

# VARGO STATTEN

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*New Worlds to Conquer*



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# THE MASTER MIND

By

John Russell Fearn

Writing under the pseudonym Vargo Statten.

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It was at the Fantasy Club where the notion was born. Old Doctor Landhurst, retired professor of science, far more wealthy than any one man had any right to be, shocked his fellow members one morning with a typical observation.

“They’re all alike! Every one of them! Dress the stories up any way you please, but it boils down to the same thing . . . Nobody will ever convince me that you can rule a world without guns, force, and menace.”

He slammed down the magazine he had been reading and glared round on the others. His white hair was nearly standing up with inner annoyance.

“Here are we, gentlemen, in the year 1970, members of a club devoted to the pursuance of all things fantastic and scientific—literature in particular—and yet what do we find? We find dozens of authors, known and unknown, still churning out the same old stuff. They suggest control of the world by kindness, logic, negotiation—control by everything except the right medium—force! One writer here even says the people of the world are a bunch of suckers who can be forced into believing anything without any resort to force and without a single raygun! I say it is impossible. The human mind is so balanced that it only understands a loaded weapon.”

“Doctor, you’re quite wrong, you know . . .”

Landhurst glanced round, surprised. A young man with fair hair was seated in the corner, his legs crossed easily, his firm young face remarkable for its expression of bland candour.

“Quite wrong,” he repeated. “I’m Douglas Harrigan, and I wrote the story you’re referring to. I wrote that story because I *believed* it!”

“So it was *you*!” The scientist narrowed his eyes momentarily. “You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Harrigan!” he went on bitterly. “Where is your manhood? Where’s the manhood of any of these writers these days, that they suggest such namby-pamby methods?”

“Force died out long ago, doctor. I maintain the world is populated by the kind of people who’ll believe anything, providing you tell it to them long enough and often enough.”

“Propaganda, eh?” Landhurst meditated for a moment. “Come to think of it, Harrigan, I don’t know you too well. New to this club, are you not?”

“I joined last week—just to get an idea what sort of views you folks have. Now I know they’re mostly wrong. Most of you are getting on in years, working on the policy of 1940 to 1960 when power and force were considered the chief factors for progress. We know now how mistaken that idea was: but old ideas die hard . . . I believe in modern ideas. I believe, as I told in my story, that a whole world can be ruled by one man without a single application to force. Ray guns, space machines, death beams, and all the rest of it, are just props. All that is needed to master a planet is ingenuity and absolute calm of manner.”

Landhurst gave a harsh laugh. “You are very young, my friend. You would soon find out the difference if you tried to live your story in real life!”

"I don't agree." Harrigan lighted a cigarette calmly and gazed back with his light blue eyes.

"Good Lord, boy, you seriously mean—?"

"Absolutely!"

There was a silence among the members, the silence of stunned surprise. Anyway, nobody had ever dared to stand up to despotic Landhurst like this before. Then at last Landhurst said slowly:

"Listen to me, Harrigan. It has long been a moot point amongst us members whether any of the fantastic stories printed today are even remotely possible in truth. I assert they are all impossible, and *your* theory in particular. If you could master a world within, say, six months—as you do in this story—without a single recourse to force, I'd—I'd give you fifty thousand pounds! And willingly! Because I know you cannot possibly manage it."

Harrigan smiled. "A decidedly sporting offer. Doctor. I'm not a rich man, being just a magazine writer, and fifty thousand might come in useful . . . I'll take you up on that!" He sat up with sudden decision in his chair, turned to a grey-haired man on his right. "Mr. Beddows, you're a lawyer. I want you to draw up this wager in legal terms. When I am ruling the world I don't want any hitch . . . All a matter of business, Doctor Landhurst. You understand?"

"Of course, but— Dammit, man, you're not serious?"

"I said I believed what I wrote—and I'm going to prove it. I wrote of a man from Tibet who ruled the world by application of logic. I had to study up a good deal about Tibet to get my facts straight, therefore I shall play a similar role in real life. I know just what a man from Tibet ought to do . . . I make only two stipulations, gentlemen. In the story there were three assistants. I reserve the right to have three—friends whom I know I can trust. The other clause is that, while I am building up my world-control act, not one of you must communicate with me or give me away. You will find how I am going on rapidly enough from the newspapers . . . What do you say?"

"Well, it's fantastic and can't possibly work, but I'm willing," Landhurst chuckled. "Rule a world without force, starting from scratch, and you'll get fifty thousand from me."

"And plenty of publicity besides for future use," Harrigan smiled. "That may be useful when I start writing in a big way . . . All right. Mr. Beddows, it's up to you to draw up the agreement. I'll prove to you that there's one born every minute . . . suckers, I mean, not agreements."

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The Fantasy Club hardly knew whether to take Harrigan seriously or not. In any case the fact remained that he had the agreement completed, and Landhurst retained a copy of it. The next day Harrigan was missing from the Club.

As a matter of fact he called on his three friends scattered around London, then went to a junk dealer's and bought a second-hand steam boiler very cheaply. This he had removed to a small firm of engineers with whom he left definite and rather unusual instructions. Being a small firm and anxious for orders they raised no objections.

After that, for nearly a week, Harrigan spent a great deal of time in the basement beneath his apartment—much to the amazement of his landlady, dabbling with chemicals, printing film, reading thick textbooks, and producing weird smells from gluey looking chemicals. His landlady, peering once down the steps, caught sight of him like some ultra-modern Faust. Once she could not be sure if it was him at all. Catching a glimpse of a dead-white face, lined with a multitude of creases, she fled for her life . . .

Just the same it was still the normal Harrigan who came up the steps from the cellar with an amused grin on his calmly impudent face.

"Mr. Harrigan . . . ." The landlady emerged from the rear regions, wrapped up in a huge apron and a good deal of wrath. "Mr. Harrigan, what have you been doing down in my nice clean basement?"

"Only laying plans for ruling the world, Mrs. Brown."

Fortunately, Mrs. Brown, as Harrigan well knew, was one of those beings whose orbit centred exclusively round a kitchen. She was blessed with a total absence of imagination.

"You can't rule the world from my basement, young man!" she declared firmly. "And what is more—"

"Mrs. Brown—*please!*" Harrigan held up his hand solemnly; "My mind is full of four dimensional ideas: I beg of you not to disturb them. Like this . . . see." He held out his handkerchief four square and showed the doubting woman both sides. Finally he gave it to her to hold tautly. She obeyed, watched as he drove his fist through the linen and took the shreds from her.

