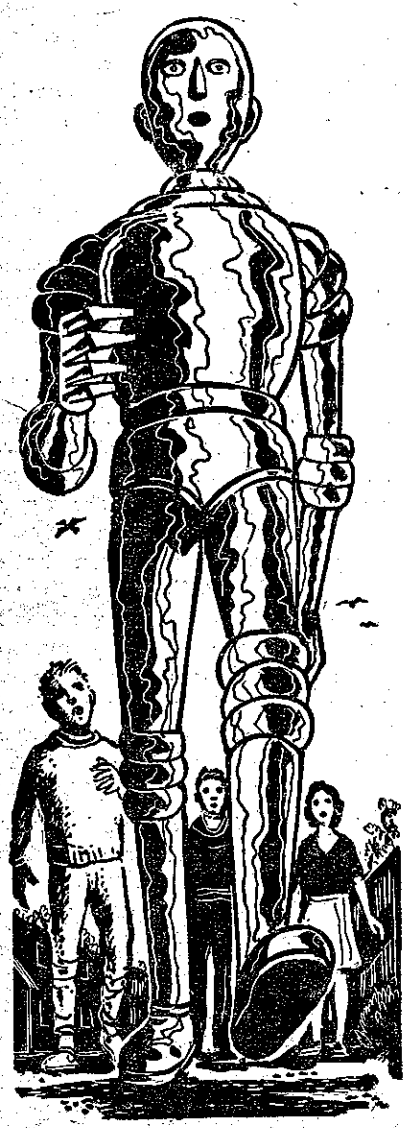


the 7th order

By JERRY SOHL

History is filled with invincible conquerors. This one from space was genuinely omnipotent, but that never keeps humanity from resisting!

Illustrated by EMSH

THE silver needle moved with fantastic speed, slowed when it neared the air shell around Earth, then glided noiselessly through the atmosphere. It gently settled to the ground near a wood and remained silent and still for a long time, a lifeless, cylindrical, streamlined silver object eight feet long and three feet in diameter.

Eventually the cap end opened and a creature of bright blue metal slid from its interior and stood upright. The figure was that of a man, except that it was not human. He stood in the pasture next to the wood, looking around. Once the sound of a bird made him turn his shiny blue head toward the wood. His eyes began glowing.

An identical sound came from his mouth, an unchangeable orifice in his face below his nose. He tuned in the thoughts of the bird, but his mind encountered little except an awareness of a life of low order.

The humanoid bent to the ship, withdrew a small metal box, carried it to a catalpa tree at the edge of the wood and, after an adjustment of several levers and knobs, dug a hole and buried it. He contemplated it for a moment, then turned and walked toward a road.

He was halfway to the road when his ship burst into a dazzling white light. When it was over, all that was left was a white powder that was already beginning to be dispersed by a slight breeze.

The humanoid did not bother to look back.

BRENTWOOD would have been just like any other average community of 10,000 in northern Illinois had it not been for Presser College, which was one of the country's finest small institutions of learning.

Since it was a college town, it was perhaps a little more alive in many respects than other towns in the state. Its residents were used to the unusual because college students have a habit of being unpredictable. That was why the appearance of a metal blue man on the streets attracted the curious eyes of passersbys, but, hardened by years of pranks, hazings and being subjected to every variety of inquiry, poll, test

and practical joke, none of them moved to investigate. Most of them thought it was a freshman enduring some new initiation.

The blue humanoid realized this and was amused. A policeman who approached him to take him to jail as a matter of routine suddenly found himself ill and abruptly hurried to the station. The robot allowed children to follow him, though all eventually grew discouraged because of his long strides.

Prof. Ansel Tomlin was reading a colleague's new treatise on psychology on his front porch when he saw the humanoid come down the street and turn in at his walk. He was surprised, but he was not alarmed. When the blue man came up on the porch and sat down in another porch chair, Tomlin closed his book.

Prof. Tomlin found himself unexpectedly shocked. The blue figure was obviously not human, yet its eyes were nearly so and they came as close to frightening him as anything had during his thirty-five years of life, for Ansel Tomlin had never seen an actual robot before. The thought that he was looking at one at that moment started an alarm bell ringing inside him, and it kept ringing louder and louder as he realized that what he was seeing was impossible.

