

Termanites Invade New York! SEE PAGE 8

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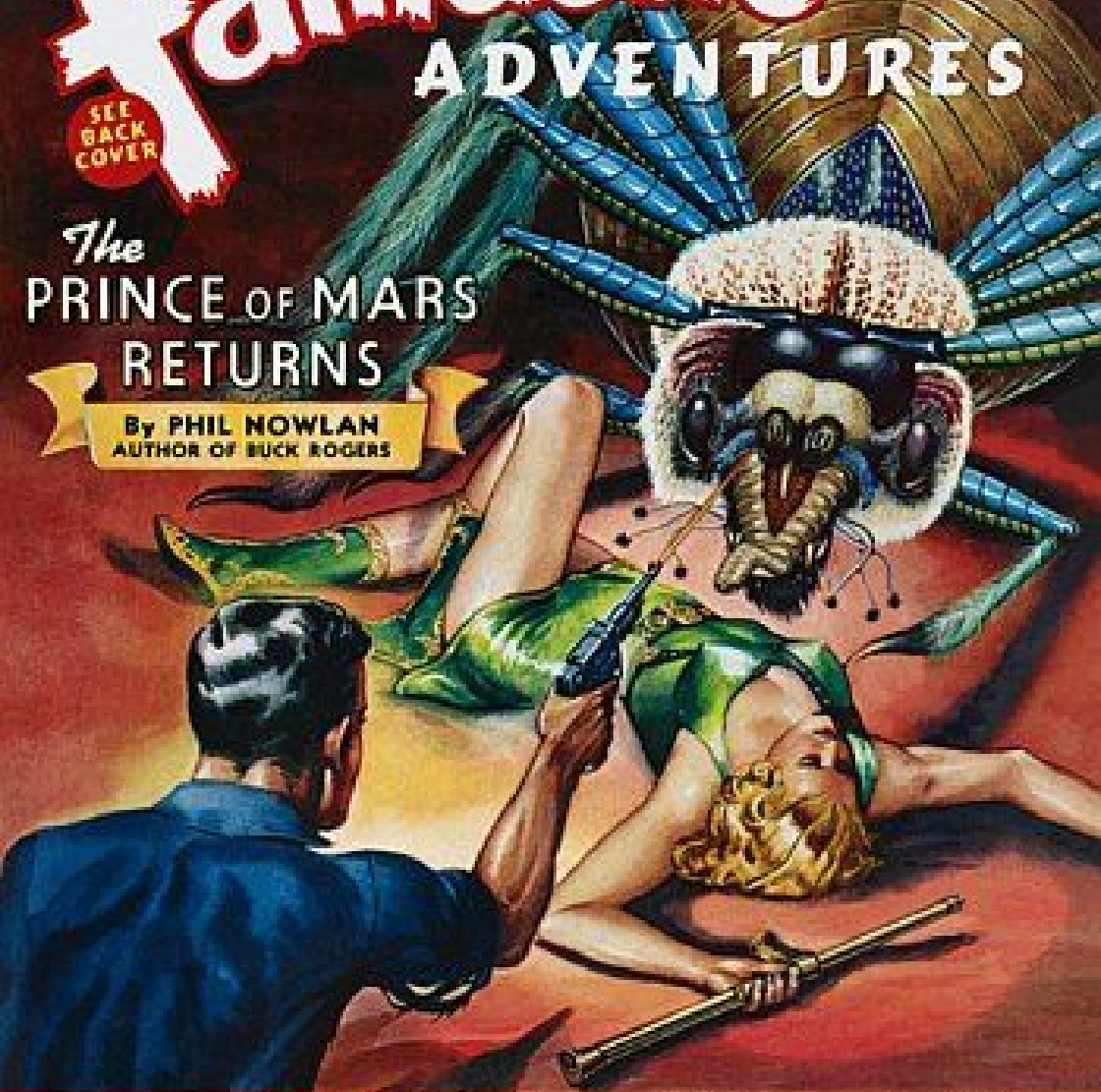
FEBRUARY 20c

ADVENTURES

SEE
BACK
COVER

The
**PRINCE OF MARS
RETURNS**

By **PHIL NOWLAN**
AUTHOR OF BUCK ROGERS



GREAT STORIES BY **ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS** ★ **THORNTON AYRE** ★ **NELSON S. BOND**

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White Outcast

By

John Russell Fearn

Also published under the title *Mystery of the White Raider*, in *Fantastic Adventures*, February 1940, under the pseudonym *Thornton Ayre*.

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The Attack

The summer evening had fallen with quiet calm over Manhattan Island when the flyer suddenly appeared. On the less densely populated outskirts of New York City, families on their apartment roofs, either reclining or taking supper, saw the flyer first as a tiny oval against the crimson flush in the west.

Nobody paid much heed. Flyers of various designs were common enough over the rearing super-city of this advanced age. Only one thing seemed queer. The flyer was not heading toward any of the 2,000-foot high directional towers that would guide it to the landing bases; and yet it was not lost. Its steady movement showed no sign of hesitancy.

Here and there men and women glanced at one another in surprise. Then throughout the entire block of apartments—known as Square 14—there was sudden consternation as the flyer came to a halt a thousand feet above.

Hundreds of pairs of eyes stared upward at a flat, aluminum-coloured belly. A light of blinding amber winked momentarily within it—and then hell broke loose! Square 14—the entire vast cube-like apartment block—split asunder with a tremendous din.

Bricks, steel girders, black glass façades, whole roofs even, mingled with the shattered bodies of human beings in a blast that shook the heavens. Avalanches of debris thundered back into the streets a thousand feet below. The calm peace of the summer evening vanished with diabolical suddenness.

Here and there trapped survivors in the wreckage caught a glimpse of the mystery flyer as it swept downward. But now, suspended from its base, were twin horseshoe magnets—magnets that dove into the wreckage with ceaseless purpose, magnets of tremendous heaviness that hurled many a running figure into eternal darkness.

There was something incredible about the way those magnets plumbed the wreckage as demoralized human beings tried to find out what it was all about. For ten minutes the flyer darted about, driven with amazing accuracy, avoiding the stunted ruins that might have smashed it in pieces.

Then the magnets withdrew suddenly and the flyer whirled through the dusty haze, finally screamed to the ground on the top of plaster and gray boulders.

Arthur Corton, an uptown bank clerk, pinned under the wreckage by some miracle of fate had his head free. He was possibly the only man who saw what happened. Through the dust he glimpsed an open airlock in the ship. From it a figure slowly emerged. He was almost naked, save for a loincloth; human in outline, but of a doughy white colour. His skin hung in pasty folds. His face was flattish, almost bestial, with spreading nostrils and eyes as colourless as glass.

Corton struggled frantically to free his pinned legs. Failing, he lay there gasping as the mysterious individual scraped hurriedly amidst the ruins with a tiny magnet in each hand. The man came and went with desperate purpose; then all at once stopped and listened.

All of a sudden he raced back to his ship at top speed, jumped in and slammed the door. There was a titanic gust of hot air. The flyer lashed forward with staggering speed into the murk and deepening darkness.

Moments later a party of rescuers came plowing through the ruins.

