

THRILLING

WONDER

STORIES

15¢

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

JUNE

THE MOLTEN BULLET

A Story of
Astronomical Doom

By **ANTHONY RUD**

MENACE FROM THE MICROCOSM

A Novelette of
Worlds Within Worlds

By
**JOHN
RUSSELL
FEARN**

STRANGER THAN TRUTH

THE CHESSBOARD OF MARS

A Novelette of Super-Telepathy
By **EANDO BINDER**

LOST IN TIME

A Novelette of
Dimensional Secrets
By **ARTHUR
LEO ZAGAT**



*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

Title: Lost in Time

Date of first publication: 1937

Author: Arthur Leo Zagat (1896-1949)

Date first posted: Apr. 9, 2019

Date last updated: Apr. 9, 2019

Faded Page eBook #20190441

This eBook was produced by: Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpcanada.net>

LOST IN TIME

A Novelette of Dimensional Secrets

A Warp in Space-Time Catapults Jim Dunning into
Another Age Four Centuries Hence!

By ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT

*Author of "The Lanson Screen,"
"The Land Where Time Stood Still," etc.*

CHAPTER I

The Stratocar

Jim Dunning gasped in the surge of terrific heat. A vast roaring deafened him. He leaped to the lashed wheel of the *Ulysses*. In a single motion he loosed the fastenings and threw all the power of his knotted muscles into a desperate twirling of the polished spokes. The deck slanted. The yawl shot about in a foaming half circle and fled like some live, terrified thing from the whirling, topless column of fire that had leaped out of the sea.

Dunning stared, over his shoulder, across the lurid waters that a moment before had been a glassy plain, silvery under the moon of a windless Pacific night. The crimson pillar soared stupendously, the speed of its whirling whipping the ocean into long, blurred spirals of fire.

The tremendous blare of sound leaped suddenly higher in pitch, became a shriek. Something sprang into view at the base of the fiery column, something huge and black and round. On the moment the sea heaved and climbed heavenward till the flame was lashing from within a huge liquid crater. The dark wall of water expanded. A towering wave rushed toward Dunning with incredible speed.

Dunning crouched over the wheel as if to add the naked force of his will to the frantic *putt-putt* of the *Ulysses*' motor. The little vessel darted away like a thoroughbred under the lash. But the towering wave caught up with her, loomed appallingly above her. A briny avalanche crashed down on the doomed craft.

Jim Dunning fought for his life in a seething welter of waters. A hatch-cover, torn from its hinges, thudded against him. With a last, instinctive effort he hauled himself across the cleated plank, clung to it desperately as consciousness left him.

A reckless bet with some of his club members had sent Jim Dunning out from 'Frisco, six weeks before, on his disastrous attempt to cross the Pacific, single-handed, in a thirty-foot, auxiliary-engined yawl. And now in the greying dawn, his still shape floated on the tiny raft amidst a mass of wreckage. About him the vast circle of the horizon enclosed a waste of heaving waters, vacant of any life. Only a light breeze ruffled the sea's surface, calm again after the sudden disturbance of the night.

Eventually his eyes opened. Hopelessly, he raised his head. A curious object that looked like a large spherical buoy, floating half submerged, met his gaze. But what was a buoy doing here, a thousand miles from the nearest land,

in water a half mile deep?

Dunning kicked off his shoes and swam strongly through the cool brine. The great ball hung above him as he floated, its exterior glass-smooth. He swam slowly around it, searching for some projection that would enable him to get to its summit. Inches above the water a threadlike crack showed. It made a rectangle three feet wide by five. Was it an entrance to the interior of the ball whose floating showed it to be hollow? There was no handle, no means of opening it.

Dunning trod water and with the flat of his hand he pushed against the unyielding sector, inward, then sideward, with no result. In sudden exasperation he drove his fist against the polished surface and yelled: "Open, damn you, open up and let a fellow in!"

Amazingly, the metal moved! Dunning stared as the curved panel jogged inward for an inch, then slid smoothly aside.

"It's like the Arabian Nights," he muttered. "I yelled 'open sesame' and it opened." A prickle along his spine did deference to the uncanny happening. Then, oddly enough, he chuckled.

"That's it! An electric robot. Nothing to be scared of."

Only a week before Dunning's departure Tom Barton had demonstrated to him this latest ingenuity of the electrical wizards. It was installed in Barton's garage, a phon-electric cell so adjusted that at the coded honking of a horn it would set a motor in motion to open the doors. Barton had picked up the idea at the airport, where the same device turned on the floodlights in response to a siren signal from an approaching airplane.

"If honking horns and howling sirens can open doors, why not the human voice? Well, let's take a look at the Forty Thieves."

Gripping the opening's lower edge Dunning leaped out of the water and through the aperture. He was in a confined chamber, its walls and ceiling the vaulted curve of the sphere itself.

Sprawled across the flat floor was a girl, unmoving. Dunning caught his breath at the white beauty framed by long black hair that cascaded along her slim length.

"No!" he groaned. "She can't be dead!"

Dunning bent over the girl and lifted one limp hand, feeling for a pulse. There was a slow throb. A long whistle of relief escaped him. She was breathing, shallowly but steadily, and her dark lashes quivered a bit where they lay softly against the curve of her pale cheeks.

There was a couch just beyond the girl. He lifted her to it, laid her down. Gently he straightened her robe of some unfamiliar, shimmering material—and whirled to some inimical presence glimpsed from the corner of his eye.

He crouched, his spine tingling with ancestral fear, his brawny arms half curved, his great fists clenched. But the man did not stir. Seated at a desklike object just beyond the opening, he stared straight before him. It was his uncanny rigidity, the fish-white pallor of his face, that were so menacing. He was dead.

Dunning moved cautiously across the floor toward the seated corpse. It toppled as he reached it, thumped soggly to the floor.

The acrid odor of burned flesh stung Dunning's nostrils. There was a huge cavity in the cadaver's chest, its gaping surface blackened and charred by some searing flame!

