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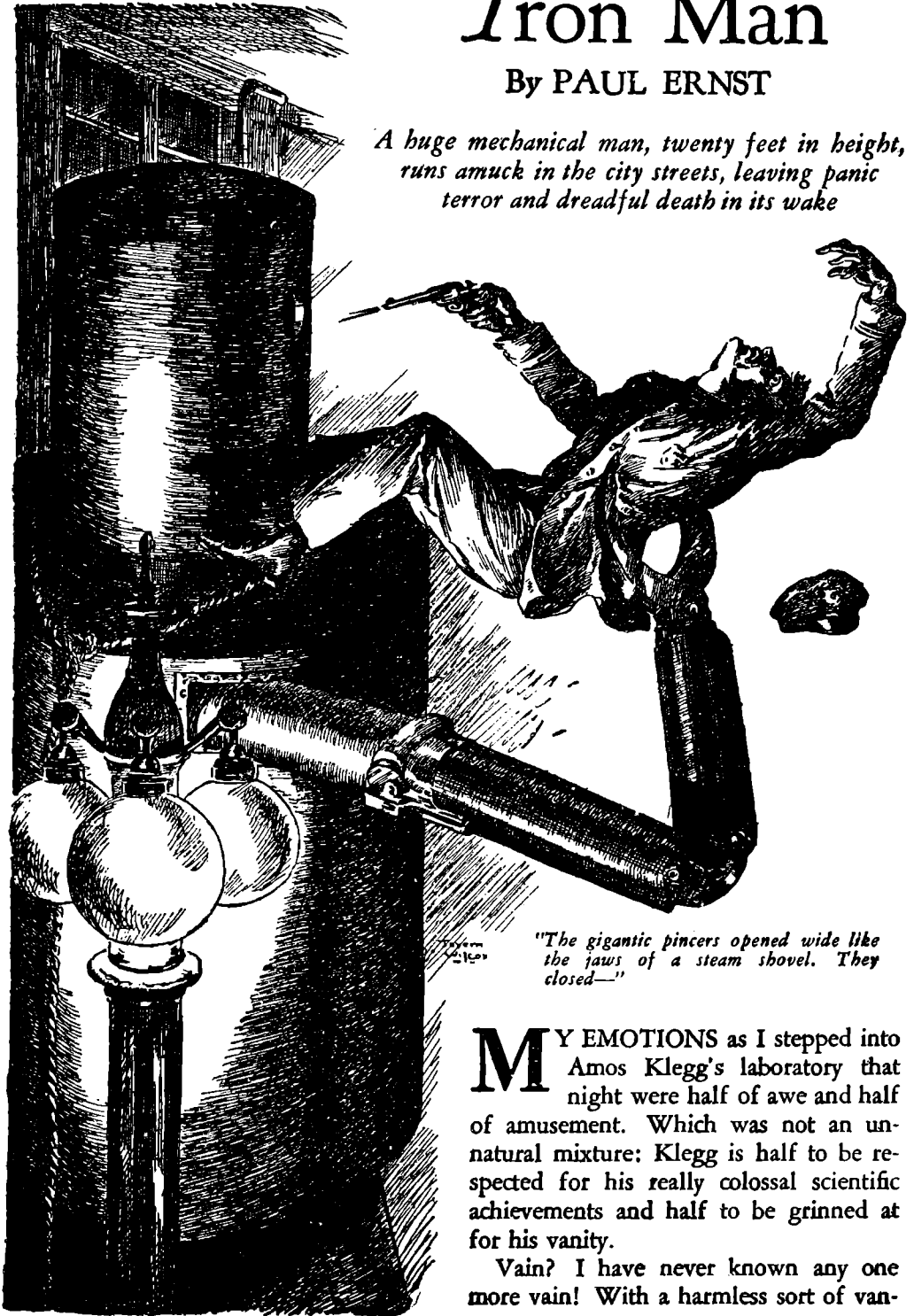
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# The Iron Man

By PAUL ERNST

*A huge mechanical man, twenty feet in height, runs amuck in the city streets, leaving panic terror and dreadful death in its wake*



*"The gigantic pincers opened wide like the jaws of a steam shovel. They closed—"*

**M**Y EMOTIONS as I stepped into Amos Klegg's laboratory that night were half of awe and half of amusement. Which was not an unnatural mixture: Klegg is half to be respected for his really colossal scientific achievements and half to be grinned at for his vanity.

Vain? I have never known any one more vain! With a harmless sort of van-

ity, I'll admit. Perpetually the showman, he must stage-set every denouement, present it always in the most spectacular light.

For the past eight months he had apparently forgotten my existence, though I was his closest friend. Then, that morning, he had telephoned and demanded that I come that very evening to "Oh!" and "Ah!" over his latest brain-child. Demanded! That was the word. Klegg never invited; like royalty he took one's presence for granted.

Now here I was, waiting in his laboratory for him to come and parade his latest scientific marvel before my properly startled eyes.

