

# THE ROBOT ALIENS

a novelet by EANDO BINDER

## CHAPTER I METEORITE

BERT BODELL gazed with un-disguised admiration at ringed Saturn through his four-inch refractor on a clear night in the spring of 1952. He was one of that large and ever-growing group of "amateur astronomers" who took delight in observing, when weather permitted, the wonders and glories of the firmament, who occasionally discovered new comets and asteroids before the observatories did. A young lad of twenty, it was one of his greatest delights to peer through the telescope of his own making.

But this night in spring the mag-netic glory of beautiful Saturn—white and striped through the `scope, xanthic-yellow to the naked eye—drew him to aimless staring worship. He was in the back yard of his home in Oak Park, outside of Chicago. The 'scope had been installed behind the garage so that the lights from the house would not interfere with celestial observa-tions.

Yet, absorbed as he was in the majesty of distant Saturn, when a blinding meteor flare caught the corner of his eye he jerked away from the eyepiece of his 'scope and turned to watch the sight. For a moment he was panic-stricken—the Meteor seemed to be coming straight down!

Then the white-hot object streaked down to the horizon and plunged to earth in a southwesterly direction. Being a quick-witted youth, he pulled out his watch and noted mentally the exact time. As a conscientious star-gazer it was his duty to note the time, approximate length of visibility and apparent source—which latter he judged to be the constellation of Aries.

Bert's mind began to whirl ex-citedly. The meteorite had landed somewhere nearby. If he could be the first, or one of the first, to locate its position, what a thrill that would be! He might even get official recog-nition!

Imbued with an inspiration at least as great as the fanatical urge that sent the knights of old after the Holy Grail, the young amateur astronomer precipitately abandoned his 'scope and ran to the house.

"Heavens! What's got into you?" asked Mrs. Bodell as her son tore like a madman through the kitchen and hall to his bedroom and out again.

"Meteorite landed—direction of Aurora or Yorkville—somewhere around there!" gasped Bert. He jin-gled his car keys. "Mother, I'm going to chase it in my car!"

"But, Bert dear! It's late. You'll lose sleep—"

"Hang sleep!" cried Bert dashing to the study and jerking an atlas from the shelves. As he turned the pages to a map of northern Illinois, he called to his mother, "Stand out on the back porch, mother, will you—and listen for the noise. If it comes, look at the clock and remem-ber the exact time—the exact time—seconds and all!"

Mrs. Bodell complied with a resigned sigh. If she did not humor him he would nurse a grouch for days.

A MOMENT later, Bert flew to the porch where his mother stood silently. "Hear anything—like distant cannon or thunder?"

A negative somewhat quenches the boy's eager enthusiasm. It was already four minutes since the time of landing. No noise from the meteorite indicated that it had either landed very far away or had failed to explode on hitting the ground and had bored downward. In the former case it would be so far away that he would not reach it for several hours. In the latter it would take mud-searching to locate it unless eye-witnesses had been reasonably new its collision with the earth.

"Aw!" muttered Bert, "probably the traffic noise from North Avenue drowned it out." Thereupon, he followed his original intention and dashed to the garage, determined at least to make an attempt to locate

the meteorite.

As he drove his new coupe down the alley to reach North Avenue's loud voice hailed him from the back fence of a neighbor's yard.

"Hey, Bert! D'ja see the meteor?"

"I'm going after it," said Bert, stopping the car. "What direction would you judge it—I mean, what town is it lined with?"

"Waal," drawled the neighbor, "I'd say Joliet or maybe north of that, near Yorkville."

From the roar of Bert's accelerating car came a faint, "Thanks!"

Bert swung to the Aurora road, despite his neighbor's mention of Joliet, which was farther south. At Aurora thirty-five minutes later he found a group of excited people in a main street, all waving their hands and talking. His queries got contradictory answers but Yorkville seemed to be the favorite.

Fifteen minutes of hare-brained driving over good concrete highway brought him to Yorkville, a sleepy little rural town whose inhabitants had mostly been in bed and had therefore missed the meteorite. But one favorite corner was populated by night-lifers, who were discussing the meteor vehemently.

Bert stopped the car at the curb. The Yorkvillers advanced upon him in a body, believing him to want information either on road routes or tourist hotels. Bert surprised them by asking where the meteorite had landed.

One long lean fellow placed his visage at the window of the car.

"The meteorite? Why't fell straight south o' here—"

"Did not!" came a voice from the crowd-at his back. "I tell you it was more to the east."

"Straight south," repeated the first man, indicating that the stranger should disregard any opinions but his own. "You a newspaper reporter?"

"No," Bert answered shortly. "By the way, did you hear any noise?"

A roar came from the crowd and after it broken bits of sentences by various seers and savants. ". . . like ten cannons" . . . "like the world split in half" . . . "my ears're ringing yet."

The sage individual, who had attached Bert for his own personal dependent, curled a lip at the murmurs behind him and bent a wise eye on Bert. "Bunch of liars—them!" He jerked a thumb backward. "It was a noise, all right, but real sharp and sudden-like—not like a cannon."

"Have you any idea how long after the meteor landed the noise came?" asked Bert hopefully.

The man squinted sagaciously. "No more'n a minute."

Bert thanked him and roared from the spot, turning down the next county highway that went south. A minute—that would make it only about fourteen miles from Yorkville! If it were that near he still had a chance to be among the first there.

In his enthusiasm the boy failed to reckon that he might wander up and down many country roads before actually locating the spot. But luck was with him and he struck the trail just outside of Yorkville. A drawling farmer pointed southeastward and mentioned a road he might follow.

Bert came soon after to a crossroad where two farmers were conversing about the inevitable meteor. They steered him down another road which brought the impatient youngster to a brightly lit country home whose womenfolk and children were running about haphazardly as though they had received news of an invading army.

HYSTERICAL answers finally convinced Bert the meteorite had landed but a mile or so away with "a God-awful noise, sir!" They pointed the direction with trembling fingers and asked if he would see that their menfolk had not been destroyed or hurt, for they had gone there despite their frantic wives' pleas to stay home.

Bert drove down a wagon road which should lead him to his destination. Two miles of the jolting road, then he saw a tiny flicker of light to his right across a wide cornfield.

In a fever of excitement Bert stopped his car, clambered over a barbed wire fence and trampled his way over young and tender corn shoots. As he approached the light he had seen from the road, it resolved itself into a roaring fire, around which several black figures stood conversing.

His first question when he came up to the group was, "Where's the meteorite?"

For a moment, there was no answer. They were all farmer folk— four grown men and three boys. The look on their faces was one of bewilderment.

Finally one of them answered, "Back there behind that knoll. Come along—I'll show you. But it ain't no meteorite, mister. It's suthin' else!"

Bert was prevented from asking further by seeing the answer for himself as they topped a low hill. There on the other side, a few hundred yards distant, was an object that stopped him in his tracks.

It was a metallic ellipsoid, half buried in the hard untilled ground, glowing bright red and radiating heat, even as far as the hill where he stood. It was, judging from its un-buried half, perhaps a hundred feet long and its uniform surface was unmarred by anything resembling a door or window. It was not smashed or damaged in any way.

"What—what is it?" Bert found himself asking in a hoarse voice.

The man beside him and two who had followed and now stood with them shook their heads. "It's more'n we know," the gestures plainly said.

Bert made as though to descend the hill but one of the men grasped his arm. "Better not, mister. Gets awful hot when you 'proach any nearer."

Bert nodded and swallowed painfully. As though by a signal the party walked back to the fire, which had been made not for warmth but for light. Men hate to discuss mysteries in darkness.

Introductions went around. When Bert told of his driving all the way from Chicago they looked at him in surprise. At mention of a car one of the men spoke.

"We ought to get the news to some authorities. Maybe you having a car, you'd drive to Joliet and tell the Chief of Police about this thing?"

Bert's answer was involuntary. "I'd rather not—er—I mean I'd like to be here when it's cooled off." He feared the police might detain him with questions. "But if one of you can drive and wants to use my car—"

One of the youngsters eagerly volunteered and Bert handed him the keys.

