

[Version: 1.0]

[Proofread by Ghilderich]

Piggy Bank

Henry Kuttner

Ballards's diamonds were being stolen as fast as he could make new ones. Insurance companies had long since given him up as a bad risk. Detective agencies were glad to offer their services, at a high fee, but, since the diamonds were invariably stolen, anyhow, this was simply more money down the drain. It couldn't keep up. Ballard's fortune was founded on diamonds, and the value of gems increases in inverse proportion to their quantity and availability. In ten years or so, at the present rate of theft, unflawed blue-whites would be almost worthless.

"So what I need is a perfect safe," Ballard said, sipping a liqueur. He stared across the table at Joe Gunther, who only smiled.

"Sure," Gunther said. "Well?"

"You're a technician. Figure it out. What do I pay you for?"

"You pay me for making diamonds and not telling anybody I can make 'em."

"I hate lazy people," Ballard remarked. "You graduated top man at the Institute in 1990. What have you done since then?"

"Practiced hedonism," Gunther said. "Why should I work my head off when I can get everything I want just by making diamonds for you? What does any man want? Security, freedom, a chance to indulge his whims. I got that. Just by finding a formula for the Philosopher's Stone. Too bad Cain never guessed the potentialities of his patent. Too bad for him; lucky for me."

"Shut up," Ballard said with soft intensity.

Gunther grinned and glanced around the gigantic dining hall. "Nobody can hear us." He was a little drunk. A lock of lank dark hair fell over his forehead; his thin face looked sharp and mocking. "Besides, I like to talk. It makes me realize I'm as much of a big shot as you are. Swell stuff for my soul."

"Then talk. When you're quite finished, I'll get on with what I've got to say."

Gunther drank brandy. "I'm a hedonist, and I've got a high I.Q. 'When I graduated, I looked around for the best way of supporting Joe Gunther without working. Building something new from scratch wastes time. The best system is to find a structure already built, and add something more. Ergo, the Patent Office. I spent two years going through the files, looking for pay dirt. I found it in Cain's formula. He didn't know what it was. A theory about thermodynamics-he thought. Never realized he could make diamonds simply by developing the idea a bit. So," Gunther finished, "for twenty years that formula has been buried in the Patent Office, and I found it. And sold it to you, on condition that I keep my mouth shut and let the

world believe your diamonds were real."

"Finished?" Ballard asked.

"Sure."

"Why do you recapitulate the obvious on an average of once a month?"

"To keep you reminded," Gunther said. "You'd kill me if you dared. Then your secret would be quite safe. The way I figure it, ever so often you work out a method of getting rid of me, and it biases your judgment. You're apt to go off half-cocked, get me killed, and then realize your mistake. When I'm dead, the formula will be made public, and everybody can make diamonds. Where'll you be, then?"

Ballard shifted his bulky body, half closing his eyes and clasping large, well-shaped hands behind his neck. He regarded Gunther coolly.

"Symbiosis," he said. "You'll keep your mouth shut, because diamonds are your security, too. Credits, currency, bonds-they're all apt to become worthless under current economic conditions. But diamonds are rare. I want to keep 'em that way. I've got to stop these thefts."

"If one man builds a safe, another man can crack it. You know the history of that. In the old days, somebody invented a combination lock. Right away, somebody else figured out the answer-listening to the fall of the tumblers. Tumblers were made noiseless; then a crook used a stethoscope. The answer to that was a time lock. Nitroglycerin canceled that. Stronger metals were used, and precision jointures. O.K.-thermite. One guy used to take off the dial, slip a piece of carbon paper under it, replace it-and come back a day later, after the combination had been scratched on the carbon. Today it's X rays, and so forth."

"A perfect safe can be made," Ballard said.

"How?"

"There are two methods. One, lock the diamonds in an absolutely uncrackable safe."

"No such thing."

"Two, leave the diamonds in plain sight, guarded by men who never take their eyes from them."

"You tried that, too. It didn't work. The men were gassed once. The second time, a ringer got in, disguised as one of the detectives."

Ballard ate an olive. "When I was a kid, I had a piggy bank made of glass. I could see the coins, but I couldn't get 'em out without breaking the pig. That's what I want. Only-I want a pig who can run."

Gunther looked up, his eyes suddenly sharp. "Eh?"

"A pig who's conditioned to flight-self-preservation. One who specializes in the art of running away. Animals do it-herbivores chiefly. There's an African

deer that reacts to movement before it's made. Better than split-second reaction. A fox is another example. Can a man catch a fox?"

"He'd use dogs and horses."

"Uh-huh. So foxes run through herds of sheep, and cross water, to spoil the scent. My pig must do that, too."

"You're talking about a robot," Gunther said.

"The Metalman people will make us one to order, with the radioatomic type of brain. A seven-foot robot, studded with diamonds, conditioned to running away. An intelligent robot."

Gunther rubbed his jaw. "Lovely. Except for one thing. The intelligence must be limited. Metalman have made robots of human mind-power, but each one covers a city block. Mobility's lost as intelligence increases. They haven't yet found a substitute for the colloid brain. However-" He stared at his fingernails. "Yeah. It could be done. The robot must be conditioned in one line only, self-preservation. It must be able to build logically from that motivation, and that's all it needs."

"Would that be enough?"

"Yes, because a robot's logical. You can drive a seal or a deer into a trap. Or a tiger. The tiger hears the beaters behind him, and runs from them. To him, that's the only danger he knows, till he falls in the pit that's been dug for him. A fox might be smarter. He might think of both the menace behind him and the one in front. A robot-he wouldn't stam~pede blindly. If he was driven toward a cul-de-sac, he'd use logic and wonder what was up that blind alley."

"And escape?"

"He'd have split-second-in fact, instantaneous reaction. Radioatomic brains think fast. You've set me a beautiful problem, Bruce, but I think it can be done. A diamond-studded robot, parading around here-psychologically, it's right up your alley."

Ballard shrugged. "I like ostentation. As a kid I had a hell of an inferiority complex. I'm compensating for that now. Why do you suppose I built the castle? It's a showplace. I need an army of servants to keep it going. The worst thing I can imagine is being a nonentity."

"Which in your mind is synonymous with poverty," Gunther murmured.

"You're essentially imitative, Bruce. You built your economic empire through imitation. I don't think you've ever had an original thought in your life."

"What about this robot?"

