

"The Case of Charles Dexter Ward"—**LOVECRAFT**
NOVEL

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Weird Tales

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I KILLED HITLER

THE ROBOT GOD

a novelette

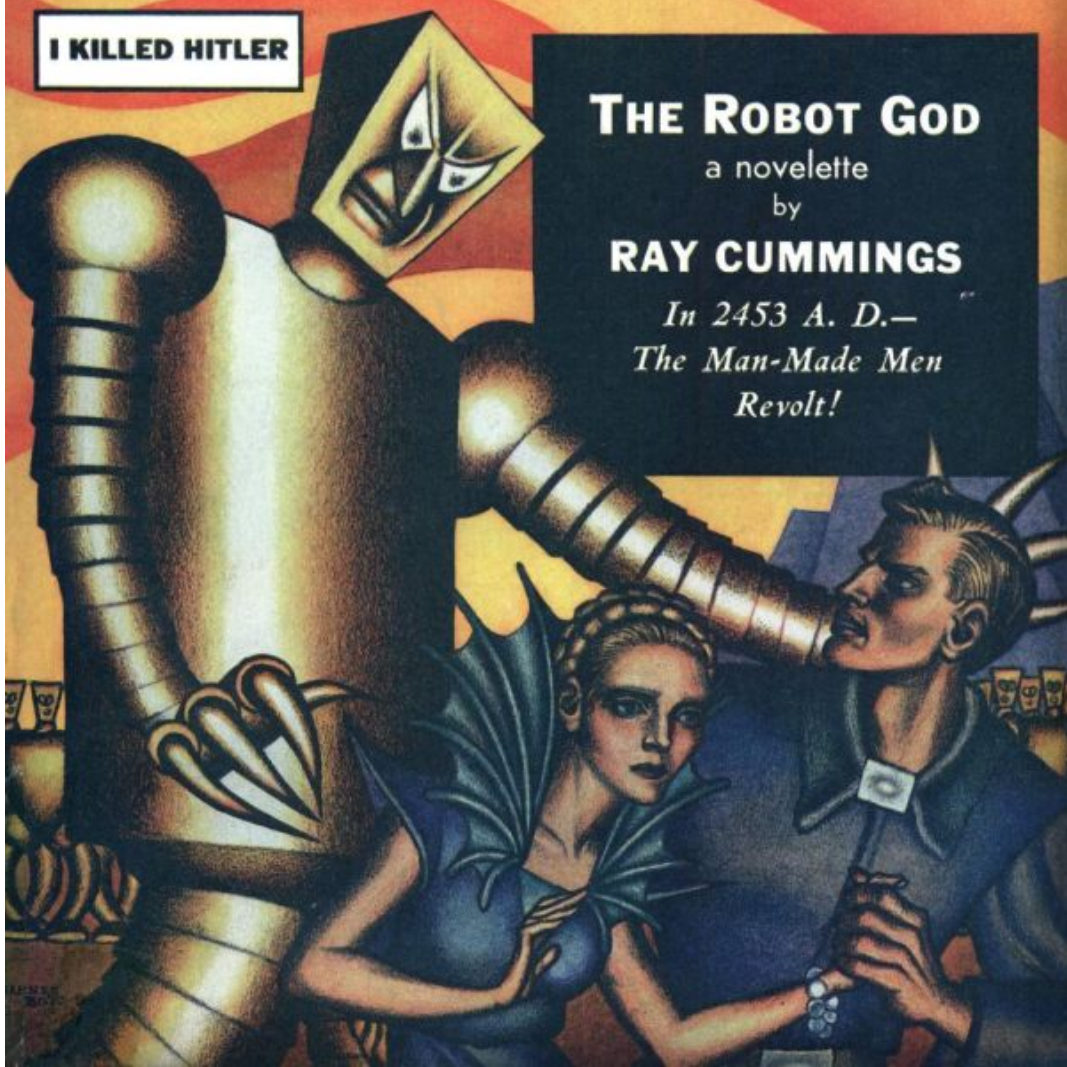
by

RAY CUMMINGS

In 2453 A. D.—

The Man-Made Men

Revolt!



