

• THE BEST IN SCIENTIFIC FICTION •

STARTLING STORIES

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CONTENTS

JULY, 1939

A Complete Book-Length Scientific Fiction Novel



GIANTS FROM ETERNITY

By **MANLY WADE WELLMAN**

Five Geniuses from the Past Are Summoned Back to Life to Face and Defy the Challenge of the Future, Applying Their Wizardry to Combat the Strangest Menace That Has Ever Gripped the Earth - - - 13

Other Unusual Stories

ROBOT A-1	Oscar J. Friend	87
THE WORLD WITHOUT NAME	Edwin K. Sloat	96
THE LIFE BATTERY	Eando Binder	113

Special Features

GUEST EDITORIAL: See Earth First	Willy Ley	13
THEY CHANGED THE WORLD—Leonardo da Vinci	Picture-Story	94
THE ETHER VIBRATES	Letters	106
THRILLS IN SCIENCE—Thumbnail Sketches	Mort Weisinger	109
SCIENCE QUESTION BOX	Questions and Answers	119
SCIENTIFIC CROSSWORD PUZZLE	A Brain-Teaser	120
REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION FAN MAGAZINES	The Editor	122
FORECAST FOR THE NEXT ISSUE	Coming Events	124
MEET THE AUTHOR: A Self-Portrait	Manly Wade Wellman	125

Cover Painting by H. V. Brown — Depicting Scene from ROBOT A-1

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SCIENTIFICTION THE WORLD

HALL OF FAME STORY

By EDWIN K. SLOAT

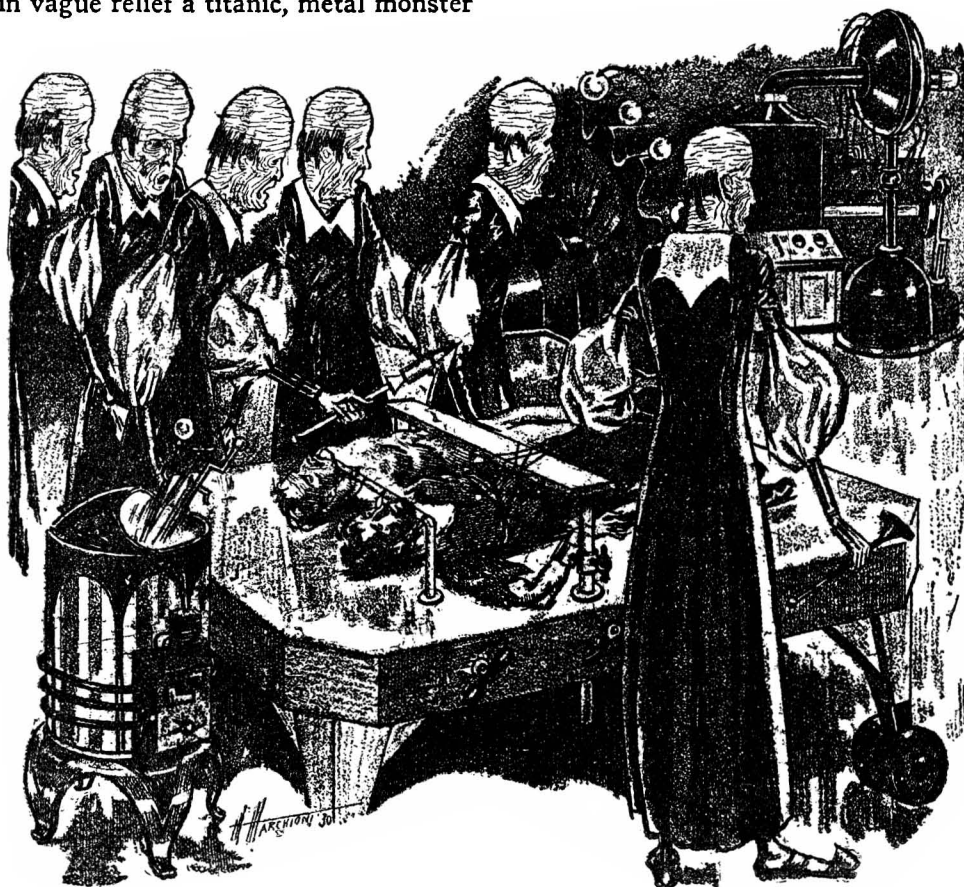
A scientifiiction favorite of the past nominated for revival by STARTLING STORIES

THE room was vast and cavernous. Occasional electric lights gleaming here and there in it fought off the encroaching darkness, magnifying its gloomy corners and the shadows among the cobwebbed wooden girders of the roof.

