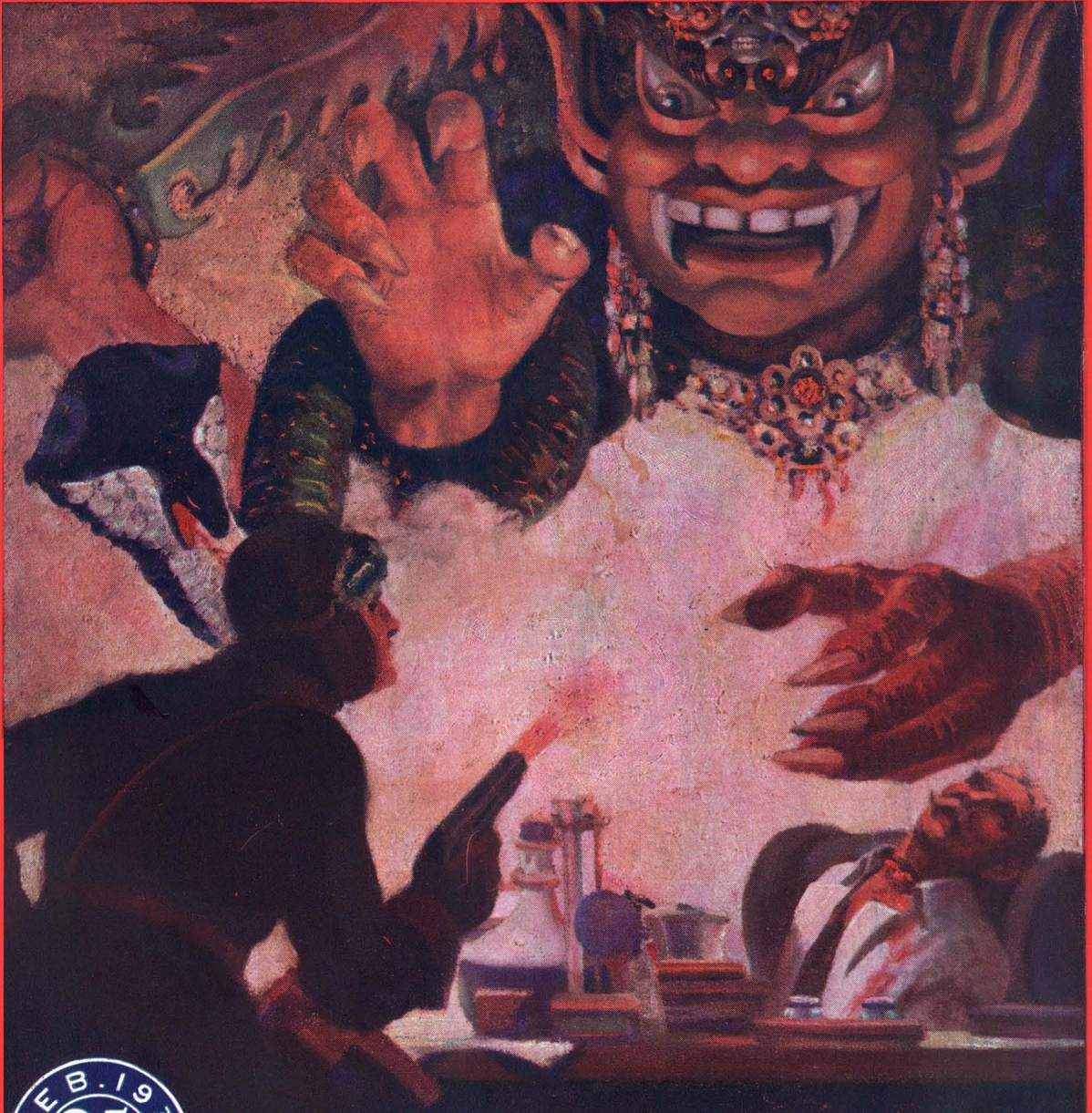


# Weird Tales

*The Unique Magazine*



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***SIVA* the DESTROYER**  
*by J.-J. des Ormeaux.*

FEBRUARY-MARCH

# Weird Tales

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*A thrilling weird story of super-science and a conflict to the death with a genius that threatened the world*

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*"I seemed to be spinning through space, mounting through infinite leagues, whirling, rushing."*

# Siva The Destroyer

By J.-J. DES ORMEAUX

*A novelette of super-science and a death-conflict with a genius who threatened the world*

**T**WELVE thousand feet up, automatic controls set for the vicinity of the Channel ports, I hummed along in my tiny Bat-type monoplane, watching in a sort of semi-dozed the undulating white thread below me that was the surf breaking along the coast of Spain.

Below me were scores of other craft, triplanes, tandem biplanes, lazily moving dirigibles, gaudily painted pleasure ships, tiny one-man helicopters that spun like gauze-winged insects in the sun.

The stuttering flash of my receiver broke in on my wool-gathering.

*Stanage . . . Detective-Captain Stanage . . . N20 . . . N20 . . . N20. . . .*

That was my code signal at Detective quarters, American Zone.

I threw in my key, answering: *Stanage . . . N20 . . . vicinity Cadiz. . . .*

The message flashed back:

*Pick up Blue Express at once between I-361 and Gibraltar . . . received message ten minutes back unknown source Blue Express to be destroyed before reaches*



*Mediterranean ports . . . may be crank calls self Siva the Destroyer . . . take no chances but cover . . . am reaching others in vicinity. . . .*

I repeated the message, flashed off my key, released the automatic control switch and banked in a steep arc landward.

