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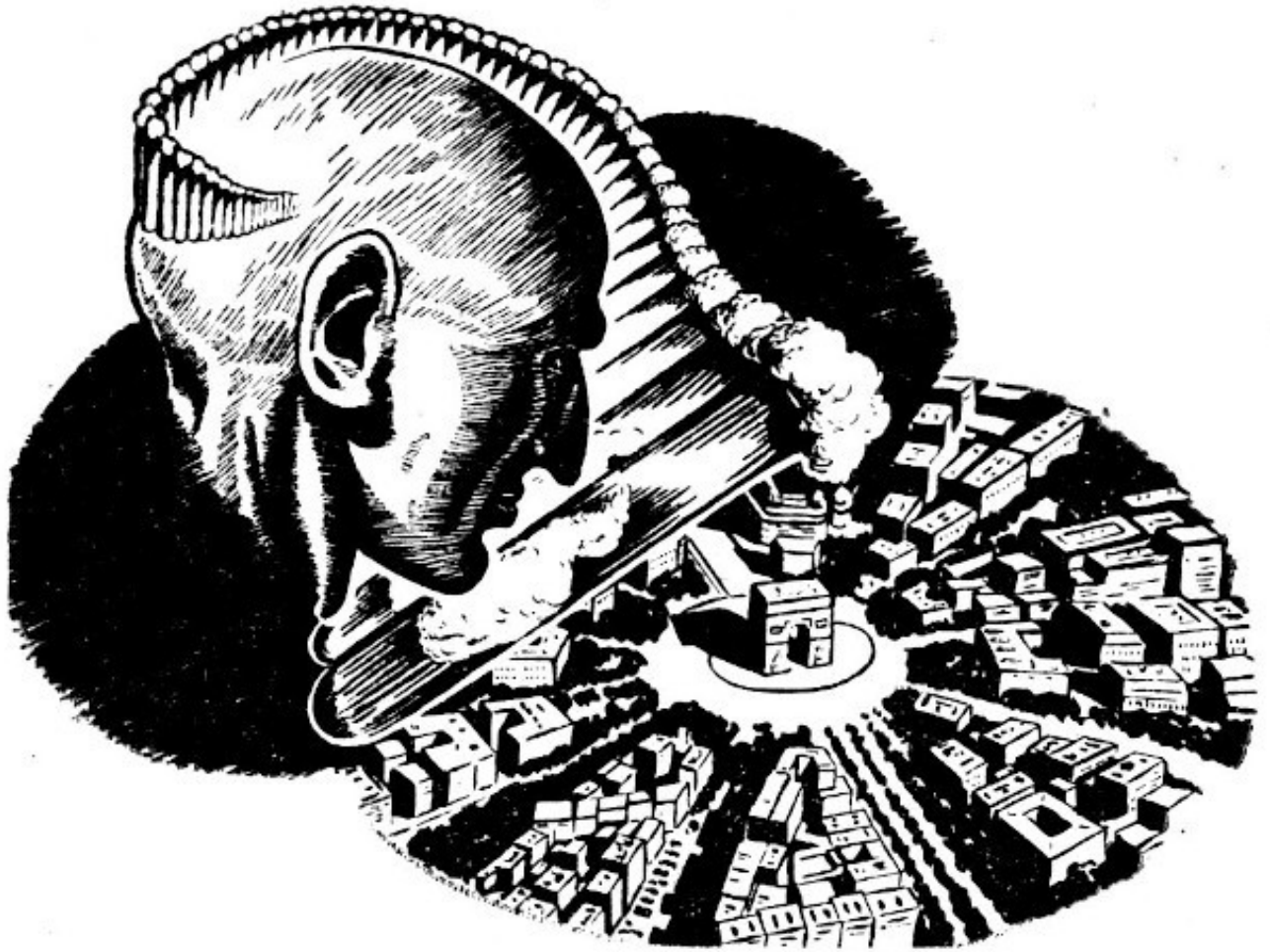
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE INCREDIBLE
INVASION ***



THE INCREDIBLE INVASION

BY GEORGE O. SMITH

Illustrated by Ayers

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Jim Franklen paused a moment before he opened the door of the office. He stopped to read the black lettering with a surface of pride—he was a part of it.

The sign read:

UNITED NATIONS
WEAPON SECURITY
COUNCIL

Thomas Winter, President

Then Franklen opened the door and went in, confidently. He greeted the man behind the desk, who looked up worriedly from a maze of paper work and bade Franklen to sit down.