In the dim light there appeared in vague relief a titanic, metal monster

sprawling all along one side of the room. Uprearing its disordered, ungainly shape halfway up the wall, its twisted, tortured masses of tubing, wires and coils suggested, somehow, the vitals of a mechanical giant.

A maze of dials, switches, and gauges revealed the switchboard control of the monster, and near it stood a long, low table covered with green billiard cloth



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Science Unlocks the Gateway to an

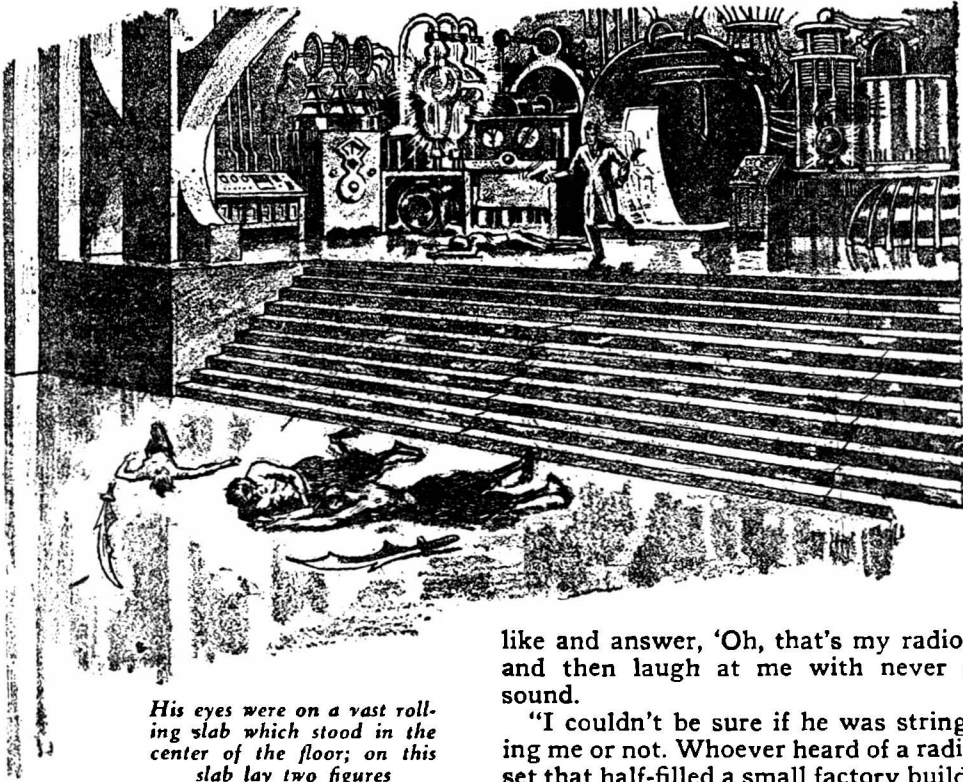
WITHOUT NAME

and lighted by a single electric light bulb suspended above it. Seven men were seated there, all staring at a square of paper beneath the light. On the paper-square was a mound of ashes such as might fall to the floor of a cremator when a corpse is consumed in it.

Seven pairs of eyes stared at those ashes with mingled awe, curiosity and loathing. The heavy human silence was disturbed only by the booming rumble of thunder in the rainswept night outside, and the rattle of rain on the roof overhead. One of the men coughed as the acid-laden air bit his

him, and who stood at the head of the table. He seemed uneasy and afraid. His glance darted from one face to another, then unwillingly strayed to the mound of ashes. He said:

"I don't know whether Steinhilde was crazy or not. I didn't know him very well—no one around here did—but I suppose I knew him better than the rest. That was because I dropped in pretty often and kidded him about all this machinery. Asked him what he was up to, anyway. He never talked very much, but sometimes he would shift those big shoulders of his slow-



His eyes were on a vast rolling slab which stood in the center of the floor; on this slab lay two figures

throat. He turned toward the open window nearby, for a breath of fresh, damp air.

There was an eighth man present, a lanky, powerful individual whose clothes seemed too small and tight for

like and answer, 'Oh, that's my radio,' and then laugh at me with never a sound.