The extreme end of Spain seemed to wheel below me; Gibraltar, the Rock standing up like a bald head; across the narrow strait the tiny white roofs of Tangiers in Morocco; to my left the Mediter-

anean, to my right the gray Atlantic. I shot out over that gray watery waste, my Bar climbing into full speed, the air even in the enclosed cockpit humming and quivering. Few other craft were over the sea; some freighters lumbering along the lanes from London to Rio, a few pleasure dirigibles skirting the shore. I

kept my eyes on that quadrant of horizon where I-361 would appear. That was the last of the ilots, or huge floating landing-stages, that intervened in the ocean before the Spanish coast. I passed my hand over the breech of the two automatic turret-guns that poked their long noses out along the snout of my Bat. What madman was this that was threatening the destruction of the Blue Express? These two guns I had my hand on, manufactured for Universal Police Bats, could penetrate with their explosive bullets six-inch armor plate, at a mile's distance, and blow a hole big enough to pass a body through. Three or four more craft armed like mine would be even now speeding toward the Blue Express. Did some one want to fight a duel with us? It was preposterous. It must be, as the message had said, some crank.

In five minutes I had picked up ilot I-361, floating like a child's toy on the surface of the water. By the time I could make out the hotel roofs and terraces on it the Blue Express was above it, a blue-green cigar hurtling with all the power of its multiple engines toward the European coast. I climbed steeply, reduced the engine, circled in a great curve above the Express, whipping smoke messages in the International Code from my rudder discharge. They answered, saying they had met no one. Obviously the skipper had not received the message I had.

I scanned the horizon on every side. It was empty. The air was cloudless, tranquil, blue, the sea sun-dappled. It was unthinkable that anywhere in that serenity destruction could be waiting for the Blue Express. It was absurd. Whoever had given that message was the sort of person who turns in a fire alarm to see the engines run.

And then, in the midst of all that tranquillity, a bolt from the blue, it happened.

Fire streaked from the air to the left of the Blue Express. It was a flash out of pure air, out of empty space. The whole front end of the dirigible collapsed like a smashed paper bag; the rest sagged heavily downward; from the shattered undercar people fell like plummets into the sea.

For an instant I was too stunned to make the slightest retaliatory movement. And in that frozen moment, while the huge bag swung slowly around at an angle of forty-five degrees, another burst of flame came from the air, from another position. It riddled the compartments that still clung to the exposed belly of the bag with a direct and murderous fire. With a roar that rocked my Bat from stem to stern the remnant of the dirigible exploded. It burst like a titanic rocket, spreading out on all sides like a star-shell; the air rained pieces of material, fragments of twisted metal, human bodies; heavier masses pitched in spinning parabolas into the sea.

Control came back to me in a shock of action.

I dove in a headlong swoop at the position of those flashes, my guns splitting the air ahead in knives of flame. It was a dive that nearly tore the Bat apart; the whole mechanism vibrated and screamed. Those flashes were gun flashes, those bullets were explosive bullets! *But it was a ship I could not see!* At the bottom of that swoop where the flashes had been was absolute nothingness. But as I flattened out I glimpsed those jets of flame leaping from the left and this time spurted at me.

He had missed. He was above me and in a moment would have me; I shoved the screaming Bat into a mad loop, fighting for upper position, the throttle jammed forward at maximum. Up, up, I roared, and the jets followed, to the right, to the side, behind me; with one moment more and the help of Jehovah I

would be top dog. Even in that wild zooming instant I knew one thing: whatever this was it was slower than a Bat and its guns were of smaller caliber. I spun into the first movement of a spiral and riddled the air where the jets had been. There was no answer. I raked the whole segment of space where we had climbed. Still nothing. Then it flashed on me what he was doing. He had stopped firing until he was in position to finish me.

Even as the thought leaped into my mind the jets opened from six hundred feet to my left, on an absolute dead level with me. I dove instinctively, reflexively; there was a shock from behind that knocked the ship sideways like a ball struck by a hand. Through fifty feet of space the Bat slewed; I clawed for purchase in that reeling cockpit; one glance back was enough to show half the tail ripped away; a bullet had struck the extreme end of my rudder. The heliopic devices that set in the minute the Bat stopped forward direction were partially destroyed; the ship was diving in short dips, staggering, righting itself, reeling crazily. I threw up the quadruplex hood, trying to crawl out on the wing; behind me the tail was afire; flames singed my face. I made the wing edge; the ship lunged; I half fell, half dove into space.

When the parachute plucked me out of my hurtling fall I was staring at death, if I ever looked at him before. I swung in midair a perfect target, the great bloom of silk above me, sinking gently toward the sea. Overhead the Bat still careened drunkenly, a mass of yellow flame. Below launches from the ilot were streaking toward pieces of wreckage that dotted the sea. In the comparative silence came the roar of a motor to my left. *His* motor, banking. I realized with a start that the sound was receding. A faint streak of smoke was going off to the west, like an

insolent signal. He was going. The sound died. He was gone.

I struck the water twenty feet from one of the launches. They poled me in; some one hacked the parachute harness free. We shot toward the ilot in two spouting crests of spray.

WHEN we came up in the elevator to the floor of the ilot I thrust my way through the excited throng that crowded there, making for the nearest hotel. Inside I made immediate wireless telephone connections with Severill, my chief, the man who had radioed me the message.

I told him quickly what had happened.

I heard his astounded exclamation. "This is impossible, Stanage!" he said. "This is incredible!"

"But it's true. He wrecked the Blue Express. He wrecked me."

"An invisible ship? An invisible pilot? Are you sure it wasn't some sort of remote control?"

"I know it wasn't," I said. "He was there. I heard him. I saw his guns flash. I've got a hunch it's a plain ordinary pursuit plane on the order of a Bat. But no rocket motors. He couldn't use them because the tail flames would have rendered his position clear."

He said: "I didn't tell you all the message we received. Part of the warning said the reason the Blue Express would be destroyed was because Hanishaw was traveling on it."