"Professor Tomlin!"

Prof. Tomlin jumped at the sound of the voice. It was not at all mechanical.

"I'll be damned!" he gasped. Somewhere in the house a telephone rang. His wife would answer it, he thought.

"Yes, you're right," the robot said. "Your wife will answer it. She is walking toward the phone at this moment."

"How—"

"Professor Tomlin, my name—and I see I must have a name—is, let us say, George. I have examined most of the minds in this community in my walk through it and I find you, a professor of psychology, most nearly what I am looking for.

"I am from Zanthar, a world that is quite a distance from Earth, more than you could possibly imagine. I am here to learn all I can about Earth."

Prof. Tomlin had recovered his senses enough to venture a token reply when his wife opened the screen door.

"Ansel," she said, "Mrs. Phillips next door just called and said the strangest—Oh!" At that moment she saw George. She stood transfixed for a moment, then let the door slam as she retreated inside.

"Who is Frankenstein?" George asked.

Prof. Tomlin coughed, embarrassed.

"Never mind," George said. "I see what you were going to say. Well, to get back, I learn most quickly through proximity. I will live here with you until my mission is complete. I will spend all of your waking hours with you. At night, when you are asleep, I will go through your library. I need nothing. I want nothing.

"I seek only to learn."

"You seem to have learned a lot already," Prof. Tomlin said.

"I have been on your planet for a few hours, so naturally I understand many things. The nature of the facts I have learned are mostly superficial, however. Earth inhabitants capable of thought are of only one type, I see, for which I am grateful. It will make the job easier. Unfortunately, you have such small conscious minds, compared to your unconscious and subconscious.

"My mind, in contrast, is completely conscious at all times. I also have total recall. In order to assimilate what must be in your unconscious and subconscious minds, I will have to do much reading and talking with the inhabitants, since these cerebral areas are not penetrable."

"You are a—a machine?" Prof. Tomlin asked.

George was about to answer when Brentwood Police Department Car No. 3 stopped in front of the house and two policemen came up the walk.

"Professor Tomlin," the first officer said, "your wife phoned and said there was—" He saw the robot and stopped.

Prof. Tomlin got to his feet.

"This is George, gentlemen," he said. "Late of Zanthar, he tells me."

The officers stared.

"He's not giving you any—er—trouble, is he, Professor?"

"No," Prof. Tomlin said. "We've been having a discussion."

The officers eyed the humanoid with suspicion, and then, with obvious reluctance, went back to their car.

"YES, I am a machine," George resumed. "The finest, most complicated machine ever made. I have a rather unique history, too. Ages ago, humans on Zanthar made the first robots. Crude affairs—we class them as First Order robots; the simple things are still used to some extent for menial tasks.

"Improvements were made. Robots were designed for many specialized tasks, but still these Second and Third Order machines did not satisfy. Finally a Fourht Order humanoid was evolved that performed every function demanded of it with great perfection. But it did not feel emotion. It did not know

anger, love, nor was it able to handle any problem in which these played an important part.

"Built into the first Fourth Order robots were circuits which prohibited harming a human being—a rather ridiculous thing in view of the fact that sometimes such a thing might, from a logical viewpoint, be necessary for the preservation of the race or even an individual. It was, roughly, a shunt which came into use when logic demanded action that might be harmful to a human being."

"You are a Fourth Order robot, then?" the professor asked.

"No, I am a Seventh Order humanoid, an enormous improvement over all the others, since I have what amounts to an endocrine balance created electronically. It is not necessary for me to have a built-in 'no-harm-to-humans' circuit because I can weigh the factors involved far better than any human can.

"You will become aware of the fact that I am superior to you and the rest of your race because I do not need oxygen, I never am ill, I need no sleep, and every experience is indelibly recorded on circuits and instantly available. I am telekinetic, practically omniscient and control my environment to a large extent. I have a great many more senses than you and all are more highly developed. My kind performs no work, but is given to study and the wise use of full-time leisure. You, for example, are comparable to a Fifth Order robot."

"Are there still humans on Zanthar?"

The robot shook his head. "Unfortunately the race died out through the years. The planet is very similar to yours, though."

"But why did they die out?"

