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Our Cover

depicts a scene from the story entitled "Men Without Shadows,"
by Stanton A. Coblentz, drawn by Morey.

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The Supermen

By DAVID M. SPEAKER

In this story we are told of the "War of the Supermen." It is pictured as a menacing invasion. The story goes on in journal fashion, or rather like a diary, to give us an intermittent presentation of what is called the "terrific crisis." We know that our readers will greatly enjoy this tale.

Illustrated by MOREY

ALTHOUGH the War of the Supermen has been ended for more than five years, this is the first occasion that a complete history of that terrific crisis, together with the circumstances leading up to it, has been placed before the public.

Perhaps one of the most peculiar features of the War was its extraordinarily brief duration. From the beginning to the end it occupied a period of barely three months. But those few months represented the most hectic period in the history of civilized man, and, had it not been for the brilliant genius of Professor Carl von Renstein, it would have ended with the displacement of *genus homo* from the position of the earth's dominant race.

THE first of the Supermen made his initial public appearance on November 9, 1961, late in the afternoon. Vividly silhouetted against the setting sun, he was seen, at the edge of a field in Western Pennsylvania, by a farm hand who was returning home from work. According to his story, the figure hailed him, and, as he stood still, advanced to meet him. It resembled a man of about forty with a clear complexion and black eyes, which shone with a phosphorescence clearly visible even in the sunlight. In fact, except for this last characteristic,

the Superman was outwardly no different from any human being.

"For a while we talked about all kinds of things," said the farm laborer in relating his encounter to a reporter. "And then the uncanny light beaming in his eyes made me feel rather uneasy. I guessed it was just my imagination, though. There was nothing else about him that seemed strange. He wore a hat and was rather well dressed. But I couldn't think of what he would be doing in such a place. You know the field is quite a distance from the farm house and that is the nearest place where anybody would want to go. I think he said that he was going to meet some one in the village, but that is several miles away and there is the railroad which any sensible person would have used. As the farm house and the village are in the same general direction we started to walk together. For a while we didn't say anything. Then he suddenly stopped. I turned to look at him.

"Did you drop something?" I asked. He didn't answer me but just gazed at me with those eyes of his. I tell you they just *bored* into me like a light searching my soul. It seemed to me that I stood staring at him for five minutes without moving. All at once I felt that he was ordering me to walk backwards. He didn't say anything. He just *thought* it and I had to do what he wanted me to.



The general swore softly to himself.—“Rotten aim! Should have hit the peak. We didn't get them on the first shot and now we are in for it.” They were.

Then he commanded me to stop, to walk forwards, to walk to the left, to the right. And all the time he kept looking at me with those shining eyes. It gave me the creeps. After that he made me turn around so I couldn't see his eyes, but it didn't make any difference. And the whole time he didn't say a word to me. All at once it all stopped and I felt as if a weight had been lifted from my brain.

"I turned and found that he was walking slowly away muttering to himself something that sounded like 'It works, it works. We will control them yet.' I didn't know what to make of the whole thing. At first I thought that it was one of those hypnotists practicing. Just then I got scared and started to run away. Once I looked over my shoulder and saw him staring straight at me. I ran faster and didn't stop until I got home. I've never seen him since."

A BRIEF outline of the above narrative appeared in a local newspaper and in two days was completely forgotten.

The second visitation of the Supermen was attended with tragic consequences.

About 11:30 P. M., November 22, almost half of the village referred to above was blown up by a terrific explosion which shook the ground for miles around. The next morning a posse of armed citizens searched high and low for the author of this hideous crime, but without result. No one in the vicinity dreamed of connecting the catastrophe with the advent of the Superman, but subsequent occurrences leave us with little doubt that there was a significant relation between the two.

Near the village was a large steel plant, shut down on account of a strike. Some one passing by a few days after the catastrophe was surprised to notice that

the door had been forced open. Investigation proved that a chemical laboratory within the building, designed for analytical purposes, had been completely stripped of its contents. Nothing was left but one or two specimens of a crude iron ore. The inference was obvious. Some one had, with the stolen laboratory supplies, manufactured high explosives and seemed to be conducting a war against mankind. This latter deduction was strengthened on the night of December 3, when a second blast destroyed the other half of the village in the same mysterious manner. Scarcely anyone survived to tell the tale.