Dunning swung his back to the wall, and his glance darted about the room. The dead man and the unconscious girl were the only other occupants of the hemisphere. Had someone killed the man, struck the girl down, and escaped? But how had he managed it? There was no room for an attacker between the body and the contrivance before which it had been seated.

That strange object was of some unfamiliar, iridescent metal. It had somewhat the size and contour of an old-fashioned roll-top desk, minus the side wings. Across the center of the erect portion, where the pigeon-holes should be, stretched a long panel of what appeared to be milky-white glass, divided into two portions by a vertical metal strip. Above and below, tangent to the edge of the long panel at the ends of the metal strip, were two round plates of the same clouded glass. In spaces to left and right of these disks were arrayed a number of dial-faces; gauges or indicators of some kind.

On a waist-high, flat ledge were little colored levers, projecting through slitted grooves. From the forward edge of this a metal flap dipped down some four inches. Through this metal flap a hole gaped, its curled edges melted smooth by a flame, by the flame that had killed the man at his feet!

Something hard thrust into his back.

“Don't move! Twitch a muscle and you die!”

Dunning froze rigid at the crisp command. That voice from behind, vibrant with threat, was yet unmistakably feminine.

Dunning obeyed. A vague strangeness in the words bothered him. They were oddly accented. The low-timbred, contralto voice was speaking English, but an English queerly changed, glorified in sound, lambent with indefinable majesty.

A hand passed over his body.

“You seem to be unarmed now—turn around, slowly.”

The girl was standing a yard away, pointing a black tube steadily at him. Her lips were scarlet against the dead white of her skin. Her eyes were dilated. Rage—and fear—stared forth from their grey depths.

“What have you done to Ran? Why have you killed him?”

“Nothing. I—”

“You lie!” she blazed at him. “You lie! You’re one of Marnota’s helots—sent to murder me! But how did he dare—open assassination? There is still law in the land—in spite of him.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, sister,” Dunning drawled. “My yawl was wrecked last night. When I came to, I saw you—this thing, whatever it is, and swam to it. The hatchway opened, you were on the floor, dead to the world. I lifted you to the couch, looked around, and found—this. I know less than you do how Ran was killed.”

A flicker of doubt crossed the girl’s face. There was an almost imperceptible relaxation of her tenseness.

“Your voice is so strange, you speak so queerly. Where do you come from? What are you?”

“I am an American.”

Suspicion flared again, and hate. Dunning waited what seemed ages for a flash from the cylinder of death.

“But—somehow—you don’t seem a murderer,” she said. “You have not the brutish appearance of Marnota’s mercenaries. There is something strange here, something I don’t understand.” The tube wavered, dropped a bit.

Dunning saw his chance. His hand flicked out, closed on the uncanny weapon; wrenched it away. The girl gasped. She was white, congealed flame.

“Go ahead,” she whispered defiantly. “Finish your task. Press the button and kill me.”

“I haven’t any desire to kill you, or to harm you,” Dunning chuckled. “I only want to know what this is all about. I’m Jim Dunning. What’s your name?”

“I am Thalma, Thalma of the house of Adams,” she proclaimed proudly.

“Sorry, Miss Adams. The name means nothing to me.”

Amazement showed in her mobile features.

“You do not know me!” she exclaimed, wonderingly. “And you say you are an American?”

“I left San Francisco six weeks ago. Have you become famous since then?”

She shook her head, still bewildered. Dunning continued.

“Up to then I’m sure I knew what was going on. I read the papers. New York had just won the World Series. Franklin Roosevelt was President of the United States—”

A startled exclamation came from Thalma. Her weapon dropped from a hand flung up as if to ward off a blow.

“Roosevelt—President! Why—that’s ancient history. What year was that?”

“What year? This year, of course, 1937.”

“Nineteen-thirty-seven! What are you talking about? This is 2312 A. D.”

CHAPTER II

No Way Back

Jim Dunning was staggered.

Twenty-three, twelve! She was cra— No, she wasn't. There was no madness in her wide eyes, only dawning comprehension—and fathomless terror.

“Marnota!” Thalma said fiercely. “What has he done to me?”

“What—” Dunning forced past the constriction in his own throat. “What do you mean?”

“He—Marnota—somehow he's thrown me back in time. Four hundred years back in time!”

The statement thudded against his ears, and, incredible as it was, he knew it for truth. There was something about the girl, about this queer sphere and its contents, about the very clothing of the girl and her murdered companion, that convinced him, against all reason.

“What shall I do?” Thalma's whimper was the frightened cry of a small child, alone with the dark and with blind, overwhelming fear.

Dunning took two steps to her side. His arm went around her shoulder, protectingly.

“You just trust your Uncle Jim! Everything's going to be all right, sure as God made little apples. Just sit down over here, and powder your nose, or whatever they do in your time. Then you can tell me all about it.” They moved toward the couch.

But they never reached it. The globe lurched and sent them reeling dizzily to the wall. They were buried beneath a crushing weight of bitter water. They were caught in a storm. The floor careened again, and they were sliding toward the open hatchway through which the invading wave souged out. Mountainous waves were piled high against a slanting, jagged horizon. Dunning's feet struck the sill. Braced against it, he saw the girl's white form plunge past him. He snatched at her, just managed to clutch her foot and wrest her from the grip of the out-swirling wave.

Just above him was the door-slide. He surged to his feet and thrust the panel home.

The sphere's interior was aglow with a soft light that came from everywhere and nowhere. The imprisoned remnant of the wave rushed crazily across the lurching floor. Dunning steadied himself against the wall.

From somewhere above him he heard the girl's voice, shrill through the

clamor of the storm:

“Wait! I’ll get us out of this in an instant.”

He looked up. Thalma was pulling herself along the wall, up the steep slope. The floor’s slant reversed itself, and she was flung against the desklike object where Ran had met his death. She caught at it, swung around to its front, was leaning over the panel through which a hole had been melted as if by a flame. One arm reached forward to the levers.

