

# THE GOLDEN BARRIER

By G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS

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# THE GOLDEN



Hyatt grabbed the gun by the barrel and smashed the stock down on the man's skull

**By G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS**

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**Between the Hemispheres Rises a Wall of Doom, and Hyatt of International Police Tries to Break Earth's Solitary Confinement!**

CHAPTER I  
*Ship of Doom*

**W**HAT had happened could never have occurred. The records of the Eastern Seaboard Airways were there to prove

it was impossible. Not since the year 2135, over a century past, had anything remotely like it happened. That horrible catastrophe had been due to a break in the beam which guided Eastern Seaboard's giant stratoships across the Atlantic.

There was nothing wrong with the beam

# BARRIER

A Complete  
Novelet



now. It stretched its guiding finger unfailingly between the air harbors of Europe and America. And just as unfailingly, the ships of the stratosphere rode the beam—to sudden and inexplicable disaster.

Yet it could not have happened. Bill Hyatt,

Chief Inspector, International Police, knew that it could not have happened, considering the verb “to happen” in its strictest sense. There was some human agency behind it—a human agency with an inhuman brain. Century by century, human life had grown more precious, and yet this creator of

disaster snuffed out lives by the hundreds.

After twenty-four hours of such mass murder, the horror became known to the general public. That was when it became Bill Hyatt's job. For he was a policeman, and murder was still the gravest crime on the books.

The third west-bound ship reported overdue that night was the famous 456-D, pride of the line. When Bill Hyatt heard the despairing voice of the dispatcher at the air harbor report that the 456-D was thirty minutes late, he gave up all hope.

All that day there was frightful tension at the air harbor. Not a single stratoship had made port. Every one had been lost on a world that science had made too small, too old, and too wise to lose anything as large as a five-hundred-passenger stratoship.

The tension that belonged to the air harbor itself was reflected in the tired face of Bill Hyatt. He sat in his dome-like office on the top floor of the International Police Building. His gray eyes had watched the creeping hands of the radio impulse chronometer until his eyeballs ached. He had listened to the drone of the dispatcher's voice from the concealed radio reproducer until the voice became as hopeless and fatalistic as the music of a funeral dirge.

At three minutes after nine, the round aluminum door of Hyatt's office opened and Varna Roth came in. She was wearing shorts, a bolero, and a jaunty cape that hung from her straight shoulders to her slim curved hips. The material of her clothing was woven from spun plastic of a sea-green hue that was in startling contrast to her coppery red hair.

**A**SLOW smile softened the grimness of Hyatt's mouth and then faded when he saw that Varna had no smile to match his. Had the worry of the doomed stratoships come to plague her as it did Hyatt and the officials of Eastern Seaboard?

"You're worried, too?" he asked.

Varna walked to his desk, sat on it, and took his hand in hers.

"They've turned the stratoship disasters over to you, I suppose," she said quietly.

The smile returned to his face for a moment. The wisdom of this mere girl frequently amazed him.

"How the devil did you guess?" he demanded.

"Oh, the progress of centuries hasn't changed the status of a policeman much," she said sweetly. "He's still the public servant. It's a fact that when no one knows what to do, everybody always says, 'Send for Bill Hyatt, hell-buster and trouble-shooter.'"

She leaned far forward over the panel of colored push buttons on his desk and pressed her lips to his forehead. Beneath her lips she must have felt the puzzled frown that suddenly creased it.

"Is the problem so bad, Bill?" she whispered. "Tell me about it."

"It's bad," he replied savagely. "Not a ship has made port. The Four-fifty-six-D was sighted in the televisor awhile ago. She was going down fast. She wasn't off her course, but she had dropped far below the buoyancy level into the sub-stratosphere. Her weight seemed too much for even her emergency lift propellers to take her up again. All we can guess is that she sank into the sea."

Varna Roth shuddered. "Horrible!" she gasped.

Her troubled lips were so invitingly close to his face that he kissed her. Then he looked searchingly into her violet-blue eyes.

"But it's not just my worries that you're sharing," he stated probingly. "What else is bothering you? How's your father?"

"He had some sort of attack today," she said. "It baffled the physician who attended him. Naturally I'm worried."

"Naturally," Hyatt agreed gently. "I'm sorry to hear he isn't well. But I don't think there's much to worry about. Eighty years of age isn't much, when you consider his life-expectancy should be around a hundred and ten. What sort of attack was it?"

"That's what no one is able to tell me. Dad had Nat Larcher with him at lunch."

Larcher was president of Eastern Seaboard Airways.

"I think that explains it," Hyatt said. "Your father's trouble, I mean. You know Larcher."

"Larcher worries are everybody's worries—according to Larcher," Varna said, with a suddenly relieved laugh. "I suppose he did alarm

Dad too much about these air catastrophes.”

That slight frown on Hyatt’s forehead tightened.

“This time,” he said quietly, “there’s every reason for the people on this continent to share Larcher’s worries. This can’t go on, you know. Europe can be starved out inside of ten days. America has become like a corner grocery store to the other side, what with the ever-increasing speed and capacity of our stratoships. The wholesalers simply don’t lay in large supplies in Europe anymore.”

Varna’s deep blue eyes looked grave.

“I hadn’t thought of that,” she admitted. “But what can anybody do about it?”

**B**ILL HYATT looked across the dome-like room at the chronometer.

“The Nine-seventy-five-F, a freighter, leaves the harbor inside of thirty minutes. I think I’ll run out there now and follow its course right along with the dispatcher.”

Varna clutched Bill’s arm. Her level brows pulled down into a worried frown.

“Bill, isn’t that the ship your pal Frank Kenna is master pilot on?”

Hyatt nodded. “And if anybody can lick this thing, Kenna can.”

“But surely they won’t let him go!”

“You don’t know Kenna the way I do,” Hyatt said. “The man doesn’t live who could stop him.”

From Hyatt’s office to the air harbor was a fifteen-minute journey via the tube. Arriving at the huge field, the boundary lights of which seemed to be at the distant horizon, Bill and Varna found the 975-F. She was drawn up between two loading towers, where cranes lowered food into her hold.

She would carry food for Europe—old, war-ravished Europe. In the last conflict that had spread entirely across the Eastern Hemisphere, a poison gas had been employed, which had burned the soil, destroying forever the fertility of the farm lands. Asia and North Africa had become vast desert wastes. The dwindling populations of their countries had crowded into Europe, but there had been no food, no fertile lands on which to produce it.

Now, in this era of peace, Europe had

become one enormous nation of manufacturers, depending entirely upon the agricultural products of the Western World for food.

