

"THE WATCHER FROM THE SKY" by AUGUST DERLETH

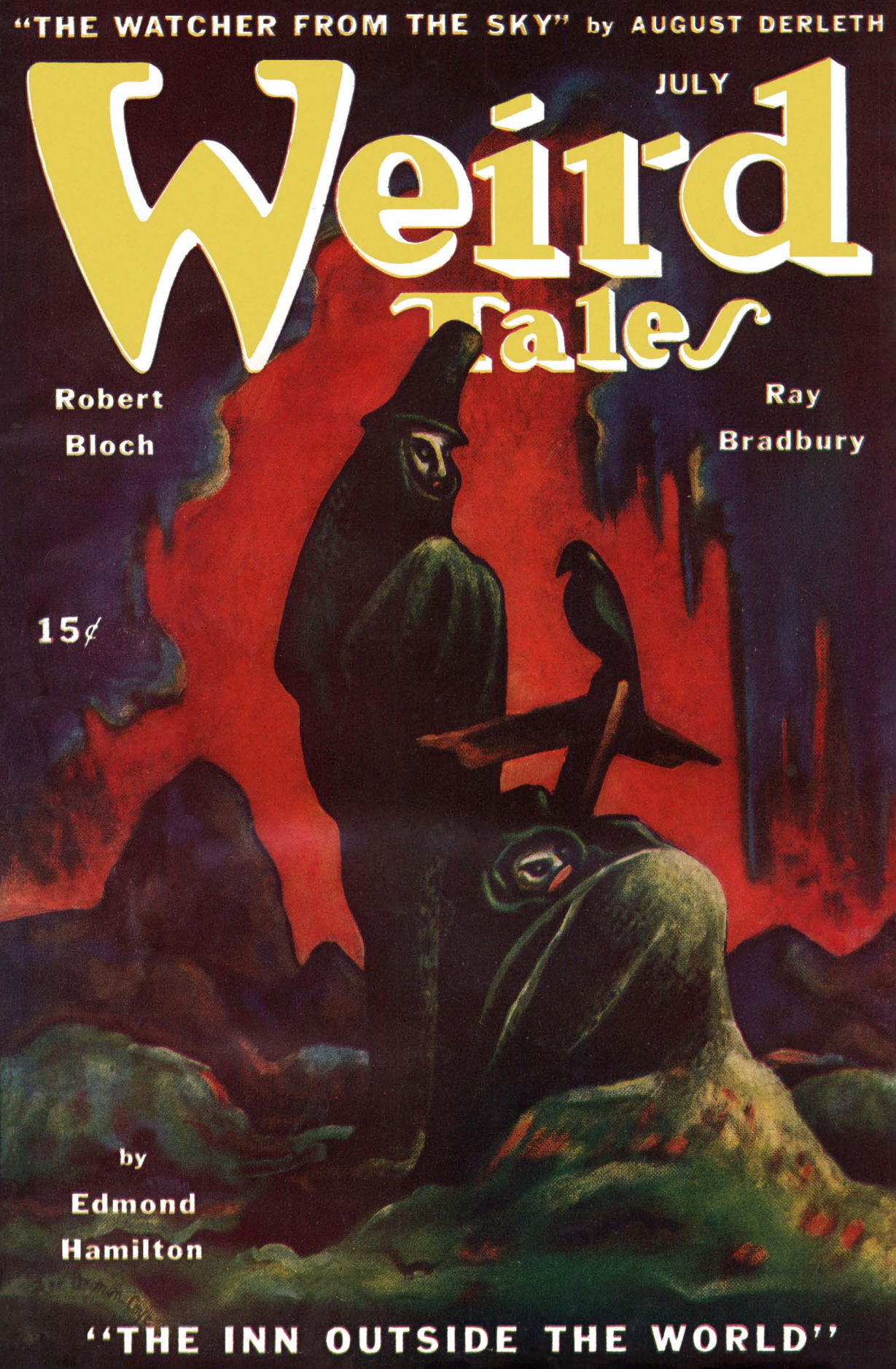
Weird Tales

JULY

Robert Bloch

Ray Bradbury

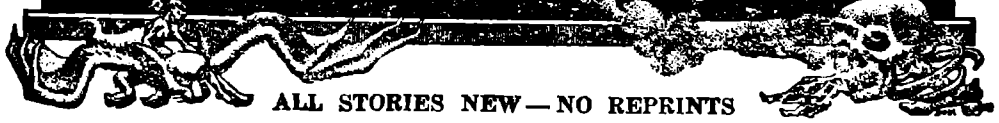
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by
Edmond
Hamilton

