

The Magazine of Prophetic Fiction

WONDER Stories

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ON THE COVER THIS MONTH

taken from Arthur G. Stangland's "Fatal Equation" we see the mathematician Macmillan escaping from his accusers by stepping into the time vortex. Almost instantly he vanishes.

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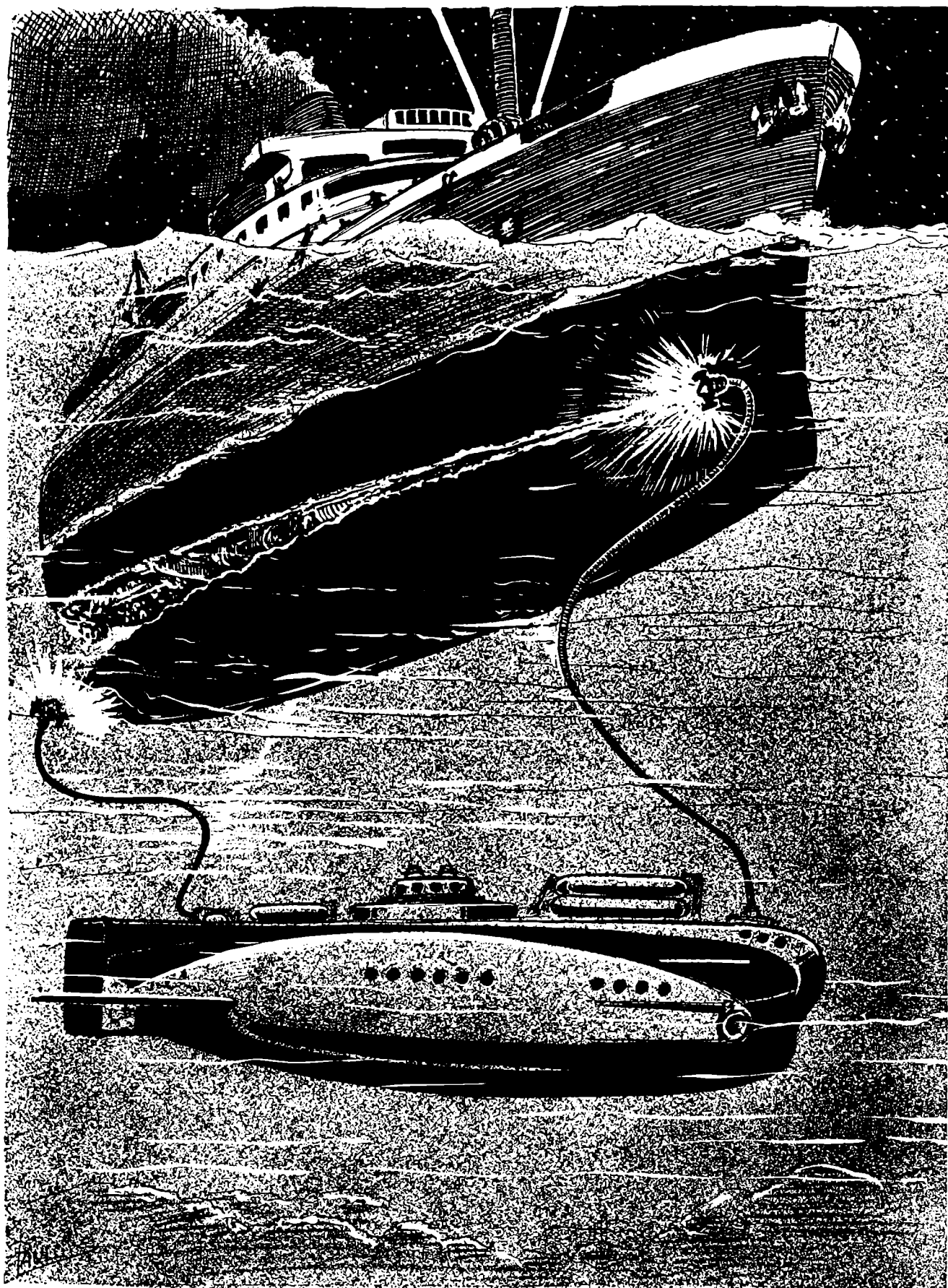
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(Illustration by Paul)

"They went through the sheathing of the hull like butter. Just as we cast off the whole bottom of the boat dropped sizzling. We had to dive fast to miss being crushed."

REVOLT OF THE SCIENTISTS

By NATHAN SCHACHNER

● Cornelius Van Wyck yawned, shook his tousled blond hair, and struggled to an upright position. Carter, his very English personal man, was standing patiently before the bed, a silver tray in his hands, uttering discreet coughs at stated intervals.

"Eh, it's you, Carter!" his sleepily indignant master exclaimed. "Go 'way. My head! What a party!" He gently sank back into the pillows.

"Yes, sir," Carter said imperturbably, showing no signs of retreating. "Your breakfast, sir—and it's noon, sir."

"Eh, what's that? The young man bolted upright again, sleep banished from consternation-filled eyes. "I've a blankety date to speak at the Explorers' Club Luncheon at twelve-thirty sharp."

"I have taken the liberty to engage a taxicab for you, sir. The driver is waiting down in the lobby."

"Good old Carter!" Van Wyck approved, his mouth full of buttered toast and hasty gulps of steaming coffee.

Carter coughed delicately. His master looked up sharply; he knew that cough.

"Out with it; get it off your chest. I've got to be out of here in three shakes of a lamb's tail."

"Hardly worth troubling you about, sir," the man deprecated, and at the same time lifted a tabloid newspaper by a corner as though it were a loathsome snake for Van Wyck to view. "It's this thing, sir. I thought you might be interested."

Cornelius stared at the violent front page of the *Daily Tabloid* and promptly choked upon a particularly enormous piece of toast.

His own rather smudged visage grinned back at him in half page display, encased in screaming twenty-four-point headlines:

"MILLIONAIRE SPORTSMAN DEFIES RACKETEERS! PLEDGES MILLIONS TO WAR ON LIQUOR COMBINE."

And in slightly smaller type:

"Cornelius Van Wyck, internationally known polo player and leader of the successful Mt. Everest Expedition, when interviewed by our reporter at the Byrd reception in honor of his homecoming, professed himself shocked at the conditions existing in the United States. He declared that—"

The lion of the Byrd reception dashed the picture-news-sheet violently to the floor, and groaned.

"Damn! I might have known the fellow was a reporter. It's evident, Carter, that I can't stand bathtub gin any more."

"Yes, sir."

"And further, old thing," the young man developed his grievance heatedly, "I've been made to look a perfect

● Albert Einstein recently called upon the world's twenty-five best minds to organize to settle some of the world's problems. Technocracy hints that technicians should take over the operation of all industries. Do these significant statements mean that science is now emancipating itself from the domination of business men and militarists? At the moment we do not know. But we do know that men of science are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the use made of their intellectual output.

Certainly therefore a time may come when scientists will be forced to break away entirely from law and order and try, as Mr. Schachner shows in this marvelous story, to create by illegal means a new world, "nearer to their heart's desire."

fool. The whole country'll be laughing at me this morning with their breakfast cereal."

"Yes, sir."

Van Wyck looked at the man suspiciously, but his face was a graven image. Not a muscle twitched.

Then Carter coughed delicately.

"Have you given any thought, sir, to the possibility that the gentry described as 'racketeers' may take your—er—vinous remarks with an undue amount of seriousness?"

Cornelius stared long at his man, then his rueful face brightened perceptibly.

"Come now, Carter, do you really think it possible?" There was an ungodly amount of hopefulness in the question.

Before the butler could reply, there was a tinkling sound from the lobby phone. Carter lifted the instrument and said: "Mr. Van Wyck's apartment."

Cornelius dangled a slippered foot against the side of the bed and stared out of the French window at the roofs of Manhattan and the green of Gramercy Park far below.

● Carter turned from the receiver: "A gentleman to see you, sir. Answers to the name of Peter Dribble."

"More of those damned reporters," said his master violently. "Tell switchboard to send him away. I'm not at home; won't be for the next year and a half."

"He says he has a letter addressed to you from a chap named Adam Roode."

Van Wyck paused in the act of pulling on a sock.

"Adam Roode!" There was astonishment in his voice. "Tell him to come up, by all means."

"Might it not be a trap, sir?" Carter suggested. "This Adam Roode—"

The young millionaire laughed. "You are an insular

blighter, old bean. Every one else in the world has heard of Roode. The world's greatest scientist in atomic physics. Winner of the Nobel Award and all that. Met him once or twice when dear old Princeton inveigled a fat endowment out of me for a Chair in Physics to be filled by him. Quit it cold two years ago to head the Research Department of General Power Company at Schenectady. I wonder what he wants from me now? Money for some fool idea, I suppose."

Van Wyck was fully dressed by the time the visitor was ushered in, all thought of the luncheon appointment driven from his mind. Peter Dribble proved to be a tall young man with a frank smile and a cordial handshake.

"I'm Roode's research assistant," he said. "The note no doubt is self-explanatory. I know nothing at all about it."

Cornelius wondered a bit at the man's haste in warding off questions as he ran his finger under the sealed flap, ripped it open and extracted a sheet of notepaper bearing Roode's monogram.

There were just a few lines in strong, angular handwriting.

"My dear Van Wyck," it read, "it is of the utmost consequence that I see you at once. For reasons which will be apparent at our meeting, it is impossible for me to come to you. You will therefore follow the bearer, Peter Dribble. Ask no questions. Speed and secrecy are vital."

The last sentence was heavily underscored, and the signature that followed was authentic. Van Wyck had seen examples of it in the formal correspondence relating to the endowment.

For a moment the young millionaire was staggered and what's more, a bit resentful. The abrupt imperatives of the note, the utter lack of explanation, the calm assurance that he would drop everything and come—was the man mad?

"What the devil does this rigamarole mean?" he exploded to the waiting young man.

"You may remember I warned you I know nothing—nothing at all," that worthy stated pointedly. Then his face sobered. "It's important, damnably important. You know old Roode. Trust him—and me."

Van Wyck hesitated, thought of his awaited speech at the Explorers' Club, and a refusal trembled on his lips. Then suddenly the mystery of the affair, Roode's undoubted prominence, the lure of beckoning adventure that had led him to the four corners of the earth, brought impulsive utterance.

"I'll come. Half a minute."

