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## THE FINAL FIGURE

Novelet of the Day After Tomorrow

by Sam Merwin, Jr.

*(illustrated by Paul Orban)*

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### The General had an unpleasant vision as he watched this model in operation....

The General was in mufti. He stood briefly within the entrance of *Models and Miniatures, Inc.*, feeling a mild envy of the civilians who brushed past him, coming and going. They looked so easy, so relaxed, so casual in posture and dress. He was wistfully aware of the West Point ramrod that was his spine, the razor-edged bandbox neatness of his banker's grey suit, the Herbert Hoover four-squareness of his homburg, the stiff-symmetry of his dark-blue fore-in-hand.

He found compensation in visualizing some of these casual civilians in uniform—then shuddered, and moved on into the shop, poise and assurance restored.

Save for the display-counters and wall-cases, the shop was softly lighted. And although it was well filled with customers and lookers of all ages there was about it the hushed quality of a library—or a chapel. Even the children talked softly as they pointed at and discussed this 100-gauge English locomotive or that working jet-model of a Vought-Chance *Cutlass*. They were well-aware of being in sight of wish and dream-fulfillment.

He moved slowly toward the rear of the shop, past the glass counters that displayed gaily-painted models of carriages, coaches and early automobiles; past the fire-engines in red and gold; past the railroads; past the planes and past the tiny ships—from Phoenician galleys and Viking vessels with gaudily-decorative sails and shields to the latest bizarre-decked atomic aircraft carrier.

He stood in front of the miniature soldiers and, for a happy moment, recaptured the glamour of parades and gay uniforms that had beckoned him into a career whose color and band-music had long since been worn off by the nerve-wracking tragedy of battle and the endless ulcerating paper-work of peace.

*Busman's holiday*, he thought. *Sailors in a rowboat in Central Park*. And he was glad he had not worn his uniform.

Each miniature-soldier manufacturer had a glass shelf to his own wares, labeled with a white-cardboard rectangle upon which his name had been neatly brushed with India ink. Here were the comparatively rude Britains, mass-produced, work-horses of toy armies throughout the Western World since before his own boyhood.

Here were the heavy and magnificent Courtleys, specializing in medieval knights and men-at-arms, beautifully caparisoned in all the colors of the rainbow. Here were the Barker Napoleonics, the one-inch Staddens, the incredible half-inch Emery Penninsulars—each a costly little work of art that defied the enlarging of a magnifying glass. Here were Comets in khaki and grey, perfect models of the guns, tanks and trucks of America, England and Soviet Russia.

To his left along the counter a chunky blond citizen, with wide cheekbones and a faint Slavic

Was it a wild talent that MacReedy had, or was it just prophetic genius that led him to figure out new, improved ordnance weapons and make models of them—before the armed forces had them? Whichever it was, MacReedy was both valuable and dangerous—and when the general saw MacReedy's final figure, the weapons following the mobile rocket A-missile launcher....

accent, was discussing a sale with the clerk. The general was only subconsciously aware of him as he moved in that direction, marveling a little at the painstaking craftsmanship, the endless hours of eye-destroying labor that had produced such microscopic perfection—as well as at some of the follies with which men had attired themselves in the name of martial glory.

He recalled having read of an order, issued at the time of the Mexican War, that the collars of all officers in the United States Army should rise to the tips of the ears. It was scarcely surprising, he thought, that the Seminoles—clad virtually in nothing at all—should have been able to stalemate an army thus uniformed in the steaming swamps of Florida.

"They're great, aren't they?"

The voice came from a lower level, and the General looked down to meet the excited blue eyes of a curly-haired male moppet who could scarcely have been more than twelve. There was an aura of friendliness about the leather-jacketed-and-corduroyed youngster, a sharing of manifest interest, that pierced the hide of the old soldier.

He smiled back and said, "Quite wonderful," and was briefly afraid his words had been too condescending. But the quick answering smile on the youngster's face revealed that he had said the right thing.

He followed the lad's rapt gaze to a shelf he had not yet studied. The name on its cardboard label read *MacReedy* and as soon as he saw the tiny figures it supported, his interest became focused upon it to the exclusion of all other shelves and their fascinating displays.

MacReedy was very evidently a specialist. His subject was American soldiery, with its chief emphasis on artillery—from early Colonial times to the present. As one of the highest-ranking officers in the Ordnance Department of the United States Army, the General's critical interest was aroused.

Here were the demi-culverins of the Manhattan Dutch, the brass field-pieces and mortars of the French wars and the Revolution, the light horse artillery cannon of the Mexican and Civil Wars, along with pear-shaped Dahlgren and Parrot siege-guns, each piece with its crew of aimers, loaders, rammers and ammunition bearers.

