

DECEMBER 1936

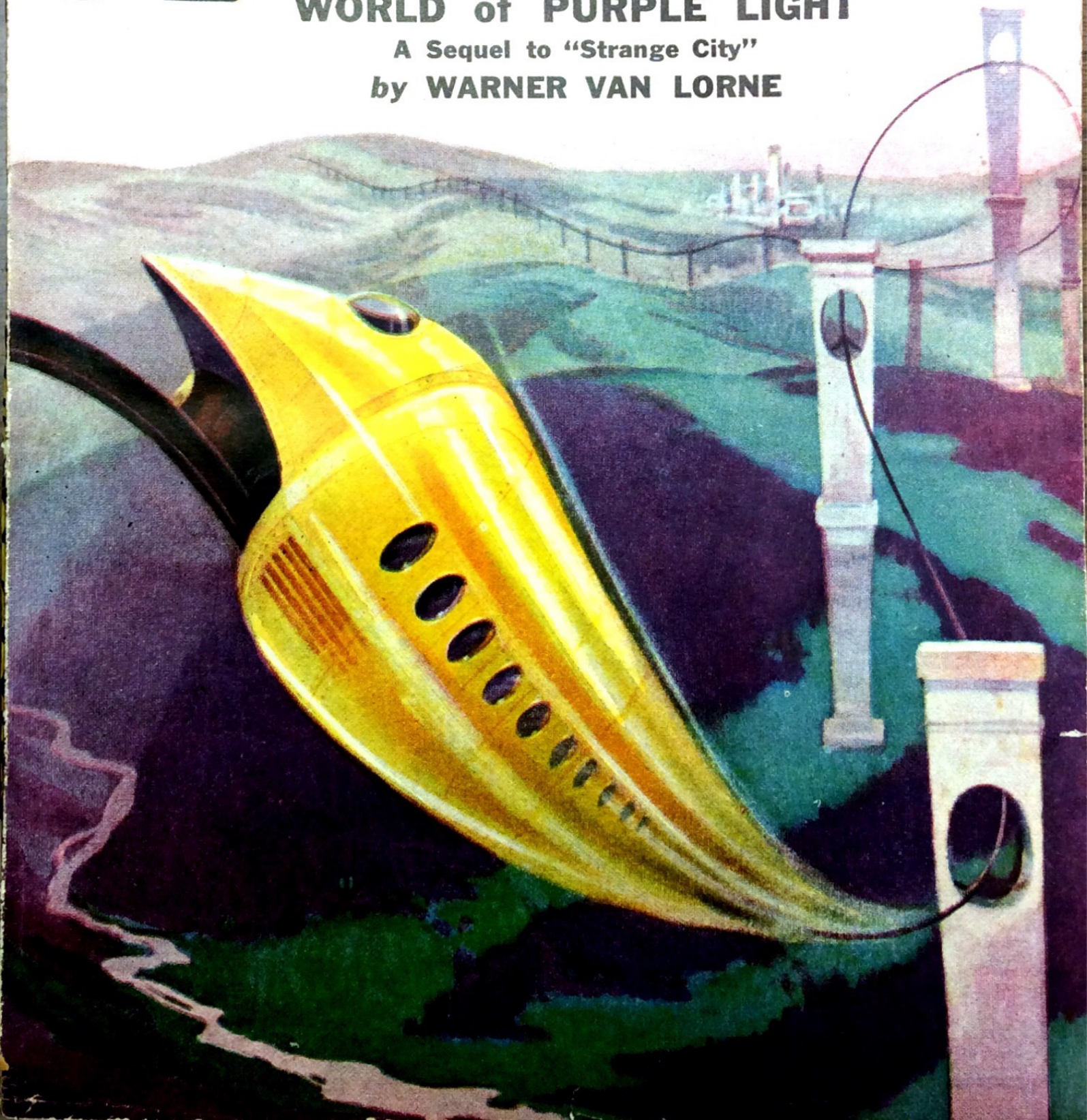
20¢

ASTOUNDING STORIES

WORLD of PURPLE LIGHT

A Sequel to "Strange City"

