

# STARTLING STORIES

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## A Complete Novel

### THE SHADOW MEN

By A. E. VAN VOGT



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## *A Hall of Fame Novelet*



### CHAPTER I

#### *Rome Haul*

**PETE MANX** was nervous. Spelling before a sideshow or working the shell game on some sucker he'd have felt at home. But the apparatus in Dr. Mayhem's laboratory bothered him. Power cables, massive insulators, tubes, coils—huh-uh! Ever since Pete's brother-in-law had taken the hot squat in Joliet Pete himself had developed a definite allergy to electricity.

He tipped his derby back on his bullet head, squinting at Mayhem.

"Now look," he said. "I know my rights. I ain't no guinea pig. For a hundred bucks I'll do a lot but—"

"Shush," frowned the doctor. "You won't be hurt. Just wait here, Mr. Manx, till I give the word."

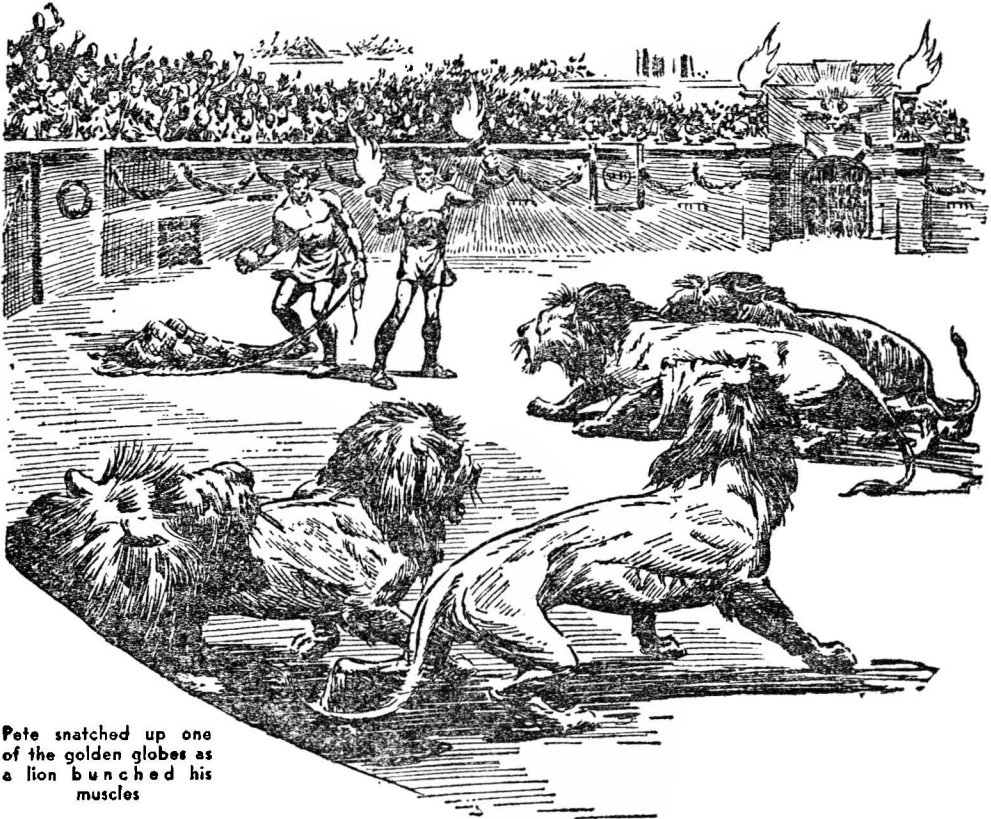
Mayhem's agile wizened figured disappeared behind a curtain. A spatter of applause greeted him as he appeared on an improvised rostrum in a screened-off portion of his laboratory.

Pete tiptoed to the curtain and parted.

# ROMAN HOLIDAY

by **KELVIN KENT**

*When time-trotter Pete Manx goes  
to Rome, he makes the Romans  
do as he does for a change!*



Pete snatched up one  
of the golden globes as  
a lion bunched his  
muscles

it. He glimpsed a dozen young men—college kids—and a large, amorphous gentleman who wore with dignity pince-nez and a who-the-devil-are-you air.

"Nasty looking customer," Pete told himself. "Wonder what this is all about?"

The doc wouldn't give me a hundred fish for nothing."

Mayhem commenced to talk.

"Gentlemen, I regret keeping you waiting. I invited you here to witness a little experiment. Professor Aker"—he

lowed with a faintly ironic leer to the man with the pince-nez—"has honored me by disagreeing with a certain theory I postulated. He maintains that you and I, gentlemen, are—um—cogs."

Pete grinned as he saw the large gentlemen bristle, then rise.

"Dr. Mayhem," rumbled Professor Aker, "I am at a loss to know why I was summoned to your laboratory. But now that I am here I feel that it would be expedient to explain my premise."

"Here we go again," whispered an irreverent freshman. Professor Aker had, in the university, a definite reputation as a bore.

"Ahem," said the professor. "It was my contention that our present-day civilization is such a complex organization, with each individual so dependent upon many other individuals for existence, that a man today receives no practical education whatsoever. He is, as I said, merely a cog. In other words he knows only a limited phase of whatever trade or profession he follows."