For the first time in a normally glacial existence, Carter stammered as he helped his young master into his expensive topcoat and handed him his gloves. "B-b-but, sir, you don't know this gentleman. How do you know—?"

Cornelius slipped a small but deadly automatic into his pocket and was already halfway to the door.

"Let's go, Dribble." To Carter: "Keep the diggings warm against my return." And he was gone, young Dribble treading on his heels, leaving a very much dismayed English butler gaping vacantly at a slammed door.

They emerged from the ornate lobby into the street. Dribble gripped him by the arm and steered him across to the park side where a small speedy sedan of excellent make was parked. Half a block down, fronting them, the noise of a self-starter emanated from a long lean touring car, whose sides were completely enswathed in curtains.

Dribble broke into a sudden run, dragging the startled young man by the arm. He wrenched the door of the sedan violently open, shoved Cornelius half-sprawling into the interior, jumped headlong into the driver's seat, slammed the door, stepped on the starter, and meshed into gear, all almost in one flowing motion.

Behind, the touring car was roaring into swift acceleration.

"What the hell!" Cornelius ejaculated, twisting half around to his companion. "If this is a plant, young fellow—" In spite of a slithering turn round a sharp corner, the gun muzzle in his hand was steady—

● Dribble twisted into Third Avenue on two wheels and narrowly missed a coal truck.

"They're after us!" he yelled. "They've gotten wind of us somehow."

Van Wyck glanced back as Dribble squirmed in and out of traffic and elevated pillars. The touring car was two blocks behind. A spurt of orange flame stabbed forward. A light sedan swerved suddenly out of their path, crashed crumpling into an iron pillar. Cops' whistles shrilled. Then Dribble shot deftly into Twenty-Sixth Street, went north on Second Avenue. The touring car was nowhere to be seen.

Van Wyck took a long breath, his eyes dancing.

"For a scientist, Dribble," he spoke admiringly, "you're rather a competent hand. But why did those birds try to wash us out; were they after you or me?"

"Both," Dribble answered laconically, and settled down to fast, steady driving. In the Seventies he turned east again. At the end of the street there was a ruinous abandoned dock; beyond it the East River flowed dark and sullen.

He steered wide and turned sharply to the right, up a runway onto the sidewalk. An old abandoned brewery loomed forbiddingly above them, its dark brick grimed with age, every window nailed up with rotting boards; ruinous, like the dock, the river on which it fronted. Though the Prohibition Amendment had been repealed two years already—since 1935, to be exact—this particular rickety structure had never been restored to its former use.

Van Wyck glanced sharply at his companion, hand gripping the gun in the depths of his coat pocket. He didn't like the looks of things.

The car had barely slowed into second when the great doors of the brewery, once wide-spreading for the resounding hoofs of powerful Percherons and the banging wheels of barrel-filled wagons, slid silently open.

It was dark inside, pitch black. The car lurched forward. Van Wyck cried out sharply, pressed his gun against the driver's side. He was sure now it was a plant. But the great doors had slid close behind them, and the place sprang suddenly into soft illumination.

Dribble was grinning. "You might as well put your gun away," he said. "I'm harmless; and Roode is waiting for you."

The young millionaire glanced warily around. To his surprise they seemed to be in a garage, a small, walled-in garage at that, housing four other cars of varying makes, and one huge enclosed Mack truck.

Van Wyck, acting always on instinct, suddenly dropped his gun back into his pocket.

"I'm trusting you," he said simply.

Dribble made no comment but switched off the ignition and opened the door of the sedan. Van Wyck followed him out silently. At the blank inner wall Dribble pressed his thumb against a tiny crack. A violet light enveloped them both.

"Photo-electric cell," the scientist explained. "It's transmitting our picture to the other side of the wall so they can check up on us."

Van Wyck was dumbfounded. What was it all about any way? But he only said: "And if we're not the right people?"

"That wall can be charged electrically with fifty thousand volts."

"Good Lord!"

But evidently the inspection was satisfactory, for the solid seeming wall slid back into a recess, and they stepped through.

Van Wyck glanced swiftly around. What a strange place Adam Roode had picked out for a meeting place. The vast interior was still redolent of forgotten beer and musty ale. The great vats of copper, the long, serpentine refrigerating pipes were still intact, and strangely enough, shining and spotless. They had been cleaned quite recently. He saw now that the entrance garage was also a recent addition, a toy inset in the great echoing space, its walls of lusterless steel.

Another new partition divided what had been offices of old from the rest of the plant. Far off in one corner, he beheld a dim maze of machinery, actively at work, judging from the intermittent sparks in the gloom and the faint hum that pervaded the place.

But he had no further time for visual investigation. A door opened in the office partition, and a man walked out toward them. The dim concealed lighting disclosed a spare angular Yankee with Roman nose, iron-gray hair and close-cropped mustache. The shrewd kindly eyes twinkled as he held out his hand.

"My judgment of you was right, then, Van Wyck." There were remnants of a nasal drawl in his voice. "I felt you couldn't resist my note."

"No more I could, Mr. Roode," Cornelius acknowledged. "But now would you please explain the meaning—"

The famous physicist held up his hand. "All in due time." Then to his assistant: "Good work, Dribble. Any trouble?"

"Plenty, sir." And the young man proceeded to tell of the touring car that had machine-gunned them.

Adam Roode turned very grave and grim. He stared thoughtfully at the distant machinery. "That means that in spite of our precautions some inkling of what we're up to has leaked out. Well, we're prepared for war; we're not afraid."

Then he smiled: "Come in, Van Wyck, I want you to meet the others."

CHAPTER II

Agreed!

● It was a very curious young man who walked into the spacious well-lit room beyond the partition with its comfortable fittings and numerous deep easy chairs. There were a dozen men seated in relaxed attitudes, and the air was hazy with pipe smoke. It reminded Cornelius of a scene in one of his own clubs.

But as the men came to their feet at his entrance, that impression was immediately dissipated. These keen look-

ing chaps with their quick, lithe movements, intellectual faces and musicianly, competent hands bore not the faintest resemblance to the stodgy, well-fed clubmen he knew. There was a Jap among them too, as well as others of distinctly foreign features.

Roode waved his hand around all-embracingly.

"My colleagues. Cornelius Van Wyck! He's scaled Mt. Everest, flown over the North Pole, descended deeper than any other man in a submarine." His smile broadened. "He's also scandalously wealthy. Now this," he pointed to a lean sinewy man with a slight stoop, "is Stewart Peasley. He's Chief Chemist of the Du Rivière Chemical Company. He's guilty of that new explosive, *dynol*, you know."

And so on down the group. Lee Randolph, Southern and fair-haired, Chief Engineer of the far-flung American Supermetals Corporation; Jonas Harmon, puritanically grim, mining and oil expert of the Lafayette Coal and Fuel Co. There was the great English mathematician, Lord Wollaston, coolly elegant; Herbert Grace of Galilee Steel; Rudolph Chess, the German physiological psychologist with moon face and nearsighted eyes behind spectacles. Also the greatest living authority on radio-communication, Alfred Silversmith, who was indispensable to the gigantic American Radio Corporation. His dark lean face and fiery eyes betrayed his Jewish ancestry. And Dr. Meyran, surgeon, whose skill with the glittering radio-knives he had invented was positively diabolical; Lake Forrest, the submarine technician; Pat McCarthy, Rabelaisian Irishman whose gusty wit was proverbial, ranking expert of General Aviation. Then finally, bowing and smiling, Dr. Kuniyoshi, noted biologist and bacteriologist.

Van Wyck's bewilderment grew as each man acknowledged his dazed salutation with a smile and a handshake. He had heard of these men, every one of them. Who for that matter hadn't? They were headliners; the world's greatest in their respective fields. What had brought them together in such utter secrecy and in such strange surroundings? So far as he knew, neither Wollaston nor Kuniyoshi were supposed to be in the United States. And just where did he fit into this stellar aggregation?

Roode noticed his inward turmoil and said gravely: "Explanations are in order. I am a scientist; so are my colleagues. We've spent our lives in following truth, scientific truth. We've probed nature's secrets, invented, discovered, and without a thought of self, given the fruits of our researches to our employers, to mankind."

He paused a moment and his colleagues nodded slow agreement.

"I for one," Roode went on, "considered my responsibility at an end when I published my research, turned my invention over to my employers. The use or misuse of the fruit of my brain did not concern me. That was the affair of business men, manufacturers, industrialists, politicians; *my* devotion was to science, pure science."

"We all felt that way," Randolph murmured.

"That was the disgrace of it," said Roode, addressing himself to Cornelius. "It's hard to say just when my viewpoint changed. During the first years of the depression I remember feeling vaguely uncomfortable. Here we were, the scientists of the world, tapping nature's resources with accelerated pace, yet somehow, the world of men, the ordinary man in the street, did not seem to be benefiting. Grace's new defensive armor, Peasley's pow-

erful explosive *dynol*, Forrest's improved submarine, McCarthy's stratosphere planes, what are they all being used for?"

Van Wyck, intent and interested, grinned wryly.

"I know the answer to that one," he remarked. "War, more war, and lots of it. I free-lanced for China in one of those stratosphere planes not so long ago."

Roode nodded. "Exactly. Half the world is now at war, and we invented the weapons that make its tremendous destructiveness possible. Take Randolph's improved machinery, my own slight tapping of atomic power; as a result production has leaped ahead, and as a stranger result, no one has the money to buy the products of our prolific machines. Then there is the general lawlessness, the rise of rackets to a dominating position in our political and industrial life. No one seems able to cope with them. I knew something was wrong, but just couldn't put my finger on it."

Harmon interrupted. "I knew the answer," he said in dour tones. "At least the newspapers gave it to me. It was Prohibition! Repeal Prohibition and the rackets it brought in its train would disappear with it. Everybody would be prosperous; all war would cease; the golden age would come."

"I had some such idea myself," Roode acknowledged. "But then Prohibition *has* been repealed, and it doesn't seem to make much difference. The bootleg racket has become even stronger. There is more unlawful liquor being sold in the United States now than before 1935. And the men who run the racket are practically running the nation. Then one day it dawned on me."

"As it had dawned on me years ago," Silversmith said passionately. "But I was a voice crying in the wilderness."

