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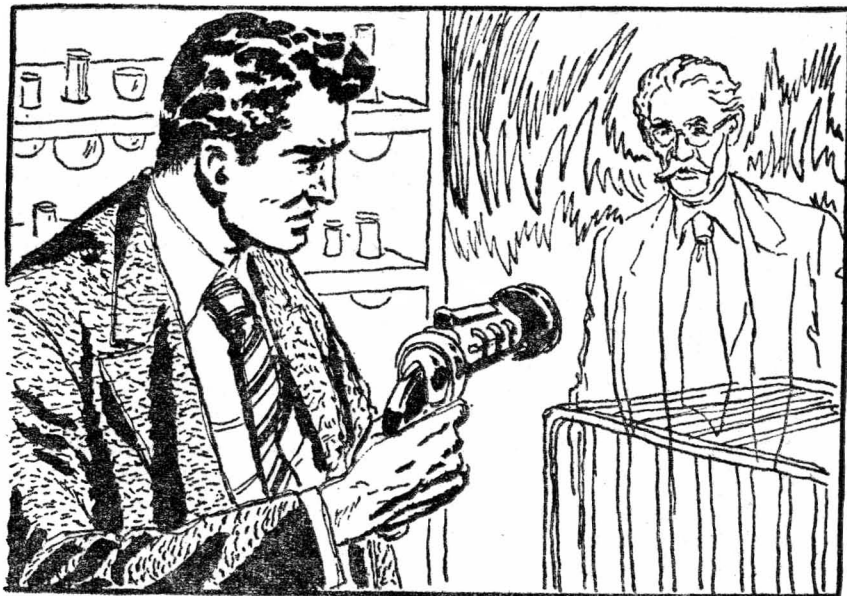
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SEE NO EVIL

By CHARLES E. FRITCH



THE rabbit cage seemed empty, but there was a tell-tale flurry of activity as sawdust flew beneath invisible feet. The man who called himself Jason Achilles watched, fascinated, as a carrot lifted itself into the air and slowly disappeared amid sounds of gnawing.

Jason glanced swiftly about the laboratory. Satisfied he was alone, he raised his wrist and

spoke softly into what appeared to be a watch, using a language not of Earth. "Achilles."

From the other side of the moon, a voice crackled in response. "Base HQ. Is the formula ready?"

"In a while, Jason Achilles promised, riveting his gaze on the laboratory door. "The experiments are quite successful. All animals eating the chemicals

are invisible. Preliminary tests indicate invisibility good for approximately four months. No ill effects noted."

The watch-radio crackled impatiently: "And on humanoids?"

"Should be the same. I'll check on Dr. Schoener, when I take the formula." He cut off and silence returned, broken only by the gnawing, scampering sounds coming from the seemingly empty cages lining the wall.

Jason peered once more into the rabbit's cage and thought of his comrades-in-arms on the other side of Earth's moon. They had been waiting four months to strike, and morale was dangerously low; they would be glad to welcome the first chance to take off in their spaceships—but they needed the formula first. Little wonder they were impatient. A thousand soldiers, ready to invade, crowded together for months on a dusty satellite—and the ripe paradise of Earth only a step away.

Well, soon it would be over, Jason consoled himself, and the bloodless invasion would be complete; bloodless, of course, to them, not the Earth people. They would get the formula, compound it from synthesized ingredients; and then a thousand invisible soldiers would be dispersed across Earth, taking it

over with swift, unopposed precision. Invisible, they could with impunity reduce the native population with their more advanced weapons, without harm to either themselves or Earth industries—and then send for the rest of their race on a dying sun many light years away.

"Fascinating, isn't it?"

Jason Achilles started at the voice. He looked into the kindly gray eyes of Dr. Herman Schoener.

"Incredibly," he agreed.

He didn't like to look into the doctor's eyes. They were intense, piercing, intelligent. Often, during the four months he had been Dr. Schoener's laboratory assistant, Jason had felt qualms of annoyance when he couldn't help but wonder if the scientist could somehow pierce his disguise, see him as someone not of Earth. The feeling came now, and he shook it off.

"Even though I know it's only the refraction of light around a body," the doctor said, "it still seems magical."

Jason nodded. He said, slowly, "The experiments, then, are complete."

"Except for a test on a human," the doctor agreed. "It should work as well, though."

"And then what?" Jason's eyes narrowed.

"And then—I don't know for

certain. The government's interested, of course—vitaly so. That's why we're here, at an army base surrounded by soldiers, instead of at a private laboratory. They sponsored our undertaking, and they'll certainly want to share in its benefits. I'd hate to have any other government take it over, though. Maybe now we can have a little peace."

"An invisible army would really be invincible," Jason mused.

"Invincible indeed," the doctor agreed. "A mere handful could take over the entire Earth, striking anywhere they wished, with no fear of retaliation. Can you conceive of the possibilities?"

Jason smiled inwardly. "Very easily," he said. "Are you going to test it on yourself?"