"Hanishaw!" I said. That was the renowned physicist, one of the celebrated triad who were working to break down the atom.

"Yes, and good Lord, man, here's the important part: we've just got word from Cairo that Doctor Khalid Bey has been warned from the same source!"

Khalid Bey was the second member of the triad.

"He has?" I said. "When was this? Is he alive still?"

"Yes, at the present moment."

I said: "What is this, a conspiracy to kill off the greatest scientists alive?"

"It looks like it," he said. "You'd better get to Khalid Bey at once."

I sprang out of the booth across the lobby for the roof elevators. In two minutes I could get the inter-ilot local that intercepted the Marseilles Express in the second air-lane. My dazed mind was still framing impossible questions. Who could this be? How had it been done? What was the object of an attack on Hanishaw, a man who had no enemies, a man who had devoted his life to disinterested physical research? Or on Doctor Khalid Bey, the wealthy amateur, who was said to scarcely venture out of his laboratory? Why slaughter hundreds of people just to kill one unsuspecting man, when he might have been lured to his death a hundred easier ways? Was it just a careless gesture of power? Was it some marauder from another world? But that was impossible. It was some one earthly, I was sure of that. Whoever Siva the Destroyer was, he had flesh and blood and a human mind, and there were mortal motives behind him.

As we transferred by lateral elevator from the local to the Express a young chap alongside me began some conversation about the afternoon's incident. I paid no special attention until I heard him mention the triad.

"What's that about the triad?" I said.

"I was saying we ought to get those three great men to work on this," he said.

"We will if they live," I said. "This looks like a direct attempt to kill them off. Hanishaw was on the Blue Express this afternoon. Khalid Bey's already been warned."

"Doctor Khalid Bey!" he exclaimed. "Why, I'm on my way to see him now!"

I looked at him. He was a keen-faced youngster, obviously fresh from a science doctorate; on the card tagged to his grip it said Charles Van West.

"What's that?" I said. "In what connection are you going to see Khalid Bey?"

"I've been given the chance to work in his laboratory as an assistant." Pride and anxiety struggled in his face. "I—it's a great chance—I—I hope——"

I finished his sentence more grimly. "I hope so too, Mr. Van West. I hope very much he's alive to receive you."

On the express deck of the super-city airdrome at Marseilles a sergeant of Universal Police picked me out of the disembarking throng.

"I've got a ship for you, sir," he said. "I was ordered to pick you up here."

"Good," I said. "Khalid Bey's laboratories in Cairo. All the speed you can possibly make."

As we sprinted across to his Bat the huge audiphones were already giving a detailed account of the catastrophe. I caught the words: ". . . and Detective Captain Stanage of the Universal Police is supposed to have been killed in a desperate . . ." That was one mistake I was glad they had made.

WE SHOT out over the Mediterranean. The sergeant cut in his emergency tanks of benzine and liquid air; we rocketed through space with a terrific roar, two tails of fire going out behind us like a double-headed comet. The effect inside was deadening; my head felt like an apparatus of plaster and lead. After an incalculable interval, in which the sense of time, space and motion seemed to disappear completely, the yellow outlines of the African coast were dimly visible. We picked up the sprawling mass of Alexandria, cut by the glittering thread of the Mahmudiyeh Canal; beyond rolling wastes of sand, and the

flat silver ribbon of the Nile. In ten minutes we were circling over the palms and round mosques of Cairo.

We dropped perpendicularly down upon the roof landing-fin of Doctor Khalid Bey's laboratory. An assistant conducted me at once to where the scientist was waiting, in a small room beyond which came the hum of enormous turbo-generators. He was a tall man with flashing, brilliant eyes, incessantly smoking cigarettes; the strain he was under showed in the nervous rapidity of his movements. He spoke with a marked accent; although English had been the universal language for a quarter of a century, he was one of those who still used his native tongue.

"I had thought this was a hoax," he said, "until this terrible news about Hanishaw and the Blue Express. He was coming to see me; I almost feel responsible. This is something frightful. Apparently I have until midnight, if I can believe the warning."

"Your warning said you had until midnight?"

"Yes. Let me show it to you." He took from a table a folded sheet of paper. It was ordinary bond paper, without watermark, and upon it was a large drawing. It was a picture of Siva, the many-handed Hindoo god, done in red crayon with deft, sharp strokes. Below was the single sentence: *You shall perish tonight at midnight by the invisible hands of Siva the Destroyer.*

There was nothing else on the sheet. The printing was angular and strong, with no effort to conceal the natural boldness of the hand.

I stared at the ominous many-handed likeness of the god.

"How did this come to you, Doctor?" I asked.

"By ordinary mail. I had the envelope, but I threw it away, not knowing of course it would be of importance later.

Every one of any prominence gets freakish letters from time to time. I don't even remember the postmark. It was addressed in the same hand, I believe."

"There's been no disturbance of any sort since you got it?"

"None."

"Is there any reason why you should be picked out for an attack of this sort?"

"None I know of. Every man has his enemies, but I certainly have none so virulent as this. And besides, it doesn't look like a personal enemy. Hanishaw and I had no connection except scientifically, and yet he was picked out by the same hand. It looks like something more wholesale."

"Is there anything you might have discovered in your experiments that some one might want kept concealed?"

He considered, his sharp face, like a bronze hawk's, resting on his hand. "There are certain things we have kept secret, but nothing any one would want to kill us for, surely. It wouldn't be of the slightest advantage to any one."

I shook my head. "It seems to be entirely without a motive," I said.

He flashed his brilliant eyes at me. "Unless it is a demonstration of power."

"I had the same idea," I said, "but still it looks incomprehensible. Why wasn't the ilot destroyed? Why was I spared?"