Bill and Varna found Frank Kenna standing outside the office of the Eastern Seaboard Company, talking to none other than Nat Larcher himself. The president of the company was a short, square-shouldered man, with a perfectly hairless head and slightly protruding eyes. As Bill and Varna approached, they heard Larcher say to the lanky pilot:

“I have given orders for all ships to be grounded, except the freighter you are flying, Pilot Kenna. If you want to refuse to fly the Nine-seventy-five-F tonight, you may do so without running the risk of earning a demerit.”

Kenna thrust out an angular chin and shook his helmeted head.

“I’ll get through, sir. Somebody’s got to do it.”

Abruptly Kenna saw Bill and Varna. His wide lips stretched in a smile, and he took three huge strides to meet Hyatt. He shook the chief inspector’s hand, nodded genially to Varna.

“I wondered how long it would be before you showed up, you old bloodhound.”

Hyatt didn’t smile. He gripped Kenna’s hand hard, searched the flier’s face with his keen gray eyes.

“I could arrest you and keep you here on the ground, Kenna. Don’t you realize you’re flying out into a great guess tonight?”

**K**ENNA kept smiling. Nothing ever damped his good humor. He looked out over the lighted field, saw the huge stratoships that were clumped together near the repair shops. A tall wire fence had been thrown up around them. Guards carrying automatic rifles paced back and forth.

“All this progress in air transportation wasn’t achieved by grounding fliers when they were about to go out into a great guess, as you call it, Bill,” Kenna said. “Suppose I do put off flying tonight. It can’t be put off forever, you know. People in Europe will get hungry. Men, women, and kids have to have food. I’m thinking mostly of the kids, I guess. And when I think that way, I can’t quit. And nobody can make me quit.”

"I could order Kenna to stay on the ground," Nat Larcher declared, grinning wryly. "But I don't want to start a mutiny."

"That's it, sir," Kenna said. "There certainly would be one hell of a loud and bloody revolt. I can give you a promise on that."

Larcher took Kenna's right hand in both of his. His protruding eyes fastened hard on the master pilot's lean face.

"Best of luck, Kenna," he said huskily.

The pilot laughed. "I never needed luck yet. Just give me a beam to ride on and I'll make it."

Striding to the 975-F, he swung onto the lower step of a tower that reached out a gleaming gang-plank toward the pilot cabin of the ocean-spanning, food-laden freighter.

Larcher, Bill Hyatt, and Varna Roth stood unhappily at the door of the president's office and watched in somber silence.

They saw the two auxiliary helicopters fasten themselves to the wings of the stratoship freighter. The helicopters were called "tugs," after the small power-boats of ancient times that used to pull giant ocean liners in and out of water harbors. Shortly the tugs would roar and grunt, hauling the great ship into the stratosphere for which it had been designed. Seven hours later, the 975-F would be lowered by other tugs to a European port—if nothing happened! But things—nameless things—*had* been happening.

Larcher, Bill and Varna waved back at Frank Kenna as he appeared at the pilot window. A light glowed on the snout of the ship, signaling that the starting time had been reached. The great horizontal props of the helicopters began to turn. When the mobile loading towers rolled back from the sides of the ship, the roar of the tugs became deafening, confusing, thought-deadening. The ship lifted smoothly, with deceptive ponderousness, rising to fly into the deadly unknown....

## CHAPTER II *The Wall*

**B**ILL HYATT'S heart was beating at a furious rate. Why, he didn't know. Stratosphere flights were as common as a bus trip of ancient

days and a hundred times safer. But somehow the take-off of the 975-F gave him the same uneasy feeling he got whenever he watched an experimental rocket being launched for another futile attempt to reach Venus. Varna Roth must have felt the same way.

"Bill," she said, "do you remember the last time you and I were out here? We watched a band of explorers who were rocket-bound for Venus. You said then that man was not yet ready to bridge the gap between the planets."

Bill remembered that night. He remembered the faint, far-away voice of some super-scientist on Venus, speaking over the radio, warning the men of Earth not to make the attempt. The people of Venus, much more advanced in science than the people of Earth, had tried to bridge that black sea of space years ago, and had failed. That night, the Venusians had pleaded with the men of Earth not to make the attempt.

But of course the rocket crew hadn't listened. Important as life was, progress was even more vital. Weeks later, a twisted, molten lump of metal had been found in the North African desert. Inside the wrecked monster that had once been a rocket, the charred bodies of the explorers had been found.

Both Bill and Varna seemed to possess tragic foresight. They were as fearful for Frank Kenna and the crew of the 975-F as they had been for those men on the rocket bound for Venus. They watched until the lights of the freighter were as a moving constellation of stars in the heavens. Then came the distant, deep-throated roar of the freighter's motors that told them the helicopter tugs were about to detach themselves from the wings.

Nat Larcher plucked Bill Hyatt's sleeve. Bill turned, looked into the eyes of the Eastern Seaboard's president. Larcher's eyes looked like marbles that had been stuck onto a billiard ball of a head.

"What do we do now, Inspector?" he asked.

"I'm going to watch that flight from beginning to the—to the end," Bill said quietly, deliberately correcting his falter.

"We don't have to go to the dispatcher's office," Larcher replied. "Come in here with me. I have a relay unit from the dispatcher's office and

a visa-screen.”

The door of Larcher’s office was little more than a kiosk that covered the steps which led into a vast underground apartment. It was Larcher’s strange idea of a home. Here he could maintain a constant hold on the vast transportation industry which he directed.

Larcher was a European by birth. In his younger days, he had been forced to flee his native land because he had become involved in political intrigue. America had offered him a home, and he had rapidly become one of the country’s leading executives. Because Larcher was a European, Bill Hyatt was not surprised to find one room of the underground apartment devoted to a botanical collection. He mused that it was curious how the very sterility of European soil prompted the typical European to fall in love with growing things.

**B**ILL and Varna followed Larcher through a huge conservatory, where plants from all over the world bloomed in artificial sunlight. Hyatt came to a stop in front of a foliage bed.

“What’s this stuff, Mr. Larcher?” he asked.

Larcher laughed. “I’m an ardent collector, am I not? That’s not particularly ornamental, but it has an interesting history.”

Bill nodded soberly, his eyes narrowed thoughtfully.

“*Datura meteloides*, isn’t it?”

If Larcher had had any eyebrows worthy of the name, he would have raised them. Varna Roth, who always felt proud of Bill’s amazing range of knowledge, told Larcher that he would be surprised how much Bill knew. He had often astonished her father, who was a famous building designer, with his startlingly profound understanding of architecture.

