

# SPACE SCIENCE FICTION

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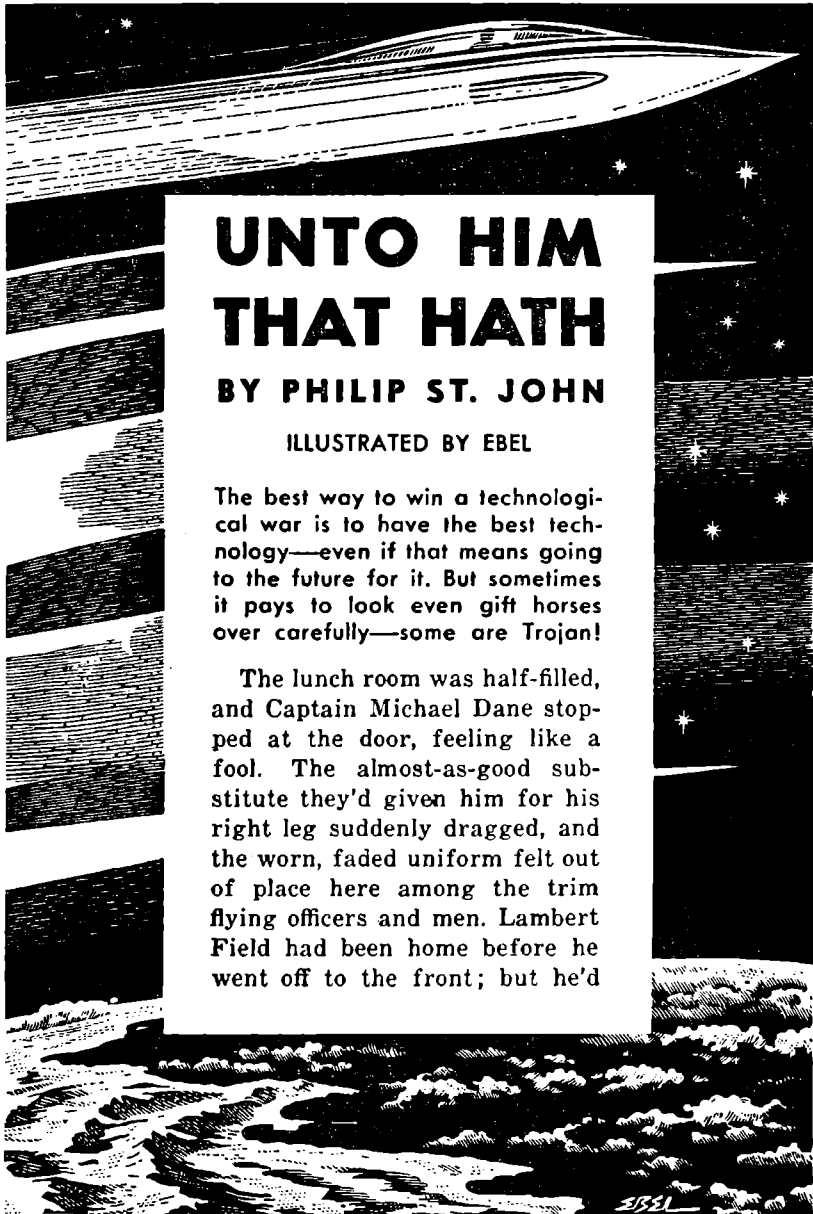
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# UNTO HIM THAT HATH

BY PHILIP ST. JOHN

ILLUSTRATED BY EBEL

The best way to win a technological war is to have the best technology—even if that means going to the future for it. But sometimes it pays to look even gift horses over carefully—some are Trojan!

The lunch room was half-filled, and Captain Michael Dane stopped at the door, feeling like a fool. The almost-as-good substitute they'd given him for his right leg suddenly dragged, and the worn, faded uniform felt out of place here among the trim flying officers and men. Lambert Field had been home before he went off to the front; but he'd

been whole and in fashion then.

Now he was attracting attention by just standing there. He moved up to the counter, selecting the old seat at the end. He sank down tiredly. There had been too many planes, too many flights, too long a time in the hospital, and now too much mystery and haste in getting him back.

"Coffee—just coffee," he ordered as a waitress came up to him. "Black and hot." He shouldn't have come into the place; it was silly to expect things to stay the same while he was gone—stupid to waste time on a whim, when he should have been reporting to the Dane Aircraft buildings down at the end of the field.

The coffee was suddenly in front of him, and he reached for it. But a hand was in his way. "Still three lumps, Mike?"

He looked up at that. Molly was four years older, but those years had done well by her. She'd filled out a bit, and had learned to use her brown hair as a setting for her oval face, instead of looking like a tousled tomboy. Now she lifted the end of the counter and came around to sit beside him. There were no rings on the left hand she dropped over his. "Been a long time, Mike—too long for no letters."

He pretended not to hear the

last. There was nothing he could say. He'd told her he wouldn't write and wouldn't let her be tied down to a man who might not come back. He'd kept his word. Now he shrugged, and turned his palm up to meet hers. "Too long, kid. I thought you'd be in school, instead of here."

"I'm helping out while I'm back. Be here a few weeks before the position I took with Caltech is ready for me."

"Caltech?" He shook his head in admiration. "I suppose that means you're a Ph.D. physicist now, with gravity all figured out, and fields doing dances at your whim. You promised you'd let me see your doctorate thesis."

She grimaced. "Not when they mark it Ultra Top Secret. But you'll see it on the planes one of these days. I found something—a whole new field of physics. I told you I would, and I did . . . How's it feel to be back?"

"Lousy." He jerked his thumb back toward a table where a pink-faced major was declaiming on how they *had* to dig out their H-Bombs and use them against Pan-Asia. Dane had heard little else since he'd been back, and there was no way of convincing the natural fools that it would be world suicide. Somehow, up to now both sides had managed to avoid turning it into an all-out fatal atomic war.

Pan-Asia was afraid the American Alliance had too many such bombs for them, and the Alliance knew how little it could do with bombs against the decentralized enemy, whose one great manufacturing center had somehow remained undiscoverable. But the Alliance was losing, now. In five grinding years of technological warfare, the despised Pan-Asians had proved themselves technologically modern, and with heavier manpower. The Alliance had been retreating across the Dnieper when Mike was wounded, and were now fighting a slow retreat through central Europe. And the fools here were braying for their favorite horror weapon, to kill off everyone!

Then Mike shrugged and tightened his grip on Molly's hand. "And good," he added. "How's Dad?"

She shook her head uneasily. "I've barely seen him, Mike. He looks happy in a feverish way—and worried. And he wants you back, pretty badly. Something funny is going on, and everything's wrapped tight in a blanket of hush-hush. You'd better report in—but come back, Mike!"

Mike nodded and got up to leave, glad to get away from the smug stupidity of the major who thought he could end war

by using something so ugly neither side had dared to touch it. He'd probably been one of the fools who had once thought they could lick Pan-Asia with a single hand, because everyone knew the enemy didn't have the Alliance's technical know-how. Some would never learn better, though the Pan-Asian jets and tanks were rolling forward month by month.

Mike went down the walk, and the weariness was heavier in him. His leg ached, and the toes he no longer had felt cramped. He caught himself limping, and forced himself to stop that. It was only habit; the prosthetic device was completely serviceable. He could even tap-dance with it, if he'd been of a mind to try it.

The Dane Aircraft buildings had spread since he had seen them. They now occupied the whole end of the field, and spread out, enclosing a small helicopter field of their own. He should have guessed it. His father had always been a whizz when he really tried, and the Dane planes had been the only ones to consistently meet the best that Pan-Asia could throw at them.

