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Editor: ROBERT A. W. LOWNDES
COVER BY EMSH

MARIE A. PARK, Asso. Ed.
DOROTHY B. SEADOR, Asso. Ed.

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the cyclops gun

by Stanley H.
Siegel

It was the perfect weapon, and it had killed the man who designed it, when he tried to dismantle the gun. Now it stood alone, triumphant, and deadly to anyone who came too close, or who tried to destroy it...

SAM ADAMS muttered to himself. "It looks like this is going to be the year of the Hero. The Chinese always give the year a name. The Year of the Rooster—the Year of the Ostrich—the Year of the rotten banana peel! This year we can call the Year of the R a d i o a c t i v e Hero. Name of Sam."

Sam roused up from this internal conversation with a start. The jeep in which he was riding with his wife came to a rather sudden stop.

It was in a town called Pernicz about twenty miles south of Sofia, which had been only recently the capital of Bulgaria. Sam and Myra entered an old, dirty red brick building on a Belgian block plaza with no sidewalks. The lobby of the building was a big bare room with a cracked grey terrazzo floor, and faded portraits of old soldiers and dignitaries hung on yellow plaster walls. It was the Town Hall.

The mayor showed them all the municipal treasures of Pernicz. He paused in front of a glass case hung on one wall and pointed with his pipe. The

glass was thin and old and wrinkled like cellophane.

"You see, here," said the Mayor, in heavily-accented English, "a document which attests to the fact that in the year 1247—twelve hundred and forty-seven, mind you—the Bishop of Sofia bestowed a charter upon our ancestors for the establishment of the municipality of Pernicz." The major coughed with pride. The brown parchment looked ready to crumble.

Under a high narrow window stood a worm-holed brown wooden chair, square-carved and dusty, its seat covered with a faded piece of red velvet plush. A length of velvet-covered rope hung from arm to arm. The sun shone into the dimly lighted room and you could see the dust lay heavily on the potted plants on the window sill.

ON THE WALL over the door, there was a curious instrument and Adams pointed it out to his wife. The little man noticed their glance at the wall, looked at them and smiled eagerly.

"Un arbaiest," he said, nod-

ding and smiling. "Arcus ballista. A great treasure of Pernicz. Comprenez-vous? Do you understand?"

"Oh yes," said Sam to Myra, "French and Latin with a Balkan accent. A machine of war. A crossbow." The mayor nodded affirmatively. Sam returned the nod and smiled. "What won't they think of next?"

"It was with this crossbow, as you correctly call it, sir, that Ringach killed the Monster in the year 1473," said the mayor. "It's so beautifully carved and inlaid with ivory. Notice..."

"Very cute," said Sam, dismally.

"Sam, don't be a tourist," said Myra. "He's doing his best." She smiled at the mayor. "Beautiful," she said. "Beautiful!"

She hissed under her breath. "What's eating you, Sam?"

"Let's get out of here!" he replied.

They took leave of the Mayor on the steps of the Town Hall. He was bowing in the bright sunlight as the wind blew dust and trash along the cobblestones. They drove the

jeep through the dirty shaded streets to the end of town.

"Sam, what is it? I got your letter and I was frightened. Why are you here? Who sent you? What about the University?"

"Now, hold on, Myra," Sam said through compressed lips, "and I'll tell all. Dammit, I was sure I didn't say anything in that letter."

"That's just it," said Myra, quickly. "You didn't say anything, so I got here as fast as I could."

"Look, Myra, I..." Sam stopped and sat silent for a moment. "All right, I'll tell you. Let's start back at the beginning."

SAM ADAMS sat hunched over the wheel as he drove and talked.

"In those days," he began, "the cold war was on and raging. We were armed to the teeth and scared stiff, for good reason, that the Russians would strike first and they, no doubt, were scared of us. They just couldn't or wouldn't comprehend that our democratic philosophy would forbid our attacking them first. They ac-

cused us of planning a third World War. They judged us by themselves. You know, they were ruthless.

"They had just put up the Sputnik and a second one right after with a dog in it, and, aside from it being a tremendous sock in the jaw propaganda-wise, it meant that they had a good long-range missile to the bargain. Anyway, they kept accusing us of preparing for war. Maybe they believed it and maybe they didn't. But they convinced too many people around the world that it was the truth.