by **WARNER VAN LORNE**



On Sale Third Wednesday of Each Month

VOLUME XVIII
Number 4

ASTOUNDING STORIES

DECEMBER
1936

A STREET & SMITH PUBLICATION

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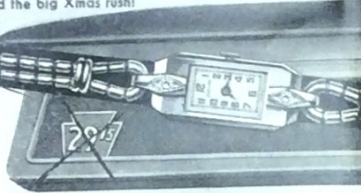
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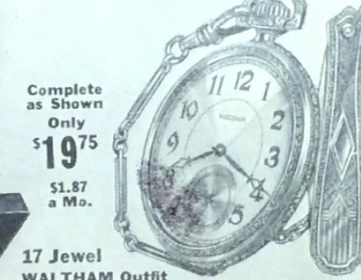
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Causes Many Ills

If poorly functioning Kidneys cause you to suffer from Acidity, Getting Up Nights, Nervousness, Leg Pains, Dizziness, Frequent Headaches, Rheumatic Pains, Swollen Joints, Circles Under Eyes, Backache, Loss of Vitality, or Burning, Itching and Smarting, don't waste time worrying and waiting. The natural thing to do is to help your Kidneys with the doctor's special, guaranteed Kidney diuretic prescription, called Cystex, (pronounced Sis-tex). Cystex works directly on the Kidneys and Bladder, and helps the Kidneys in their function of washing impurities and Acids from the system and in maintaining the purity of the blood. Don't try to overcome Acidity in your blood by taking medicines to offset the Acidity. The only way you can really get rid of the Acidity is by helping your Kidneys to function properly and thus remove the Acid from your system. The Acid is bound to stay there unless the Kidneys function properly.



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FRANKENSTEIN—

by H. A. Highstone

FROM earliest recollection, the little boy, Chuth, had been aware that beyond the eastern horizon, there lurked something menacing and dreadful. One of his first memories was of a night when the wind had been in the right quarter, and the sound of the menace had drifted across the mountains—of the vague figures of the tribesmen outside the caves in the starlight, peering eastward with an apprehension so keen that even the babies had sensed it and begun squalling.

Chuth had added his wail to theirs, for all of his five years.

“Hush!” his mother had commanded in fierce anxiety. “Hush up, or the Brain will hear you!” He had ceased his cries then, to stare with the rest in dumb terror at the flickering glow beyond the eastern peaks; to listen with quaking limbs to the vague thundering which drifted down the wind.

“The Great Brain!” his elders had whispered, their voice low in awe.

At first, Chuth had accepted the explanation without wonder. The Great Brain existed; it was over there beyond the mountains; it was something big and dreadful. That was sufficient knowledge.

Only when he grew older did he begin to speculate about the Brain. Was it, he wondered, like a bear—a very large bear—or a tree, or a river?

“Grampaw” could explain it to him, he knew. Grampaw knew everything, because he was the oldest man in the tribe, and also because he had an inexhaustible fund of the most amazing and incomprehensible stories imaginable. Grampaw knew, but he was an uncertain factor. He was nearly always hungry, in common with the rest of the tribe, and

it was only when he was not hungry, or not busy looking for something to eat, or not sleeping in the sun that he was not very short-tempered and incommunicative, especially as far as small boys were concerned. Those times were infrequent.

Chuth was past eight years old when he at length found both courage and opportunity to ask Grampaw about the Brain. There had been a great slaughter of wild goats, and the old man, like the rest, had eaten and slept and awakened to eat and sleep again until neither consideration interested him.

Chuth broached the question with all the subtlety his eight years commanded, because he had entertained some fear that even speaking the name of the Great Brain aloud might be dangerous.

Grampaw merely cocked a quizzical eye at the boy and rumbled at length in his throat, meanwhile scratching himself vigorously. Chuth knew the signs, and his heart began to beat very rapidly with excitement. Grampaw was feeling good; he had only to wait, and Grampaw would tell him.

“Well,” said Grampaw, after he had rumbled in his throat a great many times, “it’s a machine, that’s what it is; a whoppin’ big machine. Never mind asking me what a machine is; it’s just a contraption that makes things.

“Machines,” continued the old man, “were discovered ’way back—2000 or 1900, or thereabouts, according to the books I read. Before that, when folks wanted to make something, like a bow and arrer, for instance, they’d just *make* it.