He shook his head in his turn. "I have been thinking about getting away," he said, tapping his long cigarette with a quick gesture. "I have a testing-station in the Sahara whose position I have kept secret for government reasons. I have packed and I intend to leave for it at nightfall."

"Hadn't you better let us protect you?" I asked.

He smiled wryly. "With all respect to your powers—I don't see what you could do. I think hiding is better. Perhaps you had better concentrate on Ferrand."



Doctor Ferrand, of Marseilles, was the third member of the triad.

"Has Ferrand been warned?" I asked.

"I don't know," he said. "I was just going to get in touch with him." He turned toward the television at the side of the room. Just then the indicator emitted a green light, showing that some one was trying to reach him by it. With a slight exclamation he switched on the controls.

The receiving screen leaped into bright light, but no image appeared on it. Instead an enormous booming voice filled the room.

"I am asking for Captain Stanage," it said.

I stood up with a movement of surprise. "I am Captain Stanage," I said. I stepped quickly before the scanner. "Who is this?"

Still no image appeared on the screen.

"I am Siva the Destroyer," it said.

My body stiffened, my head shot forward; I could feel the short hair stand on the back of my neck.

"You have thrown down the gauntlet, Captain Stanage," said the voice, "and I have picked it up. I have added you to my list."

No words came from my mouth. Doctor Khalid Bey stood rigid, his lips moving in something like involuntary prayer.

"Doctor Khalid Bey is safe for the present," said the voice. "Just now I will race you to Doctor Ferrand."

The release dials clicked, the screen flashed dark, the booming voice was gone.

Khalid Bey said in a hoarse voice: "He will race you to Doctor Ferrand!"

I had already sprung toward the door. Midway I swung on my heel, crying: "But you! How about you!"

"I will take care of myself!" he cried. "Get to Ferrand!"

ONCE more the Bat roared over the Mediterranean, shrieking like a live thing, annihilating space. The sea fled beneath us, slower ships seemed to stand still; when we came in sight of the swarm of craft over Marseilles we missed collision a score of times; there was no way to warn them; we were traveling faster than sound. Above the small villa of Doctor Ferrand outside Marseilles we dropped like a projectile toward the ground. Would we be in time? Was he still alive? The scene below was tranquillity itself; the sea lapped peacefully inside the sheltered cove where the tiny villa stood.

All was quiet—had we won the race?

I plunged headlong over the open ground toward the house, leaving the sergeant to maneuver the Bat behind shelter. No sound came from within. I flung the door open, rushed into the domed sun-room. It was empty. A small door led off to the left. It was partly open.

I rushed through it shouting hoarsely: "Ferrand! Ferrand!" I came up short with a terrible shock in the pit of my stomach.

It was the scientist's study. In the chair behind his desk he lay, his body thrown back, his head nearly severed from his body.

As my eyes rose slowly from him the flesh froze over my body.

On the wall behind him a huge picture of Siva was being drawn stroke by stroke by an invisible hand!

I think I must have been nearer stark unreason then than I ever was in my life. My mind was blank; the contraction of my muscles held me as in a vise. With a noise between a gasp and a curse I dragged at my revolver, staggered a step forward, fired at that horrible space.

I had missed—the picture went on being drawn.

I threw myself forward desperately, firing a solid stream, emptying all the chambers of my revolver. There was a crash; I plunged blindly; I tripped over something and went headlong on the floor. I threw myself around, clawing wildly; my hands were on something; I fought at it, grasped it, pinned it. It was a body. It was still. A slow welter of blood ran through the air and flowed over my hands.

I got panting to my feet. The blood increased over a surface about the size of a man's chest. I leaned forward, exploring with my hands this thing below me. What I felt was a smooth surface, a series of smooth surfaces, like plates of some thin metal jointed together to form an armor. The outline was that of a man.

I wheeled to the table and picked up a strong sharp paper-knife. I bent down and felt for the ridge of one of the plates, inserting the blade in the interstice. The joint parted with the tenuous brittleness of aluminum. I ripped off the plate. It was as flexible as cardboard in my hand.

Beneath was human flesh.

It was burned. It was seared. It was charred black in places. I worked feverishly, rending off the plates, exposing a whole human body. A man's body. It was burned in great spreading sears beyond recognition.

I stood motionless staring at that corpse. My staggered mind was saying: Is this Siva? Have I killed him? Is it possible?

The sergeant was in the room. "Great God!" he cried. "What's this?"

I swung on him, snapping: "Get Marseilles headquarters at once. Tell them to bring a laboratory expert and a doctor."

While he made connections I went through the rest of the house. It was empty. Obviously Doctor Ferrand lived alone.

I returned to the study and gathered

the invisible plates together. I wrapped them loosely in a small rug. I was fearful of handling them after the effects I had seen on their wearer. They had no temperature to my touch, nor did my hands as yet exhibit any burns. While I was collecting the plates I came on the weapon with which Doctor Ferrand had been murdered. It was a sharp heavy knife, invisible but for the smear of blood on its blade. By scraping it with my pen-knife I found it was plated with the same material.

I stepped over and examined the seared body closely. It had no identifying marks; it was a white man, roughly thirty years old, the features too wealed with burns to tell anything about the countenance. The skin even where it was not burned had a scarified look, inflamed and raw.

The sergeant came back. I took him by the arm at a sudden idea. "The plane must be here somewhere," I said. "Come outside and we'll look."

We ran outside and hunted over the ground around the villa. We were still hunting when the headquarters men arrived. I left three or four to go on with the search and went inside with the others.

Their chief came up short at the sight of the scarified body.

"Siva!" he cried. "You've killed him! You've got him!"

"I'm not so sure," I said.

"What!" he said. "You don't think this is Siva?"

It wasn't clear in my own mind why I had any doubts.