A guard snapped up smartly. "Halt! Captain, this is restricted. You'll have to get a pass."

"Don't be a damned fool," Mike told him, with the military

formality typical on the real front. "Crank your little phone and tell Dane or Enright that Mike's reporting in."

The guard gulped, unused to facing men who were bored by the authority of a gun. He fumbled, and half-turned toward his box. But before he could reach it, a heavy baritone let out a yell. Enright hadn't changed. He was still a small man, with shoulders that were too big for him, and a wild mop of black hair that fell across his steel-rimmed glasses. Now he came running out, rubbing grease off his hands against his coveralls. Mike noticed there were oak-leaves on his collar. But there was nothing military about him.

He came up, sticking out a calloused hand. "Mike, we've been waiting for you for hours! What happened?"

"A general overrode my priority—claimed he had a sick baby here. So I hitched with a supply ship." Enright had been foreman since Mike could first remember. Mike thumped him on the back, and snapped his finger against the insignia. "Brass!"

Enright seemed embarrassed, but he grinned. "Needed them here. Anybody who can use a wrench on anything half secret gets drafted as an officer. I hear they've got eagles waiting for you. You're looking good, Mike!"

Mike knew it was a lie, but he grinned politely. "Thanks. What's it all about, anyhow? I can guess that Dad wanted me back as soon as I was off the active lists. But why the big fuss about rushing me here, getting me secrecy clearance, and everything else?"

"Big times, I guess," Enright answered, and his voice was a little bitter. "I know your father and Custer have some super-doooper plan on called Project Swipe, but I don't know what it's all about. Anyhow, the Dane works are big enough for your father to throw his weight around now, so maybe he just felt like doing that."

They were back in the first hangar Dane Aircraft had used for its original plant. Now it seemed to be the experimental building and administration offices. Enright led back through a maze of elaborate machinery. "Built the first atomic athodyd right here," he said. "Now we're supposed to be finished with development on the robots, and everything's laid off until Project Swipe comes through."

The athodyds were a bitter memory; they'd been developed by Mike's father and one of the leading nuclear physicists, and should have given the Alliance the complete air mastery, re-

placing the jets with a much more powerful drive. But somehow, the Pan-Asians had managed to get the secret in advance, and it had been all the more in their favor. They'd never found the spy, either. He knew very little of robots, beyond the fact that they were a fantastically improved version of the automatic pilot and bomb-sight combined.

There were rumors that Pan-Asia already had a model of it.

They went back through the silent hangar toward the offices built at the rear. Then Mike caught sight of his father's back, and he mounted the few steps more briskly. Dane was bent over a complicated chart, pointing out to a man wearing soiled fatigues and an Air Force cap with two stars on it.

He swung around at the sound of Mike's steps. "Hi, Mike! Let's have a look at you . . . and you look rotten, boy. Should have pulled you back before they made a useless wreck of you."

But his face flicked from worry to the old smile Mike remembered, and his handshake was hard and eager. After all the false pleasantness, his words were pure relief. The gray in big Bruce Dane's hair had spread a bit, and there were new lines in his face, but he looked about the same as Mike remembered

him. Then he turned quickly.

"General Custer, this is my son, Mike. You two know about each other."

Mike found the other's hand-clasp almost like his father's, and his liking for the general was instantaneous. Custer had been head of an engineering department at one of the major colleges until he was drafted into a commission. He'd gone up rapidly, then, but he'd still considered himself a scientist, rather than a big brass. His somewhat heavy body had none of the false erectness of a typical military attempt at pretending first-class condition, and the grin on his sharp-featured face met Mike's eyes without hesitating over the fact he was a mere captain.

"Hi, Mike. They call me Bob around here. We thought you were going to miss Project Swipe." At the mention, worry touched his face, as it did that of Mike's father. He swung to the older man. "Bruce, I still wish you'd let me take it."

"Not a chance. Who's idea was it, anyhow? Mike, remember those arguments we used to have? Over those magazine stories you started me reading?"

"The fantasy ones, you mean?" Mike asked, and a touch of a smile began on his face. His father had always detested

the use of that name for them, insisting that anything men who believed in science could do, other men would do.

"Fantasy, hell! That atomic athodyd will take us right into the era of space flight, once we get this war out of the way. And we'll be building robots here in a month— maybe not quite like men, but able to *think*. I got you back here to show you you've lost your bet— Bob and I've proved the stuff isn't fantasy!"

"There's still time travel," Mike told him. He grinned slowly, and felt a touch of bitterness against the two rise in spite of it. While he'd been fighting a war, they'd been playing with the ideas in the magazines, apparently. Maybe they'd done their share, but it sounded like a game, rather than serious business.

His father had passed across a gadget, and he took it, surprised at its lightness. "It's a tool," Custer explained. "Must be—though we haven't figured out what it's for. Looks like a wrench, but no nut ever looked like that. Try to break it."

Mike tried, and gasped. It looked and felt fragile enough to be ruined by a child, but he couldn't bend it. He frowned and handed it back. "So?"

"From the future," his father

told him. Then he gathered up his equipment—charts and a huge old pipe—and headed back towards a heavy door at the far end of the hangar. "This time, I'm going to give it full power, Bob. You two keep your eyes on the catcher."

The door opened, revealing a room beyond, but it shut almost at once. While it was opened, a high whine of dynamos had come in. General Custer pulled Mike to the side, where a heavy window was covered by a shutter. He threw back the shutter, and pointed.

The big interior of the building was without other openings. At the near end, Mike saw four big gas turbines driving generators, leading into what seemed to be gigantic oil capacitors, and a small control board connected to them. Beyond, he could see only a grid of silver bars at the ceiling and on the floor, opposed to each other.

"What nonsense. . .?" he began.

Custer shook his head. "No nonsense, Mike. Bruce and I got an idea, and tried it out on a small scale. The government was convinced enough to finance Project Swipe, so it can't be too crazy. We're actually reaching into the future. Look, we're losing the war—we know that. Pan-Asia is matching our tech-



nology and beating our manpower. But somewhere ahead, they've got things that Pan-Asia can't have—and we're going to get some of that. The wrench came from a small trial run with the machine . . . And this time, the two of us—and now you—are the only ones who know what's going on, so Pan-Asia won't get it!"

"So you get a bunch of junk from the future," Mike began.

Custer shook his head. "Not if your father's right. He thinks this works best where there's a big explosion of some kind—loosens the time fabric, or something. That should give us at least something technical, where we can rob ideas. Watch—power's about up!"

The controls were being tested carefully by Bruce Dane, and the man nodded. He began to move them carefully, according to his chart. Finally, he threw a switch. Above the banks of capacitors, a huge relay switched down. Even outside, there was a peculiar strain, and the air between the two big silver grids seemed to crackle with invisible fury.

Something began to form there. At first it seemed far away and tenuous. Then, without seeming to move, it yet appeared to rush in and grow. A corona of bluish fire sprang up around

it, and then vanished.

Bruce Dane was working frantically at the control-board, and now he seemed to be driven by sudden desperation. His hands shot out toward the big switch—

Something wrenched at the bank of capacitors, and the generators arced violently. But it was hardly visible before darkness hit the laboratory, to be followed by a deafening explosion, like the air rushing together to make thunder, after a lightning bolt. The wall where Mike and Custer stood shook.

They were at the big door at once, and Custer had a flashlight, either grabbed up or in his hands all along. He worked the lock frantically. Then the door opened ponderously, and they were inside the room.

