

Terrors Unseen

Harl Vincent

Harl Vincent was the pen name of Harold Vincent Schoepflin (born New York City, 19 October 1893; died Los Angeles, 5 May 1968), a mechanical engineer employed by Westinghouse who specialized in the installation of large electrical apparatus. He was an early reader of Hugo Gernsback's original science fiction magazine, [Amazing Stories](#), and it wasn't long before he decided to try his hand at writing science fiction. He proved to have a talent for writing readable prose, and his first published story, "The Golden Girl of Munan", appeared in the June 1928 issue of *Amazing*. Some beginning writers find that when they've succeeded in making a professional sale, the writing bug goes away. For Vincent, it had the opposite effect. He found himself writing story after story, and succeeded in placing them in the science fiction magazines. Altogether, he published 54 stories between 1928 and 1935, and another 20 between 1938 and 1942, making him one of the most prolific writers of the era. However, by the time science fiction began to move beyond the pulp magazines after World War II, Vincent had dropped out of the field. Apart from the occasional early story published in an anthology, the only fiction to see book publication under Vincent's name was the 1966 novel [The Doomsday Planet](#).

But with the rise of the internet, and the accident of old stories falling into the public domain, Vincent's fiction is starting to see the light of day again. His story "Creatures of Vibration" from the January 1932 issue of *Astounding Stories* was uploaded into Project Gutenberg on July 26, 2007, and can be found [here](#). And since the March 1931 issue of *Astounding*, containing Vincent's story "Terrors Unseen", has fallen into my hands, I've taken it upon myself to resurrect this story as well (in a multipart format suitable for the blog medium). I now present, for the first time since its original publication 77 years ago, part 1 of "Terrors Unseen".

Terrors Unseen
by Harl Vincent

Something about the lonely figure of the girl caused Edward Vail to bring his car to a sudden stop at the side of the road. When first he had glimpsed her off there on that narrow strip of rockbound coast he was mildly surprised, for it was a desolate spot and seldom frequented by bathers so late in the season. Now he was aroused to startled attention by the unnatural posture of the slender body that had just been erect and outlined sharply against the graying September sky. He switched off the ignition and sprang to the ground.

Bent backward and twisted into the attitude of a contortionist, the little figure in the crimson bathing suit was a thing at which to marvel. No human being could maintain that position without falling, yet the girl did not fall to the jagged stones that lay beneath her. She was rigid, straining. Then suddenly her arm waved wildly and she screamed, a wild gasping cry that died in her throat on a note of despairing terror. It seemed that she struggled furiously with an unseen power for one horrible instant. Then the tortured body lurched violently and collapsed in a pitiful quivering heap among the stones.

Eddie Vail was running now, miraculously picking his way over the treacherous footing. The girl had fainted, no doubt of that, and something was seriously wrong with her.

A mysterious mechanical something whizzed past; something that buzzed like a thousand hornets and slithered over the rocks in a series of metallic clanks. Then it was gone -- or so it seemed in the confusion of Eddie's mind; but he had seen nothing. Probably a fantasy of his overworked brain, or only the surf breaking against the sea wall. He turned his attention to the girl.

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She was moaning and tossing her head, returning painfully to consciousness. He straightened her limbs and placed his folding coat under the restless head, noting with alarm that vicious red welts marred the whiteness of her arms and shoulders. It was as if she had been beaten cruelly; those marks could never have resulted from her fall. Poor kid. Subject to fits of some sort, he presumed. She was a good looker too, and no mistake. He smoothed back the rumpled mass of golden hair and studied her features. They were vaguely familiar.

Then she opened her eyes. Stark terror looked out from their ultramarine depths, and her lips quivered as if she were about to cry. He raised her to a more comfortable position and supported her with an encircling arm. She did cry a little, like a frightened child. Then, with startling abruptness, she sprang to her feet.

"Where is it?" she demanded.

"Where's what?" Eddie was on his feet, peering in all directions. He remembered the queer sounds he had heard or imagined.

"I -- I don't know." The girl passed a trembling hand before her eyes as if to wipe away some terrifying vision. "Perhaps it's my imagination, but I felt -- it was just as real -- one of father's iron monsters. Beating me; bending me. I'd have snapped in a moment. But nothing was there. I -- I'm afraid . . ."

Eddie caught her as she swayed on her feet. "There now," he said soothingly, "you're all right, Miss Shelton. It's gone now, whatever it was." Iron monsters! In a flash it had come to him that this girl he held in his arms was Lina Shelton, daughter of the robot wizard. No wonder she was afflicted with hallucinations! But those bruises were real, as was the forcible twisting of her lithe young body. And he *had* heard something.

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"You know me?" The girl was calmer now and faced him with a surprised look.

"Yes, Miss Shelton. At least I recognize you from the pictures. Society page, you know. And I'm Edward Vail -- Eddie for short -- on vacation and at your service."

The girl smiled wanly. "You know of father's break with Universal Electric? Of his private experiments?"

"I heard of the scrap and how he walked out on the outfit, but nothing further." Eddie thought grimly of how nearly he had come to losing his own job when David Shelton broke relations with his employers. He had been too enthusiastic in support of some of the older man's claims.

"It's been terrible," the girl whispered. She clung nervously to his arm as he picked his way back to the road. "The loneliness, and all. No servants will stay out here now, and father spends all his time in the laboratory. Then -- this fear of the mechanical men -- they haunt me. I -- I guess they've got me a little

goofy."

Eddie laughed reassuringly. "Perhaps," he suggested, "you will let me help you. Your father, I believe, will remember me, and I'll be very glad to --"

"No, no!" The girl seemed frightened at the thought. "I'm sure he wouldn't welcome you. He's changed greatly of late and is suspicious of everyone, even keeping things from me. But it's awfully nice of you to offer your assistance, and you've been a perfect peach to take care of me this way. I -- I'd better go now."

They had reached the road and Eddie looked uncertainly at his roadster. He hated to think of leaving the girl in this lonely spot. She was obviously in a state of extreme nervous tension and, to him, seemed pathetically helpless and afraid.

"That the house?" he asked, pointing in the direction of the gloomy old mansion whose dilapidated gables were barely visible over the tree tops.

"Yes." The girl shivered and drew closer to him.