“A policeman,” Bill explained modestly, “is supposed to know a little about everything and not much about anything. Let’s get to the visa-screen, Larcher.”

The president opened a door and stood aside. They entered a room that was not large. One of the walls was entirely occupied by the visa-screen of a television outfit. A man with an egg-shaped head and upstanding honey-colored hair was seated at the control panel. When Larcher entered,

he snapped out of his chair and stood at attention.

“Howards,” Larcher ordered, “you will plug in on the chief dispatcher’s office.”

“Yes,” Hyatt said. “I’ll want to talk with the dispatcher.”

The man with the honey-colored hair seated himself stiffly at the controls. A moment later, the visa-screen showed the interior of the dispatcher’s office, including the mammoth visa-screen of that office—a sort of picture within a picture.

A light glowed on the panel in Larcher’s room. The blond man called Howards turned to Hyatt.

“You may transmit now, Chief Inspector,” he stated.

“Dispatcher,” Hyatt said, speaking at the spectacled man visible on the visa-screen, “I want to talk to Frank Kenna on Nine-seventy-five F. Bring the ship in on your screen, please. I want to follow his course closely. I am Inspector Hyatt.”

The chief dispatcher manipulated his controls. Almost instantly the flying freighter appeared on the screen. Like a silvery streak across the darkness, her wing lights were glowing defiantly. They could hear the dispatcher’s voice.

“Pilot Kenna, Inspector Hyatt wishes to talk to you.”

“Bill, you old damn fool!” Frank Kenna’s voice boomed, “Go take a walk. You can relax. Nine-seventy-five F is right on schedule, riding high on the beam.”

“Keep me posted, Frank,” Hyatt said. “I’m with you in this all the way.”

“Okay,” Kenna called back.

Mentally Bill mapped the course of the freighter. She would be dropping south steadily now, heading toward Bermuda. There was a beam relay station on the island that pointed with an invisible finger across the Atlantic to the freighter’s destination.

Instead of watching the lights of the freighter on the screen and waiting for further reports from her pilot, the president said he would go out and order some refreshment.

**N**O sooner had Larcher left the room than Varna leaned forward out of the near-gloom of the television room. She put her trembling hand on Hyatt’s knee.

"Bill, what's Larcher's idea of having those grounded ships out there guarded? Did you notice the temporary fence?"

"I did. Larcher's a European, don't forget—a man who's constantly on the lookout for foul play. He suspects that these disasters might be the result of sabotage. He had the Nine-seventy-five-F double-checked before it started out. He's got the other ships closely guarded."

Larcher returned shortly ahead of a servant who brought refreshing drinks for them. Bill Hyatt looked at the proffered tray and shook his head.

"Come, take something, Inspector," Larcher urged. "If you intend to spend seven hours watching that freighter, you'll need nourishment to sustain you."

"Thanks, I really don't want anything," Bill said.

He kept his intently staring eyes on the screen and the unfaltering lights of the 975-F.

Forty minutes went by, and stretched into an hour. Frank Kenna's reports were delivered in a voice that scoffed at Hyatt's warnings. Though they came through with monotonous regularity, Hyatt didn't relax, nor did Varna. Her fingers were gripped tightly on his wrist. The blond man at the control panel sat as though he had a rod of iron in place of a spine. The spectacled dispatcher in the freighter's European destination was no less tense.

Suddenly the silver streak that marked the freighter vanished from the screen!

Hyatt sprang to his feet, saw the dispatcher spin a dial on his panel, focusing frantically. Once more the 975-F came into view.

"Pilot Kenna!" quavered the dispatcher tautly. "You lost altitude."

There wasn't any answer for several moments. When it finally came, Frank Kenna's voice was calm but not exactly cocky.

"So I notice," he said.

Bill Hyatt went over to Howards' control panel and spoke quietly into the transmitter.

"Frank, you'd better turn back."

There was no answer.

**T**HE 975-F kept constantly slipping from the visa-screen, only to be brought back by the frantic efforts of the dispatcher.

"Frank, can't you hear me?" Bill demanded sharply.

"Yes," Kenna replied. "I can hear you, all right. But I'm going through. Somebody's got to."

"No," Hyatt said. "Not you, Frank. You're dropping steadily."

"I'm going through," Kenna retorted. His voice was strained, unnatural.

"I can arrest you for insubordination!" Hyatt shouted.

Larcher added his worried plea.

"Kenna, if you do not value your life, think of the ship and cargo. I order you to return to port at once."

The sky freighter slipped out of sight again. When the dispatcher brought it once more into focus, not even the most dexterous manipulation of the dials could keep it there. Now and then the falling ship would flash onto the screen, but it was visual torture to watch it. The motors of the freighter were pushed to the limit. Their straining roar came through clearly on the radio.

"Kenna, turn back!"

Hyatt clenched his fists until the fingernails bit into his palms.

"Turning back now," Frank bellowed shakily above the motor noise. "I'll try to make Bermuda. I'll try—"

The sinking stratoship appeared briefly on the screen, her nose pointing westward. Before it dived deep into airways which it had never been designed to navigate, Bill Hyatt saw something he had not noticed before. The ship should have appeared as a silver color on the screen. Instead, it had a definitely brownish cast.

For a moment, only the roar of the freighter's motors could be heard within the room. Then came Kenna's voice, sounding as faint and faraway as a voice from another world.

"Bill, I can't break through! I can't do it. It's a wall! It's a—"

There was such sudden silence that it hurt their eardrums.

Slowly Hyatt sank into his chair as the visa-screen darkened. The bright metal knobs on the control panel in front of him were like many pointed stars to his eyes.

"Bill," Varna said, her voice low and choked, "does that mean Frank's ship is—doomed?"



He couldn't answer. But he thought she could guess.

\* \* \*

**D**R. HAMEL CARTWRIGHT was a consultant for Eastern Seaboard Airways. He leaned back comfortably in his chair and took slow drags from his pipe. He had been stationed at the Bermuda radio beam relay station for several months now, and he was acting as official host to Bill Hyatt of the International Police.

From Cartwright's glassed-in porch, Bill Hyatt could look out across the sea that had swallowed the 975-F and its crew three nights before. The stars, like pinholes in a vast sheet of black paper, twinkling wisely, as if they alone held the answer to the riddle of the missing stratoships.

For three days and four nights, there had been no traffic between America and Europe. Already the teaming population of industrial Europe was tightening its belt. In an effort to avoid the invisible wall that separated the two hemispheres, a robot-controlled plane had been sent out for California, bound for Asia. Following the plane with the televisor, Hyatt had learned that there was a similar wall in the Pacific, about four hundred miles off the coast.

