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Pete Manx

SCIENCE IS GOLDEN

A Pete Manx Story

By

Henry Kuttner

Writing under the pseudonym Kelvin Kent.

Author of "Roman Holiday," "World's Pharaoh," etc.

First published *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, April 1940.

Pete Manx Visits the Days of Robin Hood and Proves That the Arrow Is Mightier Than the Sword!

The taxi screeched to a stop before Plymouth University. Pete Manx bounced out and thrust a bill at the driver. Up the steps he scuttled, casting a terrified glance down the street.

He jammed his derby down on his bullet head and shot through the portals of learning, orange tie and brown-check coat-tails flapping in the breeze he created. His squat figure rocketed along the hall, caromed off a star quarterback, zoomed around a red-headed sophomore co-ed, and vanished into the laboratory of Dr. Horatio Mayhem.

"Doc!" yelled Pete, skidding to a halt just short of a dangerous looking rheostat. "I done you some favors. Now you gotta help me. I gotta take a powder—fast!"

Dr. Mayhem, conversing at the moment with a colleague, was lean and scrawny. Bending over like a startled stork, he scrutinized Pete as he might examine a strange growth on a dog's hind leg.

"Ah, Pete," he said at last. "I thought you were in New York. What's all this, about a powder? I'm not a physician, you know."

Mr. Manx clutched his friend's lab smock despairingly. His face worked with anxiety. He looked somewhat like a schizophrenic gorilla.

"You don't get it," he babbled. "I gotta scam. Blow. Go up the pipe."

Still Mayhem did not understand. He looked vaguely around in search of a possible pipe. Pete sought frantically to express himself.

"I've got to—to go away," he managed, in triumphant relief.

Mayhem was not helpful. "All right, go away," he said. "Good-by."

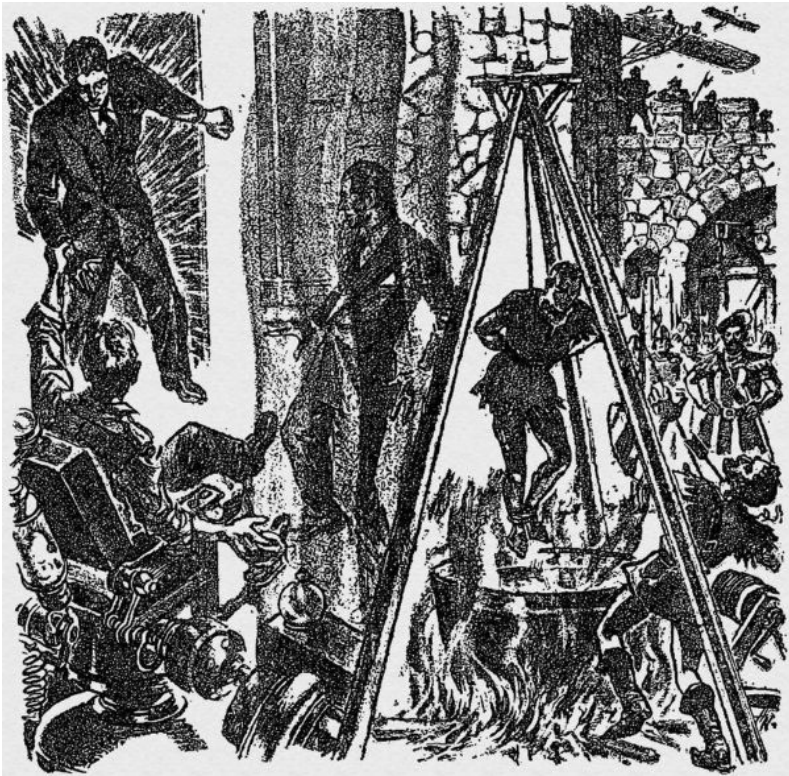
Pete was galvanized into a fresh outburst.

"Doc, I'm on the spot. They got the finger on me. Moratti and his gang are out rodding for my hide!"

The gentleman to whom Mayhem had been talking suddenly intervened. He was large, overwhelming, with pince-nez and a Captain Bligh stare.

"Calm down and talk English!" he snapped. "Now, what is this all about?"

Pete glared at Professor Aker, and was promptly glared at in return. They were not good friends, having carried on a feud that commenced in the days of the Roman Empire. Pete drew a deep breath, however, and glanced apprehensively at the door.



The executioner who held Pete sprang high, an arrow in his throat

“Well, I—uh—got in a crap game last night. With Moratti. See? And I cleaned him out. Made twenty-eight passes.” Pete had the grace to blush. “Took him for his roll, thirty-three slot machines, and a ten percent interest in his model airplane factory.”