Here were the crowbar-like dynamite guns that protected New York and Boston and Baltimore against threatened British invasion during the Newfoundland fisheries disputes, back in the 1880's; and the complex disappearing cannon that followed them. Here was the old standard three-inch fieldpiece on which the General had cut his own eyeteeth; here the French 75 and 155, long and short, and the mammoth railway guns of World War One. Here was even a model of the postwar American 75—the ill-fated cannon that had proved so accurate on the firing-range, and so utterly useless after a half-mile over a bumpy road.

Here were the weapons of World War Two, from M-7 105 self-propelled howitzer to the 240-millimetre tractor-borne cannon. And here were more recent weapons, the 120-millimetre radar-aimed anti-aircraft cannon; its newer automatic 75-millimetre cousin; the new 90-millimetre turret-mount for the Walker Bulldog, the 105-gpf in the turret of its new heavy tank.

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The General felt a stir of alarm. There had been a leak somewhere; release on this model was not scheduled for another month. He would have to report it, of course. Then he shrugged, inwardly. Leak or not there was small cause for alarm; *They* must long-since have managed to scrounge test-run photographs, if not copies of the blueprints themselves.

Still, a leak was bad business with the country so precariously balanced in a combustible world-situation. He looked at the next weapon, the last in the line.

And froze....

Here was the XT-101, with its rear-mounted turret and twin dual-purpose automatic 75-millimetre cannon. Here was a weapon, complete, that had not been completed in actuality—there was trouble with the turret, of course, there always was....

It couldn't be—but it was. The General discovered that his mouth had slackened in surprise; he closed it firmly. He eyed the turret of the miniature, noted how the automatic range-finding devices, that were causing trouble at Aberdeen, were incorporated into the turret itself, in a neat armored sheath.

He thought, *Lord! I wonder if that's the answer....* Then he thought that, if it were, the whole world would soon know it.

"A honey, isn't it?" said the curly-headed lad. He added, wistfully, "It costs twelve dollars and eighty-six cents, with tax."

"It's a honey, all right," said the General automatically. Actually, he was appalled—a possibly decisive weapon on sale to all and sundry for twelve dollars and eighty-six cents! Of course the intricate inner workings weren't there. But *They* knew enough about radar and automatic cannon to be able to figure it out from the model.

The General took direct action. He went to the clerk and said, "How many have you?" pointing to the subject of his question.

"Neat—perfect workmanship," said the clerk, donning his selling clothes.

"How many?" the General repeated.

"Only the one in the case left," the clerk replied. "I just sold the last one in stock a moment ago. We've only had four delivered so far."

"I'll take it," said the General in a fever of impatience. He *had* to get it out of public view at once—although he had a sick sensation of already being too late. He recalled the Slavic appearance, the accent of the man who had made the last purchase.

When the clerk had wrapped it up, and he had paid for it, the General asked to see the manager, who proved to be a pleasantly tweedy individual. He produced his card and said, "I'm afraid this man MacReedy has violated security-regulations. Where else is his stuff marketed?"

The manager's expression was not friendly. He said, "Mr. MacReedy's *miniatures* are marketed nowhere else; he has an exclusive contract with us." He evidently resented the General's gruff approach as much as the General resented not being addressed by title.

*Civilians!* the General thought. *The damned fools don't understand—they haven't the slightest idea....*

Aloud he said, "Where can I find Mr. MacReedy? I'm afraid I'm going to have to talk to him."

"Uncle Angus? He lives next door. I'm going home now—I can show you."

The General had forgotten the male moppet. He looked down in surprise, then up at the manager, who said, "It's quite true. This is Toby. He helps Mr. MacReedy; he's a collector himself in a small way."

The General took Toby back with him to the hotel. He knew he should be burning up the wires to Washington with news of his horrendous discovery, but somehow he wanted to see it through himself—as far as he was able. Besides, there were certain puzzling facets that would scarcely look plausible in the dehydrated prose of an official report to Security.

It smacked almost of the supernatural. Eyeing his small guest, who was happily and rather messily devouring a piece of French pastry, accompanied by a bottle of ginger-ale—sent up by room service—the General suppressed a chill that rose from his coccyx to his cervical vertebrae.

Like most veteran men of action, the General did not decry the supernatural—such decrying was the property of armchair logicians. In the course of his long career he had seen too many things that defied logic or logical explanation. He said, "Ready to take off, Toby?"

"Yes, sir," said the lad. He was properly impressed with the General's rank—revealed to him by the assistant manager in the lobby. Then, with a sudden shadow of anxiety, "You aren't going to arrest Uncle Angus, are you, sir?"

The General managed a chuckle. No sense in getting the lad scared. "No, I just want to talk to him."