"I couldn't be sure if he was stringing me or not. Whoever heard of a radio set that half-filled a small factory building and had tubes as big as boiling vats and as many gears and wheels as a threshing machine? I figured this must be a laboratory of some kind. I even got the idea he might be making artificial diamonds. I kept pestering him about it, scoffing at the idea that this

Unknown Realm—Then Seals It Forever!

could possibly be a radio.

"If you don't think that's what it is, just listen," he said, and turned to the switchboard.

"In a few seconds there was a roaring, humming sound up there among the machinery, which ended when WJZ broke through with a roar of music. I nearly fell off my chair. There was no static, or interference, it was that perfect. Steinhilde watched me out of the corner of his eye and laughed without any sound.

"Oh, she'll do, all right," he said, patting the dial. "She's the best entertainer we have, Josef and I."

AFTER that I came back often—got so I'd hang around every night after work to hear bands and orchestras that seemed to be right here in the room with us, and singers that might have been perched up there in the machinery somewhere. The applause at the end of the numbers was like the roar of the sea, and the announcer had a voice like a giant.

"Sometimes Steinhilde operated the machine, and sometimes his assistant, Josef, a little, dried-up old fellow who hardly ever talked and then only in broken English between puffs on his big black pipe. But they never offered to let me operate the thing.

"Then one day both of them were all excited about something, and didn't pay any attention to me. Steinhilde smoked cigarettes one after another, and Josef tramped about the room here like a caged animal with his kindly face set and his pipe, cold and empty, clenched between his teeth. Two or three days afterward Josef wasn't here. I found Steinhilde with his eyes glowing like coals sitting here at this table when I came in.

"Where is Josef?" I asked, more to make talk than anything else.

"Oh, he's away on a journey," he answered. "He says he'll be back soon. I'm sorry, but I can have no music for you tonight, I'm too busy. Next time."

"I don't know what made me feel uneasy, but I tell you I was glad to get out of the building. The whole thing began to look funny to me; so funny, in fact, that I didn't come back till tonight. I wouldn't have come then, but

Steinhilde called me on the phone all excited and fairly begged me to. Finally, I decided to come.

"Steinhilde met me at the door and brought me to the light beside the table here. He scared me bad—not his face, although that was grim enough, but what he wore about his waist. He had buckled a belt with a holster on each side, and in each holster was a revolver. Thrust through the front was a long, shiny knife, and from the right side hung three things that looked like old fashioned potato mashers. If he noticed me staring at them, he didn't pay any attention, but only said:

"White, you are the only man I know well enough to trust just now. You are about to witness something that no one else except myself has ever looked upon. I'm going to step into that big ball there and disappear. Do not be alarmed. I'll come back. I just want you to see that nothing is tampered with while I'm gone."

White paused in his narration. The others at the table turned to stare at the ball White indicated. It was a huge, metal globe with a mass of wires curling up and away from it like hairs from a human head. The interior, seen through a square opening large enough to admit an upright man, proved to be a perfectly spherical room. The outside of the ball was only a crust of metal and was lined with white, finely laminated substance like platinum. Beside the square opening was a switchboard with a labeled universal switch in the center and a host of dials and knob controls.

I WAS pretty scared and didn't say a word," White continued. "The lightning and thunder outside didn't help any either. Without another word Steinhilde stepped into the ball, reached out to the switchboard and twisted a knob. Great tubes back up there in the machinery lighted up with a red glow that flickered on the walls like the light of a burning building shining through the windows. While I stared at him Steinhilde disappeared. He went, just kind of like a match flame before a puff of air. I just went on staring at the empty space. Pretty soon ashes began to float down

through the air out of nowhere to settle on the floor of the ball."

White paused, mopped his face desperately and stared about the ring of faces like a hunted animal, fearing to detect there disbelief. There was none. Presently one of the men glanced up.

"What did you do then?" he asked.

White gulped, then went eagerly on. "I—I didn't know what to do! Did you ever see a man cremated like that before your very eyes? I've seen plenty of tough sights, I've lived rough, I've stood up in the ring to some good ones, and I've been in mob fights where men's heads were busted like eggs. Once I saw a man knifed to death in a speakeasy, but I never saw anything like this before.

"I was about scared to death! Here I was alone in the building. Maybe the police, you fellows, would think I did it. At first I pretty near ran away. Then I got hold of myself and sat down to think. I decided I'd better call the cops, and that's what I did!"

Only the sound of the raindrops rattling on the roof above followed. The coroner turned to the police sergeant and conversed with him in a low whisper, then turned to a detective.