"THE INN OUTSIDE THE WORLD"

Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

July, 1945

Cover by Lee Brown Coye

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The Inn Outside the World

By EDMOND HAMILTON

MERRILL felt discouraged tonight, though not for himself. His despondency was for the old man in the next room of this dingy Balkan hotel, the thin, gray spectacled old man who was one of the four most important people in post-war Europe.

Carlus Guinard had come back from exile to lead a stricken nation out of its chaotic misery, and he was the only statesman who could do it. But, tonight, even Guinard had been so crushed by defeat that he had admitted his helplessness to hold back his people from the abyss.

The night over some parts of the world may indeed be a long, long night

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV.

"Too much intolerance, too many old grudges, too many ambitious men," he said wearily to Merrill when his last conference of the day was over. "I fear it is hopeless."

Merrill was only an unimportant lieutenant, assigned by U. S. Military Intelligence to guard Guinard, but he and the old statesman had become friends in these last weeks.

"You're tired, sir," he had said, awkwardly encouraging. "Things won't look so black in the morning."

"I fear that the night over this part of Europe is to be a long, long night," murmured Guinard. His thin shoulders were sagging, his ordinarily twinkling, friendly eyes now dull and haggard.

He whispered, "Perhaps *they* could help me. It is against our laws, but—" Then, aware of the staring Merrill, he broke off. "Good night, Lieutenant."

Merrill had been worried and restless ever since. He liked and respected the world-famous old statesman, and was downcast by the other's defeat and despair. He knew what a herculean task the tired old man was attempting.

He went to the open window. Across the dark, bomb-shattered city out there moaned a chill wind. Away northward, the river glistened beneath the stars. Few lights had yet come back on in this land, though the war was over. Perhaps the lights would never come back, if Guinard failed?

What had the old man whispered, about "they" helping him? Something that was against the "laws"? Was Guinard planning a secret conference of some kind? Did he intend to slip out without his American bodyguard for that purpose?

Merrill felt sudden alarm. And it wasn't because he might lose his commission if he failed to guard the statesman. It was because he liked Guinard, and knew there were many out in that dark city who would assassinate him if they could. Guinard mustn't try to go out alone—

He went to Guinard's door and listened. And he heard a soft step inside the bedroom. It increased his apprehensions. Guinard had retired an hour before. Then he *was* trying to slip out secretly?

Merrill softly opened the door. What he saw was so unexpected and amazing

that for a moment he just stood and stared.

Guinard stood, his back toward the American, in the center of the room. The old man was holding his watch above his head, and was fingering its heavy, jeweled case.

Had Guinard suddenly gone crazy from strain? It seemed so to Merrill. Yet there seemed sober purpose in Guinard's madness.

He'd noticed the old statesman's watch, before this. It was a curious, massive gold one, with a complex pattern of big jewels inset on its back.

Guinard was pressing the jewels, one after another, as he held the watch above his head. There was something so oddly suggestive of the ominous about it, that Merrill impulsively strode forward.

Guinard turned, startled, as Merrill reached his side. The old man yelled in sharp alarm.

"Get back, Lieutenant—don't—"

It all happened together. As he shouted, as Merrill reached him, from the upheld watch there dropped toward the two men a thin, wavering thread of blinding light.

It struck them and Merrill was dazed and blinded by a shock of force. It seemed to him that the floor beneath his feet vanished and that he was falling—

MERRILL did not lose consciousness. But the world seemed to disappear from around him as he plunged through bellowing backness. And then there was a sharp shock, and he was standing staggering on firm footing again.