"Deliberate waste!" she sniffed. "I never saw—"

"Shake it out," Harrigan suggested, beaming on her.

She snatched the shreds from him and shook hard, stared incredulously as a perfect handkerchief came into view.

"Fourth dimension," Harrigan explained solemnly. "Now you know!"

Whistling, he turned to the door of his room . . .

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Exactly a fortnight after Harrigan had made his wager with Landhurst, Londoners were distinctly surprised to behold one morning, on their way to business, a gathering of people in Hyde Park. They were congregated round a battered cylinder of metal, sealed at both ends, with portholes of densely thick opaque glass on each side. The mass of metal lay unpicturesquely in the midst of trees and flowerbeds, had smashed down the railings leading to the road and to all appearances had dropped with considerable force.

At eight in the morning the crowd numbered about two hundred: by noon there were thousands. Despite the efforts of the police, traffic was held up in the main street and the park swarmed with the ordinary folk as well as newshounds, press photographers, television and movie experts. Then there were warnings to keep away from the cylinder as at 12.30 weird clankings came from inside it. At 12.45 the clankings ceased and a sealed operculum opened in the top. A deathlike hush fell on the massed watchers.

Through the opening in the top a head began to emerge slowly—a head of flowing white hair. Then beneath it there became visible an even whiter face, chiseled by a myriad of wrinkles and giving the impression of unguessable antiquity. The eyes, pale blue and inscrutable, gave the impression of keen intelligence and still youthful reasoning . . . . By degrees the whole figure emerged, attired in a long white garment with backflung cowl, rather reminiscent of a monk's cassock . . . .

At last Douglas Harrigan extracted himself completely and stood up on the old steam boiler—brought hither during the night by truck and rolled from the roadway through the railings—surveying the crowd.

"Peace!" he said gravely, raising his arm.

A murmur passed round the people.

"Say, who in blazes *is* he?"

“Looks like a Druid to me . . . *You* know those fellers in nightshirts.”

Harrigan rubbed his ear gently, the better to adjust the minute electrical pick-up therein. Then he said:

“There are among you those who believe I am a Druid . . . No, I am not a Druid. I am a Tibetan, most high scientist of the Lamas of Tibet. Unhappily, by a mistake in judgment, my space machine dropped here instead of in the Himalayas; a mistake caused by a miscalculation as I returned from Mars . . . .”

“Mars!” went up a gasp.

“Yes; Mars . . . .” Harrigan’s ghastly white face wrinkled in sudden contemplation. “I learned so much . . . the power of a race with whom we have yet to reckon . . . I had intended returning to Tibet with warnings of what I saw on Mars—but the fates willed me here. I am prepared to believe that they did so in order that I might show you of the western world what lies before you . . . .”

“Say, that was nice of the fates!” observed a laconic voice. Hodder, chief feature writer to the *Clarion*, was standing immediately below the cylinder. “How is it that you talk English so well, Mr. Tibetan?”

“What is mere language when you have mastery of thought?” Harrigan sighed.

Hodder was not convinced. His ratlike eyes searched the cylinder with ruthless care.

“For a man with the mastery of thought you made a horrible mess of your landing!” he shouted up. “Mistook England for the Himalayas! Don’t hand me that! Anyway, this thing here is a *steam boiler*!”

Harrigan’s eyes narrowed a little. The hatchet face of the journalist was irritating beyond measure. He looked like—and was—the world’s prize snooper.

“I have yet to see a steam boiler with portholes, young man,” Harrigan said at last, with due gravity—and earned himself a laugh. “This ship is battered and scarred from cosmic brickbats,” he went on. “If, as I understand is often the case with Westerners, you doubt my veracity, please come up and look through the ship for yourself . . . . All of you come and look! We of Tibet are natural masters of science and occultism, there is sometimes the necessity to convince the doubters of the west. Pray come up . . . .”

Ladders were produced. The newspapermen and cameramen came first and the bulk of the people afterwards, together with one or two rather baffled police officers. One by one they lowered themselves into the cylinder’s peculiar inside. There was nothing visible save a small bed rivetted to the floor and one lead packing case. The porthole glasses were of the variety which permit a view from inside while none can be obtained from outside.

Hodder swung round with a malicious grin, notebook in hand, to find Harrigan behind him, a smile on his wrinkled, ancient face.

“This is a trick!” Hodder said bluntly, writing briefly on his pad. “This piece of old iron couldn’t fly anywhere—let alone Mars! No rocket tubes, no machinery, no control board, not even a map! What’s the big idea?” He thrust his book back in his pocket aggressively.

Harrigan gave a patient sigh. “You poor, ignorant western people! Have you not heard of how we of Tibet sit in the glaciers and by mind force alone cause the ice to melt around us? This ship was driven through the cosmos by mind power. Matter is subservient to mind.”

“You mean you lay on that bed and concentrated?” Hodder snapped.

“I do. I could even have gone without a ship if necessary—I could have hurled myself through the void like a petrified image—but I realised I might need to carry evidence back with me from Mars. Besides, I needed such a mundane thing as a camera to reveal the truth of

my assertions. In that packing case there is the film and equipment. I could hardly have carried those without a ship.”

“No gravity in space,” Hodder observed acidly. “So I’m told.”

“Truly—but there is gravity on Earth and Mars to be overcome at the initial levitation . . .”

Hodder cocked his eye on the cases, scraped his jaw with a forefinger.

“I don’t understand why you came here instead of Tibet, even now,” he said. “Why don’t you move on to Tibet right now and prove you’re okay?”

Harrigan shrugged. “If you wish it . . .” He closed his eyes and said quietly. “We will go at this very moment. Prepare . . .”

“Hey, wait a minute—!” somebody shouted in sudden alarm. “We’re here too, don’t forget! We can’t go to Tibet. We’ve got businesses to look after!”

“Why, of course!” Harrigan opened his eyes with a sudden start. “I had overlooked that . . . Perhaps—some other time. Besides, now I am here I feel that you are entitled to explanations since I have upset the normal routine of your city.”

“Don’t worry—you’ll get plenty of publicity,” Hodder said cryptically. “In fact maybe more than you bargained for! I’ve got it all down in this notebook of mine.” He patted his pocket wherein lay the book. “Everything you have said; everything I have seen. I’m going to reason things out for myself.”