"I'll go with you," the lad offered. "Most grownups have a hard time talking to Uncle Angus. Even dad...." Whatever was his father's problem with the prophetic model-maker remained unstated, as Toby managed to wrap lips and teeth around a large final piece of pastry. He then went to the bathroom to wash his hands before they went downstairs, to where the General's car was waiting.

## 2

The sight of the huge olive-drab Cadillac limousine with its two-starred flag and white trimmed and be-fourragered sergeant-chauffeur seemed to awe Toby, who lapsed into mere occasional monosyllables during the drive through the late afternoon to his Long Island home. It was as if, since the General was in mufti, the lad had not quite been able to believe in his reality—until official car and chauffeur offered proof.

This was quite all right with the General, who was desperately trying to rearrange the chaos of his thoughts into some sort of order. He knew he was being dangerously imaginative for a man in his position. But what if this MacReedy actually could foresee the future, at least in its military manifestations?

Granting this impossibility, how could the man be used? The General shuddered at the thought of "selling" anyone with such a gift to the Combined Chiefs of Staff—those quiet-eyed, low-voiced, strictly pragmatic men on whom, perhaps, the future of country and world depended. Even if they by some wild chance accepted the impossibility, he knew full well what would be the tenor of their thoughts—and therefore of their questions.

One of them would be sure to say, "Very well, General, but if we put our planning in the hands of this man—seeking a short route to decisive superiority of armament—how do we know he won't make a mistake, or lead us up the garden path? How do we know he hasn't been planted for this

very purpose?"

How did he know? The General decided he didn't. Yet how could any man with such a private power be permitted to exercise his rights of free citizenship? He damned MacReedy, the enemy, the world and himself, and got resettled in his corner of the soft rear seat.

They had left the sun behind them, setting in a dust-pink mist behind the soft-edged towers of Manhattan. By the time they reached Flushing it had begun to snow—big soft flakes whose crystalline dissimilarities were almost visible to the naked eye as they settled against the car windows into wet evanescence. Up ahead the twin windshield-wipers ground them silently and methodically into wet-rimmed circle segments.

"I hope it lasts," said Toby from his window. "I got a sled for Christmas. I haven't been able to use it."

"You'll get your chance," said the General. Damn it, he wondered, what kind of man was Angus MacReedy—if he was a man. Somehow the silent snow, the waning traffic, the oncoming twilight, combined into a sense of ominous portent. It was as if the car were standing still, while a perilous future rushed toward it.

"We turn left at the next traffic light, sir," said Toby.

They turned. They skirted a thinly-settled swampy area on a narrow road, against a background of scrubby pines. The sprawling metropolis might have been on some other continent, some other planet. They met only one car—a long black sedan, that slithered past them on the skiddy road-surface, missing them by inches.

The house where they pulled to a halt at Toby's direction was not large. It had been put up early in the century, and its motif was that of the high-gabled Swiss chalet. Mercifully the snow gave it a touch of quaintness, almost of rightness, despite the absence of lowering alps. Toby pointed to a similar structure about a hundred yards further down the road. "That's where I live," he said.

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MacReedy answered the door. He was a tall, angular man with a long, angular face—from which small blue eyes peered alertly. He wore a grey glen-plaid reefer that was buttoned wrong, a dark blue-flannel shirt and covert slacks that needed a press. He said, "Hello, Toby—you've brought company, I see."

"This is General Wales," said the lad very politely. "General—Uncle Angus."

The General had a ridiculous fugitive memory—"Alice, mutton—mutton, Alice." He shook hands with the model-maker.

"Honored, General," said MacReedy. He ushered them into a living room, whose desk and tables and mantel were literally covered with miniature American soldiery. He said, "Sorry the place is such a mess"—picking up the morning paper from the carpet beside a worn but comfortable-looking easy-chair—"but I wasn't expecting callers. I just had to boot out some sort of a mad Russian."

"*What!*" The general didn't mean to bark but couldn't help it.

MacReedy grinned quietly and said, "This fellow said he was assistant military attache, or something. Offered me all kinds of money to do some work for him."

"What did he look like?" the General asked.

MacReedy, filling a corn-cob pipe that appeared to be near the close of its short life, paused to say, "Like nothing special—not nearly as distinguished as you, General. Blond, chunky fellow with a bit of accent. Not a lot, but enough."

The General exchanged glances with Toby. He knew, without asking, that the boy was thinking the same as himself; it was the man who had bought the XT-101 model in the shop earlier that afternoon.

MacReedy got his pipe going and said through a small blue cloud of smoke, "How does the exhibit look, Toby? Have they got it right?"

"Pretty good, Uncle Angus," said the lad seriously. "They got the Mexican and Black Hawk War units mixed up, but I guess we can't blame them for that."

"I guess we can't," said MacReedy. He turned to the General, added, "Now, sir, what can I do for you? Or need I ask?"

