

# fantastic

## ADVENTURES

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

VOL. 3  
NO. 6

# Contents for August, 1941

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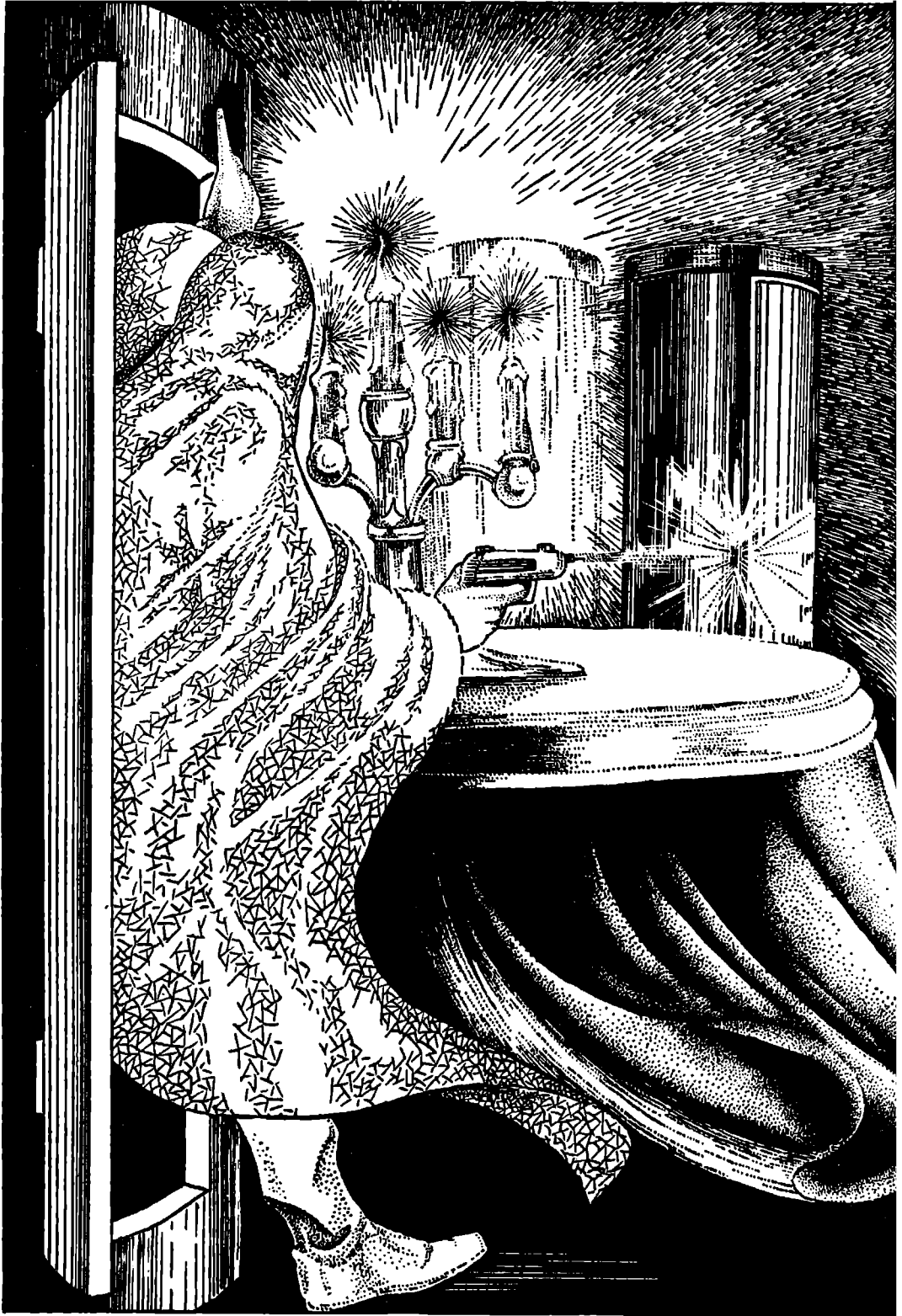
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VOLUME 3  
NUMBER 6



Hammond fired a shot squarely through the cabinet

# Secret League of Six

by **DON WILCOX**

**Who were the five members of the telepathy league, and why had Frank Hammond, who could really read minds, been invited as the sixth?**

**W**ITH a half day train ride ahead of me I had the good luck to run into Frank Hammond, just returned from Egypt. The war had stopped his work at Cairo temporarily. He was now on the last leg of his return to a mid-western museum, of which he is assistant curator.

