

THE MAN FROM THE STARS
By ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

Aided by a Mind-Reading Machine, Inventor James Egan Discovers a Strange Exile—and Is Whirled into Furious Conflict Against a Villainous Banker and Two Sinister Greed-Maddened Thugs!

A FANTASTIC COMPLETE NOVELET

CHAPTER I
Visitor from Afar

EGAN was not the first man to seek knowledge. The quest for truth is almost as ancient as the quest for food, but with Egan research had almost become a mania. The odd thing was that he remembered to eat at all, but on this particular evening, directly after dinner, he went to his laboratory. In the kitchen he could hear Anna, his huge Negro cook, sullenly banging things around as she cleaned up the pots and pans.

Egan sat down in the laboratory and waited. He was no prophet, but he knew what was going to happen. He did not like the idea, yet so far as he could see there was nothing much he could do about it.

He did not have long to wait until Anna came padding down the hall and knocked on his lab door. Egan got up and opened it. She stood there, a huge mountain of a woman, her face sullen. She wouldn't come in and she wouldn't look in, either, contriving to stare into space.

"Mr. Egan, could I speak with you a minute?"

Egan sighed. Good cooks were hard to find. "Yes, Anna," he said. "You're leaving. I know."

She seemed surprised. "How did you know that?"

Egan did not bother to answer that. "I don't suppose I could persuade you to stay, Anna? I'm paying you well and the work is light. You have only me to cook for, and the housework to do, which isn't much. Good jobs are hard to find, Anna."

"I know they is, Mr. Egan," the cook said. Then she realized she was looking into the laboratory, which was something she preferred not to do, and hastily transferred her gaze back to the door. "I sho' would like to keep on working for you, but I got a cousin that's bad sick, and they's only me to take care of her. So I got to quit, Mr. Egan."

Egan let her talk. She went into great detail about her relative, telling him the nature of the disease, how far it had progressed, and what the doctor said about it. As she talked Egan was remembering something which he had known for some time, that this particular cousin she mentioned had been dead for ten years. She had invented all this as an excuse for quitting.

"What is the real reason why you are leaving me, Anna?" Egan demanded. "Don't lie. Tell me the truth."

HE DELIBERATELY made his voice harsh, whiplike, so it would cut. As he had foreseen she grew angry and threw off further pretense.

"I'm quittin' because I'm scared," she snapped. "I'm scared to stay around this house another day. There's something here, Mr. Egan, something I can't see. All the time I think there is something behind me, trying to talk to me, but when I turn around there ain't nothing there. I'm scared, Mr. Egan, and I ain't ashamed to admit it."

As she spoke her eyes rolled wildly, showing the whites which contrasted sharply with the inky

blackness of her skin.

"Ah," said Egan thoughtfully. "I have know for some time you were frightened, Anna. Can you tell me why?"

"It's because of something I can hear but can't see," answered the cook, after some hesitation.

"Thai's ridiculous, Anna," he said.

"It ain't either," she protested. "And if you will listen to me, you'll get away from here too. This ain't a good place to be."

"But what frightens you, Anna? Tell me about it."

She looked straight at him. "Sometimes it's you," she said defiantly. "Sometimes you know things you can't know. Like me quitting. You knew I was going to quit."

Egan grinned and shook his head. It was a weary grin and it made his thin face look boyish. "You don't need to be afraid of me, Anna."

She studied his face. "No, suh," she said. "I see it ain't you I need to be scared of. You wouldn't hurt me. You know a lot of things you ain't got no right to know, but you wouldn't hurt me."

"Then what is it?" he insisted. "You can tell me. I want to know, too."

"What's that? Mr. Egan, have you felt it too?"

Her voice was suddenly hoarse.

Egan shook his head. He did not want to put an idea into her mind, to suggest something to her. "I didn't say I have felt or heard anything, Anna. But I would like for you to tell me what you have felt or heard."

She hesitated and he urged her to speak. She tried to comply.

"It's like—" She got no further. The words went into a whisper. She was looking straight at Egan but he saw she was not seeing him. Her eyes were entirely out of focus and her attention was concentrated on something else.

"Listen!" she whispered.

Egan listened. The house was on a quiet side street where there was little traffic. It was a small town. When night came it settled down to rest. Somewhere in the block children were playing. Egan could hear them calling to each other. The time was about eight o'clock in the evening. Two or three blocks away a car honked. That was all Egan heard.

Anna's eyes were still out of focus. Looking at her, Egan had the impression she was hearing something. It was stronger than an impression. He knew she was hearing something.

"A fiddle!" she whispered. "Hear that fiddle play?"

The words were so sudden and the description so unexpected that Egan was startled. She thought she heard a violin playing! A fiddle? Only it was not, could not be, possible.

Then he heard it. It was not a violin. He knew that. No violin ever produced a note like the sound he was hearing. Far up the scale, high in the upper register, was a note. It was almost too high to be heard. And while it was not a violin, it did sound a little like one. If some super musician, with more fingers than any human has, should possess and learn to play a violin better than any Stradivarius ever built, then he might produce music such as this.

An icy chill rippled up Egan's spine. "Anna," he said. "Where is that sound coming from?"

She did not hear him. She was already moving away. Her face was blank, and her black skin actually seemed to be turning gray. She began to run toward the kitchen. He called sharply to her but she did not stop. He heard her open and shut the kitchen door with a crash. There was a wooden fence around the back yard, with a gate.

A MOMENT later he heard the gate creak and then slam as it closed. Egan knew he could not catch her, that she would not be able to tell him anything if he did catch her. But he could still find out what had frightened her. With a quick stride he was back in the lab.

