

STARTLING STORIES

Vol. 2, No. 3

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November, 1939

A Complete Book-Length Scientifiction Novel



THE FORTRESS OF UTOPIA

By **JACK WILLIAMSON**

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THREE WISE MEN

A Time-Traveling Machine
Explodes on a
Millionaire's Doorstep

By
**LLOYD ARTHUR
ESCHBACH**

*Author of "The Time Conqueror," "The
Meteor Miners," etc.*

NOW, listen, Sergeant. I've got some information that you really ought to get. I guess I'd be better off if I kept my mouth shut, but—well, this Doctor Stoner you're holding is innocent. He didn't murder those three freaks. They—just died.

There's a lot to this case that you don't understand, Sergeant. Doc Stoner and I are the only ones who know the inside story. And he won't talk.

Who, me? My name's Tom Dorion. Age thirty-two. I'm a freak-hunter for the Empire Circus combine—you know, the outfit that bought out Ringling and Barnum . . .

Oh—I just keep hunting up freaks for the shows. Whenever the boss gets a lead on something new and big for the midways, he sends me out to sign 'em up. Between times I keep roving, scouting for material.

Where do I cut in on this case? That's what I want to tell you. It's a long story, and I'm not much of a hand



*They introduced themselves as visitors from the
Forty-third Century, A.D.*

at talking, but here goes. About two months back, I'd just returned from Borneo with a two-headed snake, and a Dyak boy with a pair of singing parakeets, when the big boss—that's Joe Wallace—called me into his office. I could see right off that he didn't feel like patting me on the back and handing me a cigar, and, suddenlike, he jammed a newspaper into my hand and pointed to a headline.

"Look!" he yelled. "Somewhere out on Long Island are three freaks—little guys with big heads—and I want them for my shows! They're gettin' a swell build-up. An' you're gonna sign 'em—or else!"

I didn't like that "or else," but I didn't say so. I just looked at the article. Maybe you read it, too, Sergeant—most everybody did, I guess. Anyway, I have the clipping here, and if you don't mind, I'll sort of skim over 'em, just to refresh your memory.

THREE WISE MEN COME OUT OF FUTURE

Ambassadors From Tomorrow Appear at Long Island House Party

SCIENTISTS ASTOUNDED

Long Island City, July 9—A house party at the country estate of Oliver P. Mawson, millionaire automobile manufacturer, came to an abrupt and thrilling termination last night with the appearance of three uninvited guests. With more than two hundred famous people present, including the leading figures in artistic, scientific and financial circles the party reached its height at about 2 a.m., when a terrific explosion shook the sumptuous Mawson mansion. Shouts were heard from the lawn outside, and excited guests streamed into the night.

A startling spectacle greeted them. The entire western sky was lit up by a strange greenish light rising from a little hill a hundred yards away. And in that unearthly glow they saw a huge polished metal cylinder sprawled on the hillside, its lower end twisted and torn by the explosion which had gouged and blasted the hilltop, uprooting several young trees.

As the guests reached the hill, they heard sounds within the metal cylinder, and one after another, three strange small men crawled out. Almost identical in appearance, they were little more than four feet in height, and their bodies, covered only by white sleeveless shirts of some soft silky material, and flaring white shorts, seemed amazingly thin and fragile, though tanned a

golden brown. Their heads, completely bald, were enormous, being fully twice the size of normal human heads. And their faces, thin almost to the point of emaciation, were old and wrinkled, with deeply shrunken eyes and thin, indrawn lips, the whole somehow grotesquely out of proportion with their huge heads.

SCIENTIST INTERVIEWED

In an interview, Roger St. John, noted astronomer and writer, stated: "I never saw a more startling spectacle. That green glow which seemed to emanate from the very earth of the hilltop, cloaked those three little men with an air of the unearthly. It stunned us. There was something almost juvenile in their faces, yet with it was something so incredibly ancient that—well, it marked them as creatures of another world—or time!

"It seemed almost as though they had stepped from the pages of a Wellsian fantasy—men from the future. When one of them spoke, his voice was peculiarly flat and bore an indescribable accent.