"They used every trick in the book. As far back as 1956, they approached the NATO powers with a proposal to put all of our air and ground forces out of Europe. A big, fair and square, one-for-you-and-one-for-me, buffer zone. They would return within their own borders. It sounded good, but the boys in Washington and London and Paris knew it was a trick. Satellite powers would be controlled by Moscow anyway. Neutral or weak countries could be easily subverted by Kremlin hoods. The most sacredly solemn treaties didn't

mean beans. They could work all night for Moscow and when the advantage they worked up was big enough, they would drop the big ones on us and it would be all over fast."

"Sam," Myra interrupted, "do you realize that you used those exact words at the dean's party when we met? Do you remember that heated argument you had with...?"

SAM DIDN'T even notice what she had said. "All right, I was at the University under Professor Rogossin then and we talked about it all the time. He was no politician, but that kind of buffer zone in Europe was unthinkable to him. This was no answer and Professor Rogossin knew it.

"I was just a kid then. He was a big man, a world famous physicist and engineer. I looked him up in 'American Men of Science' one day when I was doing some work in the library. He took up almost half the page. You know the way they write it up:

ROGOSSIN, Argid B (IR)
'18; B.S., N.Y.U. '36; M.A.,
Sorbonne '37; PhD D.S.C.,

M.I.T. '40; Hon D.S.C., Ox-
ford '41; Hon PhD, Chicago
'42...

and then a list of papers he presented at a million and one seminars, meetings of big-brain societies, papers and acoustics, microwaves, antennas, electronics, glow discharge oscillators, mathematical physics, the Rogossin electronic organ wave-guide lens antenna; artificial microwave dielectrics, servomechanisms—it was fantastic!

"I was up in his office that week and he was storming up and down in front of a blackboard that covered one wall..."

SAM ADAMS kept on talking, virtually living the scene over again, and Myra could visualize it. Rogossin there in that room with her husband.

"They're nuts!" Rogossin yelled. "Absolutely, stark raving *nuts!* Do you know that one of those idiots in Washington wants us to *consider* that buffer zone? It's ridiculous!"

He whirled and pulled down a map that rolled like a win-

dow shade above the blackboard—a map of Europe as it stood in 1949. He stabbed viciously at the map with a blunt forefinger, as he held a newspaper up in one hand. “Listen to me! They want us to pull out of western Europe and leave this heartland to the Russian bear. Should we leave Europe so the mines and factories and people can be used against us? Look at this! The Rapacki plan! The plan of the Polish foreign minister, Adam Rapacki. He wants a zone in Central Europe free of nuclear weapons, embracing Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland. Very smart. The Russians love it. Sam,” his voice suddenly lowered and he asked in mock innocence, “can missiles fly over nuclear free zones?”

“No, my friend! I have a better answer than their fake buffer zone. Here! Here! And here!” He drew a line with his fingernail. “Danzig! Trieste! Istanbul! Then we draw a line across Asia and one sweep across the Arctic and we’ve got it. This,” he shouted, “will be a real buffer zone. Not of politics and bluff and secret police, but one of *steel*. One the

Russians cannot cross. Not with infantry, rockets, surprise ballistic missiles, or even sputniks.”

Then he calmed down. “What we need is a fire-break in the deep woods which are now very dry,” he said softly. “Separating East and West. Like the Dead Sea, a dead strip where no one will live or graze cattle—a barren ground across which not even one man can walk.”

“Look!” He came and crouched over Adams, as if he could pound his intelligence into Sam’s brain. “An automatic gun! Self-contained, self-aiming and loading. A limited range to be defined by treaty, able to fire to full 90° elevation and to rotate 360° in azimuth. Nothing passes. A complete, absolute and everlasting barrier to human and machine alike.”

ROGOSSIN went to the U. N. (Sam continued.) The Russians accepted, though no one could figure out why—perhaps they thought it wouldn’t work. Perhaps they thought they could go on de-

veloping technologically, beat the gun, and spring a load of fission on us. Maybe they really were scared of us, strange as that may seem. But history says they accepted.