But the hotel room was gone. The walls, the floor, the lights, had vanished as by witchcraft. The only thing remaining of all that was Carlus Guinard, whose thin arm he had been clutching.

"What—" choked Merrill. He couldn't form or speak more words than that one.

He was standing on grassy ground in a strange misty darkness. He was in the open air, but there was nothing to see. Nothing but a swirling mist through which filtered a faint green glow of light.

In that green glow, Guinard's thin face was close to him and was staring at him aghast.

"You came through with me!" Guinard

exclaimed, thunderstruck. "But this—it's never happened before. It's forbidden! You don't belong!"

"Guinard, what happened?" Merrill asked hoarsely. He looked wildly around the greenish, silent mists. A gruesome possibility shook him. "Was it an explosion? Are we—dead?"

"No, no!" the old statesman hastily denied. His face was a study in perplexity and anxiety. He seemed to ignore their surroundings entirely in his concentration on Merrill. "But you, Lieutenant—you should not be in this place. Had I known you were behind me—"

Then Guinard pulled himself together. "I shall have to take you to the others," he muttered distractedly. "It's all I can do now. And they will have to decide about you. If they don't understand—"

Distress came into his fine, haggard face at some thought that he did not voice, as he looked at Merrill.

The American could not understand. He wanted to say something but he couldn't. It was too sudden, too overwhelming.

He could only stand, staring stupidly about him. There was not a sound. Not any movement. Nothing but the curling, greenish mists whose cool, damp tendrils silently caressed their faces.

Guinard spoke urgently. "Lieutenant, you must understand me! You have inadvertently blundered into a place where you have no right to be, into the greatest and most closely guarded of secrets."

"What is this place?" Merrill asked hoarsely. "And how did we get here like that? *How?*"

Guinard spoke slowly, trying to penetrate his dazed mind. "Listen, Lieutenant. I must tell you, since you are here. This is not our Earth. This is another world."

Merrill's brain groped for understanding. "Another world? You mean, we're on one of the other planets?"

Guinard shook his gray head quickly. "No, not any planet of any universe known to science. A different universe, a different space-time continuum, entirely."

He looked baffled. "How shall I tell you? I am a statesman, not a physicist. I only know myself what Rodemos and Zyskyn and the others have told me.

"But listen. This world, in its other space-time frame, is always close to Earth, contiguous. Held there—what did Zyskyn say?—by inter-dimensional gravitation. Meshed forever with Earth, yet forever invisible and untouchable to Earthmen."

Merrill's throat was dry, but his heart began to beat faster. A little of this, at least, he could understand.

"I've read speculations on such an interlocking world," he said slowly. "But if that's what it is, how did we get here?"

Guinard showed his watch, with its curious pattern of big jewels on the back. "This brought us through, Lieutenant. It isn't a watch, though it looks like one. It is a compact instrument which can project enough force to thrust matter from Earth into this world."

THE old man talked rapidly. "This world, and the way into it, have been known for thousands of years. A scientist of ancient Atlantis found the way first. He passed the secret down to a chosen few of each generation."

"You mean"—Merrill struggled to comprehend—"you mean that in every stage of the world's history, there have been a few people who knew about *this?*"

And he made a wild gesture toward the unearthly landscape of solemn green mists that surrounded them.

Guinard's gray head bobbed. "Yes. A few of the greatest men in each age have been admitted into the secret and have been bequeathed the jeweled Signs which are the key to entrance here. I don't claim to be worthy of belonging to the world's greatest—but they thought me so and admitted me to their brotherhood."

He went on: "And all the members of our secret brotherhood, the greatest men of every age of Earth in past and future, come often into this world and gather at our meeting-place here."

Merrill was stunned. "You mean, men of the past, present and future *meet* in this world? But—"

Guinard reminded, "I told you that this world is outside Earth's space-time. A thousand years on Earth is but a few days here. Time is different."