Winter said: "Trouble, Franklen. Bad trouble."

Franklen nodded. "I know," he said. "I've been following it. I gather that the fools are getting worse?"

Winter agreed with a slight nod of the head and replied: "I can't imagine what they're up to. Yet they continue to rattle the saber and make demands. The Central Power is not ignorant of the ramifications of their acts. Not after we've made point-blank statements. But they continue to get rougher and bolder, just as though they had the world in the palm of their hands."

"They know that they can't win, don't they?" asked Franklen.

"They should—they've been told, and they have been shown exactly what will happen, how, and why. The proof is irrevocable, undeniable. Still they continue."

"I understand we've been watching them closely."

Winter smiled bitterly. "I've got so many men watching their separation plants and their atomic stockpile that even the janitors must find UN Representatives looking up out of their coffee cups in the morning. There's no activity there that can be construed as dangerous, even admitting that we're leaning way over backwards and would be suspicious of a single gram of missing fissionable matter. Of course, they have the standard United Nations stockpile; the safety value that all nations hold against possible aggression. They're also aware that this quantity is also a fraction of what the rest hold all together."

Franklen looked at the big flag on the back wall of the office. "The United Nations," he said bitterly. "With one member slightly disunited." He turned back to the president of the Weapon Council. "Have they, by any chance, made secret pacts with other nations?"

"Not that we can tell," said Winter. "Now don't say that this is negative evidence and therefore inconclusive. It is admittedly negative evidence, but so definitely negative that it is conclusive. The Central Power has been told that if they make a move, they'll be counter-attacked within the hour."

Franklen paused in his walking and said: "Look, sir, there's one thing about the atomic

weapon that is seldom considered. I've been thinking about this for a long time. Frankly, the atomic weapon is a fine instrument for any country to use—providing it has no intention of invading for territorial aggrandization."

"What do you mean?"

"Cities are where they are because it is economically sound that they should be there. New York is the largest city in North America only because it is situated on the one spot where most goods funnel out of the country. It grew because of that fact—the fact did not follow the city's growth. In all the world, perhaps Washington, D. C., is the only city that is where it is because someone said 'we shall place our city here!' and Washington could function very well if it were lifted in toto and dropped on the center of Ohio, providing it landed on some big railroad junction. Boston is a second rate city despite all the efforts of the city planners only because its harbor is less efficient than New York's harbor and because Boston is not handily located geographically for the rest of the country. Even though Boston is closer to Europe than New York, it is cheaper to ship the goods a little farther by water, for they've got to be transshipped anyway, somewhere. For inland cities, both Detroit and Chicago are great because of their location; if their locations were not good, Chicago might still be a little tank town called Fort Dearborn, situated on the South Bank of the Chicago River—which would still be emptying into Lake Michigan."

"Granted, but what are you getting at?" asked Winter.

"Mankind has dropped two bombs in anger so far," said Franklen. "Both were dropped at the close of a war, to end it. Japan was not invaded for aggrandization. Therefore, no Americans were required to enter Hiroshima and try to rebuild it. We don't care too much whether Nagasaki ever gets rebuilt, though it will, eventually, because of the necessity of having a city right there."

"Yes, go on."

"The next time we have atomic trouble," said Franklen, "it'll not be exploded high in the air. It's more likely to emerge right out of the walls of one of those buildings. That will mean radioactivity in the area that will render it dangerous to life for some time. In any case, a totally destroyed New York is not an economic asset."

"Yes?"

"And the Central Power knows that we will not use the atomic weapons until they are used in aggression."

"No, you're wrong," said Winter. "We have promised them—and everybody—that at the first outbreak of hostility, the United Nations Weapon Council will see to it that one of their cities is reduced each day until the aggression ceases and reparations are made." He banged a hand into his fist. "It's a harsh promise, my boy, but it must be. For a border fist fight leads to knives, and knives lead to revolvers, and they lead to rifles, which lead to artillery. The next step in the scene is the works, complete and whole."

Franklen shook his head. "The first step is words," he said positively. "Then come the

fists. We should let 'em have a sample on the first angry words."

"Can't. It's entirely possible that a party can be so nasty and quiet that steps are necessary on the part of the other. The truth must be investigated."

"Is that what's been happening?" asked Jim Franklen.