I strolled through the great work-room. I was not impatient for him to come. Few had the privilege of being admitted to that enormous room; and there were plenty of weird and interesting things to look at. The room itself was weird-looking—two stories high, lighted by hanging electric bulbs that illuminated apparatus and work-benches well enough but left the high ceiling to soar dimly into shadow like the roof of a cave. A magician's cave, in a way; some of Klegg's performances certainly smacked of magic.

I noticed a great dim shape at the farther end of the laboratory. It was veiled under canvas, for all the world like a gigantic statue hidden from common eyes in a sculptor's workshop. Had Klegg gone in for art?

I started toward it, remarking as I went on the odd proportions of whatever figure it was beneath the canvas. The proportions were vaguely human. Heroic in size—the top of the cascading canvas scraped the roof twenty feet above the floor—whatever was beneath stuck out here and there as if possessed of such things as shoulders and head and torso.

I got a third of the way down the long room toward it when I stopped with a queer sensation of being watched. You know how it is. You are in a place alone, windows shuttered and locked (Klegg always kept his that way because his laboratory was on the ground level), no one there but yourself—and yet you feel as if unseen eyes were on you.

So strong was the feeling that I called aloud: "Klegg, are you here?"

There was no answer. The door through which Klegg's servant had admitted me was closed. Klegg was certainly not in that laboratory; nor was any one else save myself. Yet I was being watched. I'd have sworn to it.

Forgetting for the moment the mysterious, canvas-shrouded figure, I started slowly to tour the place. I looked under tables, behind any equipment big enough to offer cover for a marauder. I went into the alcove containing the washstand. I darted out again, thinking to surprize some one in the act of running for the door.

No one. I was utterly alone.

The inexplicable feeling began to give me the creeps. I remember wishing with almost childish panic that Klegg would hurry up and join me. I think I would have left the place had I not hated to display such weakness even to myself.

I did start for the switchboard over by the door, however. I was going to turn on more lights—all the lights—to get rid of that nasty, creepy feeling that eyes were following my every move.

And then I did get a jolt. A paralyzing one! For I located the eyes.

Beside the switchboard was a plate-glass case about a foot square and two feet high. It was standing on a table. And in it, just under the top, were the eyes.

Two eyes, undeniably human, glared at

me unblinkingly from the case. Unblinkingly? They could not have glared in any other way, for they had no eyelids to blink with. Nor were they set in eye-sockets, or surrounded by a skull. Just two naked eyeballs perched there behind glass and staring with dilated pupils into my own eyes—as though piercing clear to my soul.

**W**ELL, I got over the jolt a bit, and began to investigate. I started by switching on a bulb that hung over the table for the special purpose of illuminating the case.

The case, I saw then, was full of a colorless fluid. And there was more, soaking placidly in the fluid, than a pair of eyeballs.

There was a brain behind the eyeballs, for one thing. A naked human brain, looking like the specimens you see pickled in glass jars at a medical school. The brain rested on a glass shelf near the top of the case. The eyes projected from the forepart of the wrinkled, grayish lump on two stalks that resembled antennæ. The stalks, I recognized, were the optic nerves.

Leading down from the brain, like small trailing power cables, were a score or more of grayish-white, elastic-looking tubes. These, as they descended, branched into four main tubes. And these main tubes were finally rooted in—a human heart!

Yes, there was no mistaking it. Lying on the floor of the case, like a pallid mushroom growth tinged with red, was a human heart. And what was more—it was beating.

Steadily, effortlessly, seventy or so to the minute, it pulsed before my gaze. Beat, beat, beat. And with every beat a perceptible impulse traveled along the elastic tubes on the right (why, they were human arteries!) to the brain rest-

ing above on the glass shelf. The brain itself pulsed faintly in unison; till the whole affair gave one a conviction that here was actual, though incredible, life.

A locomotive without its train. A power-house without its factory. A human heart and brain without a body; but certainly appearing to be alive and in fit shape to guide a body should one be presented.

Meanwhile, the staring, almost hypnotic eyes on their antennæ of optic nerves. . . .

"What do you think of it, Cleave?"

I jumped a foot, and only half succeeded in repressing a yell. Klegg had come in behind me, unheard, and had spoken without warning.

"You might cough, or something, just to let a man know you're around," I said reproachfully.

He smiled. "I see it has impressed you, at least."

"It certainly has," I replied. "Tell me—is the thing alive, or isn't it?"

"It is not, of course. You ought to know that. It's dead as mutton. But it has provided me with a lot of entertainment and a great deal of new knowledge concerning automatic reflex nerve-action. For instance, look."

He lit a match and held the flame close to the naked, appalling eyes. "Watch the pupils."

I watched them—black, dilated holes in twin rings of dark brown. And as I watched, they contracted from the brightness of the match flame. It was uncanny.

"Yet you say it's dead," I exclaimed.

"Certainly. That is, as brain and heart it is dead. The individual cells are alive, and they are still governed by the mysterious automatic influence we call reflex action."

He dropped the match stub to the floor and stepped on it.