● Roode turned to him earnestly. "Don't misunderstand me. I'm not attempting to take any credit for this. I'm just explaining the genesis of this meeting to young Van Wyck. I saw, as in a blinding light, that we, the scientists, were responsible. We blithely discovered our truths, forged our weapons, and then just as blithely turned them over to incompetents, muddleheads, greed-filled industrialists—evil, ambitious men. We gave dangerous, destructive toys to children. It is too late to recall our gifts, but we can fight fire with fire. It is our moral duty. The politicians of the world, the business men, won't help. The former are the creatures of the dominant racket combines, the latter think that the Manchurian war, the South American embroglios, are God-given outlets for their products.

"I set to work. At various scientific meetings I sounded out those I thought might be receptive to my plans. To my great surprise, Van Wyck, I found most of those I approached more than receptive; they were positively enthusiastic. The feeling of discontent had been widespread. For half a year we worked quietly, and this is the result." He smiled and waved a hand around. "I may safely say that we have a goodly portion of the world's brains within these four walls, which by the way, are the gift of a brewer friend of mine who is unable to reopen because of the liquor racket."

Van Wyck was impressed, but puzzled.

"Your aims are admirable," he pointed out. "But concretely, what can you do?"

"Fight fire with fire, as I said before," Roode retorted

promptly. "There is no time for political or educational action. The world is suffering from cancerous sores, and we are surgeons who must lance them, one by one."

"You mean—"

"That our warfare with the ills of society will be entirely extra-legal. We are the spearhead of science; all its known weapons are in our arsenal. There are others too, invented by various of our men, that we have decided not to publish to the world. We shall use every resource; we shall strike hard and ruthlessly and with the utmost secrecy. That is half the battle. Perhaps by the time we are through the world will be a half decent place to live in."

His eyes burned with strange fires. Van Wyck looked slowly around the circle. In every eye, even the German's behind his spectacles, there gleamed a responsive enthusiasm, a certain grim crusading spirit.

The millionaire explorer stared at them with a strange mixture of incredulity and awe. These men of thought, of science, with slight, under-trained bodies, attempting to become men of action, trying to be hard and ruthless in a world of hard and ruthless men. Did they know what they were up against? Then suddenly: Why not? Hard clean brains have always proved a match against brute strength and muddled thinking.

"By God!" he said aloud, involuntarily, "I think you can do it!"

"We *know* we can!"

"But where do I fit in? I'm not much of a chap on science, you know."

Roode smiled. "You have other qualities; just as important in their way. That front page spread in the *Daily Tabloid* gave me the idea."

Van Wyck groaned. He regretted bitterly his bibulous expansiveness.

But Roode continued surprisingly. "It showed me you were one of us at heart. True, you mentioned only the liquor combine, but such indignation against world conditions no doubt extends to every form of injustice. We are all of us only moderately wealthy men; our resources have been taxed to the utmost for the sketchiest of preparations. We shall require literally millions. You have proffered them for war against only a minor ailment; we accept for the greater program."

Van Wyck's mouth opened, and closed again. The cool insolence of the man, disposing of his fortune like that. For a moment he felt unreasoning rage; he wanted to shout his refusal to these fanatics with their grandiose mad schemes. Don Quixotes, that's what they were, tilting against windmills! *His* money forsooth!

He started to shake his head in a decided negative when Randolph broke in: "I'm afraid Roode hasn't quite stated our program in full. Possibly he feared to prejudice you from the start, but the truth must eventually come out, and you may as well know it now. We intend to do more than fight isolated evils, right certain wrongs. That would be unworthy of clear-minded scientists. Attacking symptoms has never yet eradicated roots."

He paused a moment, and there was a deathly stillness in the room. Cornelius had an uneasy notion that it would be better for him not to hear the rest. But the fair-haired engineer went on inexorably.

"We may start on superficial sores, to try out our hand, to clear the way, but our ultimate aim is—by legal or illegal means, by downright force, if necessary, to take

over the management of the world, its industries, its mechanism, and run it as only scientists know how—for the benefit of all humanity.”

Van Wyck gasped. “But that,” he said, “is—”

“Technocracy!” Randolph interrupted coldly. There was an uneasy stirring in the room. The fatal word had been spoken aloud.

No one living in the years 1932 and 1933, which marked the first wide-spread public interest in that cult, could possibly have dreamt what anathema lay concealed in that innocuous word for the year 1937. The rabid war and post-war psychoses against such red rags to unreasoning hatred as *I. W. W.*, *Huns*, *Bolshevism*, *Communism*, possessed not a tithe of the intensity of the hysterics excited by the mere mention of the term, *Technocracy*.

● At first it had swept the country; the man in the street, in the ditch, on the farm, in the lumber camps, all spoke with assumed authority on the work of Howard Scott and his associates. The American public being particularly susceptible to sudden crazes, (vide the mah-jong and crossword puzzles of yesteryears), the name *Technocracy*, without clear understanding, ran through the nation like fire through dried stubble.

The depression-weary, the unemployed, lifted up their hands to it like unto a new religion. In vain did the engineers and scientists who had originated the plan exhort; they had unleashed irresistible forces. Spontaneously, all over the land, banners arose, bearing the magic word. Hordes flocked to them, started the march on Washington. Like snowballs they grew with countless accretions. The whole country seemed on the march.

Inevitably there was rioting, some looting. The troops were mustered. There were clashes, minor at first, then more and more serious. Then suddenly, there was revolution, fighting on vast scale between disciplined troops, trained to shoot on order, and fanatic-eyed multitudes, crying the shibboleth that was to bring them food for their bellies, clothes for their backs.

When it was over, the thousands of dead buried, the hordes driven into the ground, the business men, the financiers, and therefore the government, frothed at the mouth at the mere mention of the dreaded word. Heavy penalties were decreed for any one daring to espouse Technocracy, even academically. The original organization was scattered; dead, or repentant.

That is why Van Wyck, wealthy man of leisure, whose interests had not given him many contacts with the inequalities of the world, reacted conventionally to the word.

“Now I *know* you are mad,” he cried.

Roode smiled strangely. “Look around at the men here. You know their achievements. Are they *all* mad? Don’t adopt the opinion of an unthinking world without inquiry. The ideas of Technocracy are logical, coherent. They represent a way out of the disorder and suffering of our civilization. It is science set to cure the ills that came about through the misuse of science. We feel our competence to put them into effect, but the world will not listen. Therefore we are driven to underground methods. Let me explain in detail.”

And he proceeded to overwhelm a slightly bewildered young millionaire with facts, more facts; with theories, with energy determinants, with concrete examples. Van Wyck replied with all the arguments at his command. Whereupon the others in the room took a hand.

Back and forth the discussion raged; hours of heated wrangling; faces became flushed, smoke filled the room in thick layers, men’s throats were dry and parched. Steadily Van Wyck was driven from one untenable position to another, until finally, the young millionaire flung his hands outward in gesture of surrender.

“Gentlemen, you have convinced me. I see now that there are other and greater adventures than the ones I have been accustomed to. I agree—on one condition.”

The room was suddenly silent.

“And that is—?”

“That I become one of your band. True, I am not a scientist; but I *am* a man of action; and something tells me that before you are through, you’ll have considerable need for such a one.”

Roode let his eyes travel over his colleagues. One would never have dreamed they had been arguing heatedly for hours. They were relaxed in their chairs, placidly puffing away at pipes and cigars. Each nodded casual approbation in turn.

“Agreed then!” His voice was calm.

Just as matter-of-factly Cornelius said: “Tomorrow I shall deposit to a special account in my bank the sum of five million dollars, to be drawn against by myself or by Roode. That will provide for contingencies in the event something happens to one of us in the course of our—operations.”

“Good!” Roode commented. “We shall start at once. This will be our headquarters. Even the owner doesn’t know what use I am making of it. Its location, our membership, our aims, our very existence must be kept secret. That is vital!”

“How about that little tête-à-tête Dribble and I had with our friends the machine-gunners?”

Dribble spoke up: “I’ve been thinking about it. They must have been after you. The liquor crowd thought you meant it.”

● Van Wyck smiled slowly. “I didn’t then, but I do now. Tell you what. If this place is headquarters, it’ll need guarding. I’ll give up my diggings, announce I’m going away for a rest, and install myself here. Carter, my man, will fix me up food, keep house for me generally.” There was a murmur of dissent. “Don’t worry about old Carter. He’s loyal; wild horses couldn’t drag anything out of him. Besides, he’s an excellent shot.”

“I’ll stay with you,” Dribble broke in suddenly.

“Glad to have you,” Cornelius said cordially. He was taking over executive control with a rapidity that astounded, yet rather pleased the scientists. It would give them more time for the purely technical end of their strange war.

“Now for supplies,” Van Wyck continued. “I see you have a truck in the garage. That’s fine. Whatever your chaps need, we’ll order through dummies, have it shipped to scattered points. We’ll pick up our loads at night, run them in here. Got another idea.” He turned to Lake Forrest. “How soon could you get us a submarine? It must be small, speedy, and equipped with all the gadgets.”

Forrest smiled. “In two weeks. I’ll put day and night shifts on it at the plant. I’ve already developed plans; there’ll be some quite new wrinkles.”

“Splendid. I’ll get some soldiers of fortune I know who are down on their luck to dig a tunnel out into the river, with an airlock and all. I’ll rely on you for the

technical end of the construction. That will give us complete secrecy in getting out and in. When they're through, I'll give the workers transportation to the other ends of the earth with a stake, and they'll forget completely. What'll our first job be?"

Dr. Kuniyoshi spoke in soft, hissing syllables. "Let us put an end to the most deplorable war in Manchuria. My country has embarked on an adventure whose end may mean the end of civilization. We must stop her before it is too late."

Van Wyck whistled. That was a large order!

"It is too big for us now," Roode interposed decisively. "We must start on something small."

Kuniyoshi inclined his head. "You are right, honored friend, but we must come to it, we must come to it."

"Why not start on the Liquor Combine?" Cornelius inquired. "Especially as they seem to have opened the ball by starting on us, or on me, I don't know which. They've pretty well got the country by the throat, repeal or no repeal. The legitimate brewers and distillers haven't a chance. Only yesterday morning Ribling's brewery was smashed to bits by a bombing plane that dropped a crate of eggs on it. Thirty people were killed. All because he refused to join up with the combine. It was that incident that was responsible for my—er—brief and well-chosen remarks last night."

Randolph drawled: "The Liquor Racket is no doubt the typical sore afflicting America today. Here you can see it on the chart." He rose slowly, moved with a lazy grace to a large map pinned to the wall of a tiny alcove. "This map," he explained, "shows the energy determinants of the various areas of the country according to our own revised data based on technocratic calculations. The white areas give the figures. But actually, we have only the amount shown by the red shaded areas. A large part of the considerable deficiency, if you will glance at the figures, may be definitely attributed to the machinations of the Liquor Combine."