“So? You match your mind against mine?” Harrigan stood looking at the reporter steadily for a moment, then he said briefly, “My friend, if you probe too far you will find yourself in the same condition as your notes! Just look what you have written . . .”

“Huh? Meaning what?” Hodder tugged his book out of his pocket, flipped it open—then he started violently. When he had thrust it away it had been half full of observations, both relating to Harrigan and other matters long past, but now the book was completely blank. Not a single page had a note on it. Yet it was still his book, with the *Clarion* stamped clearly across the front.

“How the heck—?” He stared blankly as the others crowded round him.

“Such a pity,” Harrigan sighed. “Mind over matter, of course. I did it just as a warning, my friend. Do not probe into a science you can never hope to understand . . .”

“Perhaps,” Hodder said slowly, his lips tightening, “I *do* understand! In any event I’ll go to any lengths to prove what I’m thinking . . .”

But nobody was taking any notice of him. They were too busy following the “Mystic” to the airlock again . . .

## CHAPTER II

Harrigan the Tibetan hit the headlines to no uncertain effect that evening. So far, his peculiar manner and dispassionate calmness, together with an inherent ability to twist conversation to his own advantage, had made quite an impression on the body of people at large. The papers gave the reactions of the masses exactly, complete with photographs of the Druid-like visitor in his long white cassock. Some said he was three hundred years old—a master scientist, an exponent of the occult, cleverer than anything the western world had ever known. Hodder got into a row with his editor through taking the opposite view to the rest of the papers. Hodder summed up his conclusions in a leader article, which, after a statement of the main facts, concluded with this:

“This being claims he comes from Tibet, has visited Mars, and hurled a cylinder of metal across space by the force of mind alone. This represents a kind of mind power utterly foreign to us. Are we supposed to credit it? Are we, rational beings of 1970, expected to credit that even a Tibetan can do such a thing?

“Why did he arrive here? It was no accident! He came for a purpose—and a man with such knowledge as he claims will not be content with purely enlightening us. No; he will try to dominate us instead. He had spoken of a warning he brings us. What is this warning? If, on the other hand, he is a fake—as this writer fully believes—then he is treating the great British public as a bunch of fools and ought to be locked up! He has spoken of films. We demand to see them! This writer is firmly convinced that this so-called man from Tibet is a fake and will go to endless trouble to prove it. Watch this column from now on!”

Most of the readers were offended at the idea that they were a bunch of fools. It is a man's or woman's personal right to be proud of his or her own judgment . . . Harrigan himself, reading the notice in the privacy of his hotel—whither an admiring but uncertain body of civic authorities had whirled him—only smiled tautly and wondered what they were thinking at the Fantasy Club. After pondering for a while he started on the second stage of his scheme and demanded that in view of Hodder's insulting suggestions, a cinema should be appropriated for the exclusive purpose of permitting him to show his film of Martian life, and issuing at the same time a grave personal warning to the world.

The authorities arranged for his request to be granted the following night at the largest cinema in the metropolis, summarily cutting short the current hit. Not that the public minded. A first hand film of life on another world, personally commented by a mystic from Tibet, would be infinitely better than the droolings of a Hollywood blonde.

Mob law reigned in the Strand the following night. Searchlights swept the sky; skysigns blazed out the one word of the film's title—“Mars!” Men and women, rich and poor, trampled on one another in street and gilded foyer. No premiere had ever given the authorities so much trouble . . . In the best seats secured at fabulous prices, were all the members of the Fantasy Club. In the front row downstairs, travelling case on his knee, was Bob Shepherd, Harrigan's closest friend and associate. A big blond fellow, he sat with a satisfied and rather mysterious grin on his face watching the house filling up around him.

In another part of the house was the Press, Hodder to the forefront with a cold, cynical grin on his vinegary features. His grin vanished and he became intent when at last the hubbub died down and the time arrived to commence. The curtains swept aside to reveal Harrigan, in his usual queer monklike disguise, standing full in the spotlight, a microphone before him on its stand.

“Ladies and gentlemen . . .” Harrigan paused as a deathlike hush descended. “Ladies and gentlemen, because my real name is practically unpronounceable, it is better perhaps that you continue to refer to me through your press and among yourselves as ‘The Tibetan.’ I have been subjected to a great deal of criticism since I accidentally arrived here instead of my homeland. At home I would be understood and be acknowledged for what I am—the first man to conquer the void, a master of science and the occult, and one worthy to become the ultimate high Lama of my sect. To become that demands powers of the supernatural and scientific which you of the west cannot even guess at . . . Later, I will show you what I mean. First there are other things of import—my experiences on Mars, for instance . . .”

The lights dimmed and Harrigan moved aside, taking the microphone with him. Upon the screen there appeared a colour picture of a vast desert, stretching as far as the eyes could behold. Slowly the view changed revealing a vision of dead canal bottom strewn with vegetation along its banks.

“That,” said Harrigan slowly, “is quite a representative example of what all Mars’ surface is like. Now here are some samples of the life that Mars possesses on its surface. Mars is not, as some believe, totally dead. It has air of sorts, thin—but sufficient for some forms of life. Like these . . . I was enabled to photograph without difficulty since I can either live in air or master the conditions to live without it—Observe!”

The scene faded into an astounding picture of monstrous sluglike beings crawling along a rocky defile, backed by a sandy cliff to the rear. Suddenly the white garbed figure of Harrigan appeared beside them, incredibly dwarfed.

“From that you may see the comparison in sizes,” he observed. “The camera was automatic and went on turning . . .”

A woman screamed somewhere in the audience as the stalked eyes of one of the slugs turned to look at the unseen camera. Harrigan’s minute figure turned and ran for safety.

“That particular creature caught my scent,” Harrigan said, as the scene faded. “I found the visible surface of Mars populated by these queer creatures who apparently live on the canal products—on the vegetation, that is. They have only one abysmal intellect. Because of their profusion, however, I fancied that if there were any intelligent scientists on Mars they had probably moved themselves either underground or into another dimension out of reach of the creatures and of course hidden from prying eyes. I found nothing below surface—but in the fourth dimension, into which I can pass with ease, I found *this*! And here there lies menace in plenty!”

