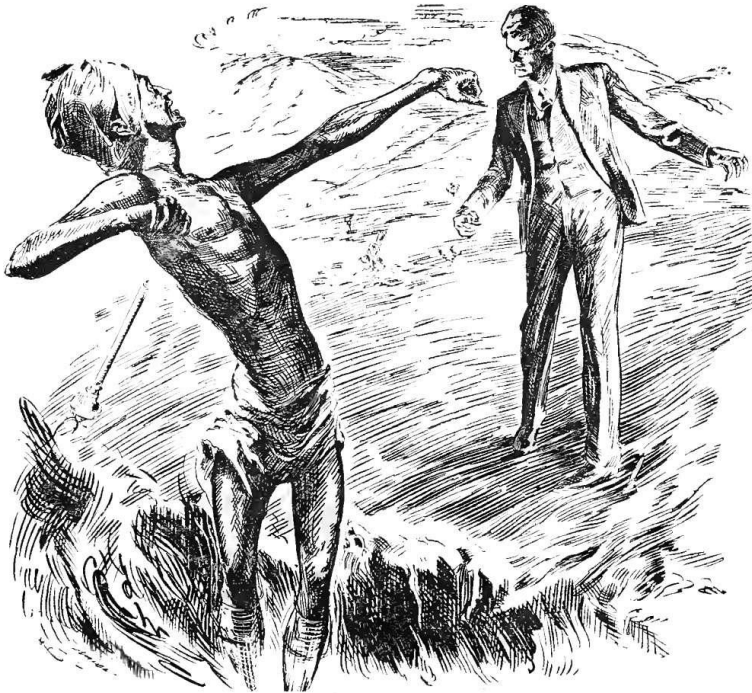


HAPPY ENDING

By HENRY KUTTNER

HAPPY ENDING

Out of the Future emerge the Robot and Tharn—while James Kelvin fights them blindly, knowing not friend from foe!



The android uttered a protesting cry as Kelvin sent a wave of mental energy at him

This is the way the story ended:

James Kelvin concentrated very hard on the thought of the chemist with the red mustache who had promised him a million dollars. It was simply a matter of tuning in on the man's brain, establishing a rapport. He had done it before. Now it was more important than ever that he do it this one last time. He pressed the button on the gadget the robot had given him, and thought hard.

Far off, across limitless distances, he found the rapport.

He clamped on the mental tight beam.

He rode it...

The red-mustached man looked up, gaped, and grinned delightedly.

"So there you are!" he said. "I didn't hear you come in. Good grief, I've been trying to find you for two weeks."

"Tell me one thing quick," Kelvin said. "What's your name?"

"George Bailey. Incidentally, what's yours?"

But Kelvin didn't answer. He had suddenly remembered the other thing the robot had told him about that gadget which established rapport when he pressed the button. He pressed it now—and nothing happened. The gadget had gone dead. Its task was finished, which obviously meant he had at last achieved health, fame and fortune. The robot had warned him, of course. The thing was set to do one specialized job. Once he got what he wanted, it would work no more.

So Kelvin got the million dollars.

And he lived happily ever after....

This is the middle of the story:

As he pushed aside the canvas curtain something—a carelessly hung rope—swung down at his face, knocking the horn-rimmed glasses askew. Simultaneously a vivid bluish light blazed into his unprotected eyes. He felt a curious, sharp sense of disorientation, a shifting motion that was almost instantly gone.

Things steadied before him. He let the curtain fall back into place, making legible again the painted inscription: horoscopes—learn your future—and he stood staring at the remarkable horomancer.

It was a—oh, impossible!

The robot said in a flat, precise voice, “You are James Kelvin. You are a reporter. You are thirty years old, unmarried, and you came to Los Angeles from Chicago today on the advice of your physician. Is that correct?”

In his astonishment Kelvin called on the Deity. Then he settled his glasses more firmly and tried to remember an exposé of charlatans he had once written. There was some obvious way they worked things like this, miraculous as it sounded.

The robot looked at him impassively out of its faceted eye.

“On reading your mind,” it continued in the pedantic voice, “I find this is the year Nineteen Forty-nine. My plans will have to be revised. I had meant to arrive in the year Nineteen Seventy. I will ask you to assist me.”