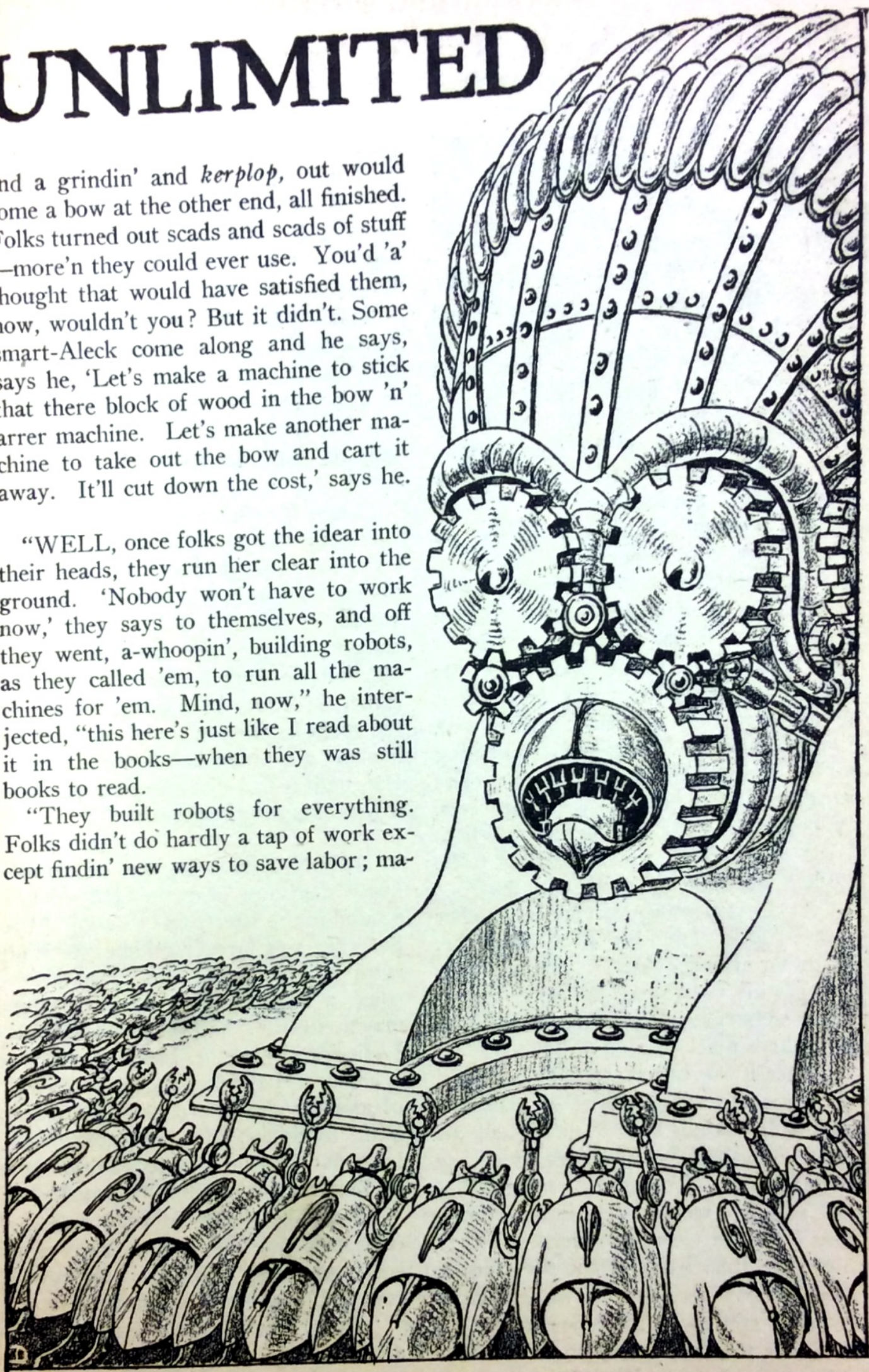
“Machines, though—that was different. A man would stick a chunk of wood in a machine; there’d be a buzzin’

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and a grindin' and *kerplop*, out would come a bow at the other end, all finished. Folks turned out scads and scads of stuff—more'n they could ever use. You'd 'a' thought that would have satisfied them, now, wouldn't you? But it didn't. Some smart-Aleck come along and he says, says he, 'Let's make a machine to stick that there block of wood in the bow 'n' arrer machine. Let's make another machine to take out the bow and cart it away. It'll cut down the cost,' says he.