"And," prodded Mayhem, "you said that if a modern man were suddenly transported back to ancient Rome, for instance—"

"Ah, yes—yes. Despite his apparent advantage of centuries of knowledge, he would be utterly helpless. He would starve for want of ability to make something useful. An office worker—what could he do? Nothing. Could an automobile worker who spends his days bolting on fenders support himself in Rome?"

"Or take an ordinary jeweler. Could he make the parts of the watches he repairs every day? Of course not! He couldn't build a clock to save his soul! I contend that the only type of man with any chance of making a financial success, if cast back into the past, is the man of science. Science alone can defeat adverse environment."

**M**AYHEM chuckled unpleasantly. "So you say repeatedly. But if you really could go back to Roman times I wonder if you would still feel the same?"

Aker drew himself up.

"My dear Mayhem, I would revolutionize Roman standards of living, change the course of history by the simple introduction of cheap power—electricity. The history of civilization is, of course, the history of transportation. By introducing electricity and motors I could—"

"Yes, yes. Familiar ground, Professor Aker. But you are soon to have a chance to put your theory to the test. I've built a time machine," said Mayhem with the simplicity of true genius.

"No, don't argue. It's never been done before, I know. But then there's never been a Horatio Mayhem before. I can project you back into the past time, and unless you want to back down, I can send you temporarily to the days of ancient Rome."

"You are mad," Aker decided.

"Suit yourself. But I'd like to make a small wager. I need a few thousand dollars' worth of new equipment for my research."

Aker reacted as department heads have reacted immemorially to such suggestions.

"Outrageous! I have already told you I would not countenance such wanton expenditure."

"So," Mayhem spoke persuasively, "I'll bet with you. I'll send you and another man—an ordinary layman—back to Rome and give you a certain period in which to prove your theory. If my man makes a bigger success than you, then you'll give me the equipment I want."

Aker purpled.

"What! Do you seriously—"

"Afraid?" taunted Mayhem.

Pete Manx, still watching surreptitiously, chuckled. Mayhem had maneuvered Aker behind the eight ball. With all those school kids making wise remarks and daring the old bloot to go through with his argument Aker, pompous and sensitive, didn't dare back down.

Aker glared around. "Afraid? Bah!" he growled. "Of course not!" He sank down into his chair.

"Then you agree," Mayhem smiled.

"Good! You may come out now, Mr. Manx!"

Manx appeared from behind the curtain, waving a hand agreeably at the group.

"Hiya," he grinned cheerfully. "Just call me Pete."

"Who is this person?" Aker demanded.

"Gentleman I hired at the beach—a barker at one of the concessions, in fact. His chief virtues are a certain native shrewdness and a knowledge of Latin, a knowledge he shares with you, Professor. Naturally, when you go back to Rome it is necessary to speak the Roman tongue."

"This—er—fellow s p e a k s Latin?" Aker said dubiously.

"And why not?" came back Pete beligerently. "My old lady was a teacher in high school. Listen. *Omnia Gallia divisa est*—"

"Not now," Mayhem interposed hastily. "But soon perhaps. Now, the arrangement is clear, I trust. Professor Aker and Pete Manx will go back to Rome in my time machine and will be given a certain period in which to achieve success. And if my man wins Professor Aker will give me my equipment."

"Look here, Mayhem," Aker said uneasily. "This is poppycock. I'm getting out of here right now!"


"You are indeed," said the doctor. "Oh my, yes! I took the precaution of wiring your chair so that it is a miniature time machine." He pressed a button. "Er—good luck, Professor."

He was, however, addressing what seemed to be a peculiarly repulsive looking corpse. For Professor Aker's ample body had suddenly slumped in the chair, an expression of utter vacuity frozen on the beefy features.

"Don't be alarmed," the doctor called, his hands raised to quiet the audience. "He isn't harmed. It's merely a trance. His mind has been projected back in time."

"Hey, wait!" Pete Manx gulped. "That looks like the hot seat to me!"

"Pete, my boy, it's quite all right."



SOME stories are forgotten almost as soon as they are printed. Others stand the test of time. Because "Roman Holiday," by Kelvin Kent, has stood this test, it has been nominated for SCIENTIFICTION'S HALL OF FAME and is reprinted here.

In each issue we will honor one of the most outstanding fantasy classics of all time as selected by our readers.

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Nominate your own favorites! Send a letter or postcard to The Editor, STARTLING STORIES, 10 East 40th St., New York 16, N. Y. All suggestions are more than welcome!

Dr. Mayhem smiled. "Just sit here if you please."

Pete squirmed.

*Bang!*

The inner consciousness of Pete Manx left his body, derby, checkered vest, and orange tie, to appear with startling abruptness in another time sector. Pete went, however, in an erratic sort of way, much like a pendulum gathering momentum and swinging back and forth between ancient Rome and modern America.

The laboratory suddenly had vanished. Sunlight glared down on him instead. Yelling tradesmen stormed and chattered. Tides of laden slaves surged among the booths of vegetable sellers and money changers.

Then—

He was back in the laboratory—paralyzed! Unable to stir a muscle, wink an eyelash or bridge a synapse, Pete stared blankly and listened to Dr. Mayhem speaking.

"Time like space is curved, revolving around a central time-consciousness. There the temporal sense of all men from the beginning to the end of things has its origin. We, gentlemen, are on the rim of the wheel so to speak. If we could project ourselves to the hub and out again along another spoke we would find ourselves in a different time."