"I'll be surer when we find the plane," I said.

While the doctor took over the bodies we went out to resume the search. We hunted everywhere. We combed the property. Nothing could have escaped us. The plane was not there.

We returned to the house. The doctor had completed his examination. "These are strange burns," he said. "They are unlike any I have ever seen. Although they destroy a great area of tissue they seem superficial and have obviously healed and rehealed several times."

"Through several exposures to the substance," I hazarded. "As though he had put the suit on and off several times."

"It might be," he said.

I looked at the body. "I am sure this is not Siva," I said.

The chief stared at me. "But it must be! Who else could it be?"

"I don't know," I said, "but this man must have come in the plane and the plane is gone. Some one brought him in it. Some one took it away."

"What!" he cried. "Another invisible man?"

"Why not?" I said. "Perhaps three or four. Perhaps more. Creatures of Siva."

"Creatures of Siva?"

"Do you think he would trust himself inside that armor, when it burns the flesh the way it does?" I asked. "Not at all. The effect must be rapidly fatal. He gets others to do it for him. When we find Siva he will not be behind any invisible plates."

I turned to the laboratory expert.

"Can you make anything of those plates?"

He shook his head. "I will have to take them to the laboratory for analysis. They are something unknown to me. It seems like a sort of metal."

"How long will that take?"

He shrugged. "It depends on what success we have. Some hours."

"We will have to wait on that," I said.

I NEEDED time to think. My brain was a maze of confused thoughts. After we had dropped the expert at the laboratory I had the sergeant leave me at the

Palladium Hotel, where I took a room to pass the time until the laboratory reported. I needed quiet to work things out. The sergeant said he would refuel the Bar and leave it at the hotel for my use.

I had been inside but a few minutes when I remembered Doctor Khalid Bey. The succession of events had put him completely out of my mind.

I made connections with him immediately. He was still at the laboratory. He had been informed, of course, of the events at Doctor Ferrand's house, and his voice was distinctly more strained.

"You don't think, do you, that that was Siva you found?" he asked.

"No," I said. "I think it was one of his henchmen."

"I am afraid it is, too," he said. "I don't think he would let himself get caught so easily." He cleared his throat nervously. "I am all ready to leave. I am only waiting for darkness, and it will be night in a few minutes now. Every moment I put in here seems like an age. I'll only feel safe when I'm on my way."

"Do you want a convoy?" I asked.

"I am afraid that would only make me more conspicuous," he said.

I realized the wisdom of his attitude.

"You had better let us keep in touch with you where you are going," I said.

"I'll have an assistant call you as soon as I get there," he said.

I wished him good luck without much heart in it. I had already given him up for gone. If Siva wanted him, there seemed little we could do about it. That was the bitter truth. To surround Khalid Bey's retreat with ships, to mass men there, to fill the very room he was in with guards, were equally futile. One bomb out of empty space could blow any defense measures we took to pieces. It was maddening, it was infuriating, but it was true. A world-wide organization of men,

picked for their police ability, picked for their courage, were helpless before the schemes of one man. Our superiority of numbers, our resources of armament, did us no good. It only made us the better targets, did Siva turn our way. We were helpless as children before this menace we could not see. We could not anticipate disaster, we could not fight back, we could only wait for destruction to fall. Khalid Bey was right: the only possible chance of escape was in hiding. And the only way we could help his effort to slip out of sight was to leave him alone.

I returned to my original trend of thought about the murder. There was one thing I could not understand, one puzzle that crowded out everything else. Why had the killer of Doctor Ferrand gone on drawing the picture of Siva on the wall when I came in? Why had he acted as though I was not there? Why had he not fought back?

I could not figure that out. It seemed inconsistent, it seemed unreasonable, it seemed unnatural. It would have been understandable if the armor had made him impregnable, but it did not: he had fallen at the first impact of my bullets.

In some way, by some faint parallelism, it seemed in a piece with my escape of the afternoon, when the destroyer of the Blue Express had left me swinging in the air and had not riddled me. I paced the room, trying to put the two together, feeling that somehow they belonged together. Then all at once I stopped pacing and stood for a long time by the window staring into the myriad moving night-lights of craft over the city; stood until my pipe went out. One word was ringing in my mind. That word was hypnotism.

I remembered certain experiments I had seen in psychology laboratories, when the professor stood in one room, the hypnotized subject in another; between the doors were closed. There was no pos-

sible physical communication between them, yet the subject obeyed the will of the professor as completely as though they were in the same room.

The subjects of Siva did his bidding miles from him.

They were hypnotized men!

Automata, instruments of crime, blindly obeying the diabolic mind behind them!

That was why they did only certain things, and did not respond to other things, did not seem to see them. Their own minds were blank, they had no knowledge of what was going on, they were conscious only of the master's commands. And since he was not there to see anything new that came up he could not direct them to take measures against it!

That was why the one who had killed Doctor Ferrand had gone on drawing the picture of Siva while I was in the room. The wrecker of the Blue Express had no doubt been given orders to destroy attacking ships; the fact that I escaped from the Bat did not exist for his consciousness. Both men had certain orders, they blindly fulfilled the orders, and what the orders did not cover they were insensible to.

Hypnotized men!

What sort of an organization was this?

Who was behind it, who was this monster that could bend men's wills to make them enter those searing suits of metal, who could send them out to do deeds that their ordinary senses would have revolted at?

It must be some one soulless, some one of extraordinary mental power.

Who was he? Where was he hiding? What was he trying to do?

Where would he strike next?