“Stop!” Dunning bellowed from a suddenly dry throat. “Don’t touch that thing!” He hurled himself through space, threw the girl headlong from the board. “You fool! You little fool!”

She beat at him with her puny fists as the sphere lurched again, and whirled dizzily.

“What are you doing? We must get up and out of this storm! The stratocar will be wrecked!”

Dunning thrust her away, threw himself to the floor, rolled on his back, jerked his head and shoulders within the space beneath the level desk that held the colored handles. He reached in and wrenched at something, then slid out again.

“Look at this!” he growled.

He held up a black cylinder to Thalma. It was the counterpart of that with which she had threatened him except that the trigger-button was missing, and that two fine wires dangled from the place where it had been. He struggled to his feet.

“That,” he said grimly, “is what did for your friend Ran.”

Thalma paled.

“And would have blasted me had I touched the levers! You have saved my life. How did you know it was there?”

“Had to be. The shot that finished him must have come through that hole in the panel. I had just figured that out when you jumped me. When I looked, just now, I could see these wires didn’t belong there, that they were spliced crudely. And this was exactly like your weapon.”

For a moment the tempest had lulled, but now it gripped the ball again. The orb whirled, tossed insanely.

“You said something about getting us out of this.” Dunning had to shout to make himself heard. “Better do it, now, if you can, or we’re done for.”

He braced Thalma against the board. She pushed a red-tipped lever. Dunning felt the floor thrust against his feet. The sphere steadied, and the silence was startling after the tumult. The girl returned the lever to its original position and pressed a button at the corner of the board. The milky-white panels on the upright cleared.

Dunning was gazing through what seemed like open windows at a vast panorama. In the lower disc, black clouds billowed. Mountains of vapor thrust up from the rolling mass, were illumined by the sun's brilliant rays. In the halves of the long, rectangular panel he looked far over the storm clouds, to where a green, untroubled sea rose and fell. In the left-hand section the sun itself rode dazzling in a clear sky, a sky whose deep blue was repeated in the upper disc. Against the whiteness of a cloud to the right Dunning saw a round black blotch that he realized with a shock was the shadow of the sphere in which he rode.

"Why," he exclaimed, "those screens show everything outside—all around, above and below!"

"Of course! How else could the stratocar be navigated?" Thalma seemed astonished at his surprise. "I forget. The visoscope was invented late in the twenty-second century. You couldn't know anything about it."

Dunning looked at the girl ruefully.

"I must seem like a child to you. It's hard to recall that you are four hundred years ahead of me. Do I understand rightly, that this 'stratocar' is some kind of flyer, like our airplanes?"

"Certainly! But it is far more efficient. It can navigate the stratosphere at speeds that to you would be unthinkable. It utilizes the terrestrial lines of force and stored solar energy. The power coils are all housed in the lower half of the ball. They are tremendously complex, but the navigation is very simple. Look here!"

Thalma turned to the control board.

"Move any of these levers away from you, and the stratocar responds. Return the handle to its original position and motion in the direction indicated stops. The red lever is to ascend, the green to descend. White is straight ahead."

Her slim fingers touched each small handle lightly as she talked.

"Black is to—" Suddenly her voice dropped, her brow wrinkled puzzledly as her hand fluttered to two levers that were uncolored. "I've never seen these before. I wonder what they're for. Could they be—" Before Dunning could stop her she had pushed one.

Across the visoscope a flame shot, crimson, whirling. The stratocar's interior was a timeless, spaceless place, where there was no up, no down; no sound, no sight; nothing but a vast heatless glare through which the pinpoint that was his consciousness fell endlessly, rose endlessly, and endlessly was motionless. He had no body, almost no mind.

He was an atom at the center of a tiny vortex, he was vast, gigantic as the Universe itself. Then—was it after eternities or in the next instant?—he was

himself again, and the stratocar was around him, and Thalma was there at his side! The two looked dazedly at each other. The girl reeled, would have fallen if he had not caught her.

“What on earth did you do that for?” he asked excitedly.

She didn’t hear him.

“That,” she said slowly, “that was how I felt before, and then everything went black, and the next thing I saw you at the control board, and Ran was lying dead on the floor. I remember now, he had just said something about dipping to the thousand foot level.”

“There must have been two trick connections to the descending control; one to the ray-gun, the other to one of these two levers. That’s how you were thrown back to 1937 the same moment Ran was killed. But that’s neither here nor there. Do you realize what you’ve done? You’ve sent us chasing through time. God alone knows whether we’ve gone forward, or back, or to what age. We knew where, or rather when, we were before you did that. We might have figured out how to get you back. But now—” He threw his arms wide.

“Then—then we’re lost in time!” Her eyes were big and round, her lips trembled. “*We’re lost in time!*”

CHAPTER III

Murder Without a Clue

The phrase echoed and re-echoed, beat its terrifying meaning into Jim Dunning's brain. "Lost in time!" The vast reaches of eternity seemed to stretch before him, eons upon eons through which he and the girl were doomed to flee, searching despairingly for a familiar world. In the visoscope nothing showed but a cloudless sky and a vast green sea that heaved oilily. Had the sphere and its human contents been thrown back to the very dawn of history? Or forward into the dim future of a dying world?

A choked sob broke in on Dunning's thoughts, and a little hand grasped his arm.

"What are we going to do now?"

"Look here, young lady, there's nothing to worry about," he mollified the tearful Thalma. "Why, we're making progress. We know how to navigate in time now. All we have to do is to find out what year we're in, and then—zip, presto—we'll have you back in 2312."

A voluntary smile responded to his buoyant tone.

"I never thought of that. There are two strange levers. If one sends us one way, the other will do the reverse. There must be some way of regulating the mechanism."