*Swish!*

Rome! A horseman pacing slowly

along a narrow street, preceded by a gilded litter borne by slaves. Cries of "Cave! Cave!" Rough fluent oaths of a bearded Gaul looming up near by.

Back again to the laboratory—Dr. Mayhem was still lecturing.

"They have both been mentally transported while their bodies lie here in a state of trance—into the minds of two persons in the days of Rome's glory. Their consciousnesses were projected into the Time-center, thence out again to a period known to us only as history. . . ."

## CHAPTER II

### "*Clavus Pila*"

**P**ETE MANX went back to Rome and this time stayed there. Once more the hot Italian sunlight blazed down upon him. Odors of wine and olives and spices were strong in his nostrils. For a moment the world swung dizzily about him.

Then suddenly something came violently in contact with his nose and he was precipitated full-length upon the Appian Way.

"Earthquake!" he gasped. "I ain't in Rome. I'm in California!"

A harsh voice spoke swift Latin words, and Pete recognized them. He sat up, feeling an odd awkwardness about his new body, and stared at a furry-bearded soldier who was shaking both fists and cursing.

"Purse-snatcher," the soldier roared among other things and expressed an intention of tearing Pete apart and scattering his revolting body from Viminal Hill to the Colosseum. "An honest soldier cannot be in Rome a day before some thief lifts his purse. What is thy name, dog?"

"Petus Manxus," replied Pete.

"Then arise, Manxus, the thief, that I may smite you again."

This struck Pete as unsound advice but he stood up nevertheless. A quick

glance downward told him that he was dressed in a billowing white tunic like a nightgown. His feet, sandal-shod, were invisible to him. Apparently Pete's mind was inhabiting the body of some Roman who had just got himself into a peck of trouble.

Pete desperately fended for himself with jujutsu. His triumph was instantaneous. A twist of the wrist sent the Gaul spinning, whereupon Petus Manxus' two hundred and fifty pounds lit upon him in a running broad jump.

The unfortunate soldier did not get up again, remaining flat on his back, twitching and wheezing. Pete fled down the Via Appia until he was protected by a surging multitude of Gauls, Scythians, Britons—a potpourri of the world. Unobserved, he withdrew into a vacant space behind a wine-seller's booth and sat down to rest and pant.

"So this is Rome," he muttered disparagingly. "Pew! Science is sure a funny thing."

But he had a job to do, and a rough-and-ready philosophy that softened life's knocks. So he carefully took stock of his possessions. They were not many. Under his tunic he wore a woolen undergarment that itched, and a leather pouch. In the pouch was a purse containing three lonely pieces of silver and a knife.

Pete grunted. If he had been a thief up to now, he'd certainly been an unsuccessful one. He would have to start from scratch and the only thing in his favor in this friendless world was the fact that there seemed to be hordes of suckers just begging to be plucked.

Wandering back into the busy square, Pete came at last to a vacant booth. In it was a sloping wooden table which had a two-inch curb all around. An idea glimmered into his brain.

He had no tools save the knife in his pouch. But with this he set to work, humming under his breath, "Hold that Ti-ber! Hold that Tiber!" Carefully he marked off the slanting surface of the table with a pattern of ten dots. At each dot he painfully gouged a shallow depression in the soft wood.

Then he whittled a number of tiny

pegs and, below each depression, bored small holes into which he fitted the pegs. Above some of them he also distributed an occasional peg. On the right side of the board, paralleling the curb, he fitted another narrow wooden strip so that a channel extending almost to the top was formed.

At the top, curving from side to side, he pegged in a semi-circular strip of stiff reed. Finally, at the base of the right-hand channel, he arranged a painfully-carved wooden plunger. He stepped back to survey his work.

"Crude," he sighed, "but good enough for a beginning." A gnawing in his middle was making itself felt. He was hungry. Hastily he went forth, surveying the Via Appia till he found three urchins playing marbles in a dusty corner. He traded his knife for the marbles.

Then he was ready. Petus Manxus returned to his booth, a cold feeling of excitement making him shiver a bit. He made an involuntary gesture to shove his derby further back on his head. He winced as plump fingers encountered a bald pink dome.

Two soldiers were passing. Pete called to them. "Hey, you two! Want to see something new? C'mere."

The men approached. "Well?"

"The Emperor's latest amusement—" Was there an emperor? Apparently so, for the soldiers bent to examine the board with interest. "You, there! With the purple nightshirt! Come and see!"

Three men in purple togas frowningly approached. Attracted by the senators others followed.

**T**HIS was familiar stuff to Pete. He launched glibly forth into his spiel.

"Friends, Romans, countrymen!" he yelled. "Lend me your ears! I come here not to sell you something, but to fascinate and amuse you! Come see the Emperor's favorite game!"

"What is it called?" a paunchy senator took the bait.

"*Clavus pila!* Pinball! Rich prizes to the skilful! This is not a game of chance, my friends, but a test of skill and skill alone. Step right up, folks, and keep

your eye on the ball!"

The crowd surged up. Pete casually dropped one marble in the channel along the right side of the board, drew back the plunger, slammed it forward again. The ball shot up, followed the curving strip of stout reed, caromed off a nail and began dribbling slowly down the board, bounding off pegs, zigzagging, and eventually dropping into one of the holes.