A bench ran the whole length of the room. A ham radio operator, taking one look at the instruments on this bench, would have gasped in admiration, "By George, what a receiver!" Taking a second look, he would have wonderingly asked, "But what do you get on this layout?"

Egan would have grinned at that question, and changed the subject. He could get something on that receiver all right—the electro-magnetic impulses generated within the human brain.

Using it, Egan could read minds.

His cook had wondered how he had known she was going to quit and how he had known her sick cousin was already dead. The answer was simple: he had been reading her mind, a fact of which she had no knowledge.

Egan was an electrical engineer, and a good one. His mind-reading device was a development of a piece of equipment standard in all hospitals, the encephalograph, which records the electrical pulsations taking place in the brain and is used to aid in diagnosing various mental diseases. Egan had merely taken the encephalograph and gone on from there, which was not so simple as it sounds.

He snapped the switches that fed current to the tubes. The device could be tuned just as a radio can be tuned. In fact, since each brain radiates on a slightly different frequency, it had to be tuned, but it was already tuned to the mind of the cook. Its big defect lay in its limited range, which was not over a quarter of a mile at best.

Egan slipped the helmet over his head. There were no earphones in this helmet, for the reason that the impulses recorded by this receiver were not transformed into sound and would not have made sense if they had been. Instead, the helmet was fitted with electrodes, two of which rested snugly against the temples, one under each ear, and the fifth fitted against the base of the skull.

The tubes warmed. Egan closed his eyes. His face muscles writhed. There was no physical pain connected with the operation of this device, but since it sent the person operating it into a sort of semi-hypnotic trance, there was a definite psychic shock. He winced automatically. Then the current began to flow and he was in rapport with the mind of Anna.

She was running down the street. He could feel the pound of blood from her heart. The brain current fluctuated with each heart beat. He could also feel—he shuddered.

Fear—black, bottomless fear! Deeper, darker, more hideous than the fear of death. The blind, unreasoning fear that goes with panic.

Her thought impulses were neither clear nor coherent, her reasoning powers being completely usurped by blind, mad panic.

Egan followed her thoughts until she went out of range of his receiver. Then he cut the switches and took off the helmet.

He had not learned what he wanted to know. Something had scared his cook. For months something had been scaring her.

What was it which had driven her away?

He did not know. Yet it must have been something around this house, something which was still lurking, something which had not gone away like Anna, and he felt his flesh crawl at the thought, for he remembered a violin had played from nowhere. He, too, had heard that violin. He listened again. The violin was not playing.

Anna had sensed the menacing presence within this house. Egan went to his desk, opened a drawer and took out a flashlight and pistol. The cool feel of steel was reassuring.

GUN in one hand, flashlight in the other, he went over the house, from attic to basement, poking into the shadows, looking in every closet, searching every room. He did not know what he was looking for but he did know that his flesh crawled with dread and a subtle mistrust which he could not suppress. Yet he did not find anything tangible which could explain this uneasiness.

He went back to the lab.

"This is nonsense," he said to himself. "There is nothing here. Anna was just superstitious and ignorant."

He put the helmet back over his head, noticing as he did so that in laying it down he had accidentally twisted the tuning dial. He closed the switches. The tubes warmed.

A look of shocked surprise stamped itself on his face.

Thoughts were flowing through the helmet.

They were not human thoughts! Although not the type that daunted easily, Egan had to force himself to sit there in the chair and leave the helmet on his head. Hair rose along the back of his neck and unconsciously his right hand dived into the coat pocket where he had placed the gun. Suddenly his muscles stiffened. He jerked the helmet from his head.

"Help!" he shouted.

He was halfway across the room before he caught himself. He stopped in mid-stride, forced himself to turn around and face the machine he had invented. He looked around the room. No one was there. Why had he shouted for help?

Then he realized that the impulse to shout for help had not come from him. It had come from that helmet and passing into his mind, had forced the word from his lips. His mind-reading machine worked that way. Just as a loudspeaker is part of a radio receiver, transforming into sound the electrical impulses coming through the ether, so he was a part of his mind-reading device, his own mind interpreting and transforming the impulses coming through the helmet.

Something, or someone, had shouted for help, and he had picked up the impulse. But who was calling for aid? He put the helmet back on his head. There was a puzzle here and he meant to solve it.

"Help!" Again the thought came quite clearly. He echoed it. It seemed to him that his own mind was telling his throat muscles to yell for help. Mental impulses were flowing from the helmet into his mind, impulses, feelings, impressions. There were no words tacked to them, he had to find the words to fit them, to take inarticulate, alien ideas and fit English words and phrases to them. And how startling those ideas were.

"Don't run—The black one—Natural telepath—She ran—Don't run—"

So the black one had been a natural telepath? That could only refer to Anna, who had said she could feel something in the house, something which she could not see. Again Egan felt the sickening impulse of terror paralyzing his body. No wonder his cook had felt frightened.

"Listen," whispered the eerie thought impulse in the helmet. "I have been trying to reach your mind, but up to now, it has not been possible. You did not tune the mind reader properly. Couldn't get through to you, except in flashes, now and then. I helped you build the mind-reader so I could talk to you, could make contact with you. Listen, I beg of you."

Egan got out of his chair then. He could not sit still any longer, for he had built this mind-reading machine all by himself. It was his own idea, strictly.

And here something was telling him the idea had come from it!