‘Here!’ Corton shouted desperately. ‘Here! I’m being crushed to death!’

The rescue squad asked no questions, got immediately to work. As it proceeded, Corton heard through his blur of pain the screech of alarm sirens, the blasting roar of stratosphere police planes, the distant crackle of static from electric guns slamming death charges into the upper heights.

Manhattan was prepared now—but the preparation was too late. The unknown craft had vanished utterly, and some seven hundred innocent persons were dead or brutally mangled. Then for Arthur Corton too the world was suddenly dark and quiet.

Between spells of coma Arthur Corton was afterwards aware of faces grouped round his bed—grim, determined faces, and one in particular which reminded him of a granite statue. He recognized the blunt, stern features of Vincent Burke, head of the Scientific Investigation Bureau’s homicide squad.

Burke was speaking in his clipped, purposeful voice.

‘You’ve been saying things, Mr. Corton—delirium, maybe; but if you can make it, I’d like to know more. Something about a ship and a man with doughy features—’

‘That’s—that’s right.’ Corton breathed hard. There was damnable pain eating through his chest. In remote horror he realized he might never be sound again.

‘I—I saw *him*—for a moment. About six feet tall, nearly naked, colour of wet bread—’

In jerking gasps Corton went on to tell of the magnets, of the searching.

‘I don’t know who—’ he started to say, and then he relaxed and became motionless.

Burke compressed his lips and turned away, rubbing his heavy jaw slowly as his associates and the newsmen gathered round him.

‘Exit the last survivor,’ he observed laconically, shrugging. ‘Come on, Sphinx, we’ve things to figure out at headquarters. No statement yet, boys,’ he added briefly.

‘Sphinx’ Grantham, his personal assistant, with features about as communicative as those of his stony superior, followed his chief out of the hospital. As usual, he made no observations. It was his job to answer, not to comment.

As the fast official car whirled the two police officials back through the traffic, the radiophone in the roof came into life.

‘Calling Chief Inspector Burke.’

Burke switched on. ‘Burke answering. Go ahead.’

‘Operator 9 reports further activity by unknown invader north of the city. In ruins of Square 14 again. Ambulance and rescue squads were overcome by gas and smoke barrage, but Operator 9 caught a brief glimpse of visitor. Six feet, white all over. Operator 9 took his aura frequencies on the detector. Invader got away. That is all.’

Burke switched off with a gloomy smile. He glanced across at Sphinx’ overlong, expressionless features.

‘About the queerest set-up I’ve struck yet,’ Burke said briefly. ‘Sounds like an interplanetary visitor of some sort—but why the hell does he have to cause all this trouble? Why destroy Square 14 and all those poor devils?’

‘I guess we’re paid to find that out,’ Sphinx replied logically.

‘Yeah—and we will!’

Burke broke off as the car drew up with a screech outside headquarters. He stalked through the building to his private office and snapped on the night duty button. In five minutes twenty men had assembled—trained, picked men, always at the service of the Bureau in the night hours.

‘Now get this, boys.’ Burke stood facing them, his face grim. ‘We’re up against either an alien murderer or else an insane man. If the former, he’s the first visitor from another world, but that doesn’t make him less dangerous; the opposite, in fact. We’ve got to find him!’

‘In this city we’ve brought crime to a low level, and no saboteur is going to start upsetting order while we’re around! Seven hundred people dead—*seven hundred!* And all for no apparent reason! So hop to it, men! Contact stratosphere headquarters, contact Operator 9 and get the frequencies of this Unknown from him. Check everybody you think would have even the slightest bit of information.

‘There’s a chance that our killer is some crook in fantastic make-up using an extra fast stratoship mistaken as a space-machine. It’s a possibility—so work on it! Get him—dead or alive!’

Without a word the men filed out. Burke turned and flipped a coin on the desk.

‘Get me a packet of cigarettes, Sphinx. I’ve run out of ’em. Can’t think without ’em—’

Sphinx took up the coin, then paused and tossed it back.

‘You can’t get away with that one,’ he observed gravely. ‘Better give me real money.’

‘Huh?’ Burke looked up impatiently, studied the coin in surprise. It was not money at all; it looked rather like a badly scratched token of some sort.

‘Somebody gypped me,’ he observed, thrusting the coin back in his pocket and tossing over another.

Sphinx went out just as ‘Big Boss’ Calman came in. Calman was the head of the entire Bureau, controller of every department, the brains behind the brains. But he knew the individual values of each of his chief inspectors, allowed them free rein unless circumstances demanded his presence.

‘Everything set to go to work on this invader?’ he asked Burke briefly, surveying him with his pale grey eyes.

‘Yes, sir—everything,’ Burke nodded. ‘The boys just left, and I’ve plans of my own to work out.’

‘Okay—if you need me at all, don’t hesitate to call. I’m going home. See you tomorrow.’

‘Good night, sir. If it’s possible to get that killer—well, we won’t be asleep at the switch, Mr. Calman.’

The Work of a Fiend

For quite a while Burke sat pondering. Mechanically he took the cigarettes Sphinx Grantham brought in for him. He was still musing by the time Sphinx had come up from the night canteen with sandwiches and coffee. Then the radio bell rang with strident force.

Startled, Burke turned and switched on the receiver.

‘Hello there, Burke. Listen carefully. This is Calman. I’m speaking from a public radio box. Come down to Intersection 30 right away. I have found something pretty queer. I believe it’s the guy we’re looking for—What? That’s what I said. He’s lying dead among the girders supporting the 30th Pedestrian Gallery. Step on it!’

‘Right away!’ Burke closed the switch. ‘Let’s go!’ he added briefly, and Sphinx was right beside him as they raced down the corridor.

The fast police touring car whirled them through the floodlit and now almost deserted streets, drew to a squeaking halt under the mighty girders of the 30th Pedestrian Gallery. Calman was there, waiting by his car, the headlights of which were turned upward.

Calman said briefly, ‘Take a look!’ and nodded his head.

Burke narrowed his eyes. A white figure, practically naked, was suspended motionless in the crotch formed by two immense X girders, caught round the waist. His legs and arms dangled grotesquely.

‘Looks like our man,’ Calman said grimly. ‘I’ve been up to take a look. Come and see for yourself.’

He led the way up the emergency stairway. Presently Burke stood looking down on that nameless thing so obviously dead. A gaping wound was on the forehead, from which blood still oozed in a dribbling stream. The entire figure, save for a loincloth of curious leathery substance, was naked. It was human enough in form, except for the ridged thickness of the skin. It was a skin utterly unlike that of a human being, rough and coarse as though afflicted with some mild form of elephantiasis.

‘Queer how he got here,’ Burke mused.

Calman said, ‘As I figure it out, he must have been creeping along the Pedestrian Gallery above, slipped, and—Wham! Anyway, it’s the man. His ship ought to be somewhere around. I saw him hanging there in the lights from my car while I was heading home. Better have the boys look around for his ship, and we’ll cart him to the morgue and see what sort of a being he really is. Come on.’

Struggling and shoving, it took the three of them their united strength to lift that gross, heavy body. They managed it finally and staggered down the stairway with it, dumped it in the back of the roomy police car.