For the next few hours Bert divided his time between talking to the others and running to the top of the knoll to look at the mysterious ellipsoid. It was not till the third trip that he noticed something no one had previously mentioned.

From a different viewpoint—to one side of the knoll—he could see that the hinder part of the object graduated into a circular flange whose walls were parallel at all points. Although the angle was acute, by standing on tiptoe, he could see over the lower part of the flange and could distinguish, dark though it was, what looked like heavy mesh or honeycomb.

His agile mind told him it was the discharging end of a multitude of rocket tubes. This, combined with several vague hints by the farmers that the front of the "meteorite" had seemed to belch smoke, settled something in Bert's mind,

## CHAPTER II

### THE ALIEN MONSTERS

LEUTENANT ARPY of the Joliet police, on night duty at headquarters, yawned and looked at the clock, whose steady ticking was the only noise competing with the snores of Policeman Murphy. Lieu-tenant Arpy, who was pacing up and down like an insomniac, glared at Murphy's peaceful Irish face in ex-asperation. He didn't mind the man taking a cat-nap at the switchboard, but he could at least not rattle his confounded hard-rubber lips.

At midnight Arpy had kicked him in the shin with a none-too-gentle toe and told him to straighten himself or he'd fall into the near-by spittoon. At one o'clock Arpy had awakened him to tell him of the meteorite—of which he had heard from a returning policeman who had been on beat—to which Murphy had granted affected interest without fully awakening. At two o'clock Lieutenant Arpy advanced upon Murphy with the full intent of dousing him with a glass of water.

A farm lad rushed in, eyes round with suppressed excitement, followed by a burly policeman who

said, "Says he wants to see the Chief about that meteor thing that come down couple hours ago. Thought you'd like to hear what he's got to say, Lieutenant."

The latter nodded, "I'm in charge —tell me about it."

"Well," gasped the boy, nervously fingering his shirt buttons, "that mete'r ain't no mete'r a-tall! It's round and smooth like a egg, sir!" Lieutenant Arpy looked suspi-ciously at the other officer. "What's this? Some funny joke—"

"Don't look at me, Lieutenant. I don't—"

"But it's true!" cried the boy al-most tearfully. "We all seen it, my dad and two uncles and lots o' oth-ers, and we figured it was suthin' for the police. It ain't no mete'r."

"How far is it?" interrupted Arpy.

"Ten miles straight west." Lieutenant Arpy decided to look into it. He ordered his underofficer to get three men into the station's squad car and be ready to leave in a few minutes. He told the farmer lad to get into .his car and lead the way."

When everyone had left the room, Lieutenant Arpy allowed a gleam of sardonic glee to come to his eyes. He walked quietly over to the peace-fully sleeping Murphy, slumped in the switchboard chair, and viciously threw a full glass of cold water in his chubby face.

"I'm going out, Murphy. If any-body wants to know where, it's to that meteor—ten miles west. You stay awake!"

The police car with its five pas-sengers followed the farmer boy out of Joliet along a decent gravel road that degenerated to a bumpy wagon trail before they reached their des-tination. Lieutenant Arpy whistled at the sizable crowd gathered around a fire that was being fed by newly-chopped orchard trees. He whistled louder at the snatches of talk he heard but he found himself unable to whistle when he looked at the "meteor" on the other side of the hill.

It was now a dull red and prom-ised to be quite cool in another two hours. The policemen were able to approach within fifty yards and play their flashlights over its surface, finding it smooth like metal with not a crack or seam anywhere. They silently circumnavigated it to find that the other side was the same.

"Seventy blue devils!" Lieutenant Arpy muttered eloquently.

He thereupon began issuing or-ders. He sent one man to the nearest telephone to call headquarters and leave a message to the effect that he, Lieutenant Arpy, and his four men would stay with the mysterious ob-ject till relieved. He detailed two of the policemen to keep watch, one on either side of it. The farmer folk he disregarded entirely.

HE AND the remaining officer sat down on the knoll. Arpy was speaking.

"I'd be willing to bet, Jones, that this here metal egg is some sort of new ship that some fool inventor took up and didn't know how to han-dle. Or p'raps it wasn't c'nstructed right in the first place, see?"

"Now what I think," argued the other, called Jones, with the confi-dence of ignorance, "is that it's a war machine! Yes, sir—a war ma-chine. Take Russia—d'you think fer a minit she's unpr'pared fer war? Not on yer life!"

"Might be," agreed Arpy, willing to concede the point without inward-ly crediting it much. "Say!" he ex-claimed, looking around, "this crowd is getting bigger right along. I'm betting the papers and radio will have this out by breakfast time."

Lieutenant Arpy then noticed a young man who was dressed too neatly to be a farmer, standing near them and looking at him in hesi-tancy. At the officer's glance the boy came closer.

"Pardon me," said Bert, "I heard you talking about what you think that thing is and I—"

"Well, what d'you think it is?" asked Arpy somewhat coldly.

"A transatlantic rocket-ship!" an-swered Bert with a rush, all eager-ness to impress them. "One of those ships that go from Berlin to New York in two hours through the stratosphere. You've seen pictures of them, haven't you?"

"Oh—er—yes," lied Arpy, unwill-ing that the boy should surprise him. "Sure, sure. So you think—" He bent his eyes on the ellipsoid as though weighing the matter in his mind.

"The pictures look just like that ship," went on Bert importantly. "Rocket tubes in back and they must

be in front too—for slowing down, you know."

Lieutenant Arpy was the recipient of an inspiration at that moment. He had a chance to solve the whole mystery before the ship cooled enough to look into it and before the Chief came. He got to his feet.

"How could we get in touch with the rocket-ship people?"

"Call up New York," answered Bert quickly. "They have an office there."

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Professor Honstein of the Yerkes Observatory, Williams Bay, Wisconsin, swore bitterly while his assistant helped him unload the photographic plates with which they had meditated catching the image of Saturn.

"Blast!" cried the professor, his voice echoing in the domed telescope pit. "Out with 'em, man! Ruined as they are, we don't have to be careful with them!"

The professor threw a switch with a savage gesture.

"Peabody, I tell you it's—it's provoking! Of all the times for a cursed meteorite—and of course it had to be a bright one—to flare across the ecliptic. Why couldn't it have chosen the rest of the sky? There's plenty of it."

Professor Honstein pulled out his watch and conquered his peevishness at the same time. "All right, Peabody. We'll load again. It's only eleven-thirty."

By one o'clock, the professor had got several plates of Saturn and re-tired. The meteor had quite slipped his mind—he being what they call an "absent-minded professor."

But not so Peabody. He had been partially blinded by the bright meteor as it flashed from almost straight above, grew like a super-fast comet, then swung like a lightning-bolt to the south. It piqued his curiosity—and at four o'clock, he tuned in the Early Worm Radio Reporter. What he heard sent him dashing to the professor's room.

"Meteor?" repeated Professor Honstein vaguely, sitting up in bed and listening to Peabody's incoherent words. "Ah—the meteor! What's that nonsense? Not a meteorite but a metallic ellipsoid, half-buried in the ground and slowly cooling?"

Peabody nodded.

"Well, let me tell you," said the professor with a flash of the evening's previous anger, "I'm going to sue whomever that thing belongs to for ruining those plates. Now let me go back to sleep."

CHIEF OF POLICE SAUNDERS of Joliet stroked a smooth-shaven chin with portentous gravity as he looked at the mystery ship from the top of the knoll and at the same time listened to the laconic voice of Lieutenant Arpy. A close observer might have seen the vacuity in his eyes that betokened a bewildered mind.

"The rocket people," finished Lieutenant Arpy, "deny having any-thing to do with it."

"Naturally they'd deny it," said Chief Saunders when Arpy stopped. "Why, if it was their ship they could be arrested and fined for endangering human life!"

"But, Chief," added Arpy cautiously, "it's quite a jump from New York, where those rocket-ships are supposed to land, to here. Kinda unreasonable to suppose they'd accidentally go another thousand miles!"