"A Vestal Virgin!" Pete bellowed, and the onlookers noticed that each hole was labeled with a name. Six were Vestal Virgins—three were Senators—the one at the top was dubbed Caesar.

"It's easy, folks! A Caesar, two Senators and five Virgins wins you two sesterces. If you hit Caesar, three Senators and all the Vestal Virgins you can take the board home with you. Come one, come all!"

With uncanny accuracy Manxus poured four more marbles into the guide slot and fired, registering Caesar, two Senators and one Out at the bottom of the board. In a trice the crowd was begging him to take their money, eager for a chance to play.

Pete took them one at a time, charging one sesterce per game, picking up marbles out of their resting places by hand after each game was finished. By a stroke of good fortune the first two players each won a little. From then on there was no stopping the mob. By nightfall Manxus' pouch and both hands were stuffed with coins.

Smelly inefficient oil lamps were brought out but Pete vetoed further play that day. Somewhere in Rome there was a place that his body called home but he naturally didn't know where it was. Instead he took a room at an inn—the Caupona Bacchus, B. Bibulus, Proprietor—which reminded him in appearance and odor of any other beer joint back home with dollar-a-day rooms upstairs. But Pete didn't mind. He was already well on the road to becoming the slot-machine czar of Rome!

Next day he set up his outfit in the square at dawn. By making it a bit easier to win he had customers lined up

all the way around the square waiting to play *clavus pila*. By eleven o'clock he had broken a carpenter, who was so afraid to return home to his wife that Pete returned his money. The grateful carpenter gladly promised to build a dozen *clavus pila* boards of finest materials and deliver them to Pete's place at the inn.

By two o'clock a tax collector had gone down swinging, losing in addition to his own money, two hundred denarii belonging to the government.

Eventually innkeeper Bibulus was seduced by the insidious sight of a praetorian guardsman raking in his winnings. He came, played and was conquered. Petus Manxus went home that evening with a partnership in the *Caupona Bacchus*.

Thenceforward the *clavus pila* rage rushed ahead on its own momentum. Pete set up the new tables in the inn, a dozen of them, and had Bibulus and his three fat daughters help regulate the play, take in the coins, watch the chiselers who tried to start their game over again while no one was looking—and put down a stern foot when anyone was caught tilting the boards.

Within a week Pete was riding the streets in a sumptuous litter, wearing far togas and following a retinue of twenty slaves. All over Rome his *clavus pila* parlors were springing up like mushrooms.

Pete was smart. The more parlors he opened, the larger his income. The more money he made, the more he could afford to lower the odds so everyone could win occasionally, working on a smaller percentage. And the more people won, the more they poured sesterces into the Manxus coffers.

"It's a vicious coicic," Pete grinned to Bibulus. "They actually beg me to take their dough!"

It was inevitable that Petus Manxus should look around for more worlds to conquer. He considered the idea of inventing roulette or tango but vetoed it. That would require opening a new set of joints and since he had all the gambling element playing pinball the new games

would just take some of the players from one racket to the other with no increase in intake. He looked into the theater situation briefly but gave that up when he learned Rome had but two or three theaters and they were the Emperor's own graft.

"Such a pity," Pete moaned cheerfully to the bewildered Bibulus. "What a pushover they woulda been for Bingo and Bank Nite!"

But politics—*there* was something in which Pete's experience would serve him well!

**P**ETE scurried around among the influential Romans who were somewhat under obligation to him because of *clavus pila* losses and put on gentle pressure. He talked earnestly to the head of the flute-blowers' guild, to his friend the carpenter, to many others. And one week before election day the moon rose on a Rome gone politically insane.

Rome was having her first political parade under the auspices of Petus Manxus.

Leading the way, blowing and plucking away with all their might, was a weird orchestra. The instruments were flutes, lyres and horns. Next came a group of Pete's intimates. Each carried a square poster, upthrust on a pole, which bobbed and twirled in the smoky light of torches and lamps.

"Manxus for Magistrate!" they proclaimed in large letters. "A New Deal for Romans!"

"Vote for Manxus, Old-line Republican! Bring Back Prosperity!"

"Seventy Sesterces Every Saturday for Each Citizen Over Sixty!"

This was followed by a gorgeously-decorated litter, carried by eight handsome slaves. Standing up inside, bowing and smiling to the crowd, was Pete. Behind came about a hundred paid retainers, all cheering mightily at the rate of one denarius per hour.

So, after a whirlwind campaign in which he advocated the Townsend old-age retirement plan, conservatism, liberalism and other incomprehensibles, Petus Manxus was returned magistrate



with the assistance of some sleight-of-hand at the polls. With Bibulus as chief adviser, Pete devoted himself to administering his office.

Things ran smoothly—too smoothly, according to Bibulus.

"The Emperor hasn't even asked you to make a will in his favor!" he worried. "Strange."

"So that's how he gets his rake-off eh?" Pete asked. "Just an old Roman custom. Y'know, I haven't even seen Claudius yet."

"Few do," Bibulus observed meaningfully, "and most of them regret it. The Emperor's favor is dangerous to lose. Just the same there's something strange about it. Are you sure you haven't a powerful friend at court?"

"Except for my uncle who is a Tammany alderman, no."