But even as he rebelled against the idea that he had had help in building the complicated device on the table, he remembered how frequently seemingly insurmountable problems had been solved in a flash by intuition. It had happened time and time again.

He sat down and once more slipped the helmet over his head.

"Please don't break the connection," the thought came. "Yes, I helped you. You had the impression it was your own idea. It wasn't. It was mine. Listen." Fists clenched, Egan was listening.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"An exile," the answer came. "From another universe!"

CHAPTER II

Voice from Another Plane

GETTING up out of the chair, Egan yanked the helmet from his head. There was a package of cigarettes lying on the bench. He grabbed one and wasted three matches trying to light it. He was scared, but the fright did not matter for that could be controlled. He just had to have a few minutes to readjust his mental outlook to a new and startling fact—that he was in contact with an exile from another universe. A superior intellect.

Egan, as has been mentioned, was an electrical engineer, but it had been years since he had practiced his profession. He was also an inventor. Down in Washington the name of James Egan could be found scrawled on patent applications. The Egan X-ray was one of them, a device for focusing X-rays. This

one patent alone would have made him a fortune, if he had wished. He wasn't interested in exploiting companies, for it was his belief that X-rays should be made available at the lowest possible cost. Hence the rights to the Egan X-ray had been released to the public.

A television system to enable plane pilots to make blind landings at night or in fogs was another patent that bore the Egan name. This one would have made him a fortune too, if he had accepted royalties. He had not. On some dark night some pilot who could not afford expensive gadgets might need his device.

There were other patents too. From them he accepted a trickle of money that was sufficient to meet his modest living expenses, but of late years, there had not been many new patents. He had been engaged in research, studying the way the universe is put together, following the mathematics of Einstein, Minkowski, Eddington, Dirac, and others, discoveries which are not patentable.

Egan calmed his imaginative faculties which were threatening to run away with him and ticked off the sequence of events. First, for months something had been frightening his cook. Second, once or twice he himself had thought he had been aware of some alien presence in the house. Third, he had solved the problems involved in the construction of his mind-reading machine too easily. Fourth, thoughts were flowing through his helmet, non-human thoughts. Fifth, there was a voice whispering, "I am an exile."

He put the helmet back on his head. "Where are you?" he asked.

"Here, in the room with you," came the answer.

Taking a firm grip on his emotions, Egan looked around the room. "I don't see you," he said.

"No," a voice whispered in his mind. "You don't see me. I don't see you so well, either. You are only a hazy outline to me, vague, indistinct, but I can feel your thoughts and your thoughts are electrical. I also am electrical, so I can feel them."

"I would like to see you," Egan insisted.

Something sighed in his mind. "All right, although you will be able to see but little. Turn out all the lights in the room."

The engineer turned out the lights. "Look straight ahead."

In the darkness of that silent laboratory Egan strained his eyes. Again the hair on the back of his neck was rising and chills were walking over his body as he stared. At what?

The room was as black as midnight. In that blackness something moved. Gray, indistinct, as vague as a shadow, substanceless—he was not sure he saw it. His hand went out, exploring, but touched nothing.

"You can't feel me," whispered the helmet. "I am not matter, as you know matter. How can I tell you what I am?"

Egan had the impression the entity was searching for suitable words. "Ah! The ether. You can't see it or feel it yet you know it must exist. I am as tenuous as the ether."

Straining his eyes, Egan could see something like the thinnest of thin gray smoke hanging in the air in front of him. It looked—it looked like a ghost. The engineer felt as if his hands were freezing.

"Don't be afraid."

Egan switched on the lights. "I'm not afraid," he said. His voice was hoarse. "Tell me: when Anna was there—she was the black one who ran—I thought I heard a violin playing. Did you cause that?"

"Yes. I was trying to reach her mind and, through her, to talk to you. She is naturally susceptible to my thoughts. I wanted to tell her to tell you how to tune your receiver so we could make contact." "You scared the wits out of her."

"She is a primitive. I did not intend to frighten her."

"Where did you come from?" Egan asked abruptly. Now that the lights were on, he was looking over the room for the gray shadow he had glimpsed, but could not see it. Apparently it was only visible in the darkness, and then barely.

"From another universe, from another space-plane-time."

SPACE-PLANE-TIME was how his mind translated the impulses. Egan was familiar with the theories advanced by Dirac, and others, that the earth we see and feel, the sun and the stars in the sky, belong to one universe. He also knew that the same theories, and he had seen the intricate mathematics

that backed them up, postulated the existence of more than one universe, of an infinity of universes, in fact. Just as space is infinite but limited, if we believe Einstein, so does an infinite number of possible universes exist, each one stacked on top of the other, each mutually interpenetrative and each mutually exclusive of all the others. This meant that, across a dimensional transit, there were worlds on top of each other, worlds without end.

"You came from another universe?" Egan said.

"Yes," the eager answer whispered into his mind. "I am glad you understand. It is difficult, impossible, to explain. There are no words to describe the way in which I came."

"I know," said Egan. Words at best were clumsy tools. His eyes were straining through the laboratory, searching for the shadow he had seen. Something as intangible as the motes in a sunbeam moved across the room. It was gone before he could focus on it.

"How did you happen to come?" he asked. "I mean was it an accident, or were you trying to reach this world?"

"It was no accident. I was hurled here by an enemy who sought to destroy me." With the impulse there came a blaze of anger, dark and bitter. Egan caught the fleeting impression that in another universe there had been treachery, false friendship, betrayal. And he sensed also that the treachery had succeeded.