Saunders nodded; within him he wondered where Arpy had ever got the idea of the rocket people and how he knew so much about them. It was not like Lieutenant Arpy to know much about such advanced matters. The chief began wishing to himself that the responsibility of attacking the mystery had fallen to someone else. Somehow, the partially buried ellipsoid struck him as a hard nut to crack.

It was eight A.M. Already a horde of scribbling reporters had arrived and almost besieged Chief Saunders, wanting to know—for their papers—what the thing was all about. Already the news would be headlining around the country, for mysterious ships do not streak from the sky like meteors every day.

The unfortunate Saunders almost hated the policeman who came up after eight to report that the outside of the ship had cooled sufficiently for human hands to touch it. Now what to do?

But Saunders, at the crisis of his life, was spared taking the initiative.

A voice, shouting from the foot of the knoll, electrified the crowd on the hilltop. "I heard a noise! I heard a noise inside this thing!"

Unbelievable, it proved true. Not a minute later there was a ringing and clanking from the ellipsoid that everybody heard.

There are times when a crowd hovers between suspense and panic. At the clangor from the mysterious ellipsoid, only one thing prevented the latter. A little boy no more than seven pointed at it and asked in a shrill voice of his father. "What makes it jingle. Dad?"

This eased the tension.

Chief Saunders might have made an ass of himself for the world to read about by approaching the now quiet ship and shouting loudly, "Who's in there?" But events moved too swiftly.

Of a sudden a new noise was heard, again freezing the crowd, a noise like the highest pitch of an organ, like the harmonic bellow of a steamship whistle, like a dentist's drill.

A circular section of the ellipsoid's wall, perhaps ten feet in diameter, abruptly parted from the rest of the surface and toppled with ringing tones to the hard ground. Yet it was not a door or hatch because the edges were uneven and ridged unsymmetrically, indicating that the piece had been cut or otherwise severed from its surrounding material.

*Something* was inside and was coming out! The people waited for the denouement of this mysterious drama that had started with a flaming meteor descending from the heavens. It was the grand moment for which many had gone sleepless and practically unfeeling.

Then it came—first a series of flickering movements in the shadowed aperture as though mirrors were being uncovered, then a shiny white bulk which emerged slowly and ponderously. It straightened up and stepped from shadow into sunlight so that all could see it clearly. Thus human eyes had the first glimpse of one of the Robot Aliens.

With a low moan, the crowd quivered like jelly, reformed into streams like melting butter on a table and radiated from the spot. Fear—blind unreasoning human fear, the emotion that supersedes all other human emotions—drove them away with but one thought—to escape the utterly monstrous apparition beside the aperture of the metallic ellipsoid.

Only four persons besides the police, who at such times are held back by a sense of pride, held their ground and dared to look twice. Then they looked at each other, as if questioning individual reasons for staying, and moved together when the people between them melted away.

Bert Bodell, with the individualism his nights of amateur astronomical pursuits had given him, was not swayed by the crowd emotion. Professor Honstein—(his curiosity had got the better of him)—was too pedantic to yield to panic. Peabody had a strong mind—when the professor was around. And the little boy of seven, who had already shamed his elders and been deserted by a weak-minded father in the rush, had the courage of innocence.

With them stood Chief Saunders, his facial expression an idiotic mixture of disdain and terror, and Lieutenant Arpy, who trembled so violently that his puttees came together in regular clicks.

The monster stood motionless and silent, seeming to watch the precipitate departure of frightened humanity. It was a metallic creation, twelve feet tall and faintly suggestive of the human form, but having instead of head and torso two equally large bulks, one of which must have been the head, for it had unmistakable "eyes" and "ears," but no mouth or nose.

From this head protruded four long arms, many-jointed tentacles coiled in repose against the body. From the lower torso came four shorter appendages, jointed twice and reversely. These were folded against the body and terminated in a grotesque parody of the human hand. For support and locomotion, the monstrous creature had two appendages, jointed but once and apparently similar in purpose to human legs, ending in flat plates of metal.

Its composition seemed entirely metallic, silvery in color, with here and there at the joints a blue or blackish metal. From the rounded top of the upper bulk extended three long thin rods, terminating in balls. It was later observed that whenever the creature walked, sparks of electricity leaped from ball to ball of these rods, accompanied by a loud crackling noise.

This was the nightmarish object that the quartet faced and watched as silently and motionlessly as the

metal monster itself observed them.

But when it leaned forward and ponderously moved a leg toward them, the humans paled and gasped and trembled. And when the metal monster proceeded to approach them, an incredible walking machine, they, one and all, without exception, fled.

### CHAPTER III THE ARMY ATTACKS

"THIS is something new," said Captain Pompersnap of the Illinois National Guard. "Ten years ago, my men were picketed in southern counties to pacify rioting miners or in northern counties to keep the milk farmers from raising Cain. Now I'm to take my men and surround a rock-et-ship which seems to be run by people disguised in armored suits."

While the handsome captain shook a puzzled head, his superior, Major Whinny, explained, "In these times of armed peace, Captain, we must not be lax. If this wingless ship and those metal monsters are a threat to the independence of our great nation, then we must see that they are destroyed."

"Is it as serious as all that?" asked Pompersnap. "I had an idea it might be some publicity stunt."

"Could be," agreed Major Whinny. "For all we know it may be something of that sort. But orders have come from Washington—from the Secretary of War, mind you—for us to picket the thing in case it turns out more serious. Personally, I think that asinine Chief Saunders of the Joliet Police is a yellow-streaked moron—saying that the first mechanical man which stepped from the ship tried to attack him.

"At least, I'd rather believe the Evening American account which stated that the robot or whatever it really is merely took one step forward, then turned around and went back into the ship. But Saunders lost his nerve and turned the whole thing over to the Federal authorities and that's why you are going there." Captain Pompersnap shrugged his shoulders. "Am I supposed to try to talk to the things?"

"No, Captain. You just picket and keep strict guard so the—the things don't gallivant around. Washington is sending a specialist to solve the mystery."

A little later, a long line of transport trucks left Fort Sheridan on Lake Michigan and wound its way southwest, loaded with National Guardsmen and their equipment. Captain Pompersnap ruminated during the three-hour trip and felt foolish. Beyond a doubt, he reflected, it would eventually turn out to be some elaborate advertising scheme.

Probably United Alloys had built the ship and armored suits out of a new and amazingly tough metal, had then dashed it groundward to demonstrate its strength, and would soon announce the price per ton and per square yard.

Then the reporters would indulge in a bit of sarcasm and tell the public—"Captain Pompersnap and his men, fully armed and prepared for anything short of war, found the only charge they could make was one for which United Alloys would extend them thirty days credit."

It was the morning of the third day, after the "meteorite" had star-tled all of northern Illinois and parts of Wisconsin, Iowa and Indiana, that the National Guard arrived and forthwith set up camp to see that a possible menace to the peace of the nation be effectively ensnared. With military precision the soldiers set up their canvas tents, distributed their trusty weapons and put a ring of guards around the mystery ship.

Lieutenant Arpy of the Joliet Police arrived before noon, emissary of Chief Saunders, who had certain weighty duties that prevented his coming. He sought out Captain Pompersnap immediately, finding him at the top of the knoll overlooking the landing place of the ship.

"What do you think of it?" asked Arpy when introductions and preliminaries were over.

"Pretty clever, I'd say," answered the captain.

"Clever?"

"Of course it's clever," repeated Pompersnap. "Obviously, it's sensational advertising, some big steel company."

Arpy removed his hat and scratched his head slowly. In the twenty-four hours since the first metal creature had stepped from a hole in the ellipsoid's hull several new developments had come about.

The original monster had proved to have two companions exactly like itself, one of which, however, had had its legs so badly smashed that its locomotive powers were de-stroyed. A timid and distant crowd of humans—using binoculars and tensed to the last man to run at a second's notice—had seen the two undamaged metal monsters lug out the third and set it upright on the ground.

Then they had brought from the interior of the ship various compli-cated and small devices with in-numerable markings and controls. These they all three had worked, us-ing their multi-jointed tentacular arms and the human-like hands with amazing dexterity.