"At first it looked so," said Winter. "They started by upping tariffs and getting too rigorous with people coming in. They were told, and they replied that their country was at present overcrowded. Why, Jim, the entire pattern is familiar. They've been holding elections and all the trimmings for years, now, and every election they hold brings more territory into their hands."

"That's something that can't be easily judged," admitted Franklen grudgingly.

"No, it can't; you're right. In any election there are plenty of unsatisfied people. We assume that the Central Power is padding the elections, but we cannot be sure. Well, again they have overrun most of Europe and now they're looking outward. We've got to do something, Jim. But we've got to be absolutely right before we move. That's what makes being right so hard, sometimes. He who is wrong can move without conscience. Well, it's now being tossed into your hands. See what you can do, take a carte blanche and see what you can find out."

Franklen nodded glumly. "I know what you mean," he said. "I'd hate to be the cause of fifty thousand killed, unless I was dead certain that my actions would save a million later."

Winter shook the younger man's hand. "Well, you've been brought into it," he said, "and you're trained to handle hypothetical problems of this nature anyway. So, my boy, go out and stop that incipient war for me!"

Jim Franklen remembered that ringing order many times in the following days. "Go out and stop that war!" was his order, and he was hoping he could. There was little real saberrattling, but only a slow spread of the Central Power's influence that was conducted in a quiet fashion.

He read the previous reports several times, and analyzed them carefully. There was one more thing, a direct, personal, man-to-man warning that could be tried and must be tried before he moved. This act must also be publicized so that his following moves would be greeted with the proper attitude. The public must know that his course met with their approval.

This brought him to the government of the Central Power, where he was first stopped by an undersecretary.

"You may state your business," said the underling with all the authority of bureaucracy.

"I'm special representative of the United Nations Weapon Council," said Franklen, "and request audience with your state head, the Commissario Hohmann."

"You may state your business to me," said the underling.

"I'll state it to Hohmann himself," snapped Franklen quickly. "And he'll right well see me, too!"

"I'll inquire," said the undersecretary.

"You'd better."

"You understand that the Commissario speaks personally only with officials of his own rank."

"That's rank enough," grunted Franklen. "And I can be just as rank as he is. Now stop caging and make that appointment for me—no later than tomorrow morning! Rank? Spinach! Where I come from, we elect our rulers and they'd better do as we want them to, or they don't stay rulers! And Hohmann can put you in his pipe and smoke it! Or," he added softly, "shall I order a cordon of United Nations marines out to see that I am properly escorted into his presence?"

"That would create an international incident," replied the undersecretary.

"Uh-huh," snorted Franklen. "It sure would, wouldn't it?"

Both he and the underling knew at that point just who would be deemed responsible for the international incident, and so there was no point in further argument. The phone was used three times, and ultimately it was reported that James Franklen would be most welcome in the morning at eight-thirty—and would he partake of breakfast with Commissario Hohmann?

He nodded. After all, Hohmann might not spoil his digestion—Franklen had a stomach installed by a copper company and felt safe.

There was pomp and ceremony as Franklen entered the swanky apartments of the Commissario Hohmann. He was escorted in by an honor-guard, and once in the ornate dining room, Franklen came face to face with the commissario himself.

Hohmann bowed genially and Franklen returned the pleasantries. He was seated across a small table from the dictator of the Central Power, and as he settled in the chair, silver service with a half grapefruit came from a servitor for each man simultaneously. Hohmann tasted his, smiled and nodded at it. "Excellent," he said to Franklen. Jim tried his and was forced to agree.

"Now," said Hohmann easily, "I've been told that the United Nations do not approve of certain happenings?"

"We do not," said Franklen. "We do not intend to interfere with the usual run of events, but we dislike to see the same pattern coming up again."

"Pattern?" asked Hohmann in surprise. His spoon paused in mid-flight as surprise caught him unawares, but then it continued on, upwards.

Franklen nodded, and then swallowed. "The pattern should be familiar," he said. "Small districts lying between larger countries suddenly vote alliance with your Central Power. A couple of years pass, and another district still farther out allies itself with you."

Commissario Hohmann, your Central Power has increased its geographic size by a factor of two to one during the past five years."

"That I know—and I am also gratified to know that my government has something to offer these outlying districts."

"The trouble is," said Franklen pointedly, "that all of these districts have—or had—a system of voting that lends itself very well to a long-term carpetbagging system. The residence required before voting in the maximum case is one year."

"You accuse me of padding ballot boxes?" demanded Hohmann angrily.