"Yes," the eager answer whispered response to his unspoken thought. "I am slowly dying. In your world I am abnormal and my strength is gradually flowing away." The whisper was forlorn, as if an elf, in a corner, were moaning he had to die.

"I'm sorry," Egan said abruptly. "What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to help me return to my universe. I want you to build a machine that will pierce the dimensional veil between our worlds, so I can return to my own home. I will teach you how to build the machine. I cannot build it myself because I cannot manipulate the matter of your world. Will you help me?"

The voice whispered into silence. Egan could feel the exile waiting for him to answer that question. It was an important question. The way he answered it meant life or death to the questioner.

Egan had a unique character. He was the man who would not accept royalties on an X-ray, because somebody who needed an X-ray might not be able to pay the additional cost the royalties would impose.

"Help you?" said Egan. "Of course I'll help you. Tell me what there is to do."

IN AN instant, as he answered the question, the laboratory was alive with sound. If Anna had been present, she would have gasped, "Hear that fiddle play." The fiddle was playing, wild notes rushing joyously forth in rapturous ecstasy. Egan suspected he was not hearing the music with his ears, that it was flowing directly into his brain, but he could not miss the happiness that was in the sound. The exile was singing with joy. He had found someone to help him.

"My friend!" the whisper came. "My friend!"

"Tell me what to do," Egan repeated. The singing violin went into silence. There was stillness while the exile marshaled his faculties. Then thoughts began to flow into Egan's mind. He closed his eyes. Little by little a mental picture began to grow up. The picture formed, took on detail, added parts, rounded itself out. It was a picture of some sort of a machine, apparently electrical. It looked like a cyclotron.

A mathematical description went with it. Egan took pencil and paper and began to write. Equations flowed from his fingers, describing the operation and construction of the machine, intricate equations, in a mathematics that he did not understand at first. It was similar to calculus, which he knew, but more involved. He asked for explanations and obtained them, and began to understand the mathematics. Later he came to realize he had been given a new system of mathematics.

Midnight arrived and he was still writing. In the small hours of the morning the equations reached an end. "Please make this machine," the exile whispered. "Make it as soon as possible."

"I'll do it," Egan answered. He studied the sketch and the equations. Yes, he could make the machine. Many of the parts were intricate, would need special tools. It would not be an easy thing to

make, but he could do it.

He began to compile a list of parts he would need, so much copper, so much iron for the core of the huge magnets, so much chrome steel. So many heavy duty vacuum tubes. He nodded. The regular tubes used by the commercial broadcasting companies would work. They were expensive, but—

A sudden thought struck him, appalled him. Quickly he made an estimate of the cost of the materials and the parts that went into the machine. Tungsten, chromium, vanadium, platinum. Lots of platinum.

The total cost staggered him. The rough estimate came to over one hundred thousand dollars.

He did not have a hundred thousand dollars. His bank account had less than five thousand dollars in it. He did not have the money to build this machine.

"What is the matter?" the exile whispered anxiously. "What is wrong?"

"Nothing," Egan answered grimly. "Nothing. I'll build the machine you need."

Later in the day, as early as banking hours would permit, James Egan went to see Stephen Connors, local financial tycoon of the town. Connors rubbed his hands when he saw Egan enter. Connors was executive vice-president of the bank where Egan had his account. Both the bank and Connors, in the past, had made a pretty penny out of fees and commissions from handling the financial end of Egan's inventions. Connors had a vast respect for the money Egan had refused to accept and a vast contempt for the inventor. It was his secret opinion that Egan was a crack-brained fool.

"Good morning, Mr. Egan," Connors said, scenting a commission. "Come in and sit down. How are you today? How are the inventions coming?"

"I'm fine," Egan said. "I want to borrow a hundred thousand dollars." The bluntness stunned even Connors. "Uh—ah—that is." Then he got control of himself. "Why of course, Mr. Egan. Certainly. You have come to the right place. No doubt you have some new invention you want financed. If you will just give me a description of the invention, an appraisal of its value, and an assignment of the patent rights, I'm sure the bank will be able to take care of you."

"I don't have an invention."

"What's that? No invention?"

"No," said Egan. "I just want to borrow a hundred thousand dollars." *Harrumph*. Connors cleared his throat. He was thinking fast. "Of course, Mr. Egan. I misunderstood you. No doubt you wish to make a collateral loan. If you will give me a list of the securities you own, I will refer the matter to the directors."

"I don't own any securities," Egan said. "I just want to obtain a loan." Connors choked and coughed to clear his throat. "My dear sir, do I understand you correctly?" he said. "Are you asking the bank to lend you one hundred thousand dollars on your unsecured signature?"

"Yes," said Egan. "I need the money in a hurry and I need it badly. Naturally, since I have done business with you in the past, I came to you. Can you let me have the money immediately?" Egan was an inventor, a scientist. He knew and cared nothing about finance. "I pledge you my word I will repay the money."

"How?" Connors asked.

"Through something I will invent. I have several ideas in mind."

THE banker stared at Egan. "Why do you need the money?" asked Connors.

"I—I can't tell you," Egan faltered, intuitively he knew enough not to tell Connors about the exile. "I need it, that's all."

"No," said the banker.

"But I have to have it," Egan babbled. "You people have made a great deal of money out of me in the past. You can't turn me down now."

Connors could and did turn him down. It had never occurred to Egan that he would not get the loan. He was so lost in the story of the exile and in plans for building the machine to return the exile home that he had not thought about how he could get the money to build the machine. He almost got down on his knees and begged Connors for the loan. The banker was obdurate. "It's not good business."