"Looks impossible, doesn't it?" he commented. "Yet it is quite simple, really. Any kind of heart can be kept beating indefinitely if immersed in a neutral salt solution—sodium, calcium and potassium salts—and nourished with a little sugar. It's a common experiment. But I don't think any one has ever before taken both heart and brain from a newly killed human being, connected the two organs with fresh veins and arteries, and kept them functioning as one system."

I stared down at him—a little man, he was—dark as a Spaniard, with bristly black hair and eyebrows, and burning black eyes.

"But why the eyeballs?" I demanded, glancing again with a shudder at the sinister, staring orbs poised on their nerve-stalks like marbles.

"To observe more effectively the way the organs react to artificial nerve stimuli," Klegg said, with a carelessness that didn't fool me for a minute: he was pleased as a child at the way his experiment worked.

"By the way," he went on, "apart from its scientific interest, that brain is a most arresting lump of meat. It's the brain of Tuzloff. You've heard of him?"

My eyes opened at that. Heard of him? Who has not! Bomber, murderer, outlaw, he had left a grim trail of death behind him for two years, until an outraged state had finally captured and executed him. He had died screaming hate at the world. No one knew where he had come from, but every one knew his mad history. Tuzloff! My word!

"What a gruesome idea!" I exclaimed. "Imagine preserving that brain, of all others, and keeping it at your elbow day and night!"

Klegg smiled. "A dead brain is a dead brain, Cleave. It doesn't matter who owned it in life. Besides, we're re-

duced to getting our cadavers mainly from the state. More often than not the corpse stretched on the surgical slab is that of some criminal. But come away, and let me show you the real work I called you in to see."

"I thought that was it," I said, pointing to the heart and the brain from which sprouted the glaring eyeballs.

"Oh, no. That's quite an achievement, if I do say so myself. But the real achievement stands under that canvas shroud." And he started toward the gigantic, veiled figure I had noticed when I first was shown into the laboratory.

I FOLLOWED him, but I could still feel those exposed eyeballs boring into my back. They had no muscles to turn them, so their gaze could not follow my path. But I was sure that, with no sockets to restrict their vision, they could see me out of their "corners" wherever I went. It was devilish, that feeling. And I didn't lose it for a second in the laboratory that night.

"Here," said Klegg, his voice lowering, "is something really unique. But before I show it to you, let me explain some of the principles behind it.

"For years I have worked on the theory that the human brain gives off energy in rays as measurable and discoverable as any other rays. Thought-rays, you might call them. Recently I solved my problem. I discovered the pure thought-ray and to some extent analyzed its secret and measured its wave-length. I've found brain emanations to be a hitherto unknown form of electrical energy somewhat akin to magnetism. This energy is capable of being harnessed by the use of proper magnetic receptors. You understand?"

"After a fashion," I said.

"All right then"—his voice rang with triumph—"look!"

Dramatically he jerked the cord that swept away the canvas from the twenty-foot-high thing it had hidden. And as I saw what the canvas had concealed, I gasped and started back a pace.

It was a colossal man, of iron. Or, I should say, it was a grim metal travesty of a man.

Two stories up, brushing the roof of the lofty laboratory, was the thing's "head"—a steel cylinder two feet in diameter and a yard high. In this, to carry out human resemblance, were cut eye-holes.

The cylinder was set, like a hat-box atop a hogshead, on a larger cylinder that made up the torso of the monstrous thing. Through the top of the larger cylinder ran a heavy casting, a beam which protruded a yard on either side. These protrusions were the "shoulders" and from them hung cylindrical arms, jointed, and ending in two-clawed pincers that took the place of hands.

The whole rested on two ponderous steel columns of legs, and the legs ended in "feet" which were solid metal pyramids with pivot joints at the apices for ankles.

"Watch it," said Klegg proudly.

He stared at it fixedly, his forehead wrinkling as if in terrific mental concentration. (I found out later that this was sheer theatrics; thought no more profound than a wish for pancakes for breakfast was enough to work the mechanism.)

In an instant the monstrous robot was set in ponderous motion. The iron man slowly lifted its right leg, slowly extended it in a forward step, and as slowly set it down. The left leg followed suit. In two strides the enormous thing was almost on top of us.

With a cry I leaped aside to avoid being crushed. But it stopped there, obedient to Klegg's will. Then it backed into its

former place, two strides in reverse. The floor, though of solid cement poured on the ground itself, quivered with its mass. Tons, it weighed.

"It looks impressive, doesn't it?" said Klegg. He almost crowed it. "Yet it's all a simple arrangement of weights, levers and steel cables, set in motion by the comparatively small pull of magnets which are acted upon by my thought—after being 'stepped-up' a good many million times. I can control the thing as though it were my own body."

"It's—it's heavy, isn't it?" was the best I could say.

"Twenty tons. You see, for every weight moved, I had to provide a counterweight. When I got through I found I had a regular steam-roller on my hands."

"What keeps it from falling over on its face?" I asked.

"A gyroscope, run by storage batteries in its chest." Klegg was beaming like a lad who shows off a home-made radio set with which he can get Australia. "The officials of the Easton Electric Company are coming to see me a week from tomorrow. They'll certainly see a demonstration!"