Dr. Hamel Cartwright listened to this explanation from Bill Hyatt. Finally he voiced the opinion which had been headlined in the newscasts the day before.

"The Earth must be belted by a force-wall," he said.

"That theory has given people something to sink their teeth into, anyway," Hyatt said. "But I think it's all wrong. I admit that Frank Kenna's last words were that he couldn't break through some sort of wall. If it had been a wall of force, though, would the freighter have bogged down the way she did? Maybe I'm nuts, but I got the idea the Nine-seventy-five-F hit a storm of molten lava."

"That's being unscientific," Cartwright snorted.

"Maybe, but it's a pretty good comparison. If we could only find some of the old ocean-going craft—something like that ship, the *Queen Mary*,

mentioned in the history books—it would come in pretty handy right now. It might keep Europe from starving. As it is, I could find only three small power-boats to use in hunting for the lost stratoship."

"Are you expecting to hear from your investigators soon?"

"They ought to produce some results tonight," Hyatt said. "Then maybe we'll be nearer the truth. You scientists have blamed this thing on Northern Lights and Sun spots—"

"Force-wall," Cartwright corrected. "At least, I'm original."

"Well, until we've seen the wreck, we're just guessing blindly.

A voice intruded on the thoughtful silence that followed. It came from the radio which rested on the table beside Cartwright's elbow.

"Calling Inspector Hyatt."

The doctor picked up the transmitter and handed it to Hyatt. The voice was that of Parsons, one of the men on the three power-boats that were being used to search for the wreck of the 975-F.

"Our electrical soundings indicate a large deposit of aluminum alloy on the ocean bed, about three miles off-shore," Parsons reported. "We can get to it in a depth sphere without any pressure trouble."

"Good," Hyatt said. "Pick me up at the dock immediately."

"But there's something else, Inspector. According to our instrument readings, another metal is clearly indicated besides the aluminum and steel alloys you'd expect to find in a stratoship. It's bothered us a good deal because we can't explain it. But we've checked our readings carefully. We're certain that there's pure gold mixed up in it somewhere!"

"Gold?" Dr. Cartwright whirled his chair around and stared at Hyatt and the radio. "Your man's crazy!" he snapped. "Gold, the most useless of all metals? Gold on a stratoship? Why, the ancients couldn't even make decent pen-points out of the stuff without tipping them with iridium. Since the world stopped using gold as a medium of exchange, after America found she had it all and couldn't do anything with it—Why, the stuff's valueless!"

"It's a sure thing that no gold was alloyed

with the metal of the stratoship," Hyatt confessed. "Unless—"

He stopped, suddenly looking seaward. There was something in his gray eyes betraying that he saw farther than the foamy white caps that dashed against the rocky shore.

"Unless what?" Cartwright asked.

"Oh, just a crazy idea of mine."

The inspector left the room abruptly.

### CHAPTER III *The Golden Beam*

**B**Y the time Hyatt reached the rickety dock, one of the ancient motor craft was ready to come alongside. Hyatt took a long-legged stride that landed him in the boat. The man at the wheel put around and headed out to sea.

There were two of Hyatt's deputy inspectors on board. They fired a continuous stream of questions at him, but got only unwilling, half-formed answers. Bill's mind was busy with the vague notion he had conceived while on Dr. Cartwright's porch. It was almost too incredible to be put into words.

The anchored boat, with which Parsons had marked the location of what he believed to be the sunken stratoship, had a depth sphere in tow. Parsons and Hyatt squeezed through the hatch of the sphere and were sealed in its cramped interior. Hastily the necessary air-hose and electrical connections were made.

"The wreck, if that's what it is," Parsons said, "is lodged on a reef down there."

He turned on a small bulb that illuminated the sphere's confines as it was lowered toward the ocean bed. There he switched on the powerful polarized searchlights with which the device was equipped.

It was not the first time Hyatt had descended in a depth sphere, but he had never quite got used to the idea. A strange sense of depression inevitably came over him. He felt like a prying intruder, sneaking into a dark and forbidden world, when the light beams cut through gloom that until then had probably never been dispelled.

Looking through a port, Hyatt got his first glimpse of the sunken ship. It seemed precariously

balanced on a pinnacle of rock which must have pierced the metal hull. It looked like a gigantic eagle poised for flight on a mountain peak.

Hyatt clutched his assistant's arm.

"Look!" he whispered.

He brought one of the incredibly efficient lights to bear on the craft. Every part of the stratoship was plated with gold!

"But—but how could it fly?" Parsons stammered.

"Yes," Hyatt said quietly. "How could it fly? The answer is pretty obvious when you consider that the atomic weight of gold is almost as high as that of lead. It couldn't fly."

"But where did the gold come from?"

Hyatt shook his head, his face grim.

"Surface, and make it in a hurry," he ordered.

"I don't understand," Parsons complained as he jerked at the controls.

"I don't either. But I was thinking awhile ago, sitting on Cartwright's porch. I was thinking that there's gold in the sea—lots of it, suspended in infinitely small particles. I remember reading something about it in an old chemistry text. It was right after the Second World War that some scientist discovered a way of extracting gold from sea water by ionization. But the scientist's discovery came too late to be of much service.

"If you remember your history, the Second World War was an economic one. The old order of economics and financing battled against a system of barter. Wars achieve nothing, we all agree. But at least we learned from that war the absurdity of having a precious metal for a medium of exchange. That was about three hundred years ago..."

Hyatt's voice drifted off into silence as he toyed with the idea.

**T**HE depth sphere rose rapidly, with Parsons working efficiently to neutralize the air and water pressure. When Hyatt climbed out of the open hatch after they reached the surface, he heard a hoarse cry. It came from one of the power-boats that had drifted out into the darkness.

Hyatt and Parsons scrambled into the boat that had drawn the depth sphere. As they did so, the boat from which the cry had come started cutting across the waves toward them. The man at

the wheel shouted Hyatt's name, cut his motor, allowed a swell to lift his craft and slap it down alongside Hyatt's boat. Hyatt ordered searchlights turned on the craft.

"Look, Inspector!" cried the man at the wheel of the other boat. "Look at Paul up there in the bow. Out there a way, it's raining gold! Look at Paul."

The man in the bow of the boat leaped across to Hyatt's launch. He was holding out his hands and arms in front of him. His flesh was covered with particles of gold that snowed off under Hyatt's touch. Even the man's face was gilded in spots.

"It got into my lungs, Inspector," the man gasped huskily. "I was forward in the boat and noticed it was getting hard to breath. When I lighted my pipe, I saw my hands. The front end of our boat seemed to be in a sort of gold storm."