"Sit down," said Hammond. "Have a cigar. How's the story-writing business?"

"Picking up," I said, dropping into the seat beside him.

"Picking up, huh?" The squint of his eye showed that he knew what I meant. I had picked up a couple of stories from him a year or so before. My talons were always sharp for a lift.

The rails clicked along under us and we wasted some precious minutes talking about the difficulties of travel in wartime and other commonplace things. But I soon steered him around to Cairo



and held him there with some blunt questions.

"Did you locate the treasure the museum sent you to find?"

"Located it—yes. That's all I managed on this trip. It'll take another year or so of work to excavate it intact. We'll have to wait till after the war."

"What'll it be worth?"

"No way of estimating. Probably millions. There's a wealth of gold filigree that I predict will surpass anything ever unearthed."

"Buried under one of the caliph's tombs, as you thought?"

"Yes."

The clack of rails bridged over a short silence.

"Too bad you had to come away and leave it there," I commented. "You sure it's safe?"

"No one but myself knows where it's located—and I don't talk in my sleep," Hammond laughed. "It's perfectly safe. The entrance to my work tunnel is so well disguised and guarded that wars and weather can come and go. It'll be there waiting."

Hammond gave a deep satisfied puff at his cigar, then turned to me with a gentle chuckle. "If you're after a treasure-digging story, you'll have to wait a few years. Until I get a chance to go back, I'm not even going to *think* about the thing. That way I'll be sure it stays put."

For the next half mile of telegraph poles I turned his words over. The extra boom of his voice on that word "think" reminded me of something about Frank Hammond from his college days—a certain quirk of his; or, as he would say, a hobby.

"How's the mental telepathy?" I asked abruptly. "Ever try any more practical experiments?"

Hammond removed the cigar from

his mouth and gave four or five thoughtful blinks. The corners of his eyes gathered into a curious far-away expression that was part twinkle and part mystery. "Now you *are* on the trail of a story," he said. "Got time to hear it?"

"Always!"

WELL, I needn't remind you, (Hammond began) that I've toyed with theories of thought transfer and extra sensory perception and so on ever since college days. Just as a matter of diversion, you understand. The scientific principles of mental telepathy haven't been brought out into the open yet, so you don't expect most people to go around using it the way they do a flashlight or a radio.

But on the way down the Nile from Alexandria to Cairo I passed some time talking about it with a few passengers who chanced to be on deck. They appeared skeptical of everything I had to say. Apparently, the only person I convinced was myself, though I'll admit there was one listener who followed closely—a one-armed nondescript fellow who might have been part Arab. Name was Lamar.

Anyway, that conversation refreshed my own interest in the subject, and may have had something to do with what followed.

Owing to the secret nature of my mission in Cairo, I could only work a few hours of each night. Daytimes I played tourist in the style of the typical leisurely American traveler. I acted bored. In fact, I was bored, waiting for the daytimes to pass so I could get back to my night work.

One day an ad in a Cairo newspaper caught my eye. It fairly jumped at me. It was only a three-line announcement in the ad section, but it contained the words "mental telepathy."

It read: "Exclusive mental telepathy league. Membership limited to six. Only accomplished need apply. Address K-5."

I answered the ad at once, stating that I was interested to know the nature of the club, entrance requirements, membership fees and activities. I needed a daytime hobby.

In three days I received a mimeographed reply. In jerky English that might have been written by an Arabian translator, the letter explained that "Member Number One" desired to secure a few new members to complete the quorum for "The Secret League of Six," devoted exclusively to mental communion on a plane vastly beyond that of ordinary man's comprehension.