"A slight miscalculation, Lon,' he said, 'doubtless due to the changing contour of the Terrestrial surface. We should have raised our supports two feet higher.'

"Fortunate that our miscalculation had no more regrettable result than the loss of our Time-drive,' replied the second little man dryly.

"The third waved a hand toward us and said in the same flat voice, 'We have audience, comrades.' And the three walked slowly down the hillside."

COME OUT OF FUTURE

After the excited throng escorted the strange visitors into the great ballroom of Mawson Manor, and subsided to a point where intelligent conversation could be carried on, the three introduced themselves as "Lon St-228-86," "Ander Cw-741-22," and "Ken Mb-390-54," visitors from the Forty-third Century, A.D., or the year 2351, New Era. They had come back into the past, so they said, to view at first hand what their history indicated was the first year of the New Era—this very year.

There followed an animated discussion, during which the visitors were dubbed "The Three Wise Men," for they revealed a startling knowledge about everything. The effect of this discovery was startling . . .

WHAT'S that, Sarge? . . . Well, okay. Anyway, maybe it gives you an idea how I felt when I looked at Joe Wallace after I'd finished reading the thing. I opened my mouth—

"Don't say it, Dorion," he snapped. "I'm dumb enough to give you credit for having a little brains—an' if you try to tell me you're fallin' for this

time-travelin' bunk, I'm liable to get sore. Look! You scam over to that Mawson guy's joint an' stay there till things break. Sooner or later the bottom'll fall outa the story these three big-headed freaks are dishing up, an' when it does, I want you there to sign 'em!"

I didn't waste much time getting out to Mawson's little fifty-acre estate on Long Island, but getting inside was something else. A faked reporter's card didn't work. Neither did a black bag, a pair of spectacles, and a doctor's front. So—well, I got in, but I was glad there didn't happen to be any police around.

After I brushed the dust off my soup-and-fish, there wasn't anyone could tell me from the other guests. When I first saw those three little men—well, it was an experience. The papers hadn't stretched things a bit. Boy, I figured, if Joe Wallace could get them, we sure had three world-beaters on our hands.

This guy Mawson had sort of set himself up as proud father and legal guardian of the Three—and let me tell you, he did things right. Some of those feeds of his would set you back twenty bucks in a Manhattan hash house.

The second day, Mawson arranged an interview with the press. Never saw such a mob of reporters before or since. The scientists were there, and—well, when the lid blew off, and the physics, astronomy, higher mathematics, biology and all the rest of that bunk started flying around sort of casual-like, the Three Wise Men got to telling the scientific big shots where to head in. Those little guys knew everything!

There was one egg there, a German scientist, who thought he was pretty hot stuff. Seems he'd written a book called "Atoms, Protons and Positrons, the Building Blocks of the Universe." The way he looked at it, now there was nothing more to be said. He mentioned his work, and Ander—he was the only one of the Three with a sense of humor—started spouting a chapter of the book, word for word! Just sat there looking at nothing while

the syllables rolled out in that flat, hollow voice.

I could see the Dutchman swelling up like a balloon—not thinking of the brains this little man had, but of how important his work was to be remembered two thousand years in the future. Then Ander said, sort of soft and gentle:

"We preserve some of the more absurd of the ancient writings as entertainment for the children. A counterpart, I should say, of your fairy tales."

When the reporters left at the end of three or four hours, the Three Wise Men were headed for the biggest splash of publicity that ever hit anybody. I still remember some of those headlines.

The Three Wise Men Explain
Relativity to Einstein

Super-Mentals Baffle Scientists

Future Men Ride Rough Shod Over
Earth's Best Minds

There were pictures by the dozens, pictures of the Three, pictures of their machine—what was left of it after the souvenir hunters got through with it.

FUNNY, but there was one big angle that everybody'd overlooked at first. But when it struck, it socked about forty million people all at once. If these little birds had come out of the future, they must know some history that hadn't happened as yet! And you know, Sarge, there's nothing a man wouldn't give to know what's going to break tomorrow or the next day. Think how swell it would be for a guy playing the market! And these Three with their super memories—well, it looked like a natural.