‘I’ll come with you,’ Calman said, withdrawing from his own car. ‘I’ve told the boys to take my car home. Let’s be moving.’

He slid in beside Burke and the engine roared.

Burke swung the steering wheel. Sphinx Grantham sat motionless in the back of the car, his deadpan face unmoved by the close proximity of the weird corpse. He gazed straight ahead at the swirl of lights as Burke stepped on the gas down the official traffic-way—90 . . . 100 . . .

125 . . .

There were no limits on this wide, light-drenched expanse; a vast bridge, one of many crossing the newly created river dividing Manhattan in half where once Madison Square had been. Now Long Island Sound and the Hudson were united to facilitate watercraft.

Below, the river shone like molten lead. The girders of the bridge zipped past in trellises of mist. Then suddenly the front of the car was no longer there!

A terrific explosion hurled the hood skyward; flame and impact split the engine asunder. In two mad seconds Burke was aware of the slender rail at the base of the girders as it hurtled to meet the shattered car.

The machine plunged through. Flung clear, Burke went flying through space. Somehow he straightened his legs as he fell, went headfirst into the water and plunged below.

Dazed but unhurt, he bobbed to the surface.

‘Sphinx! Calman!’ he bellowed, fighting desperately against the current.

‘Here!’ Sphinx yelled, about fifty yards away. ‘All right?’

‘Find Calman!’ Burke shouted.

He threshed around, calling his chief by name. Sphinx swam level after awhile, blood and water trickling together down his face.

‘Guess he’s gone,’ he panted. ‘Lend me a hand, Burke. I got cut on the head.’

Burke caught his assistant as he sank weakly. Though even their united efforts were feeble, they managed at last to struggle to the mud of the bank, crawled up and sat there trying to get their breath back.

‘He must have gone down with the car and the corpse,’ Sphinx panted at last, holding his damaged forehead. ‘I don’t suppose the corpse would float out anyway; it was jammed pretty tight in the back. But Calman could have gotten free; it was an open car.’

‘Unless the initial explosion killed him,’ Burke said soberly. He gazed up at the break in the rail where the car had plunged through.

‘That,’ he said slowly, ‘was no accident. Cars don’t blow up in these days; they’re fireproof. Either something was planted in the engine while we looked at that corpse on the gallery, or else— By God, Sphinx, I’ll find out who’s behind all this if it kills me!’

‘Calman’s dead, and we’ll have to get the dredges to work mighty quick if we want to save that corpse, too. Come on. We’ve got to report this. After that we’ll attend to your head.’

Burke turned to stumble up the bank, then about-faced sharply at the sound of threshing water behind him. Something was struggling in the river. It came closer, visible as a man’s head in the light of the bridge.

‘Calman!’ Burke cried. He plunged out waist-deep into the river again, helped Sphinx to drag in their almost exhausted chief.

‘Thanks, boys.’ Calman staggered up beside him. ‘Hell, I thought I was finished! I went under with the car and my belt got caught. Anyway, I made it—’

Without further comment the three of them floundered up the bank, headed for the nearby radio box and contacted headquarters.

‘Well?’ Burke asked grimly, as they stood waiting under the official lamp. ‘Any theories?’

‘None that I’d like to express right now,’ Calman answered tersely. ‘Either this—this white outcast is dead, or he isn’t. Depends on whether that explosion was timed for after his death, or whether the figure on the gallery girders was put there as a decoy.’

‘You mean there might be two outcasts?’ Sphinx demanded blankly.

‘There might be. Damned if I know the answer. Well, we’ll see what happens next. If there are no more attacks on us, then we know it was a posthumous effort to kill us, and it failed. If

otherwise, we'll begin a manhunt that the town will never forget!

Calman stopped speaking as two spots of light enlarged into headlamps along the bridge. That was the police car they'd ordered.

The following day, as the broadcast media and morning newspapers headlined the explosion at the bridge and later commentators began referring to the 'White Outcast'—as the unknown marauder had now become known—three grim men at Bureau headquarters went over every detail of the problem to date.

They found no definite clue, however, for there seemed to be no motive in the senseless destruction of Square 14. The effort to destroy the three leading lights of the Bureau was more understandable—but again it proved nothing.

Was the White Outcast still alive—or dead? There constituted the main problem, and until the killer perpetrated some further act of mischief, the matter was unsolvable. Certainly there was no trace of his spaceship anywhere.

Burke gave the necessary instructions for the river to be dragged, and toward four in the afternoon the salvage was complete. The derelict car was removed to the official headquarters and the corpse jammed inside was dumped on the slab in the morgue. Dr. Rayfrew, the chief medical examiner, went to work at once.

'In the meantime,' Burke said, 'I'm going to take a look at that car. Maybe we can find out something.'

'If you do, notify me immediately,' Calman told him. 'I'm going uptown to take a look into the Matthews case. You know where to reach me if necessary.'

Burke nodded. He and Sphinx adjourned to the yard behind the building to survey the soaked, muddy ruin of the car that had nearly been their coffin.

'If you expect to find anything in that, you're a better man than I am,' Sphinx commented.

'You never can tell—' Burke muttered.

He went to work methodically, tore out the sodden upholstery, stared at the utterly shattered engine. Presently he pointed to the remains of the carburettor. It was of the usual advanced type common to modern engineering.

'Notice?' he asked briefly.

Sphinx gazed at it earnestly, but he shook his head.

'So what? It's black around the broken edges. The fuel mixture must have caught fire.'

'Yes, but *how*? A modern carburettor can't catch fire! An outside agency had to do it. Somebody arranged a spark of some kind that fired the fuel. The enormously powerful mixture we use went off like a bomb and—blooey!'

Burke went back to his labours. Finally he took out what remained of the metal front floorboard. Half of it, on the left where he had sat, was smashed into jagged remains. But the other half was clear except for a neat hole, perhaps three inches in diameter; a hole apparently bored by heat, for the edges were obviously blackened.

'Either I'm crazy, or—' He broke off at length, handed the sheet of metal to Sphinx. 'Put this in cold storage somewhere. I may think of something later to match that hole.'

'Crazy,' Sphinx observed solemnly, 'was right.'

By the time Burke had finished probing around, Sphinx had returned. With him came the lean-faced medical examiner, Dr. Rayfrew.

'Say, Burke, you'd better step into my autopsy room. Plenty that is queer about that stiff you brought in.'

Once inside the place Rayfrew nodded to the dead thing on the slab, then handed over a collection of X-ray plates.

‘You’ll see for yourself that the organs of this creature are utterly different from ours. Liver, heart and stomach are there, to be true—but not in places we ever heard of. Then the bone structure is different, too. Shoulders pretty weak, legs strong. I can’t place it at all. As to the cause of death, it was probably cerebral hemorrhage caused by a terrific blow on the head. Perhaps the girder of the Pedestrian Gallery. It had to be a tough blow. This creature’s skin is so dense, you couldn’t hurt him by ordinary methods. Queer, also, are the main nerve branches.