So Rogossin built his gun. It was made to fire at any moving object. The sighting device was contained in a tube terminating in a bulb above and parallel with the firing tube. It was a single, huge, green bulbous eye. It was weird, but it was the most amazing gun-sight ever devised. It was sensitive to both visible and infrared light and emitted a radar signal that remained a secret when Rogossin died and remains one to this very day. When the sight perceived any movement at all, azimuth and elevation gyros started instantaneously. Signals recording air temperature and barometric pressure, wind velocity, were simultaneously fed into a big black box deep in the ground beneath the gun. A generator fed power to the gun motors and the gun was ready to fire.

It was a tour de force. But the projectile itself was *the* masterpiece. Its flight was authorized and instantaneously

initiated by the gun, but it was an alpha-particle rocket, and it flew faster than anything on the face of the earth. It was armed with an atomic war-head that expended with greater and greater energy the further it exploded from the gun. Thus it could not emit too big a blast too closely and destroy the gun.

Rogossin placed fourteen of those guns, from Danzig to the heart of Bulgaria before the project was abandoned....

SAM ADAMS paused to accept the lighted cigaret that Myra passed him. "You know why it was abandoned," he said. "Revolts broke the heart of the Soviet empire, and the threat of missile war was over. The mighty Union of Soviet Socialist Republics disappeared in civil war, and reformed into little, Balkan-type countries. Now we've got kings, presidents, bandit-queens and oriental-type despots. The works. And endless small wars, breaking through the borders. But they have no atomic potential, so we meditate their wars by U. N. committees. We removed their

atomic stockpiles right after the revolt and now we're trying to settle down to peace and progress." Sam smiled sardonically.

"Now begins the slow fight of man to improve himself spiritually, if possible. Naturally, the 'J' guns were a menace and had to be removed. All barriers between nations, between man and his brother stand in the way of progress and enlightenment and have to come down. Do I bore you, Myra?"

"Sam Adams, you fool! Please continue!"

"O. K. So Rogossin was called in again by the UN and went to Europe. He removed thirteen of the guns—and the fourteenth gun killed him. When he died, he took the key with him. The last gun is now free and uncontrollable. No one can approach it. It can fire at a shell coming to destroy it, then instantaneously fire another that follows back the trajectory of the first one to hit the opposing battery. You remember, it fires an atomic projectile. No amount of shells fired 'time on target' can fool it. Six American 155 mm how-

itzers fired not two weeks ago T. O. T. on the gun. The gun fired six times, destroying every shell in the air, in the air, mind you, and fired six more times. Every gun that fired was almost in the same instant obliterated by a nuclear blast. Do you know how many American boys were killed in that fiasco?" Sam demanded bitterly. "I warned those fool officials when they came to see me at the University."

"It sounds as if you have a Frankenstein monster," said Myra.

SAM NODDED. "That's just what it is. And what's more, the gun is virtually unbeatable. It's a menace to every plane that flies in the air and to any man that walks on the earth into its firing radius. It has shot down every satellite we put up. It is sending up too much radio-active dust with every discharge. It's an abomination on the face of the earth.

"So now you know. That's why I'm here. The gun killed Rogossin when he came to destroy it and nobody in the whole wide living world knows

its secret. Certainly, not me!

"In desperation, Schmerz and Frankel and that other fellow from the U. N. came. They knew I studied under Rogossin and asked me if I would come. They begged me. So here I am."

"Sam, what do they expect? What can you do?"

"Nothing, Myra. Absolutely nothing. I came because I didn't have the guts to refuse. There isn't a single solitary thing to do except to try to keep everything clear of it and to wait until its power runs down—which will be never—or until its projectiles are used up, which will be almost never."

THE NEXT morning Sam left Myra sleeping fitfully in the little hotel in Pernicz and tooted the jeep over the winding roads, bordered by ditches and hedgerows. He was deep in thought and worry. He frowned and muttered, "D-day and Normandy all over again!" Finally, he came to a point where he saw the road did not lie under the shadow of trees but seemed to grow lighter as a road does when it

approaches an open body of water.

It was not water that Adams came to, but the edge of a clearing. It was the edge of the zone of the Gun.