The Secret League of Six, the writer stated, had been established centuries ago by a Muslim prince, "Al-Samir-Reval." It was the wish of this prince that his highly developed arts of mental transfer be perpetuated by the *gifted few* of each generation who were capable of entering this esoteric realm. Would I care to apply for membership? If so, I should come to the address indicated, on any Saturday at break of dawn.

My identity, the letter guaranteed, would be kept a secret. I might come in any disguise I desired, though the form which Prince Al-Samir-Reval had preferred was simply a white robe or sheet worn over the ordinary clothes.

"However, if you are so fortunate as to become a member," the explanation went on, "your identity will be merged in the general sharing of all thoughts on that highest plane of mental and spiritual communication to which our sacred Prince Al-Samir-Reval devoted his life."

The only signature was the mimeographed name: "Member Number One."

THAT letter gave me a tremendous wallop. I reread it six times. I counted the days until Saturday.

Then I caught a breath of caution that cooled me off. There could be some hidden implications. It might be a money-making trap set for bored English and American tourists. But if that was the case, I said to myself, someone would already know what the catch was. I sent my own ad to the paper.

My ad read: "American desires acquaintances with any past or present members or applicants to Exclusive Mental Telepathy League. Address: H-15."

The ad ran for a week and in due time was rewarded with a single answer. After an exchange of letters I found myself looking into the eyes of a very lovely English girl.

As her letter had promised, I found her on a Friday afternoon sitting in the tiffin room of a hotel in the Place Ezbekieh.

"This is a pleasure, Miss Winthrop!" I exclaimed with a trifle more enthusiasm than good manners called for. At once I felt the chill of her English reserve. My efforts to be jovial or casual failed to strike a responsive chord. Her shy eyes constantly shifted to other tables. Perhaps she was afraid of being overheard.

"I was formerly a candidate for membership at the Secret League of Six," she said, and her words had evidently been rehearsed. "What do you wish to know?"

"Well, is the thing on the level?"

"On a very high level. I found myself unable to qualify."

"No catches, then?"

The girl moved the spoon in her tea cup with tight nervous fingers.

"It was a year ago that a call for members appeared in the paper. I attended a meeting. There were several

others present, all of us in disguise. But none of us could pass the tests which member number one . . .”

I ceased to hear her words. I had become completely absorbed in watching the spoon that stirred her tea. *She was drawing letters!*

Yes, she was reciting her words automatically, and at the same time making deliberate motions with the tea spoon that she meant for me to watch.

R . . . E . . . F . . . U . . . L.

She rose abruptly. “I must go now. I wish you luck in your attempt to join the Secret League. Perhaps you have more finesse at mind-reading than I.”

She drove away in a taxi.

I took a second look at the various persons who occupied the tiffin room. All of them were strangers to me. None was paying the slightest attention to me, so far as I could tell. But I was sure that someone in that room had forced Miss Winthrop to say exactly what she said.

And she had been clever enough to give me a message, in spite of it.

“R-E-F-U-L.”

It didn't take me long to make something of that. I knew I had missed some letters at the start, so I began filling in at the front of the word, trying each letter of the alphabet. Before I got back to my hotel I had it.

“CAREFUL.”

That was her command to me!

**F**ROM that moment on you couldn't have kept me away from the Secret League meeting place with a gun—not as long as I had a gun of my own with six ready bullets in it.

An hour before Saturday's dawn the sleepy taxi driver carted me across to Cairo's east side. We passed through the walls of the old Arab quarter and threaded our way along the narrow streets. The early morning light sifted

among the tall old stone houses with their black wrought-iron lattices.

The taxi stopped, the driver took a second look at the address and nodded to me. This was the place.

To my surprise it was not an Arab but an English butler who met me at the door. He gave me an impersonal “Good morning, sir. This way in, sir.”

The corridor curved sharply, and I glanced back at the windowed entrance with the comforting thought that I was in good time. The sun had not yet lifted over the tombs of the caliphs on the hills to our east.

“This way, sir,” the butler repeated. “The members of the league will assemble in a few minutes, sir.”

My second surprise came when the butler led me into an elevator. An elevator was by no means standard equipment in these old Arab houses, tall though they were. But we were not to ascend. As soon as the cage door closed, the walls began to flow upward past us. It was like a drop into a mine. It was a reasonable guess that we descended fifty or sixty feet into the earth.