At one end, something that might have been either a wingless plane or a guided missile rested between the grids. But most of the power equipment, including the control-board, was completely gone, without a trace. And there was no sign of Bruce Dane.

## II

It took a week to adjust to it. Captain Dane stayed on while they searched futilely, and gave up. It was Captain Dane who dragged out the only possible

answer—that there was a reaction for every action, and that something had been sucked forward to balance what was brought back. He helped them inspect the queer thing they had brought back, and he gave the first order that they go to work on it, once he realized that the odd arrangement his father had made in getting the contract left him in charge, with Custer only his second.

He did what he could with the group of research experts who came flooding down on them, bringing the tools of their sciences. Each evening, he went automatically back to his father's apartment, ate, and went out to a bar to drink himself just tight enough to be sleepy.

Captain Dane had seen his friends killed for four years on the see-sawing fields of Europe, and he could take it. But he was an automation, created around the flesh of Mike Dane, and sooner or later, Mike had to find it out for himself.

That came on the seventh night, while he sat in the little bar. He was thinking dully of his father's words: "In a big city, the only place where a man has privacy—real privacy, even from his own habits—is in a bar."

And suddenly, he realized his father was dead, within all the abilities they had to tell. He

lifted the scotch to his lips and drank it slowly, letting Captain Dane sink back, while Mike Dane grew used to the idea. For a while, it was rough, even though his father had gone in a peak of triumph few men could have equalled. Then his mind took the ache and the pain and put them where they should be—as real as ever, but in a corner where they could no longer keep him from continuing his own life.

He swallowed the drink, and realized that he'd been seeing Molly for at least five minutes without noticing her. She stood at the front of the place, staring uncertainly back toward him, and started back as he looked up and nodded.

"Sober, Mike?" Her words were nervous, and her fingers were doing strange things to the lapels of her little jacket.

"Reasonably," he answered truthfully. He ordered her old drink automatically, and managed a passable grin. "I was in the lunchroom, but they told me you'd left. Figured you'd gone to Caltech in a hurry."

Her eyes seemed to shine suddenly at that. "Better, Mike. I rate you, boy. I'm now a full colonel in the Air Forces, Research branch. My doctorate work is now a full project, and I'm in charge! Right near you —they cleared out the old Dowell

hangar, rigged it up, and are almost ready to go—will be by the time I get my uniform. I've been looking all over to tell you the news—almost forgot this place."

"Top Secret, of course?"

"No higher! I've arrived!"

He grinned at that. "Me, too, Molly. I may even be more no-higher than you are, now that Dad's . . . gone away. I'm in full charge of the works."

She finished her drink, and nodded. "I heard he was on some kind of secret mission. And I saw Morley coming out of your place at one ayem—so maybe you do rate my top secret, if he's working for you. No more drinks, Mike. I need coffee more."

"My place?" he suggested. She nodded, and he felt relief wash over him. It wouldn't be so hard to face the empty apartment and realize his father was gone completely. The ache still lay in his mind, but he had learned that grief must never interfere with living.

It was afternoon when he went through the main hangar and back to the side building that still housed the Enigma. Now, almost as if for the first time, he shoved his way through the crowd of top-level experts and studied the thing.

It was no more than twenty feet long, and about half that diameter at its largest. There were no wings or fins, such as any normal plane or even guided missile should have, but he knew now that it had been designed as a fighter plane. The nose swept up bluntly, the upper half covered by a clear bubble of heavy plastic.

That had been smashed when they had stolen it from the future, and there had been three guns sticking from it, all horribly twisted—as twisted as the body of the young man in the strange, abbreviated uniform inside. He had been dead, even to the cells of his hair and skin. But the machine seemed unharmed except for its cabin, which had now been repaired.

From the nose, it had sloped back to a stubby tail. Under it were two small wheels, and over it a tiny hook, purpose unknown. Aside from that, the only features were the miniature jets on each side where the wings should be, set to swivel in complete circles—forwards, backwards, up or down. In the tail, another swivel nozzle or jet was hidden, which could also be turned in a complete circle sideways.

It obviously could never fly. The jets were designed to burn no fuel. Instead, their six-inch

bores were lined with tiny bits of wire that pointed back toward the exit, and there was a coil of peculiar design around the front of each.

Custer came over, shaking his head. "You look better, Mike. Figured how she flies?"

"No. Anything new?"

"A little, but none of it good. Morley thinks those bits of wires work by the point-discharge principle that will keep a toy spinning when it's connected to a battery and high-voltage coil. And in that case, those coils must somehow collect the atmosphere ahead and pack it enough for the jets to do all the lifting."

Enright had come up, and was shaking his head vigorously from side to side. "Not now, Morley doesn't. He found the switch that turned them on, and tried it. Nothing happened!"

They had learned some things, but most of them were like that. The ship was split down the middle, horizontally. All the equipment was in the upper half, behind the pilot cabin. The lower half was apparently packed solid, and encased in something so hard and tough that diamond drills and a monatomic hydrogen torch had made no dent in it. But it held power. They were sure of that, since the big cables came from there to all the rest of the machine.

The metal of the hull was pure iron—chemically pure beyond even a trace of anything else they could find. Yet it was harder and tougher than the best beryllium steel they knew. At a hundred degrees below zero, it turned as soft as lead, but hardened again at higher temperatures—and then was nothing but soft iron. Something was done to it to give its rustless, impervious toughness and its tensile strength of almost a million pounds an inch, but they had no idea of what.

He had accepted the experts' word that the controls were worked by magnetic current without too much surprise, though they went around muttering something about Ehrenhaft being proved false and seemed to regard it as something that shouldn't be. Here soft iron was used as insulation, and a peculiar plastic seemed to form the conductor.

Another group was going insane over a transformer that was connected to the big tank the X-rays had showed in the lower half of the ship—without revealing whether it was a storage battery or some kind of atomic converter with no radiation. The transformer looked normal enough, but its secondary delivered exactly one thousand

volts at four hundred cycles per second, whether the primary was hooked to a storage battery, a tiny dry cell, a 1440 volt sixty cycle a.c. line, or a high tension coil that gave better than thirty-thousand volts. The gadget weighed about twenty pounds, and they'd put as much as fifty amperes through it without its warming up the slightest—fifty killowatts, and probably only a small fraction of what it could carry!

It had a soft iron core, copper wire wound exactly like a normal transformer, and a thin smear of insulation. Substituting a new iron core made on the spot, or a new winding designed to fit had cut its ability to handle power, but had made no change in its constant output, though the use of both the new coil and core had given them only a rather poor ordinary transformer.

There was another transformer-like gadget on the back of each of the two seats in the cabin, apparently designed to rest on the pilots' shoulders and be strapped on. They had tried putting power into it, but there had been no results. The power disappeared, but nothing happened—no fields around it, no heating up, no sound or movement.

The worst case was something whose purpose they did know.

The gadget that transformed electric current into magnetic current was a simple copper plate attached to an iron solenoid, with a winding of electric lines around it. That had worked perfectly with a substitute winding, a copied solenoid, or a new copper plate. But it hadn't worked with more than one thing substituted!

There were bolts whose nuts simply slid on—and then couldn't be removed in any manner they tried. One of the tools they had found behind the seats removed them, but it seemed no more than a simple, transparent piece of plastic that simply grasped the nut loosely.

"How'd you find it worked?" Mike asked.

Custer grimaced. "There's an instruction book, Mike. It was nicely shoved into one of the tool kits, complete. Did you take a look at the lettering on the instruments?"