"Of course there is!" No use worrying her, but that was just the difficulty. How control the time-traveling mechanism while one was merely a bodiless consciousness? "First thing to do is find some land, some people, and locate ourselves in time. Do you know which of these levers to pull?"

Thalma seated herself at the control board. "Which way?"

"East. See America first!"

The girl glanced at a dial on which were the familiar compass markings, then deftly moved a lever. The sea began to glide smoothly toward the bottom of the lower view-disc.

Were it not for the evidence of the visoscope Dunning would not have realized that the stratocar was moving, so vibrationless was its progress. The girl was still pale, and her hands were quivering. He must get her mind off their present plight.

"I wish you would tell me what all this is about. Things have been happening so quickly around here that there hasn't been any time to ask questions. For instance, who is this Marnota?"

"Marnota is America's greatest scientist, since my father's death. He is my

uncle and my guardian. He and father, together, invented these stratocars and countless other things that have revolutionized civilization. Through their inventions they gained tremendous power. A quarter of the population of the United States is employed by Adams, Inc. Its factories, its transportation lines, its ports and its warehouses blanket the Americas. The prosperity, the very existence of the smallest village in the country depends on the company.

“Why do you think he would wish to harm you?”

“I know he would. Although my father and Marnota were brothers, they differed widely in everything but their scientific genius. My father envisaged his work as something that would make the world a paradise, reduce the hours of labor, increase everyone’s opportunity for luxury and culture. He wished to donate everything to the government, to reserve a mere livelihood for himself. But all their inventions were owned jointly by the brothers and Marnota would not permit this to be done. Money is his god.

“While father lived simply, and devoted his great wealth to the people’s welfare, Marnota built himself great palaces, filled them with sycophantic degenerates who pandered to his vices. He came to my father repeatedly with urgings to reduce wages, lengthen hours, increase prices. Adams, Inc. was all-powerful, he argued. The people might grumble, but would have to submit.”

Thalma paused for a moment. “When I was just fifteen, after a particularly virulent argument in which my father made it clear once for all that he would never agree to Marnota’s schemes, he was killed by an explosion in the laboratory. Strangely enough, Marnota, who had been working with him on some new problem, had been called away not fifteen minutes before the fatal accident. The laboratory was completely demolished. There was no way of telling just what had happened.”

“Sounds suspicious, as you tell it. But, after all, Marnota was your father’s brother. Do you really believe that he—”

“I’d believe any villainy of Marnota,” the girl flared. “He is vile, I tell you, vile!” Thalma was somehow less lovely as hate darkened her clean-cut features. There was a long pause, while her unfocused eyes stared into vacancy. The stratocar swam steadily eastward. No hint of what age they were in showed in the visoscope.

The girl resumed her story.

“My father’s will had been made shortly after my birth, before my uncle’s real character had showed itself. Imagine my horror when it was revealed that Marnota was to be my guardian, trustee of my inheritance till I was twenty-one! A week before my twenty-first birthday he presented this stratocar to me. A much improved model, he said. It could be easily handled by one person and he wanted me to have the first one produced as a birthday gift.

"I was pleased, but not for the reason he thought. With this new flyer at my disposal I could disappear, hide myself somewhere until I came into my own. For I was uneasy, frightened. My death would mean so much to him. His power over Adams, Inc. would become absolute if I were removed. That night I stole out to the car, planning to flee alone. How well Marnota read me! But Ran, my faithful servant and friend, suspected my intention, and intercepted me. He insisted on going with me, and I yielded.

"We made for Hawaii. We were above the Pacific when I heard Ran say something about descending a bit. He moved the lever. There was a sudden, awful flare into nothingness—I felt myself thrown from the couch—and—well, you know the rest."

"That flame I saw, and the wave that wrecked the *Ulysses*, must have been the visible result of the warping of space-time as the stratocar shot back four centuries! What a devil that uncle of yours must be, and how well he planned! A murder without a clue—the body hidden in another era. But see how the man's scheme had been upset by accidents he could not have foreseen! If you had been at the controls, instead of Ran; if you had been over land; if I hadn't happened to be at that point in all the miles of the Pacific; he would be in undisputed control of the company, with nothing to fear. As it is—"

"As it is, I can't see what difference all that makes." Thalma's tone was flat, hopeless. "I might as well be dead as wandering aimlessly—lost in time."

Once more that phrase struck a chill through Dunning. In the visoscope, low on the horizon ahead, a bluish haze appeared. The blueness deepened, solidified. A dark fleck appeared in the sky. It grew rapidly. It was a tiny ball—the sun caught it and it glinted coppery.

"Jim! Jim!" The girl's fingers dug into his arm, her voice was strident, hysterical. "It's a stratocar! A stratocar! Do you hear me? What does that mean?"

"It must mean that by some miracle we're back in your time."

"Oh, thank God! Thank God!"

"What's that blue band around the center of that flyer, and those black discs? There are nothing like those on this sphere."

Thalma wheeled back to the screen. An exclamation of dismay came from her.

"It's a patrol ship, one of Marnota's police craft!"

From one of the black spots that had caught Dunning's eye a white beam shot out. It caught the time-traveler. The scene in the visoscope dissolved into a dazzling radiance.

Thalma tugged frantically at the levers. There was no response.

"They've got us in the neutralizing beam. Our power is gone!"

A voice sounded in the chamber, coldly challenging.

“What craft is that?”

The girl faced a circular device, covered with a fine metallic mesh, that was inserted in the wall beside the control board. “This is Thalma of the House of Adams.” Her steady tones showed nothing of the fear that stared from her eyes. “Shut off your beam and permit me to proceed.”

The voice laughed, sneeringly.

“The message received by Marnota of the House of Adams purporting to announce her return on the eve of her majority has been found to be a forgery. My orders are to bring any claimants, should they appear, directly to Marnota for identification.” Dunning and Thalma exchanged startled glances. The plotter had provided against failure of his plan.

“I demand to be taken before the Federal Court.” Thalma was defiant. “Marnota may appear there, and deny my identity if he dare.”