“Mile-away Moratti makes model airplanes?” Mayhem blurted.

“Sure. A racketeer has to have a legit business, so’s he can show the Federal boys where he gets his dough. Moratti manufactures toy airplanes. But don’t ever let on you think it’s pantywaist. He’ll murder yuh.” Pete suddenly remembered his plight. “That reminds me. Last night, Moratti grabbed the dice after we was through and looked ’em over. They—” He stopped.

“I see. I suppose Moratti found you’d been cheating.”

“It’s a lie!” Pete said with righteous indignation. “It was a frameup. But Moratti’s after my scalp. A big shot like him could knock me off and get away with it, easy. So’s he trailed me out here an’ he’ll take me for a ride, unless—”

“I’ll phone the police,” said Professor Aker.

Pete emitted a short, sharp cry.

“Keep the bulls out o’ this! Anyhow, it’s too late. Moratti’ll be here any minute, Only thing’ll save me is a hideout.”

Mayhem considered, then raised his head brightly.

“Doubtless you could elude Mr. Moratti for a time in the university’s halls.”

“That ain’t the answer, Doc. You can fix me up with the best hideout ever thought of. Just send me back in time, like you done before. Lemme duck back a few hundred years till the heat’s off.”

“What good would that do? You couldn’t stay in the past permanently.”

“Look. You shoot my brain into time, don’t you? My body stays here, but I ain’t in it. So it looks like a stiff, don’t it? Okay. When Moratti shows, let him look at me. Tell him I had heart failure or something. If he figures I’ve kicked the bucket, he’ll give up. Catch?”

“It might work,” said Mayhem slowly. “I can send you back in time. At least I can send back your consciousness, your *id*, as I’ve done before. My experiments have shown—”

Pete wasn’t listening to the impromptu lecture. He was slyly inserting a small parcel into the coat pocket of Professor Aker, who didn’t notice.

“The truth of certain broad principles. These things we may postulate—”

“Attaboy, Doc.” Pete slid into one of two familiar seats that unpleasantly resembled electric chairs. “Turn on the juice.”

Mayhem made certain adjustments on the surprisingly uncomplicated time machine. Generators generated, converters converted, tubes glowed. The doctor continued his monologue, unaware of Aker’s gaping yawn of boredom.

“First, our conception of time is the Einsteinian closed circle. It is, so to say, a wheel, with a central universal time consciousness as the hub. My apparatus frees an individual’s time sense, allowing it to travel to the central consciousness. From there it may travel outward again to any era, as on the spokes of a wheel.

“The individual identity is bound by the time sense only while it inhabits a physical body. Once the identity is freed, it is magnetically attracted to the center of this cosmic wheel where time, as such, does not exist.

“It cannot remain there, however. Impetus, or perhaps a psychic form of centrifugal force, sends it on to the rim of the wheel in another time sector. There it enters the mind of someone existing at that particular period. By creating this psychic energy field—”

“Oh, come!” Aker said wearily. “I’ve heard all that before.”

Mayhem proceeded to create the psychic energy field. High potential arcs crackled. The smell of ozone became strong.

Pete Manx abruptly assumed a corpseslike aspect. He ceased to breathe. His eyes bulged glassily. His jaw dropped toward the ghastly orange tie. His rotund body sagged in the chair.

“Good,” said Mayhem, switching off the juice. “He’s back in some other period now.”

The door opened. The diabolical Mr. Moratti entered. Moratti was dark and muscular and very competent looking. Someone in the past had tried to carve a Sanskrit inscription on his face with the point of a dagger. Dr. Mayhem grew hysterically cordial.

“Mr. Moratti, I presume? The racketeer?”

“I’m Moratti, model plane manufacturer, bud. See?” Moratti corrected the savant. “I’m looking for a tramp named Manx. See?”

Mayhem had seen some tough customers in his time, especially that left tackle Plymouth had stolen right out from under Columbia’s nose. But they were sissies, he quickly decided, compared with Moratti. He stepped aside, revealing the body of Manx.

“So-o,” growled Moratti. “You rat. . . .”

He paused, scrutinizing his intended victim. It was all too obvious that Pete had become a singularly horrid looking cadaver.

“Stiff, huh?” Moratti said with a frightful oath. He glared at Mayhem and Aker. “Who bumped him?”

Mayhem shrugged. “Plain case of suicide. I was experimenting with electric charges when this man burst in and jumped into the chair, which closed the circuit. Lord knows why. I was just going to call the coroner.”