"To the blazes with good business," shouted Egan, at last losing his temper. "You've got rich out of

me in the past. I must have that money. It's a matter of life and death."

A bitter sneer curled the banker's thin lips. His mask was off and he saw no reason to waste further time and diplomacy on this fool. Both men had risen to their feet.

"Die, then!" snapped Connors. "Get out of here and stay out. And don't come back until you have something worth money."

With this the banker shoved Egan bodily out of the office and slammed the door, leaving him dazed and despairing in the big outer room!

CHAPTER III *Search for Money*

UPON recovering somewhat from his first disappointment, Egan went to his laboratory and turned on the current of his mind-reading machine.

"I know," the exile whispered. "I followed you."

"There are other banks," said Egan grimly. "I'm going to New York."

Even on the train, as he rode to New York, Egan had an impression the intangible shadow of the exile was riding with him, urging him to hurry, hurry!

Back in town Connors was already regretting what he had done.

"Perhaps I was too hasty," he mused. "That fellow may have something good. I'd better keep an eye on him."

Egan went to three banks but at none of them was he able to get past the uniformed guards and assistants to assistants and talk to a responsible official. The banks were not interested in lending money on the unsecured signature of an inventor.

This was a new experience to Egan, but he learned fast. After all, the name of James Egan meant something in certain scientific circles in America. There was a large electrical manufacturing firm in New York that held—and made money—out of various patent rights that he had assigned to them. Egan succeeded in obtaining an interview with the president of that firm. And when he left, he had a letter of introduction to the president of one of the largest banks in New York.

The letter of introduction took him past a line of bowing assistants and awed secretaries and into the august presence of the banker himself.

"What can I do for you, sir?" the banker asked.

"I want to borrow some money," Egan said.

"Well, you've come to the right place to get it," the president said, laughing. "Lending money is our business."

"It's a rather large sum," the inventor said, hesitantly.

"We handle loans that run into millions," the banker answered.

"Oh!" Egan was greatly relieved. He had been afraid that no bank would lend him the amount of money he needed. But it pleased him to find out this firm made loans of millions. "I need a hundred thousand."

"Certainly," the president said. "We will be glad to arrange it for you, Mr. Egan."

The inventor's heart jumped at the words. He was going to get the money. "I can't begin to tell you how much I appreciate this."

"It's quite all right," the banker replied. "What are you going to use the money for?" Egan hesitated. "Oh, come, we have no secrets in business."

The banker was a celebrity, with a big, hearty, friendly, robust voice. He seemed unusually intelligent, and he must have been, to occupy the place he did in the world of finance. Also, Egan was slightly overawed by the luxury of the appointments with which the big man was surrounded.

"Do I have to tell you?" Egan questioned, his tone anxious.

"Perhaps you'd better. But have no fear that any information you may reveal here will be divulged."

"Well," the inventor said. "I need the money to build a machine to return to his home world an exile from another universe."

For a second, the face of the banker went blank. Then he leaned forward across his desk and smiled. "I'm sorry, but I didn't quite get that. Please explain at greater length."

"Certainly," Egan answered. He had been afraid to talk about the exile for fear someone would think he was out of his mind. But this banker was considered an authority on world affairs and was reputed to keep abreast of the march of science. Egan told him the whole story. "So you see, sir, the machine will be quite costly, but it will be the means of saving the life of a living creature."

"Yes," the banker answered. "I see."

"And now, sir, may I have the money immediately?"

For a second the banker hesitated. "Yes," he answered. "I will have my assistant draw up the necessary papers at once. Incidentally, Mr. Egan, I am rather fascinated with this exile of yours. Would you mind explaining in greater detail?" He pressed a button on his desk several times, using a peculiar telegraphic code.

EGAN began to retell the story, how his cook had sensed a strange presence in the house, how he had built the mind-reading machine, and how the exile had appeared. He was deep in an explanation of the co-existing universes when he heard the door open behind him. At first he paid no attention. Then he realized the banker was no longer listening to him but was looking at the door. Egan turned.

Two armed bank guards in blue uniforms stood there.

"This man is a lunatic," the banker said. "Seize him."

Before the inventor could move, the guards grabbed him, pinioning his arms.

"But—but—" Egan wildly protested.

"Get him out of here," the banker ordered.

"Shall we turn him over to the police?" one of the guards asked.

"No. He seems to be harmless enough, so the police are not necessary. Just turn him loose on the street. By George, he has strange delusions. I never heard anything funnier in my life. I could hardly keep my face straight."

As Egan was dragged from the room the banker began to guffaw with laughter and to mop his face with a fine linen handkerchief. The two guards thrust Egan out of a side door into the street. "And don't come back!" they told him. "We don't want any of you nuts around here."

Egan went back to his hotel. In the gray shadows of his room a shadow waited. He could not be certain he saw it. But he could hear a voice in his mind. "Hurry, hurry."

To help the exile he had to have money, and money was not being lent to inventors. He was learning the greater the discovery, the more revolutionary the idea, the harder it is to make other human beings listen.

There was plenty of money in New York, uncounted millions. It was the richest city of the richest nation on earth. Wealth beyond the dreams of Croesus lay about him. It would have been easy to have financed a new tie clasp or a kitchen gadget, for all men understood such things without special education. Every day vast fortunes were being made and lost. Newspapers constantly carried stories of speculators who had cleaned up on the stock market. The money that he desperately needed was here. But how to get it was a problem. More than a problem.