About forty million phone calls, telegrams and letters struck Mawson Manor at the same time. Could the Three Wise Men tell the history of the future? They could and would!

Oliver P. Mawson arranged it. He's a big fat man about six-feet-two, with round red cheeks like a pair of apples, and eyes as bright as two blue marbles—and he's just as hard. Worked his way up from a laborer in an auto plant

to become one of the richest men in the country.

With Mawson pulling the strings, the Three Wise Men were scheduled for a big television broadcast on a world hook-up. That was just a few months before the Presidential election, and the Three crowded the candidates right off the air waves.

As for the broadcast—well, everybody had heard of the Three, had read what they had said, and now they could see them and hear them. And they said plenty. They told of the big yellow war of seventy years from now. They told. . . . But I guess you heard the broadcast. About this New Era business; and this year being the first of the New Era, the beginning of a slow, unbroken march toward genuine civilization. And how they said a man by the name of Doctor Michel Stoner was the one to take the first big step forward. Michel Stoner, the next President of the United States, they said.

Let me tell you, Sarge, that rocked the great American public back on their heels. Who was Doctor Michel Stoner? Nobody'd ever heard of him. Yet the Three said he was going to be the next President!

The papers—you remember, Sarge—played it up big. Michel Stoner, the Man of Destiny! Who was he? Where was he?

So they started hunting for Michel Stoner, M.D. Some reporter found out that about twenty-five years ago he'd practiced medicine in a little Pennsylvania town, and that he'd dropped that to take over a professor's chair in a college so small they didn't even have a paid football team—and that was all. He'd simply disappeared.

The search went on until at last they found him in a little four-room cabin in the Massachusetts hills about a hundred miles from nowhere. Didn't even have a radio. Hadn't seen a newspaper in two months. Nobody around there knew anything about him except that about once every three months or so he drove out of the hills in a dilapidated flivver to buy some gasoline, food and books. The books they remembered most, 'cause there was al-

ways a lot of them waiting in the Post Office marked M. Stoner, General Delivery. I think it was through the publishers he was finally located.

Well, if nobody knew anything about him at first, it didn't take them long to find out. Oliver P., himself, drove up there in a platinum plated Rolls and carried him back to Mawson Manor. And of course there was another big world broadcast, with Mawson the master of ceremonies. The Three Wise Men were there with bells on. And Stoner—well, Sarge, if you saw and heard that broadcast, you'll have to admit he made some impression.

I DON'T care if you do have him behind the bars! I told you he's innocent—and I'm here to prove it to you.

I have another clipping . . .

Now wait a minute, Sarge. Just this one. This'll be the last one I'll read. You see, I make scrap books of the things I'm interested in—helps me keep a record. . . . Listen!

WORLD BROADCAST STARTLES VAST AUDIENCE

Dr. Michel Stoner Makes Amazing Impression

WILL RUN FOR OFFICE

New York City, Aug. 22—Dr. Michel Stoner, the recluse from the Massachusetts hills, will be an independent candidate in the forthcoming Presidential election. He revealed that last night, after a world television broadcast in which he proved to be one of the most impressive figures ever to reach the telecreens. Despite his earlier decision to leave politics to others, Dr. Stoner found the American public so overwhelmingly insistent on his running for office, that he felt impelled to yield to their demands.

Dr. Stoner faced an audience burning with curiosity to see the man mentioned by the Three Wise Men as the first President of the New Era. Of average height and rather slender in build, he is at once a figure of quiet power, impressive dignity, and magnetic personality. His head is crowned with a mass of snow white hair. And his voice—never has such a resonant voice borne so much of wisdom on the one hand and beauty of diction on the other. In Dr. Michel Stoner, America has discovered a genius.

For the past twenty years Doctor Stoner has been engaged in the writing of a vol-

uminous and comprehensive work tentatively entitled "Man and the Way of Man." In his manuscript, already more than two million words in length, Doctor Stoner has discussed in full detail the development of Man since the dawn of reason, up to the present, and into the future. If the numerous quotations from his work are an indication, he possesses a rare insight into human behavior and character.