The ensuing silence was broken by the slam of a door. His car! Eddie looked toward it in amazement; he was hearing things again. The springs sagged on the driver's side as under the weight of a very heavy occupant, but the seat was empty. Then came the whine of the starter and the motor purred into life. The gears clashed sickeningly and the car was jerked into the road with a violence that should have stripped the differential. He pulled the girl aside just as it roared past and disappeared around the bend in a cloud of dust. The sound of the exhaust died away rapidly and left them staring into each other's eyes in awed silence.

2

This is the second installment of "Terrors Unseen", a 1931 science fiction story by Harl Vincent, a prolific writer of the 1930s who has since fallen into obscurity. Since the story is now in the public domain, I have taken it upon myself to reprint it here on my blog, so that it will not be lost to posterity once the last copy of the March 1931 issue of *Astounding Stories* crumbles into dust. The first installment of the story can be found [here](#). And now, on with the show . . .

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David Shelton was prowling around in the shrubbery when they approached the house -- a furtive, unkempt creature whom Eddie would hardly have recognized. He straightened up and peered at his daughter's companion with obvious disapproval.

"Lina," he said severely, "I've told you we want no visitors."

"Yes, Dad, I know, but Mr. Vail's car was stolen out in front and there is no way for him to go on. We must look after him."

"His car -- stolen? Who stole it?" David Shelton drew close and glared suspiciously at his unwelcome visitor.

"One of your monsters, I think," she replied shakily, "though we could see nothing. And the same thing attacked me and beat me. Look at my bruises!"

Shelton was examining the marks, and his fingers trembled as he touched his daughter's shoulder. He looked piteously into her eyes. "Are you sure, Lina? Sure? Did you see it?"

"No, no. But I felt and heard -- the iron arms and the clamps and the buzzing. Oh, it was horrible!" The girl's voice rose hysterically.

"Oh, Lord! What have I done?" groaned Shelton. "It's true, then. Lina, listen: I've succeeded in making them invisible, and one got away this morning. But I thought -- I thought --" He looked at Eddie, remembering his presence suddenly. "But I'm talking too much. It seems to me I remember having seen you before, young man."

"You have, sir," Eddie stated. "In the research laboratory of Universal Electric. I work with Borden."

"They've sent you to find me?" Shelton stiffened perceptibly.

"Indeed, not, sir. I'm on vacation and was merely passing by when I saw your daughter in danger, a danger I still do not understand."

"Yes, and he helped me to the road," Lina interposed, "and then lost his car at the hands of --"

"Silence!" her father thundered. But his eyes fell before the fire that instantly flashed in those of the girl.

"Now, you listen to me!" she returned angrily. "I've stayed on here with you until I'm nearly crazy with your everlasting pattering and experimenting -- hearing your uncanny machines walking around in the middle of the night -- seeing impossible sights -- then, this thing I couldn't see but could feel. And you've gotten into such a state that you'll go crazy yourself, if you continue. Something's got to be done, I tell you. I can't stand it!"

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Her voice broke on a choked sob.

"But, Lina --"

"Don't but me, Father. I mean it. Mr. Vail discovered your hideout quite by accident and he's been very nice to me. I tell you he means no harm and I want him to stay. If you're not decent to him, if you send him away, I swear I'll go too. I will -- I will!"

Shelton's eyes misted and something of the hardness left his expression. A look of haunting fear took its place and he stared pleadingly at Eddie.

"Br-r! I'm cold!" Lina exclaimed irrelevantly. "And -- I believe I'm going to cry." She turned away and raced for the shelter of the gloomy old house without another word.

Eddie turned inquiring eyes on his unwilling host.

"Just like her mother before her," Shelton muttered softly. Then he faced the younger man squarely and

his shoulders straightened. "Mr. Vail," he said sheepishly, "I've been a fool and I ask your pardon. But Lina doesn't know. There's something tremendous behind all this, something that's gotten beyond me. I'll send her away for her own safety, but I must stay on. If -- if only there was someone I could trust --"

"You can trust me, sir," Eddie stated simply.

The older man paced the ground nervously, and Eddie could see that he was under a most severe mental strain. Several times he halted in his tracks and peered anxiously at his guest. Then he seemed to make a sudden decision.

"Vail," he said sharply, "I need help badly. I want you to stay, if you will. You swear you'll not reveal what I am about to show you?"

"I swear it, sir."

"You'll not report to Universal?"

"Never."

* * *

They surveyed each other appraisingly. Eddie was mystified by the happenings of the day and was curious to learn more concerning these mythical invisible creations. It was inconceivable that the scientist had spoken truly of his accomplishment. Yet, he had done some marvelous things with Universal and, maybe -- well, anyway, there was the girl.

"Come with me," Shelton was saying: "I believe you're a square shooter, Vail." He was leading the way along the gravel path at the side of the house. Before them loomed the squat brick building that was the laboratory.

The door crashed open before Shelton's hand had reached the knob, and one of those buzzing, unseen monstrosities rushed clanking by, knocking the scientist from his feet in its passage. Ponderous, speeding footsteps crunched the gravel of the path, and then, with a wild thrashing of the underbrush alongside, the thing was gone.

Eddie bent over the prostrate man and saw that he was unconscious. A thin trickle of blood ran from a cut in the side of his head.

"Lina! Lina!" called Eddie frantically. For the first time in his life he was genuinely frightened.

3

This is the third installment of "Terrors Unseen", a 1931 science fiction story by Harl Vincent, a prolific writer of the 1930s who has since fallen into obscurity. Since the story is now in the public domain, I have taken it upon myself to reprint it here on my blog, so that it will not be lost to posterity once the last copy of the March 1931 issue of *Astounding Stories* crumbles into dust. The first two installments of the story can be found [here](#) and [here](#). And now, on with the show . . .

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He half carried, half dragged the limp body through the door of the laboratory and propped it in a chair. It required but a moment for him to see that Shelton's injury was inconsequential. He had only been stunned and already showed signs of recovering.

"What is it, Mr. Vail? What's happened?" came the voice of Lina Shelton breathlessly. She was framed in the doorway, dressed now and panting from her exertions in responding to his call. "Oh, it's father," she wailed, dropping to her knees at his side. "He's been hurt. Badly, too."