Moratti grunted. Bending over cautiously, he stared probingly into the glassy eyes. With dangerous softness, he spoke.

“Maybe. And then again, maybe you know this Manx heel. Maybe he talked. Maybe a lotta things.” He produced a squat blue-steel automatic, waved it menacingly. “This is a frisk.”

He searched Mayhem first, finding nothing more significant than the less appetizing half of a dissected frog. But Aker’s coat pocket gave up something that made Moratti stiffen. A packet of banknotes emerged. Moratti thumbed through them rapidly.

“So! Manx slipped you the dough, hey? Trying to pull a fast one? Or maybe you birds knocked off Manx for the dough, hey?”

Aker’s beef-pudding face turned pale. He stuttered disclaimers. He hadn’t known the money was in his pocket. He was ready to assure—

Moratti’s forefinger dug in Aker’s paunch.

“Fat stuff, you’re comin’ with me. And you,” he glanced at Mayhem, “will keep your trap shut.”

“D-do you intend to kill me?”

Moratti smiled horribly. “Naa. Just teach you a lesson.” He drew a knife. “Not here, though. Some place where we won’t be disturbed.”

Aker stared at the knife, his flesh almost visibly crawling. The prospect of being carved into steaks was definitely unappealing. Though not usually a man of action, Aker this time made a quick decision.

He reeled realistically, then threw himself back into the chair beside the one which held Pete Manx’ body. The surprised Moratti lunged, but Aker swiftly reached up and pulled the switch. There was a crackling flash of blue flame.

Aker stiffened, relaxed into apparent lifelessness.

Moratti, whose hand clutched the professor’s arm, suddenly learned what it is to be a conductor of electricity. He, too, took the charge. Desperately he fought to get free as he felt his senses whirling. Instinct pulled the trigger of his gun as his right arm flailed the air. Glass and metal smashed and rattled.

Woosh!

“Mile-away” Moratti slumped across Aker’s knees. He had been taken for a ride—six hundred years into the past!

In Pete Manx’ brain, the whirling mists swiftly cleared away. He had a sudden sense of vertigo, very familiar to him. He swayed, regaining his balance just in time.

He looked around. In the distance lay meadows. Beyond, hemming him in, was a thick wood. Under his feet was a log and beneath the log rippled a fairly deep stream.

Pete closed his eyes, crossed his fingers and fervently hoped for a change of luck. In Rome he’d been an unsuccessful thief. In the days of the Pharaoh’s he’d been a slave. Maybe this time he inhabited the body of a king, or at least a local big shot.

He glanced down at his attire. He groaned, though he felt like crying.

His clothing was of torn and ragged buckskin. His cap was a shapeless mess, his purse disgustingly flat. In his hands he gripped a large quarterstaff.

There was only one consolation—his new body this time was a honey. He was tall and husky, a regular Tarzan. Pete wished Moratti were here now. Things would certainly be different. . . .

He had started on across the stream when a voice halted him with a sharp command.

“Hold, fellow!”

Hold what? Pete glanced up to see someone starting toward him on the log. The newcomer was a tall, slender, lithely muscled man dressed neatly in green.

“Hold yourself, mug,” said Pete belligerently, conscious of his bulging biceps. “Back up and chase yourself. I was here first.”

The other laughed, with a flash of white teeth.

“And you’ll be first in the stream if you don’t make way,” he said cheerfully.

“Yeah? Who says so?”

“I declare thusly. Master O’ Sherwood Forest am I, Robin Hood!”

Well! The guy didn’t look much like Errol Flynn, but he ought to know who he was. And if he was Robin Hood, then this was fourteenth century England. Pete tried vainly to remember the picture he had seen quite a while back, or ahead, whichever way you want to look at it. About all he could salvage was something about Robin Hood meeting a muscleman on a log. Little John, the name had been.

But Robin Hood, also holding a quarterstaff, was moving warily forward. He thrust it out.

“Learn, stranger, what it is to meet with a champion of the quarterstaff!”

Pete parried. With very unorthodox strategy, he jabbed Robin Hood on his horns. As the outlaw hopped in agony on one foot, another poke sent him sprawling off the log. There was a mighty splash.

Pete finished crossing the log, considerably gratified. He jumped on a grassy bank just as Robin Hood crawled out of the water. For a moment war clouds hovered. Then the brigand threw back his head and bellowed laughter.