He elaborated hastily. "Think of the

different ages of Earth as rooms along a corridor. You can't go from one room into another, from one age into another. But the occupants of all the rooms, of all the ages, can, if they have the key, come out and meet together in the corridor which is common to them all."

The old statesman's face was haggard as he concluded. "I came here tonight to seek help from the others of our brotherhood! Help that could enable me to pull my people and nation out of the abyss of anarchy. It's the only hope I have left, now. Always, it's been against the laws of our brotherhood to give each other such help. But now—"

He clutched Merrill's wrist and pulled him forward. "I can't delay here longer. You will have to come with me, even though you are not of the initiated."

Merrill found himself being hurried along by the old statesman, through the greenish mists. The grassy ground rolled in low swales, and they crossed little streams. They could see little but the enfolding mists, and there was no sign or sound of life.

The American felt as though he walked in a weird dream. His brain was staggering at the implications of what Guinard had just told him.

A SECRET brotherhood of the world's greatest men of all ages, an esoteric tradition that held the key to entrance into an alien world where all those men of many ages could mix and meet! Incredible, surely—

A clear voice called suddenly from close behind them. "*Est Guinard? Salve!*"

Guinard stopped, peering back into the mists. "*Salver frater! Quis est?*"

He murmured rapidly to Merrill. "We have to have some common language, of course. And we use Latin. Those who didn't know it, learned it. You know it?"

Merrill mumbled numbly, "I was a medical student before the war. But who—"

A figure emerged from the mists, overtaking them, and gave cheerful greeting.

"I hoped to see you this visit, Guinard," he said in rattling Latin. "How go things in that strange century of yours?"

"Not well, Ikhnaton," answered the old statesman. "It's why I've come. I've got to have help."

"Help? From us others?" repeated the man called Ikhnaton. "But you know that's impossible—"

He broke off suddenly, staring at Merrill. And Merrill in turn was gazing at him with even more wonder.

The man was young, with a thin, dark, intellectual face and luminous eyes. But his costume was outlandish. A linen cloak over a short tunic, a snake-crested gold fillet around his dark hair, a flaming disk hanging around his neck with the curious jeweled pattern of the Sign in its face.

"Ikhnaton, King of Egypt in the 15th century, B.C.," Guinard was explaining hurriedly. "Even if you don't know much history you must have heard of him."

Ikhnaton! Merrill stared unbelievably. He'd heard of the Egyptian ruler who had been called the first great man in history, the reformer who had dreamed of universal brotherhood, back in time's dawn.

The Egyptian was frankly puzzled. "This man doesn't belong to us. Why did you bring him?"

"I didn't intend to, it was all a mistake," Guinard said hastily. "I'll explain when we reach the inn."

"There it is," Ikhnaton nodded ahead. "And it sounds like a good gathering this time. I hope so—last time I came, there was nobody here but Darwin and that stiff-necked Luther, and our argument never ended."

Warm, ruddy light glowed in the mists ahead, beckon to them. The light came from the oblong windows of a low, squat building.

It was a curious structure, this place they called "the inn." One-storied and built of dark stone, with timber gables, it looked dreamlike and unreal here in the silent mists. There were vineyards and gardens around it, Merrill saw.

Guinard opened the door. Ruddy light and warmth and the clamor of disputing voices struck their faces. Men hailed them in Latin.

"Ho, Guinard! Come in and listen to this! Zyskyn and old Socrates are at it again!"

Merrill stood and stared. Most of the inn was a big common-room, stone-flagged, with heavy, timbered walls. A huge fireplace at one side held a leaping blaze, and

its flickering light joined the reddish glow of torches in wall-sockets to illuminate the room.

THERE were long tables down the center. Grouped around the longest table, with their wine-cups standing unheeded upon it now, were the most motley group of men possible to imagine.

A tall Roman in bronze sat beside a man in super-modern zipper garments, a grave, bearded man in Elizabethan ruff and hose beside a withered, ancient Chinese, a merry fellow in the gaudy clothes of 16th Century France beside a stout, sober man in the drab brown of an American Colonial. At the far end of the table, silent and brooding, sat a man wrapped in dark robe and cowl-like hood, a man with a pale, young-old face.