"I have a hunch you know pretty well what I'm after," said the General. "My predecessor must have given you some idea."

"I've been afraid of this," said MacReedy with a sigh. "It's what I deserve for trying to show off to Toby."

"I don't understand," said the General.

"I was trying to show Toby how good I was," he said, ruffling the boy's curly hair. "Then, when I got that seventy-five AA-gun doped out ahead of time—and it proved correct—I had to go one step further. I should never have let the model out of the house."

"I'd like to see your workshop," said the General.

Angus MacReedy removed his pipe and said, "Come along."

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The basement ran the length and width of the house. Although furnace and fuel-storage were walled off in a separate room at one end it still provided a sizable workroom, enough for three long wooden tables. On one of them MacReedy carved his tiny figures and cannon and vehicle parts from solid chunks of lead. Another was used for painting, a third for drying.

On this third table were a half-dozen more of the XT-101's—along with a group of Confederate cannons and their field-pieces, some Indians, a small group of knights in armor, and what appeared to be Roman Legionaries.

The General pointed to these and said, "I didn't know you went in for them. I thought you were strictly an American specialist."

MacReedy puffed at his pipe, then said, "I'm doing these for Toby—in return for his services as delivery boy and all-around helper. I'm trying to teach him history in reverse."

"Odd concept," said the General.

"It works—doesn't it, Toby?" MacReedy said to the lad.

"Uncle Angus says it will help me when I take history in college," Toby said stoutly. "This is King Henry the Fifth at Agincourt—just like Sir Lawrence Olivier in the movie. And this is Genghis Khan. And here is Tamerlaine, and Charles Martel, and Caesar...."

"I see," said the General. He was a little overwhelmed at so much evidence of one man's individual craftsmanship and industry. He eyed the XT-101's with malevolent interest, then studied a nearly-finished weapon on the carving table. It looked like....

It was! One of the just-conceived, self-reloading rocket-launchers on armored mobile carriage with amphibious tractor-treads. He said, his voice dry and tight, "Where'd you get this, MacReedy?"

MacReedy wandered over to stand beside him. He said, "I didn't *get* it anywhere; it just seems like the logical next step in ordnance, General. I've had pretty good luck in the past, figuring things out this way. I had the Sherman tank plotted back in nineteen-forty—just before I was drafted. I hadn't dared trust my hunches till I saw my first one two years later at Pine Camp."

"You were in the Army?"

"Six years," said MacReedy. "Two years here in camp and Officer's Candidate School, then two abroad—Sicily, Anzio and the Rhone Valley. I stopped a piece of shell near Lyon, and put in the rest of my time in hospital."

"Rough," said the General though he had neither the time nor the interest for sympathy. "Tell me how you 'figure' these things out. The Sherman tank, if you wish."

MacReedy wagged his head modestly. "It wasn't too difficult, once I'd seen the General Grant. That one obviously wouldn't do; it was too high, needed a full-pivot turret. Yet the basic design was there—anyone who'd thought about it could have done the same. But it was a pleasant shock to learn I'd been right."

"I see," said the General. "And you did the others by the same process—and you're always right?"

"Not always," replied MacReedy. "I fluffed badly on the atomic cannon. I expected a longer barrel for greater muzzle-velocity and range; here, I'll show you." He led the way to a dusty wall shelf where imperfect and broken models crowded together. There was the A-cannon—not as it had appeared, but as the General knew it was going to look in two years, when certain needed changes were made.

He said, "An understandable error. Unfortunately, mobility had to be considered." He paused, looked MacReedy straight in the eye. "I hope you didn't show any of this to your—previous visitor."

MacReedy laughed. "Hardly," he replied. "I'm American, never fear. I'm just one of the lucky few who has been able to make a good living out of my hobby; I have no axes to grind."

"We may have an axe to grind with you," said the General with a hint of grimness. The rocket-launcher and the improved A-gun were like the one-two punch of a good heavyweight-hitter. He went back to the XT-101, said, "About this twin-mount tank—how'd you figure we'd mount the automatic machinery outside the turret?"

"That wasn't too difficult—if I'm right; and I gather I am," said MacReedy. "There's simply too much stuff to put inside a tank-turret; you've got to mount it outside. And that means plenty of

protection, which means an extra armored sleeve. So...."

### 3

The General said, "MacReedy, why are you showing me this? I could be an imposter, a spy."

"With that official limousine?" the model-maker countered. "I doubt it. Besides, Toby vouches for you."

"Risky," said the General.

"Besides," said MacReedy with the suggestion of a smile, "I've seen your picture in *Life* magazine." He paused, added, "After all, in my humble way I'm a bit of an ordnance nut myself."