The voice continued; ignoring the interruption.

“You will follow me peaceably, or I shall be compelled to ray you.”

Thalma threw her arms wide, signaling their helplessness.

“We follow, helot!” she cried aloud. To Dunning she whispered: “One flash of their ray-gun and there will be nothing left of this stratocar but some dust. Marnota would like nothing better.”

The view-screen cleared. Close at hand they could see the police-car, hovering. The voice came again.

“Keep within a hundred feet of us. Remember, the slightest swerve from that position and I blast.” The blue-banded stratocar began to move, and with trembling fingers Thalma pressed down the levers to follow.

CHAPTER IV

Death Behind the Arras

Faster and faster the two spheres cleaved the air, till below there was but a tinted blur. The hazy earth dropped away, was a great bowl, then rounded again into a far-spread convexity. Dunning peered at the control board.

“Look here, Thalma. The time-lever you pressed returned automatically to neutral position. That must mean the time mechanism is set to make just that one leap of approximately four hundred years. That gives me an idea. All we have to do is press the other handle. We’ll shoot back to my time—I’ll see that you’re taken care of there for life.” His hands darted to the board.

Thalma thrust it aside.

“No!” Low-voiced as the exclamation was, inflexible determination sounded in it. “No, Jim, I cannot. I must remain in my own time. I must meet Marnota face to face and accuse him of his crimes. My father’s memory cries out for vengeance, and the downtrodden people lift their hands to me in mute appeal. Something here,” a white hand pressed against her heart, “tells me that he cannot triumph.”

Dunning’s hand dropped from the levers, and he was silent. He could not argue against the burning vision in Thalma’s grey eyes, the fire in her low voice.

“But *you* can easily escape.” The girl turned and pointed. “There, just in front of the couch, is a trapdoor to the lower hull. Hide below there, among the coils, till I am taken away. Then you can steal out, shift the time lever and go back to the twentieth century.”

“No!” Dunning told her firmly. “I’m staying here—with you.”

They were slowing now. Below was a far-spreading white city. Great towers reached upward to the dropping sphere. The rooftops were landscaped gardens. Airy bridges leaped in a gossamer network across mile-deep chasms. Dunning glimpsed the Hudson, almost hidden beneath many bridges.

In the middle of a watery expanse Dunning recognized as New York’s Upper Bay a circular building brooded, black, ominous. Straight down to its flat roof the sphere with the blue band drifted, and Thalma followed. The roof opened, dividing into many leaves that slid one under the other, and a round gap showed. The leading stratocar dipped within.

Guards in bright green uniforms surrounded them as they emerged from the stratocar. Two mercenaries ranged themselves on either side of Dunning and the girl, seizing their arms at the elbows. But just as they started forward a

voice rang out.

“Sergeant Farston!”

The leader whirled, and saluted the communication disc. “Here, sir,” he snapped.

From somewhere among the half dozen private police crowding around him Dunning heard a gasped, “Marnota, himself!”

“You will bring the prisoners to me, at once!”

“Yes, sir.”

“Gosh, the chief has listened in on damn near everything the last week!” someone said, low-voiced.

Presently they were marched to Marnota through a circling corridor whose marble walls showed fine veinings of gold. Then the party was being challenged by a sentry before a doorway curtained by cloth of gold.

“Halt! Who goes there?”

“Sergeant Farston and prisoners.”

“You will pass in at once, Sergeant, with the prisoners. Orders are to dismiss the rest of your men.” The guard drew the curtain aside. A bronze portal behind it swung open.

Dunning had a confused sense of tapestry-hung walls in the room they entered, of a floor covered thick with glowing rugs. But a tableau at the other end of the chamber, fifty feet away, caught and held his attention as the sergeant halted him just within the closing door.

On a great carved chair of ebony in the center of a gold dais, sat a small thin man whose black eyes gleamed piercingly out of a sharp-featured, hawklike face. Thin lips were twisted in a cruel, sardonic smile.

Marnota’s stubby hands rested on the arms of the thronelike chair, and it seemed to Dunning that the short fingers curled and uncurled like the claws of a cat toying with a helpless victim.

Thalma approached him fearlessly, her slight form straight and defiant. The girl’s arm was outstretched, her hand pointed at the throned man.

“Remember, Marnota,” her clear accents rang out, “in the end, you will fail, and terrible will be the price you pay.”

Thalma’s arm fell to her side. She swayed a bit, then drew herself again proudly upright. A rustle of sound drew Dunning’s eyes away from her. He started. Behind the rich tapestries, to the left of the entrance, someone was hidden, someone in the green uniform of Marnota’s helots. He saw a black death-cylinder, ominously ready.

Marnota’s sadistic smile deepened. There was amusement in his silky tones.

“Splendid!” he said. “You are a marvelous actress. No wonder you were

selected to come here with your absurd claim to be my niece. Unfortunately the forger who concocted the note that preceded you was not as skillful as the surgeon who remodeled your features.”

He turned toward Dunning and his guard.

“Ah, Sergeant, you arrived a little more quickly than I anticipated. But I’ll be through soon, very soon. You may leave your prisoner here, and go.”

The sergeant saluted, turned sharply, and was gone.

“I shall be finished directly, young man. Just step to one side.”

Marnota turned back to Thalma. “Yes,” he purred. “You are a wonderful actress. Too bad you have allowed yourself to be duped into this imposture. However, you will not be able to deceive the court. You may go.”

Thalma turned wonderingly toward the door. And suddenly Dunning understood Marnota’s amazing show of leniency. The lurking mercenary was posted to flash the girl down as she passed. If there were an inquiry, the explanation would be simple. Balked in her attempted fraud, she had tried to escape, had been rayed by an over-zealous guard. The cylinder would do its work well, there would be no chance for troublesome identification. He was the only witness. He would not be alive to testify.