"What do you think about it, Smith?"

"Plain case of suicide," declared the detective. "The old boy was nuts over this radio stuff and cremated himself. Probably bumped off his assistant, Josef, the same way. This Steinhilde ought to have worked for an undertaker."

"Those are my views, too," agreed the coroner. "There is nothing more we can do. However, one of the men had better watch the place tonight," he added with a meaning nod at White who was slumped down in his chair. "And before we leave, we might as well shut off the power and save somebody some money."

He arose, went to the switchboard and pulled the universal switch. Immediately the hum of the concealed, powerful motors ceased. The others arose, buttoned their coats about them and left the room, leaving behind the detective who had been assigned to watch the building. He drew a chair up before the door, sat down and leaned

back. The tragic mound of ashes had been taken by the coroner.

White sat dejectedly in his chair. He had not been accused of the death of Steinhilde, nor arrested. Yet he was aware that he was under suspicion; he realized that the detective had not been assigned to watch the building, but to watch him. He mentally reviewed the details again.

IT was not more than twenty minutes ago that Steinhilde had stood here before him talking. And now he was dead, and White was under suspicion for killing him. As he tried to analyze his feelings further, White found that he was vaguely uneasy from some cause apart from that suspicion. He felt that he had left undone something he should have done, or had done something he shouldn't have done.

He sprang to his feet and paced restlessly up and down the room, pausing finally before the battered desk at which he had often seen Steinhilde working. It was cluttered with papers covered with algebraic figures and copies of several scientific magazines. At the back of the desk against the wall was a collection of scientific volumes. White glanced at them carelessly and was about to turn away when he noticed a small, thin, red book wedged in between two thick tomes bearing German titles. He drew it out, and turned its pages idly, stared suddenly at the reading matter in amazement, then hurried back to the light. The detective kept his eyes on him but made no move. White opened the volume and began to read feverishly.

"June 16—We have proved that the transmission of matter by the electronic disturbance set up by atomic disintegration is entirely feasible. Josef is so delighted he can scarcely talk. Our efforts of more than a decade are about to be rewarded. Weather conditions were ideal today, although I believe they will have no effect on the phenomenon, so we set up our miniature electronic sets in either end of the building shortly after midnight and by smashing the atom of hydrogen succeeded in transmitting a pint of water from one to the other. The water disappeared from the sending set and

came out of the receiving set as steam. Success is close."

White skipped several pages devoted to code and mathematical formulas before he came to another entry. He grinned sheepishly as he read it.

"**J**OSEF is still chuckling about my simple plan of installing an ordinary radio receiving set with the speaker concealed up in the machinery of the atom disintegrator, and passing off the whole machine as a monstrous radio set. White obviously believes that is what we have, and so does our landlady. Well, brighter minds than theirs have been fooled by simpler devices.

"July 2—We have now finished our first big electronic set with its tremendous power hook-up. It stands fifteen feet high and is both a transmitter and a receiver. There is a peculiar circumstance connected with it. As soon as we put it into operation as a receiver mysterious sounds began to emanate from it. Josef was fascinated. He listened to it all morning, and copied down a number of what he thinks are messages. He believes he is on the trail of something big, but I think he is merely listening to some sort of static. It seems to buzz out the letters 'A A A O U K, A A A O U K,' over and over. If the sounds come from some station, the letter combination must be its call letter. Josef points out that static doesn't usually repeat itself in that fashion. He may be right.

"July 3—Josef has a friend in Washington who is a code expert. Josef is going to send him the messages he has copied and see what luck he has with them. If they are of human origin and mean anything, he can decipher them."

"August 1—Real success this time! We transmitted a brick from one little electron set to the other and it came out flawless. Tried a kitten next. It walked out of the receiving set in a dazed sort of way. Josef was so enthusiastic he sent the little animal through the process again. It seemed none the worse for the experience. The transmission was instantaneous. Even the slightest nerve impulse in motion at the time is transmitted with the matter.

"We also hooked the little set with the big one and found both reception and sending of the big set perfect. It was an easy matter to perfect it after we solved the mystery of the laminated inner surface.

"What a war weapon we have discovered! Our imaginations are staggered by its stupendous possibilities. An army appears within the enemy's gates, transmitted there instantaneously thousands of miles across oceans, mountains, deserts and cities as fast as armed men can march in and out of the sending and receiving sets. All existing methods of transportation, except for pleasure, pass into history with the primitive ox cart, scow and pack animals. Distance vanishes. Hongkong, London, San Francisco, Buenos Aires, Honolulu, Capetown and Sydney will be but an instant, the fractional part of a second, away from each other.