"I don't believe you," said the General flatly—"I mean about working these things out through logic and guesses. But however you do it, surely you can appreciate that you're much too dangerous to be walking around loose. Especially since *They* know about you. I'm afraid I'm going to have to take you back with me."

"Nothing doing," said MacReedy. "I can take care of myself. Besides, this is my home. I like it here."

"You're being close to treasonable," said the General.

"Not I—*you* are," came the incredible reply. "You, not I, are attempting to deny a citizen his rights under the Constitution."

"Damn it, man!" the General backpedaled quickly. "Can't you understand? Suppose *They* got hold of you—*They'd* have you dishing up our innermost secrets to them ahead of time. I don't need to tell you what that could mean in the present world situation."

"You don't, General," said MacReedy. "But I don't think *They'd* get much out of me—much that was useful, I mean. I can't think clearly under drugs or torture; I'd be more of a menace than a help. I explained that to my visitor before you came. He seemed to believe me."

"Maybe *he* did," said the baffled General, "but don't bet on his superiors. You've been an Army officer, MacReedy; I can have you called back into service."

"With a permanent medical discharge?" MacReedy countered.

The General sighed. He knew when he was beaten. He said, "You'll have to stand for a guard then—twenty-four hours. We'll keep them out of sight as much as possible." He wished the whole business were rationally explicable to his own superiors. As it was he knew his hands were tied when it came to drastic action.

"I suppose it's necessary," said MacReedy sadly, but not defiantly; "I should never have tried to show off."

"It's too late for that sort of thing," said the General. "I'm going to have to take some of your models with me—it's too late to do much about the new tank, but I'll have to have the rocket-launcher and the A-gun. And I'll want your promise not to indulge in any more such experiments except as I request."

"That I am glad to give you," said MacReedy and there was no doubting the sincerity of his words.

"I'll pay you for them," offered the General.

"Of course," replied the model-maker; "my name isn't MacReedy for nothing."

As he handed over a couple of hundred dollars the General found himself almost liking the man. *Damn these screwballs*, he thought. He wondered when he was going to wake up and find it hadn't happened. It *couldn't* be happening, any of it. But the perilously-perfect models, of weapons that were yet to be, felt terribly real to his touch.

He said, "Toby, run upstairs and tell Sergeant Riley to come down here and take some stuff out to the car." And, when the boy was gone, "MacReedy, will you do some work for us?"

"Of course," said the other. "A man gets feeling a bit useless making toy soldiers in times like these."

"The pay won't be much...." the General began.

"I can afford it," said MacReedy with the unexpected generosity of the true Scotsman. "What do you want me to do?"

"*They* have a new weapon building," said the General. "All we've got are a few spy-photographs—not very good, I'm afraid."

"What sort of weapon?" the model-maker asked.

"That's just it—we don't know," replied the General. "I'm going to send you what we have on it tomorrow; I'm hoping you can give us a line on its purpose." He paused, added grimly, "As it is we don't know how to meet it. We haven't an inkling. It's given the Chief a whole new patch of

grey hairs."

"I'll do what I can," said MacReedy. "But don't expect the moon."

"All I want is the nature and purpose of that weapon—if it *is* a weapon," was the General's reply. Then Toby and Sergeant Riley came clumping down the stairs and the conference was at an end.

Before he left the General gave Toby five dollars. "That's for bringing me here," he told the lad. "You'll be seeing me again."

"Yes, sir," said Toby. He didn't sound at all surprised.

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When he got back in the car alone, the general counted the models on the seat beside him—one rocket-launcher, one A-gun. He said, "Riley, how are we fixed for gas?"

"Pretty good, sir," came the reply. "We can make the city okay, sir."

"Fill up before you get there," the General told him. "We're going right on through to Washington tonight."

"But, sir, I haven't notified the motor pool at Governor's Island," the Sergeant protested.

"Damn the motor pool!" the General exploded. "I'll take care of them. Now get going; we've got a long drive ahead."

The big car gathered speed through the thickening night snow.

The General slept most of the way, after he and the Sergeant stopped for dinner at a Howard Johnson restaurant on Route One, just north of New Brunswick. After a shower, a change into uniform and breakfast, he was in sound operating shape when he reached his office at the Pentagon the next morning.

He arranged for a round-the-clock guard of Angus MacReedy's house, ordered investigation of the model-maker's record, had a copy of the complete file on the possible enemy weapon forwarded to Long Island by special messenger. Then he summoned a special meeting of top-echelon Ordnance brass and produced the models of the XT-101, the self-reloading rocket launcher and the improved A-gun.

If such a Broadway-Hollywood term as *sensational* could be used in any connection with a Pentagon conference, the General's meeting with his colleagues might have qualified for it. Experts were quick to understand the practicability of the models, quick to recast their plans accordingly.