“Swounds! If I but blew this silver whistle at my belt, I’d have a score of my merry men here before you could escape. They’d beat you till your pelt was sore indeed, and hang you by yon oak, I doubt not. But I like you, friend. You did not blanch at the name of Robin Hood. Give me your hand on’t.”

Two calloused palms met in a firm grip.

“Okay, pal,” Pete said, grinning.

Robin shook himself like a terrier, water cascading from his Lincoln green.

“Who are you?” he asked pleasantly. “How are you named?”

“Uh—Pete’s the name. Peter Manx.”

“A mere stripling, forsooth!” Robin took stock of the other’s giant frame. “Little Peter. Ha! A good name for you, indeed. Are you serf or freedman, *esne* or landholder?”

“Republican,” said Pete, and fell to thinking. He had no idea how long he’d be marooned in this alien time sector. Meanwhile, he had to live. “Listen, Hood,” he said at last. “Know where I can snaffle some chow—food, I mean? I’m hungry.”

“You’ll feast royally on venison,” Robin Hood promised. “Venison belonging to Sir Guy of Gisbourne, may it turn to poison if he ever sinks his teeth in it. Come along. By your looks, you’re neither nobleman nor usurer, and therefore probably as honest as I.”

Along a well trodden path through the wood, Pete followed Robin Hood. They suddenly found themselves in a large clearing that swarmed with lean and hardy men dressed in green, and rang with good-natured oaths and laughter.

With a queer sensation of having been through it all once before, Pete was introduced to men bearing familiar names. Friar Tuck, fat and profane, begged divine forgiveness at every blasphemy. There was Will Scarlett. Alan-a-Dale strummed melancholy love tunes. And he met all the rest.

Almost immediately they sat down to eat at a long open-air table. The setup reminded Pete of a sheriff's barbecue.

Throughout a meal of succulent venison, wild fruits and nuts from the forest, and magnificent ale, Pete's brain took in all the information available. He turned it over and over like a squirrel in a cage. Characteristically, Pete was looking for an angle that would enable a wise lad like him to get along.

Robin Hood, plainly much taken with the newcomer, sounded Pete out on the idea of joining the outlaw band.

"Our only rule," he said, "is that all who join our merry throng must contribute a needed service. Something new."

"Well, let's get the picture," said Pete through a mouthful of pasty. "As I see it, this Sir Guy and his pals run the country. He is rolling the pork-barrel for his friends and slapping huge taxes on John Q. Public."

Robin Hood looked despairingly at Friar Tuck.

"You're a scholar," he appealed. "Know you whereof he speaks?"

Friar Tuck downed a stoup of ale before allowing his mind to work.

"Ha! He speaks strangely enow, but his meaning is clear. Aye, friend. Guy of Gisbourne, under the usurper John, rules England with a sword. He commits all the crimes in the calendar. No man's goods, property or wife can be left unguarded whilst he lives."

"Yeah. Like Chi in the good old days. And you're hijackers, huh?"

"We take only from the rich," said Robin Hood, "and give only to the poor."

"That's what we were doing back home. Well, you got a good racket. But you ain't organized. You need system. All you do is hide in Sherwood here and hi-jack anything that comes by. What you need is an efficiency expert. And I'm the guy for the job."

Robin Hood shook his head in bewilderment.

"What advantage will this—er—efficiency be to me and my merry men?"

"Make things easy," Pete explained. "You're risking a scrap every time with Sir Guy and his stooges, and the other nobles you knock off. Under the Little Peter system, see, they'll be glad to pay us a monthly stipend. Without argument. Without fighting. See?"

The listening outlaws exchanged looks of worried amazement.

"He hath not the manner of a madman," Will Scarlett said doubtfully, "but—"

Robin Hood was overlooking no bets, however crazy they might seem.

"And how will you persuade Sir Guy of Gisbourne to part with a monthly contribution to outlaws' purses?" he asked.

Pete leaned back, grinning.

"The answer to that is simple, pal. We'll give him the old oil."

"Oil?"

"Yeah. Oil. That fishy stuff you burn in lamps. Oil."

At dawn, three days later, Little Peter, Robin Hood, and the tribe stood atop the highest hill in the vicinity. The outlaw was disguised, a patch over one eye and a shoddy yeoman's costume on his lithe frame.

"Don't forget," he warned, "call me Locksley. There's a price on Robin Hood's head."

"Don't let that bother you," Pete comforted. "Stick with me and you'll wear diamonds."

Robin Hood pointed out Sir Guy's castle, a towering battlemented structure of gray stone. It stood below them, not a quarter mile distant, though it rose above the surrounding plain. A hard-baked dirt road, from which heat shimmers rose, stretched from their feet toward the village of Nottingham, beyond the castle.