THEN the government took a hand. The thing was getting too serious. No one's life was safe any more. The unknown criminal might commit even more horrible deeds if he was not instantly checked in his career. The whole section was placed under military protection. For almost two weeks nothing happened. And then the third manifestation of the Superman and his possible associates took place. It seems that towards evening one of the soldiers was chopping a bit of firewood to replenish the supply. Whistling softly to himself, his ax was rising and falling with monotonous regularity.

WITHOUT warning a slender ray of intense green light suddenly stabbed through the night and apparently pierced the blade of the ax, just as it was poised for a stroke. There was a sharp crackle and a pungent smell filled the air. The beam lasted but a second and ceased as abruptly as it had begun.

By the time the startled soldier recovered from the stupefaction produced by this astounding phenomenon, he found himself surrounded by an excited, gesticulating group of companions, eager to know what had befallen him. For an an-

swer he could only point dumbly to the ax. Inspection revealed that the center of the blade was perforated by a round, clean-cut hole. An officer came running over to learn the cause of the disturbance. His questioning disclosed that the ray originated from the peak of a high mountain, many miles away. The officer, much puzzled by the story, communicated with his superior. Orders were given that an airplane be sent to investigate. The whole staff was watching the progress of the plane by the aid of binoculars, which made clear each detail. Just as the machine passed above the spot in question, the green ray shot vertically upward directly in its path.

THOSE who had been watching say that the pilot made a tremendous effort to steer clear of the deadly beam but could not succeed as it followed him in every direction. Suddenly the ray darted to the roaring engine which was at once illuminated by the fierce green glow. The steel machinery vanished at the contact. The pilot attempted to volplane to the ground, but the diabolic pencil of light traversed the body of the ship once or twice toward the rear, thus effectively cutting the control wires. For a brief instant the airplane hung in the air, during which time the pilot was barely able to save his life by the parachute with which he was equipped. Then, diving with ever increasing velocity, the machine crashed to the ground and went up in flames.

For the first time the soldiers realized that they were dealing with an enemy of unknown powers. But it must be said to their glory that they went to their duties without hesitation or fear.

Immediate steps were then taken to drive the Supermen (for it was now evident that more than one were involved) from their station. Two six-inch guns were ordered and in twenty-four hours

arrived at the vicinity of the mountain. At 8 A. M. the following day the first shot was fired, formally opening the War of the Supermen. As the shell approached the mountain peak, the latter became enveloped in a brilliant red glow lighting up the surrounding country. At the moment the missile entered the region of the ruddy light it suddenly stopped in its course, to the amazement of the beholders, actually went backwards for a yard or two, and dropped to the ground. Each time a shell came within close proximity of the mountain the same thing occurred. In the meantime, the devilish green ray commenced to operate again with the result that the two guns met the same end as the airplane engine in spite of the most strenuous efforts on the part of the men to avert it.

THE general, believing that higher power guns might succeed in penetrating the ruddy glow, had two of fourteen-inch caliber brought over which met with exactly the same fate. In a fit of rage he shook his fists in the direction of the mountain and hurled imprecations at its inhabitants with the net result that a few of them appeared and regarded him curiously from behind the red defence screen.

The situation was truly tantalizing. Here was the enemy safely ensconced in the mountain without having made one counter-attack. On the other hand there seemed to be no way of either capturing or exterminating them. There was no possibility of attempting a sudden attack on foot for it was well known that they were in possession of bombs of tremendous power. No airplane could go near them and even fourteen-inch shells were unable to pass through their defence.

Affairs had remained in this neutral state for a week when the Supermen made their first initial attack, since the

government had opened the war. In the morning, while the soldiers were being reviewed, the green ray suddenly appeared and swept the ranks from end to end. No one was injured but all the flashing rifle barrels disappeared in a few seconds as the beam was moved so as to include every bit of visible metal. Medals, rings, wrist-watches—everything of metal met the same fate.

When the world began to realize what was going on, thousands of scientists were anxious to inspect these new and amazing phenomena. Foreign governments offered suggestions, sent men, and did everything they could in an effort to help combat this menace. But all to no purpose. It was now over two and a half months since the first of the Supermen was seen and not a single thing had been accomplished. Meanwhile fresh atrocities were being committed daily. Town after town was being blown up by bombs projected in some mysterious manner, and the green ray swept the sky in search of airplanes.