Kelvin put his hands in his pockets and grinned.

“With money, naturally,” he said. “You had me going for a minute. How do you do it, anyhow? Mirrors? Or like Maelzel’s chess player?”

“I am not a machine operated by a dwarf, nor am I an optical illusion,” the robot assured him. “I am an artificially created living organism, originating at a period far in your future.”

“And I’m not the sucker you take me for,” Kelvin remarked pleasantly. “I came in here to—”

“You lost your baggage checks,” the robot said. “While wondering what to do about it, you had a few drinks and took the Wilshire bus at exactly—exactly eight-thirty-five post meridian.”

“Lay off the mind-reading,” Kelvin said. “And don’t tell me you’ve been running this joint very long with a line like that. The cops would be after you. *If* you’re a real robot, ha, ha.”

“I have been running this joint,” the robot said, “for approximately five minutes. My predecessor is unconscious behind that chest in the corner. Your arrival here was sheer coincidence.” It paused very briefly, and Kelvin had the curious impression that it was watching to see if the story so far had gone over well.

The impression was curious because Kelvin had no feeling at all that there was a man in the large, jointed figure before him. If such a thing as a robot were possible, he would have believed implicitly that he confronted a genuine specimen. Such things being impossible, he waited to see what the gimmick would be.

“My arrival here was also accidental,” the robot informed him. “This being the case, my equipment will have to be altered slightly. I will require certain substitute mechanisms. For that, I gather as I

read your mind, I will have to engage in your peculiar barter system of economics. In a word, coinage or gold or silver certificates will be necessary. Thus I am—temporarily—a horomancer.”

“Sure, sure,” Kelvin said. “Why not a simple mugging? If you’re a robot, you could do a super-mugging job with a quick twist of the gears.”

“It would attract attention. Above all, I require secrecy. As a matter of fact, I am—” The robot paused, searched Kelvin’s brain for the right phrase, and said, “—on the lam. In my era, time-traveling is strictly forbidden, even by accident, unless government-sponsored.”

There was a fallacy there somewhere, Kelvin thought, but he couldn’t quite spot it. He blinked at the robot intently. It looked pretty unconvincing.

“What proof do you need?” the creature asked. “I read your brain the minute you came in, didn’t I? You must have felt the temporary amnesia as I drew out the knowledge and then replaced it.”

“So that’s what happened,” Kelvin said. He took a cautious step backward. “Well, I think I’ll be getting along.”

“Wait,” the robot commanded. “I see you have begun to distrust me. Apparently you now regret having suggested a mugging job. You fear I may act on the suggestion. Allow me to reassure you. It is true that I could take your money and assure secrecy by killing you, but I am not permitted to kill humans. The alternative is to engage in the barter system. I can offer you something valuable in

return for a small amount of gold. Let me see.” The faceted gaze swept around the tent, dwelt piercingly for a moment on Kelvin. “A horoscope,” the robot said. “It is supposed to help you achieve health, fame and fortune. Astrology, however, is out of my line. I can merely offer a logical scientific method of attaining the same results.”

“Uh-huh,” Kelvin said skeptically. “How much? And why haven’t *you* used that method?”

“I have other ambitions,” the robot said in a cryptic manner. “Take this.” There was a brief clicking. A panel opened in the metallic chest. The robot extracted a small, flat case and handed it to Kelvin, who automatically closed his fingers on the cold metal.

“Be careful. Don’t push that button until—”

But Kelvin had pushed it....

He was driving a figurative car that had got out of control. There was somebody else inside his head. There was a schizophrenic, double-tracked locomotive that was running wild and his hand on the throttle couldn’t slow it down an instant. His mental steering-wheel had snapped.

Somebody else was thinking for him!

Not quite a human being. Not quite sane, probably, from Kelvin’s standards. But awfully sane from his own. Sane enough to have mastered the most intricate principles of non-Euclidean geometry in the nursery.

The senses get synthesized in the brain into a sort of common language, a master-tongue. Part of it was auditory, part pictorial,

and there were smells and tastes and tactile sensations that were sometimes familiar and sometimes spiced with the absolutely alien. And it was chaotic.

Something like this, perhaps....