New Era Dawning

"Man," he said, "has reached the threshold of vast new truths. The doors of knowledge are swinging aside. Old thoughts and methods of thinking are passing away, displaced by a newer, more rational consciousness. Long-standing fears, disorders and superstitions are yielding to an imposing array of new knowledge, like a tidal wave sweeping everything before it. And Man rides like foam on its crest!

"A New Era is dawning, a new age when all mankind will be welded into one vast spiritual whole, one tremendous world community in which the term 'war' will have no meaning. Someone with cosmic understanding, someone in whom the world consciousness has awakened into fullness of life, will lead you, but it should be someone wiser far than I—someone whose name I do not know."

Yeah, Sarge, I suppose that is enough. Seems like everybody else thought so, too, for it was only about ten minutes after he left the air that demands started pouring in for him to run for President.

What a howl went up in certain quarters when the Doc started his campaign. After all, this guy's speeches were the kind that got practically anything they asked for, and with the Three Wise Men on his side, it looked like a sure thing for the dark horse. The Democrats kicked because they figured they had had the thing in the bag; and the Republicans kicked because they thought—or, at least hoped—that this time they'd be able to upset the mule.

But the howls were only straws in a cyclone. No one paid much attention to the other candidates. A blind man could see that Stoner was slated to go in with the biggest majority in history. What was the use in voting against a man who, future records showed, had been elected? And with the Three for him, and Mawson's millions behind him—well, Sarge, it was some set-up.

I DIDN'T see much of the three little big-shots those days, nor much of Stoner or Mawson, either. They still made the big Long Island mansion their headquarters, but they were too busy to spend much time with a flock of perpetual house guests. I figure they'd have given us our walking papers if it hadn't been for the scientists, but they made company for the Three, and good copy for the tabloids. Anyway, I was in, and enjoying it.

But after awhile my conscience started working. I remembered Joe Wallace, and here I was, swimming and playing tennis with a pair of swell dames, eating so much that I'd put on an average of two pounds a week, and—well, I decided to get busy.

It took about a week for me to get the hang of the place; then one night when I was playing detective I stumbled on something big. There'd been some big doings in Philadelphia—Stoner given the keys to the burg, a big parade, speeches and everything that went with it. They'd come back to Mawson Manor all played out.

I was sliding along one of those big corridors when I heard voices. Mawson's bark, Stoner's smooth, deep baritone, and the flat creaking voices of the Three. And they didn't sound like they were chinning just to pass the time away.

"Get this, Stoner," I heard Mawson say, and his words sort of cut like a knife, "you're not backing out! You couldn't, even if I'd let you. And I'm not letting you, see! There's too much involved in this for things to topple now. So forget it."

"I can't forget it," Stoner said, as solemn as a funeral. "I'm tired of the whole thing. I wish you'd never found me."

Then one of the Three spoke—I think it was Lon.

"We're tired, too." And he certainly sounded tired; like a guy with insomnia, who hadn't slept for months.

"Tired!" Mawson's voice cracked. "Then go to bed—get some sleep. Tomorrow you'll be over this nonsense. I've got enough to worry about without this. Got another threatening let-

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ter today—this one, I think, from the Ernisto mob. The politicians are back of 'em, I'm certain, but I can't prove it. The police—they can't do a damn' thing! And where'd we be if the Three Wise Men were kidnaped!"

I heard a door slam, and I beat it down the hall—fast.

I didn't sleep so well that night. What I'd heard took heavy thinking. Stoner was tired of the whole thing. Tired of what? Of running for President? Or of a big fake? Then I thought of those strange big-headed little men with their young eyes and old voices, and I didn't know what to think. . . . And this talk of kidnaping—there hadn't been even a whisper about it in the papers. Big things were starting to break, and I could only wait.

I dragged through the next two days in a sort of fog, waiting for something to happen. And when I woke up on the morning of the third day, it had happened all right—cracked wide open.

THE THREE WISE MEN KIDNAPED!