Thalma came slowly across the floor, straight toward the waiting assassin. Dunning whirled. His great hands spread wide, caught the arras on either side of the form behind it. He lunged forward, tearing the fabric from its fastenings. He toppled, fell heavily, with the writhing, heaving bundle in his arms. A tearing dart of flame seared his shoulder. He located the round of a head under the cloth, and slugged at it. The wrapped, entangled figure slumped beneath him.

Dunning leaped to his feet—glimpsed Marnota, standing on the gold dais, blue flashes crackling from his ray-gun—saw Thalma, just outside the open door, struggling in the arms of the outer guard.

Dunning was a maelstrom of lightning action, the very swiftness of his movements foiling Marnota’s darts. He sprang through the opening, thrusting at the door as he went. The clang of its shutting drowned the smack of his fist as it splashed into the snarling face of the guard. The helot jarred loose from Thalma. His hand shot to the ray-gun, jerked it from his belt. Before he could use it, hard knuckles exploded again on his jutting jaw, and the mercenary crashed to the floor.

A siren moaned an alarm. Dunning twisted to Thalma. She was snatching up the guard’s weapon from where it had spun as he fell. Its blue ray shot out, splattered against the edge of the bronze portal. The metal glowed red and fused where the heat vibrations impinged.

“The lock,” the girl gasped. “That will hold him for a while.”

The siren's wailing rose to new fury. From around the curve of the corridor shouts came and the thunder of many rushing feet.

"They're coming!" Dunning exclaimed. "We've got to get out of here!" He whirled to the right, hesitated as from that side, too, clamored an oncoming rush still hidden by the arc of the circling hall. Aside from the sealed entrance to Marnota's audience chamber, the black marble walls were without a break. "Finish!" he groaned. "We're trapped!"

"Not yet," Thalma snapped, her face white but her eyes bright and fearless. She was at the wall opposite the bronze door. Her hand reached out to it, her fingers pressed the center of an apparently aimless whorl in the gold tracery. A narrow rectangle of stone shot down into the floor, revealing a black void behind. "Quick! In here!"

Dunning was on her heels as she darted through. Some gesture of the girl's, indistinguishable in the darkness, sent the secret panel thudding back into place.

He crouched, listening. Had they been swift enough? Had the screen closed in time to conceal their retreat from Marnota's men? Or would the cracking of heated marble show that the ray-guns were at work, seeking out the fugitives?

Muffled noises, the moaning siren, guttural calls, an authoritative voice in sharp command, came through the wall. Behind him, Thalma's heavy breathing gusted and the beat of his own pulse hammered in his ears. The air was musty, stagnant. Dust, long undisturbed, choked him. Fierce agony seared his shoulder, sent tendrils of pain raying through him.

A hand tugged at Dunning.

"Come!" Thalma's voice was an almost inaudible whisper. "We've got to get out of here before Marnota frees himself and directs his stupid helots in their search."

The endless passage twisted, pitched downward, so narrow that Dunning's arms brushed the walls on either side. In the tar-barrel darkness even Thalma's white garments were invisible. Dunning clung to her icy, trembling hand, let it guide him down and down.

"This is the way I went when I thought I was escaping from Marnota, as he planned I should think. Jarcka, Ran's father, was in charge of this building's construction, shortly after my own father's death. He must have foreseen I should some day need a hiding place. By a minute adjustment of the building machines, he contrived this secret passage, with outlets in my own quarters, in the corridor from which we just came, and in the wall of the stratocar hangar. It also connects to a secret tunnel under the Bay, into the city."

"Secret! But thousands of men—"

Thalma answered swiftly. “Only Jarcka himself knows of it. He used Thorgersen’s Mechanical Mole, converting earth and rocks into energy, reconverting some of it into a lining for the bore, harder and more rigid than steel. I— Oh-h!”

She broke off in a wail of terror. The tunnel had flared into a sudden luminescence. The walls glowed with a cold, infinitely menacing light.

“What is it?” Dunning gasped, leaping into new effort after the bounding girl. “What—”

“The search rays. The kappa-light that penetrates all inorganic matter. Hurry!”

Far behind ruptured marble crashed, and the confined space echoed with the awed snarling of the human hunting-hounds. The passage dropped steadily, curved dizzily, leveled out. Twisted sharply—and ended against a rust-red wall!

“Hell!” Dunning gasped. “We’re cut off.” The clamor of the following helots was appallingly nearer. “We’re lost.”

“No,” Thalma cried, springing to a stance in front of the apparently impregnable barrier. “We’re saved.” She thrust the captured ray-gun into Dunning’s hand, gestured queerly with raised arms, as if in invocation to some strange god. “It’s the tunnel doorway. Eighteen inches of beryllo-steel. Once we’re past it, it will defy the rays for hours.”

Dunning whirled, crouched, his burning eyes on the angle that cut off view of the passage through which they had come. Pounding footfalls, shrill cries of the pursuers, made a fearful sound about him, and behind him Thalma’s voice went on.

“Its lock is worked by beams of invisible, infra-red light. Only Jarcka and I know the combination.” Thalma explained her fantastic actions. She was blocking off the guarding beams, one by one, with her waving arms. When she finished—

A green uniform hurtled around the corner Dunning watched, and toppled headlong to the impact of his beam. Another, and another, coming too fast to save themselves, met the same fate. The narrowness of the passage forced the pursuers into single file. The bodies of Dunning’s victims jammed the way. His position was unassailable—as long as his weapon’s charge lasted!

Behind him he heard a little exclamation of triumph, and the squealing of ponderous metal on metal. It told him the door was moving. His victims were piled across the corridor, a breast-high mound of contorted corpses that would hold the helots back for minutes.

“Jim!” There was sudden terror in Thalma’s voice. “Jim! The portal is jammed. It will not open!”

CHAPTER V

The Bomb

Dunning's tone was calm. "Try again. It must open."
"No use. The electric eye responded to my gestures, and the door started to move, but something is in its gears, blocking it. I can do nothing."