"Furthermore," said Harmon, "the most dangerous and anti-social of all public enemies is at the head of it. This man who is known even to his own associates only as the Boss, has never been seen by outsiders. If left alone, he will continue with the process of absorbing other illegal rackets until there is no telling what may happen. The fate of our larger plan depends on smashing him and all he stands for."

There was a general ripple of assent. War had been officially declared!

"How do we communicate with each other?" Peasely asked.

Silversmith's dark face lit up.

"For the past five years," he said, "I've been working on a compact portable combination sending and receiving set. About six months ago I had it perfected, and was about to turn it over to American Radio when Roode spoke to me. I saved it for our purposes. It's a very simple affair; flat and not over three inches across. It can be strapped to the chest under your clothing. It will be set for a fixed wave length and have a sending radius of about twenty-five miles."

Suggestion followed suggestion in rapid succession after that. Time and again Van Wyck was astounded at the calm assurance with which these men casually tossed off scientific ideas that seemed to his lay mind positively miraculous. It was midnight by the time they broke up,

plans for the first onslaught already tentatively laid out. It would take a month, however, before all the requisite apparatus could be assembled.

Before they left, small groups at intervals in the waiting sedans, each of which was equipped with a special silencer to muffle the noise of its exhaust, Van Wyck asked one further question of Adam Roode.

"What would you have done if I refused to come in after you had imparted all your secrets?"

The scientist looked at him gravely and steadily before replying. When he did, it was with the air of weighing his words.

"We could not afford to have any one outside our group aware of our plans. We had decided on the procedure. Dr. Meyran would have operated on you to induce partial aphasia. He has developed a remarkable technique for operations of that sort."

CHAPTER III

The Man Known As—

● The man known only as the Boss leaned back in his swivel chair and stared reflectively at the two sullen men before him. He did not look like the accepted idea of a boss racketeer; that portly front and jelly-quivering jowls comported more easily with the success story of a boom-days realtor or a retired manufacturer of widgets. When he laughed, and he was careful to do so frequently, his whole body shook, chortling wheezy sounds gurgled from a fat throat; but somehow there was no mirth to it, no merry glint to the pale blue eyes.

Yet he was head and front of the great Liquor Combine that had sprung full-fashioned from his fertile brain the day the Prohibition Amendment had been repealed. Coming mysteriously from Cleveland, with unlimited funds and no background of lawlessness, he had somehow gained the respectful attention of the panicky "big shots" of the liquor racket, who saw huge profits melting away with the return of legal beer and wines, not to speak of stronger stuff.

He had combined them into one huge organization, with himself as General Manager. He had set up dozens of breweries and distilleries in the fastnesses of remote sections, and then had proceeded systematically to purchase official after official, offering substantial cuts to the important ones. As a result, the Ring's stuff was distributed tax-free; the government lost important revenues, and the legitimate tax-paying brewers and distillers met with unbeatable competition.

But the Boss was not satisfied. He wanted an iron-clad monopoly. Accordingly he offered these outsiders niches in the illegal racket, on conditions. Those who refused, and continued in business, found their trucks highjacked, their plants bombed, and themselves taken for a "ride."

It was a reign of terror of the most ruthless kind, with the various law-enforcement agencies seemingly helpless in the face of it—or bought off.

"Well?" asked the Boss.

"It's just what I've told you before, sir," said the slighter and darker of the two men nervously. He was manager of field operations. "Another one of our boats gone, right off Sandy Hook. The *Mary Gaynor* this time, with a hundred thousand dollars worth of choice French wines on board."

The Boss shifted his enormous bulk slightly.

"You took every precaution?" he said mildly.

The manager's name was John Terry. He had been a noted martinet and disciplinarian while a colonel in the Marines, yet he answered defensively.

"I tried not to overlook a thing. The crew was hand-picked; every man was searched before boarding the vessel. She was equipped with rapid-firers manned by former Coast Guard gunners. A bombing plane met her a hundred miles out, escorted her in. Yet she sank all the same."

The Boss said: "How did it happen? Same as the others?"

The manager answered: "Here is the captain. He can tell you."

The second man, tall and powerfully built, with red, weatherbeaten face, twisted his seaman's cap nervously in his hands.

"I just don't rightly know *what* happened. It was all so sudden-like. There we were, one moment a-sailing along on a calm sea, not a thing in sight, a good hundred-tonner and fit as a fiddle; and the next moment we were dragged down, so help me. Like as if some'un had reached up for us. I had to swim like hell to get out of the suction, and when I was able to turn around, there's nary a sign of the old lady, not a ripple to show where she foundered. Only the seven o' the crew, their heads bobbin', an' swimming furiously."

The captain paused and wiped perspiring forehead with a red bandanna.

"It wasn't so nice, Boss. Fifteen miles take a heap o' powerful swimming, and the plane couldn't've saved more than one or two of us. But just then something comes shootin' out o' the sea, end up, bobs around a bit, and rights itself. It's a raft; a nice aluminum affair with air compartments and tins o' provisions and water lashed on snug and shipshape. We scrambled on board an' floated around until the plane's radio brought a speed boat out after us."

"You may go," the fat man nodded to the sea-faring man. That worthy retired precipitously, glad to be let off so easy.

"You see, sir," said the manager, "it's the same every time. That makes the fourth boat. Take our planes, too, within two weeks, seven of our Montreal planes crashed. I know the pilots; good, sober lads with excellent records. Every mother's son swears his controls were right; the motors carefully overhauled before each trip. Yet the motors stalled suddenly, without even a sputter. The pilots had to take to their chutes."

The Boss let his vast bulk teeter back, stared thoughtfully out of the window at the vast expanse of sky. Through the open door that led to the outer offices, he saw the ordered efficiency of big business. Trim typists worked swiftly at noiseless machines; busy executives dictated into dictaphones, interviewed callers, ruffled through heaps of assorted papers on their desks. A big banking establishment, the casual visitor would have said admiringly; the epitome of big business.

The Boss turned his eyes back again.

"Any ideas?" he asked.

Ex-Colonel Terry grunted. "Not many. There's no question some one is tagging us for destruction. But who is he, and how is he doing it? It sounds impossible. At first I thought it was young Van Wyck. Michaels, head of our Secret Service, gave me a memo on him. Disappeared some two months ago after threatening to make

war on us; and five million dollars was withdrawn from his private account the next day. But—I can't see him on this. They're uncanny, these mysterious attacks."

● The fat man threw his whole weight back and laughed in wheezing gurgles. They were not pleasant to hear. "Let us go into this a bit more carefully," he said when he had recovered himself. He pressed a button under his desk.

"Get me Burns," he spoke into the flat microphone disk on his desk. "I want the financial reports for the last two weeks."

It was not over a minute when a small, mouse-like man walked into the room, a huge portfolio under his arm.

The Boss looked at him. "What were our losses due to accidents during the period?"

The little man, chief of the accounting division, ran a skillful finger down the top sheet in his portfolio.

"One million, three hundred and sixty five thousand dollars," he announced.

"And our total operations?"

"Over fifty seven millions."

"That is all, Burns." The accountant bowed and went quietly out.

"Nothing to worry about yet, eh?"

"No, but if it keeps up—"

The Boss stood up. His height was deceptive; he towered over Terry.

"Even if it were only a dollar's worth that was destroyed, we cannot tolerate it. Whoever was responsible, *must* be hunted down relentlessly. Let me show you more." He pressed a button under his desk. A long shallow compartment shot noiselessly forward. It was full of neatly flattened papers.

He took a bundle out, took off the clips and tossed the first sheet over to Terry. "Look at this. I had Michaels get it together for me."

It was a long sheet of tough bond paper on which was pasted a series of newspaper clippings mostly headlines.

Terry read them:

"MILLIONAIRE POLO-PLAYER VENTURES IN NEW FIELD. COMPETES WITH PROFESSIONALS IN AERIAL DERBY. TAKES SECOND PLACE."

"FAMOUS SPORTSMAN-ADVENTURER ACHIEVES NEW GLORY. PILOTS SUBMARINE TO NEW RECORD DEPTHS."

There were many others, all featuring the reckless, daredevil exploits of one Cornelius Van Wyck, millionaire.

"Certainly," said Terry. "I knew this; it isn't new. But they don't mean—"

"Of course not," interrupted the Boss. "Now keep quiet, and let me read you some more." He leafed among the papers and extracted several.

"Jan. 16, 1937. WORLD RENOWNED PHYSICIST DISAPPEARS. OFFICIALS OF GENERAL POWER CO. PROFESS IGNORANCE OF ROODE'S WHEREABOUTS."

"Jan. 30, 1937. LAKE FORREST STILL NOT FOUND. SUBMARINE EXPERT WORRIES FRIENDS AND ASSOCIATES."

"Jan. 25, 1937. PAT McCARTHY NOT REPORTED SINCE TRIAL SPIN IN NEW STRATOSPHERE PLANE."

"Feb. 4, 1937. PASSENGER IDENTIFIES PICTURE

OF JAP BIOLOGIST, LONG MISSING, AS FELLOW-TRAVELER ON TAKU MIURA, FRISCO-BOUND. LE-GATION REQUESTS SEARCH."

Terry goggled and said protestingly. "But what has this to do—?"

The Boss chuckled his wheezy, mirthless laugh. "There," he said, "is the reason I'm Boss of the Combine, and you—you're field manager. You cannot see the connection, eh? Let me—"

But what he was going to say was never completed. For just then, in that soundproofed, inner sanctum of the great Liquor Trust, a voice spoke startlingly.

"Raymond Melchior; Raymond Melchior," it repeated. "You are not taking our warnings to heart. Last night your gunmen murdered John Ribling for daring to re-open his brewery. Our patience is exhausted. We will smash you within the week. The Liquor Racket must go."

The bodiless voice ceased, and for a long moment there was silence. John Terry, ex-Colonel of Marines, sprang to his feet, hand to hip. Outside, the ordinary muted noises of the great establishment filtered through the shut door. They had not heard!

At the first sound of the repeated name, the Boss had swivelled sharply around. A corpse-like pallor enveloped him, his clothes seemed suddenly sizes too large for the shrunken body within. The chuckle had died in his throat with a little rattling sound.