"I imagine so. It's a harmless chemical. Its only purpose is to cast an invisible aura about the body surface, which refracts light around that body, clothes and all, so that a person appears to be invisible."

"Try it now," Jason suggested.

"It can wait," Dr. Schoener said. "I'd like to do it before some officials, so—"

"Try it now," Jason Achilles said. A strange tubular pistol was in his grasp.

Schoener frowned. He looked into the other man's face. "I see."

"The capsules," Jason insisted, with a wave of his gun. "Get them." He went to the door, bolted it silently. "And the formula," he added.

"You'll get caught, Jason," the doctor warned. "The place is heavily guarded. A fly couldn't get through."

Jason laughed. "An invisible fly could. The capsules!"

Dr. Schoener unlocked a drawer. He held the small metal box uncertainly in his hand, together with a paper.

"Take one," Jason commanded. "And then toss the box to me, with the paper in it."

Helplessly, the scientist did as he was told.

"That's it," Jason Achilles said, pleased. He held the gun pointing at Schoener's chest, while he spoke into the watch-radio. "Achilles."

"Base HQ," the set crackled. "The formula?"

"Stand by." Jason read the formula into the set.

"Are you certain it's correct?" the radio said.

"I've seen it before, and the factors check. It'll work, all right. Schoener's beginning to fade."

"Good," the voice said; for the first time, it seemed genuine-

ly pleased. "The synthesizer will give us enough in an hour. Meanwhile, we'll be airborne!"

Jason smiled and cut off. A few yards away, Dr. Schoener was rapidly becoming transparent. The portion of laboratory bench directly behind him was visible, becoming clearer.

"You'll never get away with this," Schoener said, but his voice was uncertain.

"No reason I shouldn't. In a few short hours, your planet will be under our control," Jason boasted. "Already our fleet is aloft." He grinned and raised his pistol. "But of course you won't be able to see the conquest."

Schoener sprang quickly. His body was little more than an outline now, as though he were made of glass, and seeing him was difficult. In sudden panic, Jason fired. A blast of light crackled from the pistol, missed.

The scientist plowed into him, knocking him down. At close quarters Jason used the weapon as a club, striking out furiously. In the scuffle his radio was smashed against the floor, but Jason paid it no attention. With a desperate thrust of his feet, he pushed Schoener upright and fired swiftly into the near-invisible figure.

Schoener staggered back into the laboratory bench, stood

swaying uncertainly, and then crumpled to the floor.

Puffing, Jason got to his feet. He reached out gingerly, prodded the invisible figure. From behind the closed door came the sounds of hurrying feet and excited voices.

Jason started to speak into his radio, and only then discovered it was broken. Well, it didn't matter; they had the formula, were even now mass-producing the capsules. He tore the formula to shreds, slipped a capsule into his mouth and the box into his pocket—and waited.

Voices were shouting beyond the door, giving commands. Jason ignored them. He waited, confidently.

He examined his hands. They seemed to be slowly changing, becoming slightly transparent. But suddenly the lights in the room seemed to be getting dimmer. Jason frowned. In darkness, they would be as invisible as he. Was that their trick, he wondered? He laughed nervously.

Fervently, he wished the process were faster. He held his hand to the dimming light. He could see the neon tube through it. No, that was not right. He could see the tube *around* the hand, for light waves were being cut off from the hand itself. Just as they were being cut off

from other parts of his body—from his arms, his legs, his head, his—

The lights seemed to dim even more, and a terrifying thought came to Jason Achilles.

The light from the neon tubes was not dimming! *It was being refracted around him!*

"But—I won't be able to see!" he exclaimed aloud.

"That's right, Jason," a voice said nearby.

"Wha—What? Schoener! But I killed you . . ."

The voice was smiling. "Not quite. Your—your ray, or whatever it was, hit me, all right; but thanks to the invisibility, it wasn't direct. I'll get better."

"But—how—"

"I don't know where you're from, Jason, but you must be pretty vain to think you could pose as an Earthman and get away with it. You tripped yourself up a dozen different times."

Jason snorted. "Then why the pretense?"

"We resolved to find out your mission here by letting you learn the process. It was safe—because under the circumstances it's as much a weapon against the user

as anyone. You yourself just discovered the difficulty. A person made invisible by this process is like an ostrich with its head in the ground."

Jason waited, stunned, still not believing. Around him, the laboratory was drifting into darkness.

"In time," Schoener continued, "we may utilize infrared or other equipment to see, but now— Tell me, Jason, can you also conceive of how helpless an army is that's blind?"

With an angry, frustrated curse, Jason Achilles threw the gun hard in the direction of the voice, but only its harmless crash against the wall and Schoener's triumphant laugh answered him.

Somewhere, a door was being smashed in, but Jason paid it no heed. He would be safe, as would be Schoener, for four months, until sight—and visibility—returned. But the army—the invaders—his comrades-in-arms—would be out in space when the darkness came.

The door gave way with a crash. Jason, enveloped by his own private darkness, waited, sobbing quietly.