"Not at all," said Franklen. "Padding a ballot box is illegal, which you would not condone. No, Commissario Hohmann, you are proceeding quite legally, but you are, nevertheless, twisting the law to suit your needs."

"Nonsense!"

"We know differently. There was the Phalz District that voted into your Power two years ago. Its voting population rose markedly for two years before the election, and dropped shortly afterwards. Strangely, its drop coincided with the rise of voting population in the Rhehl District a year later."

"You approach me with the accusation that people of mine are traveling from district to district and voting them into my government for them—and against their wishes?" demanded Hohmann.

"I wouldn't state whether it was the same people that moved," said Franklen, "but there is definitely some exchange."

"My dear young fellow," said Hohmann consolingly, "please do not be alarmed by some of the problems of the floating population of Central Europe. That is what happens when cities are decentralized, you know. And may I remind you that the United Nations were instrumental in decentralizing the cities of my country some twenty years ago?"

"You have all the rationalization of the last ruler of Central Europe. He proceeded legally at first."

"He proceeded legally until he was forced to move illegally. He was attacked first, you know."

"Look, Hohmann, he who eludes the legal statement by twisting the law to suit his own illegal end is illegal."

"That's sophistry."

"No, it is not. It is a statement of the fact that you are legally right and morally wrong and you know it. Frankly, you are expanding at a rate that will bring on a state of war and you know it. Regardless of your spoken intent, you are expanding illegally and it must cease!"

"And I assure you that if people decide to join my government, I can but be gratified and accept them."

"Even though the populace disagrees?"

"They voted, didn't they?" asked Hohmann. And seeing Jim Franklen's answer, even though skeptical, Hohmann added: "And if they want to, they can as easily vote out again."

"Oh certainly," snorted Franklen angrily. "The district of one quarter of a million people vote in all by themselves, but in voting out again they must submit to a national election. One quarter million versus some seventy million."

"Well, the welfare of my country is a national problem, and the welfare of any part of it is equally a national concern. To secede, any part, therefore, should convince the entire nation that this course is best. That is, naturally, very difficult."

"Impossible," snapped Franklen.

"Almost impossible," agreed Hohmann, nodding his head slowly in complete agreement. "Yet for all your distrust of my government and its supposed aggressive attitude, I assure you that we are humanitarian to the core, and will go to any lengths to make our people happy. Unlike the former ruler, who insisted that the individual is second to the State, I know that the State is the property of the individual. Unfortunately—or fortunately—there are always differences of opinion. That makes it difficult to please everybody with any single act. We try, however, to make the bulk of the people satisfied. I—"

He was interrupted by the arrival of an aide, who brought him a sheet of teletyped copy. "Commissario Hohmann," said the aide, "I am sorry to disturb your breakfast, but this is an important message."

"Quite all right, Jenks," smiled Hohmann. "Pardon me?" he asked of Franklen. Then he read, first quietly and then aloud:

"International News Service representatives in Paris, France, today told of a serious pandemic sweeping the country. This illness seems to be some strange combination of mild dysentery complicated with very mild influenza. It is quite contagious; isolated cases were first noted three days ago, but the epidemic has been spreading into dangerous proportions. It is believed that if this pandemic gets worse, the government may close all places of business and public works."

When he finished, Hohmann looked up across the table at Jim Franklen. "Unfortunate," he said sincerely. "Yet one man's meat is another man's poison. This distressing affair may give me a chance to prove to you that the Central Power is still a member of the United Nations, and concerned about the common lot of all mankind."

"Meaning?" asked Franklen.

"Meaning that I must leave you for a bit. I intend to muster all forces that the Central Power owns that can, in any way, be used to combat the common enemy that is striking at France. I invite you officially to join and observe."

"I may take that invitation," said Jim.

"The Central Power will enter that plague area to take relief and aid—even though we may ourselves suffer greatly. It is things like this, James Franklen, that endears us to our immediate neighbors. You may watch one half of the population of my country turn from

their own problems, and bravely enter France to aid the stricken. Jenks! A message to Le Presidente Jacques La Croix. 'We stand ready to aid in every way if your need increases. You have but to request, and we will answer in the name of humanity! Signed Edvard Hohmann, Commissario of the Central Power.'

Jim Franklen faced Winter wearily in the latter's office. It was two weeks later, and Jim was glad to be back, even though his mission was but half accomplished.