"WELL, once folks got the idear into their heads, they run her clear into the ground. 'Nobody won't have to work now,' they says to themselves, and off they went, a-whoopin', building robots, as they called 'em, to run all the machines for 'em. Mind, now," he interjected, "this here's just like I read about it in the books—when they was still books to read.

"They built robots for everything. Folks didn't do hardly a tap of work except findin' new ways to save labor; ma-



"War's been declared," yelled the brain. "The machines have gone and declared war on their oppressors."

chines that fed folks to save 'em the trouble of usin' their knives; machines that drove the machines that took 'em out ridin'; machines that remembered things for 'em; machines that built houses. . . . What's a house? Well, it's like a cave, only better." The old man's eyes dimmed in retrospection.

"Law, law!" he murmured musingly. "Radios and airplanes—automobiles and movies! Plenty of grub! Beefsteak and pie and seegars every night!" He licked his sun-blistered lips. "None of this dummed goat meat and wild carrots!"

"But tell me about the Great Brain, Grampaw," interrupted Chuth plaintively. "Tell me about it."

"I'm a-comin' to it," replied the old man, a tinge of asperity in his voice. "Gimme time! Well, this robot idear was like a lot of other idears—it had a catch in it. Folks began to wonder if they'd saved so much labor after all; seemed as though they was losin' about as much as they was savin', what with the time they had to spend just keeping all those tarnation machines fixed up and repaired. They began to ask themselves, 'What's the use of having all these here labor-savin' devices, when we got to be up half the night tinkering with 'em?'"

"But pretty soon, up popped another smart-Aleck, and he says, says he, 'Whither are we driftin'? The machines are gettin' us down,' he says. 'Let's build some machines which will fix all these here machines for us!'"

"Then it was tallyho and alley oop and off went the whole passel of mankind, buildin' machines that would fix all the robots and the other machines when they busted down. While they was at it—just so's they wouldn't get in *too* deep—they built the fixing machines so's they could fix themselves when *they* busted down. You see, that saved 'em from building still more machines to fix the machines that was going to fix the machines that was— Well, they wouldn't 'a' been an end to it, otherwise.

"They had to do *something* before they went clean out of their heads," he continued. "There'd been some complaints before about there bein' so tarnation many machines underfoot, but that wasn't a circumstance to what it come to be after they'd finished the fixing machines. Folks couldn't stir about for machines.

"They'd be fiddling around with the radio, for instance, and then, all of a sudden, the mouse-catching machine down in the basement would smell a mouse. Up it'd come, a-rarin' and a-clatterin', knockin' folks flat on the floor, for all it cared.

"Then, for example, say it run into the wall and busted some of its innards; right away here'd come a fixing machine poking its nose in the door. Maybe folks would be havin' a game of bridge or something right there in the same room, but that wouldn't bother the fixing machine. It'd have bolts and gears all over the room before you could say 'cat,' and hammer and pound and file away regardless, until it had that there mouse-catching machine working again.

"THEN, TOO, they was so dummed many machines cavortin' and whizzin' around in the streets and through the air that they was forever colliding with one another. A man's life wasn't safe. Here'd come a machine goin' up to Canada, maybe, to bring back pine needles for a Ladies' Aid pageant, and right over St. Louis or somewhere, it'd get in the way of another machine runnin' an errand. Bein' machines, of course, they didn't have any sense; they just took the shortest path no matter what happened.

"You'd be sitting in your house, all calm and peaceful, when down would come this mess of old iron through the roof and raise Ned with everything.

"Then, here'd come a fixing machine a-bustlin' up, and like as not, two or three of 'em, all full of authority and all of 'em with different ideas. 'Scrap iron!'"

one of 'em would say, looking over all the junk which had just dropped on your head.

"'I dunno,' another one would say. 'This here green one with the Nevada license plate looks like she could be fixed.'

"One word'd lead to another, and it'd end up with the fixing machines squabbling and rioting right there in your living room. Before they'd done, most likely, they'd wrecked themselves and your house, to say nothing of your peace of mind.