All this fantastically variegated company, except that brooding, cowed listener, were eagerly joining into an argument. The two chief disputants were a handsome young man in a strange, glittering garment of woven metal and a bald, stocky Greek with shrewd eyes and a broken nose. Then, Merrill thought numbly, these two disputants were Zyskyn and—Socrates?

A fat jolly, moon-faced fellow in the costume of old Babylon waddled up to them. That he was the master of the inn, Merrill knew by the brimming wine-cups he was carrying as he greeted them.

"Welcome, friend Guinard!" he boomed. "And you too, Ikhnaton—but remember, no more arguments about theology."

His eyes fell on Merrill, behind them. And he stiffened. "But this man is not one of us!"

The booming words rang out so suddenly loud that they cut across the argument in the room, and all heads turned toward them.

The tall, bald, bleak-eyed Roman put down his goblet and strode up to them. He faced Merrill.

"How came you here?" he demanded sharply. "Do you have the Sign?"

"Wait, Caesar," begged Guinard urgently. "He doesn't have the Sign. But it's not his fault that he's here."

Caesar? Julius Caesar? Merrill could only stare at the Roman and then at the others.

The quiet, grave-faced man in Elizabethan costume interposed himself into the argument.

"You remember me, Guinard? Francis Bacon. May I ask where you and Ikhnaton found this man?"

The Egyptian king made a gesture of denial. "I never saw him until a few minutes ago."

"His name is Merrill, and he came with me," Carlus Guinard said rapidly. His voice rose with tension. "It's my fault that he's here. I was not careful enough about being alone when I came through, and he got caught in the force of the Sign and was swept with me."

Guinard hurried on. "If there's any blame for his coming, it attaches to my carelessness. But I was half-crazy tonight with worry. Back in my time, my people reel on the brink of anarchy and destruction. I have to save them. And so I have come to you others—for help."

The handsome young man in the queer flexible metal garment stared at him incredulously.

"For our help? You know we can't help you to do anything in your own time, Guinard!"

"Zyskyn is right," nodded Francis Bacon. "You surely should have known that, Guinard."

"But I *must* have help!" Guinard exclaimed feverishly. "Some of you are from times future to my own, and your greater science and wisdom can save millions of my people. At least, let me tell you!"

Caesar's curt voice cut into the excited babble that followed. "Let's take things in order. This is a serious thing you propose, Guinard. For the time being, we'll pass over the matter of this man you chanced to bring with you. His fate can be decided later. Sit down, all of you, and we'll hear what Guinard has to say."

MMERRILL could see that Guinard's proposal had thrown a bombshell into this group. As they returned to the table, all were still excitedly talking, all except the brooding, cowed man who had not stirred.

Merrill found himself pushed into a seat at the table by Ikhnaton. The young Egyp-

tian king looked at him with friendly glance.

"It must seem strange to you, eh?" Ikhnaton said, over the excited clamor. "It did to me, when I first came through. I was almost afraid to use the Sign."

"How did you get the Sign?" Merrill asked him. "How were you initiated into—this?"

Ikhnaton explained. "Rodemos of Atlantis—he isn't here tonight—was the first to find a way into this world. He passed down the secret, which is imparted to only a few men in each generation."

The Egyptian continued. "I imagine you have heard of most of these here tonight. Though some, of course, are still in your future."

Merrill learned that the handsome Zyskyn was a great scientist of the 31st century Antarctic civilization. The old Chinese was Lao-Tse of the 5th Century BC and the swarthy, slender man beside him was the Dutch philosopher Spinoza.

Stout, pawky Benjamin Franklin sat beside the great Buddhist emperor Asoka. Next to them was John Loring, a famous space-explorer of the 25th Century, and across from them the merry face of Francois Rabelais.

"It's incredible," Merrill said hoarsely. "I've read and heard of most of these men—Caesar, yourself—I know how long you lived and how you died."

Ikhnaton interrupted sharply. "Don't mention anything like that! It's considered bad taste to talk here of a man's personal future, even when you know it from history. It would be disconcerting, you know."