At night the metal monsters had again entered the ship and brought forth a tripod affair whose spherical summit cast a brilliant white light all around them, so that their queer manipulations could go on uninter-rupted. By morning the ground just outside the ship was littered with a motley array of unnamable instruments, most of them metallic and mirrored, some containing jars of colored solutions.

Arpy thought over Pompersnap's odd idea in his slow incoherent way and finally ventured to remonstrate. "But, Captain, what would a steel company be having them machines playing with a lot of crazy toys for?" Pompersnap shot him a scornful glance. "For the effect, man—and to drag out the mystery so that it'll be headlined longer."

"Is that why the gov'ment sent you here?" asked Arpy.

"No," snapped the Army man, flushing. "We are here because your Chief of Police thought this was war-stuff and was afraid he was risking his precious life. Take a look! There ain't a weapon around that ship."

Arpy muttered agreement but thought it proper to add, "I'll tell you, though, Captain, them things is ornery-looking from closer up. If you'd ha' seen that first one stepping toward you like a skyscraper on legs you might kinda—sorta shiver!"

Captain Pompersnap expanded his manly chest at these words and al-lowed a look of noble bravery to cross his handsome features. "Lieu-tenant Arpy, I see you don't know us men of the Army. Don't you ever get the idea that those things, just because they're big and strong look-ing, would scare us. Nothing scares us."

"Well, when you get down to it, fellows like us," said Arpy, "soldiers and police, are above the average that way. Take us and our criminals now—"

From this congenial start, the two brave minions of law and order be-gan a delightful conversation in which each matched stories of brav-ery and prowess.

IN THE afternoon the specialist arrived from Washington—Colo-nel Snoosharp by name. He had a secretive air about him and his pursed lips seemed to betoken that he had much to say, but that duty prevented him from revealing important secrets. He drew Captain Pompersnap away from the camp to have a heart-to-heart talk with him.

"Now, Captain," he began, "this whole affair may prove more serious than anyone thinks. You are under my orders—I have the proper authority from the Secretary of War—and first of all increase your sentry line. Furthermore, set up your machine-guns and—let's see, have you any larger pieces?"

"Why, no—except grenades and tear bombs. But what—"

"Now listen to me," went on Snoo sharp in a low voice as though spies might be eavesdropping. "Give your sentries grenades and impress upon them they must be alert at all times In fact, all your men must be on their toes. You really should have some heavier pieces—well, later for that.

"Captain, detail me a party of ten armed men who will accompany me. I was told to clear up the mystery and I'm going to approach those metal monsters or robots and at tempt to communicate with them. And for heaven's sake keep the people back. There's at least ten thousand of them around here."

Captain Pompersnap picked nine men and himself joined the colonel. The crowd immediately sensed that something important was occurring and only the stern line of bayonet armed Guardsmen kept them from pouring closer.

At the top of the knoll the party formed in military step, two rows of five each, with Colonel Snoosharp in front. Halfway down the slope the captain's voice barked out, "Present arms!"

The party reached the foot of tin knoll and halted. Not twenty yards away was the nearest of the



three metal monsters. The Robot Aliens had ceased their mysterious work with the queer instruments and two of them had faced directly about.

The humans, seeing the creatures close up for the first time, felt a vague dismay—even a little fear. Ominously quiet and inhumanly proportioned, the Aliens struck a note of unreasoning terror in the human heart of flesh and blood. The ground beside the ship had been trampled hard as though steam-rollers had gone over it, attesting to the creatures' terrific weight. Mechanical eyes, with lurking unfathomable depths, peered unblinkingly at them.

Colonel Snoosharp could only bolster up confidence by periodically shifting his eyes to the shiny bayonets back of him. Captain Pomper-snap remembered suddenly Arpy's words, "... you might kinda—sorta shiver!" Several of the bayonets danced in the sun from hands that trembled.

Pompersnap nudged the specialist who had fallen into a trance. Snoo-sharp started and licked dry lips. Then he shouted out at the motion-less Robot Aliens, "Who are you?"

Beyond a click from mechanical ears that turned funnel-shaped objects toward them, there was no sound from the metal monsters.

Snoosharp tried several different languages without success.

Suddenly the Robot Aliens retaliated. The foremost raised one of his tentacular arms and stretched it out till it pointed skyward. Holding it there, he swung a second tentacular arm in circles, paused, swung again, twice again swung and paused. Then the tentacular arms fell limply into the coils with a faint sound of whirring machinery and rubbing metals.

The captain and colonel, equally pale and disconcerted, looked at each other helplessly. The creatures could not speak or understand and gesticulated in a quite incomprehensible way.

"I think," whispered Snoosharp hoarsely, "we'll just have to give it up."

Captain Pompersnap responded with alacrity. "Right about face. *March!*"

Then a surprising thing happened. The foremost metal monster, the one which had gesticulated, moved toward the retreating men, waving all its appendages violently. As it moved the three prongs on its "head" sparkled with electricity—a sound which associated itself in the soldiers' collective mind with machine-gun fire.

In blind panic at hearing this dreadful crackling the Guardsmen, without an order from the captain, who was incapable of giving orders at the time anyway, fired at the Robot Alien and then ran precipitately. But neither the captain nor the colonel was last to reach the hilltop.

The former, completely unrattled, shouted for his men to, "Repel the attack," at which several soldiers flung their grenades. None reached the Robot Alien, which now strode quite rapidly up the slope like a nightmare horror, throwing all the human watchers into a frenzy of blind fear.

Scattered bullets flew through the air and a few rang upon collision with hard metal. In a moment of sanity Captain Pompersnap tried to rally his men but they were absolutely deaf to his commands. They ran, pausing to shoot at times at the twelve-foot tower of metal that lumbered along behind.

The crowd on the other side of the knoll, hearing the shots and explosions and hoarse cries, screamed in mortal fear, trampled over itself without thought and poured across the fields away from the scene of action.

The Robot Alien gained the top of the knoll and then stopped. Clicking eyes swept the scene—the black scurrying humanity, the brown moving soldiers, some of whom stood their ground, the still bodies lying on the ground, unfortunates who had been swept off their feet and crushed. A hand grenade arched from a resolute-faced man in khaki and exploded not a foot from the machine-man's feet. Beyond a slight swaying and short backward step the metal monster took no notice. It stood there for a long minute and then slowly turned and descended the knoll back to its fellows.

The reports that reached the public ears and eyes were vastly distorted. In the main, the individual reporters had used their imaginations and painted the Robot Aliens as malign enemies of mankind, armed with terrible weapons. One reporter said it had long metal whips with which it had scourged and beat people during that hectic affair.

Captain Pompersnap and Colonel Snoosharp had to fabricate a story of attack by the vicious Aliens to cover their own cowardly panic and shameful lack of competence in such a crisis.

Not only was Captain Pomper-snap an arrant weakling but he was also an accomplished liar. Worst of all Major Whinny, a political officer and therefore incompetent, believed him, sympathized with him and promised retribution.

Colonel Snoosharp's report to Washington by telephone aroused the whole War Department. Due to the conflicting newspaper accounts and the still more garbled radio ef-fusions there was none to gainsay that, "The Metal Monsters are in-imical to human life, dangerous to the continued peace of our glorious nation and absolutely void of human feelings or sympathies."

The government, with character-istic sagacity and wisdom, promptly ordered the territory under martial law and transmitted secret orders to Major Whinny to destroy the enemy.

There had been thirty people killed, most of them by the panic of a fleeing mob, the rest by stray bullets, some thrice that number in-jured in various ways. Yet all the Robot Alien had done was walk up the slope and stand at its summit for one minute! Truly it was a for-midable destroyer of human life!

## CHAPTER IV PANIC IN CHICAGO

MAJOR Whinny, small, wizened, thin-voiced and arrogant—and incidentally allied with powerful political interests—sent the entire Fort Sheridan soldiery to the spot, along with anti-tank guns and several larger pieces of ordnance. In wartime he would have made one of those commanders who run has-tilly over important data, disregard perfectly obvious precautions, and pour a flood of cannon-fodder at the laughing enemy.