I racked my brain fruitlessly over those questions. I got nowhere, but my mind would not be still; it kept running at the

*(Please turn to page 280)*

# Siva the Destroyer

(Continued from page 169)

enigma like a wall, falling back, trying to scale it again. I rehearsed every part of it I had witnessed, I kept turning it over and over. After a long time the telephone broke in on me. It was the laboratory, calling to report the success of their efforts with the plates. Their analysis had got nowhere, their attempts had been fruitless; the substance of the plates was metallic, but it was something totally unknown to them, something of a new atomic structure. If it was a composition it was according to a formula that physical science knew nothing about.

I returned to my fruitless mental struggle. I lay at full length on the bed, my eyes closed, my mind moving like a weary treadmill. Time passed; the hotel grew quiet; the noise of planes arriving and departing on the roof fins around me grew more infrequent. By degrees I sank into a semi-doze.

**H**ow much later I awoke I do not know, but I awoke with that start a person has when there is a sharp noise near him. For an instant I could not place it; then it came again, a sharp creak of wood to the left. My eyes swung that way. The window was slowly opening.

The window was opening and there was no one outside.

The room was entirely dark. My gun was in my coat across the room. The sash had already opened wide enough to admit the passage of a man.

Feet jumped cat-like to the floor.

By an enormous effort of will I held my body perfectly still. It was my only chance. If I sprang up for my revolver I was defenseless. My only hope was

waiting until he came to me. There was no other.

Siva had got to me.

I kept my body rigid with my whole strength; it was an appalling effort; the sweat stood out on my skin. The feet moved softly across the rug. Slowly, softly. Cautiously. As though with hands outspread he was seeking among the darkness of the room.

Something soft like a hand touched the bottom of the bed.

I turned my elbows the barest fraction, to get my hands free. The feet crept nearer, stopped. They were standing beside me. An indistinct sound of breathing was above me. It bent closer.

I sprang from beneath with all my strength at the position of that sound. My arms clasped something like a neck; I swung on it, kicking out, pivoting, throwing myself forward at the floor. We crashed down; sharp pain bit my side; I swung my fists heavily into the shape, metal gave under my knuckles. I tried to spring back; he had me by the leg; I kicked out savagely; we reeled, clawed, rolled on the floor; steel cut by my cheek; I twisted free, I was up. I turned to dive for my coat and hit a chair; I stumbled headlong. Before I could recover he was on me; something cut into the floor with a zip of metal; I swung the chair by one leg and connected; I was free again. He was gone from me now into some other part of the room; I crashed around blindly once or twice and then stopped, motionless, listening, crouching.

No sound came. I tried to hear his breathing, tried to locate him. I could not. I knew not what other weapons he had beside the knife I had felt. I dared

ot move. He was stalking me in that  
ark room.

From twenty feet away came the si-  
nced spit of a revolver.

I plunged headlong at that flash with  
ie chair raised over my head. One  
ance in a million. If I missed he  
ould riddle the room till he found me.

I hit the corner, swinging the chair  
raight down. Crash! Something was  
ere. Something was moving. The gun  
pat. I swung furiously, madly, unceas-  
igly, using the chair like an ax. Wild  
ounds were coming from my throat.

There was silence.

I crouched for a moment panting,  
eaving, my throat rasping. I thrust one  
and forward. The body was still.

I ran across to the lights and flashed  
iem on. My cheek was bleeding, my  
nuckles were torn. I whipped out my  
nife, ran to the prostrate form, began to  
p away the plates.

A body came into view.

The burns were fresh, smaller, less  
eep. The flesh was warm. I worked  
pidly, feverishly. I worked up to the  
ead, exposed the neck, the chin, the  
eek. I sprang back with a cry.

I ran desperately for water, ran back,  
ung it over that insensible face.

The lips parted, shuddered, the eyes  
pened. It was Van West!

Van West, the young science graduate,  
ie man who had been going as assistant  
o Doctor Khalid Bey!

His lips moved. Life was in his eyes.  
he double shock had riven through the  
oma that held his mind.

I bent down. "Who is it? Who is  
? Who has done this to you?"

He murmured in a tortured voice:  
Khalid Bey."

Khalid Bey!

Khalid Bey was Siva!

I stood upright with the shock.

I leaned over him again, forcing his

eyes, compelling his waning attention.

"Where is he?" I said. "Where has he gone? Where is the place you were to return?"

A jumble of words came from his lips, incoherent, meaningless, but among them were figures which taken together made an aeronautical position over the Sahara.

He was unconscious again.

I sprang for the phone, called the hotel doctor, carried the limp form of Van West to the bed. Then I ran to the window, climbed the fire escape to the roof fin, ran to the dark shape of my Bat.

The night was black. The roof was silent. The way the Bat's nose pointed was the direction of the Sahara.

**I** STREAKED like a meteor through the black sky. As my eyes automatically picked up guiding lights, as my hands automatically corrected my position, my mind was still held by the incredible truth. Khalid Bey was Siva. The warning he had received was merely a ruse, to remove him from suspicion. No wonder he had not had the envelope it was mailed in; there had been no envelope; he had written the warning himself. While the voice had spoken to me over the televisior it had been his mind that directed it; that was why his lips moved—an unconscious effect of intense concentration. That explained why the voice knew my name, how it knew I was there—knowledge verging on the supernatural by any other explanation. That was why his emissary knew where to find me while I lay asleep—I had telephoned Khalid Bey a few hours before. And now he was gone, with our full permission, with our full cognizance, into his secret retreat in the Sahara.

I cut off the rocket motors as soon as the great yellow beacon from the harbor of Algiers showed I was over the African

coast. I wanted no stream of light to warn of my approach. Inland I shot, climbing steeply over the unstable air above the Atlas Mountains; now all was black below me, I was above the limitless wastes of the Sahara. I attended carefully to my position, checking and re-checking. In ten minutes I was swinging in a gigantic circle, auxiliary engines cut, my eyes trying to pierce the darkness below. I was over the spot.