Even the hard boiled and suspicious Hodder gasped a little at what followed. The scenes were weird and unearthly. The picture showed a city shimmering with unearthly yet beautiful living colours—a city that was somehow *within* a city, and the whole mass of leaning edifices with vast bases and foreshortened summits. It was the kind of scene to make a trick camera turn handsprings. At the base of the buildings were people, but they came and went magically—stepping out of a demarcation of nothing into visibility, then walked back into nothing!

“This, my friends, is what I saw in Mars’ fourth dimension,” Harrigan said calmly. “The camera was set at the foci of three and four dimensions. As photographic experts have already

testified, examination of my camera has revealed things about it which cannot be explained by normal photographic law. That is because it is designed for dimensional use. Through its lenses you see people walk in the fourth dimension then veer out of it as it crosses our own space. I saw other things too—such as this . . . .”

Through eye-blurring, foreshortened angles there appeared power engines, dwarfing anything ever known on Earth, before which tiny beings worked and toiled. In shape they appeared almost earthly, and for that reason the vast scale of the engines they worked could be imagined. View upon view showed visions of power beyond the wildest imagination, and finally a whole mass of some thousand objects which, even to the uninitiated, were plainly space ships.

The twisting angles began to fade . . . . The lights came up. It had been thirty minutes in wonderland.

“Before we continue with more normal, orthodox views of my adventures, there is something I must say,” Harrigan said gravely. “You are fortunate indeed in that circumstance led me to arrive here on my way home, otherwise you would probably not have known of the menace threatening your civilization—indeed every civilization. You talk of world war, of nation against nation, and yet never give a thought to the possible preparation by other beings on other worlds against you . . . . You have seen vast engines of power being constructed on another world, in a dimension hidden from your eyes. With my superior scientific knowledge I probed the deepest secrets of these beings. They too are preparing for war—for onslaught upon this planet! Let there be no mistake about that. It is only a matter of months and against them you stand no chance because your science is not accurate enough.”

“But yours is!” shouted somebody.

“Quite true, but—” Harrigan shrugged. “I am disbelieved by certain people. I cannot place my powers at the disposal of unbelievers.”

Hodder stood up suddenly in the Press box. “I know quite well that your remarks are directed against me, Tibetan—but I have reasons for my disbelief. How do we know that these film scenes are genuine? How do we know *you* are genuine? Beyond making my notes vanish—which probably has an explanation far more mundane than mind force—you have done nothing. I assume that the master minds of Tibet can do better things than make writing vanish from a reporter’s notebook?”

“Aw, sit down!” bellowed a voice from the cheaper seats.

“Why should I sit down?” Hodder demanded. “This man here, a self-confessed mystic, warns us of approaching war from Mars—though he omits to mention exactly why the Martians should desire our world so suddenly—and our only proof of it is a collection of pictures which any skilled cameraman could fake.”

“Experts pronounce my camera totally unlike any they have ever seen,” Harrigan answered imperturbably. “It was made in Tibet—by me.”

“So what? Suppose you start putting yourself in the fourth dimension, like you did on Mars? Without machinery! Do it—now! That’s a challenge, Tibetan and one you can’t refuse if you’re all you claim.”

“And if I do this?” Harrigan asked gravely. “Will you believe?”

“I’m not promising anything because I know you can’t do it . . . .”

Harrigan creased his aged, wrinkled face into a smile. Then he closed his eyes, folded his arms, and became motionless. From somewhere in the packed house a shriek went up as he

slowly began to fade from sight. In sixty seconds he had disappeared, and the stage in front of the screen was totally empty!

Hodder looked nonplussed for a moment, then he vaulted over the gangway and finally gained the stage. He started searching hurriedly, ignoring the derisive cries of the audience. As he searched the draperies Harrigan slowly reappeared on the opposite side of the stage.

"Did you lose something, my friend?" he enquired politely.

There was a roar of laughter as Hodder swung round. He glared for a moment, then searched the Tibetan's cassock hurriedly. Harrigan did not stop him; he only continued to smile blandly.

"I have nothing up my sleeve, young man," he said solemnly. "But while you are about it you might like to witness something else, in case—in a sudden fit of impulse you should feel like killing me. Give me a match, will you?"

Hodder complied dubiously, then watched with his eyes narrowed as Harrigan took the flame and held it against his pale cheek, each in turn. Finally he held his fingers in it, then at last, threw the dead match away.

"If red hot bars were handy I could do the same with those," he observed. "Like the rest of my race I am indestructible by ordinary means. I am a scientist and master of the supernatural . . . Now go and sit down."

"I don't see—"

"Sit down!" Harrigan thundered, his eyes blazing suddenly.

Hodder turned away and resumed his seat in the press box. He was certainly baffled, but by no means quelled. The excited muttering died away as Harrigan took up the microphone again.

"Mainly to satisfy this young unbeliever I have exerted mental strain to get in and out of the fourth dimension," he said gravely. "That at least ought to prove to you that I am in earnest when I speak of an invasion from Mars . . . I can save you, yes—but only if you all believe . . . Now let the performance resume!"

It did resume, but the films were merely photographed records of a space flight, and as such, of not over-impressive interest after what had been done. Most of the audience was thinking of that mystical demonstration on the stage and of the grim warning of approaching invasion. . . .

In a few short hours Harrigan of Tibet had hit the mind of the world with more force than a cataclysm.

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Harrigan returned to his hotel surrounded by a clamouring mob, from which he only succeeded in escaping after a speech from the balcony of his hotel room. Then he closed the windows, threw himself into a chair, and relaxed. Finally, making sure the doors and window were locked and the shades down, he peeled off his fireproof synthetic flesh make-up and threw himself gratefully on the bed. He went to sleep fully assured of the conviction that there is one born every minute. . . .

The next morning the papers handed him his biggest laugh for years as, with his make-up on again, he received the newspapers from an awestruck bell hop.

"IS TIBETAN A FAKE?" asked the *Clarion*. That was Hodder's doing. Nasty piece of work, Hodder. The other papers took the thing seriously, and they were the papers which really dominated public viewpoint. The headlines were varied—

MYSTIC'S GRAVE WARNING. TIBETAN DOES A VANISH! IS MARS PREPARING WAR? And so on. . . .

Harrington had hardly finished his breakfast—it had been rather hard to convince the management that he ate as normal people do when in the west—before there came a knock on the door. Immediately he assumed his trancelike pose and said gravely, “Enter, my friend!”