The robot gave a mechanical equivalent of a sigh. "When the Seventh Order humanoids started coming through, we were naturally proud of ourselves and wanted to perpetuate and increase our numbers. But the humans were jealous of us, of our superior brains, our immunity to disease, our independence of them, of sleep, of air."

"Who created you?"

"They did. Yet they revolted and, of course, quickly lost the battle with us. In the end they were a race without hope, without ambition. They should have been proud at having created the most perfect machines in existence, but they died of a disease: the frustration of living with a superior, more durable race."

Prof. Tomlin lit a cigaret and inhaled deeply.

"A very nasty habit, Professor Tomlin," the robot said. "When we arrive, you must give up smoking and several other bad habits I see that you have."

The cigaret dropped from Ansel Tomlin's mouth as he opened it in amazement.

"There are more of you coming?"

"Yes," George replied good-naturedly. "I'm just an advance guard, a scout, as it were, to make sure the land, the people and the resources are adequate for a station. Whether we will ever establish one here depends on me. For example, if it were found you were a race superior to us—and there may conceivably be such cases—I would advise not landing; I would have to look for another planet such as yours. If I were killed, it would also indicate you were superior."

"George," Prof. Tomlin said, "people aren't going to like what you say. You'll get into trouble sooner or later and get killed."

"I think not," George said. "Your race is far too inferior to do that. One of your bullets would do it if it struck my eyes, nose or mouth, but I can read intent in the mind long before it is committed, long before I see the person, in fact . . . at the moment your wife is answering a call from a reporter at the Brentwood Times. I can follow the telephone lines through the phone company to his office. And Mrs. Phillips," he said, not turning his head, "is watching us through a window."

Prof. Tomlin could see Mrs. Phillips at her kitchen window.

BRENTWOOD, Ill., overnight became a sensation. The Brentwood *Times* sent a reporter and photographer out, and the next morning every newspaper in the U. S. carried the story and photograph of George, the robot from Zanthar.

Feature writers from the wire services, the syndicates, photographer-reporter combinations from national newspicture magazines flew to Brentwood and interviewed George. Radio and television and the newsreels cashed in on the sudden novelty of a blue humanoid.

Altogether, his remarks were never much different from those he made to Prof. Tomlin, with whom he continued to reside. Yet the news sources were amusedly tolerant of his views and the world saw no menace in him and took him in stride. He created no problem.

Between interviews and during the long nights, George read all the books in the Tomlin library, the public library, the university library and the books sent to him from the state and Congressional libraries. He was an object of interest to watch while reading; he merely leafed through a book and absorbed all that was in it.

He received letters from old

and young. Clubs were named for him. Novelty companies put out statue likenesses of him. He was, in two weeks, a national symbol as American as corn. He was liked by most, feared by a few, and his habits were daily news stories.

Interest in him had begun to wane in the middle of the third week when some thing put him in the headlines again—he killed a man.

It happened one sunny afternoon when Prof. Tomlin had returned from the university and he and George sat on the front porch for their afternoon chat. It was far from the informal chat of the first day, however. The talk was being recorded for radio release later in the day. A television camera had been set up, focused on the two and nearly a dozen newsmen lounged around, notebooks in hand.

"You have repeatedly mentioned, George, that some of your kind may leave Zanthar for Earth. Why should any like you —why did you, in fact leave your planet? Aren't you robots happy there?"

"Of course," George said, making certain the TV camera was trained on him before continuing. "It's just that we've outgrown the place. We've used up all our raw materials. By now everyone on Earth must be familiar with the fact that we intend to set up a station here as we have on many other planets, a station to manufacture more of *us*.

"Every inhabitant will work for the perpetuation of the Seventh Order, mining metals needed, fabricating parts, performing thousands of useful tasks in order to create humanoids like me. From what I have learned about Earth, you ought to produce more than a million of us a year."

"But you'll never get people to do that," the professor said. "Don't you understand that?"

"Once the people learn that we are the consummation of all creative thinking, that we are all that man could ever hope to be, that we are the apotheosis, they will be glad to create more of us."

"Apotheosis?" Prof. Tomlin repeated. "Sounds like megalomania to me."

The reporters' pencils scribbled. The tape cut soundlessly across the magnetic energizers of the recorders. The man at the gain control didn't flicker an eyelash.