“—Big Lizards getting too numerous this season—tame threvvars have the same eyes not on Callisto though—vacation soon—preferably galactic—solar system claustrophobic—byanding tomorrow if square rootola and upsliding three—”

But that was merely the word-symbolism. Subjectively, it was far more detailed and very frightening. Luckily, reflex had lifted Kelvin’s finger from the button almost instantly, and he stood there motionless, shivering slightly.

He was afraid now.

The robot said, “You should not have begun the rapport until I instructed you. Now there will be danger. Wait.” His eye changed color. “Yes ... there is ... Tharn, yes. Beware of Tharn.”

“I don’t want any part of it,” Kelvin said quickly. “Here, take this thing back.”

“Then you will be unprotected against Tharn. Keep the device. It will, as I promised, ensure your health, fame and fortune, far more effectively than a—a horoscope.”

“No, thanks. I don’t know how you managed that trick—sub-sonics, maybe, but I don’t—”

“Wait,” the robot said. “When you pressed that button, you were in the mind of someone who exists very far in the future. It created a

temporal rapport. You can bring about that rapport any time you press the button.”

“Heaven forfend,” Kelvin said, still sweating a little.

“Consider the opportunities. Suppose a troglodyte of the far past had access to your brain? He could achieve anything he wanted.”

It had become important, somehow, to find a logical rebuttal to the robot’s arguments. “Like St. Anthony—or was it Luther?—arguing with the devil?” Kelvin thought dizzily. His headache was worse, and he suspected he had drunk more than was good for him. But he merely said:

“How could a troglodyte understand what’s in my brain? He couldn’t apply the knowledge without the same conditioning I’ve had.”

“Have you ever had sudden and apparently illogical ideas? Compulsions? So that you seem forced to think of certain things, count up to certain numbers, work out particular problems? Well, the man in the future on whom my device is focused doesn’t know he’s en rapport with you, Kelvin. But he’s vulnerable to compulsions. All you have to do is concentrate on a problem and then press the button. Your rapport will be compelled—illogically, from his viewpoint—to solve that problem. And you’ll be reading his brain. You’ll find out how it works. There are limitations, you’ll learn those too. And the device will ensure health, wealth and fame for you.”

“It would ensure anything, if it really worked that way. I could do anything. That’s why I’m not buying!”

“I said there were limitations. As soon as you’ve successfully achieved health, fame, and fortune, the device will become useless. I’ve taken care of that. But meanwhile you can use it to solve all your problems by tapping the brain of the more intelligent specimen in the future. The important point is to concentrate on your problems *before* you press the button. Otherwise you may get more than Tharn on your track.”

“Tharn? What—”

“I think an—an android,” the robot said, looking at nothing. “An artificial human ... However, let us consider my own problem. I need a small amount of gold.”

“So that’s the kicker,” Kelvin said, feeling oddly relieved. He said, “I haven’t got any.”

“Your watch.”

Kelvin jerked his arm so that his wrist-watch showed. “Oh, no. That watch cost plenty.”

“All I need is the gold-plating,” the robot said, shooting out a reddish ray from its eye. “Thank you.” The watch was now dull gray metal.

“Hey!” Kelvin cried.

“If you use the rapport device, your health, fame and fortune will be assured,” the robot said rapidly. “You will be as happy as any man of this era can be. It will solve all your problems—including Tharn. Wait a minute.” The creature took a backward step and disappeared behind a hanging Oriental rug that had never been east of Peoria.

There was silence.

Kelvin looked from his altered watch to the flat, enigmatic object in his palm. It was about two inches by two inches, and no thicker than a woman's vanity-case, and there was a sunken push-button on its side.

He dropped it into his pocket and took a few steps forward. He looked behind the pseudo-Oriental rug, to find nothing except emptiness and a flapping slit cut in the canvas wall of the booth. The robot, it seemed, had taken a powder. Kelvin peered out through the slit. There was the light and sound of Ocean Park amusement pier, that was all. And the silvered, moving blackness of the Pacific Ocean, stretching to where small lights showed Malibu far up the invisible curve of the coastal cliffs.