He sprang from his chair as the warning note ceased. His face suffused a dark red. With an agility surprising in a man of his bulk, he flung himself upon the roughly Craftexed walls, tapping and pounding upon them in a very agony of impatience. Terry watched him with frightened eyes. The Boss had gone mad!

Little animal sobs burst from the fat man known as the Boss as his frantic search failed to disclose anything. He completed the circuit of the walls; nothing remained except the large panelled window that flooded the interior with the last rays of the westering sun. It was seven hundred feet to the city streets; above were the last thin spire of the Larkin Tower and the vast reaches of the sky.

Yet he did not hesitate. He heaved at the window with such maniac fury that the glass broke and fell splintering upon startled pedestrians, hundreds of feet below.

"A-a-ah!" It was a long drawn exhalation. Terry rushed to the jagged casement in time to see the Boss reach out, pull savagely at something. There was a ripping, tearing sound, and the fat man fell back into the room, holding in his hand a tiny black box with a funnel opening, from which several lengths of broken wire were trailing.

"For God's sake, what is it?"

● The Boss was panting slightly, and there was a queer strained look about his eyes as he stared at the thing in his hand. He seemed to have forgotten his underling's presence.

"So it's war to the hilt, eh?" he said softly. "Very well, so be it. Take care for yourselves!"

Then he pivoted on his field manager.

"Not a word of this to anyone," he said harshly, his blue eyes grim and glowing. "To *anyone*, do you hear?"

"Y-yes, sir."

The fat man took a long breath, and chuckled. "This thing?" He threw the black box on the table. "A very, very clever apparatus. I'll have Winthrop in to explain

it." He spoke into the microphone.

The chief of the Science Division, dignified, efficient, came at the summons.

The Boss indicated the box. "What is it, Winthrop?"

The scientist, former chairman of a department at a great Eastern University at less than one third his present salary, picked it up and examined it very carefully.

"It looks to me as if it were a radio receiving unit, but of a most unusual type. I've never seen anything like it before."

The Boss nodded. "I thought that was it. Tell me, Winthrop, have you gone into those questions I referred to you?"

"Yes, sir. I've checked them with my staff. It is our considered opinion that the ignition system of the motors used in our planes was smothered under a broadcast blanketing wave of unknown power and intensity."

"What is the solution?"

"Destruction of the source of power, or installation of Diesel-type motors that require no magnetos."

"How about the loss of our ships?"

"No doubt due to a new form of submarine attack. We suggest installation of sound-detectors, use of torpedoes and depth bombs."

"How long will it take to make the necessary installations on sixty ships and seven hundred odd planes?"

The science chief shrugged. "I can get out the plans complete within a week. As for the installations, that is the job of the Equipment Division."

"I want the plans by tomorrow noon," said the Boss. "Wait." He spoke into the microphone. "Send in Michaels, of the Secret Service, Galton of Equipment, Norris of Public Relations."

Terry listened respectfully to the ensuing War Conference, heard the swift orders to each of the department heads. But underneath, his mind was busy. He knew now who his mysterious Boss was! *Raymond Melchior!*

* * *

Van Wyck maneuvered the little submarine skilfully along the bottom of the East River until his narrow-beamed searchlight picked out the entrance to the tunneled lock beneath the brewery. He pointed the nose to the black yawning hole, reduced speed, set the sonar device, and released the controls. The metal fish warped its way into the narrow opening, contacted the end of the lock without the tiniest of jars, and automatic machinery started pumping water out of the air chambers.

The landing device was Forrest's own invention. Sound waves were promulgated through the water, and rebounded from the sides of the tunnel to impinge upon the delicate controls of the steering apparatus, thus constantly guiding the submarine at a safe distance to its berth.

"All right, men," Van Wyck said to his crew of three, rangy, leathery men with the sniff of salt about them. They nodded silently, passed through the cramped ejector-lock into the by-now dry air-chamber. They were but three of some fifty gentlemen adventurers, soldiers of fortune, trained technicians, mechanics, whom the millionaire had carefully hand-picked for the initial digging of the underwater tunnel, and then decided to maintain for further work and possible emergencies in special barracks installed for them on the third and top floor of the converted brewery.

A reckless, hardbitten lot who relished the three squares a day, the good pay and lazy life between spells of hard,

feverish work. True, their freedom was circumscribed to the four walls of the brewery and special missions outside under control, but one couldn't have everything, they said philosophically. A loyal, enthusiastic lot, withal.

Van Wyck remained behind for a final inspection of the submarine. He was inordinately proud of it, and of the feat he had just accomplished. It was fish-shaped, and tapered to blunt, saw-toothed rams at either end. It was driven by internal combustion engines of a new type that sent the craft hurtling through the water at a speed far greater than ever achieved before. The combustion products were led off into the water ballast tanks, so that there was no chance for deadly gases to accumulate, as in the case of the old-fashioned storage batteries. The oxygenation apparatus kept the interior supplied with fresh clean air for periods of over two weeks. Sonar devices gave the exact location of surface ships up to five miles distance.

CHAPTER IV

Attack

● Van Wyck took a last glance around, entered the airlock, climbed the ladder, and emerged onto the floor of the brewery. It had been greatly changed in the past two months. Over half the great expanse was devoted to complicated whirring machinery that had been assembled bit by bit and brought in at dead of night. Men moved deftly within this eccentric dance of power, tending, adjusting, fashioning.

He walked through the maze, entered the executive office. Dribble was just shutting off the broadcasting unit; his face was pale with repressed emotion. Lord Wollaston and Rudolph Cheas lounged in great chairs, pipes in mouth. Their particular researches, conducted in the laboratories on the second floor, were progressing nicely. Almost at the very beginning it had been decided that the planned war was a whole-time job; accordingly the scientists had abandoned their stations in the outside world and were living in quarters on the third floor.

Roode, who had been standing close to Dribble, turned sharply at Van Wyck's entrance. His face was also lined with emotion, but it relaxed at the sight of the young man.

"Glad you're back. We were a bit worried. What luck?"

"Splendid!" Van Wyck said enthusiastically. "The *Volstead's* resting comfortably in a watery grave off the Jersey banks. Brand new thousand-ton steel ship on its maiden voyage out of Glasgow, loaded to the hilt with Scotch and Irish whiskey and liqueurs. This'll set the Trust back several million dollars."

"Did you have much trouble?"

"None at all. And I was worried a lot, too, when our English emissary wirelessly that code message. I'd never tackled a boat that big before. But it went off fine. We cruised back and forth in front of the little bay they used as an unloading point, submerging every time a fishing smack went by. It was a day after we had taken our station that we sighted her, low on the horizon.

"We went under and put on full power. I took electronic pictures as we scuttled along, some ten fathoms down, to make sure it was the right craft. It was the *Volstead* all right.

"When our distance sounders told us we were directly underneath, I threw out the magnetic clamp, turned on the juice, and we rose until we gripped tight on the submerged hull. It was simple after that. The magnetised

flexible steel hoses ran off the revolving drums fore and aft, attached themselves to the hull. Then we forced out the liquid hydrogen and oxygen, to be united at the tip, and ignited by a spark. It went through the sheathing of the hull like a knife through hot butter.

"As we drew in the hoses, they ran along the edge, burning their way through, until, just as we cast off, the whole bottom of the boat dropped sizzling. We had to dive fast and deep to miss being crushed. The worst part of the whole business is releasing the aluminum rafts and hanging around, watching in the electronic visors to make sure every man of the crew reaches safety. I was sure for a while we'd have to come to the surface to rescue some of the poor devils. That ship carried a large crew."

"Let them drown," Dribble broke in violently.

Van Wyck stared at him with brows knit.

"I thought it was clearly understood in the beginning that we were to take no lives except in self-defense," he said coldly. "Those fellows are seamen, most of them, glad to take any job where the pay is good."

"Peter didn't quite mean that," Roode said kindly. "He's under rather a nervous strain; so am I, for that matter."

"What's happened?" Cornelius asked quickly.

"John Ribling was killed. Taken for a 'ride' by the Liquor Trust last night. He had rebuilt and reopened his brewery. I don't know if Dribble has ever told you, but he was Dribble's favorite uncle, and a very close friend of mine too. As a matter of fact this place was his."

Van Wyck said harshly: "We must get the Boss for this. Find out who he is, and crush him like a snake."

"We've already discovered his identity," said Dribble grimly.

"You have!" echoed Cornelius in surprise. "That's a trick no one else has been able to accomplish. Enters and exits from his headquarters in the Larkin Tower by secret passages; no outsider has ever seen him; it's even rumored his own men don't know who he is."

"They don't. When we got the news last night, Mr. Roode determined on action. McCarthy and I went out in one of the small 'copter planes, poised her at the window of the private office where we had been told the Boss sat in state every day. Pat kept the plane steady while I lay flat on the wing and attached a receiving set with inset loud speaker to the outer frame, and also the lens end of a special movie camera that Harmon and Wollaston—excuse me, Lord Wollaston, collaborated on."

The nobleman grinned from the depths of his chair, puffed out a huge cloud of smoke, and murmured: "The young man is pulling my leg, what?"

Peter went on: "It's a clever affair. The lens is at the end of an adjustable length of hose; the image is carried by periscope mirrors up the hose to the camera, which we affixed to the top of the Tower, some fifty feet above. A timing mechanism started it grinding at nine this morning; another clockwork contraption released exactly at noon a balloon to which the movie camera was attached, also releasing the spring clips that held it all in place, and it sailed sky-high. Of course, Pat and I were casually winging past at the time; we grabbed it and returned to develop the film. We have complete pictures of everything that happened in that office this morning."

"And the Boss is—"

"I recognized him at once," said Roode quietly. "He is Raymond Melchior."

"Melchior!" Van Wyck repeated in puzzled accents. "Melchior! The name sounds familiar. Wait—wasn't that the banker who went to jail back in 1933 for cleaning out the National State Bank?"

● Roode nodded. "The same. One of the biggest and most ruthless men in the banking business at the time, and the least known. Had a horror for all kinds of publicity. Never had a picture taken. It was reported that he had manipulated at least twenty million dollars into his pocket before the bank closed its doors. Did it so cleverly that all they could convict him on was a technical charge of failing to pay a proper income tax. I've done some checking up today. He was released from San Quentin a little over two years ago, and promptly dropped out of sight."

"But surely some one in his own organization would have recognized him as the Boss," Van Wyck protested. "Melchior was an internationally known figure."