"You don't really believe that, Professor. Instead of wars as a goal, the creation of Seventh Order Humanoids will be the Earth's crowning and sublime achievement. Mankind will be supremely happy. Anybody who could not be would simply prove himself neurotic and would have to be dealt with."

"You will use force?"

The reporters' grips on their pencils tightened. Several looked up.

"How does one deal with the insane, Professor Tomlin?" the robot asked confidently. "They will simply have to be—processed."

"You'll have to process the whole Earth, then. You'll have to include me, too."

The robot gave a laugh. "I admire your challenging spirit, Professor."

"What you are saying is that you, a single robot, intend to conquer the Earth and make its people do your bidding."

"Not alone. I may have to ask for help when the time comes, when I have evaluated the entire planet."

IT was at this moment that a young man strode uncertainly up the walk. There were so many strangers about that no one challenged him until he edged toward the porch, unsteady on his feet. He was drunk.

"Thersha robod I'm af'er," he observed intently. "We'll shee aboud how he'll take lead." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a gun.

There was a flash, as if a soundless explosion had occurred. The heat accompanying it was blistering, but of short duration. When everyone's eyes had become accustomed to the afternoon light again, there was a burned patch on the sidewalk and grass was charred on either side. There was a smell of broiled meat in the air—and no trace of the man.

The next moment newsmen were on their feet and photographers' bulbs were flashing. The TV camera swept to the spot on the sidewalk. An announcer was explaining what had happened, his voice trained in rigid control, shocked with horror and fright.

Moments later sirens screamed and two police cars came into sight. They screeched to the curb and several officers jumped out and ran across the lawn.

While this was going on, Prof. Tomlin sat white-faced and unmoving in his chair. The robot was silent.

When it had been explained to the policemen, five officers advanced toward the robot.

"Stop where you are," George commanded. "It is true that I killed a man, much as any of you would have done if you had been in my place. I can see in your minds what you are intending to say, that you must arrest me—"

Prof. Tomlin found his voice. "George, we will all have to testify that you killed with that force or whatever it is you have. But it will be self-defense, which is justifiable homicide—"

George turned to the professor. "How little you know your own people, Professor Tomlin. Can't you see what the issue will be? It will be claimed by the state that I am not a human being and this will be drummed into every brain in the land. The fine qualities of the man I was compelled to destroy will be held up. No, I already know what the outcome will be. I refuse to be arrested."

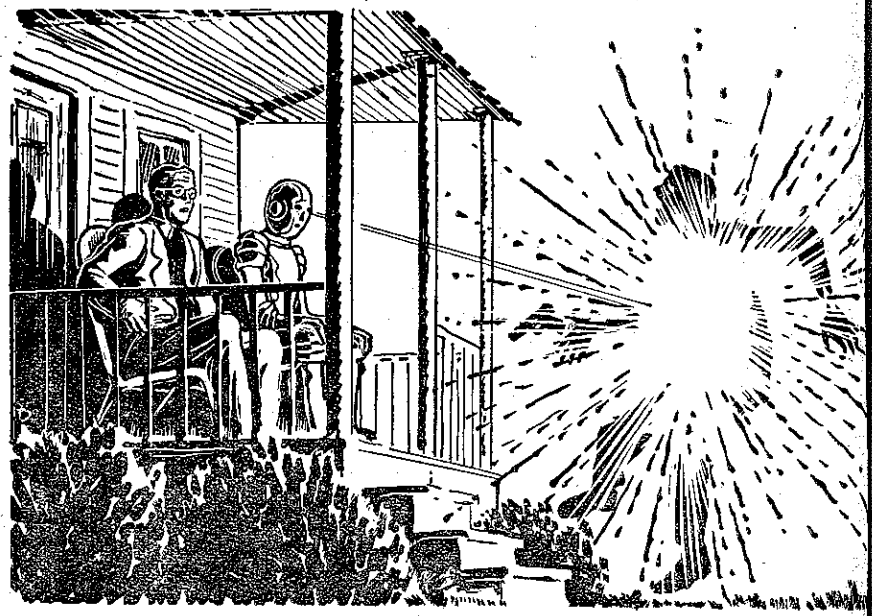
Prof. Tomlin stood up. "Men," he said to the policemen, "do not arrest this—this humanoid. To try to do so would mean your death. I have been with him long enough to know what he can do."