"They certainly will," I said weakly. "Why in heaven's name did you build the thing so big?"

"To make the demonstration more spectacular." Ah, there spoke his vanity again. "Tons of metal, so delicately balanced and counterbalanced that it can be moved solely by the power of thought! The idea was irresistibly alluring. And now that the thing is done, I can make it follow me about like a dog, if I wish."

"I wouldn't," I said, visioning little Klegg walking down Main Street with the towering colossus thundering meekly behind him.

He made the robot do more tricks for me. One was to pick up a telephone book

from a bench, in its mighty pincers of hands. There wasn't much left of the book when it finished, but it picked it up, all right.

Then I left—side-stepping widely around the glass case in which were the brain and heart, and the horrible, alive-looking eyeballs which seemed to note our movements with devilish concentration.

I went home, to wonder at the amazing combination of scientific genius and vain-glorious little boy that was Klegg.

I had nightmares about the contents of that glass case. If ever anything looked alive, those glaring eyeballs did. Yet Klegg had assured me, as did my own common sense, that brain and heart and eyes were dead, though the individual cells composing them lived on in the salt solution.

**F**IVE days were destined to pass before I heard from Klegg again. And then he was to get in touch with me under circumstances so fantastic and terrible. . . .

But I'd better stick to some sort of order in my account.

Eleven o'clock in the evening of that fifth day. I had just come home and, minus collar and coat, was smoking a good-night pipe before turning in, when my telephone rang.

"Hello——" I began. But my voice was cut off by a wild rush of words avalanching over the wire.

"Cleave! Is that you? Cleave—this is Klegg. Cleave—for God's sake come over here at once! To my laboratory! You hear? The thing's got loose! Come at once—oh, my God! It's after me——"

There was a crash, a sound like distant thunder over the telephone, then silence.

"Klegg!" I called, stupidly shaking the telephone as if it were his shoulder I had hold of. "Klegg! What's wrong?"

But there was no answer; and in a sec-

ond or two I had collected my wits. I tore out into the warm summer night, hatless and collarless and in my shirt sleeves, and jumped a taxi for Klegg's laboratory.

The front part of his house was all in darkness. I pounded at the door, rang the bell furiously. No one answered. I remembered then that it was the night off for Klegg's servants. Klegg alone—no one to help or admit help—and he in some terrible trouble. . . .

But what could the trouble be? Burglars? No. Klegg had said *it* was after him. *It* was loose.

With knuckles bleeding from the fruitless pounding at the door, I raced around to the rear of the house. Here, a separate brick building connected with the house by a short, covered runway, was the laboratory.

"Klegg!" I shouted as I came. "It's I—Cleave. Can you open the back door, or a window——"

I stopped, then, and stared, stupefied, at the wall of the laboratory.

From ground level to roof there was a yawning hole in the solid wall. And scattered over the lawn and sidewalk were the bricks that had filled that space, some broken to chips and some crushed to dust. A charge of dynamite could have done no more damage.

Then I saw, in the strip of lawn between sidewalk and laboratory, a single hole, like a footprint save that it was a yard square and ten inches deep. And I knew, of course, what *it* was that had got loose.

"Klegg!" I cried again, leaping in through the gaping hole in the wall. "Klegg!"

The laboratory was in ruins. Every bit of apparatus, every work-bench and instrument was crushed as flat as if a steam-roller had been methodically driven from side to side and end to end of the place. The electric globes blazed down on a

ruin more complete than an earthquake could have produced.

"Klegg, where are you?"

I heard a low moan from near the door.

I jumped in that direction, saw a figure lying on the cracked cement near it—and stopped in horror.

It was Klegg, or, rather, what was left of him. How he had managed to live during the minutes of my coming is more than I'll ever be able to figure out. Pure will-power, I guess.

From the waist down he was a ghastly pulp. His chest . . . well, I won't go into details.

His eyes were glazing even as I looked into them; plainly he had only a few seconds left.

"The iron man," he whispered. "Broke away, stalking the city . . . loose . . . twenty tons of death. . . ."

"But how could it break away?" I demanded. "It has no will of its own; it's just a mass of steel."

". . . brain," whispered Klegg, "brain in glass case. It was alive . . . *alive!* And I . . . put case and all in iron man's head. Something made me . . . like hypnotism. . . ."

"Yes," I urged. "Yes. . . ."

But Klegg was past urging. He was dead.

I stared down at the pitiably twisted thing that had once been a human being. So small, so inconsequential-looking. But what a monstrous thing it had done!

The iron man, twenty tons of invulnerable metal, stalking through the crowded city—directed by the maniacal, revengeful brain of the mad Tuzloff! Twenty tons of steel, guided by a soft gray lump of pure hate in a salt solution! What horrible possibilities were there!

"May God forgive you, Klegg," I mur-

mured. "For I'm afraid mankind never will."

Yet it wasn't his fault, really. That malevolent brain—which had been alive after all, as my every instinct had warned—shut up alone with him week after week, working on his unsuspecting mind, slowly dominating it, sapping into it, imposing its own will on Klegg's—till finally the scientist's will had snapped and he had mesmerically obeyed its command and given it a new body of steel.