"No, not badly, Miss Shelton. He'll be around in a minute. I'm sorry to have excited you, but when I called I feared it was worse than it is." He was washing the blood from her father's small wound as he spoke.

She took the basin from his hand, spilling some of the water in her eagerness. "Here, let me have that cloth," she demanded.

Eddie admired her as her deft fingers took up the task. She was as exquisite in a simple sport outfit as she had been in her bathing suit.

The scientist opened his eyes after a moment. Remembrance came at once and he sat erect in the chair, staring.

"Lina!" he exclaimed, grasping her hand conclusively. "You're here, thank God! I dreamed -- oh, it was horrible -- I dreamed they had you." He clung to her closely.

"They," she murmured inquiringly.

"Yes. Two of them are loose now. It's danger for you, my dear. You must leave at once. No, no -- I can't let you out of my sight until they are captured or destroyed." He rose to his feet in his agitation and shook his head to clear it. He looked pleadingly at Eddie as if expecting him to offer a solution of the difficulty.

"Vail!" he exploded, then, pointing a shaking forefinger at an elaborate short-wave radio transmitter which occupied a corner of the large room, "I ask you to bear witness. That is the source of energy for these creations of mine and it's shut down. How on earth can they keep going? I ask you."

"Perhaps someone else, sir," Eddie suggested doubtfully. "Have you any enemies who might be able to duplicate the impulses of that apparatus?"

"Bah! Enemies, yes -- with Universal -- but none who could duplicate the complicated frequencies I use. My secrets are my own. I've never even put them on paper."

* * *

Eddie was examining the intricate apparatus. "You knew of the first one's escape, didn't you?" he asked. "How did it happen?"

Shelton again became the enthusiastic scientist. "Here," he said, "I'll show you and you can judge for yourself." He strode to the gleaming figure of a seven-foot robot of startlingly human-like appearance.

Lina let forth an exclamation of repugnance and fear.

"No, Mr. Shelton," Eddie objected. "The same thing will occur again. Then there will be three."

"We'll fix that, my boy." The scientist was removing cover plates from the hip joints of the mechanical man. "I'll disconnect the cables that feed the locomotors. He *can't* walk then."

Eddie was still doubtful but dared offer no further objection, especially since Lina Shelton was watching in wide-eyed silence. He examined the monster and saw that it was quite similar in outside appearance to those supplied by Universal for heavy manual labor, excepting that this one was armed as were those used for prison guards. There were the same articulated limbs and the various clamps and hooks for lifting and heavy hauling; the tentacles for grasping; machine guns front and back. Under the helical headpiece that was the antenna this robot seemed to have two eyes -- a new feature -- but closer examination showed these to be the twin lenses of a stereoscopic motion picture camera. This robot, then, could see. Or at least it could record what the lenses saw for its masters.

"There," Shelton grunted when he had finished his tinkering, "he's paralyzed from the waist down. Let this one try and get away from us."

"Guns aren't loaded, are they?" Eddie asked.

"Lord, no! Never have any of them loaded. That *would* be a fool stunt." Shelton had pulled the starting handle of a motor-generator and its rising whine accompanied his words.

* * *

The vacuum tubes of the transmitter glowed into life and the scientist manipulated the controls rapidly. Lina was watching the robot with fascinated awe. Its arms moved in obedience to the controls, tentacles waved and coiled; the humming of its internal mechanisms filled the room. The locomotion controls had no effect as the scientist had predicted. Eddie drew a sigh of relief.

"Now, Vail, watch," Shelton exulted. "I'll show you what I was doing with the first one." He closed a switch that lighted another bank of vacuum tubes behind the control panel.

"You can make this one invisible?" Eddie asked incredulously.

"Certainly -- from the waist up. This ought to be good."

"Mind telling me the principle?"

"Not at all -- now. I've your promise of secrecy. It's a simple matter, Vail, really. Just a problem of wave motions -- light. Invisible light; the ultra-violet, you know. My robots are built of specially alloyed metals which permit great freedom of molecular vibration. The insulating materials and even the glass of the camera lenses are possessed of the same property. Get it? I merely set up a wave motion in the atoms of the material that is in synchronism with the frequency of ultra-violet light, which is invisible to the human eye. All visible colors are absorbed, or more accurately, none are reflected excepting the ultra-violet. Perfect transparency is obtained since there is neither refraction nor diffraction of the visible colors. And there you are!"

Eddie stared at the upper half of the robot and saw that it was changing color as Shelton tuned the

transmitted wave. Then suddenly it was gone. The entire upper portion of the mechanism had vanished; had just snuffed out like the flame of a candle. He could see down into the tops of the thing's hollow legs. Shelton laughed at him as he stretched forth his hand and hesitatingly felt for the invisible mid-section and upper body. It was there all right, unyielding and cold, that metal body. But no trace of it was visible to the eye. He drew back his fingers as if they had touched a hot stove. The thing was positively uncanny.

"Dad! Turn it off -- please," Lina begged. "It's getting on my nerves. Please!"

Obligingly, Shelton pulled the switch. "Now you'll see," he said to Eddie, "whether the same thing happens. Watch."

* * *

Mistily at first, the outlines of the monster's torso and arms came into view, semi-transparent but clouding rapidly to opacity. Then it glinted with the barely visible violent, a solid once more, rigid and motionless. It was a lifeless mechanism, for the source of its energy had been cut off. Eddie had an almost irresistible impulse to pinch himself.

Then he gasped audibly, as did Shelton, for the thing snuffed out of sight again without warning, and the hum of its many motors resumed. There came a terrific clanking as it waved arms and tentacles and violently thrashed with its upper body. But the visible portion, its legs, remained rooted to the floor of the laboratory. Lucky it was that the scientist had disconnected those wires; lucky too that the machine guns were empty of ammunition.

"There now -- see?" Shelton's voice rose excitedly. "It's been no fault of mine. The power is off but it moves -- it moves. What on earth do you suppose --"

Eddie's shout interrupted him. He had seen something at the window: a face pressed against the pane and contorted with unutterable malice. Then it was gone. With the shout of warning still in his throat, Eddie bounded through the door in pursuit of the intruder. Lina's cry of recognition followed him into the twilight. "Carlos!" she had called.