Pete, in his new body, wasn't even panting when the outlaws climbed the knoll and reached the moat. A drawbridge was presently lowered over the circle of scummed, putrid water. Pete and Robin Hood strode across the resounding planks. At the bastioned gate, a sentry in chain mail roused himself to present his pike.

"The tradesmen's entrance is at the back," he grunted.

Robin Hood took from his tunic a small leathern bag that clinked.

"We have important business with Sir Guy of Gisbourne." He rattled the coins suggestively. "Eh?"

The bag disappeared and the sentry also vanished. After a moment, a huge, tough looking customer appeared, as big as Pete himself. The newcomer was richly but sloppily dressed. By the appearance of his neatly trimmed beard, he'd had eggs for breakfast.

"I am Guy of Gisbourne," the man growled. "And who are you?"

"Glad to know you," Pete said, professionally cordial. "We got business to talk over with you. We want to do you a favor—"

The lord scrutinized them nastily.

"Do you think I need help from such tattered beggars as you two?" he broke in jeeringly.

"We're incognito," Pete explained with an air of great patience. "We represent the Sherwood Mutual Insurance and Protective Association. You pay us so much a month, and we insure you against accidents."

Guy's eyes opened wide. "Accidents? Insurance? What manner of madness is this?"

"Sure. Accidents happen all the time. This country is crawling with bandits. They make trouble for you solid citizens just for the hell of it. They're getting bolder every day. First thing you know, one of 'em will come along and heave a brick through your window, just for no reason at all. Like this."

Pete found a convenient stone and demonstrated. Glass flew, with a shattering crash. Guy's jaw dropped in horrified disbelief. If the castle itself had tumbled about his ears, he could have been no more surprised.

"See?" Pete prattled on. "Insure with us and your windows are safe."

Sir Guy shivered slightly. His fingers were twitching as he looked intently at Pete's throat.

"No outlaw dares do that to Guy of Gisbourne. Heads would fall hereabouts like the leaves of autumn."

"But you don't savvy how smart these hoodlums are getting. They ain't scared of you. They doped out a clever angle to make it tough for you. The SMIPA is the only company what can insure you against this new trick, because we know how to put a stop to it."

Guy was intrigued in spite of himself.

“And what might this device be? Though, mind you well, I fear no shabby outlaw trickery. Heads,” he reiterated, “would fall—”

Pete wasn't listening. Instead, he was directing two of Robin Hood's men to roll a few of the rough-hewn casks, which they had painfully carried with them, to the brink of the moat. These they broached. Fish oil dripped slimily onto the green waters and spread rapidly. At a signal, a torch was flung in.

“This,” Pete explained, “is what you may have to contend with if you don't sign up with the SMIPA.”

A sheet of flame belched up surrounding the castle. Black smoke rose in a greasy cloud.

“Phew!” gasped Pete, falling back. “That must be whale oil. This is sure going to smell up the place!”

“Worse than a lazar-house,” Robin Hood agreed, holding his nose.

The castle wasn't air-conditioned. Since the moat completely surrounded it, it didn't matter which way the wind blew. Fish oil smoke blasted in through crevices, windows, and over the battlements. The aroma was enough to change history.

Furiously, bewilderedly, Guy thundered orders. His men streamed out of the castle and vainly sought to stem the blaze with dirt.

The outlaws fell back, scattered down the knoll to enjoy the spectacle. Only Pete and Robin Hood stuck it out on the drawbridge, presenting Sir Guy their cogent arguments. They maintained he really should sign up with SMIPA to prevent recurrence of such an atrocity. Sir Guy was wondering which head to lop off first when an interruption came.

A magnificent coach came charging up the road leading to the castle. It was drawn by six white horses, and soldiery sprouted from every window. On the door was printed a sign in golden letters.

“Ye Sheryff of Nottinghamshire. And Hys Deputy.”

Most of the outlaws retreated to a safe distance. But Robin Hood and Pete were trapped on the drawbridge as the carriage pulled up. An enormous personage descended grandly, a Falstaff, a veritable Tony Galento of a person. He bowed with incredible ponderousness to Sir Guy.

“The law is usually administered by ourselves, Sheriff,” Guy growled irritably. “I was just going to—”

The sheriff took over with great efficiency, herding everyone available inside the castle walls and explaining in an undertone to Guy as he did so. Pete caught snatches of the conversation.