"Induction-simple addition. You figured out your requirements and added them up. The result is a diamond-studded robot conditioned to flight."

Gunther hesitated. "Flight isn't enough. It's got to be escape-self-preservation. Sometimes offense is the best defense. The robot should run as long as that's feasible and logical-and then try escape in other ways."

"You mean giving him armament?"

"Uh-huh. If we started that, we couldn't stop. We want a mobile unit, not a tank. The robot's intelligence, based on flight logic, should enable him to make use of whatever he needs, the tools that are at hand. Squirt his brain full of the basic patterns, and he'll do the rest. I'll get at it immediately."

Ballard wiped his lips with a napkin. "Good."

Gunther got up. "I'm not really signing my death warrant, you know," he said conversationally. "If you have a theft-proof safe like the robot, you won't need me to make more diamonds. There'll be enough on the robot to satisfy all your needs till you die. If you kill me, then, your diamond monopoly's safe-nobody can make them but me. However, I wouldn't make that robot without taking precautions. The Patent Office formula isn't listed under the name of Cain, and it isn't really a thermodynamic principle."

"Naturally," Ballard said. "I checked on that, without telling my investigators exactly what I was after. The patent number is your secret."

"And I'm safe as long as it remains my secret. It will, until I die. Then it'll be broadcast, and a lot of people will have their suspicions confirmed. There's a pretty widespread rumor that your diamonds are artificial, but nobody can prove it. I know one guy who'd like to."

"Ffoulkes?"

"Barney Ffoulkes, of Mercantile Alloys. He hates your insides as much as you hate his. But you're a bigger man than he is, just now. Yeah, Ffoulkes would love to smash you, Bruce."

"Get busy on the robot," Ballard said, rising. "See if you can finish it before there's another robbery."

Gunther's grin was sardonic. Ballard didn't smile, but the skin crinkled around his eyes. The two men understood each other thoroughly-which was probably the reason they were both still alive.

"Metalman, eh?" Barney Ffoulkes said to his chief of staff, Dangerfield. "Making a diamond-studded robot for Ballard, eh? Bloody show-off I"

Dangerfield didn't say anything.

"How big?"

"Seven feet, perhaps."

"And studded-wonder how thickly? Ballard's going to tie up a lot of rocks in that sandwich man. Wonder if he'll have the diamonds spell out, 'Hurrah for Bruce Ballard'?" Ffoulkes got up from his desk and buzzed around the room like a mosquito, a ginger-haired, partially bald little man with a wrinkled rat-trap face, soured in brine. "Get an offensive ready. Revise it daily. Chart a complete economic front, so we can jump on Ballard from all directions when we get the tip-off."

Dangerfield still said nothing, but his eyebrows lifted inquiringly in the

sallow, blank face.

Ffoulkes scuttled toward him, twitching. "Do I have to make a blueprint? Whenever we've had Ballard in a spot before, he's wriggled out-insurance companies, loan flotations, more diamonds. No insurance company will handle him now. His diamonds can't be inexhaustible, unless they're artificial. If they are, he'll find it harder and harder to float a loan. See?"

Dangerfield nodded dubiously.

"Hm-m-m. He'll have a lot of gems tied up in this robot. It'll be stolen, naturally. And that time we'll strike."

Dangerfield pursed his lips.

"O.K.," Ffoulkes said. "So it may not work. It hasn't worked before. But in this game the whole trick is to keep hammering till the wall's breached. This time may be the charm. If we can once catch Ballard insolvent, he'll go under. Anyhow, we've got to try. Prepare an offensive. Stocks, bonds, utilities, agricultures, ores-everything. What we want to do is force Ballard to buy on margin when he can't cover. Meantime, be sure our protection's paid. Hand the boys a bonus."

Dangerfield made a circle with thumb and forefinger. Ffoulkes chuckled nastily as his chief of staff went out.

It was a time of booms and panics, of unstable economics and utterly crazy variables. Man hours, as usual, remained the base. But what in theory seemed effective in practice was somewhat different. Man hours, fed into the hopper of the social culture, emerged in fantastic forms. Science had done that-science enslaved.

The strangle hold of the robber barons was still strong. Each one wanted a monopoly, but, because they were all at war, a species of toppling chaos was the result. They tried desperately to keep their own ships afloat while sinking the enemy fleet. Science and government were handicapped by the Powers, which were really industrial empires, completely self-contained if not self-supporting units. Their semanticists and propagandists worked on the people, ladling out soothing sirup. All would be well later-when Ballard, or Ffoulkes, or All-Steel, or Unlimited Power, took over. Meantime-

Meantime the technicians of the robber barons, well subsidized, kept throwing monkey wrenches into the machinery. It was the time preceding the Scientific Revolution, and akin to the Industrial Revolution in its rapid shifting of economic values. All-Steel's credit was based chiefly on the Hall-well Process. Unlimited Power's scientists discovered a better, more effective method that scrapped the Hallwell Process. Result, the bottom fell out of All-Steel, and there was a brief period of frantic readjustment, during which All-Steel yanked certain secret patents out into the open and utilized them, playing hell with Ffoulkes, whose Gatun Bond Issue was based on a law of supply and demand which was automatically revised by the new All-Steel patents. Meantime each company was trying to catch the others with their pants down. Each one wanted to be master. When that enviable day arrived, the economic mess would settle, it was hoped, under the central control, and there would be Utopia.

The structure grew like the Tower of Babel. It couldn't stop-naturally. Crime kept pace with it.

Because crime was a handy weapon. The old protection racket had been revived. All-Steel would pay the Donner gang plenty to keep their hands off All-Steel interests. If the Donner boys happened to concentrate on robberies that would weaken Ffoulkes or Ballard or Unlimited Power-fine! Enough spectacular thefts would lead to a panic during which enemy stocks would drop to the bottom, one asked, nothing bid.

And if a man went down, he was lost. His holdings would go to the wolves, and he himself would be too potentially dangerous ever to be allowed power again. *Vae victis!*

But diamonds were increasingly rare-and so, till now, Bruce Ballard's empire had been safe.

The robot was sexless, but gave the impression of masculinity. Neither Ballard nor Gunther even used the neuter pronoun in reference to the creature. Metalman Products had done their usual satisfactory job, and Gunther improved on it.

