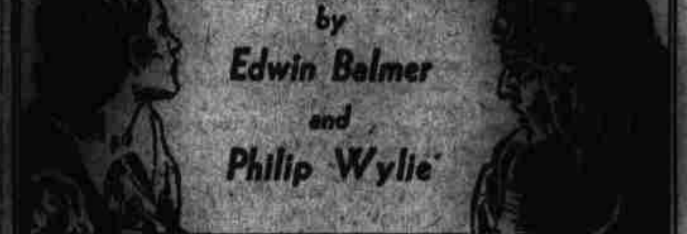


# AFTER WORLDS COLLIDE



by Edwin Balmer and Philip Wylie

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CHAPTER X—Continued  
—17—

Shirley grinned. "What a nice mauve-and-yellow shirt? Want a pair of red-and-silver shorts?"

"Any rigs? Any old iron? What's the trouble? Your clothing department running out of orders?"

"None. And when we do, we'll revive fashions—so you'll have to patronize Shirley Cotton's mills, whether you want to or not. Higgins is going to present some patterns."

"He never will, I trust."

"I'll bring him with a waistcoat in Bronson Beta orchids and mushrooms. By the way—how long have you been sitting in this cramped hole?"

"All morning. Why?"

"Then you haven't heard about the green rain?"

James looked at her with surprise. "Green rain?"

"Sure. Outdoors. Didn't amount to anything—but for about ten minutes it rained green."

"I'll be d-d! What was it?"

Shirley shrugged. "Search me. A green sky is bad enough. But a green rain—well, anything can happen. Higgins has bottles full of whatever it was—more like snow than rain—only not frozen. It misted the dome a little. And then—you probably haven't heard the rumor about Von Belts that was going around."

"Not now. A rumor. Scandal. I'd call it. People have been saying this morning that the spies hiding here are undoubtedly from the Midlanite gang. Some of them are Germans. Von Belts was a German. So they say that he wasn't kidnaped, but that he had always belonged to them, and merely joined them at the first opportunity."

Elliott James swore. "That's a lousy libel. Why, Von Belts is one of the whitest men I know. A great brain, and nerve! I fought side by side with that guy in Michigan, and—why—h—h—! He's practically a brother of mine. Why do you think I've been in every corner of this burg looking? Because Von Belts wouldn't turn us in for his life—that's why."

The handsome Shirley Cotton nodded. "I agree. But everybody's nervous these days."

"Heaven knows there's enough to make them nervous—"

They were interrupted by a banging on the door.

"Come in!" James called.

The door swung inward automatically. On the threshold stood Duquesne. He was ordinarily of

any sort of blockade—or cut wood under fire from an enemy. No." "The river, then?"

Duquesne spread his hands. "You have imagination, my boy. But already it is too cold. And to build a dam and hydro-electric plant takes months. I have thought of those things."

"In other words," Shirley said slowly, "if you are right about the Midlanites being in possession of the power plant, we'll have to take it away from them—or beat them somehow. Or else—"

James grinned bitterly. "Why not just leave it at, or else?"

"No. What's the trouble?"

The Frenchman stepped into the room, and the door closed behind him. "I have searched everywhere. James leaped to his feet. "You don't mean that Tony—"

"Oh—no, not lost. Just busy somewhere." Duquesne regarded the man and woman for a moment. "I was in a hurry to find him, because I have some very interesting information. I shall tell you. It is for the moment confidential."

"All," said the writer, as he had

to his previous guest. "What's it about?"

"The source of our power," James leaned forward. "You found it?"

"Not specifically. I have clung to the theory that power was generated under the city. When we learned that the interior of the planet was still warm, it seemed plausible that the power was generated from that heat—deep in the earth. So I explored. It was difficult. All the electrical connections are built into the very foundation of the city. They cannot be traced. My assistants meanwhile studied the plans of the city—we found many. The clue in them pointed always toward a place in the earth. We finally—this morning—located that place. It is far underground. But it is not a generating plant. No."

"What is it, then?" James asked.

"A relay station. A mere series of transformers. Stupendous in size and capacity. From it lead the great conduits—out, underground, deep down—toward the north. The station for this city is not here. It is, as we suspected, in some other city—or place. And all the cities near here derive their power from that place. This is the explanation of why, when the lights came in one city, they came in all. It was a central plant which had been turned on—and which supplied every city."

James leaned back. "I see. You mean that now it is sure that they have control of our power?"

"Exactly."

"And they can shut it off whenever they wish?"

"Precisely."

"So that—when it gets colder—they can cut our power and not only put out our lights, but stop our heat?"

"Right."

James tapped on his desk with the pencil he had been using.

"How much chance," he asked, "have we of setting up a power station of our own—a station big enough to heat a couple of buildings, and light them, all winter?"

Duquesne shrugged. "What do we use for fuel?"