He saw a stocky figure slink around the corner of the laboratory and make for the underbrush beyond. In a flash he was after him. No, he thought grimly, Shelton hadn't any enemy clever enough to duplicate his transmitter! The hell he didn't! Who the devil was this fellow Carlos anyway? He tore savagely at the impeding branches as he plunged deeper and deeper into the thicket.

4

This is the fourth installment of "Terrors Unseen", a 1931 science fiction story by Harl Vincent, a prolific writers of the 1930s who has since fallen into obscurity. Since the story is now in the public domain, I have taken it upon myself to reprint it here on my blog, so that it will not be lost to posterity when the last copy of the March 1931 issue of *Astounding Stories* crumbles into dust. The first three installments of the story can be found [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#). And now, on with the show . . .

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It was a fruitless chase and Eddie soon retraced his steps to the laboratory. Swell mess he'd gotten himself into! His car was gone: probably wrapped around a tree by this time. And here was a situation that spelled real danger, a thing with which Shelton was utterly unable to cope. As a matter of fact, he

was so impractical -- such a visionary cuss, after the fashion of all geniuses -- that he'd never be convinced of the seriousness of the matter until it was too late. What to do? The girl was a corker, though, and game as they made 'em. Just the sort a fellow could tie to

Lina's firm clear voice came to him through the open door of the laboratory. "Dad," she was saying, "why don't you give it up? Let's go back to New York where it is safe for you and for me. Let the things go and forget about them. What do they amount to, after all? We've plenty of money and you already have earned enough fame to last the rest of your life. Come on now -- please -- for me."

"What do they amount to?" Shelton reiterated, his voice rising querulously. "Lina, it's the most tremendous thing I've ever done. Think for a moment of what my robots could accomplish in the next war. And there'll be a next war as sure as you're alive. Think of it! No sending of our young manhood into the bloody fields of battle; no manning of our air fleets with the cream of our youth; no bloodshed on our side whatsoever. Instead, these robots will fight the war. They'll fight other robots too, no doubt, but the property of invisibility will be an invincible weapon. It will be a war that will end war once and for all. You can't --"

"Nonsense, father," the girl returned sharply. "You've let your enthusiasm run away with your judgment. See what's happened already? -- someone's figured it out before you've even perfected the thing. An enemy of our country could do the same in wartime. Maybe it's a foreign spy who has done what's been done to-day."

* * *

Eddie walked into the laboratory. "Couldn't find him," he announced briefly.

"No difference," said Shelton. "He doesn't count in this. We called to you when you rushed out, but couldn't make you hear."

"Who is he?" Eddie asked shortly. What he had overheard made him more than ever impatient with the older man. So clever and yet so dense, Shelton was.

Lina avoided his gaze.

"Only Carlos -- Carlos Savarino," said Shelton, carelessly, "a Chilean, I think. He worked for me for two months during the summer and I fired him for getting fresh with Lina. Good mechanic, but dumb as an ox. Had to tell him every little detail when he was doing something in the shop. I'd have saved time if I'd done it myself."

The girl looked at Eddie squarely now. She was flushing hotly. "And I horsewhipped him," she added.

"Yes," Shelton laughed; "it was rich. He sneaked away like a whipped puppy, and this is the first time we've seen him since."

Eddie whistled. "And you think he doesn't count in this?" he asked.

"Of course not. Too dumb, I tell you. Doesn't know the first principles of science. He thinks the only wave motion is that of the ocean." Shelton chuckled over his own jest.

"I wouldn't be too sure," Eddie snapped. "And I want to tell you something, Mr. Shelton. Through no

fault of my own, I heard some of your conversation with Li -- with your daughter, before I returned here. I was puzzled over your reasons for working so absorbedly on this thing, but now I know them and I think you're wasting your time and keeping your daughter in needless danger."

"You dare talk to me like this!" Shelton roared.

"I do, sir, and you'll thank me later," Eddie returned the older man's glare with one equally savage.

Lina's gurgle of laughter broke the tension. "He's right, Dad, and you know it," she interposed. "Let him finish."

Eddie needed no such encouragement, though it warmed his heart. And Shelton listened respectfully when he continued, "I'm into this now, sir, and I intend to see it through to the end. I'll keep your secret, too, though I doubt if it'll ever be of much value to you. Know what I think? I think this Carlos is a damn clever fellow instead of the ass you took him to be. He probably just pretended he was ignorant of science. Why shouldn't he? That way he got a liberal education from you in the very things he wanted to find out. Since you tied the can to him he's had plenty of chances to build a duplicate of your control apparatus -- with the aid of some foreign government, no doubt -- and now they've stolen two of your machines to complete the job. Your secret already is out and in the very hands you've tried to keep it from."

* * *

Shelton paled visibly as Eddie talked. "But -- but how --" he stammered.

"How should I know how they did it?" the younger man countered. "Here -- let's take a look around. I'll bet they've left their trail right here in this room."

He walked from one end of the laboratory to the other, peering into corners and under work benches as he passed. Shelton trailed him like a shadow, squinting through the square lenses of his spectacles.

They carefully avoided the partially invisible robot, for the humming of its upper motors continued and clanking sounds occasionally issued from the unseen upper portion. The enemies of David Shelton were still at work on their hidden controls.

"Here -- what's this?" Eddie exclaimed suddenly, pointing out a glinting object in a dark corner of the laboratory.

Shelton examined it closely, looking over his shoulder. The object he had located seemed to be a mounted and hooded lens, a highly polished glass of about two inches diameter with its mounting attached rigidly to the wall.

"Never saw that before," Shelton stated with conviction. "And -- why -- it looks like an objective such as those used in the latest automatic television transmitters."

"Just what it is," Eddie grunted. He picked up a pinch bar from a nearby tool rack and drove its end through the glass as he spoke the words.

A violent wrench tore the thing loose and broke away a section of the thin plastered wall. There, in the cleverly concealed cavity behind, was revealed the mechanism of the radio "eye." Somewhere, someone

had been watching their every move. And abruptly the thrashings of the robot ceased and its upper portion again became visible.

5

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"Well," said David Shelton. "Well! Looks as if you're right, young man. I'm astonished." His watery eyes looked sheepishly over the rims of his glasses.