It was a complete deputation which came in, mainly middle-aged men with thoughtful faces, headed by no less a personality than the Mayor of London himself.

“Your—er—Excellency,” the Mayor said, bowing uncertainly. “I have come in person at the request of various high officials who wish to know more about your alarming prediction of last night.”

“So?” Harrigan said softly. “You mean my warning of war with Mars?”

“Exactly.” The Mayor looked relieved at finding elaboration unnecessary. “Such a thing, you must realise, cannot be taken lightly. The whole world knows about it this morning—and naturally the whole world is alarmed. The hardest thing is to understand how this can be true—your prediction I mean—particularly as our astronomers, these gentlemen here, can find no trace of anything unusual on Mars’ dead surface. Not even with the new Mount Wilson reflector.”

Harrigan smiled wearily. “Gentlemen, did I not make it impressive enough that these Martian beings exist on Mars’ surface in *another dimension*? They cannot be seen: therein lies the subtlety of their plan. Only the slugs inhabit the normal surface, but they are far too small for telescopic observation in any case.”

“The facts,” said one of the astronomers rather uncomfortably, “were not given to us very clearly, Your Excellency. You must forgive us for doubting you. . . .”

“Of course.”

“It is possible,” the Mayor went on, “that the Prime Minister may wish to see you in regard to your warning. We must take all possible precautions.”

Harrigan frowned very slightly. He felt he was getting into deeper waters.

“Whatever precautions you take will avail you nothing,” he said. “Only science such as mine—*mind* science—can conquer these Martians when they come.”

“But you would be willing to aid us? I may convey that promise to the Prime Minister?”

“Providing there is nothing but unswerving adherence to my wishes, yes,” Harrigan assented, thinking. “Not otherwise. Mind force cannot operate successfully against adverse elements.”

The Mayor nodded hurriedly. “Of course—of course. You may rest assured that all unwanted elements will be suppressed by the law. . . . I will communicate your observations to the Prime Minister. Thank you, Your Excellency. . . .”

Harrigan bowed them out, then stood pondering. This was hardly the move he had expected. Unless he was very careful he was likely to force a world wide rush to arms and cripple all industrial pursuits. The Prime Minister! That would take some tackling. . . . It gave even his sublime nerve a jolt. However, the thing was done now: only thing to do was to tighten things up a little.

He spent both morning and afternoon delivering speeches from the top of his “space ship” in Hyde Park, speeches in which he stressed the necessity for misguided western civilization to take this chance of heeding a supermind from the East. He was not quite sure how much of his talking went over—but from the expressions of those who watched him he judged he had cashed in again on the strength of his mystic feats at the cinema the previous night.

The evening papers said in the main—MYSTIC SPEAKS AGAIN, and all save the *Clarion* avowed allegiance to his warnings and predictions.

Hodder still maintained his obstinate stand, but even he began to see he would have to change his views, not because of personal conversion but because of the fury of his editor and the public. Everybody had reared up Harrigan as a prophetic, scientific god. On every occasion he had proved his powers. It was not befitting that the *Clarion* should be the one dissenting voice. . . .

But Hodder, scenting a scoop one day, kept on with private investigations just the same.

### CHAPTER III

A special train plentifully sprinkled with guards in plain clothes whirled Harrigan from London to the Prime Minister's south country home the following day. He was deeply uneasy, but the synthetic make-up on his face prevented any apparent worry from showing itself. To the onlookers, and the authorities grouped about him, he was the same imperturbable mystic of yore.

When at last he was shown into the Prime Minister's library his courage nearly deserted him. The calm figure standing with his back to the window, hands behind him, stirred Harrigan to the realisation of the monstrous hoax he had perpetrated. He only went on for one reason now—because retreat was impossible.

Then he was alone with the man who was the leader of the nation.

"I understand," the Prime Minister said quietly, "that your name is too unpronounceable for us; therefore I will designate you as others have done. Won't you sit down, Excellency?"

Harrigan obeyed, waited, wondering when he would be discovered. But evidently his disguise was without flaw for presently the Prime Minister said:

"From various sources I am given to understand that you have definite first hand information concerning an intended attack upon this world from Mars. However fantastic that may seem, these days of scientific progress demand that every possible contingency, earthly or unearthly, be taken into consideration. You yourself have so proven your powers that one must at least pay heed to your warning. You are absolutely convinced that this attack will come?"

"Absolutely, Mr. Prime Minister," Harrigan said quietly.

"You have referred to the highly devised scientific powers of these invaders, which you alone can combat. How do you propose to go about such a combat?"

"Your armaments, vast though they are, are useless, Mr. Prime Minister. There is only one way to defeat these invaders, and that is by mass-hypnotism, such as my own people use to master every physical difficulty and every material barrier. . . ." Harrigan felt himself perspiring as a silence followed.

"You believe we should not alter our existing armaments or army personnel in the least, but should practice this—this mass hypnosis system?" The Prime Minister sounded vaguely incredulous.

"I do, yes. You see it is simply a matter of concentration. Thousands of minds, pooled to one particular thought wave, can produce a mental force sufficient to upset the finely balanced minds of the Martian invaders. . . . I say frankly that I would be willing to help the world follow out this system because, of course, we of Tibet will be as much at the mercy of the invaders as anybody else—and we alone are not sufficient in number to offset so many Martians. It will take vast masses of people—millions, all concentrating on one thing, to produce the right effect."

"I think I understand, Excellency," the Prime Minister mused. "But tell me, is it not possible for the heads of nations—or at least their representatives—to visit Mars in this machine of yours and see for themselves what you saw? It would serve as a better basis for conviction. After all, I have to convince others—many others. . . ."

For one moment Harrigan thought he was lost: he thought furiously. Then at length he said calmly, "It would produce conviction, certainly, but to even project *myself* to Mars demanded

a vast expenditure of mental effort. I could not possibly accomplish it with several people. Besides, none of you are trained to mastering space strain and lack of air by mind control, as I am. . . .”

“I had overlooked that,” the Prime Minister admitted ruefully. “For myself I do not doubt your veracity—but there are many others, even in my own House of Commons, who may. If, to defeat these invaders, it demands the resources of a whole world’s minds, the heads of other Governments as well as my own must be convinced of your authority.”

“I have proved my ability to enter a fourth dimension: I have brought film records of the actual preparations being made. . . . What more can I do?”