"Not coal—we've seen none. Or oil. How about wood? These forests?"

"And how do we get wood here?"

"Trucks."

"And if our enemies are trying to freeze us into submission, would they let us save ourselves by running trucks day and night to distant forests for fuel? No. They would blow up the roads and bomb the trucks. It would take much wood to keep us warm. We could not run

My Assistants Meanwhile Studied the Plans of the City—We Found Many. The Clue in Them Pointed Always Toward a Place in the Earth. We Finally—This Morning—Located That Place."

My Assistant

CHAPTER XI

HIGGINS entered the dining hall at luncheon time in great excitement. Instead of taking his place he went to Tony and spoke for a moment. Tony stood, then, and struck a note on a gong. Immediate silence was the response.

"Doctor Higgins," said Tony, "has made a discovery."

Higgins stood. This ritual had been followed in the announcement of hundreds of discoveries relative to Bronson Beta, and the life, arts and sciences of its original inhabitants.

"It concerns the greenness of the sky," Higgins said. "We have all remarked upon it. We have agreed that normal light polarization would always produce blue. We have agreed that any gases which would cause a green tint in atmospheric—halogens, for example—would also be poisonous."

"This morning at seven-eighty, Bronson Beta time, we had a green rain of nine and a half Bronson Beta minutes' duration. I collected the precipitated substance. It proved to be the explanation of our atmospheric color." He took a vial from his pocket and held it up. Its contents were green. "The color is caused by this. A new form of life—a type of plant unknown on earth."

Arms were taken from racks, and at vantage points near the gates, men and women—some still carrying hastily snatched bits of food—took their posts.

The plane, meanwhile, had reached the dome of the city. It did not fly over, however. It did not drop bombs, or a message. Instead, it circled twice to lose altitude, and from a hatch in its fuselage a white flag was run up on a miniature mast.

Then it landed. By the time it touched the ground more than two hundred persons were on hand to see. The transparent cover of their city gave them a feeling of security. However, the flag of truce upon the plane did not encourage them to any careless maneuver.

The ship was expertly brought down to the ground, but afterward it behaved badly. It lurched crazily, hit a rock, smashed a wheel, dragged a wing—and its motor was cut. Then, half wrecked, it stopped. There it stood, like a bird shot down, for five full minutes. No one moved inside it. No one made an effort to descend.

Tony gathered his lieutenants and advisers together. "Ruse to get the gate open," Williams said. "I think so," Tony agreed.

A thought moved through the mind of Elliot James. He went to



Tony and Jack Taylor Emerged From the Half-Wrecked Plane and Pulled Out the Limp Form of Von Belts. Elliot and His Companion, Waterman, Ran Toward Them.

You are all familiar with the algae in the sea—minute plants which floated in the oceans of earth in such numbers as to change the color in many places. Very well. The higher atmosphere of Bronson Beta is crowded by plants in some ways similar. These plants are in effect tiny balloons. They germinate on the surface of the earth apparently, in the spring. As they grow (the ground everywhere must be covered by them) they manufacture within themselves hydrogen gas. They swell with it until, like small balloons, they rise. Their hydrogen holds them suspended high in the atmosphere during the summer and fall—trillions upon countless trillions of them. They make a level of this, greenish fog overhead. Examined microscopically, they reveal their secret at once.

"There is sufficient carbon dioxide and moisture to nourish them. They live by simple photosynthesis; and it is the chlorophyll they contain which makes them green—a characteristic of all terrestrial plants except the parasites. These plants reproduce from spores."

Higgins sat down.

His brief description was greeted by applause in which the botanists and biologists were most vehement.

Carter stood up. "About their precipitation, Higgins?"

Again Higgins took the floor. "I have only a theory to offer. Temperature. I believe that, although they are resistant to cold, an adequate drop in temperature will cause them to crack and lose their hydrogen. Then, naturally, they fall to earth."

"So you anticipate more green rain?"

"I do—a tremendous volume of it. And I may add that these plants fix nitrogen, so that their dead bodies, so to speak, will constitute a fine fertilizer, laid annually upon the soil of the entire planet."

Carter nodded. "Excellent, Higgins! Have you made calculations relative to the possible and probable depth of 'green rain' we may expect?"

"Only the roughest sort. But to give the color-intensity we observe in the sky I should imagine that the atmosphere contained enough of these vegetable balloons to cover the ground to a depth of two feet, at the least. Of course, decay would soon reduce the green blanket to a half inch or less; but in their expanded state two feet would be conservative as an estimate."

During that noonday meal the guards on the north gate saw one of the Midlanite planes moving toward the city.

It was not uncommon for an enemy plane to pass across their range of vision. This plane, however, was evidently headed for the city of Henderson. A swift car from the north gate brought news of the danger.

Too Much Gab  
Barber—Shall I go over it again? Victim—No; I heard it the first time.—Answers Magazine.