"Well, they'll know they've been in a scrap before they get us," he said grimly. "Hey—"

An ovoid object, black, fist-size, arced over the tangled bodies, hit the wall. Pounding footfalls sounded.

Horror struck at Dunning.

"Down, Thalma!" This thing was a bomb, an explosive grenade. He leaped to it, snatched it up, hurled it over the cadavers, far up the tunnel.

A tremendous detonation crashed about him. Consciousness left him for an instant, then flooded back. Every bone in his body ached, his head whirled, but he was alive. The glow induced by the kappa-light search beams was gone, and impenetrable darkness blanketed sight. "Thalma," Dunning shouted, "Thalma!"

"Here, Jim," a weak voice answered him. "Are you all right?"

"Fine as silk. And you, girl?" Dunning pulled himself to his feet and groped in the direction of the voice.

"I-I'm a bit dazed. But there aren't any bones broken. Will we ever get out of here?" Sudden joy replaced the doubt in her accents. "Jim! I can feel the jamb against which the door rested. It's open, Jim! The explosion must have blown it open. We can go on, now. We're safe!"

"Great!" Dunning exclaimed. "And Marnota thinks we were killed! Otherwise he'd still be using the search-rays."

"That's right. He's sure we're out of his way at last. There's a surprise coming to him. Now I wonder if I can get this barrier shut again." Dunning heard Thalma moving in the darkness. "No. The shock must have damaged the photo-electric control. We shall have to trust to the debris to hold them back. Come on. I shan't feel safe till we are well out of here."

The footing rose, abruptly. Thalma's fingers on Dunning's arm sent an electric tingle through him.

"The end of the tunnel, Jim!"

He sensed that she was standing before some unseen barrier, again was going through the fantastic gyrations that opened locks in this fantastic world

of the future. Abruptly there was a vertical line of light in front of him. It grew rapidly wider, filling the tunnel end. The light blinded Dunning's eyes, so long used to darkness.

And then there were vague forms about him, many hands seizing him. Thalma screamed. Dunning grunted, jerked. He couldn't break the grips that held him. He was helpless! Caught! After all they had gone through they were caught! Marnota had outwitted them. He must have known all along of this tunnel.

"Salom!" It was Thalma's voice, strangely joyous. "Jarcka! Let him go. He's my friend. He saved me."

The hands dropped. A circle of men, stalwart, clad in flowing, pastel-hued cloaks, hemmed in the girl and himself.

Each was armed with a ray-tube and the face of each was alight with a peculiar exaltation.

"Salom!" Thalma was speaking to one of them, tall grave-countenanced, grey-haired, the evident leader. "How did you know to come and meet me? How did you know I would be here?"

"We didn't," the man replied. "We thought you lost. We were determined that Marnota should not live till tomorrow to claim your estates. We were going through the tunnel to raid his lair. To surprise and slay him."

"Thalma." Another spoke, shorter, his stern visage seamed with anxiety and grief. "Marnota broadcast a report that you had been killed in an explosion of your stratocar. Ran, too, has disappeared. Do you know anything of him?"

Thalma turned to him, and there was compassion, pity, in her eyes.

"Ran is dead, Jarcka. He gave his life for me, when Marnota attempted to murder me."

Jarcka staggered, as if a physical blow had struck him, and then was straight, stalwart as before.

"It is high time to put an end to Marnota's crimes. Let us proceed, Salom."

A sigh gusted through the group. They started toward the tunnel entrance. Thalma barred their way.

"Stop! You cannot go through. The tunnel is blocked."

"But you have come through it."

Thalma told them what had happened. When she had finished there was silence for a moment. Then Salom made a hopeless gesture.

"It was our last, desperate hope. Now America is lost indeed. Tomorrow morning Marnota will appear in court to demand immediate title to your half of the company. Under the law it must be given him and—" Again his gesture took the place of words.

"Tomorrow! Where, Salom?"

“In the Federal Court, before Judge Layton. Layton is on our side, but he is bound by the law. He will have to—”

“You forgot that I am alive. The law is on our side now.”

“Marnota will defy the law. He will not retreat now. He has the power—and he will use it.”

“No!” Thalma’s clear voice rang out, and she was living flame in that dim chamber, her face aglow with a light that was somehow blinding. “He has the power. But we have right on our side. Salom. Jarcka. Take me to a safe hiding place. We have all night to think. To plan. We shall find a way to defeat him.”

“Impossible,” someone muttered. “He is too powerful.”

“Oyez, oyez, oyez. The court is open!” In ten centuries the immemorial formula had not changed. On the wall above the long, ornately carved bench still was pictured the ancient representation of the blindfolded goddess, with her balanced scales. The justice, in his high-backed chair, still wore the ancient black robes. Judge Layton was a short, slender man, stooped a little under the weight of his years and learning. His jaw was grim-set as he surveyed the scene below him.

The row upon row of chairs that filled the courtroom were occupied, every one, by hard-visaged men who wore the green of Marnota’s cohorts. Each held, ready in his hand, the black cylinder of his ray-gun, and the eyes of each was fastened immovably on the countenance of his master.

Marnota sat at the counsel table, his bearing that of a monarch deigning to appear before his subjects. There was an aura of power, of dominance, about him, and in the sharp blackness of his eyes there was a glow of triumph. Overflowing the seat beside him, the flabby, bulging contours of him gross and sensual, was Ranta, head of the Adams Company’s legal forces.

At the other end of the long table Salom sat, his face an imperturbable mask. Save for the clerk of the court at his desk, and a single attendant policeman contrasting ludicrously with Marnota’s armed display, he was alone. He seemed the leader of a forlorn hope, checking for the last of innumerable times the disposition of the enemy and his sparse preparations for battle.

He glanced at the huge, bronze entrance portal, at the small door behind the bench that led to Layton’s chambers. And finally at two screened openings in the ceiling, openings that Dunning might have identified, had he been present, as the voice outlets for the communication system of this twenty-fourth century world.