"You forget several things," Roode pointed out. "He is seen only by his present associates, who naturally had not been intimate with him in the old days. His picture has never been published; even during the trial he managed to evade the photographers. And furthermore, whereas I knew him as a rather tall, thin individual, he has since grown extremely fat, and his height has been masked to the casual eye. I myself would not have recognized him had he not been guilty of certain habitual movements of his hands. You see, this banker pillar of society had been a trustee of the University before his downfall."

"I remember the case now," Van Wyck said thoughtfully. "They never traced the twenty million. He cached it safely. But then, with all that wealth, why did he not retire to Europe, live in splendor, instead of partaking in a dangerous game like the Liquor Combine?"

"Dangerous?" Roode echoed bitterly. "It hasn't been dangerous as yet, unless *we* make it so. It's been big business, fast on the road to utter respectability. I wouldn't be surprised if others of the banking gentry join in establishing similar rackets; the profits are immensely great. Besides, Melchior's stay in prison must have given him a definite anti-social complex, even if he didn't have one before. He is out for revenge on a society that punished him so mildly; he is seeking power. He always was ambitious—and inordinately vain. We must crush him, and without mercy. Dribble has just finished broadcasting a warning to him. He was given until the end of the week, but we must work faster. Tonight he must die; the power of the Trust must be crushed throughout the country."

"Do you intend bombing the Larkin Tower?" Van Wyck asked slowly.

"No. Too many innocent lives would be involved. There are other methods." The old scientist fixed him with a keen shrewd eye. "The expedition starts at midnight, McCarthy in command. Dribble is going, and I intended you as the third member. Do you care for the job?"

"Care for it! Try and keep me out of it. My objections were based simply on a distaste for taking human life without giving the other man a chance."

"I know, my boy," approved the other. "But remember, we are dealing with men who do not return the courtesy. Yet wherever possible, human lives are not to be taken. Only Melchior is marked for death; he is too dangerous

a man to leave alive. In two years he would be Dictator in this country."

"Okay," said the young man lightly. "In that case I'll grab a shower, a bite to eat, and snatch a spot of sleep."

He went out whistling; he was never so cheerful as when there was danger and adventure ahead.

Up the moving ramp to the second floor where he nodded to various scientists at work in the laboratory. They returned his greetings with half-absent nods, and plunged back in utter absorption into the numberless experiments under way. This was their life, their passion.

Cornelius grinned quizzically, and went on up to the barracks on the third floor. It was almost six in the evening, and the mess hall was crowded with a riotous confluence of men. They shouted huge greetings to him as he passed, and he shouted gaily in return. A heart-warming crew, profane, irreverent, but all the better in a tight hole.

He entered his own diggings, a tiny cubbyhole of a room, bare of everything but a cot, a rough pine box pretending to be a dresser, and two chairs. Carter was bending over the cot, laying out khaki shirt and trousers, worn puttees, leather jacket and helmet, with the same meticulous care as if they were immaculate evening clothes and the room the luxurious penthouse apartment on Gramercy Place.

"Hello, old bean," said Cornelius boisterously, "I'm back, as you see. Is the bath drawn?"

It was a standing jest, and Carter answered as gravely as ever. "There is, I believe, a waiting list ahead of you, sir." One of the huge beer vats had been converted into a shower room; the men pranced around on its copper bottom and were showered with water drawn through the specially perforated ammonia pipes above. "But you are going out tonight, sir, and I have taken the liberty to lay out your clothes, sir."

● Van Wyck stared at the "clothes." "How did you know I was going to need those?"

"It is a matter of common knowledge, sir." Then Carter proceeded to cough delicately.

"All right, Carter, what is it now?"

"If it wouldn't be presuming too much, sir, I'd like to be a member of the expedition."

"W-what?" yelled his master, taken off guard.

"Yes, sir." Carter looked steadily in front of him. "I'm given to understand the expedition is by airplane, and I—I was once a humble member of His Majesty's Royal Air Force."

"And a damn good one, I've heard," Van Wyck said cordially. "Was it nine German planes you winged?"

"Only eight, sir."

"Well, I've no objection. But Pat McCarthy is the leader of this particular sortie, and I'll have to put it up to him."

Carter bent low over the neatly pressed khaki outfit, patting each garment deftly into place.

"I've already asked Mr. McCarthy, sir, and he has expressed no opposition."

.
Zero hour! Midnight! Four men sat in the enclosed, airtight cabin of the great stratosphere plane. McCarthy, at the controls, grinned and waved his hand to the crowding group visible through the glassite porte. Van Wyck

yelled something, but of course he could not be heard. Dribble stared straight in front of him, weak with the weakness that comes to men at the zero hour. And Carter, butlerish and dignified, fitted strangely well into his aviator's khaki.

Roode signalled, and the crowd fell back. The platform rose swiftly to the roof, and became an integral part of the structure. The stars overhead wavered in the haze of New York. Then, with barely perceptible sound, helicopter vanes whirling aloft, the great plane took off almost perpendicularly. Straight up and up it went, until it was some five thousand feet above the glare of the huge, sprawling city. It showed no lights and the keenest observer in the streets beneath would have seen only a tiny shadowy blob.

Then for the first time McCarthy spoke to his companions.

"We're headed for the Larkin Tower. It's our first port of call."

Van Wyck said sharply: "You're going to bomb it?"

Pat grinned his wide Irish grin: "Don't go off half cock, young fellow. We're aiming only for the Boss himself. Here's the layout. One of you is to take the baby 'chute and drop to his office window."

"Parachute? You're crazy, man; it'll drift any old way."

Pat chuckled. "Mine won't. It's a little invention of my own. Here, take a look at it."

He opened a compartment and dragged out what appeared at first sight to be a typical parachute of standard size with straps for body attachment. But there was a light aluminum shield from which projected an oblong box of the same material, to which in turn was attached a propeller, some two feet across and of advanced airplane design.

McCarthy surveyed his brain child with fond pride. "This," he said, "will make a good ten miles per hour; and there's sufficient juice in the actuating storage battery to cruise comfortably twenty-five miles in calm air. This contraption," he pointed to a handle bar arrangement in front, "is the joy stick, and here," attached to the rear of the strap were two vanes, concave on their outer surfaces, "are what you might call the rudders. Simple, compact, and safe enough if you don't hit a storm."

"But why, sir," said Carter, eyeing the affair with manifest distaste, "don't you use a regular plane to gain entrance?"

"Because this bus is miles too big, and the small pursuit planes require two men to handle, and particularly myself at the controls. It's the time element tonight that's so damned important."

Van Wyck opened his mouth to say, "I'll take a—" when Dribble broke in hurriedly, almost feverishly. "I'll go! I'll go!" to ward off other claimants, and he started fumbling at the straps.

"Okay, old man," Pat said kindly. He reached over to a stand where a heart-shaped bag of rubberized material lay carefully swathed in cotton. He took it out gingerly. There was a tiny nozzle in the tip and a lens at the blunt end. "This little toy contains two capsules; one filled with an aqueous solution of potassium cyanide, and the other, concentrated sulphuric acid. Behind them both is a steel tube of air under tremendous compression. The lens in the rear is the eyepiece of a photoelectric cell. A change in light will turn valves in the capsules and the

compressed air tube. You readily see what happens if this is placed in a drawer in the Boss's private desk. The shift from darkness to light as the drawer slides open would actuate the cell; the valves turn, the sulphuric and cyanide mix, and the compressed air blows the resultant hydrocyanic acid gas flush over the man whose desk it is."

Van Wyck shuddered. "I don't like it," he said. "It's murder."

"No," McCarthy told him harshly. "It's war, stripped to the waist; ruthless; no false glamor. That man has been responsible already for the killing of over a thousand men. You'd set off a mine in warfare, over which enemy troops were marching, without compunction, wouldn't you?"

Van Wyck sighed. "I suppose you're right," he said unwillingly.

Dribble's eyes were feverish. "Then what do I do?"

"Climb out the window, set the motor working, and head for home. You have a clear airfield from the Tower. In any event steer for the river, so that if anything goes wrong; you'll hit fairly soft."

"It seems to me, sir," interposed Carter, "it would be simpler and easier to walk down stairs."

Pat smiled. "That building is a death trap for unwanted intruders. The Boss is no fool."

● While the great craft drifted idly under its whirling vanes at the five thousand-foot level, Peter was installed swiftly into his queer self-propelled 'chute. The last goodbye had been said, the last warm handshake, when McCarthy exclaimed suddenly: "I nearly forgot. There's a spring near the 'eye' to set it going. Press it and you have exactly one minute before it works. So make sure you have the drawer shut in time."

He stepped back, pulled a lever. Peter catapulted out through a trap-door that sprang immediately into place again. The men stared down with beating hearts at the tiny whirling figure in the immensities. Then, timed to the second, the great silk bag bellied and jerked Dribble's free fall to a slow, drifting, downward motion. The expanse of the 'chute prevented them from seeing what he was doing, but after breathless seconds, the ghostly white apparatus moved purposefully on a long steep slant. Far beneath, the topmost spire of the Larkin Tower showed as a tiny pinprick on an illuminated jigsaw puzzle.

Van Wyck fetched a deep breath. "I hope he makes it. Maybe we'd better wait; something's bothering me."

"Can't. We have a full night ahead of us."

McCarthy advanced his motors to full speed ahead, tilted the plane skyward. There was a deep humming vibration as the great bird zoomed aloft. At the sixty thousand-foot level he leveled off, locked the controls at a steady speed of five hundred miles an hour. Then he took out a huge chart, showing the United States in outline. It was covered with red dots, some thirty-five of them, scattered over the wide expanse of white. They ranged from the Great Smokies in the South to the forested areas in the region of the Great Lakes.

"Each of those dots," Pat explained to his companions, represents an illicit brewery or distillery of the Combine. It took our agents over a month to ferret them out, and no doubt there are more. But with those destroyed, and the Boss dreaming of bitter almonds, the back of the Trust will be broken for good."

"Bombs, of course," repeated Van Wyck tonelessly.

"Yes." Pat's eyes twinkled as he fell into a thick Irish brogue. "Shure, an' ye're a br-roth uv a bhoy, wid yur white liver an' humane instincts." Then in normal English. "We're not killing a dog if we can help it. I drop at minute intervals for fifteen minutes warning bombs that blaze a light trail and explode with enough noise to wake the dead. They do no damage. At the end of that time there won't be a soul in our objectives; they'll be taking to the hills as fast as their legs can move. Then I empty a crate of Peasley's improved *dynols*, and every one'll swear the moon dropped out of the sky."

