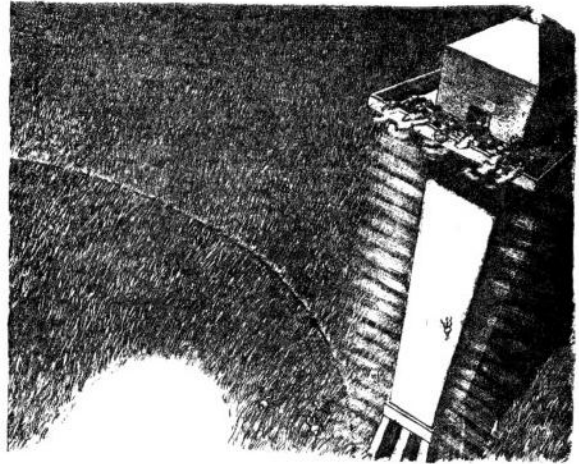
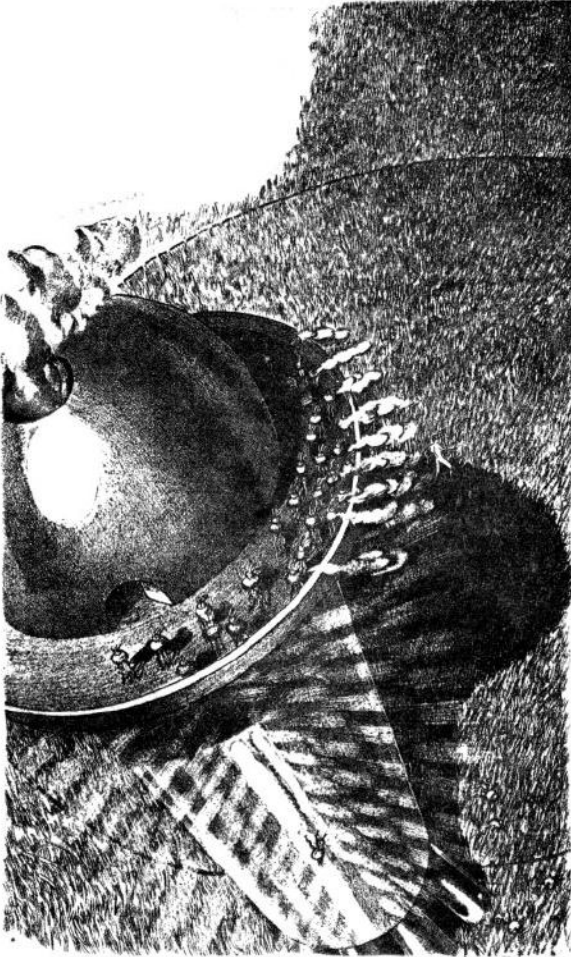


# The Mind Magnet

*by Paul Ernst*



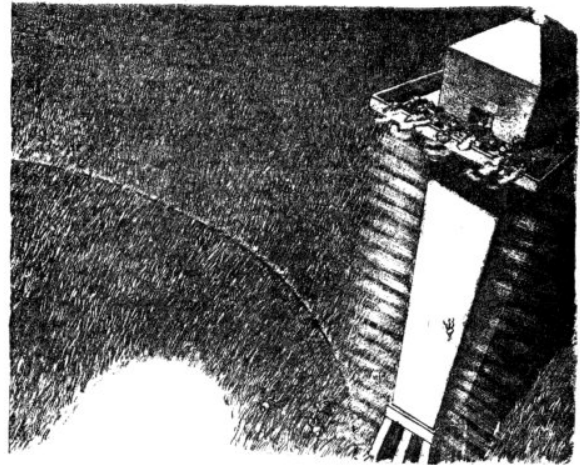
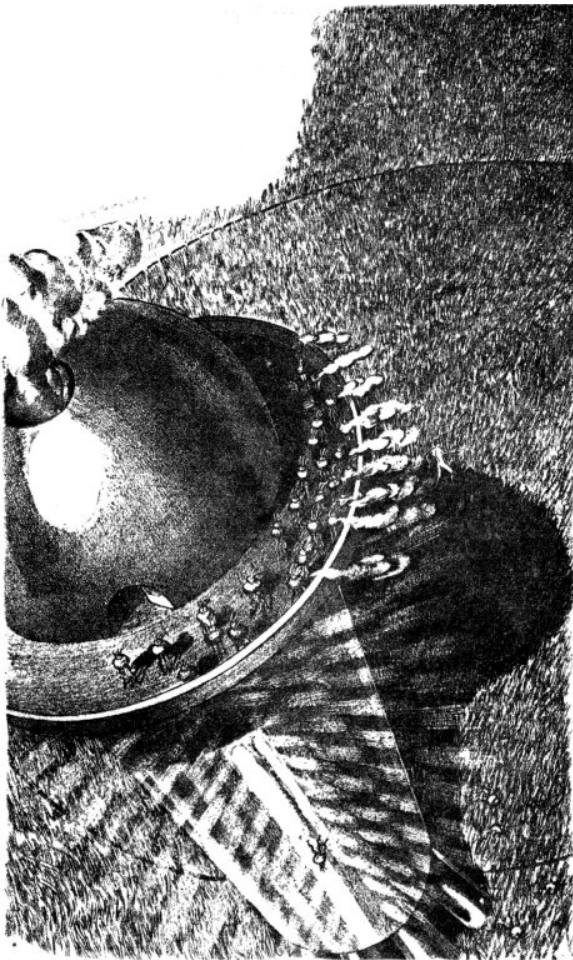
## CHAPTER I The Trial of Professor Stillwell

TWO men stepped into that stratosphere balloon. One was Professor Stillwell, the other was Commander James Farman.

Thirty-eight hours later the balloon settled to earth in North Carolina in the midst of a crowd drawn by the sight of its

descent. Only one man stepped out. That one was Stillwell. Farman would never step anywhere again. He lay inside the duralumin ball.

Dead, they pronounced him at first, for his heart was not beating and no film showed on any polished surface held before his lips. Then came the great mystery, brought on by the embalmer who thought the corpse wasn't quite normal and insisted upon more exhaustive tests.