MERRILL gestured past the excitedly clamoring group toward the cowed man who sat strangely silent and unmoved at the end of the table.

His face fascinated Merrill. It was smooth and young, but his dark, watching eyes had something infinitely old about them.

"Who is that?" he asked the Egyptian.

Ikhnaton shrugged. "That's Su Suum, who never talks about himself. We know only that he comes from some far future time, farther even than Zyskyn's age. He comes often, but just sits and listens."

The clamor of discussion that had been

unloosed by Guinard's proposal was quelled again by the crisp voice of Julius Caesar.

"Will you not be quiet enough so that we may at least hear what Guinard has to say?" he demanded.

The uproar quieted. Men sat back down, and looked toward Guinard. Franklin polished his steel-rimmed spectacles with a silk handkerchief, while Rabelais drained his wine-cup and set it down with a sigh.

Merrill looked back and forth along the faces. From Ikhnaton of old Egypt, beside him, to the farthest end of the table where sat the silent figure of Su Suum, man of the remotest future.

Guinard was speaking urgently. "I know the laws of our brotherhood as well as you. First, to keep this world and our meetings always secret. Second, to give the Sign which is our badge of fellowship only to those who are above petty self-seeking. And third, that one age of Earth must never through us directly influence another age.

"Nevertheless," he continued earnestly, "I desire tonight that you grant an exception to that third law. I come here for my people, seeking aid to save my 20th Century land and race from utter misery."

HE WENT on, telling them of his war-stricken land and of the danger that anarchy and terror would crush its millions. He pictured his own helplessness to halt the tide.

Loring, the space-explorer of the 25th, interrupted. "But from what I've read of your century's history, those convulsions of which you speak will finally end."

"They will end, yes, but before then millions of my people will have lived starved and stunted lives!" Guinard exclaimed. "It is to prevent that that I appeal to you for help."

"Let us be clear," said Socrates keenly. "Just what sort of help to you desire?"

Guinard looked toward Zyskyn, and John Loring, and the silent man called Su Suum.

"You three," he told them, "come from far future times when scientific progress is great. Could none of you suggest any scientific means of psychologically pacifying my people into good-will and cooperation?"

Merrill saw that Su Suum remained silent, watching abstractedly and making no

sign of assent. But young Zyskyn answered slowly.

"Why, yes, down in Antarctica our psycho-mechanists long ago solved that problem. We have certain apparatus whose subtle radiation we use to manipulate the psychology of backward peoples, and twist their thinking toward peace and cooperation."

"Give me the secret of that apparatus and with it I can save millions in my time from misery!" cried Guinard.

That the proposal was disturbing, Merrill could see. The group were silent, looking troubledly at each other.

Then old Lao-Tse spoke, using the unfamiliar language slowly and with difficulty.

"I am opposed to doing that. For it would violate the laws of time and infinity which separate the ages of our Earth. It would introduce a confusion of eras which might bring on cosmic disaster."

Ikhnaton retorted warmly. "What harm could it do? Guinard would keep his use of the apparatus secret. And it would save many. I say, let us make an exception to our law and help him."

LORING, the space-explorer, looked anxiously at the bald Greek next him. "Socrates, you're one of the wisest of us. What do you say?"

The Greek rubbed his nose thoughtfully. "It is my belief that all outward things are but forms and shadows of the ideal, and I cannot credit that the ideal laws of the universe would permit transgressing the bounds of Earthly time without dire results."

Francis Bacon spoke precisely and calmly. "I hold the other opinion. Once I wrote that our object should be to extend man's dominion over all the universe. Why not conquer time as space has been conquered?"

Spinoza and Franklin shook their heads doubtfully, and then Caesar interrupted restlessly.

"Talk, talk—we have too much of it here. What Guinard wants is action and help. Are we to give it to him?"

"I say again, let us help him!" Ikhnaton exclaimed. "Why should not the future aid the past, as the past has always aided its future?"

Rabelais shook his head sorrowfully. "Men are fools. Guinard's people would have no more troubles if they forgot their hatreds and hopes and stuck to their drinking."