“The matter of the settlement of the estate of Thantala of the House of Adams.” Judge Layton’s voice was thin and quavering. “Any motions?”

Ranta rose with a mock bow.

“Your Honor.” His mellow accents filled the great chamber. “I appear for Marnota of the House of Adams, brother of the decedent and his sole surviving kin. We move that the title to all property of the estate be vested in us.”

Salom was on his feet. “Your Honor, I appear to oppose this motion.”

“Representing whom?”

“Representing Thalma of the House of Adams, daughter of the decedent.”

A little rustle passed through the great room.

“I object,” Ranta thundered. “Thalma of the House of Adams is dead. No attorney can represent a dead person.”

Salom’s voice remained calm and low. “I submit, your Honor, that the death of my client has not been proved before the court. The presumption is, therefore, that she continues to live. I move that the guardianship of Marnota of the House of Adams over the body and goods of my client, as set up by the decedent’s will, be declared at an end, and that title to the property of the estate be vested in my client.”

Ranta riposted, quickly.

“We have submitted affidavits from several persons who state definitely that a stratocar, in which Thalma of the House of Adams was known to be, was seen by them to explode in the air above the Pacific Ocean. We have the affiants in court and are ready to produce them.”

Judge Layton turned again to Salom.

“That seems to settle the matter, counsellor. Do you demand that these witnesses be placed on the stand?”

“That will not be necessary, your Honor. I can prove the existence of my client to the court’s satisfaction.”

“I defy you to,” Ranta roared. “You cannot prove what is not true!”

Salom’s voice never rose. “I can prove Thalma of the House of Adams to be alive.”

The lawyer turned, and pointed to the massive entrance doors. As if his gesture were a signal, they started to swing slowly open. Eternity seemed to pass as the space between the huge bronze leaves widened. Salom’s quiet words thudded into a deathly silence.

“Your Honor, Thalma of the House of Adams.”

A slim figure stood in the aperture. The paleness of Thalma’s set face matched her white garment. Only her eyes were alive, darkly grey, as they sought and held Marnota’s gaze.

The crack of the judge’s gavel cut short a rising murmur. “The motion of Marnota of the House of Adams is denied. I grant—”

“Stop!” Marnota’s cry cut short the words. He was on his feet. As if at an unvoiced command his helots had also risen. “I’ve had enough of this farce.

What you grant or deny is no concern of mine.”

“What do you mean?”

“You and your law have no power over me. My men have surrounded the White House, have invested every army barracks, every police headquarters, in the nation.” He raised his right arm high above his head. “When my arm drops, the signal will be flashed, and the government whose law you administer will be at an end. From now on *I* am the law!”

“Marnota!” Thalma’s voice rang sharply from the door. “Marnota! You will never give that signal!”

The bronze doors clanged, shutting her out. Swift action exploded in the courtroom. Salom, with agility beyond his years, lifted himself over the barrier, and leaped to the little door behind the judge’s seat through which Layton, the clerk and the lone attendant had already darted. A roaring sound filled the chamber.

At first like the growling of some vast impending cataclysm, it shot higher and higher in pitch. In seconds it was a shrill scream, slashing at the nerves of the imprisoned Marnota and his helots, invading their quivering brains with needling pain. Then there was no longer any appreciable sound. But Marnota, feeling the agony whipping through his body, knew that the vibrations still kept on, high above the upper limit of human hearing.

At the great bronze door, at the smaller exit through which Salom had escaped, frantic knots of green-clad men worked with their ray-tubes to force an escape. Some, deprived of reason by the searching torture of the unheard sound, clawed maniacally at the unyielding metal. A pandemonium of curiously muffled shouts burst out.

As the myriad cells of tortured bodies shattered into dissolution under the inexorable, destroying vibrations that unceasingly poured out of the communication discs in the ceiling, cylinders dropped from palsied hands, legs crumpled. The courtroom was a tremendous shambles of writhing, dying humanity.

The invisible, inaudible, vibration of vengeance kept on. Marnota, still holding himself erect by the force of the tremendous, twisted will that had been his undoing; his face empurpled by the bursting capillaries of his skin, his eyes dark pools of torment; glared through a blurring haze the heaving, dying mass that had been the flower of his army. He strove to speak, but the cords of his throat refused his bidding. Slowly, with a defiance still radiant from his pain-wracked form, he slid to the floor. The arm that was to have given the signal for flashup flung out, quivering—There was not the least stirring of any form in all that crowded room.

Thalma’s eyes held no jubilation, nor Dunning’s as they stood in the

doorway of that courtroom that was a tomb. After a while they turned silently away.

“Just what happened, Thalma? I know that you arranged with your secret adherents to have some kind of machinery connected with the communication system that led into the courtroom, and turned on at your cue. But I can’t understand how it could have done—that.”

The girl’s voice was very very weary.

“Some time in the twentieth century it was discovered that bacteria in milk could be killed by using sound waves above the upper limit of audibility. This process was extended to other foods, but when it was attempted to cure disease by the method, it was found that while the pathogenic bacteria were killed by the vibrations, the patient, also, was killed, or injured.

“What we did was simply to connect the sound-sterilization machinery of the Central Milk Plant with the communication system of the courtroom, and turn the tremendously amplified vibrations into the courtroom.”

Jim Dunning was silent again for a long minute.

“You’re safe now, Thalma, and all the great power of the Adams Company is yours,” he said finally. “You can, carry out all your father’s plans, unhindered, and make this country a paradise.”

The girl’s voice was very soft.

“If it hadn’t been for you that could not have come to pass. I should still be—lost in time.” Silence, again; and at last she spoke. “It’s a great responsibility, Jim. Will you help me?”

In the grey eyes that looked into his Dunning read something that thrilled him. He knew that the world was theirs—for always.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.
[The end of *Lost in Time* by Arthur Leo Zagat]