IT was the genius of Carl von Renstein, a hitherto obscure professor of biology who interested himself in physics as a hobby, that at the last possible minute saved the human race from almost inevitable destruction. He worked out the problem of the red glow employed by the Supermen. To his astonishment he found that they had mastered the secret of universal magnetism and repulsion, so that they were able to operate it on a large scale on any metal, whereas it had been formerly used in a comparatively rudimentary state in connection with iron, cobalt, and nickel, but with no other metals. The mystery of the green ray which produced atomic disintegration in metallic substances remained a mystery, which to the chagrin of the learned savant. However, having discovered the secret of the crimson light which protected the

Supermen, he could rest content, satisfied with the knowledge that he had saved mankind from certain doom.

His whole discovery was summed up in a formula which he presented to the government. The exact details of it were unknown, but it was announced that it explained the preparation of a compound that would resist the action of that peculiar agent in service of the Supermen that repulsed the shells.

The formula was put to use the next day. Hundreds of high explosive shells were coated with a kind of paint made of this substance and a score or so of sixteen-inch guns were hastened to the vicinity of the mountain and placed in a semi-circle around it. Carefully camouflaged, they were loaded and aimed at the peak whence had emanated the green ray. When the prearranged moment arrived the first gun was fired, and at the report the red light appeared as before. But this time the shell failed to stop, and hitting the mountain-side, blasted a large hole in the rocky slope.

THE general swore softly to himself. "Dammit! Rotten aim! Should have hit the peak. We didn't get them on the first shot and now we're in for it." They were. Like a striking reptile the green ray leapt from the mountain peak, and attacking the gun, caused it to vanish into thin air. Following it a bomb was discharged from the same place and blew six of the massive guns into fragments. It was fortunate that the genius of von Renstein had foreseen this, when he advised taking several of them. The next shot saved the day. For better aimed, it struck squarely on the center of the peak and hurled the Supermen into eternity.

I will not dwell on the reception accorded to von Renstein at Washington, nor will I dilate upon the Great Inter-

national Treaty of Paris which followed a short time after. All of these facts are now matters of historical interest.

BUT now I come to the hitherto unknown portion of this history. It is a matter of public knowledge that Carl von Renstein died about a year ago leaving behind him, among other things, a will and a diary. In the will was a request that the diary should not be opened until twelve months after his death. Now that the specified time is up, I am acting in accordance with his wishes in printing certain portions that are connected with the Supermen. The manuscript was originally written in German and a rather free translation, *minus* a few somewhat explosive remarks, appears below. Besides clearing up a few details here and there of the above history that may seem somewhat vague and insufficient, it actually solves the mystery that has always surrounded the origin of the Supermen—a mystery with which the greatest living scientists have been powerless to cope.

JANUARY 4, 1960. A fine day. But my work leaves me little time for admiration. My advanced biology class begins work on heredity to-day. And there is that experiment about the speed of the light reflex action of the amoeba as compared with that of the paramecium. Then there is the new parallel beam microscope that just arrived from Germany yesterday, that has to be assembled.

JANUARY 5. The heredity class yesterday was interesting. I explained how the genes, found in the chromosomes of the nuclei of the reproductive cells, influence various hereditary characteristics. I told them of unit characters and of dominant and recessive traits. With the new microscope we could actually see the genes in the germ cells of a

rabbit. Just then one of my pupils asked me a curious question. He wanted to know whether one could fix an animal's characteristics beforehand to suit one's self, if he could tamper with the genes and arrange them at will. An interesting thought.

FEBRUARY 26. It is a long time since I have entered anything in this diary. The new incubator came to-day. By the new Austin electrical process perfected last year, we could watch the fertilized egg of a guinea hen grow into a complete and mature individual in the short space of twenty minutes!

JUNE 16. Four or five months ago I used to write in this book every day. Now, for some reason, I don't. Probably because nothing of interest ever happens here.

JULY 10. Vacation at last! Now I can go on with some original work in biology, which I had planned.

JULY 12. There is something that sticks in my mind. It is that question that I was asked about changing the hereditary characteristics by manipulation of the genes. Of course the thing is theoretically possible. But practically, who knows? After all there has recently been developed apparatus undreamed of ten years ago.

JULY 21. I have decided. I am going to devote myself to research on hereditary traits and their artificial alteration. But first I must get one of those excellent parallel beam microscopes. And I need an incubator like the one in the college laboratory.

AUGUST 29. Eureka! Success at last. I have taken the fertilized ovum of a cat and by injecting some of the

genes of a dog I could actually make it bark! Yes, bark! It is wonderful. Such a success I never dreamed of. Yet sometimes I fear that no good can come of this. Such power is more than mortal man should be allowed to possess. Well, now I am going to take a vacation. And then back to college and to work!