The tabloids screamed it in the biggest headlines since the Lindbergh case. The telescreens sort of snapped, or roared it at a wholesale rate. I'd been half expecting it, yet it knocked the wind out of me.

It seemed Doctor Stoner and the Three had been returning late from a trip to the studios. Mawson had been delayed. On a lonely stretch of road they'd run out of gas—how, was a mystery, 'cause the gauge registered "full." Must've been tampered with. The chauffeur had walked back toward the last gas station they'd passed, and when he'd come back, car, Wise Men, and Presidential candidate had disappeared.

BUT you know all that, Sarge, better than I do—and you know how they found Stoner the next day lying in the back of the car as sick as a dog, and the smell of chloroform strong enough to choke an elephant. He told how a big sedan had pulled up and

four men with tommy-guns had ordered the Three into their machine, and had doped him. That was all he knew till the cops found him. And the mileage gauge had been smashed . . .

Oh, I know it's all old stuff to you, but I've got to tell this in my own way. I don't want to skip anything important, see?

Well, in Mawson Manor things resembled a first-class madhouse. The big boss tore things wide open. Doctor Stoner was confined to his room, almost prostrated by shock. And then the police came in droves, and sort of suddenlike I got the idea that it was time for Tom Dorion to scam! I was the uninvited guest, and I'd have a tough time talking myself out of this spot if the police caught up with me.

In town, I hung around my room waiting to see what would happen next. There wasn't much—just the delivery of that first ransom note demanding one million dollars for each of the Three. Letters clipped out of newspapers and pasted on a sheet of bond paper by a guy wearing gloves. No fingerprints—no nothing!

You picked up a lot of mobsters that first week, didn't you, Sarge? And you looked for a house guest who had disappeared on the day after the kidnaping, a guy nobody seemed to know much about—only you couldn't find him. And after a little while you found out you hadn't accomplished anything. The papers made it hot for the police commissioner, and he made it hot for everybody under him. You sweated a flock of mobsters—and it didn't mean a thing.

It was about that time that I decided I'd better get busy. Joe Wallace had told me to stick with the Three Wise Men till I'd signed 'em up for his shows, and here I'd let 'em be kidnaped under my very nose. I sort of thought things over and I got a hunch. You see, I couldn't get that little conversation between Mawson, Stoner, and the Three out of my dome. So I hired a flivver and headed for the Massachusetts hills.

That little cabin of Michel Stoner's wasn't the easiest place in the world to find, but I found it. I guess I was

about two blocks from the place when I parked the rattling wreck I was driving and sort of crept up toward the joint. It was a nifty little hideaway.

It took me about a half an hour to cover a couple hundred yards. I didn't figure there was much danger, if my hunch was right. But I couldn't be sure, so I didn't take any chances. If those hardboiled boys with the hair grease and the tommy-guns were mixed up in this—well, it might not be so healthy for Tom Dorion!

But I finally got there and sort of eased my eyes up over a window sill. There they were—the Three Wise Men and nobody else. It took me just about one second to get around to the door. Let me tell you, Sarge, I felt good. This was a break. Here was my chance. If I didn't get their names on some kind of a contract, it wouldn't be my fault.

WHEN I knocked on the door and one of them answered, "Come in," some of the pep went out of me. Honest, Sarge, I never heard anything as—*as* lifeless as that voice. So flat and dull. Almost like I was hearing the dead talking, if you get what I mean.

There they were, sprawled out across a cot bed, hardly moving. They always were queer-looking birds, but now it seemed like they were centuries old, as though they were shrinking, drying up before my eyes.

"Good morning, gentlemen," I said cheery-like. "Thought I'd stop in an' say hello."

Anders answered, and he didn't even move his head. "We are glad you came. We are so—tired. We have lived beyond our—allotted span. Soon we shall die. And it is not good to die alone."

If you don't think that just about floored me, Sarge, you're crazy. There I was with the best attraction that ever hit the show game, practically in the palm of my hand, and they were dying! For a second I didn't say a word, just stared from one to another. I still remember half seeing the rest of the room—a little stove with an empty frying pan on it, and a coffee

percolator; rows and rows of books.