Suddenly Egan sat erect. A new idea had popped into his mind. Instantly he was pacing the floor. "Riches can be made on the stock market," he muttered excitedly. "Why can't I deal myself a hand in that game? Why can't I clean up on the market, especially since I can read minds?"

Another thought came which he discarded at once. There were secrets here that were worth millions, more millions than could be counted. A man who could read minds could learn the combination of any vault, the manufacturing secrets of any firm. He could also learn juicy tid-bits that rich men would pay not to have known. He put the thought out of his mind. He was not a criminal or a blackmailer.

That left the stock market.

He made a hurried trip back to his laboratory. When he returned, he brought his mind-reading machine with him.

Two weeks later a gossip columnist carried this item:

What is the name of the man who has moved in among the bigshot gamblers down along Wall Street? Who is it that has sat in on the game played by the bulls and the bears, with millions at stake, and has taken the big time operators for such a ride that the financial market is gasping at the spectacle? We might whisper that his name is Egan.

We might also whisper, that in a series of daring and spectacular plunges, this small town inventor is reputed to have cleaned up close to a quarter of a million dollars within the last ten days. Nice going, Egan!

FOR once, a gossip columnist was right. Egan had cleaned up over two hundred thousand dollars. The extra hundred thousand was to pay the income tax on his winnings, for Egan had learned fast. But this was not difficult, for a man who could read minds.

When he got off his train in his home town, the first man he saw was Connors. The banker came rushing to him, grabbed his hand and began shaking it.

"Mr. Egan, I can't begin to tell you how delighted I am to see you. How are you, sir? Did you have a good trip?"

"Fair," said Egan, removing his hand from the other's grip.

"That's fine, that's fine," the banker beamed. "I should like to talk to you, at your convenience, sir."

"What about?" the inventor demanded.

Connors could not restrain his excitement. "To be frank, sir, I wanted to tell you that the bank, upon my persuasion, has reconsidered your request for a loan. The directors are prepared to lend you any amount you find necessary."

"I don't want it," said Egan bluntly. He turned to go. The banker followed him.

"Just a minute, sir. Just a minute, Mr. Egan."

"What do you want now?" the inventor asked.

"Well, sir," Connors was perspiring. He looked around the platform to make certain that it was deserted, then leaned forward and continued the conversation in a whisper. "I—ah—read about your little killing down on Wall Street, sir. And, to be frank, my meeting you here was no accident. I have been looking forward to your return." Connors took a deep breath and plunged, "I wondered if we could go into partnership together, sir? With your inventive genius and my knowledge of the financial world, we could become the wealthiest men in the world."

"Do I look like a fool?" said Egan.

"But we could make millions, sir. With my knowledge of finance—"

"—And your abysmal ignorance of everything else," Egan supplied. "Get out of my way, Connors. I have no time to waste on you. There is work to be done."

He pushed past the banker and entered a taxicab. Connors, his face flushed with anger, watched him go.

It took Egan two months to build his machine. The parts that went into it were not coming off the end of any assembly line, and in several instances, the tools to make the parts had not even been invented. Egan had to make most of the equipment himself. He could not buy these things ready made. He worked day and night, and as he worked an intangible shadow looked over his shoulder.

He had grown accustomed to that shadow now. It was no longer alien or perturbing. It was a friend, a friend who was growing weaker daily.

"Your world is dangerous to me," the inventor's mind-reading machine whispered. "There are radiations here—light, electromagnetic waves—that clash with my own vibrations. And I am hungry. Do you know what it means to be hungry?"

"I certainly do," the inventor answered. In his own younger days, he had gone without food. Now he had all the food he needed, but it was not food which could be shared with this strange exile. The chemicals extracted from meats and plants could not sustain the exile. His bodily needs depended upon elements not to be found anywhere on earth.

Meanwhile, like a man on a desert island, he was slowly perishing from starvation.

It was storming the night Egan completed the machine and prepared to test it. The howling winds of

fall were whipping rain across the roof of the house. Black wetness mantled the world outside.

The machine looked like a cyclotron, a four-foot mass of gleaming coils and hulking housings. Everything was ready. All that was needed was to turn the current into it. Egan picked up the helmet of the mind-reading device.

"Shall I go ahead?" he asked.

CHAPTER IV *The Exile's Return*

A STARTLING pulsation of eagerness flowed into James Egan's mind. Exultation, joy, glory. A condemned man, waiting in the death cell for the guards to come who sees the door open and finds they have brought, instead of death, a reprieve and full pardon, would not have been as exultant as the being whose thoughts flowed into Egan's mind.

The exile was happy.

And—the fiddle was playing. It was a thin, high, singing note, so far up the scale it was almost out of hearing. Above the moan of the wind, above the rattle of the rain on the roof, it came flooding through the laboratory, rising, falling, singing. The note was carrying a melody, but it was not such a melody as ever before heard on earth. A master violinist playing before a hushed audience in a concert hall.

There was power in the note, surging, rising power. And exultation, such an exultation as primitive dancers know.

A slave, released from bondage, might sing as this note was singing. A traveler, lost in the desert, might sing like this when his faltering, death-dogged footsteps led him at last to water and to life.

Ears that had heard the pipes of Pan playing on the rocky headlands of ancient Greece, Orpheus at his lyre, the golden notes of the sirens—this was their music. A fiddle playing—

"Yes," the singing voice exulted in Egan's mind. "Go ahead."

He closed the switches. From somewhere within the bulked housings of the machine that looked like a cyclotron came a grunt as the current hit the field coils.

