"

"I object!" cried out the speaker for the trio of State attorneys. "The hearsay gossip of the witness has no bearing on the question."

"I agree to that," said Robot A-1 before the judge could rule on the matter. "Witness dismissed."

The next witness was a woman with a pugnacious jaw, a hard and jaundiced eye. Miss Marie Lemar had been present in the subway warren at Times Square on the third day of June and had witnessed the actions of the Tri-octopus.

It had been standing innocuously in a corner tied up in brown paper on the upper level. Suddenly the tentacles had stirred and writhed, breaking aside the brown paper, weaving like a willow tree in a gale.

Then the powerful three legs with their flat-iron appendages for feet had sprung into activity. The machine had rumbled down the steps like a toddling toy toward the lower level. As people screamed and sought to get out of the way of the animated monster, it began encircling them with its tentacles and choking them to death.

One man's head had been squeezed completely off. From the interior of the metal machine came a soft purring noise, like the hum of a well running motor. Occasionally, however, this was interrupted by sharp pops and cracklings, like static on a radio.

SUBWAY guards rushed up, and one of them died horribly for his bravery. A policeman going off duty was there and he drew and fired his gun at the thing until his hammer clicked on an empty shell, and it had no more effect than if he had popped a toy pistol. And just as the Tri-octopus was reaching for Miss Marie Lemar, the solid concrete and steel areaway trembled under the rapid charge of none other than Robot A-1.

With one hand the robot pressed a button or two on his own studded front; with the other he grasped one of the terrible tentacles near its base. To Miss Lemar it seemed that the two things were talking to each other in some sort of electrical language. She didn't have time to think Robot A-1 was queer, because he looked so much more human than the other thing.

And then the Tri-octopus almost snarled as its machinery and motors whirred into higher speed. It tried to jerk away from Robot A-1. And Robot A-1 did an amazing thing. He tore the tentacle free from the monster. In its recoil the Tri-octopus staggered back and toppled off the platform onto the express track of the downtown train just as a string of cars came into the station. That was the end of the first Tri-octopus.

Court attendants brought in fragments of whiplike tentacles, a metal shell, one flatiron foot—and Miss Lemar identified them as particles of the seven-foot monstrosity that had slain several people in the subway.

From this the State's attorney attempted to build up their case against Robot A-1. According to their theory, Robot A-1 had, like the classical monster of Frankenstein, turned upon his creator and destroyed him. Then he had proceeded with his experiments with remote control of the Tri-octopus, and the latter had got out of control that June day in the subway and had murdered a number of people, including a policeman and a friend of a friend of the police commissioner. Therefore, Robot A-1 should be condemned to death for the manslaughter of these innocent men and for the undoubted murder of Dr. David Forsythe, although there was no corpse to prove the crime.

The Washington reporter couldn't stand it any longer. He got up and moved down to the railing near Robot A-1. He stood there fascinated until a uniformed attendant came and led him away.

Robot A-1 was not pleading a case for himself. But he was explaining what he had been doing in the subway station at Times Square the day of the terror.

"To be only a cold metal robot in the midst of warm human life is a terrible thing," he said in his mechanically perfect voice. "Especially when one has all the impulses of mankind. The Times Square subway station is one of the most crowded places in New York, day or night. Remember that a robot never tires, does not need sleep, does not need to waste time in resting or eating. Thus when I was not reading in the public library, I spent all my spare time in the subway wistfully watching the human beings who scurried about me.

"After Dr. Forsythe disappeared with his Tri-octopus I found myself very lonely. I was not happy with my newly won freedom. I attracted attention wherever I went, people regarded me as a freak. There is a great deal more to my story, but you find it in-

credulous enough as it is, and I will not add further strain on your mind. But you must believe me when I tell you that Dr. David Forsythe is a madman who is determined to control the world. His conquest will begin with the release of giant war-machines all over the earth. If anybody in the world should know this to be true that person—or robot—is I.

FORSYTHE disappeared purposely. He knew where to find me. He knew I would be in the subway at Times Square at that hour. By remote control he deliberately staged his display of the Tri-octopus in order to test its powers, and to have it destroy me. I tried to stop the actions of the Tri-octopus I had helped create—as this witness, Miss Lemar, has testified. But Dr. Forsythe had amplified the control I designed for him, and I was unable to command the machine. Fortunately, it was destroyed. But Dr. Forsythe has the plans and he will duplicate the Tri-octopus—perhaps a thousand times, if he isn't found and stopped.

"Do what you will to me. I deserve my fate for abusing my talent for his vile ends, for letting him fool me with his story of an Utopian world with mechanical Tri-octopi to do the work for men. Why should I have believed him after what he had done to me? But I wanted my freedom. And history teaches us that mankind has gone to great extremes for freedom. . . ."

There was more, but Lamkin didn't hear it. He was led back to his seat by the court attendant, and he sat down beside his New York friend like a man in a daze.

"Robbins!" he whispered, when the other shook him to bring him out of it. "Robbins! It's uncanny—unbelievable! I tell you that—that thing has a personality. I felt it. I stood close to it for a few moments, and I felt it beating out at me like a tangible force. I've gone mad, I'm firmly convinced. Let's beat it out of here and get a drink."