“Saw the smoke from yon village. . . I've been expecting some unusual phenomenon. . . There's an infamous wretch of an outlaw in these parts lately, a low fellow with some native shrewdness. But he is incapable of coping with the advanced scientific functions of law enforcement. Preparations have been made . . .”

The sheriff won a grudging assent from Guy. Quickly, the fat man unrolled a bundle he was carrying. It consisted of the air-tight bladder of some animal.

A hole at one end was fitted around an upright, hollow reed.

The sheriff's eyes glittered as he glanced from Pete to Robin Hood.

“Bare your right arms,” he commanded.

A horrible suspicion seeped into Pete's brain. That bladder outfit looked very much like a blood-pressure tester. Wrap it around the arm, fill it with air, put liquid in the reed to rise and

fall as the heart beat.

But no! It was worse than that!

“Wow!” cried Pete as understanding dawned. “That’s a lie detector! And you ain’t no sheriff. You’re Professor Aker.”

The sheriff chortled triumph, putting his apparatus away.

“It will be unnecessary to conduct my test. This oaf”—he indicated Pete—“is my man. Thief, murderer, politician, cheat, wanted by the Crown. I take him into custody.”

Sweating, Pete clutched the sheriff by a fat arm and dragged the man aside.

“You can’t do this to me,” he whispered frantically. “It’s a double-cross!”

Professor Aker looked mean. “I suppose you didn’t plant that money in my pocket and get me almost killed by Moratti. When we went back to Rome, you were a politician and I was thrown to the lions. In Egypt, I was a felon and you made yourself a promoter. Bah! You’re going to sit quietly in a cozy little cell now, till Mayhem brings us back to our own time sector. You won’t be hurt. But you’ll be where I can have my eye on you.”

Sir Guy approached, smiling unpleasantly.

“You have my thanks, Sheriff. But I shall administer the law myself. I have a score to settle with both these men. Get you gone. I shall send you a bag of gold.”

Professor Aker blinked. He had not bargained for this. Repenting too late, he endeavored to argue, but soon found that Sir Guy of Gisbourne was stronger than the law in Nottingham.

Still wildly protesting, the sheriff was ejected with all his men. Pete was too stunned even to protest. Fortune had kicked him, with great thoroughness and vigor, in the pants. And of course he had only himself to blame. If only he hadn’t stashed that dough in Aker’s pocket!

Rough hands seized Pete. “Take them away!” Sir Guy roared. “To the dungeons with the rest of the rats!”

Pete sat on the straw of his cell and scratched himself. The oil smoke hadn’t killed the fleas, apparently. He rattled his chains, sighing sadly.

There were three possibilities. One, Dr. Mayhem might bring him back to 1940 before it was too late. Luckily for Pete’s peace of mind, he did not know that Moratti’s wild gunfire, just before the gangster had lost consciousness in the lab, had smashed two of Mayhem’s ingenious tubes. The doctor was laboring day and night to replace them.

Two, the execution might go through as scheduled. Pete shuddered. Aker might be able to help, but he was seemingly helpless to untangle the knot he had created. Law officers were simply creatures of the feudal barons. Stooges, in fact. Yet Aker was a scientist, and he might be able to dope out *something*.

Three, a way of escape might be found. Yeah! Like escaping from Alcatraz!

Torchlight glimmered on the walls, and Pete peered through the barred door. A scrawny, middle-aged man in tattered garments was staggering dazedly along the corridor. He carried a flambeau. Alternately he stared at the torch, at his surroundings, at his body and clothing. Then he wrapped his free hand around his head, monkey-fashion, and rocked from side to side. Now and then he cackled in mad laughter and muttered hysterically.

Pete’s eyes grew round. He was listening to Italian oaths and prayers! Swift comprehension dawned on Peter Manx.

“Holy smoke,” Pete gurgled. “It’s Moratti.”

The skinny man looked up, saw Pete. He rushed toward him, clutching the bars in talonlike fingers.

“For Gawd’s sake, brother, help me! I *am* Moratti, only I ain’t. One minute I’m Moratti back home, then I’m somebody else. And I look like somebody that’s been dead for hunnerts of years. What is this, anyhow? And who’re you, brother? D’you savvy this business?”

Moratti seemed half crazy with fright. Pete grinned, enjoying his triumph. He reached out and seized Moratti’s throat.

“Rat,” he said, “I’m Manx. You was gonna plug me a few days ago. Well, now—”

His stubby fingers began to tighten, when a greater idea dawned. He released his fainting victim.

“Moratti,” he said earnestly, “you want me to get you out of this mess?”