So he came back inside the booth and looked around. A fat man in a swami's costume was unconscious behind the carved chest the robot had indicated. His breath, plus a process of deduction, told Kelvin that the man had been drinking.

Not knowing what else to do, Kelvin called on the Deity again. He found suddenly that he was thinking about someone or something called Tharn, who was an android.

Horomancy ... time ... rapport ... *no!* Protective disbelief slid like plate armor around his mind. A practical robot couldn't be made. He knew that. He'd have heard—he was a reporter, wasn't he?

Sure he was.

Desiring noise and company, he went along to the shooting gallery and knocked down a few ducks. The flat case burned in his pocket. The dully burnished metal of his wrist-watch burned in his

memory. The remembrance of that drainage from his brain, and the immediate replacement burned in his mind. Presently bar whiskey burned in his stomach.

He'd left Chicago because of sinusitis, recurrent and annoying. Ordinary sinusitis. Not schizophrenia or hallucinations or accusing voices coming from the walls. Not because he had been seeing bats or robots. That thing hadn't really been a robot. It all had a perfectly natural explanation. Oh, sure.

Health, fame and fortune. And if—

THARN!

The thought crashed with thunderbolt impact into his head.

And then another thought: I *am* going nuts!

A silent voice began to mutter insistently, over and over. “Tharn—Tharn—Tharn—Tharn—”

And another voice, the voice of sanity and safety, answered it and drowned it out. Half aloud, Kelvin muttered:

“I’m James Noel Kelvin. I’m a reporter—special features, leg work, rewrite. I’m thirty years old, unmarried, and I came to Los Angeles today and lost my baggage checks and—and I’m going to have another drink and find a hotel. Anyhow, the climate seems to be curing my sinusitis.”

Tharn, the muffled drum-beat said almost below the threshold of realization. *Tharn, Tharn.*

Tharn.

He ordered another drink and reached in his pocket for a coin. His hand touched the metal case. And simultaneously he felt a light pressure on his shoulder.

Instinctively he glanced around. It was a seven-fingered, spidery hand tightening—hairless, without nails—and white as smooth ivory.

The one, overwhelming necessity that sprang into Kelvin's mind was a simple longing to place as much space as possible between himself and the owner of that disgusting hand. It was a vital requirement, but one difficult of fulfilment, a problem that excluded everything else from Kelvin's thoughts. He knew, vaguely, that he was gripping the flat case in his pocket as though that could save him, but all he was thinking was:

I've got to get away from here.

The monstrous, alien thoughts of someone in the future spun him insanely along their current. It could not have taken a moment while that skilled, competent, trained mind, wise in the lore of an unthinkable future, solved the random problem that had come so suddenly, with such curious compulsion.

Three methods of transportation were simultaneously clear to Kelvin. Two he discarded; motorplats were obviously inventions yet to come, and quirling—involving, as it did, a sensory coil-helmet—was beyond him. But the third method—

Already the memory was fading. And that hand was still tightening on his shoulder. He clutched at the vanishing ideas and desperately made his brain and his muscles move along the unlikely direction the future-man had visualized.

And he was out in the open, a cold night wind blowing on him, still in a sitting position, but with nothing but empty air between his spine and the sidewalk.

He sat down suddenly.

Passersby on the corner of Hollywood Boulevard and Cahuenga were not much surprised at the sight of a dark, lanky man sitting by the curb. Only one woman had noticed Kelvin's actual arrival, and she knew when she was well off. She went right on home.

Kelvin got up laughing with soft hysteria. "Teleportation," he said. "How did I work it? It's gone ... Hard to remember afterward, eh? I'll have to start carrying a notebook again."

And then—"But what about Tharn?"

He looked around, frightened. Reassurance came only after half an hour had passed without additional miracles. Kelvin walked along the Boulevard, keeping a sharp lookout. No Tharn, though.

Occasionally he slid a hand into his pocket and touched the cold metal of the case. Health, wealth and fortune. Why, he could—

But he did not press the button. Too vivid was the memory of that shocking, alien disorientation he had felt. The mind, the experiences, the habit-patterns of the far future were uncomfortably strong.

He would use the little case again—oh, yes. But there was no hurry. First, he'd have to work out a few angles.

His disbelief was completely gone....