So Argus came to the castle, for final conditioning. Rather surprisingly, the robot was not vulgarly ostentatious. He was functional, a towering, symmetrical figure of gold, studded with diamonds, He was patterned on an armored knight, seven feet tall, with a cuirass of bright gold, golden greaves, golden gauntlets that looked clumsy but which contained remarkably sensitive nerve-endings. His eyes had diamond lenses, specially chosen for their refractive powers, and, logically, Ballard called him Argus.

He was blazingly beautiful, a figure out of myth. In a bright light he resembled Apollo more than Argus. He was a god come to Earth, the shower of gold that Danae saw.

Gunther sweated over the conditioning process. He worked in a maze of psychological charts, based on the mentalities of the creatures that lived by flight. Automatic reactions had to have voluntary cut-offs, controlled by logic, when reasoning power took over-reasoning power based on the flight-instinct. Self-preservation was the prime factor. The robot had it in a sufficient amount.

"So he can't be caught," Ballard said, regarding Argus.

Gunther grunted. "How? He automatically adjusts to the most logical solution, and readjusts instantly to any variable. Logic and superswift reactions make him a perfect flight machine."

"You've implanted the routine?"

"Sure. Twice a day he makes his round of the castle. He won't leave the castle for any reason-which is a safeguard. If crooks could lure Argus outside, they might set an ingenious trap. But even if they captured the castle, they couldn't hold it long enough to immobilize Argus. What have you got burglar alarms for?"

"You're sure the tour's a good idea?"

"You wanted it. Once in the afternoon, once at night-so Argus could show off to the guests. If he meets danger during his round, he'll adjust to it."

Ballard fingered the diamonds on the robot's cuirass. "I'm still not sure about-sabotage."

"Diamonds are pretty tough. They'll resist a lot of heat. And under the gold plate is a casing that'll resist fire and acid-not forever, but long enough to give Argus his chance. The point is that Argus can't be immobilized long enough to let himself be destroyed. Sure, you could play a flame thrower on him-but for how long? One second, and then he'd scam."

"If he could. 'What about cornering him?'"

"He won't go into corners if he can help it. And his radioatomic brain is good! He's a thinking machine devoted to one purpose: self-preservation."

"And he's strong," Gunther said. "Don't forget that. It's important. He can rip metal, if he can get leverage. He's not a superdoooper, of course- if he were, he couldn't be mobile. He's subject to normal physical laws. But he is beautifully adaptive; he's very strong; he has super-swift reactive powers; he's not too vulnerable. And we're the only guys who can immobilize Argus."

"That helps," Ballard said.

Gunther shrugged. "Might as well start. The robot's ready." He jerked a wire free from the golden helm. "It takes a minute or so for the automatic controls to take over. Now--"

The immense figure stirred. On light, rubberoid soles, it moved away, so quickly that its legs almost blurred. Then it stood motionless once more.

"We were too close," Gunther said, licking his lips. "He reacts to the vibrations sent out by our brains. There's your piggy bank, Bruce!"

A little smile twisted Ballard's lips. "Yeah. Let's see-" He walked toward the robot. Argus slid away quietly.

"Try the combination," Gunther suggested.

Ballard said softly, almost whispering, "All is not gold that glitters." He approached the robot again, but it reacted by racing noiselessly into a distant corner. Before Ballard could say anything, Gunther murmured, "Say it louder."

"Suppose someone overhears? That's--"

"So what? You'll change the key phrase, and when you do, you can get close enough to Argus to whisper it."

"All is not gold that glitters." Ballard's voice rose. This time, when he went to the robot, the giant figure did not stir.

Ballard pressed a concealed stud in the golden helm and murmured, "These are pearls that were his eyes." He touched the button again, and the robot fled into another corner. "Uh-huh. It works, all right."

"Don't give him such obvious combinations," Gunther suggested. "Suppose one of your guests starts quoting Shakespeare? Mix up your quotations."

Ballard tried again. "What light through yonder window breaks I come here to bury Caesar now is the time for all good men."

"Nobody's going to say that by accident," Gunther remarked. "Fair enough. Now I'm going out and enjoy myself. I need relaxation. Write me a check."

"How much?"

"Couple of thousand. I'll tele-call you if I need more."

"What about testing the robot?"

"Go ahead and test him. You won't find anything wrong."

"Well, take your guards."

Gunther grinned sardonically and headed for the door.

An hour later the air taxi grounded atop a New York skyscraper. Gunther emerged, flanked by two husky protectors. Ballard was running no risks of having his colleague abducted by a rival. As Gunther paid the air cabman, the detectives glanced at their wrist spotters and punched the red button set into each case. They reported thus, every five minutes, that all was well. One of Ballard's control centers in New York received the signals and learned that all was well—that there was no need to send out a rush rescue squad. It was complicated, but effective. No one else could use the spotters, for a new code was used each day. This time the key ran: first hour, report every five minutes; second hour, every eight minutes; third hour, every six minutes. And, at the first hint of danger, the detectives could instantly send in an alarm.

But this time it didn't work out successfully. When the three men got into the elevator, Gunther said, "The Fountain Room," and licked his lips in anticipation. The door swung shut, and as the elevator started its breakneck race down, anaesthetic gas flooded the little cubicle. One of the detectives managed to press the alarm warning on his spotter, but he was unconscious before the car slowed at the basement. Gunther didn't even realize he was being gassed before he lost consciousness.

He woke up fettered securely to a metal chair. The room was windowless, and a spotlight was focused on Gunther's face. He manipulated sticky eyelids, wondering how long he had been out. Scowling, he twisted his arm so that his wrist watch was visible.

Two men loomed, shadowy beyond the lamp. One wore a physician's white garment. The other was a little man, ginger-haired, with a hard rat trap of a face.

"Hi, Ffoulkes," Gunther said. "You saved me a hangover."

The little man chuckled. "Well, we've done it at last. Lord knows I've been trying long enough to get you away from Ballard's watchdogs."

"What day is this?"

"Wednesday. You've been unconscious for about twenty hours."

Gunther frowned. "Well, start talking."

"I'll do that, first, if you like. Are Ballard's diamonds artificial?"

"Don't you wish you knew?"

"I'll offer you about anything you want if you'll cross up Ballard."

"I wouldn't dare," Gunther said candidly. "You wouldn't have to keep your word. It'd be more logical for you to kill me, after I'd talked."

"Then we'll have to use scopolamin."

"It won't work. I've been immunized."

"Try it, anyway. Lester!"