My head shot forward suddenly. A tiny circle of light was there, a diffused effulgence such as might come from beneath the edges of a protected dome. Far, far below it lay, a weak glow-worm of light. I touched my key, flashing its position into space; whatever police operators were listening would pick that up and ships would follow.

I descended straight down toward the position of that glow.

I was not worried now about the noise of my plane. I had remembered that he would be expecting a ship.

I alighted on a roof, a wide roof, the roof of a huge building. It was deserted; a gigantic noise of generators was beneath me, throbbing, pulsating, shaking even the roof beneath my feet. To the left rose the dome; it seemed to be plated with lead. A door in it was ajar, with the carelessness of entire unsuspecting.

I moved quietly toward that door, my gun in my hand. From thirty feet away I could look in, see an entire section of the room. Intricate apparatus was there: coils, electro-magnets, gigantic mushroom-shaped condensers, bulky terminals, Tesla coils, looped cables. I moved gradually until I had scanned the whole room. The apparatus covered all the sides of the dome, converging in the center above two enormous copper balls, below which was a strangely-shaped receptacle, man-sized, armored with cables like

an octopus with a thousand legs. At a long bare table, absorbed in some diagrams before him, sat Khalid Bey.

He was alone. His back was turned. I stepped to the door, stepped inside, swung it shut behind me.

He swung around at the sound. He was looking into the muzzle of my gun.

"So you are Siva the Destroyer," I said.

He sat motionless, his hawk-like head thrust forward, his brilliant eyes unblinking. His face was without expression.

"You are the murderer of Hanishaw and Ferrand," I said.

He said nothing. He was like an image, like an image of one of the bird-headed gods of the Nile. The eyes remained upon me like two cold gems.

"Get up," I said. "If you make a move toward anything I'll kill you."

He rose slowly. The eyes still stayed fixed upon me, glittering, compelling. I went over him quickly. He was unarmed.

I stepped back. "Sit down," I said. "It will do you no good to try to think any of your assistants up here. The door's bolted. You're caught."

The lids dropped over his eyes like two films.

"It is true," he said in a voice entirely without emotion. He sat down. "May I smoke?"

"You admit you did this?" I said.

"I am Siva the Destroyer," he said. He took a cigarette from the box. His movements were calm, almost casual. "What good is it to deny it? If I had thought Van West would have failed I would have killed him before he started. Unfortunately I am not omniscient. You have caught me napping and I am helpless. It is over. I have failed."

I stared at him. "You seem re-



signed," I said. "Doesn't it affect you that you are facing death?"

"Death?" he said. "Why should it affect me? I am not afraid of death. It is no more unnatural than birth. It means no more to me."

"Why did you do these things?" I said.

He flashed his eyes at me. "I told you this afternoon. A gesture of power."

"A gesture of power! To kill two innocent men, your associates, your friends?"

He shrugged a little. "They were the only two men alive of scientific knowledge and ability approaching mine. Their death was necessary as a preliminary to controlling the world."

"So that was your object!"

"Control of the world," he said, and closed one fist slowly, while his eyes gleamed with a peculiar luminous radiance. It was the first sign of emotion he had shown, that indescribable look. Yet it was not emotion, it was too cold and inhuman. I knew then that the man was mad, with the kind of madness that is more calm and lucid than sanity.

He had masked his eyes again. "Hanshaw and Ferrand knew the secret of chorybdium," he said. "Chorybdium, the invisible metal. We had come on the secret of its composition accidentally, in our efforts to break down the atom." He stopped, and smiled slightly at me, a smile more sinister than his eyes. "Or perhaps you do not care to hear about it?"

"By all means," I said.

"The formula will die with me," he said. "But I will tell you some of its peculiarities. Most metals, most things, have an affinity with the visible end of the spectrum. Chorybdium has an affinity with the invisible end, the ultra and infra rays. It does not reflect what we commonly call light, the visible rays. But its

defect is made up by the intensity with which it absorbs the invisible rays. Hence the burns. They are perverted Roentgen ray burns, perverted by the atomic idiosyncrasy of chorybdium; they spread over large superficial areas, and after a time cover enough surface to cause death. I can manage to stave death off for a longer period by a series of insulations on the subject." He nodded slightly toward the octopus-like box. "Long enough for the subject to be of considerable service to me, where otherwise he could not survive for many hours continuous contact with the metal. Two insulations are usually necessary. I destroy an infinitesimal layer of the epidermis, substitute for it . . ."

He stopped suddenly. "Does anything of this interest you?" he asked.

"It all interests me," I said. "It will interest your jury very much."

He was looking at me steadily.

"Does anything of the thought of power interest you?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" I said.

"There are many young men who come to me," he said. "Earnest students, eager seekers after knowledge, anxious for a chance to study under me, to learn in my laboratories. Gullible young men, they are flattered at being chosen as subjects for any experiments of mine. The supply is almost without limit." His voice had lost its casual note. "Let your imagination play with the thought of power. Descending where you will, destroying what you will, taking what you will—money, gold, plunder, anything you desire. Entire nations bending to your will, a subjugation of the earth."

"Are you suggesting that I join in with you in this scheme of yours?" I asked.

He was leaning forward. His eyes flashed now strangely with warmth; they were vivid, persuasive, magnetic. "I am

offering you the chance to be my equal. To be my partner in sharing the earth."

I said: "It could never happen in a thousand years."

"The prospect does not interest you?" he said.

"Not in the slightest," I said grimly. "The only prospect that appeals to me is seeing you brought to dock for your murders."

Again the lids filmed his eyes. "Very well," he said. He shrugged slightly. "There is no use opposing the inevitable." He extended his hands. "I am ready to go with you."

I stepped across and slipped the handcuffs on him. As I did so he turned one hand over; there was a sharp prick in the base of my wrist. I started back with an exclamation; on his face again was that sinister, inscrutable smile.