The man pointed back over his shoulder with a gilded finger.

Bill sprang to the searchlight and swung it around in the indicated direction. The beam revealed nothing until he manipulated the lens control, flattening the beam. The effect was like that of a knife-edge of sunlight filtering into a dark room, revealing particles of dust floating in the air. Only this dust gleamed dully, and it wasn't floating. It was racing apparently with the speed of light—straight upward into the blackness—a moving wall of gold particles that reached into the stratosphere and beyond!

A beam of gold, raying off into space, an impenetrable wall of gold, so far as stratoships were concerned....

Hyatt turned away from the searchlight and looked upward. High above the western horizon, the planet Venus, home of a people from whom Earthmen had heard but had never seen, mocked him with its brilliant, twinkling eye.

It smashed home to him as never before, the stark wonder of that far-off civilization on Venus. What minds those creatures must have! They had become so advanced in their experiments with radio and television that they had actually looked in upon their neighbors of Earth. Had they not proved their claim of super-intelligence by learning how to speak as Earthmen spoke?

Yet always those communications from

Venus had been in a superior voice—a voice that barely tolerated the lesser creatures of Earth. They had extracted information from the generous Earthmen, and had given almost nothing in return. Selfish were the voices from Venus. Like all Earthmen of his day, Hyatt longed to think the Venusians were humanitarians, because of their great intelligence. But he had to admit to himself that the voice from Venus had seemed utterly selfish.

**I**N brief, the facts compiled by Hyatt's staff of technicians were these—

The wall of moving gold particles ringed Earth and extended into outer space. The source of the gold was sea water itself. The particles had been ionized so that each was highly sensitive to other electrical charges. A force remote from Earth was attracting these electrically charged particles.

The nature of the force itself was not beyond understanding. Nothing more complicated was needed to attract the ionized gold than some equally powerful body of directly opposite charge.

It was the source of the force and how it was controlled that baffled the best scientists of Earth.

The "gold plating" of the stratoships was readily explained. Charged particles of gold, traveling at tremendous speed on this unknown beam of force from outer space, bombarded any object within their path. Streaking at enormous speeds through the thinnest atmosphere, the stratoships became statically charged. Naturally that made the gold particles cling to the metal of the ship, weighing it down.

In fact, so small were the ionized particles of gold that almost any object coming between them and their mysterious destination was certain to become coated with gold.

All this, Hyatt could understand. Understanding, however, and doing something about it were two widely different things. With a hunch that was born of sheer desperation, he had ordered the great new space-radio station to attempt contacting the intelligences of Venus. As yet, there had been no answer to Earth's call.

Immediately he put his men to work on a study of current requirements from various power transmission stations. He figured that ionization of

the gold particles would require a great deal of current. Any unexpected drain from any of the power stations was to be carefully checked.

But the stream of gold particles into outer space continued without let-up. The effect in Europe was horrible, terrifying. The Old World was hungry, and starving men do strange and unreasonable things.

Late that afternoon, following Hyatt's return to the mainland, a message reached his office from one of his European agents. A squad of light substratosphere planes had covered the continent, its great cities and important mining territories. Handbills had been scattered, violent enough to alarm the most phlegmatic of men—and Bill Hyatt was not phlegmatic.

Bread or bombs,  
Which will you have?  
We can deliver either  
On short notice.

Such scraps of paper had kindled Europe before now. The International Police were desperately trying to find the source of these handbills, yet go about their work sanely. But Europe was still starving and thinking murderous thoughts and growling angrily.

Curiously enough, blame for the whole catastrophe fell upon the shoulders of America. Reflecting upon that point, Hyatt could hardly see how it could be otherwise. In turning back the pages of history, anyone could see that Europe was constantly blaming America for its ills. America had been accused of not entering European wars and thus prolonging them. She had been blamed for entering European wars and prolonging them. European poverty had inevitably been called the result of America prosperity.

**T**HE following day, there was still no word from Venus, nor had Hyatt's agent discovered any unusual drain on the power-transmitting stations. And something occurred which no one but Bill Hyatt had expected to happen.

At three o'clock that afternoon, the President of America called Bill Hyatt's office and said that something had to be done immediately. The ban on shipping, created by Hyatt and the

International Police in cooperation with Eastern Seaboard Airways, had to be lifted.

"That's impossible, Mr. President," Bill said into the radio transmitter. "Lifting the ban won't dissolve a wall of gold that can't be broken through or surmounted."

"But, good Lord, Man!" the president raged. "I've been handed an ultimatum from the European General Council. The claim is that we are trying to extend a stranglehold on Europe, trying to dominate the nations of the East. They've gathered an enormous fleet of stratoships loaded with bombs. We haven't enough air defenses."

"We have," Hyatt said. "We've got a wall of gold that's not of our making. If a strato-bomber can break through, I'd like to see her do it. I tell you, this situation is beyond our control. Why isn't Venus answering my persistent calls? Answer that, and you may have the answer to the whole mess. The best we can do is try to prevent the European bomber fleet from annihilating itself in the golden wall. But to consider the matter selfishly, I don't see what we have to worry about. They can't touch us."

The President and the Minister of Defense, though, were badly worried about the bombers that had massed for an attack on America. What if the wall of gold didn't hold? Suppose the inexplicable wall stopped existing as suddenly as it had come into existence!

With these questions troubling them, they went to the arsenal at Newark and opened its enormous locked doors. Instantly panic broke loose in America. The arsenal, a supposedly impregnable fortress had been looted of all its powerful Archimedes Earth-Mover bombs!

The International Police went to work, quickly arresting the guards at the arsenal. As the result of questioning, which was carefully checked by the most advanced lie detectors, it was learned that the guards were all hirelings of somebody they knew only as the "Master."

But that wasn't the only headache for Bill Hyatt. The arsenal was the masterpiece of a really great designer. Its many doors were equipped with special combination locks, the secret of which was known only to the President, the Secretary of Defense—and, of course, the man who designed

the locks. And the designer's name was Archibald Roth. He was Varna Roth's father!

CHAPTER IV  
*Voice from Venus*

**A**FTER dark that evening, while Hyatt was waiting anxiously for word from Venus, Varna Roth was announced. She practically strode into the chief inspector's high-domed chamber. There was high color in her cheeks and dangerous lights in her blue eyes.

"Bill, what do you mean by arresting Dad!" she demanded.

Hyatt got up from his desk, came around it slowly. His gray eyes looked as though they had forgotten what it was like to close in peaceful slumber.

"Your father isn't arrested, Varna," he said. "He's merely being held for questioning."