SEPTEMBER 27. College has begun. I saw the boy whose chance question put me on the track of my great triumph. I told him of my work. How his face beamed with pleasure and amazement when he heard of it! He suggested that it might be experimented with in man. A terrible idea! What might occur, no one can guess.

The notes inscribed from September 28, 1960 to September 30, 1961 have been omitted as they are of little interest to the layman, being principally scientific reflections having no bearing on the story of the Supermen.

NOVEMBER 1, 1961. To-day I have returned to my study of hereditary transmutations after a lapse of a year. A sudden revival of interest.

NOVEMBER 6. I have done it! I have created Supermen! Their bodies are no different. But the brains—ah, there lies the secret! By the aid of the incubator I was able in a few hours to breed and cross-breed those in which the genes regulating the mind were best developed. By delicate operations on some of the genes I succeeded in giving them the power of mental control at a distance. What a commotion this will arouse!

NOVEMBER 8. I have permitted six of them to grow to normal size. Only six, for the rest I killed off. But those six are the pick, the flower of the crop, as the expression goes. All males.

NOVEMBER 9. What a terrible misfortune! My Supermen have escaped. I read to-day that one of them was met in a field by a farm hand. The Superman discovered his power of mental control. *Mein Gott!* To think that this should have happened!

NOVEMBER 23. Yesterday I heard how half of that innocent village was ruthlessly destroyed. I fear they have resolved to make themselves masters of the globe. Of course the pillaged laboratory supplied the materials. Even a Superman cannot make high explosives from nothing.

DECEMBER 4. Tragic! For a while I thought that they had stopped their murdering, but no. Alas! The other half of the village was blown up yesterday.

DECEMBER 19. Things are getting rapidly worse. The Supermen have built an instrument for producing a ray which appears to disintegrate all the molecules of metallic substances.

DECEMBER 20. I have made inquiries. I found that there was in the plundered laboratory one ounce of uranium nitrate. Of course uranium is only weakly radio-active but they seem to have found a way of hastening its decomposition and it is the tremendous power which results, that they use to produce their green ray. But as they have only an ounce of the uranium compound, they must be economical with it and that is why they operate but one small beam. However, I learned that they are going to be shelled out of their mountain to-morrow with six-inch guns.

DECEMBER 21. The guns were of little advantage. The Supermen have devised a system for actually repelling the shells as fast as they arrive. It

takes the form of a rosy-hued glow which encompasses the entire mountain. As soon as a projectile comes in contact with it, it is hurled back a few feet. Like a magnet its force seems to vary inversely proportional to the square of the distance. That is why the shell is jerked so suddenly instead of being gradually retarded.

DECEMBER 22. Eureka! I once exclaimed this when in my folly I made a discovery which might have destroyed mankind. Now I say it again when I have found the means for overcoming the menace of the Supermen.

In looking over a file of papers of some years ago relating to physics, I unearthed a whole set of original experiments on magnetism and its relation to electricity.

In the course of my perusal my eye was attracted to a phrase on the margin of one of the sheets. It was a speculation I had once made on the probable explanation of magnetic attraction and repulsion, which may lead to a way of neutralizing these should my theory prove true. It struck me as curious that I had never tried to verify it experimentally, but the biology class and my other work kept me so busy. And then it occurred to me that, if my theory were substantiated, it would save the world. And the world needs saving now.

WELL, let it suffice when I say that I did succeed in proving the truth of my suppositions. What is even more important, I was able to extend my principle so that like the Supermen I could endow any metal at all with magnetic properties. Now it only remains to perfect a neutralizer and the Supermen will be conquered.

DECEMBER 24. They tried using larger guns, the fools. As if the repulsive glow would not work just as well with large shells as with small ones! However, it doesn't matter. The neutralizing substance has been prepared and the formula sent to the government. I advised them to have a large number of guns concealed so that if the Supermen succeed in destroying a few before they are blown up, there will be enough left to complete the work.

DECEMBER 27. Triumph! The world is saved! But to think that it all might have been averted. There was a celebration. I was awarded a gold medal and they made long speeches. But in spite of all that, I was unhappy. What glories can compensate for the loss of life, the damage, the destruction? And then——.

Here the diary of Professor Carl von Renstein abruptly stops.

THE END