Theory indicated that immediately above the machine, in a cup-like depression where the fierce currents were concentrated, an opening should appear. This opening should resemble a window, but unlike the windows we have in our homes on earth, which open out upon our familiar world, this window should open out upon another universe. In effect, the machine dug a hole in the fabric of space itself, rending momentarily, the tenuous but extremely tough veil that separates the worlds.

As the current hit the machine it began to rumble.

Egan was watching with all eyes. Deep within his mind, he could still hear the exultant fiddle playing with so much happiness that it made him happy too. But he wanted to see and to understand everything that occurred. He saw the window begin to open.

It started as a pin-point of gray mist, then began to expand. It grew to the size of a baseball, then it was as big as a basketball. Staring at it, Egan caught one bewildering glimpse of an opening that seemed to be miles in extent, yet was less than six inches long. There was an odd telescoping effect which shortened incredible distances to inches. He knew this was a dimensional effect.

For several seconds, as if through a long tube, he looked into an alien universe at a city of light. Great gleaming towers of a vast city lifted into the sky, merging into the distance. Rainbow colors flashed and scintillated in blinding radiance. Red towers, blue towers, yellow towers, and a dozen other shades he could not name flickered and danced against an opalescent sky. A glory of unearthly beauty dazzled his sight.

"My world," the exile whispered in his mind.

Egan would have kept on looking, even if he blinded himself, but the window filled with mist, obscuring vision. He suspected this was caused by the congealing of the water vapor in the air.

"Thank you, my friend," came the voice of the exile. "The window is open and I am going home."

"Goodbye," Egan answered. "Goodbye."

IT OUGHT to have been a dramatic moment, this return of the exile. But there was no drama. Egan, watching, saw the mist obscuring the mouth of the tube swirl as something moved through it. That was all. The exile moved into the tube, and was gone.

Egan sighed. From somewhere in infinity a voice whispered once more. "Goodbye," it said again.

Suddenly Egan felt lonely as he sat there by himself in the laboratory. During all the months he had worked, the inventor had been constantly aware of a friendly presence near him, a thin, almost invisible gray shadow that watched and helped him. He had grown accustomed to this presence. Now it was gone and he was lonely.

The lab was silent, except for the humming of the machine. In the night outside noisy rain ran over the iron roof and the storm beat against the windows.

With a crash the door of the room was kicked open and Egan swung around. Clad in a dripping raincoat a man stood there. It was Stephen Connors. One hand thrust deep into his raincoat pocket, the banker advanced into the room.

"Hello," he said.

"What the devil are you doing here?" Egan gasped. The banker had never visited him.

"I dropped in to discuss a business proposition," Connors answered. "I have nothing to discuss with you," answered Egan. "So far as I'm concerned, the quicker you leave, the better I will like it. You weren't invited here and you aren't wanted. Get out."

Egan had just watched an event touching on the mechanics of another universe, which any true scientist would sell his soul to witness, and here Connors had come to talk business, like the sordid, warped money-grubber he was. Almost it verged on sacrilege.

"Go on, get out."

The banker did not move.

"I want to make you a proposition, Egan," he said. "You have a machine by which you can forecast what the stock market is going to do. How much do you want for it?"

Egan stared at him. "Are you insane? I have no such device."

"There is nothing to be gained by denying it," Connors answered. "I know all about that killing you made on Wall Street. I've had detectives on your trail and they discovered the office you rented, and by talking to janitors, learned that you had installed some kind of a machine in your office. You opened a trading account with a broker and immediately began to clean up. Don't try to lie to me, Egan. I know you have invented some machine that will forecast market trends."

Appalled, Egan stared at the banker. He realized what had happened. Connors had misunderstood the nature of the device Egan had invented. He thought it was a machine to forecast the market.

"You've come to the wrong place," Egan answered. "I have a mind-reading machine, not a market-forecasting device."

"A what?"

"There it is," Egan gestured toward the apparatus assembled on the work bench. "If you don't believe me, look it over."

The banker was startled. He stared suspiciously at the assembly of apparatus on the table.

"You mean you can read minds?" Egan nodded.

"What's that thing?" Connors pointed to the bulked housing of the machine that had been used to return the exile to his own world.

"That? Oh, that's something else." The machine was still running and the gray ball of mist was still visible, clouding the opening to the tube to infinity. The inventor started to turn it off.

He found himself looking into the muzzle of a pistol that Connors jerked from his pocket.

"Don't touch anything," the banker snapped. "Get your hands up and keep them up. I'm not taking any chances of you electrocuting me."

AS Egan obeyed the order, the banker stared at him. "So you can read minds," he said thoughtfully. "I see how anyone could clean up on the market, if you can read minds, and do a lot of other things too." His eyes shot fire. "Why, anything would become possible. If some firm is shaky, needing only a push to

go to the wall, you can learn about it, and supply the push. You can learn everything they know down in Washington, the things they don't talk about. And if you have enemies, you could know every move they intended to make in advance."

There was sudden exultation in Connors' voice. "Mind reading would make me the richest man in the country. I could rule the world. Everybody else would be my slave. I would have absolute power!"

Egan was beginning to feel sick. He felt sicker when Connors laughed. "I came in here looking for a machine that would forecast the stock market," the banker exulted. "Instead I find something much more valuable."

"You're forgetting one thing," the inventor interrupted. "The machine is not for sale."

"Isn't it?" The banker laughed. "Everything is for sale. How much do you want for it? Oh, you needn't think I will take advantage of you. We will be partners. I will see that you get your fair share of the proceeds."

"No," said Egan.

The gun muzzle centered itself directly on his heart. "Don't think I will hesitate to shoot," Connors said. "Not when there are millions at stake."