Instead of a cigarette he had taken from the table a narrow hypodermic syringe!

It was in his hand. I could see it. I could see it, though I did not seem able to move; I tried to raise the gun, to fire it; something heavy as lead and volatile as mercury seemed to be spreading through my veins.

He rose slowly, still smiling, from his chair.

"Morphic ether," he said. "The most powerful anesthetic known to science. Its effects are immediately paralyzing, though the senses dim out more slowly."

Objects in the room seemed to have receded to a plane; his voice came to me as from a distance.

"Now you, Captain Stanage," he said, "will join the company of invisible men."

I tried to cry out, I tried to wheel, to struggle; I was powerless, it was like laboring in a dream. I felt myself fall-

ing; one of his arms was around me; his face bent over me.

"Two insulations," he said. "After that the armor."

**T**HERE was a space then in which events moved dimly around me and as though hidden by an intervening sightless fog. My mind was crying out the horrible truth; I was to join the ranks of Van West and the others, I was to be his creature, to go out and do unspeakable deeds! And even as I framed the thought my mind was losing itself, dissipating into nothingness, going out into that sightless fog. The sense of touch went last. I felt myself being dragged over the floor, felt myself being lifted, felt the hard surfaces of something enclose me.

I was in the octopus-like box.

Something closed over me.

My last impression of anything in that room was of those enormous copper balls, gleaming, suspended overhead. . . .

I drifted nowhere.

There was a sound as of an infinite turbulent sea churning around me, encompassing me, lashing me, drowning me.

Blackness descended like a sword, riving my mind apart, striking to my soul, plunging me into unfathomable Night.

I seemed to dream.

Fragments of scenes appeared, cities, seas at midnight, storm-beat trees, the spectral radiance of the moon. Faces I had known, faces I had never known, whirling, parading, floating, mingling, vanishing.

Eons seemed to pass.

Pain struck through me in a white flash of agony, unutterable pain, blinding, timeless.

With that pain chaos began around me; formless blooms of things, unnam-

able floating fantasmagoria, mad whorls of spectra without shape.

Again pain rove me to infinite, unbearable, swooning depths; it was like the sounding of a chord, like monstrous hammer-blows, like the striking of a gigantic clock. It increased, mounted, struck harder, faster; it was intolerable, my flesh could not stand it, it seemed to be behind me, following me. I seemed to be spinning through space, faster, faster, mounting through infinite leagues, whirling, rushing, ascending in a mad curve through void.

Objects in the room appeared vaguely before me, swimming in a dissolving mist.

I heard his voice say: "The first insulation."

My senses were returning. The terrible effects of the insulation had destroyed the power of the drug.

I was no longer in the box. I seemed to be sitting upright; his face was before me. Strength was coming back to me; objects were resuming their natural position.

But my mind was dull, flaccid. It was inert, it lacked volition. It wanted to rest, it did not care what happened.

Something in the bottom of me seemed to say: It is your last chance. It is your last chance before oblivion.

His face leaned closer. Those brilliant baleful eyes were upon me. They fixed mine, they flashed insistently, commandingly, they seemed to plumb my soul.

"You will obey me," said his voice. "You will be my slave, my creature, you will go out to do as I say, you will obey me utterly."

I tried to gather my tired mind together. With every ounce of my strength I strove to resist the force of those eyes,

The hypnosis was commencing. If it succeeded I was doomed.

It was like a struggle on the edge of some giddy precipice. I slid toward it; the eyes flashed, he pressed me; I groped painfully forward; he held me once more, I could do nothing; he overcame me again; I was hanging by my hands; I pulled up; he resisted; we struggled soul to soul, neither gaining; I was tired; I could not hold on; I was slipping back, sliding over, slipping over the brink. . . .

With a tremendous effort I gathered myself together to do something physical. I could not cope with him mentally. It was the last and the utmost effort in my body. It was the ultimate that I could ever do.

I threw my hands forward to seize him by the throat.

It was weak. It was like a child's gesture. He threw my arms aside with a sweep of his hand, but in that instant his attention had shifted. The concentration broke. I plunged forward from the chair, diving at the floor, trying to roll over, to gain time.

With a cry he leaped down to seize me.

Strength was flooding through me, abounding strength, my blood sang with it. I twisted over, swinging my fists, lashing out at him, trying to gain my knees. He leaped back, clubbed me with something, sprang at me to drive me down. He was strong, with the nervous strength of a maniac. But I was strong with the hope of life. I came up under his arm, drove my fist once, twice, into that basilisk face. He cried out, fell back, whirled, broke from me, dove at the table where he had sat.

It was there the narrow syringe lay.

I threw myself after him in a flying dive. I struck his knees as he struck the table. We battled, twisting, smashing, snarling. He got his body half up

over the table and reached for the hypodermic. I had his wrist. He had the needle in his hand.

If he could turn his hand over . . .

With a cry he threw himself around, gouging with his free hand. A superhuman strength was in him. He raised the hand that held the needle; I still grasped it; he raised it higher; his eyes were like a demon's; he was at the apex of his maniacal strength.

I could see in his eyes the shock of something he saw behind me. Something was at the door.

In that instant of shock I drove his arm back against his shoulder.

There was a crash at the door. Voices cried: "Stanage! Stanage! Where are you?"

His face was suddenly ashen. The eyes were dead. With a desperate wrench he thrust the needle into his shoulder and drove the plunger to the base of the syringe.

Men were in the room.

I did not seem to know they were milling around me, I did not seem to hear their shouts, until the face of one thrust close to mine cried: "Why, it's Khalid Bey!"

I let the inert body slide limply to the floor.

"It is Siva the Destroyer," I said. "And he is dead."