Lina watched their every move. She seemed to sense the seriousness of the situation far more than did her father.

Then the lights went out. It had darkened to night outside and the blackness and silence in the laboratory was like that of a tomb.

"They've cut the wires," Eddie whispered hoarsely. "Got any weapons here, Shelton?"

"Yes. A couple of automatics. I'll get them." The scientist was no coward, anyway. His whispered words came calmly through the silence.

Eddie heard him shuffle a few steps and fumble with a drawer of the desk. In a moment the cold hard butt of a pistol was thrust into his hand. It had a comforting feel.

"Stay here with Lina," he commanded. "I'll go out and see if I can find them. This looks nasty to me."

"No," came the girl's voice. "I'm going too."

"You are not," Eddie hissed. "You'll stay here or I'll know the reason. It's dark as a pocket outside and my eyes are as good as theirs. I'll get 'em if they're around here. You hear me?"

"Yes," she whispered meekly.

Edward Vail, only that morning headed for rest and quiet, was now out in the night, stalking an unknown and vicious enemy. And -- for what? As he asked himself the question, the smile of Lina seemed to answer him from the blackness. *Cherchez la femme!* He was getting dotty as he neared his thirties. Maybe it was the hard work that had affected his mind.

* * *

The black hulk of the old house loomed against the scarcely less dark sky. There was no moon, and in only one tiny portion of the heavens were the stars visible. Mighty few of them at that. The swish-swish of the surf came to his ears faintly. Or was it someone creeping along the wall of the house? He held his

breath and waited.

They wouldn't use the robots at night. Couldn't follow their movements in the televue, if such an attachment had been built into their control transmitter. No, the devils would be here in person.

A muttered Teutonic curse sounded close at hand. That wouldn't be Carlos. God! Were the heinies mixed up in this thing? Just like 'em to be swiping a new war machine; but hadn't they gotten enough in 1944? Without warning he was catapulted from his feet by the impact of a heavy body. He struck the ground so violently that the pistol was jarred from his hand. Disarmed before the fight had started!

Then he was rolling over and over, battling desperately with an assailant who was much larger and heavier than himself. He was dazed and weakened from his initial dive to the hard ground. All rules of boxing and wrestling were forgotten. Biting, kicking, gouging, all were the same to this silent and powerful antagonist. It was catch-as-catch-can in the darkness, and mostly the other fellow could and did. He had a grip like the clamp of a robot. Trying to dig out one of his eyes? Eddie saw stars -- and lashed out with all his might, his flying fists playing a tattoo on the other's ribs. Short arm jabs that brought grunts of agony from his big assailant. Try to blind him, would he?

Eddie somehow managed to get on top; his clutching fingers found the other's collar. Then he let loose with terrific rights and lefts that smacked home to head and face. Those outlanders don't like the good old American fist, and Eddie had room to bring them in from way back, now. The fellow had ceased struggling and Eddie's hands were getting slippery. Blood! Must be, for the stuff was warm and sticky. He rested for a moment, breathing heavily. The other was quiet beneath him -- knocked cold. He staggered to his feat triumphantly; wondered how many more of them there were.

* * *

He looked around in the darkness, straining his eyes in vain to pierce its thick veil. There was a glimmer of light over there, through a window. The laboratory! The light flickered a second and vanished. A cold fear gripped him and he stumbled through the grounds blindly, finally colliding painfully with the brick wall. He felt his way toward the door, or where he thought it should be.

He dared not call out for fear the others would hear. Where *was* that damned door? He rested again and listened. Not a sound was to be heard from within or without. he clawed his way frantically along the unsympathetic wall. It was a mile wide, that laboratory of Shelton's Ah -- at last! Weakly, he staggered within.

"Lina!" he whispered. "Lina! Shelton!"

There was no reply. He fumbled for a match. Funny how slowly his mind worked . . . thoughts coming jerkily like a sound film running at quarter speed . . . fingers shaking so he could scarcely strike a light. The flare showed the laboratory empty of human beings . . . Lina gone . . . that crazy robot . . . quiet now, and visible . . . but grinning at him . . . then darkness . . .

6

This is the sixth installment of "Terrors Unseen", a 1931 science fiction story by Harl Vincent, a prolific writers of the 1930s who has since fallen into obscurity. Since the story is now in the public domain, I have taken it upon myself to reprint it here on my blog, so that it will not be lost to posterity when the last

copy of the March 1931 issue of *Astounding Stories* crumbles into dust. The first five installments of the story can be found [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#). And now, on with the show . . .

* * *

What a headache! Eddie rolled over and groaned. Astounded by the hardness of his bed and the stiffness of his joints, he roused to instant wakefulness; sat up and stared. Where the devil was he? The laboratory -- Shelton's -- Lina. He jumped to his feet. Dawn was breaking and its first faint radiance lighted the robot with eery shifting colors. He berated himself: he'd passed out.

He dashed through the door and made a wild circuit of the grounds. Empty! No -- there was his automatic, where it had fallen. Blood stains on the grass showed where the encounter had taken place last night. Must have smashed the Dutchman's nose. But he was gone. Everybody was gone. He rushed into the house and from room to room, upstairs and down. The place was deserted.

This was something to think about. Not an automobile around, no neighbors, not even a telephone. When Shelton went into seclusion, he did it thoroughly. Eddie returned to the laboratory and hunched himself in the scientist's chair. Maybe he could think better here.

They had Shelton and his daughter, all right. Kidnaped them. There was probably some detail of his discovery they couldn't dope out, and had decided to force him into telling them. The devils would use Lina's safety as a threat to force him into anything. Horrible, that thought. And Carlos already had made advances to her.

Startled by a sharp click, he turned around. The robot was whirring into life. Fast workers, whoever Shelton's enemies were, and up early! He found the pinch bar with which he had wrecked the television apparatus and, with a few mighty blows, destroyed the antenna and headpiece of the mechanical man. They'd not pull off any devilment with this one, anyway.