We stopped, and the elevator door opened.

“You'll find another elevator farther on, sir,” said the butler, and he disappeared back of his cage door.

What slick, gleaming, mysteriously curved corridors! And what grotesque murals! The glow from those pictures that lined the walls and ceiling was the only source of light. Old Prince Al-Samir-Reval would have been proud if he could have seen how some modern artist had done him in invisible light.

Under the momentary distraction I lost my way. There were too many curves, too many paths branching off.

“Going down, sir.”

I turned sharply at the sound of the voice. It was another butler, dressed like the first one. He was similiar in

build, perhaps a little shorter and a trifle more snobbish in manners. He gestured me into his elevator, a cage identical to the first.

Again the walls were flying upward past me for what seemed another fifty or sixty foot descent.

Once again I was confronted by mazes of curved corridors, baffling to my sense of direction.

And for a third time a very English butler, this time a sharp-nosed one that reminded one of an impertinent blue-jay, called me into an elevator for a third descent!

At last, dizzy from rapid elevator rides and tortuous dimly-lighted tunnels, I stood before an ordinary office door marked "SECRET LEAGUE OF SIX."

A mimeographed instruction sheet posted beside the door reminded me that I would enter at my own risk, and that I was privileged to remain in disguise. I drew the white sheet close around my face, opened the door, and went in.

My boy, this was the big moment! I was here at last, and maybe you think I wasn't glad.

And suspicious?

Well, what would you think if you'd just been dunked a hundred and fifty feet down under a city that was only half that much above sea level? Not by one continuous elevator, but *three!* And all those mazes—

It made just one kind of sense—it was a high-powered job of confusing you out of your wits.

Which was pretty near my state when the other league members began to dribble in.

**B**Y this time I had followed the signs and had closed myself in one of the six iron-lung affairs that stood up around the table.

These six upright cylinders were numbered. I chose Number Six, seeing that the door to it was open.

I sat down inside, glanced over the instruction sheet and followed the orders that the ancient Prince "would have us follow if he were here to enjoy the modern equipment for mental communion." I closed the door back of me, inserted my arms into the two rubber tubes (enabling me to rest my fists on the circular table) and adjusted the screened opening to the level of my face.

I gazed across the table at number three and to the other cylinders on either side of me. I saw that it was impossible to tell whether any of the other five seats were occupied. Eyes could not be seen through the masks.

I coughed—and jumped at the sound. It was a low leaden amplified clack, the sort of empty mechanical bleat that an electric vocoder can transform any human voice into.

I glanced back at the instruction sheet posted inside the cylinder.

"By this superb equipment," it read, "all facial and vocal expressions are eliminated. All transmission of ideas must take place on the purely mental level."

A sheeted figure entered the room—hobbled in, I might say. It closed itself in cylinder Number Four. All was silent.

A minute later a tall high-shouldered figure in a long white robe strode across the floor and disappeared within Number Three. There was something marvelous about the anonymity that this equipment gave us. I heard a slightly annoyed grunt from Number Three—or perhaps it was a groan or a sigh. At any rate the tone was exactly the same as my cough of a few moments previous—an unrevealing bleat through the vocoder.

Now there were three of us present. Still there was not a single detail about cylinders Three and Four to distinguish them from One and Two and Five—which I assumed might still be unoccupied.

In time a sheeted figure whose gentle walk reminded me of the first butler I had encountered closed himself within Number Two.

A five minute wait—then Number One entered briskly and marched into the cylinder on my left. Again all was motionless and silent. Then—

“We have gathered in pursuit of the powers we have inherited from the famous Muslim prince, Al-Samir-Reval.” The vocoder voice issued from number one. I tried to picture the face that was speaking. I couldn’t—not from the inhuman voice. The words were like chunks of dead slate. “I shall call the roll. Number Two.”

“Present.”

“Three.”

“Here.”

“Four.”

“Yes.”

“Five . . . Five.” No answer.

“Six.”

“Present,” I said. All our voices, needless to say, came through on the same identical mechanical pitch. But the sounds told me one thing. There was no one present who did not speak English.