Tharn showed up the next night and scared the daylights out of Kelvin again. Prior to that, the reporter had failed to find his baggage tickets, and was only consoled by the two hundred bucks in his wallet. He took a room—paying in advance—at a medium-good hotel, and began wondering how he might apply his pipe-line to the future. Very sensibly, he decided to continue a normal life until something developed. At any rate, he'd have to make a few connections. He tried the *Times*, the *Examiner*, the *News*, and some others. But these things develop slowly, except in the movies. That night Kelvin was in his hotel room when his unwelcome guest appeared.

It was, of course, Tharn.

He wore a very large white turban, approximately twice the size of his head. He had a dapper black mustache, waxed downward at the tips like the mustache of a mandarin, or a catfish. He stared urgently at Kelvin out of the bathroom mirror.

Kelvin had been wondering whether or not he needed a shave before going out to dinner. He was rubbing his chin thoughtfully at the moment Tharn put in an appearance, and there was a perceptible mental lag between occurrence and perception, so that to Kelvin it seemed that he himself had mysteriously sprouted a long moustache. He reached for his upper lip. It was smooth. But in the glass the black waxed hairs quivered as Tharn pushed his face up against the surface of the mirror.

It was so shockingly disorienting, somehow, that Kelvin was quite unable to think at all. He took a quick step backward. The edge of the bathtub caught him behind the knees and distracted him momentarily, fortunately for his sanity. When he looked again

there was only his own appalled face reflected above the wash-bowl. But after a second or two the face seemed to develop a cloud of white turban, and mandarin-like whiskers began to form sketchily.

Kelvin clapped a hand to his eyes and spun away. In about fifteen seconds he spread his fingers enough to peep through them at the glass. He kept his palm pressed desperately to his upper lip, in some wild hope of inhibiting the sudden sprouting of a moustache. What peeped back at him from the mirror looked like himself. At least, it had no turban, and it did not wear horn-rimmed glasses. He risked snatching his hand away for a quick look, and clapped it in place again just in time to prevent Tharn from taking shape in the glass.

Still shielding his face, he went unsteadily into the bedroom and took the flat case out of his coat pocket. But he didn't press the button that would close a mental synapse between two incongruous eras. He didn't want to do that again, he realized. More horrible, somehow, than what was happening now was the thought of reentering that *alien* brain.

He was standing before the bureau, and in the mirror one eye looked out at him between reflected fingers. It was a wild eye behind the gleaming spectacle-lens, but it seemed to be his own. Tentatively he took his hand away....

This mirror showed more of Tharn. Kelvin wished it hadn't. Tharn was wearing white knee-boots of some glittering plastic. Between them and the turban he wore nothing whatever except a minimum of loin-cloth, also glittering plastic. Tharn was very thin, but he looked active. He looked quite active enough to spring right into

the hotel room. His skin was whiter than his turban, and his hands had seven fingers each, all right.

Kelvin abruptly turned away, but Tharn was resourceful. The dark window made enough of a reflecting surface to show a lean, loin-clothed figure. The feet showed bare, and they were less normal than Tharn's hands. And the polished brass of a lamp-base gave back the picture of a small, distorted face not Kelvin's own.

Kelvin found a corner without reflecting surfaces and pushed into it, his hands shielding his face. He was still holding the flat case.

Oh, fine, he thought bitterly. Everything's got a string on it. What good will this rapport gadget do me if Tharn's going to show up every day? Maybe I'm only crazy. I hope so.

Something would have to be done unless Kelvin was prepared to go through life with his face buried in his hands. The worst of it was that Tharn had a haunting look of familiarity. Kelvin discarded a dozen possibilities, from reincarnation to the *déjà vu* phenomenon, but—

He peeped through his hands, in time to see Tharn raising a cylindrical gadget of some sort and leveling it like a gun. That gesture formed Kelvin's decision. He'd *have* to do something, and fast. So, concentrating on the problem—*I want out!*—he pressed the button in the surface of the flat case.

And instantly the teleportation method he had forgotten was perfectly clear to him. Other matters, however, were obscure. The smells—someone was thinking—were adding up to a—there was no word for that, only a shocking visio-auditory ideation that was simply dizzying. Someone named Three Million and Ninety Pink

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