The gangster was utterly broken by his inexplicable transformation. He promised Manx great things if he would only fix up this mess. Pete was equally free with his promises.

“Well, don’t try to understand it, punk, but them chairs in Doc Mayhem’s lab sent us all back in time several hunnert years. See? And I’m the only guy what can get us back safe. Only I got to get out of this dump first. Now look. You can leave the castle any time, can’t, you?”

Moratti nodded vaguely. “I guess so. I’m a steward. They send me to the village once in a while for marketing.”

“And how many marines they got in the castle, huh?”

“Maybe twenty. Most of ’em are away somewheres fighting some other big shot.”

Pete snapped his fingers, thinking quickly and effectively.

“Okay. Now look. You sneak outa here and go to Sherwood Forest and find Friar Tuck and —” His voice sank to a confidential murmur, droning on for several minutes. “Think you can do it? If you do, I’ll get you back home again.”

“I’ll try, Manx,” Moratti quavered. “So help me, I’ll try.”

He shuffled away. Pete chuckled triumphantly.

“Science!” he declared snugly. “That’s the stuff. Just like somebody said once, science is golden. . . .”

Two days dragged past. On the afternoon of the second day, Pete was haled from his dungeon and dragged by the heels into the castle courtyard. There he saw (1) Sir Guy and a handful of other guys come to see the fun, (2) Robin Hood, and (3) a gibbet and a large cauldron boiling merrily over a crackling fire.

Robin was dirty but unafraid. He winked at Little Peter.

“Looks like you’re getting a dirty deal, comrade. They intend to boil you. When they throw you into the pot, lean over the side and inhale the flames. It’s quicker that way.”

“Oh,” Pete said faintly.

“I get hanged, then we both get drawn and quartered. But that won’t hurt. We shall be dead, of course. Good joke on Sir Guy, eh?”

Pete decided that the British had a funny sense of humor. He glanced at Guy, who was laughing jovially enough. A faint aroma of decayed fish still exuded from Guy’s rich trappings. Modern plumbing was not among the blessings of the fourteenth century, much too evidently.

Beyond the courtyard wall, not very far distant, he could just see the high hill where Sherwood Forest began. For a moment he thought he discerned figures moving there. But he

could not be sure.

Would help arrive in time? Moratti should have put the plan into execution before this, unless something had gone haywire. Soon it would be too late.

“We had best hurry,” Sir Guy said. “I hear that traitor of a sheriff has gone to King John to win a reprieve for these dogs. But he won’t be back for hours, I think. Are you ready?”

A black-masked figure nodded. “It is ready, my lord.”

“Good. Wheel the derrick into place.”

A scaffold contrivance was pushed toward the cauldron. Pete stared. Guy caught that horrified look.

“We lower you in gradually,” the lord explained pleasantly. “First the feet, till the boiled flesh strips away from the bones. Then still more, inch by inch, till nothing is left. The resultant soup we feed to the hounds.”

“A fine thing,” Pete moaned. “Mrs. Manx’ little boy ending up at Ken-L-Ration.”

“Hoist him up!” Sir Guy commanded.

Pete was seized. Ropes were brought.

“Farewell, Little Peter,” said Robin Hood. “You were a friend worth knowing.

“Same to you,” Pete gulped.

A shadow fell on the courtyard. Before the startled soldiers could move, there was a *whir* and a *twang*. The executioner who held Pete sprang high, a feather shaft protruding from his throat.

From above came a great cry.

“Hola, Robin! Hola, Sherwood!”

“*Sathanas!*” someone screeched. “Aroint thee, demon!”

“Friar Tuck!” Pete yelled. “Three cheers and a tiger!”

Floating down the winds came an extraordinary contraption. It looked like a bird with rigid wings. Fresh cut, slender wood was its framework. The wings were covered with a conglomeration of vari-colored silks, stolen doubtless from a conglomeration of travelers in Sherwood. From somewhere in the midst of the fantastic construction came the raucous voice of Friar Tuck.

The glider dipped for a landing in the wide courtyard and tilted tipsily. Abruptly, it spilled its pilot onto Sir Guy of Gisbourne, who went down for the count. Soldiers rushed forward with bared blades, only to halt in fright.

“More of them! More of the demons!” they cried.

Over the battlements they sailed, a dozen or more of crazily constructed but airworthy gliders, raining down murderous arrows from above. One or two inexpert pilots cracked up against the walls. But the men in Lincoln green continued to catapult bravely from the air, steel swords flashing, yelling their war cry.

“Hola, Sherwood! Hola, Robin!”