The white-gowned man came forward and put a hypodermic deftly into Gunther's arm. After a while he shrugged.

"Complete immunization. Scop is no good, Mr. Ffoulkes."

Gunther smiled. "Well?"

"Suppose I try torture?"

"I don't think you'd dare. Torture and murder are capital crimes."

The little man moved nervously around the room. "Does Ballard himself know how to make the diamonds? Or are you the only one?"

"The Blue Fairy makes 'em," Gunther said. "She's got a magic wand."

"I see. Well, I won't try torture yet. I'll use duress. You'll have plenty to eat and drink. But you'll stay here till you talk. It'll get rather dull after a month or so."

Gunther didn't answer, and the two men went out. An hour passed, and another.

The white-gowned physician brought in a tray and deftly fed the prisoner. After he had vanished, Gunther looked at his watch again. A worried frown showed on his forehead.

He grew steadily more nervous.

The watch read 9:15 when another meal was served. This time Gunther waited till the physician had left, and then recovered the fork he had managed to secrete in his sleeve. He hoped its absence wouldn't be noticed immediately. A few minutes was all he wanted, for Gunther knew the construction of these electromagnetic prison chairs. If he could short circuit

the current- It wasn't too difficult, even though Gunther's arms were prisoned by metal clamps. He knew where the wires were. After a bit, there was a crackling flash, and Gunther swore at the pain in his seared fingertips. But the clamps slid free from his arms and legs.

He stood up, looking again at his wrist watch. Scowling, he prowled around the room till he found what he wanted-the window buttons. As he pressed these, panels in the blank walls slid aside, revealing the lighted towers of New York.

Gunther glanced at the door warily. He opened a window and peered down. The height was dizzying, but a ledge provided easy egress. Gunther eased himself over the sill and slid along to his right till he reached another window.

It was locked. He looked down, hesitating. There was another ledge below, but he wasn't sure he could make it. Instead, he went on to the next window.

Locked.

But the one after that was open. Gunther peered into the dimness. He could make out a bulky desk, and the glimmer of a telepanel. Sighing with relief, he crawled into the office, with another glance at his watch.

He went directly to the televisor and fingered a number. When a man's face appeared on the panel, Gunther merely said, "Reporting. O.K.," and broke the connection. His consciousness recorded a tiny click.

He called Ballard then, but the castle's secretary answered. "Where's Ballard?"

"Not here, sir. Can I-"

Gunther went white, remembering the click he had heard. He broke the connection experimentally, and heard it again. Ballard- "Hell!" Gunther said under his breath. He returned to the window,

crawled out, hung by his hands, and let himself drop. He almost missed the ledge one story below. Skin ripped from his fingertips as he fought for a grip.

But he got it at last. He kicked his way through the window before him and dived in, glass showering. No televisor here. But there was a door dimly defined in the wall.

Gunther opened it, finding what he wanted on the other side. He switched on a lamp, riffling through the drawers till he was certain that this office wasn't another plant. After that, he used the televisor, fingering the same number he had called before.

There was no answer.

"Uh-huh," Gunther said, and made another call.

He had just broken the connection when a man in a surgeon's gown came in and shot him through the head.

The man who looked like Ffoulkes scrubbed make-up from his face. He glanced up when the physician entered.

"O.K.?"

"Yeah. Let's go."

"Did they trace Gunther's call?"

"That's not our pie. Come on."

A gray-haired man, tied securely in his chair, swore as the hypodermic pierced his skin. Ballard waited a minute and then jerked his head at the two guards behind him.

"Get out."

They obeyed. Ballard turned to the prisoner.

"Gunther was supposed to report to you every day. If he failed, you were told to release a certain message he gave you. Where's the message?"

"Where's Gunther?" the gray-haired man said. His voice was thick, the words slurring as the scopolamin began its work.

"Gunther's dead. I arranged matters so that he'd telecall you on a tapped beam. I traced the call. Now where's the message?"

It took a little while, but at last Ballard unscrewed a hollow table leg and took out a thin roll of recording wire tape, carefully sealed.

"Know what's in this?"

"No. No. No-"

Ballard went to the door. "Kill him," he said to the guards, and waited till he heard the muffled shot. Then he sighed with heartfelt relief.

He was, at last, impregnable.

Barney Ffoulkes called his chief of staff. "I hear Ballard's robot is finished. Clamp down. Put the squeeze on him. Force him to liquidate. Tell the Donner boys about the robot."

Dangerfield's face showed no expression as he made thumb and forefinger into a circle.

What Gunther had called Cain's thermodynamic patent was in reality something different, as the wire tape showed. Actually it was "McNamara, Torsion Process, Patent No. R-735-V-22." Ballard recorded that in his capacious memory and looked up the patent himself. This time he wished to share the secret with no one. He was enough of a scientist, he thought, to be able to work out the details himself. Besides, Gunther's machines for diamond-making were already set up in the castle laboratory.

Ballard immediately ran into an annoying, though not serious, hitch. The original McNamara process was not designed to create artificial diamonds. It was a method of developing certain electronic alterations in matter, and through torsion changing the physical structure involved. Gunther had taken McNamara's system, applied it to carbon, and made diamonds.

Ballard felt certain he could do the same, but it would take time. As a matter of fact, it took exactly two weeks. Once the new application was discovered, the rest was incredibly easy. Ballard started to make diamonds.

There was one other difficulty. The annealing process took nearly a month. If the carbon was removed from the chamber before that time, it would be merely carbon. In the past, Gunther had kept a supply of diamonds on hand for emergencies; that supply was depleted now, most of the gems having gone to cover the golden robot. Ballard sat back and shrugged. In a month-long before that Ffoulkes struck. He clamped down with both hands.

Propaganda, whispering campaigns, releasing of new patents that rendered Ballard's worthless—all the weapons of economic warfare were unleashed against the diamond king. Holdings depreciated. There were strikes in Ballard's mines and factories. An unexpected civil war knocked the bottom out of certain African stocks he held. Word began to go around that the Ballard empire was collapsing.

Margin was the answer—that, and security. Diamonds were excellent collateral. Ballard used up his small hoard lavishly, trying to plug the leaks in the dike, buying on margin, using the tactics that had always succeeded for him in the past. His obvious confidence stemmed the tide for a while. Not for long. Ffoulkes kept hitting, hard and fast.