*Thrilling Wonder Stories*, December, 1937

The Mind Magnet

*by Paul Ernst*

# CHAPTER I

descent. Only one man stepped out. That The Trial of Professor Stillwell one was Stillwell. Farman would never step anywhere again. He lay inside the duralumin ball.

WO men stepped into that Dead, they pronounced him at first, stratosphere balloon. One was T

for his heart was not beating and no film Professor Stillwell, the other was showed on any polished surface held before Commander James Farman.

his lips. Then came the great mystery, Thirty-eight hours later the balloon brought on by the embalmer who thought settled to earth in North Carolina in the the corpse wasn't quite nor a m l and insisted

midst of a crowd drawn by the sight of its upon more exhaustive tests.

## Thrilling Wonder Stories 2

Commander James Farman's body tremendous, straining bag of the balloon

---

was lifeless. And yet it was not dead! Not Commander Farman and I, dressed in according to the ultimate tests of the heavily padded suits. We must have been physiologists.

quite a contrasting pair. Farman is, or was, a Cold and stark that body lay. Yet its powerful man of thirty-four, over six tall and blood was not coagulating; the muscles were solidly built. I am nearly sixty, small, and not stiffening, and never did stiffen, in rigor not strong.

mortis; and there was no least sign of Farman shut the curved door, there decomposition over the months in which the was a great cry from outside, and we began lifeless flesh was observed.

to rise. The mountainous bag bore us up Dead, but not dead! An

smoothly as I valved sand from the space impossibility. You may have read in the between the floor and the curved bottom of papers of the exhaustive questioning of the ball. From the bottom of the bag our Professor Stillwell. Here was a man who had metal sphere hung like a pea depending been cooped in a ten-foot metal shell with from the stem of a pear.

Farman during the whole ascent of the The ball was checkered, with balloon. If any one should be able to explain alternate squares black and alternate squares Farman's horrible, undead state, it should be white. The black squares were to absorb heat Stillwell.

from the sun in high altitudes so that the But Stillwell's explanations only interior of the ball would not be too cold.

replaced impossibility with sheer lunacy.

You didn't read his account in any of the (*Interjection from jury foreman: "Please newspapers.*

*keep to the matter in hand, Professor* They don't print such stuff.

*Stillwell."* A

*ll, gentlemen, I*

*nswer: "Very we*

However, he is dead now; and his statement, *sta*

*will*

*rt with our peak altitude, which was for what it may be worth, can be reproduced eighty-four thousand feet."*) in this scientific journal.

All our apparatus, for the

*(June 12th, 1939, Asheville, North Carolina, written and sworn to before so forth, was functioning perfectly, But we coroner's jury investigating the apparent were unable to observe the heavens. The sky death of Commander James E. Farman.*

*at that high altitude, as you know, is like Shorthand transcription of testimony of deep black velvet, with the sun a big white Professor Walter Stillwell by clerk, Abel ball. But we were unable to see it because Whitehouse.)*

the glass traps in the top of the ball had become frosted over. We had electrical WE started at dawn of June 10th (Professor defrosters, but when we had beaten all Stillwell begins) from New York City. The altitude records at

nty-eight thousand

seve

ascent was made from the New York feet, we discarded our heavy batteries in World's Fair Grounds. There was a great order to rise still higher.

crowd around in spite of the early hour. This Commander Farman suggested that was most annoying, but as our ascent was he open one of the traps and wipe the glass financed by the Fair, we had to submit to clear. This was done, quickly, because in being a side-show attraction.

that rarefied atmosphere we swiftly lost air At ten minutes of five in the morning from our tanks. Farman resumed his seat on we stepped into the metal ball beneath the the floor, with neither of us even remotely

### **The Mind Magnet 3**

aware of what had happened while that trap to be flying to bits. My head felt as though it was open. . . .

were noiselessly exploding. I tottered on the floor, panting for breath.

SUNLIGHT came sharp and clear through The glaring sun, and everything else the square of glass. I watched it idly, and in the shell, faded into blackness. . . .

saw that in the sharp, clear beam were You know how a smashed finger g  
specks of dust. Brought up with us, floatin

feels? How it throbs and quivers to every f cou

o

rse. At that height, dust specks are beat of your heart until, if you could, you  
rare.

would be almost glad if your heart stopped Some of the flecks stayed  
steadily in beating? That was the way I felt all over position. Some danced  
and eddied. Some when consciousness returned to me.

gleamed momentarily blue or green or My whole body ached and throbbed  
yellow as infinitesimal prismatic reflections to the thud of my heart as  
though I had been were struck from them in their turning.

smashed repeatedly with a hammer. The Some glowed amethyst or gold.

agony was unendurable. I think I would But one speck, slightly larger than  
have gone mad if it had lasted long.

the rest, shone a brilliant, ruby red.

Fortunately it didn't. In a short time it My eyes, caught by the red speck,  
stopped and I was able to sit up, weakly, and focused idly on it. The first  
thing I noticed try to find out what sort of seizure I'd had.

was that the red color did not vary. The The first thing I noticed was that I  
other specks in the beam changed color as was bare. And it was while I was  
fumbling they turned. This fleck stayed rich red dazedly around for my  
clothes that I made consistently.

the second bewildering discovery.

I have been accused of self-I had lost consciousness in the shell hypnotism by the few who have already of the stratosphere balloon. But I had not heard my statement. But this cannot be true.

regained it in the same place. In horror and For I stared away from the red speck after amazement I stared around.

only a minute or so, to look up at the velvet All about me was open plain, like a black sky through the glass which Farman prairie, covered with waist-high grass that had been kind enough to wipe clear.

was reddish in color.

It was while I was staring up through the glass that I felt, suddenly, a curious OVER my head was a cloudless, glaring breathlessness. I heard Farman exclaim, and arch of sky that was not blue but light, angry then was blinded by a reddish glare. My red. Bathing my body and the bizarre prairie eyes sought the source. The glare came from was a reddish flood of light that came from a ball about as

as

big

an orange which

all directions at once instead of from a floated in the beam of light where the red central sun.

dust fleck had been.