Sam parked the jeep, took out a small wooden chest. He opened the chest and removed a telescope and a tripod. He lay on his stomach behind a pile of rubble. The Gun was on a hill four miles away. He looked at the gun through the telescope. It stood there, at rest for the moment, hideous, black, invulnerable, eternal. A gigantic, electronic trap.

Suddenly, as he watched it, the gun seemed to move. It moved rapidly. It seemed to be watching something. Suddenly, there was a flash at the muzzle, and then a smashing sound like a five inch gun going off, and then, a quick hiss. Far off to the left there was a gigantic sunburst. Sam dropped the telescope, clutching his eyes. He felt as if he had been punched in the eyes. The explosion must have been twenty miles away.

Two minutes later there was a noise like rolling thunder. It was an airburst. A plane. The

airlines had been warned. All air maps were printed now with a red circle around the dangerous area, but planes still got lost. Navigators made errors. This was the result!

THE GENERAL came to see Sam Adams in the Hotel Pernicz. He looked at Sam for a long time. Then he spoke.

"Why can't we tunnel to the gun and explode it?" he asked. "Surely, there..."

"Because, you know, all "J" guns were mined against tunnelling up to three miles around with hundreds of atomic mines. Rogossin knew the gun would have a soft underbelly, so he protected it with mines in a complete hemisphere under the ground. You couldn't get near it if you dug straight up under it from ten miles down."

"Why cannot we send swarms of missiles against it and destroy it?"

Sam was disgusted at the obvious question.

"Because it would swat every one of them down before they got within fifteen miles and fire its own projectile

along the original flight path. It would fire at a rifle bullet."

"Well, but the range, Mr. Adams, the range. Surely the projectile of that gun could not have the range of one of our Eagle missiles, for instance."

"That's true. Maybe it couldn't reach the site of the original firing, but the missile couldn't get near it. That gun's projectile would travel a good way before it ran out of fuel and then it would blow up Budapest or Prague or someplace."

"What about mortars, Adams? Why not dig a trench and lob mortar shells at it while themselves protected from the direct line of fire?"

"Those projectiles will follow back any trajectory, and I mean *any*. One would come back so fast that the mortar crew wouldn't have a chance."

THE GENERAL'S military adviser blurted, "Divert a river. Drown it out! That's it! Drown it out!"

"Where, sir," asked Sam Adams with utter scorn, "are you going to get a river?"

"Dammit, Adams," yelled

the general. "Find a way. Find a way to destroy that damned monster. You knew Rogossin. You know more about that gun than anyone else. There must be a way to destroy that gun!"

The general glowered at Sam.

"You're a great help," said Adams under his breath.

THE FOLLOWING day, the gun fired again. A gypsy van cut off the road where the barbed wire had rusted down. There was a hideous blast. The next morning, there was still a fire in the woods and police saw wagon wheel tracks leading off the road and a fire and in the middle of the fire, a tremendous black pit. The police dared not go any further because of radioactivity, so they let the fire burn out, repaired the barbed wire along the road and put up a huge sign which said in Slavish or Rumanian or something: "Attention! THE GUN!"

SAM ADAMS came down to the zone and stared into the pit for a long time.

Night came. He lay on his back beside the telescope and pounded a flat stone with his hand. The pressure was beginning to break him. Finally, he fell asleep.

He awoke at dawn, cold and wet from the dew, and in pain to the marrow of his bones. He stretched, took off his glasses, rubbed his eyes and his unshaven jaw. Then he put on his glasses and again peered through the telescope.

The gun was only slightly visible in the early morning darkness. But Adams knew that it never slept. Some birds started in the trees above Sam's head and began to cheep. They woke even before there was light on the horizon. Now, in the growing light, Sam looked for them idly.

They chirped and fluttered there at the edge of the zone, on the edge of oblivion.

Suddenly a pair of them launched themselves out of the trees and, whirling and darting, they flew toward the gun. They flew high into the early morning sky, bright blue with incredible pink cirrus clouds, until they were almost invis-

ble and then swooped far out over the barren ground directly toward the gun until they were out of sight. Sam cringed, but there was deep silence; the gun didn't fire.

"Of course," Sam muttered furiously to himself. "This must have happened ever since the gun was installed. Of course, Rogossin wouldn't have set the gun to fire at every passing bird or insect. That was obvious."