"Yes, yes," I mumbled in the wrecked laboratory, "easy to see how it happened. But what in God's name can be done to stop it?"

That naked heart would beat in its salt solution till the containing case was smashed; and while it pulsed the brain would live to guide its fantastic engine of destruction. The engine itself would continue upright as long as the storage batteries retained energy to drive the gyroscopic controls in its iron breast. Left to itself, the thing might function for days.

Meanwhile, gory death as it tramped the city under the control of a criminally insane brain!

"IT'S GOT to be stopped!" I babbled, starting to run through the yawning hole in the brick wall. "It *must* be stopped! But how?"

On the sidewalk, I turned instinctively to the right. To the right lay the main avenue of the city, a car-line street leading straight toward the downtown section. That would be Tuzloff's destination.

No sooner had I turned into the brightly lighted main avenue than I saw I would have no difficulty trailing the iron man. What a wake it had left!

At this section of the street, not a living soul moved on sidewalk or pavement. Yet excitement and horror seethed in the very air. Moans and screams were coming



from every window above the second floor level. And from every window people peered fearfully.

I stood in the center of the street and gazed around.

At the curb on one side were the remains of a touring-car. It was smashed flat. The steering-wheel was crushed on its twisted column, and embedded in a gory ruin. A small sedan that had been parked in front of it had also been squeezed flat; but this car, as far as I could see, luckily had been empty.

On the rails of the car track was a ghastly mound of wreckage. A street-car, or what was left of it. It had been pushed over on its side and painstakingly demolished. Roof and sides were splintered to nothing. Only the solid undercarriage was left fairly intact. And around the shattered car were at least a score of bodies—great, shapeless smears on the pavement.

"Look out!" I remember hearing some woman shriek. "Look out! It'll get you, too!"

I only half heard the warning. Trembling, white-faced, I began to hurry down the avenue in the monstrous trail of the iron man.

Wrecked automobiles littered the pavement every few feet. Some were at the curb, some in the middle of the street. The latter in every case were spattered with crimson. The iron man had evidently caught them as they rolled toward him—drivers no doubt petrified with horror—stamped them flat with a single stride, and gone on.

Street-cars knocked over and demolished, trolley poles broken off like celery stalks to trail live wires on the pavement, horrible red blotches everywhere on the slippery street—a tornado could not have left a plainer path.

And now, from far ahead, on the

fringe of the downtown section, I heard a din that grew louder as I hurried toward it. Shouts, yells, screams, a lurid red flare as a fire started some place near, and over it all the thunderous crashing of some great weight pounding along the pavement.

In a moment or two I got within half a block of the thing. And there I paused, rigid at the spectacle.

Glinting dully in the reflected light of street lamps and electric signs was the iron man, stalking down the street ahead of me.

Two stories up swayed the cylindrical head in which were the artificially preserved heart and the mad brain. Two stories tall the figure teetered down the street, like a reeling tower. A three-yard step. Five seconds while the counterbalanced weights slid in accordance to the magnetic controls, lifting the other leg high and lowering it in advance. Another step. Five seconds. Another step. And with every step a crashing boom of twenty tons of metal banging down on stone paving—or on an automobile or human body.

Slowly the tower of the body leaned forward like a falling cliff with each advancing step, straightened as the stride was taken, leaned backward as the next was begun. Its giant arms, ending in the mighty pincers, clanged against its metal sides as it moved. Back and forth, back and forth, with each forward lunge carrying it farther toward the heart of the downtown district—and the theater and supper crowds teeming there.

In spite of the thickening of the crowds, however, the occasional red smears on the pavement grew no more numerous. The iron man moved too slowly to overtake many victims. Thus, though people were pouring toward the source of the commotion with mob curiosity from every direc-

tion, the metal monster had its appetite glutted but seldom. People who fell in its path in their mad scramble to get away once they had seen what manner of thing was making the noise; people who chanced to dash out of building entrances squarely in its road; people who tried crazily to hide under cars or in too shallow doorways—these were the only ones caught under the huge descending pyramids of iron.

And so the thing moved forward with the steady, inexorable advance of a glacier, making every five-second stride demolish something—property, and more rarely, but still only too often, life; something—on its devastating way.

A gray-haired man, erect of carriage, blazing-eyed, with a military appearance, rushed out of a restaurant and toward me.

"Gad, sir!" he spluttered. "Gad, sir! Is it war? Is this some new kind of tank directed by radio?"

He rushed off without waiting for an answer. I saw him blaze away with an automatic at the back of the iron man. The bullets glanced off the rounded steel body like peas from a child's bean-blower. There were others shooting at it, also. Half a dozen police were there, pumping futile bullets at it.

At one minute I saw the half-dozen police and the military-looking man in a close group at the monster's heels—at the next I saw the iron man, with fiendish suddenness, reverse its stride and step backward instead of forward.

It got two of the group as they fell over each other trying to get out of the way.