“I’ve gone mad,” I mumbled to A ball the size of an orange? It was myself.

growing, swelling. It became a thing a yard At that instant an ear-splitting in diameter, then, swiftly, a sun that filled scream penetrated into the confusion of my the metal shell from wall to wall. A gigantic, thoughts. It came from some point over the fiery sun that blinded me.

horizon and sounded like a factory whistle Then something terrific happened to gone crazy. Incredible that it should come so my body. Every atom of my being seemed piercingly to my ears and yet be far enough

#### **Thrilling Wonder Stories 4**

away to be out of sight over the bend of the the way down. The bottom of it was split horizon.

into thick, jointed columns which served as But then I noticed that the horizon legs. A dozen of them, there must have was oddly close to me. On all sides, a ring of been, moving regularly as machinery moves, red sky met red ground, dipping down like a bearing the great structure rapidly nearer. A great cup. Had the world we know been tower a hundred feet high—like a tapered reduced to a ball several hundred miles in lighthouse walking on a dozen jointed legs.

diameter, the effect would have been the By now I was able to see plainly same. And this queer fact confirme y

d in m

enough to verify that the tower was a mind a conviction that I could no longer mechanical, not a living thing. It glittered deny, no matter how mad it seemed.

with a hard metallic sheen in the angry red I really was in another world.

light. As the many legs moved I could hear a However in God's name it could have savage clanking. Metal on metal with the senses in Earth's

happened, I had lost my moving of sheathed joints.

stratosphere—to regain them in another and The things on the armored turret weirdly different sphere!

were waving curiously boneless arms, or Another high-pitched, distant scream tentacles. Excitement seemed to prevail. A cut short the thoughts churning in my mind.



frenzied, ferocious excitement. It came to Involuntarily I crouched low in the waist-me that these creatures, whatever manner of high red grass to hide myself. As I did so, an life they might be, had built an enormous answering scream ripped out from the destructive engine to ride on—a machine of distance behind me. A high, hissing bellow, war.

like the cry of some gigantic animal.

Once more the shrill scream ripped Again the scream sounded ahead of out. It was followed by a puff of greenish me

rom

—to be echoed instantly by one f vapor from the metal cap of the big turret.

ehind.

b

The latter cry was pitched in a The answering scream from behind different key, so I knew it was an echo.

came so near that I could feel the hairs on The solid ground beneath me began my scalp crawl with the vibration. I looked to tremble slightly. Carefully, fearfully, I over my shoulder.

raised my head until I could see above the There, a second tower had appeared grass tops. I gazed in the direction of the over the sky-rim. It was about the same in first cry.

construction as the first, but it was built on Up over the rim of the horizon thrust square lines instead of round. It too had a something that at first looked like a moving turret crowded with gesticulating creatures.

lighthouse. It had a thick central turret, with shed over the ground on m It also ru

any legs,

a wide, overhanging balcony surrounding it.

as though eager to meet the other in titanic This balcony, I could see, was thronged with combat.

moving small figures. People? Human beings? No, even at that distance I could sense that the things on the balcony were not CHAPTER II

humans as we know them.

### The Red Planet

The moving lighthouse was rearing colossally as it neared me. Up and up it loomed over the skyline. Now I could see I AM not giving my thoughts, gentlemen, that the shaft of the tower was not solid all because at the time I had no thoughts. I was

### The Mind Magnet 5

dazed. I had been fantastically hurled into myself out of their sight.

this mad scene in some manner that defied The round tower rushed around the sanity, and I could only feel.

prohibited circle and at last was within a few My feeling told me surely that these hundred yards of the square tower. Both two things were hurtling into battle. There towers halted. I saw the tiny creatures in was no mistaking it. Manned by creatures of each fighting turret squat below the two opposing forces, if the varying parapets, and then I saw flashes come from architecture of the towers meant anything, each balcony as if the two crews were armed they housed two armies in moving metal.

with guns and the flashes were rifle shots.

Two armies about to clash. This planet, red No sound accompanied these flashe ere

s. Th

as Mars, was a planet of perpetual war and were only flame-streaks, deeper red in the death!

red light from the close-arching heavens.

Fearfully I watched the round tower, That the discharges were deadly, I as it was nearer to me. On it rushed, straight could see at once. On each turret figures toward me. But suddenly it stopped short.

threw up coiling arms, and sank out of sight And with that stopping I noticed something behind the parapets. A few fell over the that until now had only vaguely caught my railings to sprawl in space like wounded eye.

insects and crash sickeningly to the ground Around the spot in the reddish prairie over a hundred feet below.

in which I had hid, was a line as evenly The battle was too fierce to last long.

drawn as though traced by a gigantic A bristling halo of red streaks surrounded compass. The circle was about a hundred each turret constantly. Soundless as the yards in diameter, and I seemed to be shots were, an explosion splashed the legs of approximately in its center. The line, h

the round tower with fire. Two of the legs running evenly through the grass, glistened dropped off, causing the tower to list badly.

in the red light like a path of metal.

It withdrew in crippled haste, with the The round tower had stopped at the square tower after it.

very edge of this circle. A few seconds it The square monster whistled teetered there, then it drew hastily back, as if piercingly, a sort of cry of triumph, and the circle were a charmed or deadly space.

disappeared over the skyline after the other.

Its ear-splitting scream shrilled forth, while I uttered a sob of relief that these terrible answering scream from the square tower things were gone, and started to get to my sounded on a note almost of frustration. As feet.

the round tow

though

er had nearly been

trapped in some way, and had managed to TURNING, I saw Commander Farman.

escape.