Court was adjourned for noon recess in the middle of Robot A-1's speech, and Robbins went with the other reporter willingly.

That Court was never reconvened. Later, the two reporters secured the few available facts from the two sergeants in whose custody Robot A-1 had awaited the outcome of his bizarre trial. At the first alarm, Robot A-1 had prevailed on his two guards—whom he could have killed with little effort—to go with him to the laboratory of Dr. David Forsythe. There, they had stood in dumb wonder while the mechanical man gathered up some queer apparatus and then hastened with them to Times Square.

In the meantime, the two reporters, going to this throbbing heart of Manhattan so the Washington man could view the spot at which the first catastrophe had happened, were among the few eye-witnesses to the fantastic sequel to the whole amazing thing.

They had just come up out of the subway at the kiosk in front of the Paramount building when they heard a woman scream. Then they became conscious of the powerful drumming roar as of a monster air squadron flying over New York. Robbins caught Lamkin's arm and pointed.

"My God, Lamkin!" he cried in a voice grotesquely thin in his excitement. "Look!"

Lamkin stared.

Out of the canyon that was Seventh Avenue, towering several hundred feet in the air, waddling along like a golden, metallic three-legged duck, making the streets tremble for a hundred yards at each Cyclopean step, came a new Herculean Tri-octopus. Even as Lamkin stared in unbelieving horror, he heard the awful wave of sound—the cries and shrieks of the maimed and dying in the wake of the terrible thing which had marched across the Hudson River from the marshes of New Jersey, devastating Jersey City and Manhattan as it came.

THE sight of the eight cabled tentacles writhing and flexing like the locks of a metal Medusa, attacking buildings and people with their two-pronged points, simply stunned the newspaper men. Crowning the top of the thing was a spherical dome from which two intense beams of light flared

downward like malevolent eye stares.

As the paralyzed crowds watched, the huge machine rocked into Times Square, narrowly missing the Times Building and taking a hunk out of the shoulder of the Paramount Building as it passed—like a boy taking a swift dig at a piece of cake as he walked by the table. One tentacle reached down and coiled around a luckless bus, snatching it up into the air and spilling passengers out as that same mischievous boy would have shaken animal crackers out of a box.

Another tentacle gathered up a handful of the frantic crowd and dashed them to the ground in disdain. And in its wake was a cloud of dust from its passage. Panic gripped the crowds. Traffic jammed in Times Square.

Then, just as the two reporters were on the verge of diving like prairie dogs back into the hole that was the subway entrance, when the crushing of thousands was inevitable, a taxicab careened madly into Broadway from a side street, and the silvery figure of Robot A-1 stepped out and raised a long black tube which he pointed upward at the terrible monstrosity.

A pale green ray blossomed from the end of the tube, struck the huge belly of the giant Tri-octopus, and then ran in spreading lines all over the great destroyer in lambent green flames like the running flames of a gasoline fire. In the space of several seconds the entire structure was a glowing figure of green fire—all but the huge flat-iron feet which must have weighed five tons each. The queer ray ate upward.

The huge machine shuddered to a halt with one foot lifted in the air almost directly above the silvery figure of Robot A-1. It acted as though trying to obey an order to retrace its steps and flee. The terrible drumming roar of heavy motors grew louder, more strained—and then, suddenly, the whole thing seemed to explode silently. It simply disintegrated into tons of glittering green dust, an almost impalpable powder that blew for miles across land and sea in spite of the fact that most of it fell in Times Square.

The uplifted five-ton foot, sheered off as if by magic by the queer green ray,

dropped squarely on the valiant figure of Robot A-1, narrowly missing the two policemen in the taxicab.

When the two reporters reached the spot they found Robot A-1 queerly vindicated in what he had claimed at the court that very forenoon.

There was an elevator shaft in the five-ton foot and section of severed leg. The lift had descended just before the leg dropped off, and the body of Dr. David Forsythe was found imprisoned in it. He had been trying to effect his escape from the control chamber of the huge machine when the green ray overtook his colossal Tri-octopus.

ROBOT A-1 was thoroughly flattened and destroyed. When a caterpillar crane was fetched and the five-ton foot lifted from his metal body, he was nothing but a tangled and crushed debris of wires and wheels and tubes.

"But, damn it!" said Lamkin in awed exasperation. "I can't write up such a yarn, and neither can you. Whoever

heard of such a thing as a living and thinking robot?"

"Nobody," agreed Robbins, poking reverently at the head of Robot A-1 which had somehow missed the five-ton blow.

The top of the circular head came free, and the two men found themselves staring at a broken container of some colorless serum with hundreds of tiny filaments running from it down through the neck. But the queerest, most revolting thing of it all was the mashed remnants of a human brain that had been housed in the container.

"Great God!" shuddered Lamkin. "Wh— what does it mean?"

Pale to the lips, Robbins slowly answered:

"It means that Professor John Maynard will never come back from that special trip to the Orient."

"I still don't believe it," murmured Lamkin, his eyes sick with horror.

"Whether you do or not, better not write it," said Robbins.

And neither of them ever did.