"August 15—Josef received his messages back from Washington with an alphabet key. His friend, the code expert, says they were the hardest proposition he has ever tackled. Only through the merest chance, the fundamental fact that all human understanding is based on a few universal traits, did he stumble onto their solution, then had to call on a linguist for ideas about translating them into English. Even so, only a part could be made out. One message may furnish a clue to the identity of the station, although nothing in the European press dispatches indicates that the Polish armies are in the field at this time. Here is the message:

The Pole Army is hard pressed near big pass. Warning of a possible water shortage is given by Diamoude.

"**I** CAN make nothing of it.

"Josef has an idea that may bear fruit. He is going to write the English translations for the messages, if he can establish communication with this A A A O U K, and will send first the original message, and then the translation, which will give the senders at that place a basis for communication with us if they can understand the idea. I hope this entire affair will not prove to be a hoax.

"August 16—After twelve hours of unremitting effort during which Josef

sat in front of our electronic set using it in the sending phase and working with a loud, improvised buzzer, he finally got in touch with this mysterious station tonight. We were swamped with messages in code at first, then a babel of voices and strange words poured out of our set in a torrent of sound. Josef finally broke through with the buzzer and started sending his prepared messages of the originals and the translations. When he ended, absolute silence followed. We are now waiting.

"August 17—Our discovery! It is unbelievable! I shall not write down the identity of the place A A A O U K here, lest this little volume fall into strange hands and I be suspected of insanity—more so than I already am, I mean. When I have enough proof I shall set it all down in these pages and then announce it all to the world. But until then the secret of our great find must not go beyond Josef and myself. However, I will say that communication between us and A A A O U K has been established on the basis of the English translation Josef sent them. I am fascinated. I cannot work further just now on the big electronic set we are planning to send to Washington."

No additional entry had been made in the book for nearly two weeks, apparently, for the next page was dated September 1 and bore the following notation:

"Josef is determined to go to A A A O U K. Their device for transmitting is obviously the same as ours, although I don't keep it synchronized with them for that—only enough to carry on communication. They have an intelligence that is almost genius, for they have already learned to use English.

"However, we proved that we could transmit matter by sending them our kitten, and they, in turn, sent us a fish, a queer, flabby, gaseous specimen which nearly died before we discovered that it needed salt water instead of fresh water to live in. It is certain we could send a human being.

"They have promised us a most interesting visit, if we will go to see them. Somehow, I am filled with misgivings over the prospect, but Josef is wild to go. His nature is too generous

and trustful to have any suspicions of individuals who possess such intellect and accomplishments. They have promised to keep him constantly in touch with me, and he, like an overgrown boy that he is, can see nothing but the holiday part of it. Everything might be all right, but I am afraid. I don't know why.

"September 3—Josef finally overcame my objections and went today. I believe he would have been sick if I had not given my permission. I turned the knob for him while he stood in the set smiling eagerly, all dressed up with his old, battered travelling bag in his hand. Against his will I made him take a revolver. He is such a trusting old soul I know he won't carry it after he arrives, but will leave it under his pillow, or on the dresser, or whatever kind of furniture they use at A A A O U K. I saw him standing there in the globe smiling. Then he was gone—vanishing like a shadow.

"GREAT was my relief when I talked with him for fifteen minutes after he arrived. Then he went out to see the city. He talked again when he came back. He is enjoying himself hugely. I could tell that from his voice and laughter. But nevertheless I wish he were back here with me. I can't shake off that presentiment of evil. Tomorrow I shall throw myself into the delayed construction of that big electronic set for Washington. Maybe that will relieve my feelings, and in addition will surprise Josef when he comes back. God grant that he may!

"September 10—I knew it! I knew it! Great Heavens, what can I do? Josef got word to me this morning in German, a language they don't understand, although they doubtless would master it in almost no time.

"'For the love of God and humanity, *Kamerad*, don't let even one of these hellish creatures through our set!' he jerked out the words. 'They thirst, yearn, crave and demand that I send them through the set. They will do anything to get through. If one of them succeeds in getting through our set, he will do as much damage as ten thousand, and the ten thousand will

follow him—and ten hundred thousand more! After what I have seen here, it would be far better that both of us were dead and our set destroyed with its secret rather than have that happen. They may torture me into saying “yes,” but don’t listen, for I will mean “no.” I am watching for my chance to get back to you, but they won’t let me near the set now.’