Van Wyck bucked up. "That's different," he exclaimed. "Get going."

Steadily the plane cleaved the stratosphere toward their first objective; a distillery in the heart of the Smokies.

CHAPTER V Counter-Attack!

● Peter Dribble swung agonizedly downward. The city seemed an abyss; he suffered horribly from vertigo. But he set his teeth, and steered on a long slant toward the upward rushing Tower. He was on his own, a man of action, rather than a scientist. The vertigo passed, and a warm enveloping thrill took its place. He who had secretly envied Van Wyck's exploits was now a brother adventurer.

The 'chute was working perfectly as he swung around the dark looming Tower until he found the window he was seeking. To his surprise it was open, invitingly so. But Dribble gave it no further thought, and thrust the jimmy he had prepared back into its sheathing. A last look around. Not a light anywhere; not a plane in the sky; only the muted roar of the city seven hundred feet beneath.

Yet he knew that the innocuous-seeming Tower was a death trap; at least the upper floors housing the Liquor Combine. Doors, stairs, were electrically charged against unwary intruders.

Without hesitation he balanced on the sill, hooked a foot inside, unstrapped the 'chute and let it dangle from a projection outside. He was in the room now, flashlight playing around. Nothing stirred; it was quiet as the tomb. Peter extracted the deadly rubber capsule from its container, advanced to the desk that posed prominently in the center of the room. His heart was beating rapidly; the silence was somehow ominous. But the building was dead as only a office tower can be at night.

He placed one hand on the edge of the flat desk to steady himself as he bent to search for the buttons that opened the drawer. There was a faint hissing sound, but he did not hear it in his eagerness. He found the banked buttons, pressed one at random. A long, flat tray, filled with clipped papers, slid silently open. He did not know that all the buttons had been switched that afternoon so that only that particular drawer would open.

He picked up the deadly instrument; his finger was on the spring to set it, when the flashlight illuminated a sheet of paper on top of the clipped pile. It had typewriting on it in bold caps. He paused to read it and thereby saved his life.

"WELCOME"; it stated, "YOU ARE EXPECTED. AS YOU READ THIS A POWERFUL SLEEP-INDUCING GAS HAS ALREADY PENETRATED YOUR LUNGS: YOU ARE NOT TO DIE—YET—"

Dribble read thus far with dazed horror. Then as the

full purport struck his senses, he tried to run, back to the window, anywhere. But his limbs suddenly refused to coordinate; they numbed and swayed. A cloud swept over his mind; there was a steady roaring in his ears. His last consciousness was of stiffened fingers dropping the cyanogen capsule to the floor; he heard the faint thud, then he pitched headlong, the flashlight clattering into oblivious darkness. The jar of his fall released a mechanism at the base of the desk; there was a blinding flare, a huge poof of smoke, and again utter darkness.

Raymond Melchior, the Boss, saw the huge blast of light from the fifty-sixth floor window of the Squill Building, some three blocks away, removed the powerful night glasses from his eyes, and turned to field manager Terry with an air of quiet satisfaction.

"It has worked out perfectly." Then he chuckled until his whole fat body writhed in obscene undulations. "Brains, Terry, that's what counts! No wonder I'm Boss!"

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It was almost dawn. The abandoned roadhouse on the outskirts of Valhalla showed dark and deserted. But in an interior room, carefully shaded, Dribble staggered to his feet again for the twentieth time, swayed unsteadily, and faced his tormentors with fresh defiance. His face was drawn and bloody, his right arm hung limp, broken under merciless twisting, the soles of his feet were scorched and blistered from lighted matches, his body was a mass of bruises from savage, rib-breaking blows and kicks. But the spirit that flamed in his eyes was bright and unweakened.

"I won't tell you," he said doggedly for the hundredth time, "you might as well kill me now. You'll never know from me."

Terry's black eyes glittered. He motioned to his two thugs, and they moved forward threateningly; but the Boss stopped them with a wave of a fleshy hand. He surveyed his rebellious captive with mild pale blue eyes.

"If you don't talk, now," he said deliberately, "I'll—have you—operated on. A bit of brain removed, and you'll be a hopeless gibbering idiot through life. Pleasant prospect, eh?"

Shudders swept over Dribble's pain-wracked body, but his head was as high as ever.

"Even that," he stated distinctly, "won't get you what you want."

Melchior nodded casually. "All right, men, take him into the next room."

The executioners were moving forward when a faint voice burst into the room. "Peter Dribble; Peter Dribble," it intoned. "Where are you? Report at once."

The thugs stopped short in their tracks, Terry gave vent to a little exclamation, and whirled around. Even the Boss for the moment looked blank. But Dribble's involuntary cry told the story. He had forgotten about the thin flat disk strapped to his chest, and the search of his captors had failed to disclose it.

He twisted his mouth under his collar, and yelled: "Help! I'm captured by the Boss. I'm at—"

But Melchior was recovered from his temporary stupor. He moved with the speed of a striking snake; one great pudgy hand clamped down with surprising force on Peter's mouth, choking off further utterance, while his other hand ripped and tore at the buttoned shirt. It fell away, disclosing the apparatus, from which sounds still

issued: "Peter Dribble, what happened? Speak!"

"A-a-ah!" It was a soft, long drawn out suspiration. Practiced fingers found the switch, shut off a particularly worried appeal.

He turned to Dribble, helpless in the grip of his henchmen.

"We won't need you any more, my friend. This little receiver of yours will tell me everything. I'll take it around a bit, have Terry gurgle like a strangled fish-hound into it—he's very good at that—so as to wake up your people to further calls. Three different points will give me the direction of your broadcasting outfit, and then—" He made a significant gesture.

He watched Dribble being carried away, struggling and kicking.

"Get the car started," he snapped suddenly at the ex-colonel, "we're moving fast."

● The great stratosphere plane dropped steadily from the ten mile zone as it neared New York. It was slowing down from a steady speed of a thousand miles an hour. The hidden sun was already pearly the high thin wisps of cloud; in minutes the dawn light would filter down into the canyons of the city. McCarthy dropped fast, anxious to get into the old brewery before the lifting of the darkness disclosed them to strange eyes.

There was quiet jubilation within the cabin. Carter sat straight and dignified, but there was a reminiscent glitter in his eye.

Pat said jovially: "A clean sweep, eh, boys?"

Van Wyck said: "Not bad. Direct hits from heights of twenty thousand feet and over. They looked like moon craters." Then regretfully: "There was only one fight."

Pat slapped him on the back and roared. "A regular fire-eater, that's what you are. Never satisfied. You winged that pursuit plane very prettily with the machine gun."

The millionaire turned to him curiously. "Why didn't you send out the blanketing waves just as you used to do with the rum-running planes. They'd have done the trick just as well; damped out the ignition system and dropped him."

Pat shook his head. "Wasn't interested in killing those others; gave them a chance to jump. But this bird came after us with guns blazing. Besides," he grinned at Van Wyck, "I wanted to see how you could handle the quick-firers."

Roode met them as they stepped wearily out of the plane with haggard, drawn face. He barely heard their report, interrupted them almost at once.

"Peter," he gasped, "is captured. Melchior has him!"

Van Wyck staggered back. "What? How did it happen? Where is he?"

Roode explained hurriedly what little he knew; the cry for help that was strangled off; other little cries, strangely muffled, that came through at intermittent intervals.

"We're locating their source," he ended grimly. "Silversmith's on the job. They seem to come from different places, and he has a method of computing the angles. Here he comes now."

Silversmith burst into the room, waving a sheet of paper, covered with scrawled calculations. His eyes were tired, but burning.

"It's only approximate, of course," he said. "Hard to

say at just what speed the car, if it was a car, was moving; or how the road twisted. But I'd say the focus of the four signals I plotted was about here." He unfolded a large map of New York City and the vicinity and penciled a little circle around the tiny village of Valhalla.

Van Wyck stared at the map, and memories came flooding. Of a certain roadhouse off the beaten path he had once stopped at before the repeal of Prohibition, of a casual remark of a friend recently that the Liquor Combine had purchased it and promptly closed it down. But—Dribble was being dragged off by car.

"Those cries for help you heard; are you sure it was Peter?" he asked abruptly.

Roode lifted haggard tensed face. "By God, Van Wyck!" he exploded. "Only the first cry was definitely Peter's voice; the others were unrecognizable."

"That's enough," Cornelius shouted. "I know where he is then. Hurry, Pat, get out a pursuit plane, full battle equipment. Quick, if you care for Dribble's life."

McCarthy was disciplined enough not to ask questions. He dived for the movable platform on which the small speedy plane rested. For five minutes everyone worked furiously, scientists, ground crew of the planes, in a jumble of shouted orders.

"Hurry! Hurry!" Van Wyck urged them on, himself sweating like a longshoreman. Every minute was like eternity. There was no time for explanations.

At long last the plane rose swiftly to the roof, took off in what was almost broad daylight. No time to worry now if they could be observed; their hidden headquarters discovered. Fortunately, very few people were stirring at this early hour and in this deserted neighborhood of decrepit warehouses. And there was no sound except the faintest of whines.

McCarthy levelled off at two thousand feet, darted north toward Valhalla with throttle wide open.

"What do you know?" Pat yelled as the wind whipped through the struts, howled past the open cockpit. It was a two-seater; just the two of them, and an open crate of engines of warfare, hurriedly assembled, at their feet.

"I know where Dribble is," Van Wyck yelled back. "In a certain roadhouse on a little dirt path off the Reservoir Road. That moving communication unit of his threw me off the track at first. Peter yelled the first time, but someone else was making the other sounds. Wonder why they took the set for a ride."

● But all their energies were fiercely concentrated on getting to Valhalla in the shortest possible time, otherwise they would readily have recognized the menace of that moving unit.

Within fifteen minutes after the take-off the plane was diving fiercely toward a little valley nestled in rolling hills that Cornelius had pointed out. Without slackening speed, McCarthy straightened out his dive at five hundred feet, and swooped around in dizzying circles. He was taking no chances on a rifle shot from some hidden marksmen.

Van Wyck stared downward at the long squat building, with its several extensions jutting crazily out. It was dark, silent, seemingly deserted.

He felt a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach. Was his guess wrong? Maybe, but he'd have to make sure. He bent over and picked out of the racks in the crate a half dozen tiny bombs, leaned over the side as the

plane circled and circled, dropt them one by one.