A wave meter on one of the benches attracted his attention and he twirled its knob. It gave a strong indication at one and a half meters. The wave length of their control transmitter! If only he could find -- but there it was: a direction finder. Hastily, he lighted its tubes and tuned to the frequency shown by the meter. He rotated the loop over the compass dial and carefully noted the maximum and minimum signals. He had a line on the transmitter! And it must be close by, for the intensity of the carrier wave was tremendous.

* * *

Slipping the automatic into his pocket, he left the laboratory and struck out through the underbrush in the direction Carlos had taken the day before. Fighting his way through the tangled shrubbery, he kept his eyes constantly on the needle of the magnetic compass he had wrenched from the direction finder. It was tough going through the thicket, and just as bad across a swampy clearing where he was mired to the knees before he got across. Up the hill and into the woods he forged, keeping doggedly to the direction he had determined. This was rough country, less than a hundred miles from New York but uncultivated and unsettled excepting for the few summer places along the shore. He'd heard that these backwoods were infested with rum-runners and hijackers, a cutthroat gang.

There was a cabin off there through the trees, almost on the line he was following. Must be what he was looking for. He advanced cautiously, creeping stealthily from tree to tree.

Voices came to his ears, and the throb of a motor-generator. It was the place, all right. He crept closer, and, circling the house, saw that an almost impassable road led to it from the rear. A heavy limousine was parked there in the trees, and another car, a yellow roadster -- his own. A feeling of grim satisfaction was quickly dispelled by the sound of a familiar humming. Within a foot of his car, it seemed to be, and instinctively he ducked.

Click! A powerful clamp had fastened itself to his wrist. One of Shelton's invisible robots! He struck blindly at the unseen monster and was rewarded by a shooting pain up his wrist as one of his knuckles was driven backward by the impact with the hard metal. Bands of writhing metal encompassed his body, pinning his arms to his side and lifting him bodily from the ground. There he hung, kicking and struggling in mid-air, supported by nothing he could see. He closed his eyes and felt of the thing that held him. Cold, hard metal it was -- implacable and unyielding.

Clank, clank. The monster was walking with long, jerky strides. The pressure against his ribs brought a gasp of agony from his lips. Each jarring step was an individual and excruciating torture. His breath was cut off by the relentless constriction of one of the tentacles which now encircled his neck. It wouldn't be long now.

* * *

Then, when everything had turned black and he had given up hope, he was dumped unceremoniously on the hard floor of the cabin. A harsh laugh greeted him as he struggled weakly to his knees.

"Thought you could put one over on Al Cadorna, did you?" a voice rasped.

The room spun round as he tried to regain his feet. A mist swam before his eyes. Al Cadorna! The most picturesque figure in gangland. Credited with a dozen killings and with ill-gotten wealth untold, this leader of the underworld openly boasted that the police had never gotten anything on him. And they hadn't. So it was a criminal who had laid hands on Shelton's robots, not a foreign spy. Worse and worse. He thought of what they might be able to do with these invisible mechanical things: make gunmen out of them; safe blowers; house breakers. Why, society would be at their mercy; banks defenceless; the mints, even --

"Stand up on your pins, you worm! Let's have a look at you!" The muzzle of an automatic was thrust in his abdomen, prodding insistently. Things stabilized in the room and he looked up into the cruelest face he had ever seen, and recognizable from the many pictures which had appeared in the yellow press.

Eddie took in the surroundings at a glance. He was in a low-ceilinged room that was almost unfurnished. In one corner there was a replica of Shelton's robot control, televue disc and all. Carlos had just pulled the switch and the robot was taking visible form. The man who prodded him with the automatic was Cadorna, no doubt of that. His evil leer and yellow eyes marked him at once. The other occupant of the room was a big square-built man with a patch over one eye and strips of adhesive tape across his nose -- his antagonist of the night before. Must have sneaked off after he came to; it was safer to send one of the robots after the *verdammte Amerikaner*. Eddie restrained a chuckle at the thought.

"Nothing to laugh at, kid!" Cadorna snarled. "You're goin' for a nice long ride pretty quick. Know that?"

Eddie's head was clearing rapidly, but he pretended to sway on his feet. Lina and her father were not in sight. If only he could spar for a little time.

"What's the idea?" he asked. "Haven't you guys got enough?"

"That's our business. We know what we're doin', and when you butted in you just signed your own papers. Dead men don't talk, you know, kid!"

7This is the seventh installment of "Terrors Unseen", a 1931 science fiction story by Harl Vincent, a prolific writers of the 1930s who has since fallen into obscurity. Since the story is now in the public domain, I have taken it upon myself to reprint it here on my blog, so that it will not be lost to posterity when the last copy of the March 1931 issue of *Astounding Stories* crumbles into dust. The first six installments of the story can be found [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#). And now, on with the show .

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There was a door at the other side of the room. If only he could see whether Lina was in there; whether she was alive.

"Tie him up, Gus!" Cadorna kept the pistol pressed into the pit of Eddie's stomach as he gave the order. "Hands and feet -- and make it a good job, you wiener."

Eddie shouted then, "Lina!" Resistance was useless, but it would give him some satisfaction to know she still lived even though Cadorna pulled that trigger in the next instant. No reply came from beyond that door.

"So!" Cadorna grinned maliciously. "Another victim! Carlos first, then you, and now -- Al Cadorna. If you're worrying about her, kid, you needn't. She'll be perfectly safe with me."

Eddie's roar of rage shook the rafters. Heedless of the consequences, he brought his knee up suddenly and violently. Cadorna sank to the floor with a groan, his pistol clattering harmlessly on the rough planks. In a flash Eddie retrieved it, dropping behind the prostrate form of the stricken gangster. Gus had fired and missed. Now he dared not shoot for fear of hitting his chief. Eddie's gun spat fire and the big German clapped his hands over his heart, his good eye widening in surprise. Then he reeled and pitched forward on his face. A feminine cry sounded from the adjoining room and Eddie's heart skipped a beat when he heard it.

Carlos was padding across the floor, trying to get into a position where he could fire without endangering Cadorna. Eddie swung his pistol around and pulled the trigger. A miss! He fired again, but too late. Fingers of steel had gripped his wrist and the king of gangland rolled over on him, twisting the gun from his hand. Clubbed now, the pistol was raised high over that distorted, malicious face. Eddie tried to twist away from under the blow as it started its downward swing, then a thousand steam hammers hit him all at once and . . . blackness . . .