Mike had seen it. There were at least forty letters in the alphabet they used whenever this ship had been made. Some of them, like the Greek *theta* for "th" and the reversed *e* for "uh" were easy enough to decode. Some of the others seemed ridiculous, unless the pronunciation had undergone a change.

"So you couldn't read most of it?" he asked.

"No—we read it. We put a code boy on it, and he worked out a full translation. But did you ever look closely at a service manual on anything issued by the government? Sure, it told you to take such and such a nut off, and screw down such and such a switch. But I'll bet you never found one that gave the real purpose of a machine, how it was made, how to substitute parts if the right ones weren't around—in fact, anything but how to take it to pieces, put it together, and tune it up; even then, you had to know what it was all about by yourself. Right?"

He went back to his desk and returned with close-typed sheets of paper. Mike looked through them, and at the photostatted diagrams. He located the jets. The big coil at the nose was marked as being a supercharger, which would indicate it might somehow compress the air—but he got no further information, and the thing still hadn't worked at all.

Then he gulped. "What the heck is protergy?"

Morley had come up then, and his scowl deepened at the word. He picked up the sheets, rolled them carefully, and handed them back between thumb and forefinger to Custer, making a ges-

ture of holding his nose. He was supposed to be one of the ten top physicists in the country, but he now looked like a simple, tired old mechanic.

"Protergy, kinergy, duration, extension, matter," he said in disgust. "They make their handbooks less intelligent by giving basic theory. And from now on, never let me see a handbook that has that. It does more damage than good. Protergy is a state of excitation through extension, like gravity and magnetism, but the raw stuff from which they are made. Kinergy is a propagation of excitation through extension with a fixed relation to duration—light is made from it. Matter is a resonant matrix for the transformation of, protergy to kinergy, or vice versa, and is itself composed of protergy in a kinergic state, causing a compression of extension within any given duration . . . ! I'm quoting, if you think it's pure mouthwash. And just between us, it doesn't mean a damned thing, couldn't mean anything, and shouldn't. It has something to do with crystals, too—but somehow, I get the idea that every single atom is a crystal to those boys! Incidentally, Custer, what did you think of that crack there about the non-Einsteinian recognition of the limitations of the law of conservation of matter

and energy?"

Mike shook his head and moved away. Fortunately, it wasn't his business to understand, but only to work with Custer in trying to get results. He found one of the men working on a tube of something—or rather, two tubes, each with a liquid oozing out. It was from the repair kit, meant to glue together sheets of the iron covering of the ship. There were half a dozen such tubes.

"Works fine," the man said. "Spread A on one of the sheets, squirt B over it, and stick on another sheet. Only it won't work on anything except that cockeyed iron of theirs—won't work on that after the temper is drawn by too much cooling. But it sure does what it's meant to—the two sheets fuse together, exactly as strong as if they'd been one from the first."

Mike nodded and went on to look at other problems. The glue had obviously replaced welding and riveting in the future. At least he could understand its purpose. But most of the men here were working with machines that he couldn't understand, much less trying to grasp the principle of the gadget they were testing. He moved slowly back toward the big X-ray machine, wondering how much more they could cramp into this

building, and how long such a concentration of great brains could exist without Pan-Asia finding it out and sending over a super-special bomb.

The Alliance had been crowded back even further now, and the few men in Washington who knew what was going on here were practically hanging on their phones for a word of something they could use to change the tide. They were desperate enough to accept time-machines as they'd once accepted an atomic-bomb which they couldn't really believe in.

The X-ray and torsion meter were apparently cooperating on one of the tiny "bombs" they had found at the nose of the ship. They looked like tin cans of normal size, with rounded noses and small finned tails. Apparently, they were loosely joined together at the center, but the full strength of the big torsion machine was making no progress in separating them.

The X-ray of one showed an inside that seemed to be mostly solid metal, but there was a confusion of parts near the end that could only be the elaborate check-and-balance arrangement of a fuse. There was nothing that seemed capable of holding the front and back together, in spite of what the torsion ma-

chine was failing to do.

"Can't even get one of these apart," the technician said, picking up one of the tiny "bullets" that had been on a belt on one of the ruined machine guns at the front of the Enigma. "I've got a couple of guys out in the inner field, trying to crack one open. Thought they might contain some liquid or gas that was bad medicine. But . . ."

"Get them back!" Mike told him sharply. "Before they blow off an arm or leg. Besides, this stuff stays inside this building, unless you want to run a security stretch of five years! Call them in!"

The technician scowled, and then began to look scared. He was gone at a run toward the entrance, to double through the main hangar toward the inner field.

Mike turned the thing over in his hand gingerly, looking at its X-ray picture, which seemed to show nothing but a rough roll of metal inside the waxy coating, and something that might have been a percussion cap—it was too faint to tell. The thing itself looked like a small tubular capacitor without the wires trailing from the ends.

Enright seemed to have the same idea. He came up, with Custer and Morley arguing something esoteric a few feet

behind, and took the little bullet out of Mike's hands. "Might glue wires on them and sell them for tubular condensers," he said.

Morley let out a sudden yell. "Electrostatics!" He caught the power switch on the torsion machine in a running jump, and set it into reverse. His face was white when he turned back.

"Electrostatic force . . . it has to be. The plates of a charged capacitor don't separate easily, either. And yet . . . my God, the number of *farads* that would take! Dane, Custer, you can be glad that machine couldn't crack it—or the whole building would be dust—nothing but dust . . ."

Something slapped against the back wall, and the two feet of reinforced concrete jerked inwards. Mike felt himself hit the floor, while the big X-ray machine crashed within inches of him. There was a roaring sharper than any explosion he had heard, and the laboratory shook again. But its construction had been sound enough to save them, except for bruises. They got up, staring through the dust that was everywhere.

"Pan-Asia . . ." Custer began.

Mike shook his head, finding trouble with his tongue at first. "A damned fool—and the end of a couple of men who followed orders," he said. "They cracked one of these smaller bullets!"



He limped forward to peer out, and then turned back, sick. The technician whose bright idea it had been was still partly there, though completely dead. There was nothing he could see at a quick glance of the two men who had done the trick somehow. And that had been only the smallest of the gadgets!

### III

Mike sat glumly in the seat beside Molly, staring up at the stars. She had given up trying to talk, and was now driving quietly.

How did those stars look, he wondered, where the Enigma had been made? How far ahead? And if they cracked her mystery, could a weapon like that end wars for good and for all? He could see no possibility for a nation ever risking fighting another when even the bullets of the time were the equal of a blockbuster, the small bombs must be as good as A-bombs, and the big ones—well, if Custer and Morley were right, the huge capacitor that lay in the belly of the Enigma and furnished her power must be far stronger than any H-bomb could be. How many electrons . . . no, that was meaningless. They didn't pack electrons in so much as they somehow strained space . . . as meaningless as the babble about protergy and kinergy. The result

was that one hundred percent of the energy could be released in a billionth of a second or less—probably millions of horsepower hours, in almost no time!

He wondered how they got the energy they stored there, and why they should use so much to power a plane, if the size of the huge capacitor tank meant anything. With the constant voltage transformer working in reverse, they could pack it in; feed in a steady thousand volts, and it would go on working, even if the voltage inside the capacitor went up into the millions. But how could they hold such voltages?

With such a weapon, there could be no war. And that was the dream of the scientists like Molly, whatever she had found; it had been the dream of his father, and he had always shared it.

Yet up there in the future, where such power was used on a small pursuit ship, war was obviously a part of their life! Mass production fighters weren't made without a role to play. He shook his head in the breeze the car was creating, trying to picture such a world into which this world was headed. Or was it? If they cracked the secret, then they would have something that future had not had in its past. And with a multiple-choice

future, they might even find a road to permanent peace for themselves!