"I don't know how to stop him," he told the president of the Weapon Council. "He's like a stock market operator that doles out quarters to the beggar on the corner and then enters the Curb to squeeze some small operator out of his life savings. It is admitted—almost—that he is running a carpetbagging program over there. Then comes this plague in France. Like a first-class humanitarian, he musters his forces and they go into that area and take control for two solid weeks while practically every person in France is flat on his back with this devil's disease. It would have been easy for him to take over, Winter. But he sent in doctors and aides, and the like, and the only armed men he sent were merely small-arm troops. He sent just barely enough of them to maintain order, which they did and no more. I doubt if there was a store-window broken or a bottle of milk stolen over and above any normal interval. Then as the people of France recovered, he gracefully turned everything back, gave them a written report on his actions, apologized for whatever minor expenses his aid might have cost—his men did live off of the country, and that costs, you know—and then marched out with the bands playing and the people cheering.

"It gives me to wonder," continued Franklen. "Remember the 'Union—Now' cries between the United States and Great Britain during the last fracas? Well, solidarity between France and the Central Power was never so great before. Hohmann could ask them for the moon, and they'd present him with a gold tablet, suitably engraved, giving him clear and unrestricted title. Watch for a first-class alliance, Winter."

Winter nodded. "I've been watching," he said. "Regardless of how he does it, and he is a supreme opportunist, it is oppression."

Franklen grunted. "Even anarchy is oppression for some classes of people."

"But you and I both know that he rode into his office initially on a program of oppressing the minority groups. He's made no great mass-murder of them as his predecessor did, nor has he collected them in concentration camps. Yet they are oppressed, for they have little free life. They are permitted to work only as their superiors dictate, and for a subsistence wage. They do the rough jobs; they work in Hohmann's separation plants, do the mining, and the dirty work. Each is given a card entitling him to secure employment in certain lines. All of these lines are poorly paid and quite dangerous or dirty. The wage is so low that the children are forced to forgo schooling in order to help pay for the family. Regardless of his outward act of humanitarianism, Hohmann is none the less a tyrant with ideas of aggrandization. That he is able to take a catastrophe and turn it into a blessing for himself is deplorable, but it seems to be one of those unfair tricks of fate to favor the ill-minded, for some unknown reason. I never knew a stinker that didn't get everything his own way for far too long for the other's comfort. Eventually, of course, the deal evens out,

but the waiting is often maddeningly long."

"And we sit here helpless," growled Franklen, "all clutching our atomic weapons that could wipe out Hohmann and most of his country. And as we hang on to them, and rub their rounded noses angrily, we watch Hohmann walk in and take over—we are unsure of our grounds. Bah! Why not claim it for what it is—aggressive acquisition of territory? Then let's bomb him and let the world judge for itself."

Winter shook his head slowly. "And if we do, La Belle Francaise will rise up and scream 'Oppression'! For France is probably an operating country today because of Edvard Hohmann. There was once a first-class criminal, Public Enemy Number One, who, during a period of economic depression, used some of his ill-gotten gains to set up soup kitchens for the underfed. You'd hardly convince any one of them that he was entirely worthy of the electric chair and not much better. That was when his crimes were known to all. And people said: 'O.K., so he's killed a bunch of people. They were all criminals, too, and so he saved the country some expense. And besides, he set up soup kitchens, and so he's not a bad sort of fellow!' No, Jim, we've got to get evidence of definite acts of belligerency."

"Sort of like trying to get evidence against a confidence-man who sells his victims something that they believe valuable."

Winter nodded at the simile.

"More like a druggist who sells opiates indiscriminately. The people who buy them do so because they find them useful even though they are dangerous in the long run. But you keep on trying, Jim. The rest of us will see to it that Hohmann isn't running himself up a stockpile of atomics all the time that his underground warfare is going on."

Jim Franklen left the office and wandered down the hall to the Chief Physician's office. Shield greeted Franklen cheerfully and asked what was on the younger man's mind.

"Nothing much," said Jim. "I was just wondering if you'd isolated the bug or whatever it was that hit France."

"We believe so," said Dr. Shield. "We'll know in another couple of weeks. It seems to be some sort of filterable virus, air-borne for contagion, and very rugged. Intelligent, too. It apparently knows enough not to touch diparasulfathiazole."

"How do these rare illnesses get going?" questioned Jim.