Lon pulled himself up on one elbow. "There can be no mistake," he whispered, and that's all it was, a hoarse whisper. "We know we have but little time in this life. That is why we left. Doctor—Doctor Stoner arranged it—though he did not realize—how it was with us. We would like to see him before—we die."

Ken, the third little man, sat up, and I could see it took a terrific effort. His eyes burned out at me like two hot coals out of two hollow pits; coals that were burning to ashes.

"We are old—so terribly old," he croaked, "yet we are so—young. And the end is close." A thin hand pointed toward the desk. "There, in the upper drawer on that side, is a little book. Get it."

In a sort of trance I went over to the desk. I found the book.

"That explains things—which should be known." And Ken slumped back on the bed.

"Look," I said, "isn't there something I can do?" My thoughts were going around in circles, but I felt I had to do something.

Ander moved his head from side to side. "No one can help us. We know. But you can get Doctor Stoner to—come here—before we pass on. There may be time—if he hurries."

I sort of slid toward the door. "Okay, okay, I'll rush," I said. "I'll get him. Just hang on."

The next thing I knew, I was hot-footing it up the winding road toward the flivver. And, let me tell you, I sent that old can rolling like she never rolled before. I'd passed through a little town about fifteen miles back, and I headed that way with the accelerator jammed against the floor-board.

I guess I reached the place in about twenty minutes, though it seemed like hours. But I got there, finally, and I put in a long distance call for the Mawson estate. A cop answered, I think. It didn't take him long to get Doc Stoner on the wire when I bellowed it was a matter of life or death.

I SPILLED the story to Stoner in a few words, but he didn't even let

me finish. I heard a sort of choking cry, then I heard the receiver crash on the hook. I got out of there in a hurry. I didn't want to be around when the fireworks started.

You know what happened better than I do. Stoner tearing out of the mansion like a lunatic, grabbing that big Rolls Royce of Mawson's and roaring away before anyone could even think of stopping him.

Nobody but Stoner knows what happened up to the time the cops arrived, about an hour behind him. I have a good idea, but it's only an idea. Anyway, when the police got there, as you know, Sarge, they found the Doctor sitting on a stump in the weed-grown garden behind the cabin. And the cabin—it was half burned down by that time. A little later there were only smoking ashes.

And Doctor Stoner just sat there and stared. And he'd only say in a sort of dull, dry voice:

"They're dead, and that's their funeral pyre. No one will ever know."

But he didn't kill 'em, Sarge. I tell you, he's innocent. They just died!

Here's how I dope it out, Sarge. Oliver P. Mawson was behind the whole thing. You ought to be able to see that yourself with my telling you about that argument I heard. He got the big idea when he stumbled across Stoner's cabin while driving through the hills up there. Those three little guys with their big heads must have started his imagination working.

Huh? Sure, they were there all the time. Don't tell me you fell for that time-traveling bunk! Mawson staged the whole thing. I'll bet when you check on it, you'll find he had the "time-machine" built in his automobile factories. And, of course, since he couldn't very well fake a time-traveling engine, he had to have that explosion to destroy it. It was good publicity stuff, too. Made a swell spectacle, with a little chemical of some sort spilled on the ground.

It was power he wanted! Power! He had so much money he couldn't keep track of it, and that could buy quite a bit of power—but not enough. He'd been a little guy who had worked

himself up from nowhere, and it had gone to his head. He wanted to be dictator of America—and he almost got what he was after!

Sure! With these fake men from the future, he planned to have Stoner elected to the Presidency, with himself, of course, the power behind the throne. And a little later on, with those same Three Wise Men paving the way, he'd take over the control of the government. It was a perfect set-up; only something bigger than Oliver P. stepped in.

Where'd the Three come from? *That's where that little black book comes in—my ace in the hole.* That's what will save Michel Stoner from the chair or the bug-house. I've got it here. It's Stoner's diary, with a daily record covering the last twenty years.