"Yet a woman has appeared often among the spectators when you are on the bench. A beautiful woman, veiled to the eyes—"

"Women," pronounced Pete, "is poison. Ixnay, Bibby. Have you got any news about the guy I'm lookin' for?" Ever since Pete's election he had been searching for the trail of his inadvertent companion into time, Professor Aker, who should have been somewhere in Rome. Until today Bibulus had brought no news.

Now, however, the former caupo twisted his face into a crumpled arrangement of wrinkles intended to be a smile.

"I have learned of a wizard whose magic failed—a madman. He rushed down the Via Appia some moons ago, shouting dire prophecies—trying perhaps to start a new cult. To those who would follow him he promised chariots that would move without horses, lamps that would burn without flame and"—Bibulus bent double with laughter—"and galleys that would fly through the air like birds! Verily!"

Pete's eyes widened.

"Zeus! Go on!"

"He tried to make magic. He filled a pot with a liquid that burned like fire. He wound strands of wire around metal cylinders and plunged a bit of copper

into the pot. Then he began to shout and call for some metal whereof no one had heard—what was it? I forget. They brought him *zingiber*—ginger. He flung it down and trod upon it. He yelled loudly for—I have it—*zinc!*"

Pete whistled.

"I see it all now," he muttered. Aker planned to build a series of simple galvanic batteries and with them power his primitive electric motors made of coils and armature. But he had forgotten one vital thing. Zinc, necessary for his battery, wasn't known until the sixteenth century! "So what happened to him?"

"No one knows. But I shall search further. And now you must hold court, Petus Manxus. Here—your toga. Many await."

### CHAPTER III

#### *The Golden Globes*

UNCOMFORTABLY Pete donned the garment, arose from his cushioned bench and went into the next room. Once a dignified example of Roman architecture it had been altered somewhat under Pete's orders. A railing kept the spectators at a distance and to the left of the magister a railed-in enclosure held the prisoners.

There was a spattering of applause as Pete mounted the bench. He waved a negligent hand.

"First case," Bibulus called. Two guards marched forward, impelling between them a large handsome young man with jet-black curls and a harassed expression.

"A poisoner," whispered Bibulus, as the defendant was hustled into the dock. "He tried to slay Gaius Hostilius, the consul."

"What's his racket?" inquired Pete in his abominable Latin.

"A street magician of strange powers. He attracted the consul's attention with his tricks and performed the miracle of turning water to wine. That was all

right but Hostilius demanded that the cup be brought to him. When he drank of it, he fell down and rolled about in agony.

Just then the prisoner, who had stared incredulously at Pete when the latter's ungrammatical Latin had soiled the judicial atmosphere, began to shout in a language incomprehensible to the others.

"Manx! *Manx!* Is that you, for heaven's sake?"

"He casts a spell on us!" cried Bibulus and a guard promptly suppressed the unfortunate prisoner in no uncertain manner.

"Petus Manxus—by the gods! What ails you?"

"Zeus," gasped Pete, glaring at the defendant, "has stricken me with a thunderbolt!" Then, in English, "Hey, Prof! Is that you?"

"Manx!" squalled the young man. "Of course it's I! Get me out of this quick! I didn't poison the fellow. My—er—plans went wrong and I was supporting myself with simple chemical magic when he—"

"Sure. Sure." Pete soothed him. "I'll give it the fix." He turned to Bibulus. "We'll just dismiss the charge. It's his first offense."

"Poisoners," Bibulus frowned, "are always thrown to the lions."

Pete silenced him with a lifted hand, pronounced sentence. As he felt the people were behind him strongly he was naturally greatly surprised by the outburst which greeted his announcement that the prisoner would go free.

Rome didn't like poisoners.

"To the lions!" someone bellowed. "Flay him alive! Tear out his tongue!"

The professor seemed to shrink. Pete looked about in desperation. He met the eyes of a veiled woman who sat in a corner—watching him intently—perhaps the same one Bibulus mentioned. No help there. But there was a florid benevolent-looking old man in the front row and to him Pete turned for aid.

"Sir, will you use your influence in quieting this mob? After all, I'm sure the prisoner had no murderous intentions and maybe the consul deserved

killing anyway, if what I've heard about Gaius Hostilius is true."

Bibulus clutched Pete's shoulder.

"Gods, Petus! You put your foot into it that time. That's the plaintiff, Gaius Hostilius!"

It looked like a big day. The crowd suddenly turned into a mob with the volatility of the Latin temperament. Pete caught a glimpse of the veiled woman vanishing through a curtain and saw Gaius Hostilius mounting a chair to shout, "Down with the tyrant! Is this Roman justice?"

"No!" roared the mob. "To the lions with both of them!"

"My-y-y friends," began Pete, then decided the moment unpropitious for a speech. Instead he grabbed the professor's arm and dragged him back through a curtained aperture. But the mob wasn't thwarted. They came bellowing in and Pete and Professor Aker fled for their lives. But in vain. They were finally cornered in Pete's private bath and attacked with fury.

"Bibulus!" Pete roared. "Get help!"

But Bibulus had long since decided on the better part of valor. He had discreetly vanished.

The tumult and the shouting died as a corps of guardsmen marched through the mob, swords bared. Under threat of bloodshed the crowd subsided, drawing back to wait watchfully.