They fell in the soft earth about the roadhouse and almost instantly huge volumes of white drifting smoke spread upward and outward, met similar drifting clouds, eddied a bit, and coalesced into a great blanket that completely enveloped the roadhouse. Nothing more could be seen but a bank of earth-embracing fog.

McCarthy smiled grimly. "Great stuff, that new tear gas!"

Thereupon he set the plane down gently on a little grassy patch not far from the inn, calmly confident that no one would dispute his passage. The tiniest crack would be enough to insure entrance of the tear gas into the house in overwhelming quantities.

They broke out gas masks, clamped them in position over their heads, strode hurriedly, guns in hand, toward the billowy mass. They plunged into it, special films on their goggles keeping them vapor and moisture-free, so that they could achieve faint vision. Heaves of two powerful shoulders broke open the door. The interior was thick with vapor—and deserted. Yet they did not give up hope. Doggedly, room after room, they searched. Nothing on the ground floor. Upstairs, with fast sinking hearts, they dragged weary feet. Again room after room until Van Wyck shouted in the confines of his helmet. He had stumbled over a body. He turned a flashlight on it. A man sprawled, a stranger, with thick bullet head and livid scar on one cheek. A little to one side lay another body, also unknown. A third could be dimly seen in a corner.

McCarthy was lifting it, waving free hand frantically. Van Wyck hurried over. In the irradiated ghastly light of the flash through the haze, he could make out the limp features of Dribble. Pale, bloody, agonized, without life.

As they hurried him out, carrying him between them, Cornelius kicked savagely at the prostrate bodies in passing. If Peter was dead—!

Once more in the plane, Pat worked frantically over their limp friend, using restoratives specially prepared for just such emergencies.

"He's alive," he shouted joyfully, as a pale eyelid fluttered once, and redoubled his efforts.

In ten minutes Dribble was able to gasp. The tear gas was harmless; its effects wore off normally in half an hour. It was the torture he had been subjected to that had almost killed him.

As his eyes opened and he saw the anxious faces of his friends bending over him, his first audible words were: "Headquarters! Save them!"

"What do you mean?" both ejaculated simultaneously.

Strength was gradually flowing into the by-now seated man. It was a tremendous effort to talk, but he forced himself: "Melchior—used—unit—as direction—finder," he enunciated slowly and painfully. "Will attack Headquarters." Then he fainted.

Without another word the men piled into the plane, Van Wyck propping Dribble's lolling head between his legs; McCarthy ripped the little plane off the ground with such violence that the wings almost tore off. His ordinarily jovial grin was set in stern, hard lines.

Van Wyck said in a half groan: "Stupid of all of us. That was why those queer sounds came from different points. Meant to attract responses; easy enough to calculate the point of origin."

Pat said nothing; teeth clenched, hurtling the pursuit

plane through the air at a suicidal four-fifty an hour.

Cornelius sat suddenly straight, yelled: "We are fools. I'll warn them."

He unbuttoned his shirt feverishly, turned the tiny microphone knob, spoke into it: "Headquarters, urgent, Van Wyck calling!" Over and over again; then he switched the receiving knob and listened. Squeals and howls and groans, nothing else. Nothing else that could be heard through that terrible static.

Once more he groaned. "The devil! He's blanketing our beam with a scrambled broadcast."

And McCarthy drove on.

At about Elmsford Cornelius, using field glasses, first saw the tiny speck far ahead, traveling fast. It was a plane.

"Faster," he urged on Pat, and that worthy shook his head. The throttle was wide open. They gained, but not fast enough; New York was already visible as a sprawling giant. Both planes were about three thousand feet up, and traveling at a terrific clip.

● Van Wyck held his glasses on the fleeing plane. By now he could make out two doll-like figures in the cockpit, one of whom seemed enormously fat. No question now that it was Melchior. The slighter figure had turned, was staring back at them. They knew they were being pursued.

Past Mount Vernon, over the Bronx they swept. Down over the Harlem River, a snaky dull smudge beneath. And still over a mile separated them.

"We'll never get them in time," McCarthy's face was a frozen mask. "They'll have dropped a crate of bombs, and—" It wasn't necessary to complete the sentence.

"Use your blanketing wave; make him crash," Van Wyck cried.

It was a face stricken in mortal agony that McCarthy turned on him. "It's the other plane that's equipped; not this. Forgot about it; we hurried so."

Melchior was beginning to drop. He was nearing his destination. Frantic with despair, Cornelius pumped the trigger of his rapid-firer. A stream of lead sped high over the unknowing city, but the range was too great.

Already Melchior was past Nineteenth, dropping fast. In seconds he would be directly over the old brewery—Van Wyck shuddered as if he already heard the sound of the smashing bombs. Dribble was stirring uneasily against his legs.

They were close enough to shoot now, but it was too late. The enemy plane had started to circle over the brewery. A direct hit would smash it, no doubt, but the crash would detonate the bombs and wipe out the whole area. Nevertheless, Van Wyck's fingers gripped the trigger.

McCarthy whooped, rummaged feverishly with one hand in the crate of equipment. He brought out a tiny phial, from which tinier pellets rolled out into his hand. He twisted deftly at each one in turn and literally thrust them on Cornelius.

"Load them in, quick. Our last chance!"

Van Wyck took one look at his desperately set face and dropped them rapidly into the revolving drum. No time for questions. Already the fat man was moving in the other plane, leaning over the side, something in his hand.

Cornelius had no time to aim; he let the gun go in swift bursts.

They were zooming down on the enemy's tail; Van Wyck saw everything with preternatural sharpness. Little things, like the glitter of sunlight on the shiny round ball in the fat man's hand, the staring upturned faces of pedestrians in the streets below, a tug puffing and grunting along on the black, sluggish river, pulling a monster of a freighter; the very course of the pellets leaden-crawling through the air. Time seemed to stand still in one great tableau.

As in slow motion picture he saw little puffs of steam impinging on the plane.

"What good!" he thought wearily to himself, "the bombs will fall just the same."

Then, with dramatic suddenness, it happened. He heard the sharp intake of breath from the seat beside him, but his eyes were riveted on the other plane. As the steam puffed out from the pellets, the plane gave a great convulsive heave, the fat man fell violently back into the cockpit, the glittering ball still in his hand; the next moment the bomber swooshed straight up into the heavens, long straight perpendicular streamers of steamy smoke keeping pace with the mad flight.

Even as Van Wyck craned his neck upward out of the slowing plane in unbelieving wonder, Melchior's craft was already a dwindling dot in the bright blue of the sky above, shooting outward with seemingly undiminished velocity.

"Thank God! Thank God!" McCarthy was praying.

"But wh-what was it?" his companion gasped.

Pat ignored the question, cocked a weather eye upward, grinned his old time grin, as he landed the plane gently.

"Goodbye, Boss," he waved his hand aloft. "Hope you reach the moon!"

Then as the platform dropped into their hangar, and they stepped stiff-leggedly out of the cockpit, with a very weak, but conscious Dribble between them, Van Wyck was aware of a tremendous scurrying to and fro, of a frightful commotion that almost rocked the building.

They found Roode in a frantic rush. He paused as he saw Peter, his worn face lit up, he practically fell on his neck.

The uproar seemed to be increasing. McCarthy grinned knowingly.

"I'm bursting with questions, and no one seems to care," Van Wyck cried out in half-assumed, half-real anger. "What's all this particular shooting for?"

Roode left Dribble on a bench, hurried over.

"Something went wrong with one of my most recent experiments," he said gravely. "I was experimenting with some ionized hydrogen, certain that there wasn't any other pellet of it around uninsulated, when suddenly it ripped, almost under my hands, right through the steel laboratory table, smashed its way through the floor, just missed Wolleston, hit the ground floor with a roar, burrowed downward, and by now—" he shrugged, "it must be nearing the center of the earth. I can't understand it; we've gone over our stock, and the insulation on every one of the remaining pellets is perfect."

● McCarthy slapped his knee and laughed. "I think I can explain. We've knocked Melchior into kingdom come with it."

He ran over the events of that last crowded hour. When he came to the finale, he said: "I was desperate; didn't know what to do. Then I thought of those ionized hydrogen pellets stowed away in the crate. If we could get into range so that our marksman here," he indicated Van Wyck affectionately, "could tattoo their plane with them, and *if—there* was the chance—if you happened to be using one in an experiment, why the plan would work. And by George, it did!"

Roode shook his head as if he were awakening from a trance, saw Van Wyck standing slightly open-mouthed.

"You didn't know of my ionized hydrogen?"

Van Wyck said *no*.

"I stumbled across the process of creating sizeable amounts in the process of atomic disintegration. It had always been known, but in the minutest of quantities, and in a most unstable state. Didn't last more than a few seconds before losing its charge and becoming neutral hydrogen again. I found a method of making it stable." He fixed the young millionaire with a quizzical eye. "Now ionized hydrogen," he said, "is the most potent force in the world today, or rather, two separate quantities of it are. Soddy once calculated, theoretically, of course, that a gram of ionized hydrogen, placed at the North Pole, and another gram at the South Pole, would repel each other, at that distance, with a force equal to twenty-six tons. (See Note.)

"My researches have confirmed these figures. The next problem was to find an insulator for these terrific repulsive forces. All of us worked on that, and we discovered an alloy ultimately that was absolutely non-conducting. That little knob McCarthy twisted on the ones you shot loosened certain springs inside, so that the jar of contact with unyielding steel burst the pellets wide open, and let loose the repulsive force. It reacted at once to the uninsulated amount I was working with. The amounts, you must remember, were very much less than a gram; otherwise at such close quarters, you might almost be able to wreck the earth."

McCarthy laughed gustily. "Old Melchior must be landing on Mars by this time."

Roode said gravely: "He was a most dangerous anti-social being. Technocracy could never be established with such a man alive wielding the power he did."

Van Wyck said: "We'll have to move. The Liquor Racket is crushed beyond repair, but there's been too much publicity about it. Thirty odd holes in the ground, and Melchior's meteoric ascension, in full view of thousands of people, will create a vast uproar. The government will investigate, and it won't be long before they trail us here. We start dismantling at once. Tonight we use autos, truck, planes and sub. Must be out tomorrow morning. I have a private estate up the Coast that would be ideal. There we can plan the next world-problem to tackle."

(Note)—*The Interpretation of the Atom*, by Frederick Soddy (1932).