The soul of Tuzloff, mad murderer, must have rejoiced in its niche in hell. Unless Tuzloff's soul, with Tuzloff's conscious intelligence, was in the glass case with his heart and brain. . . . Could souls be kept in salt solutions, too? I wondered

crazily as I racked my brain for a way to stop this awful destruction.

**T**HE shriek of a police siren sounded far off to the right. Then another, and another. A general riot call had evidently been turned in at last.

I ran down the side street toward the wailing police cars, leaving for the moment the main street on which the iron man was sowing broadcast the seed of ruin. Of all the crowd, I was the only one who knew the true nature of the colossus. It was up to me to put my knowledge at the disposal of the blue-coated fighters about to do battle with it.

Down the street toward me came a line of cars filled with blue-uniformed figures. I stopped the first by the simple method of standing squarely in its path and waving my arms, meanwhile refusing to budge from its charge. I thought at first the car meant to run me down, heedless of one life by reason of the emergency of the call ahead. But at the last minute it skidded to a halt. I jumped onto the running-board.

A big man with a grizzled mustache, whose star shone gold instead of silver, glared at me.

"Who the hell are you," he snapped, "and why the hell are you holding us up?"

"Who I am doesn't matter," I said. "I stopped you because I know all about the thing up ahead you're out to fight."

There was a hubbub from the other six men in the car.

"You do?"

"What is it, then?"

"Where is it?"

The man with the gold star held up his hand for silence.

"We were told that some lunatic had got hold of an army tank and was running wild in it. Is that true? If it is, we'd bet-

ter phone the Fort for soldiers and field artillery."

"It's not a tank," I said rapidly. "It's an iron man, twenty feet high and proof against rifle or revolver bullets."

"An iron man!" repeated the chief, staring.

"Aw, throw him off the running-board and let's get going," some one growled savagely.

"I'm not crazy," I said. "For God's sake, listen to me! This thing is a big machine, in the shape of a man, twenty feet high. It's made of iron and it travels on two legs."

"How is it run?" was the skeptical question.

The words of the military-looking gentleman—now a smear on the pavement—occurred to me. I reconsidered my idea of telling the fantastic truth about the iron giant. Better to say something that sounded credible than try, in this crowded moment, to cram the true facts down their throats.

"It's run by radio," I said. "But listen: the radio-control mechanism is in the thing's head, a two-foot steel cylinder on top of the rest of the machine. This cylinder has two holes in it, like eye-holes. The thing to do is sharpshoot through one of those holes and smash the radio-control. Once that's done, the machine stops working. Get me?"

"Got you," he said. "But first we'll draw a cordon around this section to keep these fools from rushing in and risking their lives. Steve, flag the rest and tell 'em to block off the streets four blocks each way from here. And you"—he stabbed his blunt forefinger at me—"ride the running-board till we get to this thing ahead."

The police driver jammed into gear and we sped forward. Half a block to the main avenue. A block to the right.

"Good God!" muttered the chief, star-

ing at the monstrous moving tower, reddened half-way up its columnar legs, that was steadily working forward along the shambles of a street.

Even as we stared, the iron man reaped a ghastly windfall. A score of people, instead of trying to run, had stupidly crammed into the body of a big closed truck parked at the curb, to hide from the nightmare thing of metal that was trampling toward them.

The iron man stopped. One great leg went out, to push against the truck. The truck rocked half off its wheels but stayed upright. Yells and shrieks came from within it. A few—all too few—managed to leap out and get away. The rest . . .

The iron man pushed again. The truck leaned farther, balanced an instant, then smashed onto its side.

A great iron pyramid of a foot lifted—descended—lifted again.

With a groan the chief whirled to his men.

"Into the buildings ahead of it," he snapped. "Second-story windows—level with the damned thing's head. Concentrate fire on the eye-holes. Sub-machine guns. Quick!"

**T**HE men jumped out of the car, five of them, one a strapping blond young fellow hardly more than a lad. I noticed him then because he seemed so young—he couldn't have been more than twenty-two. And later . . . well, the whole city united in placing him on a hero's pedestal.

The five rushed forward, skirting around the iron man, fighting their way by main force through the screaming mob, till they were fifty yards ahead. Then they burst in the doors of the department stores flanking the street at that section and ran up to the second-floor windows. There they stationed themselves, two on one side of the street, three on the other, guns

ready to belch lead at the two-foot cylinder housing the "radio-control mechanism."

The chief stayed behind with me. As fast as he could load his revolver, he fired at the turret of a head. But no result was apparent. Hundreds of bullets had been fired at the iron man by now—from the guns of police and a few civilians—with the same lack of result. No armored tank could have been more impervious to gunfire.

"Tons of metal, moved solely by the power of thought!" Klegg had built his man so heavy "to make the demonstration more spectacular."

Well, the demonstration was proving spectacular enough!

"The boys'll get it through the eye-holes," said the chief, stopping his vain firing at last. "Every mother's son of 'em is a marksman. You wait."

By now the iron man was within thirty yards of the windows where the men waited for it. We held our breaths.

Thud. A five-second interlude, agonizingly long, while one great leg lifted ponderously to be set down before the other, the tower of a body swaying slowly back and then inclining forward. Thud. Five seconds again. Thud.