Molly stopped the car outside the gate, where the same guards were still posted, in a pretense that all was normal inside, and that no special protection was necessary. She ruffled his hair and kissed him quickly. "Be careful, whatever you're up to, Mike."

Then she was gone back toward the city. He passed the guards, and went inside to the office. There, his flying clothes were all laid out, together with an oxygen tank and mask. He'd thought of taking a parachute, but there wasn't room for it in his case; his body was too long for the cramped space inside the Enigma, anyhow.

Only Custer and Enright were there, where they'd knocked down the rest of the wall, and wheeled the Enigma out in the darkness onto the inner field.

"All set up?" he asked Custer.

The general nodded. "Every bit of test equipment on board. And I hope you can learn something more in actual flight than we seem to be getting the other way. Sure you still want to try it? We've got test pilots for such things."

"I started out testing Dad's planes and flying jitneys by the seat of my pants." Mike took a

last drag on his cigarette and mashed it out. "Anybody you'd rather see go in her?"

Enright croaked hoarsely. "Me. I've flown them off the drawing board, too, Mike—before I went into the shop. I . . ."

His face was pleading, almost tearful in the light of the small, deeply shaded bulb. But Custer shook his head quickly, and the little man stepped back, his fists knotted convulsively. Mike tried to grin a farewell, and climbed in.

There was barely room in the pilot's seat, once he had stopped to get under the transformer gadget that used up power with no result. He squirmed in, and reached for the throttle; at least the handbook had shown which parts were which, and he had spent all the afternoon studying the transliteration. He'd even found that one gadget kept it from starting when it had no room to fly. He cut on power.

The only result was a red bulb that flashed on at the top of his his control panel. He bent forward, trying to read the tiny letters of light it revealed. "Safety straps unfastened" was as close as he could decode it. He started to look down at the seat, but the movement made him brush against the straps hanging from the mystery transformer.

On a guess, he shoved his arms through them. The light went out.

This time, as he moved the single control back, indicators flashed green. He'd already figured how the thing worked, though. Back for up, twist for turn, sideways to roll over, and a tighter or looser grip to regulate his speed. It seemed simple.

He pulled the lever all the way back, and squeezed down on it. Ahead, the side of the building suddenly flashed down out of sight, and a steady roar came from beside him.

It was easy. The jets could lift the ship like a helicopter, but at a speed no helicopter could match. And the ship seemed to be inherently stable, in spite of its forbidding appearance. The response to any control was instantaneous and effortless, but he climbed to something he guessed to be three miles up before he tried any real maneuvering. Then he switched to horizontal, and felt her leap ahead. He increased the power. The wind roared, and the ship bucked faintly with the old familiar feeling of crossing the supersonic barrier. If the dial meant what he thought it did, his airspeed was now better than 1200 miles per hour, and he'd only started to put on power.

He changed back to vertical

and went straight up, but this time the ship tilted—apparently by some automatic device, since he knew of no forward and backward tilting control—and kept her blunt nose facing the flight line. She lifted, rising to thirty thousand feet. The thrust was still full powered, even in the thinner air—the coils that serve as superchargers must work, somehow, but only when in actual flight. However they managed to compress the air, they were efficient. He lifted further, going up to forty thousand, sixty thousand, and beyond. His estimate of the heights on the indicator showed a top of better than twenty-five miles, though the air should have been too thin there for any compressor to work. But she was up to twenty miles now, and still rising.

It was enough for him. He set her on a straight course, and tried the maximum speed. At what looked like a little better than twenty-five hundred miles an hour, she began to shake—the plastic replacement they had made was unable to take it. He slowed back to a thousand, wondering how they kept the ship cool. There was no sign of her heating up from friction. He cut into a tight spiral, and began heading downwards a little. The response was amazing. At that speed, she turned about in the

air like a light-plane stunting.

Then it hit him—there was no blackout, though such a circle must be putting at least twenty gravities pressure on him! It felt like a leisurely turn in a slow car! And the tension that should have warned him to ease off on the controls had never hit him.

Anti-gravity, or synthetic gravity neutralizing the pull by an exact counter pull? It must be some such device—probably the gadget that he'd called a transformer at the back of his neck. If it were adjusted to maintain a feeling of one gravity, naturally it would show no results when lying quietly in a one gravity field!

He found his course toward the testing ground that had been cleared and abandoned during the beginning of the war. It was again posted and waiting for him. He came over it at fifty thousand feet, set the cross-hairs of the tiny sight, and pulled down on the bomb-trigger that was to release one of the tin-can sized bombs.

The ship steadied and went into a climb, without a move on his part. It went up to eighty-thousand feet. Then something clicked, just as his eyes caught the target in the cross-hairs again. He seemed to hang there for long minutes, before he final-

ly realized he was again cruising on. Then, at last, hell blossomed below him. His work was finished, and Custer and Morley would have their check on whether the stuff worked as they expected. But he already knew that a ship with a full load of such cans could do more damage than their top-sized bombers, all combined.

The return was routine. He centered the field in the same cross-hairs, lining them up to touch the spot from which he'd taken off. For a second, he had to stop to realize it was still dark down there—but the system must have worked by infra-red, since the image was clearly lighted in the little sight. Mike touched a button marked "Land," and waited. The ship began dropping smoothly, and came to an exact landing on her own. She even cut power and released the straps from his shoulders.

He snapped off his mask, and ducked down and out of the little door, squinting through the darkness. "Back safe and sound," he shouted softly. "And after this, a comet will seem like an ox-cart."

A flashlight picked him out, and Custer's voice drifted out to him. "Come in here, Mike!"

The tones were warning that something was up. But it was

a totally inadequate warning for what the flashlight revealed.

The end of the laboratory beyond was a complete wreck. There was no pattern, even, to the twisted, distorted shapes that lay there. It was as if a fire beyond any heat men had experienced had suddenly melted two sets of machinery into one, and yet had left parts of each untouched.

Mike stared stupidly about.

"The capacitor bank and dynamos have come home," Custer said, and his voice was almost a whisper. "I was just moving back when I saw it. They were just a ghost—then here they were, right in the middle of our equipment. Two objects, one space. The riddle is answered—they didn't explode. They just got out of each other's way, molecule by molecule. From the wind, I'd say the air got completely out of the way."

He swept the beam around again. "A minute before you landed. I've been trying to think. Machinery heavier than the ship . . . didn't go as far . . . maybe action and reaction not the same . . ."

But the torch was still centered on the foreground of the ruins, and his mind was clearly not on what he was saying.

Mike took the flash, and began

going over what he could of the rubble. Then he turned. "No. No control panel here. And that means that Dad—or whatever is left of him—didn't come back. Better get the few men we can trust completely to clear this mess out with arc cutters and clear it away."

"I'll take care of it," Custer agreed heavily. "It looks as if we're washed up here, Mike. Most of our stuff is ruined between the explosion and this. And we can't work here, anyhow, if there's—more to come!"

"The scientists and technicians can take what's left. And the readings on my flight and whatever they need from the Enigma. They'll know where to ship it. I suppose you'll have to go to Washington to arrange for it—one of us will, anyhow . . ."

His leg ached again, as if the toes were curled up tightly and he was resting his full weight on them. But there was no time to think of that. The mess had to be cleared away, space had to be left for anything that came back, or whatever it might do. He'd have to post guards here, and somehow make them keep watch without telling the whole story.