“September 15—I killed their fish today. Dismembered it. Threw it into the sewer drain. I don’t even trust a fish from A A A O U K. Josef says our kitten can jump ten or fifteen feet into the air when it is frightened, and is kept on display before the crowds in the public square. They are becoming more suspicious of Josef for not ordering me to let them through. I fear for him. Sending that kitten to them was bad luck—very bad—I know now.

“September 19—I can stand it no longer! For two days I have listened to Josef’s cries and groans under torture before their electronic set. To my pleadings for them to stop they repeat that they will continue until he is dead, or until I let them come through from their seething, overcrowded world. Tonight at seven they start again—burning away his skin and flesh with white hot irons this time. I cannot let them go through with it!

“My worker, my friend! I shall rescue him, or die in the attempt. I have my revolvers, and several hand grenades saved from the war. My plans are carefully laid. When they have him before the set, I shall quickly tune in ours to synchronize exactly, and act. I shall step out of their way, before they know what is happening, and clear the room. Before they can recover themselves I shall be back here with Josef.

“I have worked out the plan thoroughly. I’ll call White over to guard the building and machinery in case we might be delayed. I’ll set the automatic timer so that our set changes from a sender to a receiver an instant after I am gone.

“It is a desperate mission, and I may never return from it. I should perhaps explain what A A A O U K is. I know positively now. But before I write it down here I want to—”

WHITE broke off his reading in abrupt horror. The current that operated the set had been cut off by the coroner when he pulled the universal switch before leaving the building! Steinhilde had no chance to escape back to the safety of the building. And after he, White, had promised to see that morning was touched or disturbed! He threw down the volume and cursed. Then he leaped to his feet.

There was still a chance. Steinhilde might even now be praying that the set would start functioning. White leaped for the switchboard and halted with his hand on the universal switch.

Suppose something strange, something fiendish, leaped out of the big ball? White shot a glance at the detective, now nodding in his chair, and crept toward him. From the armpit holster he gently removed the heavy automatic pistol, then leaped back to the switchboard and threw in the switch. The motors hummed to life, the big tubes glowed. White poised grimly before the narrow door of the big ball. There broke on his ears with a rush the sound of trampling, thudding feet, a blur of strange words and the screaming of a man. The voice was Steinhilde’s. He was shouting it desperately.

“*Ach, Gott!* White, White, I see the set coming to life! Smash it! Smash it! They are starting through! *Gott im Himmel!* It is too late!”

The scream ended in a sob. White scarcely knew what he did. Vaguely he saw his hand flash to the knob he had seen Steinhilde turn, and he plunged feet first into the ball. There was a sensation of a violent upward surge as though he was carried by a powerful elevator, then he collided violently with someone. He staggered but kept his feet as the individual he bumped into was hurled backward out of a doorway. Two other men, tall, thin, and grotesquely clad towered over him on either side. In a flash he grasped the situation.

He was in the electronic set at A A A O U K into which the three enemies of Steinhilde had already hurried! White hooked an arm about each one and lunged forward through the

opening, taking them with him.

They shot out onto a wide marble platform, or dais. A strange, monstrous, half-naked yellow giant who was standing there leaning on an immense sword, gaped at him in astonishment. Then he whirled up the broad blade savagely and charged. Crack! White's automatic stabbed redly at him. The giant stumbled and collapsed, his nine feet of pale yellow body rolling down the broad marble steps to the floor twelve feet below.

Another yellow giant was closing in from the other side with sword upraised. White had no time to use his gun. He dodged inside the sword stroke and caught the guard a terrific left in the solar plexus that lifted him clear of the floor and hurled him down the stairs.

One of the long skinny men whom White had rushed out of the ball was worming his way back toward the opening. White dived for him. His frantic fingers gripped a skinny ankle. A savage jerk. White's eyes widened in amazement. The long body seemed curiously light as it shot out above the steps and crashed down to the marble floor, well clear of the bottom step.

White whirled about, sparring. The platform was empty except for the sprawled-out figure of the man he had collided with in the ball. White took in his surroundings at a glance.

HE stood on a hundred-foot platform at the end of a vast marble hall, the ceiling of which towered a hundred feet above him, a ceiling painted elaborately with strange scenes. The walls were grandly and beautifully sculptured with weird beasts and distorted buildings and people. Along the foot of both side walls were shining, whirling machines, switchboards, squirming tentacles of heavily insulated wires.