‘I believe he might be able to control the nerve endings of his skin, like a chameleon does. The skin has a highly sensitive under-surface. Probably got that way controlling the pigment. Perhaps, if his home planet were distant from its sun, a natural power on the part of an inhabitant would be necessary to make his skin supply these deficiencies.

‘Well, anyway—thanks,’ Burke said, still puzzling. ‘He’s a mystery. Was he the only one, or were there others? Where’s his ship got to? The boys who think the pyramids are a puzzle should try this one! Well, let’s go, Sphinx. I’ve things to do. Get rid of the body in the lethal chamber, Doc—no sense in embalming it for future use: may contain dangerous germs. And hang on to those X-ray plates.’

Rayfrew frowned. ‘The scientific community won’t like that. As the first alien, they’ll want to examine—’

‘You’ve already done that,’ Burke snapped. ‘They can study your findings. Get rid of that body before it starts a plague!’

‘Very well,’ Dr. Rayfrew nodded.

In his office again, Burke switched on the intercom.

‘Terry? Hop down to the river again with the boys. Cover all the area where you dug up the car, send down relays of divers if you have to. Anyway, keep on dredging until you discover something that looks like a ray gun.

‘You what? No, I don’t know what a ray gun looks like. It’s like a torch, I suppose. Use your imagination. It’s only a hunch of mine, but keep on looking until you’re cross-eyed, if you have to. Yes, I know it’s soft ooze! Use hand and mechanical dredgers. Sift the whole bed of the river if you have to—Right!’

‘This is absurd!’ Sphinx protested. ‘Why a ray gun? We don’t even use ’em yet.’

‘No, but I have an idea the aliens do. I figure it was a ray gun or something very much like it that fired our carburettor. It wasn’t an ordinary gun, because the hole in the floorboard is too wide to show the passage of a bullet. A savage blast of flame could have made that hole.’

‘You mean a ray gun was fixed there, somehow?’

‘Just what I mean. And since it wasn’t found in the car, it must have got dislodged when the car fell in the river. Unless it was blown to bits in the explosion. But somehow,’ Burke finished slowly, ‘I don’t think it was.’

Sphinx Grantham scratched his head. ‘You got me,’ he said. ‘I—’

He paused as Burke lifted the telephone. He rang a number, the private waveband number of all wristwatch telephones owned by agents of the Bureau.

‘Hello there, 9? Burke speaking. Any dope yet?’

‘Not yet, sir. We checked up on all likely crooks for their aura frequencies, but there was nothing doing.’

Burke frowned. 'So we'll try another angle. The Outcast is a mystery if he still lives. We're not dealing with a known factor at all. Start contacting the rest of the men in the Bureau and make your plans for finding his ship. I believe it ought to be around somewhere. Report to me if you find anything.'

'Right, sir!'

Burke switched off, then on again as the emergency light went up. It was Police Officer Higson. His voice sounded excited over the speaker.

'Better come right away, Mr. Burke. I'm over on Sector 5. Something queer here. An antique dealer has been attacked by the Outcast. Come right away, or it'll be too late. I think he's passing out—'

'Okay.' Get a statement from him. Be right with you.'

Burke slapped on the office phone. 'Tell Mr. Calman to meet us right away at Sector 5. No time to explain. Urgent!'

He glanced at his assistant. 'Come on, Sphinx!'

They hurried into the waiting car. It swung around and bolted along the official traffic-ways at top speed. Neither of them gave a thought to a possible repetition of the previous night's outrage. It was the job of the Bureau to ignore personal danger—and they did, successfully. Nothing untoward happened.

They drew up on the other side of the city ten minutes later, to find a cordon of police keeping back curious sightseers from one of the oldest stores in this part of town, a section given over almost entirely to antiques of the 20th century and preceding years.

Inside the shop, Officer Higson was kneeling on the floor with his notebook beside an obviously dying man. The victim spoke weakly, looked up as Burke came in. He was oldish, possibly sixty, with crinkly brown beard around a lean face.

'He saw the Outcast, Inspector—' Higson started to say, but Burke waved him aside.

'What happened?' Burke caught the man by the shoulders.

'I—I was over there, at the desk. Things were quiet. I—I was busy—with my hobby—'

'Hobby? What hobby?'

'He writes messages on grains of rice and things,' Higson volunteered.

'Miniature calligraphy, eh? You mean you were doing that when the Outcast came in?'

Burke looked rather incredulous.

'Yes, sir. I—I hardly heard him come. Must have been watching me for—for he suddenly put out his huge hand and—and snatched up the grain I was working on. Then he fired something at me—a sort of dart—'

The man relapsed into momentary silence. 'He stole my rice, my instruments, and—and ransacked the place,' he finished dully.

As Burke puzzled, frowning, there came the approaching scream of an ambulance siren.

'You're sure it was the Outcast?' Burke snapped.

'I'm certain. Big, dirty white—only wearing a loincloth—'

The man sagged weakly, licking his lips. Burke stood up, scratching his head and watching as the man was lifted into the waiting ambulance. Then he swung around to the doctor in charge.

'Get Dr. Rayfrew from headquarters to attend to this man personally—nobody else. Tell him I said so.'

'Very well, Inspector.'

Calman came in hurriedly then, gazed around at the disordered shop. ‘What’s going on here, Burke? Came as quick as I could. The Outcast again?’ he asked seriously.

‘Yeah—and he’s no more dead than I am!’ Burke fumed. ‘But the absurdity of the thing!’ he went on helplessly. ‘The crass lunacy of the creature! He came in here and stole some rice on which that poor devil had been writing; also frisked the apparatus. That fellow does microscopic engravings for rings and things—you know, calligraphy. His hobby seems to be printing hundreds of words on grains of rice.’

Calman nodded slowly. ‘I know the kind of thing you mean. But how did the Outcast get in here without being seen? Busy street outside.’

‘There are alleys at the back,’ Sphinx spoke up. ‘I saw them as we came up. The Outcast could have skulked around there and come up from the river somewhere. Anyway, we know he’s alive—even if we can’t fathom his motives.’

‘This,’ Burke said grimly, ‘is going to take more thinking than I’d figured. Maybe we’ll get a lead when we know what it was the Outcast fired into that guy. I think it may have been a dart or something. Well, let’s get back.’

Episode at the Bridge

The antique dealer died on the way to the hospital. Just the same, Dr. Rayfrew followed out orders and made an autopsy. He returned to Bureau headquarters with a grim face, entered the private office where Burke, Calman and Sphinx Grantham were debating the problem.

‘Well, Doc?’ Burke looked up anxiously.

‘Poison,’ Rayfrew said. ‘But no poison I ever heard of, and certainly not of *this* world! Introduced by a small splinter. Latent in effect, which was why the victim took a while to die. Guess that’s all there is to it, gentlemen. I’ll analyze the poison if you want.’

Burke pursed his lips. ‘I don’t think it signifies—All right, Doc, go ahead.’

Burke looked grimly at Calman and Sphinx as the medico went out.

‘Does it occur to you that we perhaps have a clue?’ he asked slowly, after a moment or two. ‘This White Outcast is searching for something—that much we know. But doesn’t his theft of microscopic writing on a grain of rice show that it is something small he’s looking for? And don’t forget he ransacked the store looking for God knows what. He used magnets when he blew up Square 14. That seems to suggest it’s something metallic he wants.’