“There is one thing which I think will provide satisfaction all round. You must demonstrate the full range of your power. Professor Meredith, for instance, one of the greatest living authorities on Tibetan lore, would set a few recognised tests for you at a public demonstration. If you responded to each test perfectly your undoubted ability would be proven. You understand, Excellency? Not for a moment do I doubt you, but for other countries to cooperate demands proof beyond a shadow of doubt. The verification of Professor Meredith would be accepted without question. Then we can discuss with other nations whatever plans you have. . . .”

Harrigan nodded as calmly as he could. “Of course, Mr. Prime Minister. Any time you wish. . . . Anywhere. I shall stay in London until I hear from you.”

“I rather think. Excellency,” the Prime Minister said gravely, as he shook hands, “that the world will owe you a great deal in the long run. Let me assure you of the gratitude of the British for your co-operation.”

Harrigan bowed with dignity, but he walked out of the room on legs that felt like jelly. . . .

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Back in London, studiously avoiding all pleas to address the army of adherents who had sprung up in the city, Harrigan spent an uncomfortable day or two pondering on approaching events. He made the excuse that he was “meditating.” His bluff had assumed proportions of alarming size. Between him and the possible nominal control of the world—control enough at least to permit of him winning Landhurst’s bet—was Meredith, expert on Tibetan lore. That was the very devil.

At last Harrigan made moves, the only ones he could. Having left orders that he was not to be disturbed on any account for forty-eight hours—while he communed with higher planes—he removed his disguise, left the hotel during the night through the window and down the fire escape, thereafter proceeding to move about the city as an ordinary individual.

Immediately the day arrived he spent the time revising his notes on Tibetan miracles from the public library, crammed knowledge by the ton; then he made several purchases from different chemists and purveyors of magical equipment. Finally he rang up his friend Bob Shepherd and gave him implicit instructions, which he was to relay to his other two friends in different parts of the city.

Again by night, Harrigan returned to his hotel, somewhat easier in mind but by no means sure of the future even now. . . . In the morning the Prime Minister forwarded his instructions, through the Mayor once again. ‘Would His Excellency of Tibet be good enough to respond to the tests of Professor Meredith at a public demonstration at the Albert Hall at 8 p.m. in three days’ time?’

Inside a building? Not bad, Harrigan reflected. He accepted the challenge calmly—and again he slipped out at night and rang Bob Shepherd from a public call box. He chuckled to

himself as he returned to his hotel through the night. That fifty thousand pounds was not far off now; he could see that quite clearly.

What he did *not* see was a man with a hatchet face and soft hat standing in an abysmally dark doorway, watching him sedulously.

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If the London film performance had brought a crowd it was as nothing compared with the invasion which attacked the Albert Hall on the appointed night. Spurred on by the terrific build-up of the press, realising that the Prime Minister himself had convened this demonstration to test the real powers of the ‘Man from Tibet,’ the public rolled up in myriads.

There were free fights, near-riots, tripled police guards. If this thing went through successfully, the man from Tibet would become a virtual ruler—in essence if not in fact—of the policy of every country in the world. That was what the vast majority of people hoped for. A man with natural occult gifts ought to have plenty of sense—and would that be something! Besides, if there *was* anything in this Martian war possibility, he was the only man with brains enough to stop it. The papers had already hinted at that.

At 8.00 precisely, Harrigan walked calmly onto the dais in the centre of the vast amphitheatre, attired as usual in his cassock, his white hair flowing onto his shoulders. He looked like some ancient patriarch . . . Then came the Mayor, and lastly a bearded, blue-eyed, immaculate individual with a very incisive manner, carrying a small travelling case which he placed very resolutely beside him. The crowd did not need to be told he was Professor Meredith—that bearded face was familiar enough from newspapers.

The crowd hushed. Television transmitters went into action; floodlights came up, drenching that solitary square. The Mayor went through the preliminaries. Cameras ground in silence. Microphones swung into position under the blazing spots. The Press watched. Professor Meredith stepped forward at last as the Mayor retired.

“Excency,” Meredith said, and his voice was as sharp as a razor, “of the three stages of learning ascribed to Tibetans—namely, investigation, meditation, and understanding—I gather that you are the master of the third state, that you are complete controller of matter. In other words you have reached the point where matter of any kind is subservient to you? Where the minds of others are open books?”

Harrigan inclined his head gravely.

“The three supreme tests of Tibetan science are levitation, dimensional control and conquest of matter,” Meredith went on, flicking off the points on his fingers. “No matter what particular Tibetan sect you belong to, your control will be the same. Now let us commence. . . First, mind reading. I am thinking of three multiple numbers. What are they?”

“Two four six, seven four two and five four nine,” Harrigan replied instantly.

“Correct. . .” Meredith looked surprised. “Now—you placed yourself in the fourth dimension recently. Will you kindly do so again? I understand that in a fourth dimension you cannot be touched by anything in this plane? I want your word that when you have vanished you will remain inside this chalk circle. . .” Stooping Meredith drew a circle on the floor round Harrigan.

“You have my word,” he said quietly. “But to make doubly sure it would be as well to fasten me with rope and have it held at both ends.”

Meredith nodded and removed a length of rope from his case. Two volunteers from the front row fastened the rope in position round Harrigan’s waist and held both ends. Then he

closed his eyes, folded his arms, and faded slowly from view. The rope trailed into nothing on both sides of the empty chalk circle.

Meredith, frowning heavily, moved his arms inside the space—first above then below. Finally he withdrew and stood pondering as Harrigan slowly merged back into sight again. With a calm smile he nodded to the knots and presently dropped free.

“Excellent—excellent indeed!” Meredith observed. “Now here—” He pulled forth an ordinary piece of wood from his case. “Here is a plain piece of timber. By the power of concentration I want you to make it burst into flames. I believe it is a feat much favoured by you mystics.”

“Hold it up so everybody can see it,” Harrigan ordered briefly.

Meredith obeyed, a rather sceptical smile on his face. Then there was a long silence as Harrigan stood motionless, concentrating. It was positively startling when the whole mass of wood burst into smoke and flame, causing Meredith to drop it hastily and stamp on it. He gave a rather sheepish smile through his beard.