Zyskyn spoke troubledly to the old statesman. "Guinard, they seem to feel there is too much danger in what you ask."

Guinard's thin shoulders sagged. "Then I shall never be able to steer my people out of their misery."

Uproar of argument broke out again. Merrill ignored it. The desperation, the hopelessness, in the old statesman's face had awakened a fierce resolve in the young American.

"Guinard, there's one way to get what you want," he muttered. "This way!"

And Merrill snatched out the flat pistol inside his jacket and leveled it at Zyskyn.

"I hate to do this," he said to the dumfounded group. "But I've *seen* the misery that Guinard is trying to relieve. He's got to have your help. You'll promise him the apparatus he needs, or—"

"Or what, man of the past?" said young Zyskyn, smiling faintly at Merrill.

He made a swift motion with his hand. From a bracelet on his wrist leaped a little tongue of green light.

It hit Merrill's arm with paralyzing shock. The pistol dropped from his nerveless fingers.

The silence was broken by Caesar's laugh. "I like that young fool. At least, he doesn't just talk—he tries to act."

"He has shown that the people of his age are too barbaric to be trusted with Zyskyn's science," snapped the space-explorer, Loring.

Guinard looked down strickenly at the American. "Lieutenant, you shouldn't have done that!"

AND then suddenly, through the increased uproar of disputing voices that followed Merrill's impulsive action and defeat, there came a slow, chill voice.

"Will you listen to me, brothers?"

It was the man at the farthest end of the long table who was speaking. The cowed figure of Su Suum, always before silent.

Zyskyn, Caesar, Franklin — all in the room were stricken to silence by the unex-

pected voice. They stared wonderingly at Su Suum.

"You have often wondered about me," Su Suum said quietly. "I told you that I came from Earth's far future, but I did not tell you more than that. I preferred to listen. But now, I think, I must speak.

"I come from a time far in Earth's future, indeed. By your reckoning, it would be the 14,000th Century."

"That far?" whispered Zyskyn, astounded. "But—"

Su Suum, his strange young-old face quiet and passionless, continued. "As to who I am—I am the last."

A terrible realization came to Merrill, of the meaning of those quiet words. "You mean—?" Socrates was murmuring astoundedly.

"Yes," said Su Suum. "I mean that I am the last man of all men. The final survivor of the race to whose past you all belong."

His brooding eyes looked beyond them into infinite space and time. "All the history of our race, I know. I could tell you all of it, how the first star-colonists left Earth in the 34th Century, how the cooling Earth was itself evacuated in the 108th, how for thousands on thousands of years our race spread out through the galaxies and founded a cosmic empire of power and splendor you could not even imagine.

"And I could tell you, too, of how with the long ages that empire finally shrunk and withered as the galaxies faded and died. Of how the mighty realm and the trillioned races of men fell in inevitable decline, shrinking with the eras to fewer worlds, until at last but a remnant of them were left on a dying world far across the galaxy.

"I was the last of that remnant," Su Suum continued. "The last of all men left in a dying, darkened universe. With me, human history concludes its glorious span as we all knew that somewhere and someday it must conclude itself."

The cowed man made a gesture. "I was lonely, in that dying, haunted universe. And before I died I wanted to come back to the little world from which our race sprang, the Earth. Dead, icy and forlorn it is in my era—and I the only man upon it.

"That is why, by means of the Sign that

descended through the ages to me, I came among you. I have sat here many times with you men of the past, listening to your talk of the ages. And to me, it has been as though I relived the wonderful saga of our race."

The men—these men from as many different ages—stared at Su Suum as though he were indeed a ghost from beyond death.

Merrill finally heard old Lao-Tse ask, "Then, last of men, what is your word as to the decision we must make on Guinard's request?"

SU SUUM spoke slowly. "My word is this: Even though it were possible to transgress the bounds of Earth's ages without disaster, even though you were able thus to save your peoples from confusion and struggle, would it be great gain?