Within the week, he was summoned before the Combined Chiefs and commended by that body for his clear-sightedness in cutting Gordian knots of the most baffling order. There was talk of a third star and appointment as Chief of Ordnance once the somewhat-doddering incumbent was retired, come June. He was a sort of brown-haired white-haired boy. He was interviewed by representatives of three national newsweeklies.

Though he wore his new honors gracefully, actually the General was thoroughly uncomfortable. He was far more concerned with the safety of the country than with his own advancement; and his ego was much too solidly-based to permit him enjoyment of honors that were not rightfully his.

The worst of it was that he couldn't explain. If he told his superiors that his "inspirations" came from the intuitive head of a toy-soldier maker on Long Island who even denied his intuition in the name of logic—not only would his own career be permanently damaged, but the value of MacReedy's models would be suspected. So much so that they might be disregarded entirely—thus retying the Gordian knots that were stymying the armament program.

MacReedy's file was laid on his desk one morning by a plump WAC secretary. It was exactly as the model-maker had stated: he was American-born, only child of a Scottish engineer and a German-American woman from Wisconsin. He held an engineering degree from a small polytechnical institute in upstate New York.

His war-record was exemplary. At the time of his wound in Central France, MacReedy had been a captain in the Combat Engineers, wearer of a silver star won at Anzio. There was a complete medical-report on the wound and treatment, whose technical jargon was too much for the General. All he could gather was that it was a head-wound and brain injury, which had rendered the model-maker unfit for Army duty.

He took the report to his opposite number in the Medical Corps, a man whose abilities in brain-surgery were mentioned in hushed voices at Johns Hopkins. Over a highball he told the whole story for the first time, hoping it wouldn't be received with hoots.

It wasn't. The white-haired surgeon looked long and meditatively at his drink. Then he said, "Kermit, I can't begin to account for it; I have muddled around in the human brain enough to know that what we like to call our scientific knowledge is at best empirical. You say this man had his ability *before* he was wounded?"



"He built a Sherman tank two years before we did," said the General. "Yet he claims the whole process is purely logical."

"Logic!" exclaimed the brain-man with a scorn that matched the General's own on the subject. "Logic is hindsight, Kermit. When our brains, by some intuitive process of progressive thought, reach a desired point, our egos reach backward to give the process a sort of order we call logic. Actually we seldom know how we get where we do; but we're too damned conceited to admit it."

"What in hell do we know about the brain?" he went on. "I knew a perfectly healthy young girl once, who was killed when she was standing beside her horse—the horse sneezed, jerked his head up, and jolted the side of her jaw. Yet back in seventeen eighty-one, when Arnold ordered the massacre at Fort Griswold, one old rebel was bayoneted, had his skull smashed open so that his brains were oozing out on the ground. He recovered and lived for forty years afterward, sane as you please. And they didn't have fellows like me, not then. If they had, he'd probably have died on the operating table."

"In other words you don't know," said the General.

"I don't know, Kermit," replied the other. "Another drink?"

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The next day the international situation showed signs of serious deterioration, and the General took a plane to New York. All the way up he thought of something else the Surgeon-General had said to him—"One thing I have learned, it isn't exactly in my province, but I've run into it enough to make an observation.

"Whenever I've met anyone with what might be called a special gift—psychic or what have you—I've found them scared to death of it. Damned if I know why...."

He ruminated a little before continuing. "You'd think they'd be delighted—but they aren't. They either run to religion, and try to drown it in ritual—or they try to explain it away by some rationalization. Like your friend."

"Then you're willing to accept the fact he has a supernatural gift?" the General asked.

The brain-man shrugged and said, "Supernatural—supernormal—he's got something, if what you tell me is true. Can you think of a better 'ole?"

#### 4

When he was driven up to the Long Island chalet early that afternoon, the General was pleased to see a command car parked unobtrusively off the road, a sentry sitting in an impromptu sentry-box made of pine bows, that commanded a good view of the approaches. At least, he thought, *They* wouldn't find MacReedy easy to get at. According to the reports he had seen there had been no further attempts.

Toby opened the door. He said, "Hello, General, this is fine. We were going to send you a message tonight."

The General shook hands and said, "Progress?" and, when the boy nodded excitedly, "Why aren't you in school?"

"It's after three o'clock," was the devastating reply, as Toby led him toward the cellar stairs. The General wondered briefly how much he had managed to forget in his fifty-two years.

Angus MacReedy was working at his carving table with a blow-up of the spy-pictures tacked to the cellar wall in front of him, a pile of rough-sketched plans on the table. He rose and said, "I was just doing a little polishing, General. But you hit it about right."

"Good," said the General. "Got it solved?"

"I think so," said the model-maker. "Take a look."