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I Killed Hitler

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

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I suppose that I am a distant cousin of the great Dictator who holds all Europe in the hollow of his hand, and menaces the peace of the rest of the world. For I too bear the name with which he was christened—a name which he later discarded.

I have been told that my looks resemble those of my European cousin. But I always kept my hair cut short and brushed back out of my eyes, and did not descend to the inanity of copying the little trick mustache of Charley Chaplin.

I am a painter, a *real* painter, who does portraits, good ones too. It is true that my great artistic ability has not yet received, from my money-grubbing fellow-countrymen, the recognition which it deserves; but I was on the verge of success when this accursed “emergency” put a stop to my painting.

I have always hated my European cousin. Just think! So inferior to me in ability, and yet so famous, while I am still unknown! But this hatred was merely impersonal, until by threatening the safety of America, he brought about the enactment of the draft, and I was called to the colors.

“Selective service”—bah! What is there selective in taking a great artist, such as I, away from his work?

There are some queer eggs in the artistic and literary set which constitute most of the population of Provincetown, Massachusetts, where my studio is located. One of these queer eggs is Swami Ananda, who makes his living in devious ways by dabbling in the occult. He is quite a pal of mine—admires my art—is one of the few who does.

He came over to console with me about my getting called into military service. And I damned my cousin up and down to him. Also I damned the appeasers who have treated with the Dictator.

“Each of these men missed a chance to be a world hero,” I heatedly asserted. “When he conferred with the Dictator, why did he not carry a pistol concealed beneath his left armpit? Why did he not snatch it out and shoot the Dictator dead? Of course he would have immediately been torn limb to limb. But what a glorious death to die! To die like a true soldier, and thus save the lives of millions of his fellow countrymen, who must now perish in war, because the Dictator still lives. Myself perhaps included.”

“Would you have done in the place of these Ambassadors what you now say you wish that he had done?” the Swami asked, with an amused twinkle in his beady eyes.

“Most assuredly.”

“Would you do it now, if you had the chance?”

“Why not? It would be better than to rot in the trenches, as I now must do. And my name would be remembered forever—although, of course, I had rather be remembered as a great portrait-painter.”

“Perhaps your heroic act would start a vogue for your paintings. Perhaps, when they have thus been brought to popular attention, the vogue for them would persist on their own merits.”

I stared eagerly at the Swami. “You are offering me a chance to do this?” I breathed.

But Ananda shook his turbaned head. His dark eyes bore a far-away expression, and a quizzical smile hovered over the red lips half-concealed in his bushy black beard.

“No,” he declared. “What is written, is written. We mortals cannot thwart Karma—fate.”

“But perhaps it is written that I, the portrait-painter of Provincetown, am to rid the world of that other painter, who has now become a colossus. Life and fate hang by a slender thread. Think of the accidents which the Dictator must have narrowly escaped throughout the entire fifty years of his life. Any one of those accidents might, by the turn of a hair, have spared the world—and my art—from what we are now facing. Why could not someone have killed him when he was a child!”

“You think so?” The Swami shook his head. “Ah, no. For it is written that there must be a Dictator—not only *a* Dictator, but this particular Dictator—to rule over docile Europe, and plunge the world in war.”

Suddenly a weird preposterous idea came to my mind. “If I could only travel backward in time,” I ruminated, “I could seek out the boy, the Dictator-to-be, destroy him in advance, and thus undo all that this world has suffered since he first began his bloody march to power. Then I could return to my art-work undisturbed, and no-one but I would know what would have been.”

My mind drifted off on a time-traveling journey into the past—a dream of grandeur and glory, with myself in the role or arbiter of destiny, savior of the world. Then I realized the one flaw in the picture—fly in the ointment—was that I would never get the credit for what I had done. After that momentary glimpse of greatness, the role of “unknown soldier” did not hold much of appeal.

I sighed, thwarted.

The booming voice of Swami Ananda snapped me out of my day-dream.

“It can be done, my friend. We Hindus know many things not dreamed-of in Hamlet’s philosophy.”

“Will you show me how?” I cried. Once more the glory of being the man to rid the earth of the great Dictator, swam before my eyes.