He scarcely noted it all. His eyes were on a vast, rolling slab, much like an overgrown operating table, which stood in the center of the floor not more than thirty feet from him. On this slab lay two figures. One was Steinhilde, bound and helpless but struggling desperately to free himself. The other was the pitiful wreck of an old man

mercifully unconscious, his naked body giving mute, hideous testimony of the torture he had endured. Above the table were grouped tall, mummy-faced men in strange costumes staring in stupefied wonder at the intruder on the platform.

One of the kilted figures shook his head angrily to throw off the astonishment that gripped him. He started to aim a long, shining rod at White. Again the automatic pistol barked. The skinny man folded over and crashed to the floor, the rod clattering down beside him.

"White, White, get them!" Steinhilde's voice was wild with sudden, frantic hope. "Don't run for them! Jump!"

White leaped savagely. His big, powerful body left the floor like a rocket, curving over in a gentle arc that brought him crashing into the group. The impact bowled them over like ten pins. There was a terrific flash and roar as the end of the fallen, shining rod exploded. One luckless man who had stumbled into its path dissolved in a puff of smoke and was no more.

Left, right, left, right! White's heavy fists battered them like trip hammers. He felt his victim's brittle bones crack and smash beneath his knuckles. He bored in harder, unmindful of the feeble jabs rained on him in return.

Abruptly he found himself standing alone and gasping, his fists red with blood. The tall men lay about him on the floor, some oddly still and others squirming in pain. Three survivors were streaking it for the doorway two hundred feet away. White's pistol leaped into view. Its bark echoed back from the high ceiling, as the trio dodged to safety through the vast doorway.

"Quick, free me!" Steinhilde's voice was still frantic. "Let Josef alone, I can carry him. Hurry, hurry! They'll be back with a whole company of guards and blast us into nothing. You took them by surprise once, but you can't again! Hurry!"

"Maybe I can reach that big door and shut it," grunted White, struggling with the wires that bound the scientist. "It'd give us more time."

"No, no! Their death rods would cut through these marble walls like a hot

knife through a lump of butter. Grab that sword off the platform and cut these wires."

White's pocket knife was already out. Its keen blade ripped through the bonds that held Steinhilde's ankles and wrists. He rolled off the slab to the floor, fell, and struggled to his feet again. With a mighty heave he threw Josef's limp form over his shoulder and staggered toward the marble steps.

SUDDENLY there burst through the doorway the ominous sound of a distant, moblike roar, the red, flaming rage voiced by a mob. The escaping trio had summoned help. A thrill of fear prickled White's spine. He turned and dashed after Steinhilde, glanced back over his shoulder and gasped.

Fantastic and grotesque as the whole affair had been, he could scarcely believe his eyes now. Through the doorway leaped a huge, strange monster that padded swiftly across the marble floor toward him. The thing was much like a great anthropoid ape, with a nearly human face, but instead of a single pair of legs it had two pairs, squat and powerful, that propelled it smoothly and swiftly along. It stood ten feet high, with a barrel-like body, huge, bulging shoulders and six-foot arms, a single pair that swung apelike by its sides. The head was flat and sloping, with little, wicked eyes, and a huge, fanged mouth. The body was covered with red, woolly hair.

White jerked up the automatic and took a snap shot at the thing. Yet quick as he had been, the monster was quicker. It leaped sideways as the gun barked, and landed twelve feet away. Steinhilde, feebly nearing the top of the steps with his unconscious burden, twisted his head about at the shot.

"Vacari!" he gasped. "Sort of a gladiator. Specially bred for the games for at least thirty generations, Josef says. This one is from the King's body-guard. Sent ahead to hold us. We're lost now!"

White set his jaw grimly.

"Just go ahead," he growled. "Fall into the ball. I'll stop this nightmare."

The thing had dropped down to a crouching position with its knuckles resting on the floor and its legs doubled

for the leap. White measured the distance. It was nearly sixty feet. The thing was watching Steinhilde as a cat watches a mouse. Feebly the scientist crawled over the top step and approached the ball. A foot. Two feet. Abruptly the thing leaped. Up it shot from the floor forty feet into the air. White's pistol barked twice. Both shots missed the darting body. Down it came with a heavy thud almost upon him. A long, hairy arm whipped round him, pinning his hands helpless against his sides and nearly crushing the breath from his body.