Number One said, “I shall officiate until our membership of six is complete. When that has been achieved and the minds of all members have merged in a telepathic union, my duties as spokesman for Al-Samir-Reval will be done. . . . This morning we have two new candidates. Number Four and Number Six. The official business of this meeting shall be to administer tests for membership. All members shall participate . . . Ahem.”

THERE was a long pause for effect. “I’ll begin with a very simple telepathic problem,” One said. “I am thinking of a letter between A and D. When you have the answer, raise your hand.”

Every rubber-encased arm went up, including my own.

“Your answer, Six?”

“The letter is B,” I said.

“Correct,” said Number One. “I’m thinking of a letter between A and Z.”

In a moment all hands were up. Number Four gave the answer as X.

“Wrong,” said One. “You’re not concentrating.”

“It’s H,” said Number Four—and that was right. I knew it was.

Number One passed questions around among Two, Three and Four, each question becoming more difficult. They came back with the right answers. Then the questions came my way again.

“I’m thinking of a number between eleven and seventy-seven.” The rubber-encased arms lifted. “The answer, Six?”

“The number is thirty-nine,” I said.

“Correct . . . I’m thinking of a number between one hundred and two thousand. The answer . . . Six?”

I thought swiftly. The answer that came to me was nine hundred and thirty-three; but I said, Nine hundred *ninety-three*.”

“Correct,” said Number One. “Next we’ll go to names . . .”

After a thorough-going drill that might have downed any novice, Number One brought the session to a close with an official assurance that Numbers Four and Six had passed. Our telepathic powers were such that we would soon come to share our minds with theirs. There was the little matter of a fee, however.

A fee, he said, would be a guarantee of our faith in each other. While we



need not ever know each other as ordinary persons know their friends—by face and form and voice and humdrum habits of gaining a livelihood—we should all become brothers in the mental and spiritual realm of our telepathic forerunner, the great Muslim prince.

The fee that would guarantee this faith, he mentioned, could range as high as a thousand American dollars if we wished; certainly nothing less than a hundred dollars would be considered worthy of this great privilege.

The fee, he added, might be slipped through the slit to be found in the end of either of our rubber arms.

After a minute or so of delay, Number Four spilled some bills onto the table to amount to four hundred dollars.

“And you, Number Six?” came Number One’s mechanical bleat.

“I must confess,” I answered, “that I am not qualified. On one of my answers I made a tongue-slip. If the number I gave was the correct one, then the number I *thought* was right, but failed to say, must have been wrong. For this mistake I should be disqualified.”

“No,” said One. “You forget our telepathic powers. Each of us realized that you failed to say the number you knew was right. Mentally, each of us made the adjustment you were entitled to on that answer. You are completely qualified to pay your fee and become one of us.”

**I** FORCED one hundred and forty American dollars through the rubber casing on my right arm, and my first meeting with the Secret League was declared adjourned. We were instructed to leave in the order we had come, so that the blend of our minds would not confuse us as to our separate physical identities.

Before the next week’s meeting, I did considerable pondering over this matter of telepathy. As I’ve mentioned, it isn’t something that a person ordinarily bothers his head about. I’d never taken lessons in it, like you may have on the piano. But some natural musicians, you know, make some discoveries about piano playing without taking lessons—and that’s what had happened to me in this telepathy business.

As never before, I was on my toes about other people’s thoughts.

Some of my guesses were doubtless off the target. I wasn’t certain whether my strong hunch that Miss Winthrop hoped I would talk with her again was a rash tangent or the real McCoy. Anyway I tried to get a message to her asking her to phone or write me, since I did not have her address; but I got no answer, and assumed that the Arab messenger must have got tired of trying all the doors in the English quarter and gone to sleep.

The one important contact I made during the week, of interest to my telepathy hobby, was Lamar, the nondescript one-armed Arab I had talked with coming up the Nile.

It was rather strange, my running across him. I was crossing from the park in the Place Ezbekieh when I noticed someone walking along the street.

“The first butler,” I said to myself. Then, considering, “Or was it Number Two at the Secret League?”