“Yes,” Ananda judiciously declared. “It can be done. I will help you. I will teach you how to travel backward in time. But—” he shook his turbaned head, and there was a sad distant look in his amber eyes. “—it will do no good. The world cannot be saved in that manner.”

“Why not?” I demanded.

“‘Der Mensch versuche die Götter nicht,’” he quoted. “It is not permitted man to tempt the Gods. What is written, is written.”

“Words! Mere words!” I shouted. I was not a person to be brooked, when once I had made up my mind to a course of action. “If I can travel back to the time and place where the Dictator was a boy, why can I not kill him, and thereby prevent there ever having been this little man who now ‘bestrides this narrow world like a colossus?’”

“You can travel back, yes. I shall arrange it for you. And you can kill the boy, yes. It should be surprisingly easy. You can change the past, yes. But you cannot alter the present.”

“I can try!”

“Very well, try. Kill the boy, but the Gods of Karma will build up another Dictator, to take his place; for this man is but the symbol of what must be.”

We ceased our arguing. Philosophic bandying of words seemed banal, when there were deeds awaiting doing. I was flushed and hot. My pulses were racing. I was eager to be gone upon my mission. Tomorrow would be too late, for I should then be in uniform.

But Ananda calmed me with uplifted hand. Although I was in no mood to be calmed, I dissembled to humor him, for I needed his help.

“We must first equip you for the journey,” he explained. “To when and to where do you propose to go?”

“A certain little town in Central Europe, in the summer of 1899; for that is when and where the Dictator was a boy of ten.”

“Then you will need clothes of that era, and plenty of coin of a not later date.”

It was easily arranged. An appropriate costume was found in the wardrobe of our Little Theater group, and Swami Ananda produced some old Austro-Hungarian gold coins and small change. All was in readiness by evening.

We were alone together in my studio, Ananda and I. From the folds of his robe, the Swami produced a small glass ball, about four inches in diameter, securely fastened to a spindle-shaped black base.

At his command, I seated myself in a deep soft chair and stared up at his penetrating dark eyes. Then as he made passes in front of my face with his slender brown hands, he droned, “Relax. Sleep. Sleep. There is no danger. All is well. It is a difficult task to force you backward through the years, but the return will be easy, almost automatic, when the deed has been done. Now sleep. Relax.”

The passes of his hands became more rapid before my blurring eyes. My ears hummed. My hammering pulses slowed. A delicious dizziness overwhelmed me. The familiar studio swam about me. A fog drifted in and obscured it.

Out of the fog came Ananda’s slender brown fingers, handing to me the ball of glass.

And from far-off caverns boomed the echo of his voice, saying, “Now grasp firmly the stem of this crystal globe. Stare into its swirling depths. Concentrate on the little European village of your choice, and on the year 1899. Concentrate. Concentrate. But always subconsciously remember to retain a firm hold on the stem of the crystal ball. For that ball is your return ticket—your ticket back to now. When you have done your deed, focus your thoughts upon this studio and upon the present time, gaze into the depths of this crystal, and you shall instantly return. I shall be awaiting you. Now concentrate. Concentrate for your space-time journey!”

I took the globe from his hand. With every remaining effort of my will, I stared into its depths and pictured to myself the boyhood home of the little child who was destined to set the world aflame—that is, if I did not prevent him.

Complete darkness engulfed me, and I fell—or, rather, drifted—backward, down, down, down, to the beating of ever loudening drums.

Voices around me. Voices speaking a Central European dialect: “The tourist gentleman has fallen. He appears to have fainted. Quick Frau Mueller, fetch some water.”

I opened my eyes. I was seated on the grass in the square of a quaint foreign village. A young man in peasant costume was kneeling beside me, his arm supporting my shoulders. Quite a crowd had gathered.

A portly woman bustled up carrying a stein of water. The young peasant took it, and held it to my lips. I took a deep draught, and shook my head vigorously to clear the cobwebs out of my brain.

“What—village—is—this?” I asked, hardly daring to hope.

They named the village for which I had set out.

My pulses raced.

“And what year is it?”

“Hear him! He asks the *year*, rather than the *date*. It is 1899, of course.”

Calming myself with an effort, which I am sure could not have been successfully made by a lesser man than I, I arose to my feet.