Twitching and trembling, afflicted by the For the one instant of its nearness to aftermath of change that I had gone through the circle, I felt again the same nausea and myself, he sat up and looked around. Either terrific tension of body I had experienced he was quicker of intelligence than I, or, just before being transported somehow to being younger and less foolishly skeptical this small, red, warlike globe. But the concerning things usually held to be faintness passed—as if some tension in the incredible, he was more willing to place ground beneath me had been turned off, and credence in the testimony offered him by his I was again concerned only with watching senses.

e m

th

onstrous towers—and with keeping

“Another world!” he mumbled, with

### **Thrilling Wonder Stories 6**

awe in his tone. “We’re on another planet!

its existence before. Now it was thrown But where—and how—”

wide, and in the opening it revealed were I took a deep breath and tried to get two creatures that might have stepped at some sort of explanation, straight out of a nightmare. I can see them

“You were with me when I was—

yet.

whisked—here, and you seem to have come They were about four feet tall, and after me. Tell me, did I just disappear out of moved on three many-jointed legs like those the shell, or what?”

of insects. Like insects their legs and

“You were still there when I globular bodies were protected by a sort of fainted—or whatever it was happened to chitinous natural armor. Only their legs and me,” Farman said. “I saw you staring at a heads were not sheathed by the stuff. Their red ball floating in the sunlight. At least it arms—three boneless tentacles ending in seemed to be a ball. Then you stiffened, and three coiling “fingers” apiece—weaved fell full length on the floor. I went over to about like the tentacles of devil-fish.

you and tried to bring you to, but you were Their heads, round as beads, were set deeply unconscious. In fact, I thought you directly on the globes of their bodies; and were dead. I started to valve the balloon to there were no features. The heads were bring us down—and then I keeled over simply round sacks with three eye-tipped myself. Now I’m here.”

tentacles pronging from them.

I shook my head.

“How could I be back there FOR a few seconds they remained in the unconscious, and here too—wherever here opening. Then they started toward us. We is?” I mused.

could see now that in the center tentacle of There was silence for a moment, and each was what appeared to be a short piece then I went on with a queer

train of thought.

of very thick wire. The wires were leveled I don't know yet whether it was pure theory threateningly at us.

or fact.

"These things mean us no good,"

"But perhaps only my body is back muttered Farman. He drew closer to me.

in the stratosphere shell. Perhaps it was my Together we braced ourselves to meet the i

mind, my thought, that was wrenched to this attack of the nightmare things.

place, leaving the body a tenantless shell."

"Stand a little behind me," directed Farman doubled his big fist.

Farman. "I'm bigger than you."

"There seems to be something here It was true enough. He was half a beside pure thought," he shrugged.

foot taller than I, eighty pounds heavier,

"But perhaps," I said, "in this curious with cordlike muscles on his heavy torso plane, thought becomes person as well as and limbs.

personality. Thought is presumed to be He seemed more than a match, alone, electrical. So, in the last analysis, is matter.

for the two reddish-black insects, or Perhaps our minds have taken on form again whatever they were, that came near with here—the form familiar to us on Earth, after their antennae turned toward us and their being wrenched from our bodies."

dull eyes staring with cold intelligence.

Suddenly, a dozen yards away, a trap On they came until they were almost  
door opened in the ground. It had been within ou

each, th

r r

eir icily demoniac eyes cunningly concealed, sodded over with the glaring  
hatefully. Farman crouched and red prairie grass so that I hadn't dreamed of  
sprang—

### **The Mind Magnet 7**

He dropped at the clawed feet of the This Thing was not one of the two ing.  
And it seem

nearest Th

ed to be some

that had attacked us on the ground above. It discharge from the thick wire  
that had made was smaller than these, less vigorous in him drop.

movement. It bent fearlessly over us, and I t mom

The nex

ent, before I had time

thought I saw perplexity in the cold eyes so to gather my wits, the other  
creature jabbed fantastically set in the end of three foot-long its wire at me.

stalks. Was it amazed at our conformation, That was all there was to it. For  
the second so different from its own? Or was it simply time within an hour I  
lost consciousness—

considering how best to kill us?

e instan

but this tim

tly, as if I had been struck

“Shall I try and smash the Thing?”

by lightning. There had been little enough to asked Farman tensely.

the fight.

But at the sound of his words, the And now we were in the power of strange creature stepped back. It made no these Things with three chitinous legs and sound itself—indeed, there seemed to be no three slim

oiling ar

ily c

ms and three cold,

mouth or other opening through which ellishly intelligent ey h

es that waved on foot-

sound could come. But it evidently heard ng antennae.

lo

sound quite well.

“Wonder what it intends doing to us?” said Farman, rising to his feet. He

CHAPTER III

clenched his big fists. “What a nightmare The Thought Thieves

this all is—”

A quick move of the great insect—



for I still think that's what it was—made THE next tim

o

e I struggled back t

him break off. The three-legged creature had consciousness, it was to face surroundings stopped watching us as though we had even more bizarre than I had the first time.

suddenly ceased to exist. It teetered to a Farman and I lay in a large room. It small plate of metal set into the sidewall of was evidently underground for there were no one of the great cylinders. This it observed windows in the walls. It was illuminated in closely, as though it were a gauge and some concealed way by the same clear red some

m

thing ight be read in it. And, indeed, light as that which took the place of sunlight there was something! We could see that outside.

ourselves.

All about us was intricate looking Light. Rippling in waves over the metal as apparatus—laboratory apparatus most though trying to tell a story.

certainly. Great, twisting coils of metal; odd Simultaneously both Farman and machinery; huge, serried cylinders like myself felt the ground quake.

electric coils; me l con ta

tainers of all shapes

“One of the towers—it's coming and sizes that, we saw later, were filled with back!” yelled Farman.

varicolored fluids.

Breathlessly we watched the great This I had time to observe. And I had insect—a competent scientist, we judged—if time to hear Farman’s moan of returning you could call such a creature by a human consciousness. Then one of our ghastly term. With equal tensility it glared at the skinny,

looking captors teetered on its rippling light on the plate, which was chitin-covered legs around from behind a growing ever stronger now. One three-monstrous coil, and approached us.

tendriled “hand” went out to a crooked lever

### **Thrilling Wonder Stories 8**

extending from the coil beside the plate.