I had almost overtaken him when he ducked into a tiffin shop, his eyes flashing at me as he moved into the shadows.

“It was the third butler!” I said to myself, “the one with the impertinent nose.”

Then, to make sure I was right, I waited on the bench outside the shop. I squandered an hour or more. Surely in another minute or two he would

emerge. Finally I went in, sauntered down the line of tables.

"Looking for someone?" said a voice, and I saw it was the one-armed nondescript. He invited me to sit down and have tea. By this time I saw that the butler was not in the shop. How or when he had left was really none of my concern, and I turned my attention to the one-armed Arab. We drank tea and talked.

"You still believe that thoughts can be transmitted directly from one brain to another?" he asked, smiling elegantly. "How far do your mental powers go? So far as to tell me my line of business?"

"You sell linen goods and English imported clothing," I said.

He patted his hands together delightedly. "You are very clever."

"Not at all," I said. "You gave me your card as we came up the Nile."

"But you could not tell me—" he stopped and a quick anxious look crossed his brown face. The question he checked was instantly in my mind, by telepathy, and before I had thought through its implication I offered an answer.

"I can tell you," I said, "that you are carrying a great deal of money. In American dollars alone you have five hundred and forty dollars."

A sallow paleness came into his cheeks, but he managed a little bow. "Perhaps you are right, perhaps you are wrong. I must be going."

He rose abruptly, and I was momentarily at a loss to know whether I had embarrassed him.

"There's no harm in carrying large sums as long as you have deep pockets," I added pleasantly.

His glance flicked toward his clothing and back at me, and he turned and walked out without another word. My eyes followed him and I concluded that

I had added insult to injury; for plainly he was wearing clothes much too large for him—an incongruous state for one supposed to be in the clothing business. In fact, his clothes were large enough to have fitted the missing butler. I wondered . . .

AT the second meeting of the Secret League the interchange of thoughts branched out into ideas more complicated than simple numbers and names. I came away elated. The answers had come easy for me.

I flew back into my work considerably toned up. There's nothing like a hobby. Especially when you feel as though it's releasing some natural talent that you knew all along you had, but never got to use properly.

By this time my work, too, was definitely on the right track. I had struck the treasure, and had only to work out plans for its excavation before I would be ready to report back to my headquarters in America.

The third and fourth meetings of the League crystallized several of my observations that had been only half formed at first. I began to know the three different butlers as you might know three St. Bernards from the same litter—minute differences in their strutting and barking, in spite of general similarities.

I came to know the mazes of corridors that led off from the elevator shafts, though I concealed my knowledge from the butlers.

I confirmed my original observation that the elevator rides did not cause any changes in the pressure of my eardrums.

But these matters were slight compared to the leaps I had made in the practice of telepathy. There the ideas were jumping like popcorn.

I came to the fifth meeting realizing

that anything could happen.

And I was fully set to see that one thing did happen: It was high time that I had a turn at putting some questions to the others. They knew well enough that I could reach to their minds for answers. But I had never had a square proof that they had a similar reach into mine.

There were pencils and blank papers on the table when I took my place for the fifth meeting. I closed myself in my cylinder, adjusted my arms in the rubber casings, peered through the screen to watch the others arrive—one at a time, as always.

There were still only the five of us, ostensibly. That is to say, no form had ever been seen to enter the fifth of the six places, and no leaden voice had ever sounded from its mouthpiece.

"The time has come," Number One announced, "that we should delve more deeply into the treasured secrets of our hearts. For each to know the finest and best that the other knows will weld us into the spiritual one-ness that Prince Al-Samir-Reval foresaw for us."

**B**Y turns Numbers One, Two, and Three spent some minutes in silent concentration upon their treasured mysteries. The others of us were asked to relate what we had received. It suddenly became very complicated.

Number Two turned on me and asked me to recite the count of the stones in each layer of one of the pyramids, which he had just now released from his mind. I fell down badly, and Number One shot a cutting remark at me. "Perhaps we're not so near a spiritual unity as I thought. Number Six, can you *write* the numbers called for?"

I complied, and Number One allowed the meeting to proceed.