‘There’s something else,’ Calman said. ‘The Outcast obviously got the dealer’s name from the directory. He’s listed as about the only expert in miniature calligraphy in the city. Only that seems to show that the Outcast knows English.’

‘Yeah,’ Burke mused and leaned back to think. After a bit: ‘He smashed down Square 14 and searched through it. Now just what was peculiar about Square 14? Same as the rest of the city, wasn’t it?’

‘There’s one thing, but it’s probably unimportant,’ Sphinx said. ‘It was the last Square to be built. Don’t you recall the row there was over the brick delivery for the foundations? Clay pits went haywire or something and they had to import bricks from the Worth Clay Concession in the New Jersey section.’

‘Yes, I remember that.’ Burke pondered for a moment, then he said, ‘Sphinx, I’ve got an idea. It may be wrong, but anything’s worth a try. I want you to get in touch with the contractors who built Square 14 and find out everything about it; where every scrap of material came from. Maybe we can get some idea then of what the Outcast is driving at. It should at least extend our field of activity, anyway. We’re stymied as it is.’

‘Right!’ Sphinx nodded, and went out without another word.

‘Something else occurs to me, too,’ Burke continued, as Calman sat with puckered brows. ‘This Outcast possibly knows that Operator 9 recorded his frequencies on the detector. Next thing we know, the Outcast will try to steal that detector, or destroy it somehow. He might, to save himself from ever being found out.’

Calman glanced up. ‘I didn’t know you had the Outcast’s frequencies. It ought to be a cinch now to—’

‘It isn’t, sir. The Outcast watches that. Even if he disguises himself, he takes good care to keep out of sight and out of reach of that detector. It would be safer locked away in our vault, where he can’t ever get it.’

‘Well, you might do that,’ Calman agreed.

Burke made to rise, then glanced up as the door opened and Terry Walton of the Salvage Department came in. Without a word he laid a mud-stained, water-choked tube with glittering metal ends on the desk.

‘Exhibit ‘A,’ he observed laconically. ‘This what you were wanting, Burke? We dug it out of the river just as you ordered.’

Calman caught it up and stared at it. ‘What the blue hell is this?’

‘Ray gun,’ Burke said briefly. ‘I’ll look at it later. Keep it safe till I get back, Terry. Thanks a lot.’

‘You certainly work in a strange way, Burke,’ Calman commented, as they went down to the inspector’s car. ‘Incidentally, where are we going now?’

‘To pick up that detector from Operator 9. At the moment, he’ll be at his usual station.’

Burke started up the engine. In a moment or two they were cruising at a leisurely 100 m.p.h. along the official traffic-ways.

‘Just how did you know about there being a ray gun in the river?’ Calman mused. ‘That’s pretty smart detective work, I’d say.’

‘Pure assumption, sir. I usually play my hunches. I couldn’t visualize anything else blowing up our car engine. There was a hole in the right-hand side of the floorboard, too. Being metal, only a ray gun—or something like it—could have burned through it.’

‘In that case, it must have been fastened somewhere near where I was sitting. Hmm—funny I never noticed it.’

Burke shrugged. ‘Plenty of room to conceal it, and it was dark, too. Obviously it was put there while we dragged the corpse down from the gallery girders.’

He said no more, and Calman sat rubbing his chin mystifiedly. The car went on, stopped at last in the middle of the great bridge where there reposed a base box: apparatus not unlike a railway signal box of old. There were seventy of these in the city, all told, from which the various operators of the Bureau controlled their particular quarter of the metropolis. They were in truth the police precinct stations of this advanced year.

‘Shan’t be a minute, Mr. Calman,’ Burke said, leaping out. He raced up the steps into the small building and found Operator 9 inside, busy as usual at the control switchboard.

‘Evening, Inspector.’ He got to his feet.

‘Better hand over that frequency detector, 9,’ Burke said. ‘There is a chance that Outcast knows about it and will try and get it. He may blow you sky high, even. I don’t want to lose that record, whatever else may happen. I’ll take it back to headquarters.’

Operator 9 turned to the heavy safe and brought the delicate instrument to view in its mahogany case.

‘Frequency reading is registered on the tabulator, sir. Safety catch is down at the moment. Release that and she’ll jump right away when you come within six feet of the man you want.’

‘Yeah, yeah. I know all about it, son.’

Burke picked up the case and headed for the door. Just as he passed through the opening, he fancied he heard a scream. He frowned, raced down the steps. At the bottom of them he stopped dead, as he came in full view of the bridge road.

The car was still there, Burke noticed quickly, but so was something else. A mighty figure of dead white, wearing only a loincloth, was standing intently at the bridge, watching something in the river below.

Burke’s eyes narrowed as he took in the details of that bulky, doughy body. Without a sound he edged toward the car, keeping his eyes on the hideous creature. Instinctively he

lowered the detector into it—when all of a sudden the Outcast swung around. Burke gave a little gasp. The creature was almost nauseating in appearance, like something fashioned out of white, clammy clay. The pale eyes stared with hypnotic fury.

‘Get away from here, Mr. Calman!’ Burke yelled. ‘Let me handle this fiend. We can’t afford to lose you, too!’

Then, praying that Calman would follow his plea and duck out of the car, Burke centred all his attention on the loathsome white body. The pale cold eyes held him for a moment as though in a trance.

‘Operator 9! Quick!’ Burke yelled, breaking the spell. Then he swung about with a gun levelled in his hand. But he had not the time to fire it. With an incredible leap, probably because he was accustomed to a far heavier gravity on his home planet, the Outcast leaped clean over the top of the low-built car and landed in front of Burke.

Simultaneously a fist struck the police inspector violently in the face. Burke went hurtling backward against the ironwork of the bridge. His gun went sailing into space.

Operator 9 appeared suddenly, brandishing two formidable-looking guns. Burke doubled up his fist and drove it with all his power into the leering face in front of him. The doughy features jolted under the onslaught; then Burke saw the big hands tugging at a little pouch on top of the loincloth. A splinter, coated with venomous red, came into view.

Sight of it spurred Burke to desperate activity. He squirmed free from the bridge rail, rained blows on that mass of white, dense flesh, even gained the ascendancy for a moment.

Operator 9’s gun fired noisily—once, twice, three times. One bullet hit the ironwork; the other two presumably drilled into the Outcast, but seemed to make no impression beyond inciting the fiend to greater fury. He charged on Burke like a whirlwind.

Burke spun around, slammed up his fist, rocked the Outcast like a pendulum. But more than that Burke did not attempt. That splinter was no thing to trifle with! He jumped to the bridge parapet, shouting back to Operator 9.

‘Drive like hell—to headquarters! Take the detector!’

Then Burke leaped, just missing the Outcast’s clawing hands. He made a neat clean dive and plunged into the river far below, rose up shaking the water out of his eyes. As he emerged he heard Operator 9 starting the car engine from above, could see the Outcast looking down at him from the bridge.

Slowly Burke swam to the bank, climbed up it. When he looked back at the bridge again, the Outcast had gone. The chief inspector smiled bitterly to himself and made his way to the nearest official intersection on the lower walks.