Smash! Bang! A glittering limousine reduced to a tangled mass of wreckage. Crash! A trolley pole snapped off at its base.

How Tuzloff must have been laughing, had he lips to laugh with! Never in life could his distorted mind have compassed a hundredth of the damage a scientist's mistake was granting him in death.

A stabbing flame burst at last from the second-story window on the iron man's left. Another came from the right, converging toward the ghastly, cylindrical head.

There was a wild clanging of bullets on

steel. Slight dents appeared in the cylinder in swift succession, like dents in the surface of a puddle of water in a rain-storm.

"They've got it! They've got it!" shouted the chief.

But they hadn't got it. My simple idea of firing into the eye-holes to break the glass case and spill its contents—heart, brain, salt solution and all—was not going to work. And the next instant the chief saw it too.

There is no doubt that Tuzloff's brain could "hear" the bullets that beat against the monstrous iron body. The shock of these impacts must certainly have sent vibrations to the sound areas of the cortex, in its fluid solution. The "sound" may have been slight; it may have battered terribly against the raw, exposed brain surface; at any rate it was certainly sensed.

With the first indication that here at last was a really efficient and well-directed fire, the iron man stopped in its tracks. It couldn't lower its head to present the blank top of the cylinder to the hail of bullets; there was no neck to bend. It couldn't incline its whole body, save for the slight leaning backward and forward of walking, because of the gyroscopic controls.

But it could—and did—turn around so that its cartoon of a "face" was no longer in danger from the bullets of the men in the windows ahead of it.

Back it came, over the red road it had traveled. Back directly toward the chief and myself. And now the chief began firing again, slowly, taking careful aim. But the eye-holes were small; the two-foot cylinder was moving in a difficult arc; and the only light was that from electric signs and the few street lamps the giant had left unbroken. No bullet hit near the mark.

Both ponderous arms extended slowly

toward us. The clanking pincers stretched wide, then lunged in our direction.

We ran.

Fifty feet away we stopped and looked back. The iron terror, we saw, was still stubbornly following us. But—we saw something else.

Behind the iron man, keeping pace with it and so near it would have crushed him had it fallen over backward, was a blue-clad figure. And this figure was swinging a coil of rope picked up in one of the department stores.

It was the blond youngster who had ridden in the chief's car.

"Doyle!" muttered the chief. "But what's he up to? Does he think he can trip that thing with rope? It would snap rope like thread!"

But it seemed that was not the blond young giant's idea.

Deliberately he drew still closer to the crashing iron monster. He started whirling his noose, awkwardly, inexpertly, but managing to keep the loop fairly wide-spread. He cast it—and cast it upward. The cast failed, but the chief and I gasped as we noted his target.

He was trying to lasso the cylindrical head.

"But what will he do if he succeeds, eh?" snapped the chief. "That is, if it's possible for him to succeed—and not be smashed like a potato-bug in the trying."

I shook my head. It was beyond me. Then both of us hopped back a few hasty steps. The iron man was pursuing us like a slow-moving avalanche, relentlessly, steadily, everything else but our destruction seeming for the moment to be forgotten by it.

Or was it *my* destruction the thing wanted? Had the naked, diabolical eyeballs, glaring through one or other of the head-holes, recognized me as a friend of Klegg's? Had the brain behind the eyes

realized that I knew of its existence, and decided that I must be crushed before the other work of destruction could be resumed? It was more than possible.

At any rate the iron man appeared just then to have no target in mind but us. And we let it be so. Our backward progress was deliberately kept slow enough so that the clanging pincers were constantly within a few yards of us. For, as the chief said: "Looks like our play now is to keep it occupied till Doyle can do—whatever it is he's trying to do."

Again the blond youngster, Doyle, made an awkward cast with his loop. This time the noose settled clumsily around the head. Doyle drew it tight.

"And now what?" I breathed, staring wide-eyed at the man in the monster's tracks.

"Back!" roared the chief.

I barely made it. I'd been almost fatally interested in the maneuvers of Doyle. And while I was watching them, the iron man had got almost too close. I'll swear the pincers fanned my face as they swept downward.

**F**ROM our next halting-place we turned to look again. And then our hearts seemed to stop in our breasts. At least mine did; and the open mouth and stertorous breathing of the chief, as he stared at his man, indicated that he was as appalled and fascinated as I was.

For Doyle was starting to climb his rope, hand over hand, toward the iron man's head.

Foot by foot he progressed, scaling the sheer cliff of the metal giant's back. With each forward sway, he stopped. Evidently in those seconds it was all he could do to hang on. In each backward leaning he hauled himself up a bit more. He got to within four feet of the base of the head, within which he innocently sup-

posed was a soulless bit of radio mechanism. Three feet. And still we couldn't divine what purpose was behind his daring.

And then the vast iron thing stopped, as though at last aware of the clinging, puny creature on its back. But it couldn't be aware of it! No nerves to feel. No ears to hear. Unless the scraping of Doyle's heavy shoes had carried through the metal to the brain in the case? But that was utterly improbable.