That slight incident aroused my fighting blood.

Then like a blast of cannon-fire through a cloud came a spoken proposal from Number Three.

"I wish to share with you one of the most stupendous pieces of knowledge that man ever possessed. I know the location of a vast treasure, one of the richest ever buried."

The metallic clank of his words echoed wildly in my ears. I was instantly on my guard.

"I may be the only person in the world," he continued, "who knows under which of the many so-called caliphs' tombs the treasure lies, and how it may be found. Think with me, my brothers, while I impart this information to you."

The dead silence held for a few seconds, then the rubber arms began to come up, indicating that the message had gone across.

I raised my hand with the others. But in truth I had received no message from Three. His knowledge of a treasure was all bluff!

"Number Six fumbled on the last question," said Number One. "He may have done the same on this."

"Let him write his answers," said Number Three. "I'll see whether he caught all the details."

"Write," said Number One.

I swung the pencil into action, then hesitated. "I'll write if the rest of you will do the same."

Number One made a slight reach, but evidently thought better of it. "The rest of us have checked our results mentally," he said. "Write."

I wrote: "King Tut's Tomb. Dig till you find it." I passed the paper across the table.

"This is an outrage!" Number Three clacked. He recited my words without picking up the paper. "I can't understand this levity! I specifically referred to the tombs of the caliphs!"

"Levity constitutes a breach of faith!" Number One snapped crustily. "Al-Samir-Reval's rule was death to any member who would trifle with his brother's trust."

"I don't wish to be hasty in judgment," said Number Three, "If Six didn't know the rule give him another chance to comply. Let him write the full answer within the next three minutes."

"Be quick about it, then!" Number One barked. "We allow you three minutes—"

"I'll take them," I cut in, "to ask *you* some questions!" In that tense moment everything came clear to me. I plunged. "Listen! As a paid member, I demand the right to test *you* as you've tested me!" I slipped my gun down toward the fingers of my right hand.

"Don't be childish!"

"Answer up with your hands," I said, "as quick as you catch my message. Here it is: I'm thinking of the most fascinating discovery I've made since I got quick at this game of reading other people's minds. What's my discovery? Hands, please!"

No hands responded.

"I'll give you a hint. It's a rare secret gift that has come down—to *you*—through the hands of a few rare magicians and sorcerers—"

No hands.

"A gift to be envied by actors—"

Still no hands. I hurled my challenge like thunderbolts.

"What? You don't know? Or do you? If you do, you're trying to keep it a secret from me. But you can't! I got it from you by mental telepathy . . . All right, I'll give it back to you straight! My discovery is this: *Someone here has the rare gift of being able to change his features and his bodily form!*"

**T**HERE was a dead silence, but I didn't let it last. I was full of words that wouldn't hold back.

"Generations will come and go without ever guessing that blackest of man's secrets. But wait until the day that mental telepathy sweeps out the dark corners. You rare Proteans won't have such a sweet advantage. Your Jekyll-and-Hyde acts will come right square under telepathy's searchlight! There'll be a ventilation of all the skullduggery your breed gets away with!"

"Your three minutes are up!" Number One snarled. "You'll die!"

"I'll take three more!" I clanked. "What am I thinking, Number One?"

His clipped words came back fast. "You're thinking you've violated all the rules sacred to the prince. You've come back at a brother's test question with a ridiculous answer. You're thinking that if you don't come through with a quick answer on that treasure you'll never see daylight!"

I laughed, and the laughter clacked out in the same even key as his threat.

"Your telepathy was never at lower ebb, Number One! Take a straight look at my thoughts and you'll see that killing me wouldn't gain a thing for a certain butler-turned-Arab named *Lamar!*"

I jabbed my gun through the slit in my rubber arm.

"Wait, Hammond! Hold it!" The monotone outcry spilled from the mouthpieces of Numbers One, Two, Three and Four simultaneously. A single voice from everywhere!

*Bang!* I shot through Number One. I turned my gun on Number Two.

And because my mental telepathy told me exactly what I was doing, I pulled the trigger all of four times. One bullet punctured *each of the first four upright cylinders.*

Then I turned the gun toward Num-

ber Five. On the instant the vocoder's mechanical monotone was broken by the scream of a girl.