“I am a traveler from America,” I explained. “The heat has been too much for me. You are all very kind, my friends.” I stared around the square. A nearby store was marked “Mueller’s Delicatessen”; it seemed to have spacious quarters above. So I asked the good lady who had brought me the water, “Frau Mueller, have you rooms to rent?”

Her bland face contracted into a slight scowl, until I fished in my pockets and produced a gold mark. Then she beamed and nodded, with a: “Ja! Ja!” And soon I was ensconced in a comfortable room on the second story, overlooking the village square. I made a few necessary purchases, and then sat in my diamond-paned window and waited.

Later in the afternoon the square filled with children. Instantly I noticed one dirty, disheveled, snarling, whining, schnit-faced brat, playing half-heartedly by himself. From the black looks which he gave the other boys from time to time, it was evident that he hated them—considered them to be conspiring to oppress him. And from the furtive glances which they occasionally cast back in his direction, it was evident that they instinctively disliked him—perhaps even feared him somewhat.

Going downstairs into the shop, I pointed him out to Frau Mueller, and inquired as to his identity.

With a sniff and a snort, she mentioned a name the same as mine.

Although I had instinctively known that it was he, my pulses quickened at this confirmation. I hastened out into the street, and approached my prospective victim.

“My lad,” I said, “Can you direct me to the Convent?” For I remembered that at this stage of his life, the great Dictator had been a choir singer—of all things!

He eyed me furtively, appraisingly. “Why should I!” he growled.

I held out a small coin. Instantly his manner became subservient and ingratiating.

“Oh, most certainly, Herr—?”

“Smith,” I added. It was the English name which I had given to my plump landlady.

The next several days I devoted to trying to win the confidence of the little lad, but it proved very difficult to get under his hide. He was one of those “souls like stars, that dwell alone in a fellowless firmament.”

Not only was it necessary to become intimate with him, so that I might find a chance to lure him somewhere where I could murder him and make a safe getaway, but also I was intrigued by this opportunity to study the beginnings of the man who was destined some day to have the whole world by the tail. No—that was not right. Rather the man who, *but for me*, would *have had* the whole world by the tail.

Almost unlimited time was at my disposal. The only restriction was the extent of my funds, and the danger that the local Politzei might think to ask for my non-existent passport. Dumkopfs that they were, they had doubtless assumed that I must have had one in order to get

thus far into their country; and, so long as I paid my bills, created no disturbance, and kept as inconspicuous as possible, the question might not come up. Still, there was always the possibility.

As the days passed by, some imp of perversity—perhaps the actor in me that went hand in hand with the artist—led me not to shave the center of my upper lip, led me to let my hair grow long. It would add to the irony of fate, for the slayer of this little lad to resemble that which he was now destined never to live to be.

As I studied the unattractive brat—tried to worm my way into his confidence by bribery with small coins—I could not help growing to admire him. Here he was, a ragged nobody, son of a ne'erdoowell, who did not know his rightful name. Hated and mistrusted by all the other boys, and hating them and the world in turn. Anyone who could build on that quicksand foundation the pillars of a great empire was deserving of respect.

The little fellow had a keen mind, and a retentive memory. He asked innumerable, and very intelligent questions about America. My America—damn it—the country that refused to recognize my art. The boy had a real appreciation for finer things, for he instinctively recognized my ability—even treasured some gloomy little sketches which I made for him. Almost was I tempted to let him live, let him overrun the world, until I remembered how his War had disrupted my peaceful life and had interrupted my incipient career.

So for my own sake, much as I had grown to admire him, the boy must die, so that the man would never come into being. For I saw in him the possibility of some day perhaps becoming even a greater artist than I—and I resented this intrusion into my own exclusive field.

At last my opportunity came. By promises of a painting lesson, I lured him to a picnic in the woods. And there I wrung his little neck.

The boy was dead. Now he would never grow up to bestride the world. I had saved our generation from a useless, pointless massacre. Europe would be free. America would be free. And, what was more to the point, I myself would be free—free to return to my quiet seashore life, and my beloved canvases.

My first reaction was that of personal triumph. I, a mere obscure American painter, had overcome the greatest Dictator in the history of mankind. And why not? Given the opportunity, even I might have been a greater Dictator than my cousin.