Was the gun so made that it would not fire at something as small as birds? No. The gun had fired at snipers' bullets that were no larger than bumblebees and then destroyed the snipers. Was it that birds were not metal, and therefore. . . no, of course not. A man inching his way into the zone was fired upon. The body of a man or the rapid flight of a bullet caused the gun to fire. It did not fire on birds, but it fired at a man. It did not fire upon birds, but it fired on bullets.

Sam's heart leaped into his throat. *It must be*, he thought. Smaller than a man, and less swift in flight than a bullet—but still able to destroy the gun or disable it!

SUDDENLY, Sam Adams was charged with nervous energy until he trembled. He jumped into the jeep, started it up and stalled it. He finally got it going and slammed into Pernicz like a madman. The jeep never touched the bottom of a pot-hole until it screeched to a stop in front of the Town Hall. It was deserted.

He tore up the stairs of the brown building and flung himself through the doors. He grabbed the red velvet chair and jammed it against the wall and climbed up and grabbed the crossbow and its winder and its one flethed historic bolt from the yellow plaster wall. Then, turning, he ran to the jeep, jumped in with his prize and raced back to the zone as fast as the jeep could fly.

He dropped down beside the telescope, panting and sobbing. He brushed his hair back and took off his glasses and wiped them on his shirt. Then he turned over and lay on his back.

"Now, Sam," he whispered, "calm yourself. Don't do anything stupid. This could be very embarrassing."

He got up on his elbows and

looked into the zone. It was formerly forest that was cleared years ago by bulldozers to give the gun a clear field of fire. But the ground was not table flat. It *could* be done!

SAM TOOK the crossbow in his hands and attached the winder to draw the bow. It had not been fired in almost five hundred years. Adams wound it slowly, exerting all its strength until the linen bow cord at last fell into the notch. He cast aside the winder and dropped the iron and wood bolt into its groove. It was an ancient and primitive weapon but it had a shoulder stock like a rifle.

Sam looked into the telescope at the gun. Then he traced a course that would conceal him and lead him to the gun.

He flattened out like a flat worm as he entered the zone from the shadow of the woods. He took advantage of every slight depression in the earth. He took shelter behind the smallest rock. His cheek pressed tightly against the ground as he inched his way almost four miles to the crest

of the low hill upon which the gun stood.

Finally, he reached the concrete apron that spread out around the gun. No man alive could cross that apron. The bow would have to be fired from where he was. It was two hundred and fifty yards; he had one shot. It had to be figured, and he had to have a lot of luck.

Sam Adams raised his eyes above the concrete and slowly started to bring the crossbow to bear on the gun. There was a high frequency hum and the gun slowly turned until it pointed directly at Sam. He froze. The sweat ran into his eyes. The gun swung past him and then back again. He did not move; he was presenting too small a target to actuate the gun. The gun moved again. It was hunting him!

Sam's finger curled around the trigger of the crossbow. The gun was pointing at him, looking at him with a great green malevolent eye. Sam squeezed the trigger.

THERE WAS a snap and a hum. *Crash!* The cross-

bow's dart had hit the single green eye of the gun.

Sam looked at the gun for a long time. Then he backed slowly out of the zone on his belly and drove like wildfire to the American military mission that camped on the outskirts of Pernicz.

Far away in North Africa, at a SAC base nestled in the Atlas Mountains, a waiting bomber received the green flag from the tower and rolled over the runway slowly, gathering speed, until its Jato unit fired and set it hurtling into the air.

Sam lay on his back and saw contrails climbing the sky from the horizon. There was a flash of stainless steel as the bomber reflected the light of the mid-morning sun. No

sound. Couldn't even see it. It was too high.

There was an interminable wait. Suddenly the ground around the gun erupted in an enormous tower of flaming gas and dust and boiling energy. Explosions echoed deep in the earth as the mines detonated. The enormous thunderclap of sound rushed over the barren zone and beyond and stripped the leaves from the trees of the forest and tore them out by the roots.

Sam lay on the earth in the forest, covered with mud and torn leaves and twigs. The earth was sweet and warm and felt alive. This forest would grow again and spread and cover the barren ground of the zone. Men would plant there.

The gun was dead.