"You won't shoot," Egan answered. "Because without me you can't operate the machine."

"You will teach me how to operate it."

"No."

Defiantly Egan uttered the word and he meant what he said. He knew how Connors would use the mind-reading machine and he suspected what would happen if he taught the banker how to operate it.

The banker raised his voice. "Boys," he said.

The lab door opened. Two men entered. They had the hardened faces of criminals.

"I've just been waiting for a night like this," the banker told Egan. "I suspected you might act stubborn, so I waited for a stormy evening, when everyone was in bed and nobody would hear you yell." He nodded to the thugs. "He's got a secret that I want to find out. Make him open up."

The ruffians sprang over to the inventor and, before he had a chance to resist, had wrenched his arms roughly around the back of the chair.

"We know how to make him sing," snarled one. Then to Egan. "Say how would youse like it if we shoved lighted matches against yer bare feet? Or would a couple of busted ribs go better, eh?"

Egan stared up into their brutal faces. He knew he could expect no mercy from them. By a sudden effort he tore himself free, leaped to his feet and darted toward the door. But the thugs were too active. They leaped after him. A hand grabbed him, spun him around, slammed him against the wall.

"So you'd run out on us, huh?" a voice growled. "How do youse like dis maybe?"

Something struck him on the side of the face with stunning force. A blackjack. Stars exploded in front of his eyes. He struggled to free himself. From the other side came another wallop, heavy, cruel. The second hoodlum had produced a piece of lead pipe. Egan reeled under the combined assault.

"Help!" he shouted, striking out blindly. "Help!"

"Shout all you want to." It was Connors' mocking voice. "Nobody will hear you on a night like this." Blows, heavy savage blows, were rained on the head of the helpless inventor, who sank to the floor with blood spouting.

"Help!" Egan screamed again. He tried to cover his bleeding head with his arms.

Smack! The blackjack whammed against the other side of his face. Thud! A fist drove into his side. Biff! A heavy shoe crashed against his shin, sending lancing fires of pain up his leg. He sagged flat on floor. Again a thick-soled boot collided with his body, this time in the ribs. He heard the crack of a breaking bone.

"Help!" he gasped. His only hope was that somebody would hear him and come to investigate. He listened for running footsteps coming up the walk outside, for someone pounding on the door. But no footsteps came, no one pounded on the door.

"Keep it up, boys," Connors kept yelling. "Batter his insides out. I can hire other men to tell me how to run the machine."

Again the men began to kick him. Suddenly they stopped. "What's that?" one of them asked.

"I don't hear anything," the second said.

"All I hear is music," Connors spoke. "Probably coming from a radio. Someone playing a violin. Pay no attention to it. Your job is to maul this crazy fool."

Egan heard it then—fiddle playing! Only there was no ecstasy in the sound now, no joyous happiness, no glorious notes. Instead there was anger, such burning bitter anger as he had never dreamed possible.

A fiddle playing!

With dazed eyes, Egan stared at the ball of mist in the cup-like depression on top of the machine which was still running in the middle of the room. Out of that ball of mist, something came. As pearl mist swirled, a gray shadow leaped out, a firmer, thicker shadow than he had seen before, a shadow that had seemingly found food, and substance. Angry pulsations darted from the misty form.

CONNORS saw the shape emerge, threw up his gun and fired. The slug drove through the shadow, whanging into the opposite wall. The shadow kept coming, and darting straight at the banker, fastened upon him, and seemed to merge into him.

Violin notes surged through the laboratory, notes mad with anger.

A dazed expression appeared on Connors' face. A shudder passed over his body. Lines of sudden pain grooved themselves in his dark countenance. The gun suddenly dropped from his hand, from fingers that no longer had the strength to hold it.

Connors screamed then, once, a sound retched from the depths of pain. A condemned felon, dropping from the scaffold, might scream thus when the fatal rope tightened around his neck. And his scream would end as quickly as this one did. It stopped, instantly.

Connors turned to run. He missed the door and ran headfirst into the wall. Gurgling, screaming, he clawed for the door, found it, blundered into the hall, ran down it. Egan heard him smash into the front door, heard the tinkle of broken glass as the man went through. The shadow was again in the room. Again the angry notes of the violin were ringing out. One of the men screamed.

Then both of them were running from the laboratory.

Egan heard them go. Dazedly he climbed to his feet. His vision was blurred, obscured. He clung to a chair for support.

He heard the violin come back. "They will never return to bother you," the voice whispered.

"Are they dead?" Egan asked.

"No. But they have no intelligence left. I destroyed their minds."

For an instant the violin notes surged angrily. Then they softened. Kindliness and compassion crept into them. "You are hurt, my friend?"

"I'll be all right," said Egan. "But—why did you come back?"

"I felt you call for help," the exile answered. "The window was still open and I could feel the pulsations through it. You saved my life. So I returned, to help you. I have," there was grimness in the voice, "a few powers at my command."

"So I see," said Egan. "Thank you, my friend."

"Thank you," the answer came. "And now, can I help you further?"

Egan shook his head. "I'll be all right. Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

Something swirled, in the ball of mist. For a second the violin notes hung in the air, playing softly. Then they went into silence, into some lost infinity. Egan opened the switch. The ball of mist collapsed. The exile was gone.

THE next day Anna returned, to Egan. She went all through the house, listening and looking.

"This is a good place now," she said. "There ain't anything bad here any more."

"There never was anything bad here," said Egan. "There was something strange, something different, but never anything bad."