Guy’s soldiers fought, but a quick sortie opened the drawbridge. The rest of the merry men poured in. Ten minutes saw the end of the battle. The outnumbered defenders were dead or captured. Pete and Robin were free. Sir Guy was in the dungeon with ravenous fleas for bedfellows.

Robin Hood, Friar Tuck, Pete, and the miserable Moratti retired to the great hall to toast one another in hearty ale.

“Great magic indeed,” said Robin, gulping mightily. “Men are enabled to fly like birds.”

Moratti's thin chest swelled. "Shucks. Anybody who's made model airplanes can make a regular sized glider. Easy to teach outlaws to fly. Used to glide a lot myself over in Joisey. Anyway, the hard-packed road from Sherwood to the castle made something they call a—uh—thermal. It makes the hot air and the boys just rode the thermal. . . . But I'll kill the guy who says model planes are pantywaist stuff. So help me, I'll mow 'im down!"

Pete grinned and gently cuffed Moratti halfway across the hall.

"Nuts. Remember, you ain't back home yet—"

He stopped, feeling a bizarre sense of disorientation, a hollowness in his stomach, a weird shock.

Woosh!

Pete Manx opened his eyes. He was back in Dr. Mayhem's laboratory. Guy's castle had vanished, along with Robin Hood's brave band.

He stared around vaguely. Mayhem was pottering about on some apparatus near by. Slung awkwardly over the second electric chair was Moratti, just reviving. Mayhem turned.

"Oh, hello, Pete. I brought Professor Aker back first. He told me all about your adventures. He seemed slightly ashamed of how he'd acted. Begged me to apologize for him."

"Aw, that's okay," Pete chuckled. "We came out all right. Moratti really done it. Hey, pal?"

The gangster managed to stand up, passing a dazed hand over his brow.

"Yeah," he said incredulously. "I guess so. We sure showed them monkeys."

"And I brung you back like I promised, hey pal?" Butter dripped from Pete's tones.

Memory came back to Moratti.

"Yeah, you did. But I seem to remember you slugging me just before we left the castle, knocking me clear across the room. How about that, mug?"

Pete laughed falsely. "Just a little fun, pal. No offense. Now wait, Moratti! No sense getting sore. Stay away from me! Ain't you got no gratitude?"

Pete retreated from his erstwhile pal's twitching, murderous fingers.

Mayhem had apparently removed the gangster's gun, but Moratti seemed not to need any weapon.

"This," he said hoarsely, "will be fun."

Pete brought up with a jolt, his back against the wall. Suddenly his fumbling hand touched a long pole, used for opening transoms. The touch of the wood struck a familiar chord in Pete's brain. It was the exact length and weight of a quarterstaff. He whipped it into position as Moratti lunged.

The unfortunate racketeer was stabbed in the middle with the metal-tipped end of the pole.

"*Whoosh!*" said Moratti. He doubled up, making horrid noises, striving to get enough air to tell Pete what he intended to do. But Mr. Manx, remembering his successful strategy with Robin Hood, jammed the pole down viciously on Moratti's corns.

The gangster screamed shrilly. He hopped about, flailing the air.

Pete proceeded to drive his victim out the door. Loud and anguished cries diminished rapidly down the hall.

Pete returned, looking pleased.

"That," he said, wiping his hands, "is that."

Mayhem blinked absent-mindedly.

"Eh? Oh, Moratti. Congratulations, Pete. But what's going to happen to you when Moratti gets a gun and some of his thugs together?"

“Nothing. I won’t be here,” Pete said firmly. “I am taking it on the lam right now. If you can slip me that dough I loaned Aker a few days ago— You still got it, huh?” he asked hopefully.

Mayhem withdrew a roll of bills from his smock, divided it into two portions, one of which he gave to Pete.

“I took the precaution of rescuing your money from the professor’s coat.”

“Hey!” Pete objected, counting his ill-gotten gains. “One grand? I had three! You’re holding out on me.”

“Two thousand dollars is my fee for sending you back in time,” Mayhem said blandly, patting his pocket. “I need new equipment, and this donation will come in handy. After all, your life is worth at least two thousand dollars, isn’t it?”

Pete’s face fell.

“Yeah,” he said glumly. “I guess so. Well—”

He fumbled in his pocket and brought out two ivory cubes. These he let drop on the lab bench.

“Seven! Okay, Doc, keep the two grand. I still got the bones. And believe you me, I’m a scientist with these babies. Nothing like science, hey, Doc?”

[The end of *Science Is Golden* by Henry Kuttner (as Kelvin Kent)]