Burke landed back at headquarters looking bedraggled and feeling ill. He found Operator 9 already there, waiting, the undamaged detector in his possession.

‘It meant letting the Outcast escape to follow out your order,’ the youngster said briefly. ‘I just made it!’

‘Good man.’ Burke scooped back his hair. ‘You can get back to your post now, and notify every man to keep his eyes peeled. We know the Outcast is in the city, anyway. I’ll take charge of this detector.’

He swept the instrument up and went out to the Bureau vault down the corridor. When he came back into the office, he gave a start of surprise. A drenched figure was standing there, clothes tattered and torn, eyes gleaming with anger. It was Calman, physically unhurt, but in a pitiable state of attire.

‘In a little while,’ he said slowly, ‘I shall get thoroughly burned up if I drop in that damned river again. So he got you, too! I leaped for it before he had a chance to ram a dart in me. I just let out one mighty yell to try and warn you, then chose the least resistance. Got out at the south end.’

‘Then I guess you didn’t hear me yell,’ Burke acknowledged grimly. ‘When that devil loomed up before me, I didn’t even glance inside the car to see if you were there. Well, anyway, sir, you escaped, and that’s the main thing. By the way, Mr. Calman—that killer must have known somehow of what I’ve intended doing.’

‘I’ve realized that,’ Calman nodded, ‘and it’s something I can’t understand.’

‘I’ve got one or two ideas doped out,’ Burke admitted, ‘but they can wait for awhile. I’m going home for a change of clothes before I get busy again. Six o’clock now. Be back at seven. Maybe Sphinx Grantham will have got some information by then, too.’

He turned impatiently and swung out of the office.

The Decoy Theft

It was exactly 7.00 p.m. when Chief Inspector Burke returned. He found Calman absent, but the chief had left word that he had departed on an urgent mission with Dr. Rayfrew. Burke wondered vaguely what it could be.

Taking advantage of the brief lull, he picked up the ray gun from Terry Walton's department and spent half an hour making experiments on his own. He came thoughtfully back to the office to find Sphinx Grantham lounging around, munching a sandwich.

'Well, find out anything?' Burke asked shortly, tossing the ray gun on the desk.

'Yes—but nothing of much use, I'm afraid. Say, I hear you and Calman were attacked by the Outcast this afternoon and—'

'Forget it! What did you discover?' Burke snapped impatiently.

'Well, I found out that, as I had figured, most of the bricks in the foundations of Square 14 were made of clay from the Worth Concession in the New Jersey area. It seems, though, that several men went to the Worth works and asked where the clay from a certain section of the concession had ended up.'

'And they were told it went into Square 14?' Burke asked quickly.

'Yes, that's right.'

Burke snapped his fingers. 'Now get this! Something was in the clay of the Worth pits which the Outcast wanted. He found it had been used—at least, that part which he wanted—in the bricks of Square 14 foundations. So he wrecked Square 14 to try and find whatever it is he seeks. Remember the magnets he used?'

'It's an idea, sure. But who were the other people who made the inquiries at the Worth works?' Sphinx asked shrewdly.

'I believe,' said Burke, 'that "the other people" was probably the dead Outcast we found on the gallery. He could be made up to look like an Earthman, and he could adopt various different disguises.'

'He could at that!' Sphinx whistled. 'Then this other fellow who keeps attacking you and Calman and murdering obscure people—'

'He, I imagine, was the partner of the chap on the gallery, and for some reason did him in. I'm sure I'm right on that point. And so far, the Outcast hasn't found what *he* wants.' Burke broke off and smiled grimly. 'And we don't know what it is, either.'

'Something small, hidden in clay.' Sphinx mused perplexedly. 'Probably something with minute writing on it, if the attack on the calligrapher is any guide.'

Sphinx gave it up with a shrug and glanced at the ray gun.

'Find out anything about this?' he asked.

'It was the thing which set our engine on fire, sure as fate. The area of the beam—I've fixed it up again so it works—exactly matches up with the size of the hole in the floorboard. It went through the metal in a second, smashed the carburettor, with which it was in a direct line, and exploded the fuel mixture. It was so arranged that—'

Burke glanced up impatiently as the chief keeper of the safety vault came in.

'Mr. Burke—the detector's gone!' he exclaimed hoarsely.

'What!' Burke yelled. 'You damned, confounded idiot! Didn't I tell you to—'

‘Yes, yes—to guard it! I know—and I did! You put it in the safe, and I’ve sat there every minute myself, looking in the safe at intervals to make sure—’

‘*All* the time?’ Burke demanded.

The guard gulped a bit. ‘Except for an interval of about ten minutes when I was called to the checking room. Somebody was on the telephone and wanted the criminal record of Henry Walford. I was the only one that could give it. When I came back to guard the detector again, it had gone. That was just now. It’s half an hour since I answered that telephone call.’

Burke thumped his fist slowly on the desk.

‘Did this person at the other end of the wire thank you for the record when you’d finished?’

‘I don’t remember it, Mr. Burke. I just reeled it off—and you know what those records are. Takes ten minutes or so to do it—’

The man stopped, astounded. ‘Good heavens, you don’t mean I was drawn off to recite all that stuff and there was nobody listening on the other end!’

‘Who,’ Burke asked slowly, ‘asked for the record?’

‘Chief Inspector of Sector 20. Come to think of it, it struck me as rather queer at the time that he should want such a record. But—’

Burke whipped up the telephone, got the inspector on the wire. Sphinx and the vault keeper stood listening to Burke’s clipped remarks. And the guard’s face grew drawn with anxiety.

‘—so you didn’t, eh? Don’t even know Henry Walford? Okay, that’s all I wanted to know.’

Burke lowered the phone. ‘Keeper,’ he said grimly, ‘the inspector did not ring you! He never even heard of Henry Walford. It was a great idea to take up your time and keep you out of your department—but nobody listened to your recital. And since there is a Henry Walford record in the files, you thought it was all on the up-and-up.’

‘But it was somebody else who asked the question! And only the oldest employees in this organization, like you and Sphinx and Calman, and I myself—together with some twenty-five other employees in other departments—know about the Henry Walford case. Somewhere among these thirty old employees is the one who rang you up!’

‘But nobody but the Outcast would want to steal that frequency detector!’ Sphinx cried. ‘You’re not suggesting the Outcast is among our own staff, surely!’

‘No, I’m not suggesting—I’m telling! How else could the Outcast know our plans so well! Who else but one of the staff could think up a trick like the Henry Walford record! Of course’—Burke gave a faint smile of triumph—‘I fully expected the detector would be taken. It confirms a theory I’m working on.’

He eyed the vault keeper steadily for a moment. ‘You can get back to your job,’ Burke said quietly.

‘Yes, Inspector. I can’t begin to say how—’

‘All right; all right. Forget it. Now, Sphinx—’

Burke broke off rather impatiently as Calman came into the room.

‘Burke, you’d better come along to the morgue. We’ve just brought in a fellow attacked by the Outcast this evening. The police called Dr. Rayfrew and I went along with him, since you were away.’