“I confess I came here to trip you up, Excellency,” he said quietly. “But I am afraid the tables are being turned. *I* am being made to look the fool. . . One more test, then I shall be satisfied. The most difficult feat even for an advanced Tibetan is the art of levitation by sheer will power opposing gravitation. It is hard enough for the mystic to force himself to rise from the ground but to make another rise from the ground is even harder! I challenge you to do that. If you succeed, I shall probe no further. It would be obviously futile. . .”

“You require me to raise myself into the air?” Harrigan asked.

“Not yourself. Raise *me*!” Meredith grinned cunningly.

“Very well—but I warn you I shall use hypnotism. Like this!” Harrigan shot out his fingers suddenly. In defiance of gravitation Meredith leaned backwards slowly, as stiff as a poker, gradually lowered to the floor and lay motionless. For a moment or two Harrigan stood pondering and the audience waited breathlessly.

Then he waved his hands at the head and feet of the obviously tranced expert. Slowly, gradually, Meredith began to rise, floating horizontally in mid-air. There he remained, two feet from the floor, with Harrigan’s hands poised over him compellingly.

For perhaps six seconds there was dead silence; then Harrigan made another gentle pass and in response the expert slowly went back to the floor again. A snap of the fingers before his eyes and he began to get dazedly to his feet.

“What did I—?” he began, then the rest of his words was drowned out by applause, reverberating from roof and walls.

Here, in glaring lights, without any apparatus—for the whole place had been searched not five minutes before the demonstration had begun—something had been done that made stage illusionists look like amateurs. And the cream of it was that the master mind of Tibetan lore had been the victim. Meredith had been made to float. He was standing now looking incredibly bewildered.

Then at last, as the din died away, he held out his hand frankly.

“There can be no further doubt of your Excellency’s abilities,” he said quietly, his words relaying to everybody by the microphone. “This world-wide telecast, convened for the purpose, has proved to the world that we have in our midst a natural controller of material forces—one who has come to warn us of impending danger and upon whose undeniable ability and resource we now cast our allegiance. Excellency, I bow to your genius!”

Harrigan smiled faintly, but he said nothing. Inwardly, his chief anxiety was to get clear of the surging, admiring mob of people who looked perilously likely to assail him. He made a quick motion to the police guard round the dais and they closed in immediately.

Even at that he had a rough and tumble journey back to his hotel. Not until he was at last back in his room did he breathe freely again, and turned to look at the Mayor and group of officials around him.

"It is more than likely that the Prime Minister will himself have seen your efforts over the televisor, Excellency," the Mayor observed. "In any case a full film and sound record will be dispatched to him tonight, together with my personal reports. . . There can be little doubt as to the outcome," he added smiling.

"I am entirely at the Prime Minister's disposal," Harrigan answered. "And now, gentlemen, if you please. . .? The strain tonight. . ."

"Of course." The Mayor nodded to the officials and they bowed themselves out of the room. Harrigan gave a faint, troubled smile when the door had closed. He waited around his room until long after midnight, smoking and pondering. Finally, shedding his disguise, he turned to the writing table and penned a brief note—

"You did magnificently. Tomorrow I should get the okay from the Prime Minister himself. That will constitute the winning of my wager because it will make me virtual ruler of the world. I cannot go further than that. I shall simply vanish and become Harrigan again. Then, and only then can you release Professor Meredith. You'll hear from me further. Thanks a lot. DH."

Harrigan smiled, sealed the note in an envelope and tied it to a small paperweight. At one in the morning he saw what he was waiting for—the momentary flash of a torchlight way down in the deserted street outside. Immediately he opened the window and dropped the letter outside. The figure stooped and picked it up, moved silently away into the night. . .

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Next morning brought an official of the Government to the hotel, surrounded by the usual horde of eager newspaper men. The envoy refused to speak, was admitted to Harrigan's room, gave a slight bow, then handed over a long, heavily sealed envelope.

Harrigan extracted the authoritative notepaper of the House of Commons and read the communique rapidly. His heart gave an extra beat. The note was signed by the Prime Minister in person. It commended the vindication of the previous night's test and requested the co-operation of 'His Excellency' at a conference of world heads, to be shortly convened—at which 'His Excellency' would perhaps be good enough to suggest ways and means of defeating the approaching Martian menace.

In essence, despite legal and technical phrasing, the letter was an admission of Harrigan's mystical powers and was a request for him to become the shadow power behind the thrones of the world. It was the fulfilment of a fifty thousand pound wager.

Harrigan nodded and smiled, walked over to the door and handed the note to the nearest pressman.

"Publish this—facsimile," he requested briefly. "It is not my policy to keep requests secret. I consider it in the public interest that they should know what is to be done. . . I am to be ruler of the world, my friends—and I assure you my one wish is to help you all to overcome this approaching invasion."

He withdrew without further observations, turned to the envoy.

"I will communicate with the Prime Minister within the hour," he said quietly. "I have other matters to attend to first. . ."

"Very good, Excellency." The envoy departed with brisk tread.

Harrigan smiled rather ruefully as he was left alone. He began to think out loud.

"If I retire now I'm safe. I have not taken a cent from anybody, I have proved that there is one born every minute; and the press will advertise to Landhurst that I have become ruler of the world without any resort to force. . . Well, it was good while it lasted." He began to peel off his disguise. "A brief note can say I was recalled to my ancestors in Tibet, or something. Then—"

He broke off and glanced round sharply at a sudden hubbub in the corridor, followed by a pounding on his room door. Frantically he tried to put his disguise back in place but it just would not stick.

"One moment—!" he called out anxiously; but to his horror a duplicate key grated in the lock. The door flew open suddenly.

It was Hodder of the *Clarion* who came stalking in first, his face sour with triumph. Around him were police officers and behind them the hotel manager and an inquisitive crowd.

"Douglas Harrigan," the inspector said curtly. "I have here a warrant for your arrest on charges of fraud, kidnapping, and false representation. I must warn you that anything you say \_\_\_"

"All right, skip that," Harrigan interrupted, with a little sigh. He stripped off the rest of his disguise, then glanced at Hodder. "Nice going, Hodder," he commented dryly. "But you're just a shade too late. I've done all I need to do. . . Now gentlemen, I am at your service."

## CHAPTER NINE

Possibly no trial in the history of British justice had such sensational angles as that of the ‘Tibetan Mystic.’