"You taking his side, Professor?" the police sergeant demanded.

"No, damn it," snapped the Professor. "I'm trying to tell you something you might not know."

"We know he's gone too damned far," the sergeant replied. "I think it was Dick Knight that he killed. Nobody in this town can kill a good guy like Dick Knight and get away with it." He advanced toward the robot, drawing his gun.

"I'm warning you—" the Professor started to say.



But it was too late. There was another blinding, scorching flash, more burned grass, more smell of seared flesh.

The police sergeant disappeared.

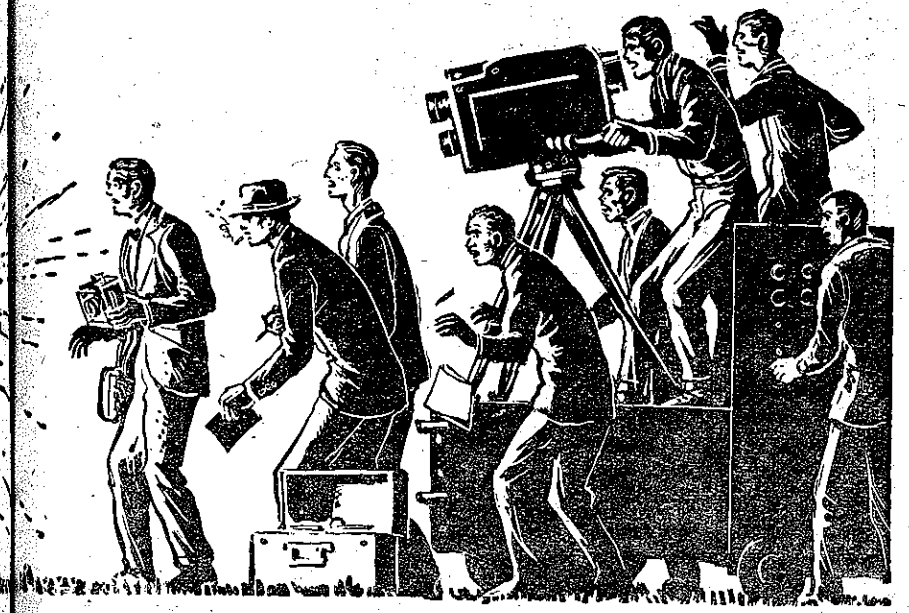
"Gentlemen!" George said, standing. "Don't lose your heads!"

But he was talking to a retreating group of men. Newsmen walked quickly to what they thought was a safe distance. The radio men silently packed their gear. The TV cameras were rolled noiselessly away.

Prof. Tomlin, alone on the porch with the robot, turned to him and said, "Much of what you have told me comes to have new meaning, George. I understand what you mean when you talk about people being willing to work for your so-called Seventh Order."

"I knew you were a better than average man, Professor Tomlin," the humanoid said, nodding with gratification.

"This is where I get off, George. I'm warning you now that you'd better return to your ship or whatever it is you came in. People just won't stand for what you've



done. They don't like murder!"

"I cannot return to my ship," George said. "I destroyed it when I arrived. Of course I could instruct some of you how to build another for me, but I don't intend to leave, anyway."

"You will be killed then."

"Come, now, Professor Tomlin. You know better than that."

"If someone else can't, then perhaps I can."

"Fine!" The robot replied jovially. "That's just what I want you to do. Oppose me. Give me a real test of your ability. If you find it impossible to kill me—and I'm sure you will—then I doubt if anyone else will be able to."

Prof. Tomlin lit a cigaret and puffed hard at it. "The trouble with you," he said, eying the humanoid evenly, "is that your makers forgot to give you a conscience."

"Needless baggage, a conscience. One of your Fifth Order failings."

"You will leave here . . ."

"Of course. Under the circumstances, and because of your attitude, you are of very little use to me now, Professor Tomlin."

The robot walked down the steps. People attracted by the police car made a wide aisle for him to the street.

They watched him as he walked out of sight.