Burke followed immediately with Sphinx at his heels. The man in Rayfrew’s autopsy room was pretty elderly, plenty knocked about, but still alive.

‘He’s all right,’ Rayfrew said briefly, ‘except for bruises. About the first victim to survive the Outcast, I guess—except you and Sphinx and Calman.’

‘I went for the Outcast with an electric gun,’ the latest victim panted. ‘That scared him a good deal. And hurt him too, I think! It saved me from getting a dart of some sort. What? My name’s Bradshaw. I’m a scientist, an inventor.’

‘Are you listed in the directory of occupations as a scientific inventor?’ Burke asked keenly.

‘Certainly I am. That was how the Outcast found me, I presume. I live in an isolated, old-fashioned place near the ruined Square 14. I was in my laboratory when the Outcast broke in through the window. He spoke to me—in English!’

Burke’s eyes gleamed. ‘Then what?’

‘He said he had heard—probably through the television and newspapers—that I had invented a machine capable of producing long-range heat rays. That is quite true; but I invented the machine for peaceful purposes, mainly with a view to opening up the Arctic for exploitation of its mineral resources.’

‘I know plenty of warmongers on this world would like that ray of mine for destructive purposes. Well, sir, to my utter amazement, the Outcast said I had stolen the secret of my invention from his medallion, that it was one of his own twelve scientific secrets. He demanded I hand the medallion over.’

‘Medallion!’ Burke cried. ‘So that’s what he’s looking for!’

‘Naturally,’ Bradshaw went on, ‘I denied all knowledge of a medallion. Furious, he flew at me and I hit him. Then he pulled out a dart. I realized ordinary weapons were of no use, but an electric gun I had handy kept him away.’

‘Had I not been in my laboratory, I’d be dead now—Well, gentlemen, he fled. I summoned the nearest policeman to come and attend to me; I was pretty well knocked about, I can tell you. Then Dr. Rayfrew came finally, and Mr. Calman.’

‘Your home, then, is about ten minutes away from here by fast car?’ Burke asked thoughtfully.

‘About—yes.’

Burke got slowly to his feet from the bedside chair.

‘Mr. Bradshaw, it is evident that by a coincidence you happened to have made a machine identical with one supposed to be the secret of the Outcast—in formula form, at least. The secret of this machine, together with eleven other secrets, is impressed on a medallion. Hence, the theft from the calligrapher, in the hope that it might be there.’

‘Say, that’s right!’ Calman cried. ‘What else?’

‘Sphinx found out enough to show me that this Outcast, either by accident or design, planted a medallion in the clay on the site that is now the Worth Concession. It’s a comparatively recent site, remember. The clay the Outcast wanted had gone when he returned; it had gone into the bricks of Square 14. Result—the attack. Thereafter, a desperate search for the medallion and its twelve scientific secrets.’

‘Then where *is* the medallion?’ Calman demanded. ‘Isn’t that the next point? I think—’

‘I believe I know where the medallion is,’ Burke answered slowly. ‘And I believe I can make the Outcast come and get it—this very evening!’

‘You can!’ Sphinx cried. ‘But—but how?’

‘You’ll see.’ Burke glanced around. ‘Mr. Calman, I’m requesting you to order all members of the Bureau who have been in our employ over ten years, to be present in the assembly hall

by 9.30. There will be around thirty, including ourselves.

‘You’re the chief, so the order had better come from you. I’ll produce the medallion, all right, and I’ll so arrange it that the Outcast will be bound to come for it.’

Metamorphosis

Those of the staff whom ten year's service designated were not at all keen on Burke's scheme, but since Calman gave the order, there was nothing for it but to turn up. Thirty or so employees—all of them who knew of the Henry Walford case—presented themselves in the big assembly hall by 9.30.

Calman was there, on the platform. Around him were one or two officials, Sphinx Grantham and Dr. Rayfrew. Burke arrived last by the rear door, looking very resolute and keeping his right hand in his pocket. He raised the other for silence.

'In this room,' he said slowly, 'are thirty-four people. I checked them as they came in. Every one is human—except one! I have publicized the fact in the last hour that the medallion is here tonight for the Outcast to come and get.

'So the Outcast is with us, and I warn him that I have the whole building surrounded by guards. But now I must make a confession. I have no medallion. In fact—I don't even know what it looks like!'

There was a tense silence. Calman broke the spell finally.

'I'm afraid I don't get this at all, Inspector.'

Burke's voice was harsh with purpose. 'The idea, Mr. Calman, is to make sure the Outcast is here. And he is. He knows we are right on his tail, and only by guaranteeing him the medallion would he be sure to come. Otherwise, he would probably have made a run for it before being caught and exposed.'

Burke paused and walked slowly across the stage. Then suddenly he whipped his right hand from his pocket. There in his palm was fisted the ray gun with which he had been experimenting. He levelled the weapon steadily.

'All right, Calman! Stand up!' Burke snapped.

'Me?' Calman cried. 'My good man, have you lost your mind?'

'Show's over, Calman. You're all through. *You are the Outcast!* And this ray gun of yours is the only thing your blasted flesh will wilt under! This—and an electric gun!'

Calman got up slowly, his eyes hot. 'Now look here, Burke, I can stand just so much nonsense! This is absurd!' he exclaimed. 'You're overwrought, Burke! Why, you must be seeing things!'

'Yeah?' Burke made a signal. From behind the stage curtains a technician emerged, carrying a frequency detector. Burke motioned him to hold it up.

The audience plainly saw the red register needle tally exactly with the blue frequency reading, previously recorded, as the instrument came near Calman. Indisputably Calman was the White Outcast!

'Aura frequency detectors never lie, Calman,' Burke snapped. 'You are the Outcast—and I've known it for some time! But I wanted to be absolutely certain. I found out quick enough when you stole a detector from the vault. Knowing the safe combination we use, it was simple enough, wasn't it? But you did not know I had put *another* detector in the vault with a phony number-frequency on it!

'The real detector was carefully put aside for an occasion like this. I had to manoeuvre things so I could get a reading without your being aware of it—and believe me, it took some

doing. You made the Henry Walford phone call. You killed the *real* Calman on the night we found that awful-looking body in the Pedestrian Gallery girders. You killed Calman as he went home!’

‘Calman’ breathed hard. Suddenly there was a hoarse shout from the audience. Even Burke got a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. For with a slow metamorphosis, Calman began to change into something revoltingly different. His features slackened and smeared, became doughy white. His flesh thickened oddly.

In four minutes ‘Calman’ had gone and the White Outcast—dressed in the lounge suit he’d stolen from the real Calman—stood in his place. Even the weird creature’s eyes had gone several degrees paler by inner control of iris pigment.

‘All right, you win,’ the Outcast said, without anger. ‘I thought I was a good scientist—but you’re one better than me. Why shouldn’t I admit it?’ He sat down heavily, shaking his head. ‘I don’t begin to understand how you knew.’

Burke’s voice was hoarse from the strain he’d undergone. ‘I didn’t suspect you until Dr. Rayfrew said the Outcast might be able to control his nervous system after the fashion of a chameleon. He might, in other words, be able to metamorphose, to change himself, at will. Then Dr. Rayfrew told me of the possibility of extreme toughness.