At no stage did I feel any compunction at the deed. Something of my cousin's own conscienceless fixity of purpose had been contagiously bred in me by our close association together.

And I had not the least fear of any reprisals. No Politzeidiener could arrest me and hold me for the murder of this little boy; for long before the crime could possibly be discovered I would be forty years and half the width of the world away. All that I would have to do, in order to make good my escape, would be to return to my rooms over Frau Mueller's delicatessen shop, grasp my crystal gazing-globe firmly in my hands, concentrate on my studio, and on Swami Ananda there awaiting me. That is, if my "return ticket," the globe, were still there.

Horrors! Suppose something had happened to it in my absence. Cold sweat broke out on my forehead, as—not waiting even to cover the twisted little body with leaves—I turned from the grove where we had been lunching, and rushed headlong, panting, back to my room on the village square.

What a relief to find the crystal globe still in the closet in my quarters! With trembling hands I seized it and sank into a chair.

A step on the stairs—it might be the police, even now coming to arrest me for the murder of a child.

I gazed fixedly into the crystal depths. I concentrated on my studio and Swami Ananda.

Inasmuch as I am a painter—and a very realistic one, I believe—my memory is a vivid pictorial one. In the swirling interior of the glass globe I could actually see the tapestry-draped walls of my work-room, my canvases standing on their easels and stacked along the walls, and the turbaned swarthy visage of my Hindu friend, nodding and smiling at me. The lips beneath his thick black beard were moving. There was an inscrutable something in his smile, as though he were mocking me.

His parting words, on the eve of my journey back into time, flashed into my memory.

“You can change the past, yes. But you cannot thereby alter the present.”

We should see! I had nipped the Dictator in the bud. It was inconceivable that a *dead* man could ever rise to power. I squared my shoulders, with supreme confidence that I had saved the world and my career as a painter.

I began to sway, and a dizziness engulfed me, exactly as the time before. But this time, as the waves of darkness swept over me, I fell forward rather than backward.

My last reeling thought was to wonder what the Chancellory in Europe’s capital city would be like without the Dictator, whom I had prevented from ever existing.

I relaxed my grip on the stem of the gazing globe. I should need it no more, for I was going home, my mission accomplished.

Gradually the light returned. I blinked my eyes and stared around me.

I was standing in an ornate salon. Facing me stood three men. One was a massive fat individual with beaming face. He was immaculately clad in a perfectly tailored uniform. The second was a ferret-faced fellow, short and slim, with one clubbed foot. The third was a suave and gentlemanly appearing personage, a typical high-class salesman.

In unison they raised their right arms aloft as they intoned the words, “Heil to our Fuehrer.” Instinctively I raised my own hand and replied, “Heil.”

“What are the wishes of the Fuehrer?” the resplendently uniformed fat man inquired in an oily tone.

My eyes narrowed, and I set my jaw.

“My patience is exhausted,” I replied. “At dawn tomorrow we launch our armadas against America. That corrupt, treacherous, democratic country must be crushed. America has refused to recognize my greatness. And when, by my efforts, my people have resumed their rightful place in the sun, have won their Lebensraum, I shall retire, amid the plaudits of a grateful world to which I have at last given peace—the only permanent peace, peace of the sword. Then I shall resume my paintings. I have always wanted to paint. I had rather be known by posterity as one of the world’s greatest painters, than even as the savior of my beloved country.”

My fat friend opened his mouth as though to register an objection, but I silenced him with one flash from my blue-gray eyes. He closed his lips and bowed meekly.

The interview was over.

“Heil, Hitler!”

“Heil!”

The three backed out of the audience chamber. I was alone.

The reaction to my moment of exaltation came. Suppose our assault on the Americas should fail. Suppose the scorned democracies should hold firm.

Well, if worst came to worst, I could flee, as the last of the Kaisers had done before me. And there would still remain my beloved painting. I was young yet. I could still startle the world with my masterpieces.

Alone in my chancellory, I raised my arm aloft, and shouted: "Deutschland über alles! Hitler über Deutschland! Heil Hitler!"

[The end of *I Killed Hitler* by Ralph Milne Farley]