"You're just in time," Pete sighed thankfully to the bronzed *legatus*. "Brother, we needed help and how!"

"Seize them," the lieutenant snapped. "Disarm those men! Petus Manxus, you and this felon are under arrest. Caesar himself will decide your fate this day!"

**C**LAUDIUS D r u s u s Germanicus, Caesar Imperator, gnawed on a mutton bone in one hand. With the other, he wrestled impotently with an ornate *clavus pila* board, tilting it this way and that as a marble bounced merrily down its length. He was a stunted, unhealthy, red-eyed person, clad in plain white garments, his fingers hidden beneath a blaze of jeweled rings. Claudius looked up as Pete and Aker entered.

"Ah," said Caesar pleasantly, shooting another marble, dropping the table and reaching for a goblet. "Malefactors. When are the next games, Cratinus?"

"They are in progress now," Cratinus said. "These men are here at the order of the Empress Messalina, Caesar. She was in the fat one's court—he's a magistrate—when the riot broke out and she summoned the Imperial Guards."

Just then a strikingly lovely brunette came through a curtained doorway.

"Here is Messalina now." Claudius beamed. "Sit beside me, my dear. We have these dogs you ordered brought before us."

The Empress sank down, her dark eyes scrutinizing the men. "And what do you intend, Claudius?"

"Feed them to the lions." Caesar solved the problem with a gesture.

Messalina frowned but said nothing. Claudius pondered for a time and suddenly laughed.

"One moment! I've an idea—one that should amuse us since this banquet is so dull. If either of these two men can prove he deserves to live he shall live and be honored. If he fails—there will be a holiday in the arena tomorrow."

The guests applauded. Caesar motioned the guards back.

"Now, you two. Show me your worth! You first, young man. What is your profession?"

Professor Aker gulped. "I am a scientist."

"What? A magician, more likely. Well, do magic for us."

The unhappy professor stared around desperately.

"I—I have no equipment."

Cratinus whispered in the Emperor's ear and Caesar looked up with a gleam in his eye. "I hear you can turn water to wine. Do so!"

"I can't," Aker confessed. "Not without certain—necessities."

"A faker," Caesar said. "As I thought. To the arena with him."

"Wait!" Aker struggled to free himself. "I can foretell the future. I'm a prophet, that's it! I can tell the future of Rome."

Claudius was interested. "Well?"

"Er—Rome shall rule the world."

"Rome *does* rule the world," Cratinus pointed out. "Every *puer* knows that."

The professor tried again. "Two thousand years hence science will rule the world. Horses will be almost extinct. Electricity—a certain invisible force of nature—will provide unlimited power."

"Our poets can do better than that," Caesar yawned. "And I like not what you say about horses. A noble animal, the horse. If these be your best prophecies—hold!" Caesar leaned forward. "If you can truly read the future, tell me how I shall meet my death!"

Silence. The guests paused with food or drink half-lifted. All eyes were on the unhappy Professor Aker.

And he, after a hasty glance at Messalina, broke into a profuse sweat and closed his eyes, shuddering. For, as every schoolboy should know, Claudius Germanicus, Caesar Imperator, was poisoned by Agrippina, his wife, after he had put aside Messalina. And to go into detail about this, Aker realized, would not only be untactful but suicidal.

Caesar grunted and turned to Petus Manxus.

"What about you? I hope you're of more worth than this idiot."

**P**ETE took a deep breath. He said gravely, "I am worth a fortune, Caesar. Hidden in a secret place in my house is much gold—too much for a private citizen to possess. Now if you would accept this treasure as a pledge of my loyalty—"

The Emperor's eyes gleamed. The greed of Claudius was notorious in Rome. Pete felt a little wave of relief.

"We shall see," Caesar said ambiguously. "Cratinus, do you go and examine this treasure. Where is it to be found, prisoner?"

Pete gave directions, and Cratinus hurried out. Then, at a wave of the Emperor's hand, Pete and Aker were seized by the guards and pulled back against the wall, where they waited while the banquet proceeded.

The minutes dragged. Yet it was not

long before Cratinus returned. With a baleful glance at Pete he approached Caesar and began whispering hurriedly into the Emperor's ear. Claudius sat erect with a jerk. He turned to glare at the prisoners.

"It is not wise to attempt trickery upon Caesar," he said at last in a dangerously low voice. "Cratinus, speak out. Let us all hear of this deception."

Nothing loath, Cratinus announced, "I found the treasure chest where Petus Manxus said it was, filled to the brim with spherical golden ingots. Apparently there was a fortune before me. But I have dealt with thieves before and I tested one of the ingots. It was of pottery—baked clay—with a shell of gold about it to conceal the deception. All were alike. Almost worthless!"

Caesar's face was bleak and cold. "Take those men away. Tomorrow we shall watch the lions feed."

Pete spent an unhappy night in the dungeon beneath the Colosseum. He was, he admitted, in a tight spot. And there seemed no possible means of escaping Caesar's vengeance. Pete tossed for hours upon his straw pallet but arrived at no solution to the problem. Certainly Professor Aker couldn't help. He had been dragged off, shouting, to some other dungeon.

At last a guard opened the door. He seized Pete's arm and with the point of a short sword urged his unwilling prisoner along a corridor, through a metal grating that swung back on creaking hinges and into the arena.