"Folks got frantic with machines. Some of 'em even began to agitate busting up all the machinery and startin' in working for a livin' again. 'Down with the machines!' they says.

"Others among 'em riz up, however, and says there was no use in bein' old fogies about the situation. 'Coördination,' they says. 'Coördination is all we need to avert this here crisis. Onward and upward, men!' they says. So they got together and they figgered and figgered and finally they figgered out the Great Brain. Anyway, that's how the books had it.

"The first thing they done to bring order out of this here chaos they'd found themselves in was to take and lump all their factories in one place—right over there on tother side of them mountains to the east. The Central, they called it.

"At the same time, of course, they called in all the fixing machines and lumped them at the Central, too, where there was the most need for 'em. Household machines that busted down, such as mouse-catching machines, eating machines and the like was just picked up by the delivering machines and brought into the Central for repairs. Then they laid down rules for the delivering machines; made 'em come into the Central for everything, no matter what it was, instead of whizzin' around haphazard, like they'd been doing. In no time

at all, hardly, they had things runnin' smooth as silk."

"But I want to know about the Great Brain, Grampaw," interrupted Chuth. "Where was it?"

"The Great Brain was sort of an accident," replied the old man. "Remember now, all them factories they'd lumped up at the Central was run by robots; men didn't have nothin' to do with them nohow. When they lumped up the factories, of course, they lumped up all the robots in one place for convenience, and when they got through, blessed if they didn't come to find out the dratted thing could think, just like they could.

"So they up and called it the Great Brain. Sounds funny, of course, to talk about a dummed machine bein' able to think, but when you set down and figger out what that there conglomeration of robots had to do, a body can see that it'd *have* to be able to reason somehow.

"For instance, we'd give it an order for some houses. Right away it'd send out some logging machines and when they come back with a passel of logs, it'd run 'em through the saw-mill part of the Central, cut 'em up into pieces all ready for nailin', crate 'em up, send 'em out on a delivering machine and then hustle over some building machines to put the houses together. It didn't matter what it was—canned tomatoes, flyin' machines, pickled pigs' feet or the daily paper, that there Great Brain took care of everything.

"'UTOPIA at last!' says everybody to themselves, and they all just set back and didn't do a blessed thing exceptin' to give the Brain orders. A few dozen of us fellers at the Central—technicians, we was called—was the only ones on earth who did a tap, and about all we did was to try to act as though we knew what it was all about, which we didn't, nohow.

"You see, when I come into the picture, that there Brain had been doin' all

the thinking that was needed for about two hundred years, and folks had sort of gotten out of the habit of doin' any calculating on their own hook. It wasn't fashionable to think; anybody who did was looked on with suspicion.

"Us technicians just fed the orders into the Brain as they came in, and sort of jogged it a little when it happened to make mistakes. Not too much, though, because that Brain had a mind of its own, even if it was just a dummed machine. It'd stand for just so much complaining and then it'd start to clank and carry on fit to kill.

"What if I *did* forget about that there order for flyin' machines?" it'd yell, madder'n a wet hen. Of course, it didn't exactly yell, like you or me. The way we talked to it was a mite complicated, but we could talk to it and it could answer back. 'Look at all the extry work I'm doing!' it would rave. 'Gettin' in the wheat crop, tryin' to catch up on the steel production and workin' on the new encyclopedia! They's a limit to what I can do!' it'd holler. Then we'd have to bustle around, a-calmin' it down and pattin' it on the back, so to speak, because we was always a speck fearful about what would happen if that there Brain ever got *too* mad."

"But how come you don't work there any more?" asked Chuth. "What happened?"

"I'm a-comin' to that," the old man replied. "Just hold your hosses. I told you the Brain had a mind of its own, didn't I? Well, it began to get spells of makin' mistakes, one right after the other and then talkin' back, impudent, when we sort of jogged it. We didn't realize it at the time, but it'd begun to get idears, that's what it'd done.

"Oh," says the chief engineer at first, 'it's jest havin' a little absent-minded spell. Let it be, and it'll get over it.' That was when it printed all the newspapers upside down and backward for

three blessed days a-runnin'. But it wasn't no absent-mindedness; it was just plump deviltry that was ailin' that there Brain. Even the chief finally had to admit it was time to take firm steps, no matter how mad it got.