No wonder Pan-Asia was nearing the Rhine. They hadn't developed a time machine to curse them with false gifts.

## IV

The same idea was in his mind, only greatly strengthened, when they met with those in Washington who knew of Project Swipe. At six hundred feet below street level, where most of the higher echelon actually met, even the best construction and air-conditioning had never overcome the cold and the dampness that was in spirit more even than fact. Mike's missing leg ached worse, and his thoughts were more bitter than ever.

The assistant to the Secretary of Defense opened the business briefly. "So far, gentlemen, we've spent months of preparing, a great deal of effort concealing, and five weeks of actual operation of this project. The Dane Aircraft works have come to approximately a standstill—and you know the need for those planes as well as I do—because we've been forced to screen out most of the workers, and keep only a token staff there; since our contract guarantees normal operations, the tax-payers will have to foot that bill. We've also tied up most of the great research organizations of the Alliance this last month. And unless my preliminary information is false, the enemy has only failed to penetrate our security because there has been nothing to learn, not because our most strenuous

efforts have kept an airtight net. Dr. Morley, will you sum up what the laboratories keyed to your section have discovered?"

"Just a minute," another man asked. Mike didn't know him, but he could guess that he must be from the President's office, from the looks directed his way. "How do we know this wasn't meant for us to find? Can we say it was a genuine plane?"

Custer stood up. "It was an actual war-plane, and one that had seen combat. Nothing we have short of an H-bomb could have ruined the plastic bubble, as it was first found. *Nothing* could have killed every cell in the pilot's body, to our current knowledge. The notice pasted inside the handbook, recommending action if forced down in enemy territory, confirms the desperation of those using the plane. We don't know whom they were fighting—or what—but this was no fake. It was a die-stamped job, mostly—and that means mass production. They've got war up there, and it's something we'd better forget, if we want to stay sane. All right, Dr. Morley."

Morley shook himself, and began reciting what they knew. The capacitors—big and little—were just that; the piece they had recovered from Mike's single bombing had proved it. But it

was impossible for such capacitors to exist. Capacitors carried a charge according to the product of the plate area and number, times the dielectric constant of insulation, all divided by the thickness of the dielectric. Size, number of plates, and thickness could only be altered within limits. So in the future, they had apparently found a material with a nearly infinite dielectric constant! He tried to explain how impossible that was, but Mike lost track of some of that. Anyhow, they now knew that this dielectric was a thin smear of a lacquer-like substance, the same as their insulation, and would stand up under a voltage that exceeded anything imaginable for such a thin substance—several million volts.

“Naturally, it’s completely self-healing when cut or punctured,” he added. “It seals a cut instantly, or you’d get a short through the air around your condenser. I am informed it’s composed of helium, lithium, argon, fluorine, bismuth and carbon. I have no idea of how they managed to make a compound out of inert gases. And I have even less idea of how they polymerized the stuff. We don’t know why it works, how it is made, nor how to duplicate its properties. It is completely outside all our knowledge.”

Other accounts began to come in, of equally impossible things. Copper could not be alloyed with nitrogen — without forming a compound — but it had been handled that way. No alloy of simple tungsten and boron could stand up under a temperature of over 6000 degrees Centigrade, without pitting. Bolts that held their nuts on by magnetostriction couldn’t have those nuts removed by a tool that was nothing but vinyl acetate.

Mike listened, trying to picture it all. The trouble was that men were only barbarians. Columbus had known that iron would sink, and had built his ships of wood. But if he’d been given a metal ship, his time couldn’t have cast the plates for more such ships. DaVinci had conceived the helicopter, but it took centuries to develop the steels and alloys, with their heat treatments and other processing; he had had no power adequate in his time, and he couldn’t have understood the ignition system of an engine if he’d found one. Men of the old stone age couldn’t make rifles.

The chemists were the last, with their glum report on non-metals that were completely pure but behaved like metals, paints that carried heat one way much better than the other, but could-

n't be analyzed at all, and a host of other things.

There was only one weakly cheerful note. The head chemist of DuPont stood up, and he seemed almost too modest as he announced it. The trick glue that served to weld metals together could not only be duplicated already, but could be made in tanker lots at a reasonable figure. It was much simpler than they had thought. And it could be made to glue anything. The glue formed an open-ended chain molecule, and it would glue any element which was *not* attached at the end. The sample had contained all elements except iron, so it had worked on iron only. But he could provide one which contained only nitrogen, and which would glue all metals, although it didn't harm plants or animal substances. It was probably the greatest stride in a thousand years of sticking things together. Spread the glue, add the polymerizing fluid, and wait five minutes.

The assistant to the Secretary of Defense nodded. "A remarkable piece of work, doctor—it'll probably win you top honors in the field for the year. But since we're equipped to weld and rivet, and not to pressurize joints for five minutes, I suspect it won't help production for quite some time. Mr. Dane, what do you

think?"

Mike grinned sourly. "It'd slow us up now. But you might spread a batch of it over the enemy by plane, and follow with the polymerizer. That *might* glue him down for a few days."

A few smiled, but nobody laughed.

Custer summed it up. "A gun would do Pithecanthropus no good. He couldn't use it without bullets—arrows wouldn't work. And if he knew about bullets, he still couldn't build a forge to melt his lead. Marconi couldn't have found out a thing about radar—and couldn't have built modern tubes if he'd had full instructions. Show Faraday twenty kilowatts going into an antenna and apparently nothing coming out, and he'd have given up physics to teach Latin the rest of his life!

"In the last fifty years, science has quintupled itself. In the next hundred, we can't imagine what it will be. Maybe they tailor the electron rings to make that transformer work, but I can't examine such things, and couldn't duplicate it in any event. Probably the men who designed it couldn't build one with our crude equipment. Unto him that hath, unto him shall be given. And we're still havenots!"

He paused, watching their



faces. Then he grimaced. "We don't even gain theoretical knowledge from it. We might think it proves the future is invariable, since getting this has made no change in our science. But it proves nothing. We can't change ourselves — but a man from that future might decide to come back and take over the world with some of their heavy armament that history shows doesn't exist now. In that case, the future might be changed—or he might be unable to do it . . . Our report, except perhaps for the metal glue, is—perfect failure, with a recommendation that nothing be done about it!"

There were no dissenters. Words spilled across the table, but they all boiled down to the same things as Custer had said.

Mike and Custer caught a plane back together. Mike was wondering whether they hadn't changed the future, after all. Pan-Asia was rumored to be past the Rhine, and the Alliance was behind schedule, in many ways because of this useless effort. The language in the handbook for the Enigma had been English — but would English even be used in the future toward which they headed now?

What kind of a world could exist that would make such a concentration of destruction as

the Enigma a mass-production affair? What could the men be like, and the scientists who would loose such things on the world, or the fighting men who knew the stupidity of war and still could not stop it? Or had they thought that such weapons would stop it? Every improvement made in killing power had brought with it the idea that war would grow too horrible, and peace would come. Yet each move had only made the horror worse. It was a vicious cycle that could only be broken by an explosion—and one which apparently lay far in the future.

He shrugged it off, and turned to Custer, who had remained in the assembly chamber longer than he had. "What happens to the Enigma?"

"We seal it up, and give it to a museum when the fracas is over."

Lock it up in a museum—and taunt and mock the men who would waste their lives trying to understand it, when they might do better never knowing it existed. Mike thought of Faraday turning to Latin after watching electricity flow into an antenna and vanish; if that had happened, the world would have been poorer in every way. The country that kept such a thing would always be under its insidious influence. He finished Cus-

ter's quotation in his head: "And from him that hath not, from him shall be taken away, even that which he seemeth to have!"