By the end of the month, Ballard knew, he would have all the diamonds he needed, and could re-establish his credit. In the meantime—

The Donner gang tried to steal Argus. They didn't know the robot's capabilities. Argus fled from room to room, clanging an alarm, ignoring bullets, until the Donners decided to give it up as a bad job and escape. But by that time the police had arrived, and they failed.

Ballard had been too busy pulling strings to enjoy his golden plaything. The advent of the Donners gave him a new idea. It would be a shame to mar the robot, but the diamonds could be replaced later. And what good was a bank except for emergencies?

Ballard found a canvas bag and went into the robot's room, locking the doors behind him. Argus stood motionless in a corner, his diamond eyes inscrutable. Ballard took out a tiny chisel, shook his head rather sadly, and said in a firm voice, "What light through yonder window breaks—"

He finished the scrambled quotation and walked toward the robot. Argus silently went away.

Ballard moved his shoulders impatiently. He repeated the key sentence louder. How many decibels were necessary? A good many— Argus still ran away. This time Ballard yelled the key at the top of his voice.

And the robot's flight mechanism continued to operate. The automatic alarm began to work. The siren screech hooted deafeningly through the room.

Ballard noticed that a little envelope was protruding from a slot in Argus' cuirass. Automatically he reached for it-and the robot fled.

Ballard lost his temper and began to follow Argus around the room. The robot kept at a safe distance. Eventually Argus, since he was untiring, won the race. Panting, Ballard unlocked the door and rang for help. The alarm siren died.

When servants came, Ballard ordered them to surround the robot. The circle of humanity closed in gradually, until Argus, unable to retreat within himself, chose the most logical solution and walked through the living wall, brushing the servants aside casually. He continued toward the door and through it, in a crackling of splintered mahogany panels. Ballard looked after the retreating figure without saying anything.

The envelope had been brushed free by the encounter with the door, and Ballard picked it up. The brief note inside read:

Dear Bruce:

I'm taking no chances. Unless I make a certain adjustment on Argus daily, he reverts to a different code phrase from the one you give him. Since I'm the only guy who knows that code, you'll have a sweet time catching Argus in case you cut my throat. Honesty is the best policy.

Love,

Joe Gunther.

Ballard tore the note into tiny fragments. He dismissed the servants and followed the robot, who had become immobile in the next room.

He went out, after a while, and televised his divorced wife in Chicago.

"Jessie?"

"Hello," Jessie said. "What's up?"

"You heard about my golden robot?"

"Sure. Build as many as you want, as long as you keep on paying my alimony. What's this I hear about your hitting the skids?"

"Ffoulkes is behind that," Ballard said grimly. "If you want your alimony to continue, do me a favor, I want to register my robot in your name. Sign it over to you for a dollar. That way, I won't lose the robot even if there's a foreclosure."

"Is it that bad?"

"It's plenty bad. But as long as I've got the robot, I'm safe. It's worth several fortunes. I want you to sell the robot back to me for a dollar, of

course, but we'll keep that document quiet."

"You mean you don't trust me, Bruce?"

"Not with a diamond-studded robot," Ballard said.

"Then I want two dollars. I've got to make a profit on the transaction. O.K. I'll attend to it. Send me the papers and I'll sign 'em."

Ballard broke the beam. That was done, anyhow. The robot was unequivocally his, and not even Ffoulkes could take it away from him.

Even if he went broke before the month was up and the new diamonds ready, the robot would put him on his feet again in no time. However, it was first necessary to catch Argus-

There were many telecalls that day. People wanted collateral. Brokers wanted margin covered. Ballard frantically juggled his holdings, liquidating, attempting flotations, trying to get loans. He received a visit from two bulky men who made a business of supplying credit, at exorbitant rates.

They had heard of the robot. But they demanded to see it~

Ballard was gratified by their expressions. "What do you need credit for, Bruce? You've got plenty tied up in that thing."

"Sure. But I don't want to dismantle it. So you'll help me out till after the first--"

"Why the first?"

"I'm getting a new shipment of diamonds then."

"Uh-huh," said the taller of the two men. "That robot runs away, doesn't he?"

"That's why he's burglar-proof."

The two brokers exchanged glances. "Mind if we make a closer examination?" They went forward, and Argus fled.

Ballard said hastily, "Stopping him is rather a complicated process. And it takes time to start him again. Those stones are perfect."

"How do we know? Turn off the juice, or whatever makes the thing tick. You don't object to our making a closer examination, do you?"

"Of course not," Ballard said. "But it takes time--"

"I smell a rat," one of the brokers remarked. "You can have all the credit you want, but I insist on testing those diamonds. Call me when you're ready."

They both went out. Ballard cursed silently. The telescreen in the corner flickered. Ballard didn't bother to answer; he knew very well what the purport of the message would be. Collateral- Ffoulkes was closing in for the kill.

Ballard's lips tightened. He glared at the robot, spun on his heel, and summoned his secretary. He issued swift orders.

The secretary, a dapper, youngish man with yellow hair and a perpetually worried expression, went into action. He, in turn, issued orders. People began to come to the castle-workmen and technicians.

Ballard consulted with the technicians. None of them could suggest a certain method for immobilizing the robot. Yet they were far too optimistic. It didn't seem difficult to them to catch a machine.

"Flame throwers?"

Ballard considered. "There's an alloy casing under the gold plate."

"Suppose we can corner it long enough to bum through to the brain? That should do the trick."

"Well, try it. I can afford to lose a few diamonds if I can get my hands on the rest of 'em."

Ballard watched as six men, armed with flame throwers, maneuvered Argus into a corner. He warned them finally, "You're close enough. Don't go any nearer, or he'll break through you."

"Yes, sir. Ready? One. . . two--"

The nozzles blasted fire in unison. It took an appreciable time for the flame to reach the robot's head-some fractional part of a second, perhaps. By that time, Argus had ducked, and, safely under the flames, was running out of his corner. Crouching, he burst through the line of men, his alarm siren screeching. He fled into the next room and relapsed into contented immobility.

"Try it again," Ballard said glumly, but he knew it wouldn't work. It didn't. The robot's reactions were instantaneous. The men could not correct their aim with sufficient speed to hit Argus. A good deal of valuable furniture was destroyed, however.

The secretary touched Ballard's sleeve. "It's nearly two."

"Eh? Oh-that's right. Call the men off, Johnson. Is the trapdoor ready?"

"Yes, sir."