The fact that these Things seemed to have Then the earth tremors subsided; the no way of making sounds indicated mental rippling light died on the plate; the tower telepathy.

was going away again. W

a gesture that

ith

It pointed upward toward the prairie rely indicated disappointm su

ent, the Thing

over our heads. Then it drew a large circle turned away from the lever.

on the floor. Finally, into the circle it introduced a round tower. It rubbed this out FARMAN walked toward it. The creature instantly with a savage sweep of a boneless stepped back on its three clattering legs, arm, and waved its three tentacles upward.

whipping up one of the thick wires from a

“Do you see?” Farman said nearby stand. Farman smiled placatingly and excitedly. “A tower comes into the circle slowed his

. The Thing lo

pace

wered its

and is somehow made to vanish off the face weapon but stared warily out of three icy, of this planet. Is thrown clear away from it.

malevolent eyes.

But how, I wonder?”

oesn’t look definitely

“The Thing d

As though reading his mind, though hostile,” Farman said to me. “I’m going to it may simply have been going on with the try to warm up to it.”

gestured account, the Thing pointed to the He stopped, and smiled again. He crooked lever set in the coil. It went

bent down and went through the motions of through the motion of pulling the lever far drawing diagrams on the floor. A hopeless forward. That was how it was done, the maneuver, I thought. But it was not movement said.

hopeless. With a really wonderful quickness Farman swung toward me.

of intelligence, the giant insect caught the

“Do you see?” he almost shouted.

meaning.

“Do you see? That’s how we got here!”

It went to a corner and returned with What did he mean?

a piece of soft reddish rock. Farman tried it, Farman explained his idea rapidly.

and it left a mark like red chalk on the floor.

“The strange repelling coils

“Smart,” breathed Farman. “We’ll connected with the lever and working see how far its brains can go.”

through the great metal circle outside did not He crouched and applied the chalk to destroy a tower unfortunate enough to stray the smooth floor. He drew a tower—a round into the wrong spot,” he pointed out. “It one, and looked up questioningly.

simply cast it forth into another sphere.

The response was immediate and Conversely, if the lever were pushed in the violent. The Thing snatched the chalk opposite direction, beyond the neutral point, roughly away and drew a square tower.

it might perhaps set up a reverse action and

“We’ve been caught by the army of attract objects—pull them from outside into the Squares, or whatever they call it—and this sphere.”

there’s plenty of patriotism on both sides,”

said Farman. I nodded, feeling as I had all MEANWHILE, with that lightning-quick along that I moved in a dream.

mind it seemed to possess, the Thing Farman gazed at the Thing, pointed appeared to have thought to the same at the round tower he had drawn, and looked conclusion. It stared at us, at the lever, at the puzzled. The creature caught the thought diagram on the floor, with its cold, instantly—so quickly that I divined a bit of malignant eyes glittering dully.

thought reading along with the pantomime.

It teetered to the lever, made as if to

### **The Mind Magnet 9**

push it in reverse, then stopped with its three enough to save our lives.  
Wouldn't the same tentacles writhing in what appeared to be thing happen  
with the enemy?

indecision and perhaps awe.

Apparently the Thing thought it But if our theory was correct, how would.  
Whereby a plan had grown in its had the great mass of our bodies been cold  
brain—a plan that was fine for it but brought to this small globe? Well, from  
rather ghastly for us.

Farman's story, they hadn't. Our bodies We were to wander into the Round  
were apparently back in the stratosphere encampment, where we would  
probably be shell. Only our minds, our consciousness, received under  
guard, but left alive as seemed to have been brought here by those  
curiosities. Once there we were to blow up relatively mighty coils, een

and then have b

ld with

their strongho

explosives hidden in

ateria

m

lized again into our Earthly the hem of a sort of loin cloth, which we  
likenesses by some mysterious alchemy.

were handed.

But now our minds became occupied What would happen to us in the with  
speculations le

d

ss abstract—an more

explosion? This was something that momentous. What were our fantastic  
captors obviously concerned them not at all.

going to do with us?

I shook my head frantically as the That, in addition to some basic facts  
meaning of the diagrams became clear.

concerning this small red planet, was rm

Fa

an stood straight and defiant, arms divulged gradually to us by gestures and  
the folded across his chest.

use of the bit of chalk. I won't take time to

“They can go to hell,” he said.

language

describe the ingenious sign

“Walk into an enemy camp and blow evolved by the Thing to make its  
meaning s to

ourselves

bits with it just to help them clear; I'll simply give the result.

in this senseless war

w

? Do they think we are

This compact little globe had been fools?”

scarred by war as long as it had had life.

Constant war! Half the population against THE words, of course, meant nothing to the the other half. The towers were the latest Thing. But our defiant attitude was plain

. Each aide had about a fighting engines

enough. Its three dull eyes glinted hundred; one hundred square against a malignantly. It went to a flat bench, like a hundred round.

table. On this were several cubic metal The repelling circle was a new one, containers. It opened

thrust in a coiling

invention. So new, indeed, that some of its tentacle, and drew out the most repulsive latent possibilities, like the peculiar action thing I’ve ever seen.

resulting from the reversal of the lever, had It was a gigantic insect, nearly a foot not yet been learned. It seem offer an

ed to

in length, covered with coarse, black hair. It end to the ceaseless warring by giving licked

had three sets of horn pincers, which c victory to the square-tower forces.

ferociously in empty air as the Thing held it However, the Squares overlooked no carefully behind its round, ugly head.

chances. Our strange appearance here had Several of these things, we were given the scientifically trained bug before us given coolly to understand, would be a grim idea. Startlingly alien and different as allowed to feast slowly on our living bodies we were, wouldn't we be able to penetrate if we refused to obey. We had our choice.

enemy territory? Our weird (to it) Instant death, blown to bits by powerful appearance had intrigued its attention long explosives—or slow death as our living

### **Thrilling Wonder Stories 10**

flesh provided food for these terrible insects.

were now forgotten. But if so, how could we Farman's jaw squared. He glanced at find the headquarters we were supposed to e. I n

m

odded. I fear death as much as any destroy?

man, but I prefer it quick, if it must come.