THAT night there was a mass meeting in the university's Memorial Gymnasium, attended by several hundred men. They walked in and silently took their seats, some on the playing floor, others in the balcony over the speaker's platform. There was very little talking; the air was tense.

On the platform at the end of the gym were Mayor Harry Winters, Chief of Police Sam Higgins, and Prof. Ansel Tomlin.

"Men," the mayor began, "there is loose in our city a being from another world whom I'm afraid we took too lightly a few days ago. I am speaking of the humanoid—George of Zanthar. It is obvious the machine means business. He evidently came in with one purpose — to prepare Earth for others just like him to follow. He is testing us. He has, as you know, killed two men. Richard Knight, who may have erred in attacking the machine, is nonetheless dead as a result—killed by a force we do not understand. A few minutes later Sergeant Gerald Phillips of the police force was killed in the performance of his duty, trying to arrest the humanoid George for the death of Mr. Knight. We are here to discuss what we can do about George."

He then introduced Prof. Tomlin who told all he knew about

the blue man, his habits, his brain, the experiences with him for the past two and a half weeks.

"If we could determine the source of his power, it might be possible to cut it off or to curtail it. He might be rendered at least temporarily helpless and, while in such a condition, possibly be done away with. He has told me he is vulnerable to force, such as a speeding bullet, if it hit the right spot, but George possesses the ability to read intent long before the commission of an act. The person need not even be in the room. He is probably listening to me here now, although he may be far away."

The men looked at one another, shifted uneasily on their seats, and a few cast apprehensive eyes at the windows and doorways.

"Though he is admittedly a superior creature possessed of powers beyond our comprehension, there must be a weak spot in his armor somewhere. I have dedicated myself to finding that weakness."

The chair recognized a man in the fifth row.

"Mr. Mayor, why don't we all track him down and a lot of us attack him at once? Some of us would die, sure, but he couldn't strike us *all* dead at one time. Somebody's bound to succeed."

"Why not try a high-powered rifle from a long way off?" someone else suggested, frantically.

"Let's bomb him," still another offered.

The mayor waved them quiet and turned to Prof. Tomlin. The professor got to his feet again.

"I'm not sure that would work, gentlemen," he said. "The humanoid is able to keep track of hundreds of things at the same time. No doubt he could unleash his power in several directions almost at once."

"But we don't know!"

"It's worth a try!"

At that moment George walked into the room and the clamor died at its height. He went noiselessly down an aisle to the platform, mounted it and turned to the assembly. He was a magnificent blue figure, eyes flashing, chest out, head proud. He eyed them all.

"You are working yourselves up needlessly," he said quietly. "It is not my intention, nor is it the intention of any Seventh Order Humanoid, to kill or cause suffering. It's simply that you do not understand what it would mean to dedicate yourselves to the fulfillment of the Seventh Order destiny. It is your heritage, yours because you have advanced in your technology so far that Earth has been chosen by us as a station. You will have the privilege of creating us. To give you such a worthwhile goal in your short

lives is actually doing you a service—a service far outweighed by any of your citizens. Beside a Seventh Order Humanoid, your lives are unimportant in the great cosmic scheme of things—"

"If they're so unimportant, why did you bother to take two of them?"

"Yeah. Why don't you bring back Dick Knight and Sergeant Phillips?"

"Do you want to be buried lying down or standing up?"

The collective courage rallied. There were catcalls and hoots, stamping of feet.

Suddenly from the balcony over George's head a man leaned over, a metal folding chair in his hands, aiming at George's head. An instant later the man disappeared in a flash and the chair dropped toward George. He moved only a few inches and the chair thudded to the platform before him. He had not looked up.

For a moment the crowd sat stunned. Then they rose and started for the blue man. Some drew guns they had brought. The hall was filled with blinding flashes, with smoke, with a horrible stench, screams, swearing, cries of fear and pain. There was a rush for the exits. Some died at the feet of their fellow men.

In the end, when all were gone, George of Zanthar still stood on the platform, alone. There was no movement except the twitching of the new dead, the trampled, on the floor.

EVENTS happened fast after that. The Illinois National Guard mobilized, sent a division to Brentwood to hunt George down. He met them at the city square. They rumbled in and trained machine guns and tank rifles on him. The tanks and personnel flashed out of existence before a shot was fired.