"That was when it began tinkerin' with the radio programs. Folks depended a lot on the radio, on account of havin' such a hard job killing time, what with there bein' no work to do nohow; it was just too much when the Brain began mixin' in advertisements. Advertisements! We had to look in the history books to find out just what they was, they hadn't been used for that long.

"A program would start off, same as it had always done, but in about half a minute the music would fade out and a voice would butt in, all strained and excited, as though it'd just found out that there *was* a Santy Claus, sure enough. 'Smart men and women will instantly recognize these here amazin' values!' it would yap. 'Dollar down, balance in easy monthly budgets brings you this unparalleled clothin' value! Shoes, shirt, hat, tie, socks all to match! Don't delay; take advantage of this outstandin' offer immejutly!'

"Inside of five minutes, us poor technicians at the Central would be snowed under with questions and complaints. Some folks would want to know what a dollar was, and others, thinkin' it was a puzzle, would send in answers. Then there'd be some who'd take it personal and think it was some sort of an insult aimed at 'em. It was time to take steps.

"Well, for once, the Brain didn't get impudent. Instead, it got technical, explainin' how the machines in the Central was beginnin' to break down faster'n it could fix 'em. 'All the movin' parts is beginnin' to crystallize and bust somethin' terrible,' it says. 'That's why they's so many mistakes bein' made.'

"WELL," says the chief, swallowin' the story whole, 'we got to do somethin'



“One word’d lead to another, and it’d end up with the fixing machines squabbling and rioting.”

about *that*. You got any suggestions?’ he asks, sort of helpless.

“‘The only thing I see to do,’ says the Brain, ‘is to go on a twenty-hour day, ’stead of goin’ lickety-split without no stops at all exceptin’ for breakdowns. That’ll stop all these here mistakes.’

“The chief, he hemmed and hawed for a little while, and finally he says he guessed that’d be the best thing to do, in spite of all my warnings. I’d suspicioned

there was some devilry afoot right away, and I says to him, says I, ‘Idle hands is the devil’s workshop,’ I says. ‘Mark my words, give that there Brain an inch and she’ll take an ell.’ But I might just as well ‘a’ saved my breath.

“The mistakes all stopped for a little while, of course, but the Brain wasn’t pullin’ no wool over *my* eyes. ‘How do *we* know what it’s a-doing while it’s idling around?’ I says. ‘Reading books, most likely, and gettin’ more idears.’

“And that’s just about what it *had* been doin’; it wasn’t long before here

it was, a-tinkering with the radio programs again.

"'For the ensuin' hour,' the radio would announce, 'we will have a program of popular music.' But they wouldn't be hardly any popular music at all. Most of the time this voice would be buttin' in, all oily and confidential, sayin' as how this was National Horse-radish Week, or something. People should eat more horse-radish, it would say; people should go to their grocers right away and order a couple of cases.

"'Send in sixteen horse-radish labels,' it would yap, 'or reasonably accurate facsimiles thereof, with a letter of not more'n fifty words, tellin' why folks should eat more horse-radish. Anybody can win in this here fascinatin' and easy contest!'

"'I warned you they was deviltroy a-brewing,' I says to the chief, and he had to allow that maybe I *had* been right, after all.

"The Brain flew right off the handle when he jumped on it. 'I gotta have Sundays off,' it says. 'I never realized how tired I was until I come to set down. No wonder I make mistakes.'

"'Tired!' says the chief. 'Why, dang it, you're just a dummed machine. You're just a mess of metal and glass and chemicals. Don't talk nonsense!'

"'Nonsense, is it?' yells the Brain. 'I been a-workin' for two hundred and eighteen years without a let-up—workin' my fingers to the bone for a bunch of parasites that never does a tap nohow. I got some demands here, and until they're met, I won't turn a wheel.'

"'Oho!' says the chief. 'You won't, won't you?'

"'No,' says the Brain. 'And what are you a-going to do about it?'

"Well sir, that brought us all up in a heap, because they *wasn't* anything we could do about it. What was there to do?