There were sane and intelligent people who saw from the conflicting reports that it was quite possible that imagination had made Robot Aliens so destructive. One of Cap-tain Pompersnap's own men, a quiet-mannered private who had calmly climbed a tree of the orchard during the excitement and watched the whole thing with unprejudiced eyes, came to him at the news of armed attack and declaimed the action as unwarranted. Major Whinny lis-tened to only half his speech and then had him arrested for dishonorable action—he had climbed a tree after all.

By the afternoon of the fourth day elaborate preparations for at-tack were made. Troops were stationed at all points of the compass in a huge circle of three miles, armed with anti-tank guns. Artillery crews were stationed farther back with heavier weapons and enough am-munition to bomb all Chicago. The Air Force was also scheduled to drop bombs. It was to be quick and de-cisive.

"What I'm worried about," ad-mitted Major Whinny as he looked out the window of a farmhouse which he had commandeered as his temporary headquarters, "is whether they have any weapons more dangerous than that one you men-tioned. I mean any guns or bombs."

"I suspect they might have, sir," commented Captain Pompersnap. "But I only know definitely of the one that sparkles like rifle fire and makes guns go off accidentally—which, as I've said before, accounts for so many wounded by stray bullets. It's obvious that my men could not have shot those bullets voluntarily."

Major Whinny nodded. "I am prepared to say though," he said reflectively, "that those numerous instruments they had strewn about and were assembling are sure to be some form of lethal weapon."

"In that case our attack will catch them unprepared," cried the captain eagerly.

A helicopter landed in a plowed field and its pilot came in with a salute.

"I beg to report, sir, that there is no particular sign of activity from the enemy. They are outside the ship, engaged in fingering certain instruments I can't define, sir, and seem oblivious to anything else."

Major Whinny waved a finger for him to go.

"They are together and unsus-pecting, Captain. Let's give it to 'em!"

The anti-tank guns burst into rapid fire, which at first missed its mark but gradually crept closer as observation planes above radioed range figures. At the bursting of shells and the flying of clods and shattered rocks the Robot Aliens jerked to their feet—except, of course, the one whose pedal extremi-ties had been previously mangled—and gazed about.

When the explosions of larger shells joined those of the .57's the two standing creatures hastily tugged

at their helpless companion and started to carry him into the ship. Then the first direct hit came.

A shell tore a hole at their very feet. Another struck the ship and ripped a small fragment of the hull away.

At this the two whole-bodied Aliens abruptly left their companion and raced away from the ship. For the first time human eyes saw with what amazing speed they could move. At the rate of a slow auto-mobile, legs flying like pistons, the two metal monsters quickly traversed several fields, plowed through barb-ed-wire fences without a pause and neared a troop of soldiery who fired several sporadic rifle volleys and then scuttled away like frightened rabbits. Bullets had no apparent effect on the monsters and they dis-appeared in the distance.

Major Whinny got two pieces of news at once. One, the ships and surroundings had been bombarded to dust. The other, two of the Robot Aliens had escaped and flown the cage.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Just what are we faced with?" gasped the President of the United States, his tone betraying inward agitation.

Secretary of Defense Rukke ran a finger around his tight collar. "That is not easy to answer, Mr. President. Suggestions have been pouring in upon me but they are all guesses. Some say they are a foreign threat, first members of an invading army of metal monsters. Again they are creatures from the ocean depths, encased in pressure suits. But the suggestion that most appalled ME was that they are creatures from another planet!"

THE President smiled even in his predicament and bent a pair of amused eyes on the Secretary of War.

"Strange, isn't it, how people's imaginations will run away with them?" he said half-scornfully. "Be-ings of another planet—bah! The public has been absorbing too much of these—what are they called?—science-fiction stories that have been circulating the last thirty years. I read some of them once out of curi-osity. They are so preposterous and hare-brained that it is no wonder all those queer ideas about the metal monsters sprang up. All crazy, aren't they, Rukke?"

"Well, yes," answered the Secre-tary defensively. "But still, Mr. President, they are something out of the ordinary. We've all heard of robots and mechanical men a lot, but dam-me if I've ever heard of things as independent and—and human-like as these. The important thing is—what to do about them?"

"Yes," mused the President, stroking a dictatorial chin. "We must do something about it, that's sure. You say there are only two of them now?"

"Just two," assented Rukke. "Ma-jor Whinny and his Fort Sheridan militia bombed and destroyed the third and their ship. He went over the ground after the bombing and found it strewn with pieces of ma-chinery, wheels, cogs, gears, axles, wire, plates.

"Yet the ship's hull had withstood the bombing to a surprising degree, being shattered only into large sections, not into small pieces. The inner contents of the ship, which was quite a large one, were com-pletely demolished."

"And Major Whinny tried un-successfully to communicate with them before the bombing?"

"Yes, Mr. President. Whatever or whoever they are they understood no common earth language—or did not care to."

"And they have destroyed prop-erty and caused death and injury to several dozen United States citi-zens?" continued the President.

"Exactly, Mr. President. And they have made no attempt to explain their presence or get in touch with authority."

The President pointed a finger. "Then, Rukke, we must hound the two remaining metal monsters down and destroy them as being unwanted, unauthorized and dangerous aliens. Whatever their purpose it cannot be benevolent, for it has already proved the opposite. Therefore will I issue a formal denouncement of the two metal monsters which will empower you to war upon them with any and all

means at our command. Our glorious democracy must be saved!"

The Mayor of Chicago darted his eyes all about the room before he bent close to Alderman Gorsky, speaking in hushed tones.

\* \* \* \* \*

"So, Gorsky, you see him about that. Tell him it's okay with me. Get a regular contract and purchase papers. Have X—you know who I mean—make out the fake contract and bring it to me secretly and I'll look it over. Then have G.S. come here next week Monday at noon and we'll figure out his cut. And then, Gorsky—" The Mayor smiled unctuously.

Gorsky licked his fat lips as though thinking of fried chicken, which he loved with an unholy love—the same love he bore toward filthy lucre.

"And then," finished Gorsky, "we'll find fifty thousand laying in front of us like a present. A park will go up on the South Side, the contractor will be paid, the people will be pleased in my ward and no one will miss a bit of money that slips our way!"

"Yes, yes," said the Mayor, rubbing his hands gleefully. "Oh, yes, yes. But for heaven's sake, watch your step."

He broke off, listening. "Say, Gorsky, what's that noise? Hear it? like a steady roar somewhere south."

Together "Honest Pete," the Mayor, and his pet alderman cocked their ears and sought to define the rumbling and rushing sound that came to them above the Loop traffic roars. Gorsky ran to an open window and looked out upon State Street. Beyond the fact that hundreds of people had stopped and looked around puzzled there was nothing to see.

The Mayor grabbed the telephone and called below. "What's up?" he barked.

Gorsky saw him grow pale, saw a trembling hand hang up the receiver.

"Good Lord, Pete! What's the mat-ter?"

The Mayor, all his poise and smugness gone, answered in tones that had lost their oiliness and grated harsh instead, "Those metal monsters! They're coming down Michigan Avenue."

The faint and distant sounds grew to a roar as the metal monsters came north on Michigan Avenue and neared the congested Loop with its thousands of shoppers and innumer-able cars. The Mayor wanted a close look at the creatures that had been headlined for five days, yet dared not leave his office. But the Mayor had his wish. For some inexplicable reason the two tall metal beings turned off Michigan Avenue and finally came down State Street, pass-ing just under his window.

IN A street suddenly deserted, except for numerous stalled autos and one lady who had fainted and lay flat on the sidewalk, the two Robot Aliens made their way. As in a hideous dream the Mayor and alderman watched from their window. A moment of panic came to them when a lackluster depthless mechanical eye bored straight in their direction for a split second.

Yet for all of the reputation the creatures had as ravening ruthless destructive monsters, the Mayor saw that they moved along quite care-fully, walked around autos, stepped over the reclining lady, and made no move voluntarily to destroy property.