"Don't! Don't kill him!" Her cries came from under the circular table.

I held my gun on Number Five. "Come out, Lamar. I've got ammunition enough to blow you through the wall."

"You're talking big, Hammond!" said the figure that emerged from Number Five. It was neither a butler nor a one-armed Arab; or rather, it was something of both, a balance of extremes achieved in the transition stage. "Don't forget you're pretty well trapped down here a hundred and fifty feet below the ground."

"Don't make me laugh," I snorted. "Your canvas walls that rolled past your stationary elevators weren't quite as realistic as your contortions . . . Tell that girl to stop screaming!"

I JERKED out of my rubber arms, swung through the door of Number Six, and flashed my gun at the disappearing figure of Lamar. He slid through the trapdoor in the floor of Number Five.

In that split second I let him get away. The girl, crawling out from under the table, saw me turn my gun aside.

"Oh, thanks," she moaned, clutching at my knees helplessly. "Thanks for letting him live!"

"I hadn't any other intention," I muttered. "If his mental telepathy had been any good, he'd have known that . . . Say, you're Miss Winthrop, aren't you! I've been having some strong premonitions that you were mixed up in this." In fact, I had known, by telepathy, that she was eavesdropping, driven to it by her fears.

I helped her to her feet. She was as frightened as any child you ever saw,

pleading for the life of the man who was her uncle. He was all she had to depend upon, she cried, and if all the crimes he'd got away with came down on his head it would kill him—and her too. She just couldn't bear to live if she lost him.

The way she was carrying on, darned if I didn't think she was putting on an act—but at once my mental telepathy told me otherwise. And it also told me that her Uncle Lamar wasn't going to pop out of a trapdoor in the floor to make trouble with firearms. He had his own plan . . .

I made the rounds of the cylinders and saw the trapdoor in the floor of each, and saw how easy it had been for Lamar to make one entrance after another in the guise of different persons, slipping out each time by under-floor passages. I examined the equipment in Number Five, where Lamar had stationed himself, after all his entrances to shift his voice back and forth and carry on conversations with himself from four different points. I saw the mechanical devices by which he operated the rubber arms of One, Two, Three and Four. All in all, it was the neatest mechanical set-up for conducting a one-man secret society you ever saw.

FRANK HAMMOND glanced out the train car window at the passing telegraph poles and chuckled softly to himself. "Yes," he said, "the changeable old cuss had gotten by with a lot of hoaxes, all kinds of them, by a clever use of his high-pressure equipment. But this mental telepathy business was his Waterloo. He didn't *have* it, and it took him for a ride."

"What happened to him?" I asked. "You mentioned a plan."

"Yes—a quick suicide. It was hard to explain to the authorities, but I gave

them my telepathic insight. The fellow just couldn't face defeat. He saw all his glittering hoax was punctured—the biggest hope of his life, to get next to that colossal treasure, was blasted right out of his hands. He couldn't take it. Miss Winthrop and I heard the gunfire from the passageway under the floor, and when we reached him he was dead . . . There was one bit of comfort for her. In dying, he had reverted to the form of one of the butlers. It was in that guise that she had loved him most."

Frank Hammond rose from his seat. He looked down at me and seemed to read the countless questions that welled up in my mind.

"Think it over, my friend," he said. "And don't forget what I said about the new insights that telepathy is bound to bring us. So far as I know, there's no other way that this diabolical art

of Lamar's would ever have been apprehended—though I'll admit he was in a tight spot in the tiffin room that time I waited for him as a butler, and he shifted into the one-armed Arab to elude me—in spite of his clothes."

"I can't understand why such a girl as this Miss Winthrop should have strung along with him," I said.

"Poor kid," said Hammond. "She was a victim of circumstances. She had grown up under his domination. It seems to have become a part of her make-up. It may take years for her to outgrow the effects of his bullying."

"She probably never will," I commented.

"On the contrary," said Hammond. "She shows progress every day. By the way, she's back in the next car wondering what's become of me. Would you like to go back and meet her?"

THE END