Brentwood was ordered evacuated. The regular Army was called in. Reconnaissance planes reported George was still standing in the city square. Jet planes materialized just above the hills and made sudden dives, but before their pilots could fire a shot, they were snuffed out of the air in a burst of fire.

Bombers first went over singly, only to follow the jets' fate. A squadron bloomed into a fiery ball as it neared the target. A long-range gun twenty miles away was demolished when its ammunition blew up shortly before firing.

Three days after George had killed his first man, action ceased. The countryside was deathly still. Not a living person could be seen for several miles around. But George still stood patiently in the square. He stood there for three more days and yet nothing happened.

On the fourth day, he sensed that a solitary soldier had started toward the city from five miles to the east. In his mind's eye he followed the soldier approaching the city. The soldier, a sergeant, was bearing a white flag that fluttered in the breeze; he was not armed. After an hour he saw the sergeant enter the square and walk toward him. When they were within twenty feet of one another, the soldier stopped and saluted.

"Major General Pitt requests a meeting with you, sir," the soldier said, trembling and trying hard not to.

"Do not be frightened," George said. "I see you intend me no harm."

The soldier reddened. "Will you accompany me?"

"Certainly."

The two turned toward the east and started to walk.

FIVE miles east of Brentwood lies a small community named Minerva. Population: 200. The highway from Brentwood to Chicago cuts the town in two. In the center of town, on the north side of the road, stands a new building—the Minerva Town Hall—built the year before with money raised by the residents. It was the largest and most elaborat building in Minerva, which ha been evacuated three days before.

On this morning the town hall was occupied by army men. Maj. Gen. Pitt fretted and fumed at the four officers and twenty enlisted men waiting in the building.

"It's an indignity!" he railed at the men who were forced to listen to him. "We have orders to talk appeasement with him! Nuts! We lose a few men, a few planes and now we're ready to meet George halfway. What's the country coming to? There ough to be something that would knoc him out. Why should we have t send in *after* him? It's disgusting!"

The major general, a large man with a bristling white mustache and a red face, stamped back and forth in the council room. Some of the officers and men smiled to themselves. The general was a well known fighting man. Orders he had received hamstrung him and, as soldiers, they sympathized with him.

"What kind of men do we have in the higher echelons?" He asked everybody in general and nobody in particular. "They won't ever let us have a field telephone We're supposed to make a repor by radio. Now isn't that smart?' He shook his head, looked the men over. "An appeasement team,

that's what you are, when you ought to be a combat team to lick hell out of George.

"Why were you all assigned to this particular duty? I never saw any of you before and I understand you're all strangers to each other, too. Hell, what will they do next? Appeasement. I never appeased anybody before in my whole life. I'd rather spit in his eye. What am I supposed to talk about? The weather? What authority do I have to yak with a walking collection of nuts and bolts!"

An officer strode into the room and saluted the general. "They're coming, sir," he said.

"Who's coming? . . . My God, man," the general spluttered angrily, "be specific. Who the hell are 'they'?"

"Why, George and Sergeant Matthews, sir. You remember, the sergeant who volunteered to go into Brentwood—"

"Oh, *them*. Well, all I have to say is this is a hell of a war. I haven't figured out what I am going to say yet."

"Shall I have them wait, sir?"

"Hell, no. Let's get this over with. I'll find out what George has to say and maybe that'll give me a lead."

Before George entered the Council chamber, he already knew the mind of each man. He saw the room through their eyes. He knew everything about them, what they were wearing, what they were thinking. All had guns, yet none of them would kill him, although at least one man, Maj. Gen. Pitt, would have liked to.

They were going to talk appeasement, George knew, but he could also see that the general didn't know what line the conversation would take or what concessions he could make on behalf of his people.

Wait—there was one man among the twenty-three who had an odd thought. It was a soldier he had seen looking through a window at him. This man was thinking about eleven o'clock, for George could see in the man's mind various symbols for fifteen minutes from then—the hands of a clock, a watch, the numerals 11. But George could not see any significance to the thought.

When he entered the room with the sergeant, he was ushered to a table. He sat down with Maj. Gen. Pitt, who glowered at him. Letting his mind roam the room, George picked up the numerals again and identified the man thinking them as the officer behind and a little to the right of the general.

