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by FREDRIC BROWN

*Emperor of the World? Why  
be a cheapskate? There was  
simply no limit to the pros-  
pects of the man who had—*

# THE POWER

**T**HE Power came to Larry Snell suddenly and unexpectedly, out of nowhere.

How and why it came to him, he never learned. It just came; that's all.

It could have happened to a nicer guy. Snell was a small-time crook — when he thought he could get away with stealing — but the bulk of his income, such as it was, came from selling numbers racket tickets and peddling marijuana to adolescents. He was fattish and

sloppy, with little close-set eyes that made him look almost as mean as he really was.

His only redeeming virtue was cowardice. It had kept him from committing crimes of violence.

He was, that night, talking to a bookie from a tavern telephone booth, arguing whether a bet he'd placed by phone that afternoon had been on the nose or across the board. Finally, giving up, he growled, "Drop dead," and slammed down the receiver. He

thought nothing of it until the next day when he learned that the bookie *had* dropped dead . . . while talking on the telephone . . . at just about the time of their conversation.

This gave Larry Snell food for thought.

He was not an uneducated man; he knew what a whammy was. In fact, he'd tried whammies before, but they'd never worked for him. Had something changed? It was worth trying. Carefully he made out a list of twenty people whom, for one reason or another, he hated. He telephoned them one at a time — spacing the calls over the course of a week — and told each of them to drop dead.

They did. All of them.

It was not until the end of that week that he discovered that what he had was not simply the whammy, but the Power. He was talking to a dame, a *top* dame, a stripteuse working in a top nightclub and making twenty or forty times his own income, and he had said, "Honey, come up to my room after the last show, huh?"

She did.

It staggered him, because he'd been kidding. Rich men and handsome playboys were after her, and she'd fallen for a casual, not even seriously intended, proposition from Larry Snell.

Did he have the Power? He tried it the next morning, before

she left him. He asked her how much money she had with her, and then told her to give it to him. She did, and it was several hundred dollars.

He was in business.

By the end of the next week he was rich. He had made himself that way by borrowing money from everyone he knew — including slight acquaintances who were fairly high in the hierarchy of the underworld and therefore quite solvent — and then telling them to forget it. He moved from his fleabag pad to a penthouse apartment atop the swankiest hotel in town. It was a bachelor apartment, but he slept there alone only seldom, and then only for purposes of recuperation.

**I**T was a nice life. Even so it took a few weeks of it to make Snell realize that he was wasting the Power. Why shouldn't he really use what he had? Why not take things over — the country first and then the world — make himself the most powerful dictator in history? Why shouldn't he have and own everything, including a harem instead of a dame a night? Why shouldn't he have an army to enforce the fact that his slightest wish would be everyone else's highest law? If his commands were obeyed over the telephone, certainly they would be obeyed if he used radio and television.

All he had to do was pay for (pay for? Simply demand!) a universal TV network that would let him be heard by everyone everywhere. Or almost everyone. He could take over when he had only a simple majority behind him. The others would come into line later.

But this would be a Big Deal, the biggest one ever swung, and he decided to take his time planning it so there would be no possibility of his making a careless mistake.

He decided to spend a few days alone, out of town and away from everybody. He had planning to do.

He chartered a plane to take him to a relatively uncrowded part of the Catskills, and from an inn (which he took over simply by telling the other guests to leave) he started taking long walks alone, thinking and dreaming. He found

a favorite spot. It was a small hill in a valley surrounded by mountains. The scenery was magnificent. He did most of his thinking there, and found himself becoming more and more elated and euphoric as he began to see that it could and would work.

Dictator, hell! He'd have himself crowned Emperor. Emperor of the World! Why not? Who could defy a man with the Power? The Power to make anyone obey any command that he gave them, up to and including—

"Drop dead!" he shouted from the hilltop, in sheer vicious exuberance, not caring whether or not anyone or anything was within range of his voice . . .

A teenage boy and a teenage girl found him there the next day.

They hurried back to report the dead man they had found on the top of Echo Hill.

— FREDRIC BROWN