It was an eerie-looking item—a sort of stove-pipe mounted on a disc, surrounded by a flock of flying buttresses. Frowning the General peered at it, then looked at the blow-ups on the walls. From the correct angle, the similarity was ominously unmistakable. He said, "What in hell is it, Captain?"

MacReedy grinned. "Looks weird, doesn't it? It had me stumped for the better part of a week. There's only one thing it could be and that's what it is. Look...."

He picked up a sort of miniature torpedo from the work-table, dropped it down the stove-pipe. The thing worked like a trench-mortar. Some spring in the base of the tube sent the rocket flying in a high arc to smack the opposite wall and drop to the floor.

"It's a mobile rocket-launcher," he said needlessly. "I'd lay odds it can be used for atomic warheads."

"Good Lord!" cried the General. His mind was in a racing turmoil. The problem with the Nazi V-1 and V-2 weapons during World War Two had been the immobility of their launching platforms. If

*They* had managed to get around it....

He thought of an insuperable obstacle, said, "But what about back-blast? Don't tell me they've found a metal able to stand up under the heat of launching."

"I doubt it," replied MacReedy seriously. "They use this barrel to give her a boost like a trench-mortar shell. My hunch is the rocket doesn't fire until she's well off the ground."

"Is it accurate?" the General asked, thunderstruck.

"Is a trench-mortar accurate?" the model-maker countered. "Ask anybody who's been in Korea."

It was a wallop for the General. Atomic rocket-launchers, mobile rocket-launchers that could function as artillery, could outrange the A-gun perhaps by hundreds of miles. And if the missiles thus fired could be guided—he could see no reason why not—the A-gun was already obsolete.

He sat down on a packing box and mopped his brow although the cellar was far from hot. He said and his voice was unsteady, "Thanks, MacReedy, I think maybe you have done it."

"I think so," said the model-maker. He wasn't boasting, but he was sure of himself. "You want to take it along with you? It should be quite simple to make. I've got a few improvements over *Their* supports, I think."

"If it's the last thing I do," said the General, rising, "I'm going to see you get credit for what you've done."

MacReedy made a gesture of dismissal. "Don't let it bother you, General," he said. "I like my work. Maybe you could arrange for me to make some models for the War College."

"Hell, why not the Smithsonian?" said the General. "Why not both? We ought to have a historical ordnance exhibit somewhere. And you're the man, no doubt about it."

As he left with the precious model MacReedy asked, "By the way, General, what do you want me to work on next?"

The General hesitated, then said, "Follow your hunches—logic if you will. Let's see what the next weapon after this one is going to be. You've been ahead of us the rest of the way."

"I'll see what I can do," said MacReedy with his quiet smile. "Let me know how things come out."

"That I will," said the General. Toby walked with him to the car and the General gave him another five dollars. He wished he could do something more for both of them; but at the moment it was out of the question.

---

It was almost six months before the General got back to the Long Island chalet. Thanks to his now fully-established reputation as an inventive genius, he was able to get a full speed ahead order on the new-type mobile rocket-launcher. MacReedy's improvements were valid, and the Department experts came up with further simplifications. By the time they were ready to go into production they actually had the weapon self-propelled, were well ahead of *Them* on mobility, range and accuracy. It promised to be a military revolution.

Then the General had to make a flying trip around the world—to visit American military installations in Western Europe, in Italy and Spain, in Africa, Formosa, Japan and Korea. He got back to Washington, a thoroughly tired man, and walked into both his promised third star and the Chiefship of the Department. Also into an international situation worse than any since September, 1939—when the Nazis invaded Poland.

*They* were pushing aggressively in both Europe and Asia, pushing with an arrogance that suggested they felt they could win in a walk if the free nations of the world offered large-scale military defiance. Rumors of a terrible secret weapon were being bruited about—not only in hush-hush military circles but in the public prints as well. One picture magazine of national circulation had actually published an article stating that *They* had mastered pushbutton warfare.

The General, and the Combined Chiefs made a hurried and secret trip to Aberdeen the day after his return. There, on the proving ground, they watched a big transport-plane land on a makeshift airstrip. They saw a small group of soldiers unload from the plane an odd-looking tractor-mounted weapon that resembled an immense stove-pipe with certain refinements.

They saw a lean sausage of a rocket rolled into a door near the base of the tube, watched a trifle nervously while it was elevated almost vertically. An order was barked, a button was pushed—and the rocket rose rapidly from the tube with a dullish report, rose to a height of perhaps a hundred yards.

Then, suddenly, its tail blossomed smoke and flame; it rose with a new lease on life, to disappear into the heavens, leaving a trail of smoke behind it. Pointing to a prefabricated building that stood alone, a mile away, the General said, "Watch that target, gentlemen," and lifted his field glasses to his eyes.