"We'll find it soon enough," grunted The Thing seemed to give out some Farman. "We'll be captured—or killed—

soundless call. A panel in the wall opened before we get very close to it."

and four more of the great, chitin-covered We glanced at the four monstrosities Things teetered into the laboratory. Two of which guarded us, each with its deadly wire them bore metallic-looking squares of on us, and then started in the direction fabric, and two carried gingerly two small indicated. On and on we plodded, ears alert packets of tubes that looked like for one of the terrific, whistling sc am re

s that

firecrackers. The tubes seemed to be made i



m ght indicate a tower nearby. But none was of metal, however, and had no fuses heard. The prairie seemed lifeless.

dangling from their tiny ends.

While the tubes were being folded AND now, with the hidden laboratory at into the cloths, and these being twisted into least a mile behind us, I thought to put into thick strips, like belts, we were given our execution the idea I had conceived before orders.

we set out.

We were to walk up to the enemy

“Why not just leave these loin cloths, stronghold, which was only a short distance explosives and all, lying harmlessly here in away, and let ourselves be captured and the open fields?” I said to Farman. “Then taken to headquarters. There we were to we’ll go on as planned, get captured, but try blast that section of the red planet out of to convince the other side that we’re existence by simply slipping off the belts or harmless. If necessary we can pretend to be loin cloths and dashing them, explosives and willing to fight on their side. That way we’ll all, to the ground. Evidently horrible power live a while longer, even if we accomplish lay in the tiny, fire-cracker-like tubes.

nothing else.”

Sure death, of course, if we followed Farman nodded and stopped. We the command. But we had no intention of peered around. No sign of life broke the obeying.

unending surface of the sea of red grass. We The trapdoor was opened. We were took off the belts.

thrust up onto the prairie surface—two Almost at our elbow rose one of the human beings in a world of creatures such as four Things. Silent as shadows, having no human had ever seen before, bearing practiced all their lives at moving invisibly death for hundreds in the folds of our loin through

this prairie grass, they had trailed us cloths. The four Things came with us. One to prevent this very move. Evidently they pointed with its middle arm the direction we want

m

to keep us in sight until we were to take.

actually in the hands of the enemy.

None of the moving towers was in At a menacing sweep of the Thing's sight. Nor was there a sign of any of the wire, Farman and I put the cloths back on.

Things moving in the waist-high grass.

Hopelessly we started again toward the Seemingly this was a deserted planet.

unseen enemy encampment. Beside us and Probably all on it lived under its surface, behind us we could hear, now that we knew driven there by the centuries of ceaseless we were still guarded, occasional faint war, the very cause and reason for which rustles in the grass.

## **The Mind Magnet 11**

I think we must have covered six was all jaws. If we had tried to, we could not miles when abruptly we heard the thing we have run fast enough to avoid it. In an had been dreading: the ear-splitting shriek of instant we were engulfed in it and were rs. A round tower, we saw, one of the towe

to the tu

being swept up

rret, ten or twelve

as it thrust itself over the horizon and rapidly stories above us. There, it opened and approached us.

spewed us out.

Straight toward us the thing came.

Dozens of the Things, identical in We cowered down in the grass, but at a prod form and appearance with the Things that from one of the guarding Things, we stood had sent us to destroy them, surrounded us up again so we could be seen. The tower got in a circle, staring with their three eyes so close that we could distinguish moving on the foot-long stalks that individually the nightma enizens of this

re d

supported them—and with their weapons, lanet that stood in th

p

e fighting turret. And

more of the thick wires, unanim ained

ously tr

en it was directly over us.

th

on us. Then there was a silent stir in their ranks and the tower galvanized to life.

“Shouldn’t wonder if our four guards CHAPTER IV

potted,” Farm

have been s

an said. “If so,

Return to Earth

they'll pay for following orders so implicitly!"

The tower moved faster, rushing WE stood in the very shadow of the tower  
nderous

forward for a dozen quick though po with our eyes closed, waiting for  
death.

steps. Then it stopped, and though we could (*Interjection, jury foreman:*  
"This not see the result, we could guess it.

*man is a well known scientist, but his story* In the blood-red grass below,  
*pulped is so unbelievable on the face of it that I* wer, w

under the metal feet of the to ould be

*hould halt it here and now. Also I think we s*

our sh

f

n

apeless blobs that had once bee *move that he be examined by the psychiatric*  
chitin-covered intelligences.

*board."*)

terest was transferred back to us.

In

(*Protest by three members: "Let him*

"If they search us—" breathed *finish, w*

*l*

*ith a warning that he faces menta* Farman.

*examination if he persists in telling of things* The discovery of the tiny tubes of *which could not possibly have happened.*”) explosive would mean our instant death, of

*(Professor Stillwell: “Gentlemen, I course.*

*can only tell the truth, as God hears me,* Several of the Things drew near, *hat occurred to Commander about w*

coiling arms

w

weaving cautiously to ard us.

*Farman and myself in the stratosphere* Farman held up his hand, palm out. *shell.”)*

“Just a minute!” he barked.

But death did not come (Professor The words, of course, meant nothing.

Stillwell resumes). The Thing in the But the gesture stopped the Things. Once laboratory had reasoned correctly. Our more Farman went through the motions of bizarre appearance, the t we

obvious fact tha

wanting to draw pictures on the floor.

were absolutely alien to the planet, kept the This time it took longer for his meaning to Round forces from instantly killing us.

be grasped; but eventually it was. One of the A sort of scoop lowered swiftly from surrounding horde produced a sharp piece of the turret. It swooped on us like a bird that metal and handed it to Farman. He stooped

## Thrilling Wonder Stories 12

. Again there followed a passage of with it

had left. In an amazingly short time we were estures, and of diagram g

s scratched on the

within a half mile of it. We could imagine floor.

in its underground

the cold-eyed Thing

borat

la

ory, bent tensely over the tell-tale FARMAN pointed to us and then to the metal plate, watching.

heavens, telling that we came from another One of the Things wheeled out a sort pointed off

world. Then he drew a circle and of catapult and fastened our loin cloths in over the plains, finally getting the message the sling. He released the contrivance. The across that we had landed there.