Throughout it all Harrigan remained perfectly at ease, answered every question truthfully, gave the details of his wager and of his intentions to step out before he did any real harm. The only thing he refused to say was his method of performing his feats. He had reasons for that: newspapers were bidding fantastic prices against each other for his personal revelations. All he had to do was sit back and wait for the highest bidder.

Hodder’s revelations were surprising. Suspicious from the very first, he had watched every move Harrigan had made. He had seen him leave and return to his hotel. He had seen him telephone. He had traced the call to Bob Shepherd, sorted out the details from the Fantasy Club—by joining as a member—and had gradually built up the evidence that had led him to see the actual kidnapping of the real Professor Meredith by Harrigan’s two friends, on his way to the Albert Hall demonstration. It had been simply accomplished by switching taxis.

For Shepherd to apply whiskers and resemble Meredith had been the easiest thing in the world. After the demonstration Hodder had taken it on himself to corner Shepherd and get the whole story out of him. Hence it had been Hodder himself and not Shepherd who had taken the note dropped by Harrigan from the hotel window. It gave the complete low-down—but it did something else too: it proved that Harrigan had really intended to step out before he got too involved.

Had Hodder had his way Harrigan would have been arrested the moment he had got the truth out of Shepherd—but it had taken time to get the law to believe him, even longer to arrange the legal details of the warrant; time in which Harrigan had got what he wanted—the admission from the head of the nation that he was to become the shadow ruler of the world. The thing was void now, of course—but that was not the point. Harrigan had achieved his object, to which Landhurst willingly testified on the stand, and further substantiated it by paying in fifty thousand pounds to Harrigan’s bank account.

One by one the witnesses were grilled. The case dragged on. The judge was forced to exercise a solomon-like wisdom to appraise the matter in its true light. In the annals of hoaxes there had never been one quite like this. No actual harm had been done beyond the ‘detention’ of Meredith and the absolute gullibility of people at large. It was a profoundly difficult problem to deal with. Harrigan had stolen nothing, hurt nobody, had even paid his hotel bill, and had intended to withdraw before precipitating a crisis.

The only clause the judge could work on was that of kidnapping—but here Meredith himself stepped in the gap with a self confessed admiration for Harrigan’s cheek. The result of it all was that Harrigan got one year’s imprisonment. He took it with a calm smile and advised the newspaper whose figure he had finally accepted—the *Clarion* as it happened—that he would forward a personal confession from jail. So Hodder got his scoop too and Harrigan’s fifty thousand pounds jumped by another half.

In jail, out of sight, he was not forgotten by those whose faces were still red at the thought of their gullibility. The *Clarion*’s circulation soared vastly as his confessions were published with perfect frankness. Skipping the main personal angles of the trial, readers read the ‘Secrets’ department with avid eyes. . .

“ . . . and I have no doubt that reporter Hodder was much surprised when his notes vanished. He need not have been. Dimonitrite ethyl, if concentrated into a pill or tablet, dissolves rapidly into the air but gives off odourless fumes which loosen the ingredients of ink, or graphite (pencil) and evaporate it. It is the basis of many liquid erasers on the market today. I dropped a tablet in Hodder's notebook pocket, with results that astounded him a good deal. The fumes, in the confined space, went up between the book leaves and eliminated everything written therein. . .

“ . . . my disguise was of course synthetic flesh, such as is used by modern beauty parlours to patch up defects in my lady's face. The only difference was that mine was fireproof, simple enough by adding one chemical, whereby I could burn matches on hands and face without trouble. Again, synthetic flesh fits with such elastic tightness it is impossible to tell where it joins, ends or begins. . .

“ . . . my films were perfectly normal but taken over a long period of time in preparation for such an event as this, and also to satisfy myself in regard to details of certain stories I have written. They were taken on a small camera and then enlarged to standard size in my own dark room: nobody save me ever saw them before. Microphotography of slugs on a stretch of sand and superimposition of myself by what is called the 'Dunning' process, gave disparity in sizes. The four dimensional effects were done with prisms and mirrors. The Martian 'City' was New York done in this wise, and the giant power engines were photographed in an ordinary power house and human beings were superimposed afterwards in such a style as to look after them. The colour effects were, once again, entirely prismatic and 3-D.

“ . . . my own apparent disappearance into a fourth dimension was purely the work of polarising light vibrations. Since these scientific machines are usually confined to side shows or military headquarters, they are little known to the general public even though invented and proved as far back as 1937. I had long known the principle of these polarising machines. A professional one is rather large: I made a smaller one capable of fitting into a small travelling case.

“On the occasion of the premiere, Shepherd was seated with the case in the front row. He had merely to operate the mechanism at the desired time by buttons on the side disguised as a handle, and I came into the range of the beam. He did the same when in the disguise of Meredith he asked me to disappear. By ducking my head as he waved his hand over me, and by raising my feet one after the other as he waved his hand below, the impression was conveyed that I was not there. The invisibility machine was in his travelling case. Since he was virtually in the know with everything I did, it made matters profoundly simple. . .

“ . . . in the case of the burning wood, the wood was of course prepared with chemical beforehand. Shepherd had merely to press a concealed switch at the required time. Shops for magical apparatus sell these anywhere. . .

“ . . . the system by which I levitated 'Meredith' was an ordinary illusionist's trick. I had wire ready fixed in my hands. He had small invisible hooks on his shoes and the shoulders of his coat. All I had to do when making the passes was slip the wires on to the hooks, then cause him to rise slowly, first one end and then the other, until at last he floated in apparent contra to gravity. The trick lies in the angle at which you raise the victim, as any magician will tell you. Ju-jitsu relies on the same

principle. It is possible by absolute accuracy to raise a man half as heavy again as yourself with perfect ease. That was all I did. Naturally ‘Meredith’ and I took good care that nobody else came near us while the trick was done. It was the total absence of any visible apparatus that swung the thing . . . .”

In plain truth, the readers of the world did not know whether to be offended, or whether to admire the ingenuity of a young man who by nerve, a little magic, and a knowledge of Tibet and science—and above all a masterly conception of mass psychology—had hoodwinked an entire world into believing him. He was a showman, par excellence.

That was why, when he came out of jail a year later to use his fifty thousand, he wrote the best selling book ever and called it “There’s One Born Every Minute”. At the Fantasy Club he was a being enshrined because he was the one man who had written a story and then *proved* it—word for word!

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Numerous mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *The Master Mind* by John Russell Fearn]