The robot suddenly turned and headed for a door. It was time for his first tour of the castle that day. Since his route was prearranged and never swerved an iota from its course, it had been easy to set a trap. Ballard hadn't really expected the flame throwers to work, anyhow.

He followed, with Johnson, as Argus moved slowly through the ornate rooms of the castle. "His weight will spring the trapdoor, and he'll drop into the room below. Can he get out of that room?"

"No, sir. The walls are reinforced metal. He'll stay put."

"Fair enough."

"But. . . uh . . . won't he keep dodging around that room?"

"He may," Ballard said grimly, "till I pour quick-setting concrete in on him. That'll immobilize the so-and-so. It'll be easy after that to drill through the concrete and get the diamonds."

Johnson smiled weakly. He was a little afraid of the huge, glittering robot

"How wide is the trap?" Ballard asked abruptly.

"Ten feet."

"So. Well, call the men with the flame throwers. Tell 'em to close in behind us. If Argus doesn't fall into the trap, we want to be able to drive him in."

Johnson hesitated. "Wouldn't he simply smash his way through the men?"

"We'll see. Put the men on both sides of the trap, so we'll have Argus cornered. Hop to it!"

The secretary raced away. Ballard followed the robot through room after room. Eventually Johnson and three of the flame-throwing crew appeared. The others had circled around to flank the robot.

They turned into the passage. It was narrow, but long. Halfway along it was the trapdoor, cONcealed by a rich Bokhara rug. In the distance Ballard could see three men waiting, flame throwers ready, watching as the robot approached them. Within minutes now the trap would be sprung.

"Turn it on, boys," Ballard said, on a sudden impulse. The crew of three walking in front of him obeyed. Fire jutted out from the nozzles they held.

The robot increased its pace. It had eyes in the back of its head, Ballard remembered. Well, eyes wouldn't help Argus now. The rug- A golden foot came down. The robot began to shift its weight forward, and suddenly froze as instantaneous reactions warned it of the difference in pressure between the solid floor and the trap. There was no time for the door to drop down, before Argus had instantly readjusted, withdrew his foot, and stood motionless on the verge of the rug. The flame throwers gushed out toward the robot's back. Ballard yelled a command..

The three men beyond the trapdoor began to run forward, fire spouting from their hoses. The robot bent its legs, shifted balance, and jumped. It wasn't at all bad for a standing broad jump. Since Argus could control his movements with the nicest accuracy, and since his metal body had strength in excess of his weight, the golden figure sprang across the ten-foot gap with inches to spare. Flame lashed out at him.

Argus moved fast-very fast. His legs were a blinding blur of speed. Ignoring the fire that played on his body, he ran toward the three men and through them. Then he slowed down to a normal walk and continued mildly on his way. The alarm siren was screaming Ballard realized, just as it died.

For Argus, the danger was over. Here and there on his metal body the gold

had melted into irregular blobs. That was all.

Johnson gulped. "He must have seen the trap."

"He felt it," Ballard said, his voice low with fury. "Hell! If we could just immobilize Argus long enough to pour concrete on him-"

That was tried an hour later. A metal-sheathed ceiling collapsed on the robot, a ceiling of mesh metal through which concrete could be poured. Ballard simply had liquid concrete run into the room above till the platform collapsed under the weight. The robot was below-

Was below. The difference in air pressure warned Argus, and he knew what to do about it. He lunged through the door and escaped,, leaving a frightful mess behind him.

Ballard cursed. "We can't shoot concrete at the devil. If he's sensitized to differences in air pressure-hell! I don't know. There must be some way. Johnson! Get me Plastic Products, quick!"

A short while later Ballard was closeted with a representative of Plastic Products.

"I don't quite understand. A quick-drying cement-"

"To be squirted out of hoses, and to harden as soon as it hits the robot That's what I said."

"If it dries that quickly, it'll dry as soon as air hits it. I think we've got almost what you want. A very strong liquid cementoid; it'll harden half a minute after being exposed to air."

"That should work. Yeah. How soon-"

"Tomorrow morning."

The next morning, Argus was herded into one of the huge halls downstairs. A ring of thirty men surrounded the robot, each armed with a tank,, filled with the quick-drying cementoid. Ballard and Johnson watched from the side lines.

"The robot's pretty strong, sir," Johnson hazarded.

"So's the cementoid. Quantity will do it. The men will keep spraying the stuff on till Argus is in a cocoon. Without leverage he can't break out. Like a mammoth in a tar pit."

Johnson made a clicking noise with his lips. "That's an idea. If this shouldn't work, perhaps I-"

"Save it," Ballard said. He looked around at the doors. Before each one was stationed a group of men, also armed with cementoid tanks.

In the center of the room stood Argus, blankly impassive, waiting. Ballard said, "O.K.," and from thirty positions around the robot streams of cementoid converged on his golden body.

The warning siren screamed deafeningly. Argus began to turn around.

That was all. He kept turning around. But-fast!

He was a machine, and could develop tremendous power. He spun on his longitudinal axis, a blazing, shining, glittering blur of light, far too fast for the eye to follow. He was like a tiny world spinning through space-but a world has gravitation. Argus' gravitational pull was negligible. There was, however, centrifugal force.

It was like throwing an egg into an electric fan. The streams of cementoid hit Argus, and bounced, repelled by the centrifuge. Ballard got a gob of the stuff in his middle. It had hardened enough to be painful.

Argus kept on spinning. He didn't try to run, this time. His alarm kept screeching deafeningly. The men, plastered with cementoid, continued to squirt the stuff at Argus for a while.

But the cementoid stuck to them when it was flung back. It hardened on them. Within seconds the scene resembled a Mack Sennett pie-throwing comedy.

Ballard roared commands. His voice went unheard in the uproar. But the men did not continue their hopeless task for long. They, not Argus, were becoming immobilized.

Presently the warning siren stopped. Argus slowed down in his mad spinning. He was no longer the target of cementoid streams.

He went quietly out of the room, and nobody tried to stop him.

One man almost strangled before the hardened cementoid could be dislodged from his mouth and nostrils. Aside from that, there were no casualties, save to Ballard's temper.

It was Johnson who suggested the next experiment. Quicksand would immobilize anything. It was difficult to introduce quicksand into the castle, but a substitute was provided-a goeey, tarry mess poured into an improvised tank twenty-five feet wide. All that remained was to lure Argus into the quicksand.