‘I figured out that an explosion—like the one in the car engine—would be unlikely to hurt you, Outcast, but very probably would kill Sphinx Grantham and me. It was worth your risk, anyway. The floorboard hole was just as I expected it would be had you had a ray gun or something similar in your hand. It would be hidden from my view by the darkness in the car.

‘Well, I had the river dragged and a ray gun was turned up. If, as I suspected, you were the Outcast, you could not conceal the weapon in your pocket; because when you came out of the river, your clothes were clinging to you and the bulge would have shown.

‘Since you were with us all the time we got the other Outcast from the gallery girders, you had not had time to fix anything in the car beforehand.’

‘How do you know that body was a so-called Outcast, as you say?’ the alien said softly. ‘How can you be sure it wasn’t Calman himself?’

Burke snorted. ‘Don’t be a fool too, Outcast. How could Calman have been metamorphosed into such a revolting mass of flesh—even by you? There are still some things that can’t be done!’

‘Indeed?’ purred the Outcast. ‘Well, I really must not spoil your fun. Continue, Inspector.’

Burke bowed mockingly. ‘Thanks so much for your permission.’

His voice grew harsh again. ‘Yes, I suspected you, all right. I knew that if you thought the frequency detector was in your grasp—which it was, in the vault—you would spare no pains to try and steal it, destroy it to make yourself safe. You did—but you took the wrong one!

‘To make doubly sure of being rid of the two most likely to find you out—Sphinx and me—you continued your efforts against me when I went to get the detector. You got rid of your clothes somehow and metamorphosed yourself into your normal Outcast appearance. You looked realistically over the bridge at a mythical Calman who might have fallen into the water. You did the same thing when you attacked the antique dealer, I presume.

‘By tonight I knew what you were looking for. Because of the medallion pretext, I made sure you’d be here. What I do not understand is, why you didn’t kill off Sphinx Grantham and me with darts in the first place. It was your logical way out.’

The Outcast smiled bitterly. ‘Too obvious. It would have thrown suspicion on me. What I really wanted to do was to become undisputed head without you two being in the way. Some

time ago,' he went on, 'I was fleeing through space from an enemy, returning to my home planet. It became essential that I get rid of the medallion of secrets as quickly as possible.

'I came to Earth, marked the spot where I had buried the medallion, and went on again without anybody on this planet being aware I'd landed. When matters calmed down, I was ordered to recover the medallion, never to return to my world until I had done so. It contains secrets of war engines that I stole from this enemy, who was pursuing me. I was allowed one companion.

'We arrived here and found changes in the clay site where I had buried the medallion. My companion and I spent some weeks learning your language by listening to radio and television broadcasts. Then my assistant, metamorphosed to look like an Earthman, started to make inquiries. We finally discovered the medallion was probably among the bricks of Square 14.'

The Outcast sighed as though in mild regret. 'My companion was against ruthless destruction, so I killed him. Then I destroyed Square 14 but failed to find what I wanted. Even though, were the medallion lying in the ruins, my magnets would have dragged it to view.'

The Outcast took two small horseshoe bars from his pocket and then replaced them.

'I had then to decide how best to find out where the medallion was. How better than as the head of the Scientific Bureau? They, in an effort to catch the White Outcast, might discover the medallion's whereabouts quicker than anybody.

'So, having studied Calman carefully beforehand in readiness for such an emergency, I took his place—killed him on the night you found my companion's body on the gallery. Calman's body I merely rayed out of being.' He said it coolly, unemotionally.

'One point,' Burke put in. 'Why did you change back into your Outcast pose when you made your attacks on the antique dealer and the inventor? Could you not have done such things as Calman, made your search under the pretext of police routine?'

'I could, yes. But while you were around, I knew it would arouse your suspicions if the chief of the Bureau started doing that kind of thing. Better to do nothing that the real chief wouldn't bother himself about.'

Burke nodded slowly. The Outcast went on calmly, in a matter of fact manner.

'I used my dead companion as a dupe, certainly. As I have already said, I tried to be rid of you and Sphinx Grantham without casting suspicions on my own bogus identity. Once I got the Bureau under my control without you two worrying me, I could probably track that medallion down in no time.

'I tried all likely people—or rather, I intended to. I only managed a calligrapher and an inventor before you caught up with me. I felt certain the inventor was the one because, according to newspaper reports, his invention was identical to the likeness on the medallion.'

'These twelve inventions,' Burke mused. 'I presume that every detail of each one is on the medallion in microscopic writing?'

'Exactly. The actual machinery can only be built with the medallion formulae. Otherwise, we only know what the inventions are—without knowing how to construct them.'

Burke said, 'Had you told us what you were seeking, to begin with, we would have helped you.'

'I think not.' The Outcast shook his head. 'Twelve engines of destruction would interest the war-loving scientists of this planet far too much. Such men could have become enemies of my own world at a none-too distant date. No, it was better I found the medallion intact, with its secrets unrevealed.'

He got slowly to his feet. Then suddenly he whipped back his sleeve and rammed something into his arm. Too late, Burke dashed forward to get a look at the tiny splinter.

‘For an Outcast to die when his mission has failed is surely logical?’ the alien asked quietly. ‘I have fought for my planet; you for yours. Both of us, I think, have lost.’

‘You wondered about my spaceship. It is in orbit nine hundred miles from Earth. It can only come down when this is operated—’

He whipped an object like a watch out of his pocket, fiddled with its tiny instrumentation, flung it on the boards and ground it under his heel.

‘I have sent my ship on a course that will take it into the sun. You will have to solve interstellar space travel for yourselves,’ he added dryly.

Suddenly he fell back into his chair, breathing hard. With a final convulsive movement he became motionless and relaxed.

Burke turned away quietly.

‘Cigarettes, Sphinx. I want to think,’ Burke said, as they went back to the office. He flipped a coin on the desk.

‘Okay—but I wish you’d use real money.’ Sphinx held up the dud coin for the second time in two days.

‘Oh, hell—’ Burke began irritably. Then suddenly he snatched the coin from him and stared at it; at the roughed surfaces smothered in tiny, microscopic lines.

‘My God!’ he gasped.

Without another word Burke raced to the autopsy room in the morgue, where the Outcast’s body lay. Rapidly he searched out the small magnets from the pockets. Instantly the coin clung to them.

‘That’s it!’ Sphinx yelled. ‘The medallion! Even when he was near you, your pocket held it in, stopped the thing from contact with the magnets. Lord, if you’d only known! If *he* had only known! But how did you ever come to—’

‘How should I know?’ Burke asked quietly. ‘Dug up by workmen, I suppose. Handed around as a false coin, got into my loose change somewhere. I may have had it for ages. Funny as hell, isn’t it?’

Burke smiled faintly as he gazed on the Outcast’s dead face. ‘You know, the fellow was right in some things,’ he added. ‘About war-mongering, for instance—Never mind those cigarettes right now, Sphinx. We’re going to the river bridge. I’ve something I’d like to throw over the parapet . . .’

[The end of *White Outcast* by John Russell Fearn (as Thornton Ayre)]