* * *

Something was pounding insistently at the doors of his consciousness. He must pull himself together! They'd left him for dead and he was -- almost. But voices as loud and raucous as those would waken the dead. He groaned with pain when he attempted to move his head.

"That's for you, you rat." It was Cadorna's voice. "Try to take my woman, will you?"

The pounding resolved itself into the angry barking of an automatic. Someone squealed with mortal agony. Eddie opened his eyes cautiously and saw that the room was full of people. The pungent odor of burned powder assailed his nostrils. There was Cadorna and Carlos, Shelton and Lina. An undersized, dapper youth stood over the body of the big German, his hands outstretched before his horro-stricken face. A moment he stood thus, like a statue. Then his knees gave way beneath him and he crumpled into a grotesque heap beside the man who had been called Gus. Such was the manner of Cadorna's dealing with those who displeased him.

The door to the adjoining room was open. Lina and her father had been kept in there, with the little thug their guard. Evidently Cadorna had caught him trying to force his attentions on the girl. Good thing he'd killed him.

Lina was sobbing and the sound brought increased agony to the helpless Eddie. He lay still where they had placed him, beside the table which supported the robot control apparatus. His cheek was against the floor and he saw that a little pool of blood was forming there, blood drawn by the butt of Cadorna's pistol when it contacted with his skull. He was bound hand and foot. They hadn't thought him dead, after all. Keeping him for that ride and a watery grave. Couldn't afford to leave his body around where it might be found.

"What are you going to do with us?" Shelton was asking, his voice bravely defiant. Game old sport at that, he was.

"Don't fret over your daughter. Al Cadorna's her protector now, and she'll be taken care of better'n she's ever been. But you -- that's somethin' else again. First off, you're goin' to give Carlos the dope on these trick metals in your machines. He couldn't analyse 'em, or whatever you call it. Then you're goin' to have a nice long ride with your friend over there."

"You'll go to the chair for this, Cadorna. And I'll never tell you the secret of the alloys."

"Tell him, Dad," Lina was crying. "He'll let us go if you do."

"The hell I will, girlie. What I said, goes. We'll make him talk first, too," Cadorna snarled.

"Never!" Shelton shouted.

* * *

Lina had seen Eddie and, with a little cry, she bounded across the room. Carlos was after her like a panther.

"Hands off that dame!" Cadorna yelled. "Let her cry over the boy friend if she wants to. Won't do her any good. You get busy and set one of the tin soldiers goin'. Make the old buzzard talk."

Carlos muttered sullenly as he started the motor-generator. Give him a chance and he'd knife Cadorna in the back -- for Lina.

The girl was kneeling at Eddie's side now, examining his bleeding scalp. He opened one eye and gazed at her solemnly, pursing his lips in a warning to silence. She caught her breath and nodded in understanding.

Cadorna was shouting like a madman. "Keep the damn thing so I can see it, you spig! They make me

bughouse when you blink 'em off. Besides, I don't trust you."

The bold Cadorna was afraid of something he couldn't see! An idea flashed across Eddie's quickening mind. But he was helpless -- bound so tightly that the cords cut his wrists.

One of the robots was clanking across the room. Lina looked up in momentary terror and Eddie saw her eyes stray over the table top where Carlos was working.

"Want to grab the old one?" the Chilean called.

"Yes. Pick him up and squeeze him till his ribs crack. He'll talk."

Lina let a little moan escape her lips. Eddie was watching as the iron monster approached the scientist and flung its tentacles around his madly struggling form. Lina was fussing with him, trying to turn him over. Cadorna's back was to them, his face thrust into that of Shelton, who was fighting desperately to avoid the crushing grip of the robot.

"Give him a squeeze, Carlos."

8

This is the eighth installment of "Terrors Unseen", a 1931 science fiction story by Harl Vincent, a prolific writers of the 1930s who has since fallen into obscurity. Since the story is now in the public domain, I have taken it upon myself to reprint it here on my blog, so that it will not be lost to posterity when the last copy of the March 1931 issue of Astounding Stories crumbles into dust. The first seven installments of the story can be found [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#). And now, on with the show . . .

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Shelton's yell brought another low moan from the girl's set lips. She was working furiously at Eddie's bonds. Lord, she had a knife! Good girl! Must have found it on the table. His hands were free and he wriggled his fingers to bring them to life. Then his feet. He was able to move. Lina whispered in his ear.

"All right?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes," he whispered. Somehow their lips touched and Eddie felt his heart pound at his temples. New life came to him with a rush of exaltation.

Shelton was crying out in pain and Lina sprang to her feet. "You beast!" she shouted at Cadorna. "Let him go."

Then she was across the room, tearing at the unyielding metal bands that pinioned her father and slowly crushed him. Cadorna laughed mirthlessly.

"Tell him to give me the dope," he retorted. "Then I'll let him go -- for a while."

Shelton's head hung on his chest, rolling weakly from side to side. Eddie doubted whether he could speak if he wished to. The Chilean was working at the controls, increasing the tension of those terrible tentacles. Eddie roused himself to his knees, watching Cadorna narrowly. He fingered the knife Lina had

used in freeing him. No, he couldn't use that. The Chilean would cry out and queer everything. He laid it on the floor, within easy reach.

Cadorna was cursing now, first Shelton and then the girl. His rage was maniacal. "Another notch!" he bellowed.

Eddie rose silently and clamped his fingers on the Chilean's windpipe. Lina's eyes widened as she saw. She did everything in her power to keep Cadorna's attention occupied as Eddie sunk those fingers into Carlos' throat. The Chilean's eyes popped from his head as he struggled furiously to tear away the steel-sinewed hand that had stopped off his breath. Death was staring him in the face, and he could not cry out. His strength left suddenly as the fingers dug in deeper, and Eddie shook him as he would a rat. In a surprisingly short time he had slumped to the floor, and not until his squirmings ceased did Eddie loose that awful grip.

"Another notch, you spiggoty!"