Blinding sunlight blazed up from yellow sand with which the floor of the Colosseum was carpeted. From the spectators—an avid multitude of them, blood-hungry, impatient—came a thunderous bellow. They had been waiting for hours, some of them, and this was the first event of the day's games.

Petus was urged toward a box above which a purple canopy hung. He looked up to meet the malevolent stare of Claudius, who sat surrounded by high nobles of the court, Messalina at his side. The Empress' face was immobile until she saw Petus. Then she leaned toward

Caesar and whispered something to the Emperor. Claudius nodded, smiling unpleasantly.

Just then the guards dragged up a shrinking figure. It was Professor Aker. His knees were wobbling and his eyes were bloodshot and wild.

Caesar leaned forward. His voice rang loud in the great Colosseum's arena.

"Petus Manxus, in a moment you and your companion will be alone with the lions. It is our custom to allow prisoners in the arena a short sword with which to defend themselves but Messalina has suggested a more interesting weapon.

"Both of you will be given torches—lighted torches to keep the lions at bay. As long as the torches burn you will live, perhaps. If you are sufficiently skilful." Claudius' face was alight with malice and cruelty.

"Now as to this gift of yours, Petus Manxus—these golden globes from your treasure chest. You have asked for them. You shall have them. So—" The Emperor waved his hand. Immediately guards hurried forward, each of them bearing two of the golden spheres. Before Pete could move he was seized and hurled to the ground.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Petus Manxus, Consul*

**C**ORDS were tied tightly about his ankles. To the ropes a net was attached and the guards swiftly filled it with the globes. There was a flurry of well-disciplined action. The soldiers marched away, and a door clanged. Pete struggled upright.

A convict with ball and chain! Pete's ankles were firmly attached to the net filled with the heavy globes. He took a step forward, stumbled, and fell flat on his face.

There was a rattling of metal. A low distant growling grew louder. The murmurs of the audience grew to a bellowing shout.

"*Leones—the lions!*"

Pete heard a strangled gasp. Through sand-blinded eyes he saw Aker staring, jaw agape, at the far end of the arena. In nerveless hands the professor held two short torches.

Just then a bright object sailed glittering through the air and dropped at Pete's feet. It was a knife, thrown to him by Bibulus. He snatched it up.

"*Professor!*" he yelled. "Hold on! Don't drop those torches!" Swiftly Pete bent, slashed the cords that bound his feet, sprang to the netful of glittering globes.

But the lions were in the arena now and they scented prey. A dozen of the

Pete seized the torches, thrust the professor aside with a hasty shove and drove the burning brands out in a swift stabbing motion.

The lioness tried to turn in midair. She failed and one of the torches ground into her muzzle. She screamed, snapped at the flames, suddenly turned to race away, shaking her head in agony. She was out of the battle for a while at least, Pete realized. But the other lions were coming—and coming fast.

Pete still held a golden sphere under his arm. He bent his head, gripped a bit of whitish string in his teeth and pulled. A few more inches of string were drawn out. Pete lit it with the torch, hefted

tawny lithe beasts came pouring up the runway, tails lashing, manes tossing in the sunlight. An angry roar came as a lean dark-coated lioness shot forward like a thunderbolt, her tail erect.

Caesar leaned forward, moistening his lips with his tongue. Messalina sat motionless, her eyes fixed on the tableau beneath her.

But Pete was almost ready. A few slashes with the knife had parted the cords of the net, and the golden globes rolled free on the sands. Pete snatched up one and turned just as the lioness bunched her muscles a dozen feet from Aker and—sprang!

The paralyzed professor couldn't move a muscle. He stood waiting for the hungry carnivore to smash him down to the ground, his face paper-white, still gripping the flaming torches in fear-tightened fingers.

the globe in his hand and hurled it at the approaching lions.

The glittering sphere sailed through the air, fell under the nose of a carnivore and rolled a few feet. The string was sputtering slightly, an almost invisible bluish flame arising from it. One of the lions batted at the thing with an angry paw—

And then hell broke loose in the Colosseum! With a thunderous earthshaking roar a holocaust of deafening fiery madness blasted out, scattering fragments of bloody lion-meat upon the horrified spectators. Caesar fell back in his gilded seat. The remaining lions stared, aghast, then fled.

Pete laughed in an unsteady voice. "Hey, professor!" he called. "Grab some bombs for yourself!"

Aker scarcely seemed to hear. He swiveled to look at the pile of golden

globes. His lips formed the word, "Gunpowder! Bombs!"

Caesar sprang up. "Open the gates!" he shouted. "Turn loose the beasts—all of them! Slay me these demons!"

Frightened guards leaped to obey. The clanging of metal sounded. From the distance came a heavy thumping and confused sounds of roaring, caterwauling and trumpeting.

"Take a torch," Pete snapped, thrusting one of them in Aker's hands. "Here they come!" He considered hurling a bomb at Claudius but the sudden advent of a score of leopards distracted his attention. He blew the great cats into bits with a well-placed overhand throw.

Aker had come to life and was doing his share as the runways disgorged beasts into the arena. Gasping, he threw a question at his companion.

"How—how did you make these?"