He started for the Dane buildings, where work was just going on toward restoring normal production. Then he shrugged. He was still as useless as he had been since his father had had him brought back at the start of this. Custer was the actual supervisor here, and Custer knew what orders they had from the government. He wanted a drink, someone to talk to about nothing. He swung toward Molly's new little apartment, half a mile beyond the field. He ought to propose, he supposed—or renew the old proposal of years before. He thought of her work—and the fact that she could never live a wholly normal life when wrapped up in it. But it didn't really matter. Molly was just Molly, no matter what turned up—the only woman he'd ever really liked.

He wasn't surprised when she didn't answer. She hadn't expected him back for at least two more days. But there would still be a drink in the place, and a chance to sleep until she returned. He pulled the key out of his pocket, and went in. There were two letters shoved through

the slot in the door, and he picked them up and put them on the little table by the sofa.

Then he stopped. The table was littered, as if Molly had been doing some last minute hasty work before leaving. A cloth was thrown over it, but he saw enough to make him toss it back.

Iron insulation surrounded plastic "wires," and fed out from a square box to a little motor affair. A battery was disconnected, but he slipped it into place and held down the switch. Without coils or commutator, the motor began to turn.

Magnetic current! Somehow, one of the little transformers from the ship must be hidden in that box, with its strange wires running out. And Molly had found how to make it work. Scientists with world-wide reputations had been stripped every night before they left the laboratory to make sure they would have nothing that could be picked up by the enemy. But Molly had this!

He remembered the atomic athodyd and the robots, which Pan-Asia now definitely had. And he remembered that no screening had ever found the man who was responsible. And Captain Dane was sick as he gathered up the apparatus and mashed it into a shapeless mess

on the rug. Captain Dane went grimly to the phone to report the spy . . .

And Michael Dane put it back on the cradle without using it. Molly was still . . . Molly. And his mind had already rationalized his actions. Let the Pan-Asians have the scraps. They couldn't solve anything from what was left, and there'd be no more chance to steal parts of the ship. Let her go, knowing she'd been discovered by him, fleeing without knowledge of when the Alliance would pick her up. Or let her wonder about the damage, but still stay on to do her dirty work. A known spy was safer than anything else.

He threw his key down on the little pile of junk, and went out of the room to find a bar and get drunk. He had a lot to forget. The Enigma had cost him his father. It had probably ruined all chances of winning the war. And now it had taken Molly.

## V

He had never found the bar. He had gone on walking, while his foot ached, and after he forgot about it. He had walked until it was dark, and the idea had come up from the darkness and grown clear in his mind. Then he had taken a cab and come back to the field. In the main

hangar office, he found the single star that had finally come for him—an iron star, to show that he was only a producer of materials instead of a real military general, but still one which gave him authority enough. He snapped it onto the collar of his hastily donned flight clothes, and opened the door to the ruins that had been the laboratory, now deserted except for the six guards and the hulk of the Enigma.

He dismissed the men, giving them formal notes, and waited for them to leave. Then he switched the lights off and headed for the machine, again re-assembled and ready for flight—or for plaguing men through the decades to come.

In the gloom, there was a sudden cough, and he swung to see Enright at the doorway, his face almost glowing under the light of a single bulb still on. Mike grimaced, but it didn't matter. Enright seemed to have some odd attachment to the machine, and the guards had complained about his hanging around. Now he stood there, licking his lips and staring at the Enigma.

His eyes switched to Mike. "You're taking her up, Mike? You're flying her again." He studied Mike, and nodded slowly, as if making up his mind. "And you're not coming back. You're

going to destroy her. I thought of that, too. Mike—Mike, don't. Let me. I'm just a has-been, Mike—but I want to feel her in my hands once. After that, it won't matter . . .”

Mike shook his head. “It's my trip, and I'm older than you are, tonight. You're off bounds, Enright. If you're caught in here now, you'll be up for another security check. Better get back. Maybe you're right, and I'm going to destroy her. But it won't do for you to be found with me, if I do. You've got your boys to worry about, and I don't have anyone. Go on, scram!”

Enright licked his lips, and shook his head. “My boys! Yes, yes of course, Mike. Of course. But let me stay here a little longer, while you get her out.”

“Okay,” Mike told him. The man must be getting senile, he thought. But he'd forgotten one vital thing, and Enright could watch the plane while he went for it. “Stay, then. But you'd better go as soon as I get back. Only a minute.”

He swung out to the entrance, and into the main hangar again. There was a flask of hydro-fluoric acid around somewhere, and that had already been proved capable of dissolving the trick metals and the trickier insulation, though they resisted even

such a violent acid for a surprising length of time. He finally found it, and went back.

Enright was gone, and the little light bulb was out. Mike stumbled through the darkness, banging his shins on something that shouldn't have been there. He cursed, and decided vaguely that something should be done about men who left things in the middle where nothing was supposed to be. Then he grinned bitterly as he realized he wouldn't be around to do anything about it.

He found the steps to the control cabin of the Enigma, and went up them, and into the cabin. He reached for the door, just as a sudden loud noise shook the air of the laboratory. Probably the guards were trying to get back. He settled under the pseudo-transformer hastily, stuck his arms through the straps, and sent power into the wheels, to go moving out where take-off was possible.

It was only as the ship was lifting savagely that he realized the laboratory floor had been bare before. Something had come out of nowhere! Maybe the control-panel had finally come back—and his father! For a second, he started to settle back. But it was pointless. The corpse of Bruce Dane could do him no

good, and he might have no chance to finish this business, if he were interrupted now. The Danes had saddled the world with the worst Trojan horse it had ever known. Now their debt had to be paid, as far as it could be paid.

He shook his mind almost free of thoughts, and went tearing upwards in the Enigma, crowding on full power. The ship almost flew itself, and he found the hatch that led down into its belly, throwing it open with one foot. He pulled the bottle of acid out, staring at its waxy surface. He uncorked it and waited.

When the great capacitor that lay there blew up, it wouldn't do to have the Enigma too low!

The needle went up, indicating twenty miles of height, and he pushed it on, until it crowded the pin at twenty-five, and the jets began to lose apparent power. There he leveled off, set her into a tight circle, and gently dropped the bottle of acid down into the inside, where it would begin eating through the tough metal and tougher insulation, to short-circuit unimaginable power. His foot snapped the hatch back, before any of the fumes could get into the cabin.

For a second longer, he let the plane circle, before he reached for the controls, to head her out towards the ocean.

"Hands up, Mike!"

The voice broke on the words, with the fear riding thickly on them. And Mike's hands shot up as he turned to see Enright crawling out from the rear, his stark white face dirty and strained. The man was shaking, and the gun wavering as it pointed at Mike—the one thing a man who has seen guns in action will always fear.

"You damned fool," Mike said, trying to keep his voice level. "Do you realize you're sentencing yourself to death?"

"They won't catch me." Enright had pulled himself up now, bracing himself to withstand the strain of pressure created by the turning of the ship, now much slower and looser than before, but still too much for comfort outside the field of the pseudo-transformer. Mike realized suddenly that the man had probably been blacked out and had seen none of his work with the acid.

"They won't catch me," Enright said again. "And this time, they'll be satisfied. They'll have to be satisfied. My boys are prisoners of Pan-Asia, Mike Dane! They have been for three years."

Horror and disgust hit at Mike as he stared at the half-hysterical man. "You!"