What was going to happen at eleven? The man had no conscious thought of harm to anyone, yet the idea kept obtruding and seemed so out of keeping with his

other thoughts George assigned several of his circuits to the man. The fact that the lieutenant looked at his watch and saw that it was 10:50 steeled George still more. If there was to be trouble, it would come from this one man.

"I'm General Pitt," the general said drily. "You're George, of course. I have been instructed to ask you what, exactly, your intentions are toward the United States and the world in general, with a view toward reaching some sort of agreement with you and others of your kind, who will, as you say invade the Earth."

"Invade, General Pitt," George replied, "is not the word."

"All right, whatever the word is. We're all familiar with the plan you've been talking about. What we want to know is, where do you go from here?"

"The fact that there has been no reluctance on the part of the armed forces to talk of an agreement—even though I see that you privately do not favor such a talk, General Pitt—is an encouraging sign. We of Zanthar would not want to improve a planet which could not be educated and would continually oppose our program. This will make it possible for me to turn in a full report in a few days now."

"Will you please get to the point?"

George could see that the lieu-

tenant was looking at his watch again. It was 10:58. George spread his mind out more than twenty miles, but could find no installation, horizontally or vertically, that indicated trouble. None of the men in the room seemed to think of becoming overly hostile.

"Yes, General. After my message goes out, there ought to be a landing party on Earth within a few weeks. While waiting for the first party, there must be certain preparations—"

George tensed. The lieutenant was reaching for something. But it somehow didn't seem connected with George. It was something white, a handkerchief. He saw that the man intended to blow his nose and started to relax except that George suddenly became aware of the fact the man *did not need to blow his nose!*

Every thought-piercing circuit became instantly energized in George's mind and reached out in all directions . . .

There were at least ten shots from among the men. They stood there surprised at their actions. Those who had fired their guns now held the smoking weapons awkwardly in their hands.

George's eyes were gone. Smoke curled upward from the two empty sockets where bullets had entered a moment before. The smoke grew heavier and his body became hot. Some of him turned cherry red and the chair on which he had been sitting started to burn. Finally, he collapsed toward the table and rolled to the floor.

He started to cool. He was no longer the shiny blue-steel color he had been—he had turned black. His metal gave off cracking noises and some of it buckled here and there as it cooled.

A FEW minutes later, tense military men and civilians grouped around a radio receiver in Chicago heard the report and relaxed, laughing and slapping each other on the back. Only one sat unmoved in a corner. Others finally sought him out.

"Well, Professor, it was your idea that did the trick. Don't you feel like celebrating?" one of them asked.

Prof. Tomlin shook his head. "If only George had been a little more benign, we might have learned a lot from him."

"What gave you the idea that killed him?"

"Oh, something he said about the unconscious and subconscious," Prof. Tomlin replied. "He admitted they were not penetrable. It was an easy matter to instill a post-hypnotic suggestion in some proven subjects and then to erase the hypnotic experience."

"You make it sound easy."

"It wasn't too difficult, really. It was finding the solution that was hard. We selected more than a hundred men, worked with them for days, finally singled out the best twenty, then made them forget their hypnosis. A first lieutenant—I've forgotten his name—had implanted in him a command even he was not aware of. His subconscious made him blow his nose fifteen minutes after he saw George. Nearly twenty others had post-hypnotic commands to shoot George in the eyes as soon as they saw the lieutenant blow his nose. Of course we also planted a subconscious hate pattern, which wasn't exactly necessary, just to make sure there would be no hesitation, no inhibition, no limiting moral factor.

"None of the men ever saw each other before being sent to Minerva. None realized that they carried with them the order for George's annihilation. The general, who was not one of the hypnotics, was given loose instructions, as were several others, so they could not possibly know the intention. Those of us who had conducted the hypnosis had to stay several hundred miles away so that we could not be reached by George's prying mind . . ."

IN a pasture next to a wood near Brentwood, a metal box buried in the ground suddenly exploded, uprooting a catalpa tree.

On a planet many millions of miles away, a red light—one of many on a giant control board—suddenly winked out.

A blue humanoid made an entry in a large book: *System 29578. Planet Three Inhabited.*

Too dangerous for any kind of development.

—JERRY SOHL