"You let him go instantly! He didn't have anything to do with this trouble at the arsenal. Aren't you ashamed to pick on an old man that way? You let him go, Bill! Do you hear me?"

He shrugged hopelessly.

"There's nothing I can do about it. Your father will be released as soon as he has been questioned. Varna, I don't have to tell you I think he's absolutely above reproach. But this isn't a personal affair. It's an international crisis."

As she glared up at his pale, haggard face, the angry lights in her eyes softened. Worry had dug deep lines around his mouth and across his forehead.

"Bill, you're dead on your feet! You don't know what you're doing. Why, I'll bet you don't even know that a button on your desk is glowing right now!"

"Where?" he blurted wildly.

He whirled around and stared at the column of buttons. The space-radio station indicator was flashing red. Even rigid discipline could not steady his finger when he pressed the button.

"We've picked up the carrier wave from Venus, Inspector," said the disembodied voice of the radio operator.

"Good! Put me right on their wave."

Eagerly Varna ran to Hyatt and caught his

arm, felt him trembling with excitement.

"Is it really Venus?" she asked breathlessly.

"Hush," he whispered tensely. "Just keep quiet and play...."

A thin musical note vibrated from the loudspeaker concealed in the ceiling and lingered with unbearable poignancy, growing deeper and more distant before it died away.

"Venus?" Hyatt breathed almost reverently. "This is Inspector Hyatt, of the International Police."

Across space, at the speed of light, his voice traveled. But nine minutes had to pass before the voice from Venus could reply. The necessary time lapse had never seemed so maddening....

"This is Venus. Hello Earth. What do you want with us, Inspector?"

Hyatt flushed as if he had been slapped in the face. The voice from Venus was cold as outer space, impersonal as a genius talking to a humble aborigine.

"I'm sorry I have to annoy you," he said ironically. "If you've been listening to our newscasts lately, you must know the tough situation we're facing."

After nine minutes, the voice replied.

"We are entirely aware of your predicament, which we are watching with interest. Accept our sympathies. We have noted a vast fleet of stratosphere warships flying toward your Western Hemisphere."

So hysterical Europe was already attacking! The super-brains of Venus had discovered the fact even before the International Police of Earth were aware of it. Hyatt clenched his fists, making himself speak politely to the voice that continually slapped his face.

"In the last newscast from Venus, we Earthmen got the impression that an enormous new source of your precious substance *Arnerium* had recently been discovered. Is that true? We would also like to know if you use *Arnerium* as a medium of exchange on your planet."

He lit a cigarette and forced himself to remain calm until the nine minutes passed.

"It is true," said the voice from Venus, "that a new source of *Arnerium* has been discovered. We use the substance as a medium of exchange."

Hyatt's lips tightened to a thin line. He

turned and nodded grimly to Varna.

"Because of this newly discovered source of precious metal, is your currency rapidly depreciating? Isn't there a decreased market value?"

**W**AITING for his words to reach Venus and the reply to cross space, he sat on a corner of the desk.

"Now we're getting somewhere," he said to Varna. "Everything depends on the answers to this question and the next."

She smiled hopefully and took his hand.

"You are substantially correct," said the voice at last. "We can no longer use *Arnerium* as a medium of exchange, because of its present low value. Seeking a metal to take its place, we discovered a substance in the oceans of Earth. The new metal we call *calabrium*."

"How did you make that discovery?" Hyatt demanded. "Our term for *calabrium* is gold. You certainly couldn't have learned through spectro-analysis that our sea water contains gold. Where did you get the information?"

Varna felt his grip tighten as he waited for the reply.

"That question will not be answered," stated the voice. "It can make no difference to Earth, since the *calabrium* in the oceans was not being used."

"That's exactly what I thought!" the inspector rapped out. "Some person on Earth gave you your information. Name him!"

He shook his head hopelessly, but the tenseness of his grip did not relax. Varna knew he did not really expect an answer.

"We refuse to reveal our source of information. Since Earth was not using the metal in the seas, that loss should be of no importance."

"But when you attract the ionized gold to Venus, you create an impassable wall between our two Hemispheres!" Hyatt shouted. "Do you realize that your piracy is causing starvation in Europe?"

There was an even longer interval of strained silence.

"What do you of Earth intend to do about it?" the voice asked finally.

"Do about it?" Hyatt roared. He slumped,

realizing that nothing could be done. "We—"

The unbearably nostalgic musical note that had begun the conversation sounded again. Hyatt gritted his teeth, swore under his breath. The Venusian radio station had signed off.

"Bill," Varna said, "do you really think someone on Earth is low enough to help the Venusians against his own planet?"

"That's what it looks like. The gold, in order to be drawn to Venus has to be ionized here on Earth. That means that electrical current is run through the sea water. Since ocean water is salt, it's a natural conductor of electricity. But, we can't find out the source of the electrical current. If we could do that, we could break the barrier in practically no time.

"The most incredible part of the whole business is that Venus, which seems so far advanced in matters of science, should be so far behind us in fundamental economics. Imagine using a precious metal for a medium of exchange! The thing to do is to find the ionization stations. Only we've been looking for them like mad men for the past three days. Then all we have to do is drop a few well placed bombs—"

He had forgotten for the moment that the only ones available were small emergency bombs allotted to the International Police. Another button glowed on his desk. When he pressed it, the voice of the President of America came into the room.

"Hyatt, a fleet of bombers is racing toward America! Europe has declared war!"

"Tell Europe to attack Venus—if it can," Hyatt said.

He turned from the desk to speak to Varna, only to find that she had left the room.

"The air armada of Europe is battering itself to pieces against the wall of gold," the President said bitterly.

**O**N his way to Archibald Roth's house, Bill Hyatt picked up the report that the President must have heard. While he realized it made good news, he knew it wasn't quite the truth. The strato-bombers were not battering themselves to pieces. They were hurling themselves into the wall of gold, being bogged down as surely as though they had been driven prop-first into quicksand. There was no escape for Europe's air

arm, no hope for the poor devils who manned the ships.

Because of a chill-voiced genius on Venus, men of Earth were dying like flies, ignorant of the unconquerable force against which they pitted their puny strength. Nor would failure of the air fleet convince Europe that America was not to be blamed for the tragedy. Europe was ravening with that madness which comes from starvation.

Bill Hyatt put his air coupe down on the flat roof of Archibald Roth's house. Only a little while before, one of the official planes of the International Police had landed there with Mr. Roth himself. Questioning of the eighty-year-old designer had been fruitless. He had been nearly shocked to death at the implication that he had played traitor to his beloved country.