## Uncommon Sense

By JOHN BLAKE  
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An observing reporter said to me once: "Did you ever notice that when a city man comes out of his house he never looks up at the stars, but a country bred man always does?"

I hadn't noticed it. But from then on I did a little observing and was convinced that my friend was something of an observer on his own account.

I am glad that I thought about this difference, for now is the time when everybody should be an observer.

In the north and middle sections of the country the leaves are coming out, the blossoms are beginning to star the trees, and the brooks, many of them fed by snows that have hidden in fence corners and the edges of the wood, are beginning to sing their songs a little more energetically.

All seasons are miracle seasons on this earth of ours, but the miracles are somewhat more noticeable just now.

Even if you live in the city, and don't like to get your shoes muddy, it will be worth your while to go out of town every Sunday for quite a while.

You will find many things that will interest you—such as little craters in the ground that have been broken through by flower stems so delicate that you wonder how they can shoulder the hard earth out of their upward way.

The early blossoming maples will wear new dresses of pink and green, the pussy willows will be thrusting their little furry ears out into the sunlight, and here and there the really beautiful foliage plant that bears the undesired name of "skunk cabbage" will be rising up to flaunt its fan-like fronds in the open.

The animals, too, will be celebrating the season.

In a little while the farmer will be doing his spring plowing, with swarms of birds, mostly crows, alighting on the ground behind him to make a quick lunch of the worms his plowshare has brought up from beneath the surface of the soil.

And when the farmer grows a little weary, and leans against the fence to rest himself and his horses, you may learn from him a great many things about sowing and reaping that you never could have found out in a city office.

As a rule we rush through life so rapidly that when we draw near its close we can hardly tell what we have seen and heard.

But the farmer knows better.

If there were hundred of Dillingers loose in this country, instead of a few, they would prosper. Why? Crime soon becomes a safe prospect. What we are a lazy people. What we do not see, doesn't worry us.

Reading the papers, we grow concerned for a while, and say: "Something ought to be done about these bandits and murderers."

But the trouble is that we do not do anything but talk.

During the last few years there has been an appalling increase of crime.

Part of this is due to the fact that during the days of prohibition criminals enriched themselves by illicit traffic in liquor, and were easily able to build up small armies of robbers and murderers.

But comparatively few people ever witnessed any of the outrages these people committed.

The rest merely read about them in the newspapers, were shocked and alarmed for a while, and then forgot all about them.

If statistics could be gathered to show just how many people make their living by theft and murder, it would be found that they were in an extremely small minority.

When an epidemic of deadly diseases, like smallpox or cholera, breaks out, the people of the country are aroused, through fear, and take measures to end them.

Moving from street to street, in city or town, they see the warning cards posted up in windows, and say to themselves: "My family is in danger."

Then they are quick to back the authorities in putting an end to the contagion, and presently the peril is at an end.

But for one reason or another people do not get excited or alarmed about crimes that are committed in distant cities, or even in the city in which they live, if it happens to be a big one, where murders and wholesale thefts are almost every day occurrences.

Their usual observation is: "Something ought to be done about that," and then they go back to work or to the ball game, and are thankful that what has been happening to other unfortunates hasn't happened to them, and probably never will.

## CHECK EROSION, TO SAVE MONEY

Preservation of Soil Means Lower Taxes.

A taxpaying farmer saves twice when he controls erosion. He saves his basic capital, the soil. And he—and his neighbors also—save as taxpayers, says H. S. Riesbol, United States Department of Agriculture engineer.

When rain falls on a farm the water is an individual farm problem as long as it stays on that farm. The farmer may contrive to save it for his crops or he may let it rob him of his soil by sheet erosion or cut his farm land to pieces by gullying.

But when the water leaves the farm it begins to boost taxes for public works. When a farmer controls erosion, whether by terracing, by planting cover crops, or by strip cropping, he reduces both the quantity of water and the sediment that enters the streams. Also the water that escapes does so at a less rapid rate. Small streams do not flood so quickly or rise so high if the watershed is protected from erosion. Culverts and bridges, then, says Riesbol, need not be so large and expensive. If erosion is controlled, the streams are not so muddy and there is less expense in making water fit for municipal water supply or for irrigation. Reservoirs, often expensive structures, do not fill with silt so quickly.

Erosion control, Mr. Riesbol says, is still too new to have had much effect in making possible many notable economies in public works. Individual farmers have protected their fields, but it is only in the year or two that there have been organized demonstrations of what erosion control can do when applied to all or most of the land in a small watershed. This is the type of work, says Mr. Riesbol, which the civil engineers need to watch and study so that they will be ready to take advantage of the economies that will be possible as a result of checking the run-off of water and the waste of soil.

## DEBT TO SCIENCE

When sugar was first made from beets it required about 20 tons of beets to produce one ton of sugar; now it requires but six tons, the change being due to scientific production of beets.

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