"Always knew how," Pete clipped, lighting a bomb. "Used to make fireworks in a medicine show. Sulphur, charcoal and saltpeter. Burned willow for the charcoal. Got the sulphur from the volcano—what's its name—Vesuvius. Bribed a lieutenant to bring me saltpeter from Arabia. He didn't know what it was—but I'd seen the stuff in Chile and told him what to look for. Get that tiger!"

Aker hastily lit and threw another bomb. The tiger disintegrated. Pete kept on talking swiftly, jerkily.

"Always get ready for trouble—that's my motto. I figured I'd get the jump on these Romans if anything went haywire. So I fooled around till I got the right mixture for gunpowder and then loaded a lot of pots with it and put in shrapnel—all the scrap metal I could find."

**T**HEN came an elephant. It got uncomfortably close but an exploding bomb disrupted the creature's nervous system and it went trumpeting and thundering around the arena, causing additional confusion and adding to the bedlam.

Pete clipped out, "And I gilded the bombs just in case. Figured they'd look harmless then—just big round gold in-

gots. If I got in a tight spot I could always offer to buy my way out, and when I got my hands on the bombs—well!"

Aker shouted, "Manx! Look!"

Pete whirled—and stood staring. Danger from the animals was past. The few that remained alive had fled, or were cowering against the walls of the arena. But directly under the royal box was the wounded elephant, trunk waving, tiny eyes blazing, trumpeting in rage. He was—mad! The tumult in the box must have attracted his attention and he was charging the massive stonework wall with titanic jolting blows, while above him men fought and screamed and sprang to escape.

Caesar himself, attempting to flee, stumbled against Messalina and Pete had a confused idea that the Empress had hurled Claudius down and overturned the gilded throne upon the squirming Roman. That done Messalina hurriedly left.

"Hold everything!" Pete called to Aker. "I got an idea."

The wall was already buckling. Masonry cracked and groaned under the onslaught of the great elephant. Pete lit a bomb, gauged his distance carefully and threw it. The resultant explosion made the elephant whirl, trumpeting, his pig-gish eyes searching the arena.

He saw Pete. He started forward.

Pete threw three bombs. If they failed he was lost. He had but one left.

But the home-made gunpowder-and-shrapnel did the trick. The elephant died in a thunderous roar of tearing, blinding explosion.

A little silence fell upon the arena. The beasts were slain. The mob, realizing this, paused tentatively, ready to renew their flight. Pete gripped his last remaining bomb, stepped forward and waited for Claudius to crawl to his feet.

The Emperor of Rome was a wreck. He shot a horrified glance into the arena and started to run. A shout from Pete stopped him.

"Hold! Halt, Caesar!"

Claudius froze. He glared down, shuddering. Pete lifted the bomb menacingly.

"I have destroyed your beasts," he called, "and I can ruin Rome as easily."

Claudius gave a terrified squeak. Messalina suddenly appeared, hurried to the Emperor's side and whispered to him. Caesar seemed to grasp new hope.

"Petus Manxus!" he called, his voice unsteady. "Do not use your magic! You are pardoned! More—I make you a consul of Imperial Rome."

\* \* \* \* \*

Pete Manx opened dazed eyes, stared blankly at a face that seemed oddly familiar. For a second he thought the bomb had exploded after all. Then, quite suddenly, he recognized Dr. Mayhem. The Doc! And all around were the wires and gadgets of the Doc's laboratory. Rome had vanished—Caesar, Messalina, the Colosseum, all the rest.

"Oh, my head!" Pete moaned rising unsteadily. "I feel like I been through a knothole. Lemme feel you, Doc, an' see if you're real."

Mayhem chuckled.

"It's real enough, Manx. You're back home unharmed as I promised." He turned as a hoarse groan sounded. "Ho, here's Professor Aker. He awoke a bit before you did."

Pete noticed the laboratory was deserted save for the three of them. Aker was swallowing convulsively.

"Let me out of here," he gasped. "Mayhem, I—I—" He turned a virulent green and staggered toward the door.

"Just a moment," Mayhem called. "Do I get that equipment?"

Aker hesitated. "You gave your word," Mayhem reminded. "It was a

bet. And in Rome you discovered how necessary the right equipment is. Besides, how would you like the students to learn of your—um—activities as a poisoner?"

"It's blackmail," Aker cried. He looked at Pete, grimaced and threw up his hands. "All right. You get your equipment. I hope it chokes you, Mayhem."

The professor departed hastily, leaving Mayhem chuckling quietly.

"Here's your hundred dollars and a hundred extra for winning out. Thank you!"

Pete counted the money carefully, then looked sideways at Dr. Mayhem.

"Uh—I was wondering about what you just said to the professor, Doc. How'd you know so much about what happened in Rome, anyway?"

Mayhem snickered. "I didn't tell Aker all the secrets of my time machine. It can be operated automatically. After I sent you two back into the past I joined you, just to keep an eye on things. It took me six experimental trips before I arrived in the mind of someone of importance, where I could be sure I'd hear everything that went on in Rome."

Pete's eyes widened. "So you were there? But who—who were you? And anyhow"—Pete chuckled reproachfully—"that wasn't exactly fair when you come right down to it."

Dr. Mayhem's face cracked into a broad grin. "You shouldn't say things like that, Pete. It might get you tossed to the lions! I was Messalina. And don't forget Messalina was Caesar's wife. And Caesar's wife is above reproach!"