But accidents will happen. One of the Robot Aliens, in passing the Mayor's parked car—a new custom job with shining body—got his left "foot" caught in the back bumper on the up-step. There was a rending of groaning metal, a sudden flurry of tentacles and arms, and then the metal monster toppled off-balance directly onto the Mayor's car.

From an almost complete ruin, the seats and top ripped to shreds and the body scratched by waving tentacles, the fallen Robot Alien arose. After a hasty glance at the sorry mess it imperturbably joined its companion and went on, its own body not so much as scratched!

The Mayor looked at the wrecked car, which had been his joy and pride for but a week and mentally made a reservation to increase his graft to twice what it had been agreed upon for the park project in Gorsky's ward.

Commander Jill of the Air Force looked around at several subordi-nates with whom he was in confer-ence, a peculiar smirk on his lean face. "So with seven bombers and a squadron of scouts we're to hunt down and blow up the metal mon-sters—two harmless and innocent somethings that have done nothing but walk around and scare people. But orders are orders and these came from Washington."

"Why call them harmless and in-nocent, Commander?" asked one of-ficer. "They've already caused dozens of deaths and lots of damage."

"Sure, sure," agreed Commander Jill. "But only because people lose their heads and kill each other in the rush to get away. Now I've been following this up pretty close, and do you know there's not a stitch of evidence that the metal monsters have any weapons? They have caused only indirect deaths without premeditation."

"But what is the world are they?" asked a young captain. "Everybody talks about what they do and how they look but nobody says who or what they are!"

Commander Jill shrugged his shoulders. "Nobody knows. What I'm driving at is that the authorities should be reasonable and try to capture the blasted things and find out what they are. They may have a human brain running them.

"Well, our orders are to bomb 'em and bomb 'em we will. Yester-day they crossed Chicago going north along Michigan Avenue out through the Loop, went west on Lake Street and circled south again. Then they picked up speed as if they'd seen all they wanted to see of Chicago and scooted out toward Harvey. No reports on them last night, so I figure they must have lain low some place in the dark. Now it's daylight again and I figure they'll be moving soon, wherever they want to go next. So we'll head for Har-vey and Homewood and scout around till we locate 'em. Then we send our bombers."

"It's going to be some job bomb-ing things that small," said one of-ficer, "unless we swing low. But it'll tear up the country something fierce."

"Orders are orders," returned Jill.

A squadron of small ships arose from the army airport of West Chicago and flew southeast. At Har-vey they dispersed and scoured the countryside. A plane that had pen-et-rated far to the east finally dis-covered two shining figures moving along a concrete highway in the direction of Gary, Indiana. A radio message brought the other scouts around and a half-hour later seven roaring bombers came to the scene.

Commander Jill in his flagship told the pilot to dive ahead of them so that he could see them closely. Un-blinking expressionless eyes followed the course of his ship as it zoomed not a hundred yards ahead of them. The two Robot Aliens were jogging along at some twenty miles an hour, apparently as light-footed as ath-letes. A continuous play of electric-ity sparkled at the tops of their heads.

Commander Jill ordered a bomber to swoop overhead and make a pass. The bomber descended in a power dive, flattened at half a thousand feet and dropped an egg. It was a small bomb as bombs go but uprooted a dozen trees at the side of the highway—it had missed the mark by a hundred feet.

The effect on the metal monsters was to cause them to stop and stare upward, much as a human might if a house had dropped from the sky. While they were standing still Com-mander Jill sent another bomber at them. It seemed like a sure thing—the egg arrowed straight at the metal beings.

But at the last second they leaped away with amazing dexterity. The egg tore a jagged gash in the high-way and flung fragments in a gey-ser, some of which struck the metal monsters with what would have been a death-blow to a human. It had no more effect on the Robot Aliens than a feather might.

Commander Jill had watched with fascination and noticed that the metal monsters displayed so sign of fear. They had become wary, watch-ful of the menace from the air, yet their every action showed nothing of that emotion known as fear. They seemed to be calmly appraising the threat of air attack and making a careful unhurried plan of escape.

As a third bomber dove at them they separated and ran in opposite directions, at right angles to the highway, out into the open prairies. One would eventually reach a state forest preserve not three miles away to the north. The other would find only open fields and towns for a long way.

Commander Jill sent three of the bombers after the one going north and four after the one going south. He himself went with the ships going north. Again and again his bombers swooped and dropped

their eggs, plowing up soil that had never felt the concussion of bombs since the birth of time. Each time they missed, for the fleeing metal monster seemed to have supernatural eyes and without slackening pace it nimbly side-stepped the explosions. Commander Jill knew before an hour was up that it was a waste of bombs.

## CHAPTER V THE MAN WITH LOGIC

FRANK MILLER, wealthy owner of a tobacco plantation and a graduate of Yale, where he had majored in botany, listened to the radio News Service just after lunch. The announcer's voice was excited

"Flash—second of Metal Monsters destroyed at nine-o-four a.m. to-day! The strategy of General Pille of West Point succeeded. His masked battery of ten cannon took the un-suspecting metal monster unawares and blew it to bits. General Pille, who will get a Congressional Medal for great service to the country, had kept the Metal Monster's movements under observation during the last three days since it left Chicago, after paralyzing that city's traffic and business, with its companion.

"General Pille knew that aerial bombing was out of the question, for the monsters have already demonstrated a peculiar quickness and cleverness in jumping and running. So to him came the brilliant idea of waylaying the creature along its known course and allowing it to walk into a few high-powered shells. One shell struck the creature squarely and scattered it to the four winds in tiny pieces. Thus that menace is gone.

"As to the one which headed south, it has been reported at numerous spots and its course has been plotted to take it into Kentucky, somewhere near Henderson. At present General Pille is planning to waylay this one in the same manner."

Frank Miller pulled the bell-rope. To the butler who answered his signal he asked, "How far is Henderson from here, Jussy?"

"About thirty mile by road, suh," answered Jussy. "De way de crow fly is on'y 'bout twenty mile."

"I see. Thank you, Jussy. By the way, Jussy, can you round up for me the news about these Metal Monsters? I haven't bothered myself much with headlines for the past month."

"Oh, yas, suh," eagerly supplied Jussy. "Ah been saving de news-paper accounts eber since dat fust day w'en dey come down. Just a minit, suh; ah'll bring de whole bunch to ya, suh."

Jussy left the room and returned in five minutes with a sizable armful of newspaper clippings, all with enormous eye-searing headlines. They told much and yet little.

Frank Miller had something of an analytical mind. He went through all the printed material. When he was done three things he had read stuck in his mind. The first was a sentence from an interview with Professor Honstein of Yerkes, who had been one of the first to see the ship and metal beings. ". . . and I verily believe they are from another planet, perhaps another solar system, creatures of a metallic evolution as opposed to us of an organic evolution . . ."

The second was from an interview of Commander Jill of the Chicago Air Corps. ". . . my impression was that the creatures knew no such emotion as fear, which is strange, for even an iron man, threatened by destruction, should show fear of that doom . . ."

The third was from the biting pen of a well-known satirist and cynic, who had written an essay on human nature after observing the chaos in Chicago. ". . . isn't it strange that as yet the so-called 'Metal Monsters' have displayed not one weapon or have ever actually killed? What then accounts for over a hundred deaths in Chicago on that great and exciting day . . ."

Miller mused awhile, then threw the clippings down on the desk and rang for the butler.

"Jussy, have Jamie saddle up Old Baldy. I'm going for a jaunt till dinner time. When I'm gone you can take away your clippings."

IT WAS Miller's habit to put from his mind all mundane thoughts while out riding, to enjoy the quiet woodland scenes. He put Old Baldy to a trot at first till they were well away from Owensboro, then let

him walk along at his ease. Tall oaks and majestic maples cast a soft shade over him. Song birds twittered and occasionally sang sweetly. The peace and joy of a quiet June day hung all about him like a subtle perfume.

Frank Miller, of a long line of tobacco kings, was unmarried at the age of thirty. His wealth could have bought him social prestige in any large city, but like his ancestors before him, he preferred an unostentatious life in practical obscurity. Intelligent and well educated, the last of the Millers found his greatest enjoyment in reading, with hunting and fishing for diversions.