"Me." Enright settled into the other seat, and pulled the con-

trol stick over to his side, kicking it around on its frame without letting the gun drop from its aim at Mike. "Call me a spy, Mike. Go ahead. You can't say anything I haven't said. When I sent them the athodyd plans—and the robot schematics—when I promised them this. But they're winning, anyhow! It doesn't make any difference. It just ends the war sooner, so less get killed. And my boys won't be tortured. I got an ear once, a single ear!"

"So you want to turn the world over to such people," Mike said, and now he was glad that the acid was eating away down there. "You—and Molly!"

Enright looked at him with an unchanged, taut stare. "Molly? No, I couldn't find what she was doing. They wanted that, too—they wanted it pretty badly. But this will satisfy them. It has to satisfy them. They'll free my boys, and the war will be over. Because they think they can crack the secret there. But you're going back, Mike. I don't want you like my boys!"

He reached forward, to press a control on the panel, and then stopped. "You should have a parachute. I—" He gulped, and his finger was shaking on the trigger. Then he caught himself. "But it's better than torture, Mike. And I can't shoot you.

Damn it, I can't!"

The finger hit the panel, as if he'd spent hours studying it in the handbook or in their checks of the real thing.

The Enigma stopped with a violent braking from her jets that threatened to buckle her back on herself. The airspeed indicator jerked to a stop against the zero pin. And suddenly, the seat under Mike seemed to explode outwards through a panel that snapped open and shut behind him. He'd been ejected into the air, twenty miles above the Earth without a parachute.

Now the Enigma flashed into motion again, and Mike jerked the oxygen mask up against his face. His body ached and burned inside itself at the change in pressure, even through the heavy webbing of the high-altitude suit that could only partially equalize things. Instinctively, he pulled up the zippers that sealed it, and it flooded with oxygen, ending the attack of bends before they could reach a full start. The pressure held his arms and legs out rigidly, but the feeling now was one of lightness and almost peace as he went into free fall toward the ground below.

The Enigma had turned and was heading westward at full speed, a little erratically, as En-

right probably fumbled while learning to handle it. But it was soon lost to sight. Mike wondered how far he would get before the acid did its work—perhaps he'd reach his goal, though that seemed doubtful. But he had no way of knowing.

Surprisingly, he was falling straight toward the little field. The air began to thicken, slowing his fall and setting up a shriek in his ears, while the suit became warm. Then it settled back. There was almost no wind, though he was surprised to find that it was raining gently here. It was too bad that he'd probably smash into the private little field. A man should keep his dying quiet, not make a mess of it where others would see . . .

The ground touched his feet! The long fall was over! And he felt nothing; no shock, no sudden impact, and no instant death he had expected.

The purpose of the psuedo-transformer was plain now. Anti-inertia! Some field that had no effect on gravity or acceleration up to the normal limit, but stubbornly refused to admit that mass had inertia or momentum beyond that normal. No wonder they hadn't detected an energy output.

It was hissing above him,

probably hot. The cover on it had been removed and never replaced, and the rain was sizzling softly against it. He shucked it off, along with his heavy suit, and began kicking a hole into the damp earth to bury it, where even that trace of the Enigma would be gone, until its normal iron core could rust away in the ground.

It was sizzling worse as he threw the last wet earth over it, but he paid no attention to that. Finished, he started back toward the ruined laboratory, his mind dulled, and without any purpose.

Then he heard a faint voice, and jerked erect, almost letting his prosthetic leg double under him.

"Mike! Somebody! Hey!"

It was his father's voice.

Mike opened his mouth to answer. But there was no time. From the place where he had buried the gadget, there was a sudden eruption of steam as the wetness found some vital spot. Then the whole field seemed to explode. Mike caught a brief second of the glare, before something hit him with a giant's hand, and he was suddenly unconscious.

## VI

Mike had vague memories of apparent clarity, and of the face of his father and that of Molly

over him. But when he finally came out of the last of the drugs and the delirium, ten days had gone by, and only Custer was beside him. He sat up, or tried to, but the other man shook his head.

"You're all right, Mike. You had a concussion that was a honey, and you lost a leg—but it was the prosthetic, not your good one, so I guess that won't matter. Here." Custer threw a small box on the bed, close to Mike's weak fingers.

"Dad?" Mike asked, and was surprised at how rusty his voice felt.

"So you heard him?" Custer grinned, though there was a strange shadow on his eyes. "He came back, unharmed—with no memory of any time elapsing, but he was stuck under a section of the control panel. A good thing we had the place cleared this time. He thinks nothing happened, except that the time-dredge exploded. We took him to the hospital with you, and managed to convince him that the shock had messed up his memory. He'll never know about the Enigma."

It was probably quite possible, Mike realized. There had been no more than fifty men who knew the whole story, and none of them would talk.

"Better open the box, Mike,"

Custer suggested, and then bent down to do it for him. There was a medal there, and two gold stars pinned to the velvet back.

"For what?" he wanted to know. "For stealing the Enigma and losing it. Or don't they know about that?"

"They know—between your raving and the black-light camera and pickup we had in the laboratory to keep tabs on the Enigma, we have the whole story." Custer reached into his pocket and brought out a heavily folded newspaper clipping.

Mike caught the headline, and gasped, skimming down through the story. Poor Enright! He'd apparently reached his goal safely, and the Enigma must have been transferred directly to the long sought secret production plant of Pan-Asia. But they'd probably tortured him and the two boys, after the results. It seemed that half of the Gobi desert had erupted. The Enigma had finally blown—and it must have touched off a whole collection of hydrogen bombs with it. Pan-Asia now had exactly *no* secret production works, and no inhabitants for a hundred miles around.

"But that isn't why the stars," Custer said. "Those are for the real reason we're finally winning the war. Project Swipe is paying



off. They took that idea of yours seriously."

"What idea?"

"Spraying. We've been running planes over Pan-Asian territory with the metal glue, and spraying from our top altitude. It's heavy enough to settle in the size drops we use. Next day, we go over with the polymerizer, and the stuff freezes. There probably isn't a machine in the whole European conquered territory that will work. And before they can get the secret, they'll be begging for peace in any terms. We're getting feelers already. Incidentally, your father thinks the can of glue was all that was left from his swipe after the machine exploded, but he seems to be satisfied to let time alone. One success is enough, I guess. He's got a couple of stars, too, now. If you get married—and it's about time—and Molly gets the rating she deserves, you're going to be quite a family!"

"Molly!"

"Molly," Custer said. "She found what you'd left in her apartment, Mike. That's why she wanted me here when you woke up—so you wouldn't get too excited when you saw her. It wasn't a piece from the Enigma, Mike. It's out in normal top secret now, and the Dane company even has part of a contract on it. Mike, Molly's found how to develop

magnetic current!"

Mike looked up at the ceiling, feeling the same shadow creep into his eyes that lay in Custer's. Molly had come back to her place in his mind, bringing warmth and content with her. But something else was there—a realization of the road they were headed down. Today the impossible magnetic current. Tomorrow, counter-inertia. Someday, capacitors that had no limit. It was the opening wedge to a tomorrow where science played god while man went on in the same old pattern of hate and death. And the future wasn't so far, after all.

Custer looked down at Mike with understanding, and dropped a hand onto Mike's shoulder. "Get well soon, boy. We're going to need you. I'll send Bruce and Molly in, in a minute or two."

Mike watched him go. From beyond the door, he heard the warm voice of Molly and the deeper warmth of his father's speech. In a minute, they'd be here, and he'd forget all the other for a while. But not for long. With the future that was coming, there was no time to waste.

Maybe they couldn't eliminate war. But as least they could be ready for it. That, apparently, was all the future could teach them, but it would be enough.