"I tell you this—no matter what great powers you win, no matter how high you carry human achievement, in the end it must all conclude with *me*. Must end with a perished race, humanity's story told, all the great goals you struggled toward fallen to dust and nothingness.

"So, it is not important that you may not attain the goals toward which you struggle. What is important is the way in which you carry on that struggle, your own courage and kindness from day to day. Though you attain the most glittering Utopia of your dreams, yet it will someday perish. But the mere passing days of struggle that you make splendid by your courage, the record that you write in the pages of the past, that can *never* perish."

Merrill saw Guinard stand up, and in the midst of a deep silence speak unsteadily.

"I am answered from the world's end," said the old statesman. "And you have given me the courage of which you speak."

He looked around the silent group. "I shall return now. May my young friend return with me? I guarantee his silence."

There was a moment's hesitation, and then Caesar made a gesture. "Let him go, friends. Guinard's guarantee is good."

Guinard held his medallion-watch above himself and Merrill, pressed the jewels on its back. The thread of blinding light from the instrument struck the American and he knew nothing.

MERRILL awoke with sun streaming in to his eyes. He sat up dazedly and found himself on the couch in Guinard's shabby hotel room.

The old man was bending over him. "I fear that you fell asleep in here last night, Lieutenant."

Merrill sprang to his feet. "Guinard! We're back on Earth, then! They let me come back!"

Guinard frowned at him in perplexity. "Back on Earth? I don't understand. I'm afraid you've been dreaming."

Merrill clutched his arm. "It was no dream! You were there with me, with Caesar, Socrates, all of them! And that man Su Suum—good God, the last of the human race—"

Guinard soothingly patted his shoulder. "There, Lieutenant, you've apparently had a nightmare of some kind."

Merrill stared at him. Then he spoke slowly. "I think I understand. You guaranteed my silence. You know that if you pretend it all never happened, I'll *have* to keep silent, since nobody would ever believe me."

The old statesman shook his head. "I'm

sorry. I don't know what you're talking about."

Merrill felt staggered. Had it all then really been mere fabric of dream, that brotherhood of the ages? If it were—

Guinard was speaking. "Enough of this. There's work to do. Work that may or may not pull my people together. But it's got to be tried."

"But last night you were so hopeless," Merrill said wonderingly.

"That was my weakness," Guinard said quietly. "I forgot that it is not whether we win or lose the struggle that matters most, but how we bear ourselves in the fight. I shall not weaken again."

THE words of Su Suum reechoed in Merrill's mind. And he knew now that it had been no dream, even though Guinard would never admit it, even though he'd never be able to convince anyone.

And Guinard knew he knew, for the statesman's eyes met his in a long, quiet look. Then the old man turned toward the door.

"Come, Lieutenant. Our work is waiting for us."

What Napoleon Would Say to Hitler!

EDMOND HAMILTON writes us concerning his story "The Inn Outside the World" in this issue of WEIRD TALES:

Few ideas have ever been so fascinating to me as that of a meeting between the great men of different ages. In fact, most people have mused on this fancy at some time or another—in today's newspapers you'll find many speculations on what Napoleon would say to Hitler, and so on.

And the idea has always had that fascination. Years ago, when I was dipping into languages and literature in a youthful desire to read everything, I found more than one forgotten work built upon this theme.

There is, for example, a queer little book in crabbed medieval French, "Le Moyen de Parvenir" by Beroalde de Verville. It brings together in fanciful fashion the great characters of ancient and medieval times. The trouble is that they do nothing but tell ancient smoking-room stories when they do foregather, so that the historic interest is completely neglected.

To go even further back, the "Deipnosophistae" of the ancient Greek writer Athenaeus has a similar theme, but its author was apparently interested only in food. His characters exchange a vast number of exotic recipes, and it might as well have been a symposium of cooks.

I wanted to write a story about a secret brotherhood of time, based on the scientific knowledge of today, in which the chief interest would be in the observation of our present-day troubled world from the perspective of the past *and the future*. I hope that I've accomplished at least a little of that purpose in "The Inn Outside the World."

—Edmond Hamilton