He was lifted off the floor, and the thing ran nimbly up the steps and wrapped its other arm round the frantic, screaming Steinhilde and the unconscious Josef. Then, holding all three of them helpless, it braced itself with squat legs spread wide apart and laughed, a hoarse, coughing rumble of a sound.

White's stomach revolted as the fetid breath of the thing fanned his face. Try as he would he could not wriggle an inch to free his gun hand. He paused to listen.

The ominous roar of the mob outside was swelling. It filled the vast marble hall and beat on their ears. Steinhilde's eyes sought White's in hopeless anguish. They were a scant twelve feet from the doorway of the ball and safety, yet were as powerless to move as though gripped in a vise. Obviously they were to be kept for torture and death, and this thing that held them would be rewarded with a special carcass for dinner and a new wife for capturing them. White turned his eyes again toward the distant doorway.

THE roar was still growing. Hundreds of people must be rushing in to the kill. He stared in fascination. Suddenly there popped through the doorway a small black ball, bounding along fifteen feet in the air at a bounce. He watched it in fearful astonishment. The ball was only a small, terrified, black kitten, leaping, spitting, clawing in terror to escape the roar of the approaching mob. Onto the rolling slab it sprang, then shot up into the air.

Down it came. Down, down, straight onto the head of the vacari, landing

with a flurry of clawing feet as it strove to keep its balance.

The vacari roared in startled fright, dropped its captives and started slapping with both hands at the kitten. Vaguely White saw the vast doorway fill with running figures. He whipped up the pistol against the side of the thing and pressed the trigger twice, then leaped over to pull his two companions out of the way of the falling monster.

Swiftly he ran with first one, then the other to the ball, and threw them in. He turned to look for the kitten. It had sprung from the head of the now dying vacari to the top of the ball and was mewling there in terror.

White looked down at the howling, racing mob. The leaders had struck aside two death rods aimed at him; they wanted to save the ball from destruction. White leaped upward along the curved side of the set. His hands closed about the frightened kitten. As his feet struck the floor again he thrust it into his pocket.

The mob was rushing up the steps now. One veritable living skeleton was several steps ahead of the rest. He was brandishing a sword. White caught his descending arm, snapped the wrist, and hurled the lanky body into the faces of the others, then leaped into the ball.

Again the powerful, upward surge. Before him was a narrow doorway. He leaped through it, stumbled and fell at the sudden heaviness of his body. He twisted about and hurled the pistol into the tangled mass of wires entering the top of the set. There followed a blinding flash as they short circuited with a crackling roar. Something hit White on the head.

"Where's my gat, you—"

White came back to consciousness with the detective standing over him with clenched fists. White stared at him dazedly and gingerly felt the bump on his throbbing head.

"I said, where's my gat!" The detective was in a rage. "What kind of shenanigan business is this, anyway?"

White struggled to a sitting position and swayed there grinning feebly as he pulled something from his pocket.

"I even saved the kitten," he observed. "Steinhilde said it was unlucky. I say it was the luckiest thing that ever happened to us."

The detective spat wrathfully. White's laugh was shaky.

"You're drunk!" accused the detective, shaking his fist. "Listen, you cheap bum, you get my gun back here pronto, or I'll run you in!"

STEINHILDE, who was lying sprawled out nearby, struggled to his feet at the threat and pulled out his wallet.

"Here, Officer," he mumbled, extracting a fifty dollar note. "Take this and buy yourself a new gun. Forget about us."

The detective frowned and muttered, but finally accepted the money and moved away. He paused at the door.

"How about them ashes in the ball?" he demanded.

"Wood ashes from the torture fire to tell them when our set started to receive," explained Steinhilde wearily.

The detective still hesitated, then opened the door.

"I know one thing," he declared in parting. "You birds better sober up and get at it now. One peep about any disturbance around here tonight, and you'll find the wagon backin' up to the door."

Neither White nor Steinhilde paid any attention. They were wrapping Josef in an old blanket and started for the door with him. White had already phoned for a taxi. Outside, the storm was breaking. The clouds overhead had parted to reveal a bit of black velvet sky in which the planet Mars glowed as brilliantly as some rare, flawless jewel. Steinhilde shook his fist at it.

"Curse and rave, you fiends!" he cried, swaying unsteadily. "Struggle for your lives, rot and die on your dying world! Send out your A A A O U K till Doomsday and be damned! Our set is destroyed. You'll never get through here!"

He collapsed suddenly beside Josef, while White dashed back to phone for an ambulance instead of a taxi.