A minute later—fifty-eight seconds was the exact time—the structure was suddenly obliterated by

a tremendous explosion. The General sighed and said quietly, "That was TNT. We have a stockpile of atomic weapons ready."

"But the accuracy!" exclaimed a weathered full admiral. "With the wind and the earth's rotation to consid...." He hesitated, then said, "Oh, a guided missile."

The General nodded, and said, "We can put batteries of these new missile-launchers, completely-mobile and with atomic heads, anywhere in the world within twenty-four hours by plane. They have a reasonably effective range of small targets of just over two hundred miles—with air-guidance, of course, over target. Gentlemen, I think *They* are in for a surprise."

*They* got it two days later—in another special test of the new weapon. The General didn't even bother to watch it. His attention was focussed upon a stocky blond man who wore the gaudy shoulder-boards of a lieutenant colonel, and was present as assistant military-attache and qualified observer. His face remained impassive, save for a slight twitch of the lips, when the target was obliterated.

Which was enough to satisfy the General.

---

Denied a sure-thing victory *They* were forced to call off *Their* war—with violent internal results. It became quickly evident that *They* were going to be busy for a long time keeping order within their own boundaries. The international situation became easier and happier than at any time since Locarno.

The General, who was due shortly to receive his fourth star, played an active role in the military portion of the peace-making. He had little time even to think of Angus MacReedy and little Toby and the miracle-workroom on Long Island. When he did think of them it was with an inner warmth that was almost devout, with a resolve to see that the model-maker received a satisfactory reward.

Then one morning, while skimming through a stack of reports, a phrase caught his eye. It read—

*... and in accord with current fiscal retrenchment-policies, all personnel on special duty were called in for terminal assignments. These included....*

The report was from Second District HQ at Governor's Island. With a sinking sensation he scanned the list. There it was—special sentry-detail to guard house of Captain Angus MacReedy (ret). He picked up a telephone and called Governor's Island direct.

Yes, the detail had been withdrawn more than a week earlier.... No, there had been no report of trouble.... Hold on, there was something in the morning paper....

The General made it in less than two hours. Angus MacReedy had been shot in the back of his head the previous evening, while building model soldiers in his cellar workroom. A boy who lived next door and heard the shot while on his way to pay MacReedy a visit, had seen the murderer drive away in a black sedan. He had given the alarm and local constabulary had picked up the trail and given chase. Ignoring a red light, their quarry had been killed when his sedan was hit by a truck. He had no identification on him but appeared to be a stocky blond man of about forty. An alien pistol, recently discharged, had been found in the wreckage.

The General and Toby stood alone in the strangely empty workroom. Only an ugly, dark stain on the floor remained to mark the recent violence that had occurred there. The General looked at the table, then at the boy. He said, "Toby, do you know, what your Uncle Angus was working on recently?" He felt a little ashamed thus to try to pick the brains of a murdered man through a child.

"He'd been pretty busy with orders from the shop," said Toby thoughtfully. "And he'd just finished *that*." He nodded toward an unpainted lead miniature on the work-table.

The General looked at it closely, and felt the blood drain from his face. He had told MacReedy to try to work out the next weapon after the guided-missile launcher....

"Are you sick, General?" Toby asked, breaking in on his abstraction. "You mustn't take it so hard, sir."

"I'm—all right, Toby," he said. "It's been a bit of a shock, that's all."

"It's been horrible," said Toby, his voice quite steady. "Uncle Angus was a great man. I'll never be able to be as great."

"You'll never know till you try," said the General. He thought that *They* had not forgotten—*They* had killed him for losing *Them Their* war. It was up to him, the General, to see that Angus MacReedy's final prophecy proved false.

Well, he had the power now to carry a little weight—thanks to the murdered man. Standing there in the cellar, the General made a vow to see that during his lifetime the peace was kept, to help set up some sort of organization that would keep the peace when he was gone.

"Will it be okay for me to take this?" Toby had picked up the final figure and was regarding it

reverently.

"What? Oh, I don't see why not."

He said goodbye to the boy outside and got into his car for the drive back to the airfield. Hence, he didn't see Toby carry the unpainted figure the hundred yards to his house, didn't see Toby place it carefully at the end of a row of gay little figures that included Napoleon, Marlborough, Suleiman the Great, Charles XII of Sweden, Henry V, Tamerlaine, Genghis Khan, Charles Martel, Julius Caesar—and newer or perhaps older, figurines of Alexander the Great, Xerxes, Cyrus the Great, Nebuchadnezzar and a trio of even more primitive conquerors.

"Gee," said Toby to himself, "I'm sorry Uncle Angus had to be killed. But if he had to be killed, I'm glad he got my historical set just about finished. I can paint this cave-man myself."

A few minutes later his mother called him to supper.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE FINAL FIGURE \*\*\*

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