"Traps won't work," Ballard said glumly. "Maybe stringing a wire to trip him-"

"I think he'd react instantly to that, too, sir," Johnson vetoed. "If I may make a suggestion, it should not be difficult to drive Argus into the pit, once he's maneuvered into a passage leading to it."

"How? Flame throwers again? He automatically reacts away from the most serious danger. When he came to the pit, he'd turn around and go the other way. Break right through the men."

"His strength is limited, isn't it?" Johnson asked. "He couldn't pass a tank."

Ballard didn't see the point immediately. "A midget tfactor? Not too small, though-some of the castle's passages are plenty wide. If we got a tank just

broad enough to fill the hall-a pistol that would drive Argus into the quicksand-

Measurements were made, and a powerful tractor brought into the castle. It fitted the passage, leaving no room to spare-at least, not enough to accommodate the robot. Once Argus was driven into that particular passage, he could go only one way.

The tractor, at Johnson's suggestion, was camouflaged, so the robot's flight-conditioned brain would not recognize and consider it as a serious factor. But the machine was ready to roll into the passage instantly.

The trick would probably have succeeded, had it not been for one difficulty. The consistency of the artificial quicksand had been calculated carefully. It had to be soft enough to drag the robot down, and stiff enough so that Argus would be helpless. The robot could walk safely under water; that had been proved days ago, in an abortive early experiment.

So the mix had surface tension, though not enough to bear Argus' great weight.

The robot was maneuvered into the passage without trouble, and the tractor swung after it, blocking Argus' escape. It rumbled slowly on, driving the robot before it. Argus seemed untroubled. When he reached the edge of the artificial quicksand, he bent and tested the consistency, with one golden hand.

After that, he lay flat on his face, legs bent like a frog's, feet braced against one wall of the passage, head pointed out over the quicksand. He thrust strongly.

Had Argus walked into the goo feet first, he would have sunk. But his weight was spread over a far larger surface area now. Not enough to sustain him indefinitely, but long enough for his purposes. He simply didn't have time to sink. Argus skimmed over the quicksand like a skiff or a sandboat. His powerful initial thrust gave him sufficient impetus. No human could have done it, and, while Argus weighed more than a human, he had also had more strength.

So he shot out, angling across the tank, buoyed by surface tension and carried on by his impetus. The quicksand got hold at last and bogged him down, but by that time Argus' powerful hands reached their destination, the edge of the tank. Another door was in the wall at that point, and Ballard and Johnson were standing on the threshold, watching.

They dodged before Argus trampled them in his automatic fight-reaction. away from the quicksand tank.

The robot dripped goo over a dozen valuable rugs before he dried. But after that he was no longer so dazzling a spectacle. However, his abilities were unimpaired.

Ballard tried the quicksand trick again, with a larger tank and smooth walls, on which the robot could get no grip. Yet Argus seemed to learn through experience. Before entering a passage now, he would make certain that

there were no tractors within reach. Ballard concealed a tractor in an adjoining room where Argus could not see it, and the robot was induced to go into the fatal passage; but he ran out again the moment the tractor clanked into movement. Argus had an excellent sense of hearing.

"Well-" Johnson said doubtfully.

Ballard moved his lips silently. "Eh? Get that stuff from the quicksand washed off Argus. He's supposed to be a showpiece!"

Johnson looked after Ballard's retreating figure. His eyebrows lifted quizzically.

Ballard had a tough session with the televisor. His enemies were closing in from all sides. If only the end of the month would come, when he could get the new diamonds! His holdings were falling in ruin around him. And that damned robot held the key to-everything!

He gave such orders as he could and wandered upstairs, to Argus' room. The robot, newly cleaned, stood by the window in a blaze of sunlight, a figure of fantastic beauty. Ballard noticed his own reflection in a nearby mirror. Instinctively he drew himself up.

It was a singularly futile gesture. The silent presence of Argus was like a rebuke. Ballard looked at the robot.

"Oh, damn you!" he said. "Damn you!"

Through the visor the impassive face of Argus ignored him. A whim had made Ballard shape the robot to resemble a knight. Somehow the idea seemed less satisfactory now.

Ballard's long-suppressed inferiority complex was suffering badly.

The golden knight stood there, towering, beautiful, mighty. There was dignity in its silence. It was a machine, Ballard told himself, merely a machine that man had made. He was certainly better than a machine.

But he wasn't.

Within its specialized limits, the robot had greater intelligence than his own. It had security, for it was invulnerable. It had wealth-it was wealth, a Midas without the Midas curse. And it had beauty. Calm, huge, utterly self-confident, Argus stood ignoring Ballard.

If Ballard could have destroyed the robot then, he might have done so. If only the damned thing wouldn't ignore him! It was wrecking his life, his power, his empire-and doing so unconsciously. Malice and hatred Ballard could have faced; as long as a man is important enough to be hated, he is not a cipher. But, to 'Argus, Ballard simply did not exist.

The sunlight blazed yellow from the golden cuirass. The diamonds sent out rainbow rays into the still air of the room. Ballard did not realize that his lips had drawn back into a snarling rictus- After that events moved swiftly. The most notable was the impounding of the castle, a result of Ballard's

avalanching economic collapse. He had to move out. Before he did so, he risked opening the annealing chamber on the new diamonds, a week before the process was finished. The result was worthless carbon. But Ballard could not have waited a week, for by that time the castle and all it contained would have been out of his possession.

Except the robot. That was still his own-or, rather, it belonged technically to his divorced wife. The documents he and Jessica had signed were thoroughly waterproof and legal. Ballard secured a court judgment; he was permitted to enter the castle and take away the robot at any convenient time. If he could find a way of immobilizing Argus long enough to dismantle the creature.

In time he might hit on a way. Maybe. Maybe-

Ffoulkes summoned Ballard to a conference, superficially a luncheon engagement. For a time Ffoulkes talked of casual matters, but there was a sardonic gleam in his eyes.

At last he said, "How are you getting on with that robot of yours, Bruce?"

"All right." Ballard was wary. "Why?"

"The castle's impounded, isn't it?"

"That's right. But I can get the robot whenever I like. The court ruled in my favor-special circumstances."

"Think you can catch the thing. I don't. Gunther was a smart man. If he made that robot invulnerable. I'll bet you won't be able to get your hands on it. Unless you know the key phrase, of course."