Nevertheless, the thing *did* know, suddenly, that something was on its back. And I believe I know now how that could be.

The eyes of the chief and myself, and of every soul within range, were focussed on Doyle. In every face must have been stamped the same agonizing tensity I felt on my own as I watched his perilous ascent up the moving metal cliff, with the ponderous arms swinging within inches of brushing him off at every step the monster took. The glaring eyeballs in the head, I think, noted that uniformity of gaze. The satanic intelligence behind them must have divined its cause.

Anyhow, the iron man paused, half turned, then began to back with regular, machine-like steps up over the broad sidewalk and straight toward the stone wall of the nearest building.

"Drop!" bellowed the chief, his face death-white. "Doyle—drop!"

But Doyle, it seemed, had no intention of dropping. He clung all the tighter, like a climber on a tree trunk in a gale of wind, while the iron man backed nearer and nearer to the fatal wall.

"Jump!" commanded the chief.

But again Doyle disobeyed; perhaps he could not hear. And deathly silence fell on those of us who watched—a silence broken only by the crash of the iron feet as they thudded on the sidewalk.

The picture will be etched on my brain till I die.

A street lamp gleamed from a pole near by. It flared into the vacant eye-holes on a level with them and only a few feet away. It showed in every detail the clanging metal monster backing toward the building wall to crush the man on its back, meanwhile throwing that gallant figure, struggling to keep its hold on the jerking rope, into deep shadow.

But Doyle was doing more than merely struggle to keep his grip. He was still inching higher.

A pendulum swing of the rope brought him a little to one side, and we saw that only a foot separated him now from the shallow flat terrace formed by the top of the body-cylinder around the smaller cylinder of the head.

Doyle's fingers caught the edge of the shallow terrace. He let go of the rope—

Crash!

The mountainous bulk had smashed against the wall. Stone chips flew from the grinding surface where Doyle had clung.

And Doyle? He was on the terrace of the "shoulders", clinging at last to the goal he had set himself. But his left foot was dangling at a sickening angle.

FOR an instant we saw him cling motionless. His face in the light of the street lamp was green. But he stuck, hugging the two-foot cylinder of a head as a lineman hugs a telegraph pole. And at last he began to move, inch by inch, to conclude the task he had so heroically begun.

Inch by inch he started to swarm around the cylinder toward the front of it. Again the great hulk of iron beneath him banged against the stone wall. The shock was terrific, but Doyle stayed.

His legs clamped more firmly around

the head, he drew himself squarely in front of the "face"—and thus at last had the bull's-eye so close that it couldn't possibly be missed.

He jerked his gun from its holster, leveled it into an eye-hole. . . .

A half-yell, such as even the agony of his crushed foot had not sufficed to wring from him, came from his pallid lips. And then he seemed to turn to stone. Of all the mob, I alone knew the reason.

What must have been his horror when his eyes, sighting into the cavernous head, saw the fiendish eyeballs glaring out of the glass case, returning stare for stare? No radio mechanism, but disembodied human eyes! For of course he must have seen them. The street-light the monster was facing surely shone in enough to reveal them.

Turned to stone! It is a hackneyed description, but it is the most exact I can think of to apply to the way he continued inactive, paralyzed in mid-course. And while he clung there, revolver leveled at the glass case in the iron man's head but with his nerveless finger refusing to pull the trigger, one of the great arms started to sweep slowly up toward him.

"Doyle . . . Doyle . . . Doyle," whispered the chief by my side. I believe he thought he was shouting it. "Doyle . . . look out . . . Doyle. . . ."

Not more than five seconds could have been required for the balanced weights in the iron torso to draw up that grim, claw-tipped arm. But it seemed like five hours. And throughout that time, when the night itself seemed to be holding its breath, Doyle hung still.

The arm curved in on itself. The gi-

gantic pincers opened wide like the jaws of a steam shovel. They closed. . . .

There was a single shot as Doyle's muscles finally obeyed his frantic brain. Simultaneously with the shot a terrible scream came from his lips.

The ponderous arm straightened jerkily; stopped; moved convulsively again, for all the world like the limb of a wounded living creature. Then it hung still, as hangs the arm of a leaning derrick. And suspended in midair, writhing feebly in the clasp of the murderous pincers, was Doyle.

For a moment we could only stand and gape at the struggling figure hanging high over our heads. Then a dozen of us began fighting for the privilege of being the first to climb the trailing rope and rescue him.

We eased him out of the awful clutch—a thing made possible only by the fact that his shot had smashed the case and the brain a bare instant before the claws could clamp with their full force—and lowered him gently to the street.

"He'll live," said a doctor who had fought his way through the crowd to bend over the badly crushed man. "He'll spend the next few months in a plaster cast. But he'll live."

"And he'll get some nice, shiny medals for this, too," said the chief gruffly.

Doyle grinned weakly up at us. His lips moved. We bent to hear what he had to say. Some heroic statement that would ring down the years? "I only did my duty?" Something like that?

"Trade somebody the medals . . . for a cigarette," was what he whispered.