metallic patches of fabric sailed through the The tale went on. We had been air. It seemed to take them minutes to hit the captured by the Squares and threatened with ground—in the center of the circle we had torture. He drew a big hairy insect, and the left.

way the things turned eye-stalks to look at There was a terrific explosion. The each othe

that th

r showed

ey understood

tower swayed sickeningly, then steadied.

in

play. Evidently this was a form of torture Everything within the distant metal circle common to them all.

geysered up into the reddish sky. We caught And then Farman managed to glim

f twisted metal, and of several pses o

convey the message that we had been sent tiny, shattered things that seemed to move under threat of death to bring about the slightly....

nds. And at the end of

destruction of the Rou

“That’s the finish of our three-legged the harangue, he carefully handed his loin friend and his damned cannibalistic torturing cloth to one of them.

reathed Farm

bugs,” b

an. “And of our

Excitement followed as the small hance

c

to Earth again,” he

s of getting back

tubes of explosives were discovered. I finished.

thought for a moment that we would be torn I looked at him.

to pieces, but even to the dullest brains

in it was

“We might have been shot back to clear that we were friendly or we would where we came from by standing in that never have surrendered our deadly burden.

circle and having the lever set to its repelling For the time, at least, we were saved.

stead

in

of attracting point,” explained There m

om

ust be, we reasoned, s

e show of

Farman.

gratitude in even the fiercest of these ice-The tower moved off, seeming to eyed monsters for such an act.

stalk stiff-legged with triumph. Dully we We reasoned wrong, as it was to leaned against the railing, unhampered by develop. We could see later why the Thing the monstrosities about, seemingly accepted in the laboratory, when it sent us forth with as allies. Miles were covered before the the explosives, didn't anticipate the simple rushing speed of the tower slowed. It act of surrender we had performed. It knew stopped. We

own.



looked d

its breed, and what happened to captives, There, under and around us, was o  
well! Its only m

only to

istake was in not

another metal circle!

realizing that we, from another globe, didn't know.

HERE, as on Earth, invention in war gave For the moment, however, we  
were rise to invention. The Squares perhaps had satisfied that we were safe.  
There was a jar, invented the moving towers. The Rounds and the tower  
began to move again, now had countered with the same. The Squares  
directly over the prairie toward the circle we had invented the deadly  
repelling circle. The

### **The Mind Magnet 13**

Rounds, through spies probably, had We were pushed only a short  
countered with the same—though it looked distance down one of the  
interminable as though the Squares did not know that yet.

corridors when we were halted opposite a But the

portan

im

t thing to us was the

up, and we saw a

door. The door rose

fact that we could hope again where all hope laboratory quite similar to the one in which had seemed lost.

we had first recovered.

“Maybe we can persuade them to A Thing teetered toward us on e from send us back where we cam in return

clashing legs that seemed more greyish than for the favor we did them,” said Farman. “It red-black. The creature moved sluggishly, as seems little enough to ask.”

though it were very old. It touched familiar-But little as it was, it was speedily looking, mighty coils carelessly as it passed revealed to us that the request would not be them. Evidently it was the presiding genius granted. When Farman pointed to the circle, of the place.

to us, and then to the red heavens, asking

“Science seems to be king here,” I plainly that we be repelled from the crimson whispered to Farman. “Both with the planet, the inhuman Things got his meaning Squares and the Rounds we have been clearly. And made no sign of any kind! It brought to the laboratory first.”

looked as though they had plans for us, or Farman only nodded. All his were perhaps simply keeping us for some attention was centered on a certain crooked cold-blooded diversion of torture.

lever beside a metal telltale plate.

Farman squared his jaw, but made no

“If we only could fight our way up to move. With their deadly wires and their the surface of the prairie and then force one overwhelm

um

ing n

bers, the Things would

our

of

captors to throw the lever,” he have made short work of any attempt at muttered.

violent escape.

The age-enfeebled Thing that ruled The big scoop rose up and began here glared at us speculatively out of slowly weaving back and forth doing service as an weaving eyes. There was no curiosity in elevator from turret to ground. Soon all of us those eyes, only a queer, intent gleam.

stood on the prairie. Nowhere, save for the At some command which we could great metal ring, were there signs of life. But not hear, our guards shoved us over to a soon a door, like the trapdoor of the Squares, deep receptacle beside one of the great coils.

was opened. The fighting crew filed down The aged Thing came after us. Into the into the ground through this. We were receptacle it thrust a metal rod, carefully, as by half a dozen of the

prodded after them

though whatever liquid was in the vessel Things which had evidently been detailed as were very deadly and dangerous to handle.

our special guards.

The Thing glanced from the Corridor after corridor stretched receptacle to us. Intuition told me what was away from the bottom of the ramp we coming.

descended. This was evidently a great city,

“They’ve got some new concoction, buried under the ground. I had a crazy probably for war use,” I whispered to wonder as to whether cities on our own Farman. “And they’re going to try it on us to Earth might not some day be all see how it works.”

round, what with the increasing underg

Farm

hing, but his face got

an said not

ferocity and frequency of our own senseless white, and his eyes told me that his guess wars.

was the same as mine.

### **Thrilling Wonder Stories 14**

The aged Thing turned toward a made the wire a weapon. The three nearby wall. I looked there. Set into it were onstr

m

osities he had bowled to the floor, gleaming metal hoops, open at the ends, for plus the other three, were leaping at him.

the purpose of holding struggling bodies in Then I saw the aged Thing go down, secure metal bonds against the wall. They slumping horribly into the receptacle beside were apparently to be used on us, now.

it. A thick reddish vapor boiled up, and the What was in the receptacle? Acid?

chitin-protected body seemed to melt into Heavy, deadly, almost liquid vapor? What?

thin air. Farman had stumbled onto the Certainly something that brought quick secret of the wire, whatever it was.

annihilation, judging from the way in which He turned it on the charging group.

the Thing had cautiously stirred it.