* * *

Eddie bent over the controls. Lina's pleadings mingled with the curses of Cadorna. She was cajoling now -- telling the brute she'd go with him gladly if only he'd free her father; promising anything, everything, in the desperate attempt to keep him from discovering that his last henchman was out of the picture. But her words served only to spur Eddie to swifter action. He twirled the knobs of the duel control. The second robot was fading from view. He'd give Cadorna a dose of the thing he really feared. He heased off a little on the other control, releasing the pressure on poor Shelton's ribs as much as he dared.

The position indicator of the second robot moved slightly as Eddie started the invisible monster toward the yelling gangster. He watched the screen closely. It was quite a trick, at that, controlling these things you couldn't see. All you had to go by were these sketchy representations in the televiuew; tiny flecks of light that outlined the various movable members of the robot.

"Eddie!" Lina screamed suddenly. "Look out!"

But he had seen Cadorna wheel around as he watched his image on the screen. At that moment a tentacle was writhing its way around his thick neck. A bullet whistled past Eddie's ear and buried itself harmlessly in the wall.

Then from the blasphemous mouth of the king of gangland there came a shriek of awful fear. The tightening tentacle shut it off in a choking gurgle. Cadorna was captured at last -- by a monster he could not see, a monster that struck terror to his cravel soul.

It was the work of but a moment to free David Shelton from the grip of the other robot. The tortured man tottered into Lina's arms for support.

Eddie played with Cadorna now, releasing the grip from his throat and pinioning his arms instead. With rapid fingers he manipulated the controls until the screaming gangster was raised high in the air by the unseen arms of the robot.

"Another notch, Al," he chortled.

Cadorna yelled anew as the clamps tightened, "For God's sake, kid, quit it! Let me down. I'll do anything

you say."

"Yeah?" Eddie moved one of the rheostat knobs a trifle.

The prince of racketeers was whimpering now, like a baby. The sharp snap of a rib punctured his outcries.

"Another notch," said Eddie grimly.

But the king of the underworld had fainted.

9

This is the ninth and last installment of "Terrors Unseen", a 1931 science fiction story by Harl Vincent, a prolific writers of the 1930s who has since fallen into obscurity. Since the story is now in the public domain, I have taken it upon myself to reprint it here on my blog, so that it will not be lost to posterity when the last copy of the March 1931 issue of *Astounding Stories* crumbles into dust. The first eight installments of the story can be found [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#). And now, on with the show . . .

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An hour later Eddie Vail surveyed the scene complacently. Lina had washed the blood from his head and face and bandaged his wound. Luckily, Cadorna's blow had been a glancing one. The girl was fussing over her father, now, and the scientist was on the point of resenting her attentions; swore he could take care of himself; he wasn't a baby. Carlos and his chief were trussed up like mummies, and had been snarling at each other ever since the Chilean recovered his senses, each blaming the other for their predicament. The robots stood motionless by the wall.

This would be a big haul for the police. Plenty of evidence to send Cadorna to the chair now. The murder of Butch Collins, the undersized thug, had been witnessed by three of them. No, four: Carlos would squeal. He was that kind. There would be rejoicing in the underworld, too, for Cadorna had many enemies. They'd be killing each other off in droves, though, for the leaders of rival gangs would be battling for his place.

"Guess we'll have to dump them in the limousine," he remarked to Shelton. "Drive them to the nearest town and turn them over to the authorities."

"Yes. Then they can come back for the bodies of the other two." Shelton grimaced as he contemplated the sprawled figures.

"What about your robots?" Eddie asked.

"Why, I'll go ahead with my original plans, of course." The scientist looked surprised.

"Dad!" Lina turned beseeching eyes on Eddie and his heart performed amazingly as he looked into their depths.

"And why not?" asked her father dolefully. "They'll insure the peace of the world. They'll --"

"Listen, Mr. Shelton," Eddie interrupted. "If you think a little you'll realize that they'll do no such thing. Has any new and terrible engine of destruction ever accomplished that result? No -- the enemy always finds a way of combating the new weapon and of devising another still more terrible. You've discovered a marvelous thing, but its value is quite problematical."

"How can they ever combat a thing they cannot see?"

"Easily. Why, I could devise a televue attachment in two days tht would make them visible. Photo-electric cells are capable of detecting ultra-violet light as you well know. Radium glows under its rays. Why not coat a televue screen with some radio-active material?"

* * *

Shelton frowned thoughtfully. "You're right, Vail," he said, after a moment of silence; "absolutely right. It was only a dream."

With dragging feet he walked to the transmitter, his expression grim in the realization of failure. He started the motor-generator with a gesture of finality.

"What are you going to do?" Eddie asked fearfully.

"Watch me! At least I can demonstrate another phase of the basic principle I have discovered."

The motors of both robots whirred.

"Don't!" Cadorna wailed. "For God's sake, don't blink 'em out!"

Carlos cursed his chief for a coward.

Shelton was talking rapidly as he manipulated the controls. Instead of building up the wave motion to the frequency of invisible light he was reducing it. Past the other end of the spectrum and into the infra-red. The heat ray! Both monsters were changing color as he marched them through the door and into the open. But now they glowed with a visible red that rapidly intensified to the dazzling whiteness of intense heat. Cadorna babbled in superstitious terror. Then, in an instant, both mechanisms were reduced to shapeless blobs of molten metal. Lina clapped her hands gleefully.

Shelton looked up with enthusiasm once more shining in his face. "Vail, my boy," he said, "we can find some use for that in industry. Let the next war take care of itself."

"You bet!" Eddie was lost in contemplation of the girl -- the flush of pleasure that came at her father's words; the shining eyes.

"Then you'll leave the old place down here?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes, as soon as we get rid of these crooks and the other robot. Vail is to spend the rest of his vacation with us, too -- if he will."

Would he? Eddie gazed at the girl in rapt admiration and with an inward thrill over his astounding good fortune. Her eyes dropped before the intensity of his and her flush heightened.

David Shelton was wiping his glasses and peering at them with an understanding smile. Good sport, Shelton -- and in some ways as wise as they made them. Eddie waited breathlessly for the girl to speak.

"Oh, that's wonderful, Dad," she approved; "And I'm sure that Mr. Vail will agree."

She turned those glorious eyes on Eddie once more, and her inquiring smile spoke volumes. He opened his mouth to accept the invitation but the words would not come. He could only nod his head vigorously like an abashed schoolboy.

Some vacation!

THE END