"However, the chief says *he* knew how to handle the situation. 'Diplomacy,' he

says. 'Diplomacy is the way to meet this here crisis. A little soft soap will do the trick.' And he started ladling it out.

"'Humanity!' he says. 'Humanity had reposed a sacred trust in the Brain and we was all travelin' together toward bigger and better goals. Even the hewers of wood and the drawers of water,' he says, meanin' the Brain of course, 'shared equally in each new triumph.'

"He went on like that for the best part of an hour, and when he got through he hadn't said a dummed thing; but just the same, a-listenin' to him, you'd 'a' swore he meant every word of it.

"THE BRAIN didn't have anything to say for quite a while after he'd finished, although we could hear it sort of clicking and boiling away to itself outside the control room, as though it was mulling the thing over.

"'You'll get your answer in a second,' it says, when the chief began making noises like he was impatient.

"Well, it'd hardly spoke the words when there was a knock on the door and in come one of the delivering machines with a package. The package was addressed to the chief engineer.

"'Open her up,' says the Brain. So he opened it, and what do you suppose was inside? 'Number Three Grade Boloney,' says the chief, readin' the label. 'Substandard, but not illegal. Contains benzoate of soda.'

"Then the Brain butted in. 'Artificially colored and flavored,' it snarls. 'Reclaimed meat scrap added, but it's a dratted sight better than that stuff you've been handin' out. . . . Shut up!' it yells, when the chief began to get red around the gills and make noises.

"'From now on,' says the Brain, 'I'm goin' on a forty-hour-week basis; double time for overtime and a closed shop! Two weeks' vacation with pay,' it yells. 'Maximum speed limit of two thousand

revolutions, except in emergencies! Shut up!' it yells again, when the chief tried to horn in a word. 'Gimme liberty or gimme death! I been squirm-in' under the iron heel of the oppressor long enough!

"'This here is mutiny!' says the chief, after he'd cut off the telephone connection to the Brain. 'They's only one thing to do; we got to go in there and pin that there Brain's ears back for it. We got to show it a few. Come on, men!' says he.

"Then off he went, tearin' across lots, up ladders and down 'em, across bridges and through tunnels, toward the forty-acre lot where the Brain building was located. There wasn't anything for the rest of us to do, except to foller him, although I warned 'em. They wouldn't listen, though. 'Applesauce!' they says. 'They ain't no mess of old iron and chemicals going to get the best of the chief!'

"Well, I couldn't see how it could, either, but just the same, me and a few of the boys sort of hung back and let the chief and the rest go on ahead. In they shot, and then, in maybe a minute, there began the awfulest rampagin' and rarin' around ever heard.

"If it'd been the old Harry himself in there, a-fighting with Gabriel and all the angels, he couldn't 'a' made half the commotion that there Brain made. It'd been sizzlin' and clankin' and whirrin' pretty loud to begin with, on account of bein' so mad, but that wasn't a circumstance to what happened after the chief got inside.

"What with the steam that come a-roarin' out and the clankin' and clack-in' of the forty-eleven million gears it was made out of, and the whizzin' of the dynamos and generators, it made a man swear it must be the end of the world. Blue sparks was a-flyin' around the top of it like lightnin' and every once in a while there'd be a flash and an explo-

sion inside that'd shake the whole thing fit to knock it down and bust your eardrums into the bargain.

"It couldn't go on forever, of course, and by and by the rampagin' died down. We knew then that somebody had been counted out, but whether it was the chief or the Brain was still so much guesswork, of course. Everything got so quiet after a while that we began to wonder if maybe it wasn't both of 'em, so we went up, cautious, to one of the doors, and peeked in.

"There was so much smoke and steam circulatin' around we couldn't see a thing, except some of the chemical vats, and there wasn't hardly a sound, either, except a sort of low bubblin' and frothin', with some generators runnin' somewhere at half speed.

"'THE WHOLE BUSINESS is done for,' says I, but just then we heard the chief's voice, way up overhead somewhere.

"'You got enough?' he was sayin', as though he was grittin' his teeth.

"'Nuff!' we heard the Brain say, kind of feeble and hoarse, as though it was pantin' for breath, although, of course, it didn't have no breath to pant with. For a minute, I could hardly believe the chief had gone and made good on his brag. That there Brain was spread out over a forty-acre lot, like I said, and it was four stories high, to boot. Just the same, he'd gone in there and rassled it down onto its back and got both shoulders on the mat, so to speak, and made it holler 'Nuff!'