He got three of the Things. Four! Then he At

another

soundless command, the

was caught by the remaining two. They Things that guarded us approached closer.

coiled their triple arms around him and They raised their weapons, probably with wrenched for the wire he held.

the idea of stunning us. But the triple eyes of the Thing in command here glinted a bit, and the wires were lowered. It seemed that it UP and down the three figures writhed and didn't want us stunned for this experiment.

fought while I raced for the rest of the weapons on the floor.

THE Things laid down their weapons, to One of the two got near enough to catch us by arms and legs and drag us to the trip me as I fled. But when I fell, I fell with wall.

the nearest wire within my reach. I got up I have never seen a man move as with it, wondering what in the world had to swiftly, as explosively, as Farman moved be done with the thing to make it work. But then. Without warning of any kind, he there was no need to find out. Farman had sprang straight at the group. Those thick torn from the two in that instant, and blasted wires, dealing such instant unconsciousness them with his wire.

or death, lay on the floor now. The Things,

“Run upstairs,” he panted to me.

six to two against us, had been too confident

“Out the trapdoor. Stand in the circle. I’ll in their numbers!

w

throw the switch.”

Like a football player, Farman

“Who’ll throw the switch for you?” I charged the group, great arms spread wide.

protested.

He knocked three of them from their tripod

“Not necessary. I’ll leave it on, and legs before they could balance themselves flow

fo

you. Run! This will be our last against his rush.

chance—”

He got to the wires on the floor.

I ran. Out the laboratory door, along With a savage shout he raised one, the corridor, to the ramp leading up to the and pointed it first at the Thing that still trapdoor. Here were two of the ghastly teetered feebly near the deadly receptacle.

Things, evidently guardians of the gate. I The Thing started to draw the metal rod waved for them

pdoor,

to open the tra

from the vessel.

pointing the wire in a gesture that threatened I think I lived a year in that second.

them with death if they did not obey.

The scientist-Thing was drawing out the Luckily they hadn't the slightest deadly rod. Farman was fighting to find suspicion of the fact that I couldn't have whatever trigger or release-catch it was that worked the weapon if I had wanted to. Their

## **The Mind Magnet 15**

icily ferocio

l

us eyes gazed with fear, they threw open the trap. The red light of the I GOT the balloon down. It landed here in heavens streamed in.

North Carolina. During the long descent, I ran up into the open. Around me Farman never moved. I thought he was spread the big metal circle. I stood there dead. He was just as he is now, seeming to waiting—waiting for the miracle to happen be dead by all ordinary physiological tests, that should transport me back to Earth.

but yet not dead. The reason, I am sure, is When Farman threw the switch—

that his mind, his consciousness, re-clothed But seconds passed and I was not so in material substance when it was transported. I was still there. Something transported to that other world, stayed in that must have happened to keep him from world, leaving his body only a shell.

moving the lever.

Perhaps that shell will live for a Now I heard a commotion, and thousand years. Ten thousand! Perhaps in a shouting, from the direction of the few days it will suffer true death.

laboratory. The shouting was the bull-Meanwhile, Farman, companion on my roaring of Farman. He was being attacked ascent, is forever gone.

again, held from the repelling lever.

This, gentlemen, is my story. I swear Reinforcements must have come to avenge on oath that it is the truth, the whole truth, the killing of the Things Farman had and nothing but the truth.

downed.

\* \* \* \* \*

I turned to go to help him. But in that (Jury foreman: “You are really trying instant Farman must have fought his way to to hint that you and Commander Farman the switch.

were for a time on a ‘planet’ which turned Once more I was seized by the out to he that tiny speck of dust?”) terrible agony that had preceded my transfer (Professor Stillwell: “This speck was to this globe of war and hate. I felt as if my undoubtedly cosmic dust, settling in through body were being blasted to bits.

the open trap while Farman wiped the frost I was back in the stratosphere shell.

clear, after wandering for untold millions of My whole body quivered with nauseating years through space. Who knows but what agony. But the veil of torture was quickly every speck of matter, every asteroid and pierced by memory.

tiny meteor, in all the heavens, has life on

“Farman!” I called.



it?”)

There was no answer from the body I (Jury member: “How could any force saw stretched on the floor of the stratosphere on a dust mote be powerful enough to draw ball near me. Between me and the body of to it two objects as vast as human bodies?”) Farman a bright sunbeam poured down (Professor

Stillwell: “I repeat, it is through the glass trap on the top of the ball.

my theory that only our minds, our In this beam, settling slowly down so that it consciousnesses, were so attracted”) was only a fraction of an inch from the floor, (Member: “And after they had been a

w s a bright red speck of dust, a mote of transported, your minds took on bodies brilliant crimson.

again?”)

“Farman,” I cried again, thickly.

(Professor:

“Yes.

tic

Bodies iden

al

Farm

ove. The red dust

an did not m

with the ones housing our minds on Earth, mote settled on the floor, extinguished like a but microscopic on that small planet.”) tiny ember at the

contact.

(Member: “How could that be

## **Thrilling Wonder Stories 16**

possible?”)

is his soul, or mind, or life spark—whatever (Professor: “I don’t know. How did you care to call it?”)

minds on Earth become clothed with bodies?

(fury foreman: “There can be little Did the bodies come first and the minds uncertainty about the verdict of this grow in them later? Or was pure thought coroner’s jury. I recommend again that first, becomi

y surrounded with a

ng graduall

Professor Stillwell be subjected to strict materialization of matter to suit, like the mental tests, and I further recommend to a hardening of a shell?”) court of law that he be held in the state (Jury foreman: “Please do not asylum for the insane. I guess that will be answer questions with questions. You have the court’s

t, a

verdic

ll right. Criminally

t plai

given us an accoun

nly either imagined

insane, perhaps.”)

or insane, for which you have not one single (Jury members: “Agreed.”)  
shred of proof—”)

(Professor: “For Cod’s sake, (Professor: “I submit the body of gentlemen  
—”)

Commander Farman as proof. There is his (Jury foreman: “Officer, please  
take note:

shell, his corpse, not living, not dead. Where care of the prisoner”)