He decided to visit his private hunting cabin, secreted in a large hardwood forest to the west. The footpath in one place bisected the road between Henderson and Owensboro. He had to bend low at places where low-hung branches waved at face level. At the road crossing he straightened up, then reined in his horse sharply. A block down the road was a tall metal creation rapidly approaching him.

"Lord!" breathed Miller at his first sight of a Robot Alien in life.

His first reaction was panic. Then he remembered the cynic's words, that the metal monsters had never displayed a weapon or an inclination to wreak harm. In other words, it was only blind human fear that had made the metal beings so formidable. Miller squared his shoulders and waited for the queer thing to come up.

The Metal Monster was moving at an easy jog and the watcher marvelled that it moved so quietly, without the clanking noise of worldly machinery. Its eight arm-appendages were folded against its body but Miller could see its several eyes clicking and shuttering as it turned its "head" slightly from side to side, showing that it was not oblivious to its surroundings.

The human watcher found himself wondering what marvelous machinery ran that giant metal frame, what powerful and efficient engines gave it motive power. He wondered too how much intelligence reposed behind that immobile metallic shell, whether it was organic intelligence or mineral, as Professor Honstein maintained.

As the mechanical being lumbered up, grotesque and awesomely large, an eye fastened on the lone human. It seemed to drink in the picture of Miller sitting erect and undisturbed on his horse, returning stare for stare. *Then it stopped!*

Miller paled a bit at the sight of the inhuman thing standing still and facing him, not twenty feet away. Then he saw a jointed arm stretch jerkily toward him. Long metal fingers clenched and unclenched. But Miller was more puzzled than alarmed, for the creature had not stepped closer.

His horse, well used to seeing all sorts of vehicles, stood motionless and Miller himself sat like a statue.

The creature next uncurled a ten-tacular arm and made four imaginary circles with it, pausing after each one. Then it tapped its breast.

Miller was a man of quick decisions. "It" wanted to talk to him. "It" was seemingly friendly. And Miller found himself wanting to talk to "it".

It occurred to him at the same moment that if they stayed in the open long, someone else would spy the monster and would spread an alarm. Miller didn't want that. He wanted to have the creature to himself for at least a few hours, to find out whether communication between them were possible. His hunting cabin sprang immediately into his mind as the ideal spot for secrecy.

Miller made a simple pantomime. He pointed to himself, then to the creature, then down the path. The metal being repeated the gesture with an arm as if in agreement.

Thereupon the man spurred his horse forward, crossed the road and looked back. *With ponderous steps the metal monster was following!*

The hunting cabin was five miles away. Miller rode his horse at a trot, looked back frequently to see the incredible miracle following him like a dog. He began to wonder what he would do next. The creature had no mouth and therefore no voice. It had ears to hear but no tongue to speak.

Then another thought struck him—it had eyes to see and fingers to write! If it had a reasonable intelligence he ought to be able to show it the connection between written words and their meanings. But that would take days—

Miller jumped from his horse when they came to his cabin, took a swift glance inside, then returned to

the metal monster which stood motionless near the door. Miller pulled a card from his pocket and wrote with his fountain pen a short message to Jussy.

*"I am staying at the cabin over-night. Come this evening with some plain food. Whatever you hear or see, Jussy, come up to the cabin."*

He pinned the card to the saddle horn, headed Old Baldy down the trail a ways and gave him a slap on his haunches. With a whinny the horse galloped out of sight.

Emotionless lackluster mechanical eyes followed the man as he stepped again into the cabin, to come out this time with several sheets of yellowed wrapping paper and a flat board. Miller printed the word man in large capitals with his fountain pen and showed it to the creature, pointing to himself. Then he wrote the word tree and pointed to a near-by oak. Then he wrote eye and pointed both to his own and the creature's eyes.

This done he drew a long breath and held the paper toward the metal being, wondering if it would understand. He watched in fascination as a double-elbowed arm unbent, raising a hand with one out-stretched finger. Unerringly the finger pointed to man, tree and eye and their corresponding words.

"Lord!" muttered the human. "It understands!"

HE THEN made a list of ten more simple nouns—grass, leaf, bark, house, men, cap, leg, arm, dirt and car. He went through the list once and to his astonishment the creature duplicated his designations without the least hesitation. It not only had human-like intelligence but it seemed to have a phenomenal memory to remember words it had never seen before in relation to their counterparts.

Miller next tried less concrete ideas —jumping, running, waving, air, sky, light and shade etc. Sometimes he had to repeat his pantomimes once or twice but invariably the metal being caught on and repeated them and pointed to the correct word.

This miraculous display of keen intellect convinced Miller that he was dealing with a mind at least equal to his own. After trying many dozen more words Miller heard the sound of hoof-beats. Jussy came up on Old Baldy.

"I brought ya sump'n to eat like ya said, suh," began Jussy, holding out a paper package. "But w'at does y'all mean by—"

His eyes at that moment encountered the Robot Alien, which had been partly in shadow and practically invisible from the trail. Jussy's black skin grew three shades lighter and his eyes popped in terror.

With a shriek he reined Old Baldy about and attempted to leave but his master had a firm grip on the bridle.

"Lemme go!" wailed Jussy. "Ah jus' seen de Debbil—jump on, suh, an' le's go w'ile de goin' is good!"

"Listen to me!" said Miller, hardly knowing whether to laugh or be angry. "Jussy, look up!"

"Yassuh!" said the darky, un-covering his face and looking at his master.

Be it said here and now that Abriel Jussy, though little known to the world and far less honored than such men as Chief of Police Saunders of Joliet, Captain Pompersnap and Major Whinny of Fort Sheridan and Colonel Snoosharp of the Secret Service, had more courage in his simple heart than any of them. Once his master had vouched for his safety and once he had seen that the fearsome metal creation was as gentle as a kitten, he dropped his instinctive fears and looked at it in curiosity.

"Come along," said Miller, who knew human nature. "Let me show you my pet and what I have taught him already."

In Miller's mind the metal being had changed from an "it" to a "him" on partaking of semi-human attributes. He held up the paper so that the mechanical eyes could see and pointed to man, whereupon a tentacular arm swung first to the master, then to the servant.

"See?" said Miller with pride in his voice. "He understands."

"Lawd help me," commented Jus-sy. "Der mus' be a man inside o' it."

"I don't think so, Jussy, not a man! But I do think there's a brain or a creature with a brain in it. And believe me, Jussy, that brain is a mighty intelligent one."

"Yassah. But what y'all plans to do, suh, wit' dat t'ing, now ya got it heah?"



"Jussy," began Miller, "I'm go-ing to teach that creature the Eng-lish language by means of words in print. I don't care if it takes a month or a year. I'm going to live right here at the cabin and you and Jamie will bring me food.

"You circulate the news at home that I've gone to Europe or China or somewhere and won't be back for an indefinite period. You and Jamie are going to bring me books, too, lots of them with pictures—and paper—and pencils—and a special oversized metal pencil for that metal man so that he can write and tell me what he knows, after he learns enough to write.

"Jussy, old boy, we're going to surprise the whole world!"

## **CHAPTER VI PROXIES FROM MARS**

AN abridged version of Frank Miller's famous work "The Robot Aliens" follows:

It is sad indeed that the au-thorities misconstrued the events immediately following the land-ing of the mystery ship in north-ern Illinois and saw fit to declare a state of war on what were known as the Metal Monsters. For the following paragraphs will demonstrate that the 'Metal Mon-sters' were not ferocious enemies of mankind but simply proxy am-bassadors from the civilization of the planet Mars, ingenious robots that took the place of flesh-and-blood Martians in the long and trying trip through space.

On June 15th of this year of grace, 1952, I met the sole surviv-ing Robot Alien on a desert road between Henderson and Owens-boro, Kentucky. Whatever upheld my courage I do not know, except that it was perhaps an intuition or hunch that the fearsome crea-ture I saw approaching was fear-some in appearance only. Never-theless, I held my ground and watched it.

That started our contact, for I thereupon led it to my private cab-in in the woods and started the task of communicating with it.