Bill entered the house through the roof door and went at once to the drawing room, where he knew he would find Archibald Roth. The old man was pacing the floor and puffing out angry clouds of smoke from his cigar. When he saw Bill, he clenched his cigar angrily and glared.

"You're the man who put those officers up to arresting me," he grated. "I'm glad you've come because I want to give you a piece of my mind. After that, of course, you won't care to set foot in this house again. I hope not, anyhow."

Hyatt held up a restraining hand.

"One moment, Mr. Roth. First of all, I had nothing to do with your being arrested, as you call it. But if I obtained the information my men had, I certainly would have insisted on your being held for questioning about the affair at the arsenal. But I want you to understand that you were not arrested. Weren't you treated courteously?"

"I was," Roth snapped. "Except that they strapped me in one of your lie detectors. Oh, yes, they were polite enough. But that's the same as calling me a liar, isn't it?"

"Purely a matter of form," Bill soothed. "I want to know something about the illness you suffered from a few days ago."

"That? Nothing at all compared with the humiliation of tonight's ordeal. Indigestion. It came right after I'd eaten lunch. I can't remember anything that happened once I got up from the table. Doctors thought it was a stroke, but my blood pressure is really below normal."

Archibald Roth went to an ash tray and rested his cigar in the groove. He cocked a glittering eye at Hyatt.

"That what you came here for—to ask about my health? Don't you want to see Varna?"

"I'd like to," Bill admitted. "She slipped out of my office without even saying good-by. That's not like her. I want to know why she did it."

The old man chuckled. "But you can't. Not here, anyway. She's gone to Niagara."

"Where!" Bill cried, wondering if he had heard correctly.

**T**HE city of Niagara had been abandoned since early in the last century, when hydro-electric power had become obsolete. *Hydro-electric power*, his mind repeated. The thought stunned him. Suppose the traitor who was ionizing sea water to make the gold in the oceans available to Venus had taken over the abandoned power plants at Niagara!

"She went to Niagara," the old man repeated. "Went to the air harbor not more than forty-five minutes ago, to charter a plane for Niagara. She's a better investigator than you are. Didn't you think of the power plants at Niagara, when you couldn't place the source of the ionization plants?"

Hyatt banged his fist into his other palm.

"That's it!" he shouted.

Abruptly his face fell. Varna would be daring enough to try to make this investigation alone. The man who permitted the air army of Europe to destroy itself against the wall of gold would not hesitate to eliminate one redheaded meddler, no matter how pretty.

Bill Hyatt raced from the room, ran up the steps to the roof, scrambled into his air coupe. He gunned the light plane across the roof in a perfect take-off and headed for the air harbor.

As he flew, he unhooked the portable radio from his belt and put in a call to Parsons, in the International Police Building.

"Take a squad of men and fly to Niagara," he snapped tensely. "Investigate the old hydro-electric plants there. They may have been put into operation. If they have been, we'll have the source of current used in the ionization stations!"

"Never thought of that," Parsons blurted,

obviously disgusted with his own failure. "That's about the only place they could be getting the current. What should we do—bomb it?"

"No," Hyatt said, thinking of Varna Roth. He must try to catch up with her before she could reach Niagara. But failing in that, he couldn't risk her death by bombs from his own policemen. "You are to bomb all power lines leading from the hydro-electric plants."

"Right, sir. Hold my wave a moment. Dispatch just in from Europe."

There was a moment of silence, unbroken except by the rattle of crisp paper. Then Parsons spoke again.

"Listen to this, Inspector. It's from our agent in Paris. 'Following report that offensive air fleet has been destroyed in mid-ocean, revolution has broken out in Europe. Internal strife between two factions. The first faction, those loyal to European General Council. Second faction, those willing to accept ultimatum of American dictator known here as the Master.'"

Hyatt took his lower lip between his teeth and bit it hard. Out of vague hunches, a new and recognizable picture was forming. The man behind the ionization stations, which were making possible the theft of ocean gold by Venus, was motivated not by a desire to help Venus out of her financial difficulties, but by his own selfish ambitions. The wall of gold he had helped Venus create had first produced a food panic in Europe, then caused the destruction of the European air force. Now a revolt had resulted.

"Parsons," Hyatt said, "carry out my orders to the letter. First destroy the golden wall by cutting off the power supply to the ionization stations. Second, send a message to the European General Council. Tell them food is on the way and armed forces will be sent to quell revolt if necessary. Third, get this man who is trying to dominate Europe. I'll handle him!"

## CHAPTER V *The Tyrant*

**B**ILL HYATT shoved forward on the throttle of his little coupe, raced toward the central air harbor. If he had not been perfectly familiar

with the landmarks about the port he might have missed it entirely, for the place was blacked out. But he swept low of the mammoth field, circled it twice. Then he went into a dive directly over the section where the enormous transports and freighters of Eastern Seaboard were being guarded against sabotage.

Leaning far out of his cabin window, he searched the huddle of stratoships that seemed to be racing up to meet the blurring prop of his coupe. On the ground, men were hurrying in and out of the big ships. Hyatt saw that they were carrying long, cigar-shaped cylinders of gleaming metal. They were bombs from the Government arsenal! Bombs to be used to whip Europe into submission!

The man who called himself the Master had only to cut off his wall of gold, fly his air armada to Europe, drop a few of those deadly Earth-moving bombs, and the starving nations would have to submit to the tyrant's demands. Undoubtedly he could hold his position once he had obtained it, with this huge air fleet.

The beam of a searchlight sprang up at Hyatt from the ground, spotted him as he started to level off. A rattling chattering gun blasted tracer shots at his craft. He dived and spun, but luck rode with the bullets. Hyatt heard his motor give a sputtering cough and die.

He wheeled to the left, one wing dipping dangerously close to earth. Leveling with a violent struggle, he set the automatic landing device. He snatched two automatic pistols from leather carriers, threw back the transparent plastic door of the coupe/ as it landed smoothly and braked to a stop. He jumped from the cabin at the same instant.

Crouched low, he scurried like a rabbit straight for the underground office of Nat Larcher, president of Eastern Seaboard Airways. Hyatt's heart thumped against his chest. He knew the odds were a million to one against him. But he was a policeman, hot on the trail of a mass murderer. He couldn't allow selfish thoughts of his own danger to interfere with doing his duty. Just outside the door of Larcher's underground apartment, Hyatt crouched in the shadows and manipulated the controls of the radio hooked to his belt. He put in a call direct to the President of America.



"Hyatt speaking," he said in a quiet, tense voice. "All Eastern Seaboard stratoships are being converted for a bombing raid on Europe. Send men at once to take over the central air harbor. The secret of the golden wall is completely known to me. I am arresting the man who is trying to become dictator of Europe. Do not bomb the central air harbor. Proceed with extreme caution. All the stratoships are laden with enough explosives to wipe out the entire city."