Of course I'll give it to you, Sarge—but you can't read shorthand, can you? I can. Listen to this—the first entry that interests us, years back:

March 3, 1930. Ann is dead. It was too much for her. God forgive me, but I did all a man could do. She was always so frail, and those endless hours of travail were more than she could bear. What will I do? I can hardly see the page before me. And those three mites, they're such pitiful little things. Their heads are enormous. Victims of hydrocephalus, obviously. I must save them—or her death will be completely futile.

I'VE looked up that word "hydrocephalus," Sarge. It means water on the brain. Here's what a guy named Blakeslee says about it. A lot of it's Greek to me, but you'll get the general idea.

"Hydrocephalus. Fluid effusion within the cranium, giving rise to a more or less uniform stretching of the cranial bones. The sutures are obviously stretched asunder, accompanied by extreme enlargement of the forehead. Frequently the eyes will appear misplaced. Sometimes they look very much deeper set than normal; in other cases they look as though they are depressed, as a result of the downward pressure exerted by the excess fluid upon the roof of the orbits. Major degrees of hydrocephalus cause such extreme enlargement of the head, coupled with such thinning of the bones and stretching of the sutures, that the diagnosis is almost unmistakable . . .

Here's the next important entry.

The three boys are still alive, though that they can live at all with such inadequate treatment is a miracle. I have only canned milk and a prepared baby food, and it's a poor substitute for mother's milk. I buried Ann out in the garden beside the stump where she liked to sit. There was nothing else to do. I can't leave my three sons while life remains in their little bodies. I've decided to try the glandular treatment advocated by Gardner for the hydrocephalic condition.

There's no use reading the entries for the next few weeks, Sarge. It's touch and go for the three boys. But here's the entry for April 22nd:

The danger for Andrew, Alonzo and Kenneth is past. They seem almost normal now, though they'll always have abnormally large heads. I hope their minds are not affected, a definite possibility, since theirs was such a severe case. I left them alone for the first time today while I drove into town for some much needed supplies.

It goes on that way, Sarge, for about seven years. Then you begin to see Doc Stoner starting to get sort of worried. Something's wrong with his boys. Finally he writes this:

May 19, 1937. Lord, what a blunder! I'm a disgrace to the medical profession. To think that this could have happened to my own sons! I've noticed a strangeness for quite some time past, and at last I know what it is. Progeria. A glandular ailment so obscure that perhaps only a half dozen cases have been recorded. The indications are almost unmistakable. I'm afraid—no, certain—that this condition is the result of my treatment for the hydrocephalus. I know now that my boys will never be normal, at least physically. Mentally they seem far above average. Andrew is the most brilliant, though all three have truly amazing memories. Already they have read and memorized every book in my library. I'll have to

buy more books. Perhaps they may develop into brilliant scientists or writers.

I looked that word "progeria" up, too, Sarge, and what a time I had. Here's the little information I got:

"Progeria is primary, spontaneous infantism mingled with premature senility. Hence, with shortness of stature and other indications of infantilism, there are baldness, emaciation, arterial sclerosis, and general decrepitude. The ear lobule is absent, the nasal cartilages are conspicuous, and the fingers nodose owing to the prominence of the epiphyses. Death from angina pectoris or other senile disease usually ensues at eighteen or earlier."

There's a lot there that I don't understand, Sarge, but I do know this. The Three Wise Men were freaks built up by those two diseases. They looked like men from the future—or, at least, like some writers say they'll look. Mawson saw their possibilities, talked Stoner into showing them off—after all, Stoner was probably proud of their brains—and got the doctor to go into the thing himself. When he saw what it was leading to, he tried to back out, but Mawson wouldn't let him. He faked the kidnaping to upset Mawson's plans.

The three boys, old men at eighteen, died of old age. And Stoner, all broken up because his sons were dead, and probably blaming himself, burned their bodies with the cabin, to let them keep the little glory that was theirs.

I've spoiled that by telling you this, but anyway, I've saved him from the chair.

Here's the diary, Sarge. There's a lot more dope in it. I guess I'd better report back to Joe Wallace.