The Robot Alien confided in me recently that it had more than once tried to get into close contact with earthly beings but none had had the courage to stop and face him! Incredible fact!

In two months I taught the Robot Alien enough so that we could exchange information of a simple sort. It seems strange that I should speak of the Robot Alien as a living being when actually it is a machine, but since I do not know the name of the Martian he represents—we used the symbol X between us—and since the Robot Alien itself is more real to me than its controlling power mil-lions of miles across space, it is easier to speak of the robot as the actual being.

Briefly, X on Mars and his two companions, Y and Z, constructed, after a lifetime of work, the three robots which we saw here on earth. These three ingenious mechanisms were encased in a welded ellipsoid, along with nu-merous instruments, and shot to earth under rocket power.

The ship took four months to cross the void. Every last bit of rocket fuel was used up in the landing but it was not enough to prevent a terrific crash. Only the incredibly tough hull saved the contents from being ground into metal hash. As it was, one of the robots and several of the instru-ments were damaged.

Now a word is necessary on the robots themselves. What they are run by or what ingenious mechani-cal principle operates them I do not know—our present inter-change of words includes nothing of such involved things. But I am confident that years of effort on the part of scientists and en-gineers will finally bring all that out.

For my part of the affair I know only that the contact between X, Y and Z and their respective ro-bots was unbelievably intimate.

The Robot Alien—or rather X, by means of the Robot Alien ex-isting on earth today)—assures me that he hears and sees and moves as surely and accurately as though he were a human being walking around on earth! To X, the Martian, he is almost as fully living on earth as though he were here instead of encased in some sort of complicated control cham-ber on Mars!

Thus it will be understood that when the Robot Aliens stepped from their ship and first cast eyes on Earth it was with the same thrill that an Earthman would get stepping from a ship and gazing at Martian topography!

It was Z's robot that was injured in the crash, its legs mangled beyond use. Accordingly, the other two carried Z's robot out of the ship so that it could help with the instruments. These instruments are, for the most part, incomprehensible to me and X did not try to explain them. However, I know that they tested such things as gravity-pull, air-density, air-composition and sunlight intensity, all for their Martian scientific records.

The Robot Alien managed to convey to me that they were astonished beyond all measure at the fear the earth-people showed from the first. It may interest humanity that X considers that human reaction a trait of low intelligence and poor reasoning powers that are completely dominated by an instinctive emotion that surprised them. My own inference from this is that Martian civilization, vastly older and more advanced than ours, has uprooted and cast out that atavistic emotion known as 'fear.'

At the precipitate panic and flight of over a hundred persons on the first morning—(when all X wanted was to get into communication with them)—the Martians were puzzled. However, they bent to their work and completed most of it by the next day. When an armed party of humans approached they were overjoyed that at last they would establish contact with Earthpeople.

Imagine X's astonishment, when, after advancing a step to meet them, they fled in fright and shot their rifles at him! X was mystified and ran after them, which action caused the absolute rout of five hundred soldiers and ten thousand civilians.

When the bombardment started X and Y tried to drag Z inside the ship but the imminence of destruction to the three of them caused them to save two robots at the expense of one. It was quite by accident that they entered Chicago but curiosity led them onward as far as the Loop, where frantic motorists killed one another in their childish frenzy to save their own paltry necks from an imagined fear. They then abruptly left Chicago, which X tells me is a pitifully tiny city compared to those of Mars, and decided to see as much of earth as possible.

The determined air attack decided them to separate for a better chance to survive the fury of the queer Earth-beings, whose intellect was so low that they could think only of battle when they saw something beyond their ken. Y got his robot as far as the Pennsylvania borderline before a certain clever general ambushed it and blew it to a million worthless pieces, little realizing that he had in one mad moment destroyed a lifetime of work by a being ten times more intelligent and worthy than himself.

It is not for me to judge or to condemn as to the manner in which the authorities acted when the Robot Aliens confronted human eyes. But I think that the mere reading of these facts will bring a flush of shame to many a man who had something to do with the welcome accorded our ambassadors from Mars.

Nevertheless X says that he is glad he finally came into communication with earthpeople and that he hopes much interchange of information will take place.

All technical questions will have to be left in the air at present till we are able to teach X the intricacies of our language. After all he knows as yet less of the language than any ten-year-old on Earth—which is the best I have been able to do in two months.

At the first request from the authorities I will turn over the Robot Alien to the scientists who will be able to do far more than I have in the matter of interchanging thought. But they must have patience, for communicating solely by writing is laborious, especially when one subject must be taught the meaning of each new word, sometimes by lengthy processes.

With greetings from X on Mars, end this brief work,

BERT BODELL pointed dramatically skyward as he looked around the group of young boys and girls collected about his 'scope.

"Here comes Mars! Now let me adjust the clock and point the 'scope and then we'll all take a look."

This done, one after the other they peeped through at a small lumpy orange in the sky; some had to be dragged away from the eyepiece.

One girl's voice came awed from the darkness:

"Who'd think it possible for those funny things to come from away-y-y up there!"

"So I just stood there kinda fierce-like," said Lieutenant Arpy for the 864th time, "an' looked back at

it. The thing was chilly to look at but it didn't really scare me. You don't believe the papers, do ya, Murphy, when they says everybody ran? I'm telling ya, so help me Hannah, I stood there all the while!"

Murphy rolled a haggard eye at the clock. Two a.m. and he hadn't had a wink of sleep yet! In fact he hadn't had much sleep on night duty at the switchboard any more since the meteor had landed.

Lieutenant Arpy started version number 865 . . .

"Now, I had a suspicion all the time, Peabody, that those Robot Aliens were from Mars. Of course, I didn't say so in my interview be-cause I hadn't quite decided at the time and thought it better to make it general. But if I'm not mistaken I was the first to even suggest an extra-terrestrial origin for the Robot Aliens. Wasn't I, Peabody?"

"Yes, Professor Honstein. By the way, sir, you speak tonight at the Astronomy Conclave on the subject of 'The New Orbit of Pluto.' "

Peabody was the forgetful pro-fessor's faithful Boswell and mem-orandum pad. Such reminders as this he had just made were absolute-ly necessary in the savant's hap-hazard life.

"Oh, tut, tut, Peabody. "The New Orbit of Pluto' be hanged! I am going to speak tonight to my brother astronomers, yes, but not about Pluto. I shall speak, Peabody, on my personal experiences with the Robot Aliens! We must not forget that I was the first to suggest that they came from extra-terrestrial regions."

"Confidentially, though," whis-pered Captain Pompersnap to his ogling relatives, "I myself saw the folly of attacking the Robot Aliens without first ascertaining if they had any belligerent tendencies! You know, we men of the Army must obey our superiors without question, mentioning no names!"

His manner told much to the lis-teners, who one and all thought his actions had been above reproach.

At the same moment, the arrogant Major Whinny was subtly hinting to a group of fellow politicians that higher authority had also misled him.

Under similar circumstances, Colonel Snoosharp pointed an accus-ing finger at Washington.

Secretary of War Rukke and the President volubly agreed that "misinformation from Fort Sheridan" had caused the war-action on peace-ful ambassadors.

A week after the work called The Robot Aliens was published, a mob stormed the Miller mansion at Owensboro, dynamited the last Ro-bot Alien to nothingness and burned Frank Miller alive. Their reason—(later published) —stated that Frank Miller was a Frankenftein who had loosed his irresponsible brain-children on a peaceful world and then attempted to cover his malign sin by concocting his cock-and-bull Mars story.

Since he had always been a decided recluse, not given to associating much with society, the mob had no trouble in believing he had always been a secret experimenter and had "made" the Robot Aliens in a spell of madness.

Of the storm of controversy and denunciation which that hideous ac-tion aroused, of the bloody but short civil war that followed, we will say nothing. But we will add that Frank Miller is only one of many geniuses who died martyrs to their enlight-ened beliefs. People of reason and high intelligence admit that some day Mars will again send proxy am-bassadors and vindicate his memory.

After all, "civilization" on Earth has only begun.