"In several ways. The Law of Simple Reactions also applies, you know." And seeing the blank look on Franklen's face, he added: "When a number of reactions are possible, the one that requires the least energy will happen first. That's saying that the most likely will happen first. A few hundred years ago, so many people died of typhoid, yellow fever, and smallpox that a more complex disease like meningitis or polio seldom got beyond the normal case frequency. When the more prevalent—the more likely diseases—were stopped, we could have polio plagues. It's probably been here for a long time, killing its quota every year, but never noticed because of other, more devastating affairs."

"I think I understand."

"Why did you ask?" asked the doctor.

"Well, I was there, you know. It was rather devastating, though it didn't kill off very many."

"It isn't that type," said Shield. "Which is another factor in its not being noticed. The early symptoms are dysentery, not violent, but definitely weakening. The secondary symptoms are similar to influenza in a mild form. The whole thing just takes all the energy out of the system and leaves you weaker than a kitten for about twenty days. After which you can get up and go again, though somewhat rockily. It's a one-shot affair, luckily. The body builds up an immunity to the bug, and once you go through with it, you're safe from then on—though upon re-exposure, you can act as a carrier."

"O.K., doctor. I was just wondering because I was rather close to it."

"You didn't catch it?"

"Nope. Not yet, anyway."

"And you were in the plague area?" demanded Dr. Shield.

"For several days with Commissario Hohmann."

"Then I'd like a sample of your blood," said the doctor, reaching for his sterile cabinet.

"Maybe you are carrying the normal antibody in quantity already. I'd like to check it."

Franklen bared his arm and the doctor extracted thirty or forty CC of Jim's venous blood.

"Thanks," said Dr. Shield. "We'll also see if you have any other bugs running around loose in here," he smiled, holding up the vial.



"O.K., doctor," returned Franklen. "And if you do, just drop 'em a shot or something to pacify 'em until I get back and can take care of 'em again."

They parted on a laugh. And once outside of the doctor's door, Jim Franklen was met by an official messenger.

It was a personally written note from Edvard Hohmann:

Dear Mr. Franklen:

This is informal, because I believe that formality between friends is both stuffy and unreal. Also I count you among my friends despite the fact that our political beliefs differ.

However, in an effort to convince you of my sincerity, I am inviting you to be present as a guest of my party when the Central Power meets the French Chamber of Deputies. This will occur on August 8th, which is but a week hence.

It is to be an auspicious occasion, this meeting. Plans and forms have been drawn up, a compromise between the democratic government of France and the autocratic Central Power. We shall show the world and humanity that a meeting of minds is always possible between men of high purpose. True,

both France and the Central Power must part with certain factors, but we both believe that departing slightly from our previous course by will and agreement is far better than going on as we have, and ultimately arriving at antipodal types of rule.

Will you attend? Will you come, even to scoff? For you will remain to wonder, and the approval of your Council will mean much to all of us. Be a witness to History in the Making!

Sincerely,
Edvard Hohmann,
Your friend and Commissario
of the Central Power.

He stared at the letter, wondering. Hohmann's actions seemed logical enough; doubtless if he, Jim Franklen, were in Hohmann's shoes, he'd accept whatever the fates offered and reject whatever trouble he could. Hohmann's ambitions were normal for any ruler of Central Europe, and he was not, at least, killing millions. Yet—

Franklen smacked his fist into the palm of his hand. He turned into Winter's office again and said: "I've got it!"

Winter looked up, wondering.

"Hohmann is using biological warfare," said Franklen. "It's logical, it's sensible, and it gets him what he wants, intact. He's soon to be running France, and not a shot has been fired nor a building damaged. Were he to strike an unfriendly country—or when he makes his final break, Hohmann can take over without resistance. No soldier can serve a weapon when he's prostrate with that combination of dysentery and influenza."

"But biological warfare is not considered practical."

"No?" snorted Franklen. "Well, if used properly, it can be better than atomics. Why blast a city you hope to add to your list? Why bother? You have to rebuild it. But if you just move in, you're in and you can use the same paper and pencils and desks and even the same clerks."

"May I point out the difficulty of proving such a thing?" asked Winter.