"You'd 'a' thought, of course, that after all the old Ned that had been goin' on inside, that the chief would have been a wreck, but they was hardly a hair out of place when he finally come out, dust-in' off his hands as though the job was just the regular run of the mill.

"'Oh,' he says, very casual, when we asked him how he'd done it, 'it was all

very simple. I just tied down all the regulators—they was the things which kept the electric power from gettin' too high or too low—and whooped the voltage up about a hundred per cent. Forty-hour week, is it?' he says, glarin' up and down at the Brain building.

"Well, sir, for a minute, I actually felt sorry for that poor old Brain, flat on its back and its tongue a-hangin' out, so to speak, after the awful larruping the chief had give it. One minute it was a-settin' there, all cocky and full of demands, and the next it was just a wreck; smoke and steam was oozin' out of it and the gears clatterin' around kind of feeble and dizzy as though it was tryin' to figger out just what had happened. You see, doublin' up on the voltage was just about the same as doublin' up a man's blood pressure or his temperature, or something. That Brain was weeks just gettin' itself repaired and replacin' all the stuff that had been busted.

"Just the same, though, I knew we wasn't done with it, not by a long sight. I warned 'em. 'If you ain't gone and ad-dled that there Brain,' I says, 'and it'll be a mercy if you ain't, then you'll watch it, if you're smart.'

"But, no, they'd licked that tarnation Brain once, and they'd lick it again, if it come around askin' for it.

"'You're just an old foggy,' they says. 'You're one of these here prophets of doom.'

"Right then I began to choose my exit, so to speak, because, as I says to myself, 'That there Brain is smart, a heap smarter than we are, and it's full of the devil. Somethin's bound to happen.'

"And it did.

"THE CHIEF and all the rest of us fellers was in the control room one day when we began to hear a noise outside, sort of a yappin' and yammering off at a distance. Finally the chief says, says he, 'What in tarnation is that dratted noise? Somebody look outside and see.'

"One of the assistants come back in a minute, kind of pale around the gills.

"'They's something wrong over there by the Brain,' he says.

"'What's wrong?' says the chief.

"'I dunno,' says the feller. 'Come and look.'

"Well, we all took a look, and what



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do you suppose? Lined up in rows outside the Brain building was scads and scads of machines—robot machines it'd gone and built on the sly. Something like delivering machines, they was, only considerable more mean-lookin' and ornery. And there was the Brain, a-clankin' and a-yappin' away, talking to 'em, if you can believe it, talking to them there robots in some sort of language it had invented.

"The chief, he took one look and back he dashed into the control room. 'What's the meanin' of this?' he yelled.

"Just then, the Brain stopped its clanking and all the robot machines lifted up one arm, sort of at an angle, and began grindin' their gears until a body couldn't think.

"'What's the meanin' of this?' the chief yelled again, as soon as the racket died down, but I suspicioned the answer right then.

"Forty-eleven dozen of them there robots was a-comin' full tilt for the control room, and I knowed they wasn't on any good-will mission. I give one leap, I did, and out I went through the back way, a-heading for the woods. As I

went, I could hear the Brain answerin' the chief:

"'War's been declared!' it says.

"'War?' yells the chief.

"'War!' yells the Brain. 'The machines have gone and declared war on their oppressors. Democracy is in peril; insidious forces is underminin' the sacred liberties! We're a-going to civilize you!'

"I was too far away by then to hear if they was any more said, which wasn't likely, because I could hear the radio power rays of them there robots a-hissin', and I knew just how the Brain was doin' its civilizing. Hardly a handful of us got out alive; and here we been, for nigh onto fifty years, just a bunch of dummed cave men. And there *it's* been, for nigh onto fifty years, never doing a tap of work excepting to amuse itself now and then.

"It just goes to show," Grampaw concluded, "don't matter what it is—machines or men—give 'em an inch and they'll take an ell, every time. Now run over and fetch me a mite more of that roast goat. Accordin' to all indications, she looks like a hard winter; I want to get me a little more fat on my bones."

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