Before entering the kiosk that led to Nat Larcher's apartment, Bill Hyatt lifted off the plastic top of his radio, reached into the mechanism, dropped a jumper wire over two binding posts. Fortunately a policeman had to know a little about everything, including a method of transforming a two-way portable radio into a beat-note oscillator. That might help him pull a bluff that would save Europe—and possibly Bill Hyatt, if the going got as rough as he thought it would.

**H**E pushed through the kiosk door, hurried down the steps and through Larcher's conservatory, where strange plants thrived in artificial sun-light. A low-pitched humming sound came from the room in which Hyatt and Varna Roth had watched the wreck of the 975-F on Larcher's visa-screen.

Cautiously he opened the door. In the semi-dark room, he saw Larcher seated at the controls of a remote-control unit, such as was used to pilot stratoplanes from the ground. The visa-screen was illuminated. On its surface, Hyatt could see the silvery streak and the wing-tip lights of a small stratoplane.

"Larcher," he stated with ominous calm, "you are under arrest for high treason in America and Europe. You are accused of robbing the Government arsenal and conspiring to establish yourself as dictator of Europe."

Larcher turned slowly, looked into Bill Hyatt's guns. His protruding eyes met the inspector's gaze steadily.

"Oh, I was expecting you," he said. "I have been tapping in on your police radio wave. I've heard all the orders you have given for the cutting of my power lines between Niagara and my ionization stations. I'm not quite ready to turn off

the golden wall, so I wish you'd countermand that order. I don't want it interfered with until my fleet is ready for a triumphal entry into Europe, where I will become dictator."

Hyatt laughed. "You don't suppose I'm going to do what you want, do you?" he asked sarcastically.

Larcher nodded gravely, his eyes coldly glittering. "Look at the visa-screen. That ship is within ten minutes of the wall of gold—and death for its single occupant. The occupant happens to be Miss Varna Roth. I'm flying her plane by remote control for she is securely bound inside. Before your men can reach Niagara, she will reach the wall of gold. I think I have you exactly where I want you, Inspector."

Frigid hands took hold of Hyatt's heart and squeezed it in a freezing grip. He scarcely felt the muzzle of a gun held in the hand of Howards, Larcher's blond assistant, as it rammed brutally against his spine. He scarcely heard the order to drop his guns.

"Countermand your order and I will wheel Miss Roth's plane about and bring her back to safety," Larcher said quietly. "I am determined that nothing shall interfere with my plans. They are perfect. I have given Europe a choice of food and my dictation, or bombs of destruction. Europe will accept food and the dictates of the Master."

Hyatt's guns clattered to the floor. He moistened his dry lips.

"I would gladly countermand that order if it were possible," he breathed. "Unfortunately I have converted my radio into an oscillator which I can pitch to a certain vibration. It will be identical with the keynote of the M-six-eight bombs you are loading on those planes out there. Archimedes bombs have to be handled gently, I think you'll agree. Striking their keynote, of course, will cause them to explode. That keynote happens to be G-eight-fifty."

Hyatt touched the switch of his radio. A low-pitched whistle that constantly mounted to a higher tone and greater volume came from his radio. Larcher paled.

"You're bluffing, Inspector!" he rasped.

"Am I? That will be for you to decide. And you'd better decide it in a hurry. When my oscillator reaches G at eight hundred and fifty

vibrations, the entire air harbor will become an enormous shell hole. Everything in this area will be blown from here to Venus.”

**L**ARCHER staggered to his feet. He took three steps toward Bill. His eyes goggled at the radio that was whining up, up, up to a piercing shriek.

“Knock that radio to the floor, Howard!” he yelled at the top of his voice.

“That won’t stop the explosion,” Hyatt said, grinning despite the whiteness of his face. “We’ve practically reached the keynote now.”

Howards made a lethal error. He tried to use his gun barrel to knock the radio down and silence its forbidding squeal. The gun was an automatic rifle. No soon had it dipped to Hyatt’s radio than the inspector seized it by the barrel and twisted it from the blond man’s hands. Howards got the butt of the rifle in the face. The blow had enough power behind it to drive his front teeth down his throat. He collapsed, choking.

Larcher snatched for one of Bill’s automatic pistols. He came half out of his crouch before the butt of the rifle smashed down on his skull. The tyrant fell flat on his face, blood gushing from his opened skull.

Bill sprang to the remote control device. Twirling the controls, he watched Varna Roth’s plane in the visa-screen as it wheeled about and headed away from the wall of gold. It flew back toward America and safety.

“Varna, darling,” he quavered into the radio transmitter, “are you all right? You’re not losing altitude?”

Hyatt had never heard a sweeter sound than Varna Roth’s voice as she assured him of her safety. He sighed explosively, sat back in the chair, devoting himself entirely to guiding Varna safely back to land.

On the landing field rolled the distant crack of rifles. It was a mere flurry of gunfire, followed

by dread silence. Bill Hyatt wrenched open a door of the underground apartment. He turned to meet an Army captain in full uniform.

“The damned renegades gave up with hardly a struggle,” said the Army officer bitterly. “Where’s this man who wanted to be dictator of Europe?”

Hyatt pointed a thumb at Larcher, who lay bleeding and limp on the floor.

“There’s the man who wanted to run the world. He learned the secret of the locks at the arsenal from Archibald Roth, but the old designer didn’t know anything about it. They had lunch together that day, and he drugged Roth’s drink with an extract of the *datura meteloides* plant. Larcher had some of the stuff growing in his plant collection.

“It’s rather a rare herb for this day and age. But three centuries ago, the stuff was used to make ‘truth serum’, a substance used by the ancient criminologists. When I heard the symptoms of illness which followed Roth’s luncheon with Larcher, I thought of the *datura* plants in Larcher’s collection and put two and two together. That’s about all. Of course, he was going to sell them his own products.”

**W**ITHOUT the leadership of Larcher, the revolution in Europe came to a speedy conclusion. The traitors would be punished and peace would be restored. Hyatt’s men destroyed the ionization plants and the power lines that led to them, breaking down that golden barrier that stretched from Earth to Venus.

Naturally the people of Venus didn’t like that. They radioed appeals to Larcher and these were intercepted by the International Police.

“Tell the voice from Venus,” Hyatt said to Parsons, “to seek Mr. Larcher on another planet—a much hotter planet, eh?”

He settled back with Varna Roth in his arms and relaxed for the first time in ten days.