"I-" Ballard stopped. His eyes changed. "How'd you know-"

"That there was a code? Gunther phoned me just before he . . . ah . . . met his unfortunate accident. He suspected you were going to kill him.

I do not know the ins and outs of the thing, but I got a telecall from him that night. All he said was to tell you what the key code was-but not to tell you till the right time. Gunther was pretty farsighted."

"You know the code?" Ballard said, his voice expressionless.

Ffoulkes shook his head. "No."

"Just what do you mean?"

"Gunther said this: 'Tell Ballard that the key code is what he finds on the wire tape-the name and number of the patent for making artificial diamonds.'"

Ballard looked at his fingernails. The wire tape. The secret he had found only by tricking and killing Gunther. Only in his mind now did that information exist-"McNamara, Torsion Process, Patent No. R-73-V-22."

And Gunther must have keyed the robot to that chain of phrases before he

died.

"Finished?" Ffoulkes asked.

"Yeah." Ballard got up, crumpling his napkin.

"This is on me. . . . One more point, Bruce. It would be distinctly to my advantage if diamonds became valueless. I've sold out all my diamond holdings, but plenty of my competitors have interests in the African mines. If the bottom falls out of the market, I can do some good for myself."

"Well?"

"Would you tell me that patent number?"

"No."

"I thought not," Ffoulkes said, sighing. "Well, good-by."

Ballard commandeered a truck, well armored, and hired a dozen guards. He drove out to the castle. The officer at the gate nodded agreeably.

"Want to go in, sir?"

"Yes. I have permission-"

"I know that, sir. Go right ahead. You're after your robot?"

Ballard didn't answer. The castle, after he had entered, seemed strange to him. Already there had been alterations, rugs removed, pictures stored, furniture carried away. It was no longer his.

He glanced at his watch. Five after two. Argus would be making his rounds. The great hall- Ballard headed for it. He caught sight of the golden robot emerging into the hall and beginning its slow circuit. Two men followed it, just beyond the circle of reaction. They were police guards.

Ballard walked toward them. "I'm Bruce Ballard."

"Yes, sir."

"What . . . what the devil! Aren't you Dangerfield? Ffoulkes' chief of staff? Wh-"

Dangerfield's blank face didn't change expression. "I've been sworn in as special deputy. The authorities consider your robot too valuable to be left unguarded. We're detailed to keep an eye on it."

Ballard didn't move for a moment. Then he said, "Well, your job's finished. I'm taking the robot away."

"Very well, sir."

"You can leave."

"Sorry, sir. My orders were not to leave the robot unguarded for a moment."

"Ffoulkes gave you those orders," Ballard said, his voice not quite under

control.

"Sir?"

Ballard looked at the other guard. "Are you Ffoulkes' man, too?"

"Sir?"

Dangerfield said, "You're quite free to remove your robot whenever you wish, but until it's out of the castle, we mustn't take our eyes off those diamonds."

They had, as they talked, been following Argus. Now the robot moved on into the next hail and commenced its slow circuit. Ballard ran around in front of the creature. Covering his lips with one hand, he whispered, "McNamara, Torsion Process, Patent No. R-735-V-22."

The robot kept on walking. Dangerfield said, "You'll have to say it louder, won't you?"

He was holding a little notebook and stylo.

Ballard stared at the other for a moment. Then he ran in toward Argus, beginning to whisper the code phrase again. But the robot instantly fled till it was beyond Ballard's triggering nearness.

He couldn't get close enough to whisper the code. And if he said it loudly enough for Argus to hear, Dangerfield was ready to carry the formula to Ffoulkes. What Ffoulkes would do was obvious-publicize the process, so that the bottom would fall out of the diamond market.

The trio moved on, leaving Ballard where he was. Could there be a way out? Was there any way of trapping the robot?

The man knew that there was none-none he could employ' in a house no longer his own. With power and wealth, he might eventually figure out a way. But time was important.

Even yet, he could re-establish himself. A month from now he could not. By that time the strings of empire would have passed forever from his hands. Frantically his mind doubled back on its tracks, seeking escape.

Suppose he used the process to make more diamonds?

He might try. But he was no longer Bruce Ballard, the robber baron. He did not have the invulnerability of the very wealthy. Ffoulkes could have him shadowed, could trace his every movement. There was no possibility of secrecy. Whatever he did from now on would be an open book to Ffoulkes. So, if he made more diamonds, Ffoulkes' men would discover the method. There was no escape that way.

Escape. So easy for the robot. He had lost invulnerability, but the robot was invulnerable. He had lost wealth; Argus was Midas. His intelligence could not help him now in this greatest crisis of his life. For an insane moment he wondered what Argus would do in his place-Argus whose infallible metal brain was so far superior to the brain that had brought it into being.

But Argus would never be in this position-Argus cared for nothing on Earth but Argus' own magnificent golden hide, studded with flashing glory. Even now he was stalking on his way through the castle, uncaring and unheeding.

Ballard drew an unsteady breath and went down to the cellar, where he found a heavy sledge hammer. After that he went up to look for Argus.

He found him in the dining hall, moving with a slow, majestic tread as light from the windows slid softly over his golden mail, splintered into rainbows from his jewels.

Ballard was sweating, though not with exertion. He got in front of Argus and said, "Stop right there, you-" He called the robot an unprintable name.

Argus moved to circle him. Ballard in a clear, carrying voice said, "McNamara, Torsion Process, Patent No. R-735-V-za."

Dangerfield's stylo moved swiftly. The robot stopped. It was like stopping some inexorable force of nature, as if an avalanche had halted halfway down a mountain. In the unnatural silence Ballard heard the other guard ask:

"Got it?"

"Yeah," said Dangerfield. "Let's go."

They went out. Ballard hefted the sledge. He walked toward Argus on the balls of his feet. Argus towered over him, serene and blind.

The first blow sent diamonds showering and flashing, gouged gold from the robot's massive chest. With tremendous dignity Argus rocked backward from the blow. The thunder of his fall echoed through the silent hail.

Ballard lifted the sledge and brought it down again. He couldn't break through the almost impermeable casing beneath the gold plate, of course, nor crush the gems, but his furious blows ripped diamonds free and tore great furrows and gouges in the golden armor.

"You . . . damned . . . machine!" Ballard shouted, wielding the sledge in a blind, clamorous fury of meaningless destruction. "You . . . damned . . . machine!"