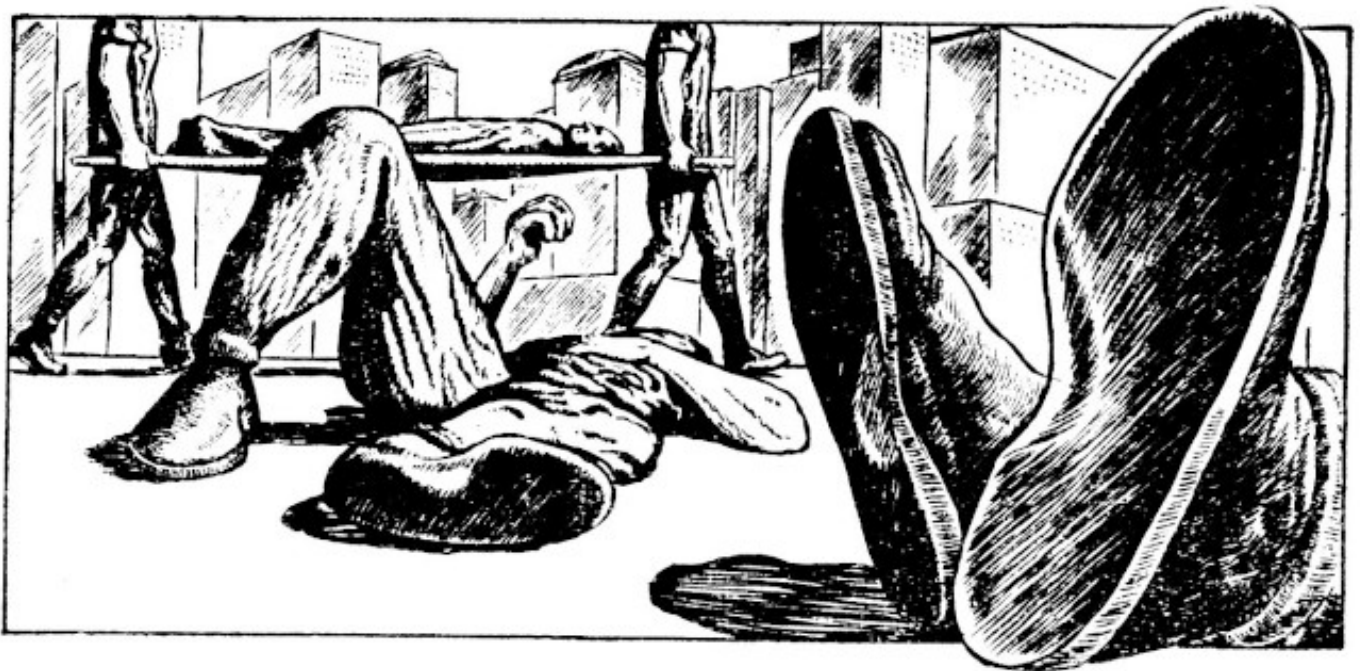
"In the first place, Dr. Shield told me that the ailment was a single-time illness. Your own troops can have it in a mild form before the invasion. Thereafter they are immune. But they are also vicious carriers, and while they're working among the stricken people, they're spreading it among those few who haven't caught it yet."

Winter sighed deeply. "Yes, and even better for Hohmann is the fact that we can prove nothing. You can make enough germ culture in an apartment house to inoculate a city—contrasting, the separation plants of the atomic era. And, Franklen, can you or anybody else make Hohmann admit that his latest acquisitions happened by any other means than an Act of God? A pandemic is considered such."

"I'll get the proof," said Franklen.

"Just stop Hohmann," said Winter. "Then we can all rest!"

Franklen never went to Hohmann's great historic meeting. Three days before it opened, the same plague struck Mexico, and the United States sent its doctors and its nurses and its aids to the stricken neighbor. A good many of them came down with it themselves, but just as it had run in France, it ran itself out in three long, hot, Mexican weeks. American wealth was poured in, and American effort and American efficiency, and Mexico rallied and was grateful. Franklen was a busy man, during those days, and he spent another week in the area after the plague was stopped and the populace well on the road to recovery.



Then he returned to his office, to see Thomas Winter.

"Warfare—or happenstance?" asked Winter.

"I'll never know," said Franklen wearily. "Why would they—Winter! You know something!"

Winter nodded slowly. He handed Franklen a teletyped page, which Franklen read aloud:

"The State of Sonora, Mexico, today voted to secede from Mexico in favor of joining the United States by a vote of almost three to one. If this is accepted, Sonora would become the fifty-first State of the Union. There is some doubt—"

"Winter—what is this?"

"A fragment of the International News Service report," replied Winter. "And here is a text of President Halstead's reply:

"The United States of America feels gratified that she is deemed so high by the residents of Sonora, Mexico. An act of this sort, however, must be made with the full consent of the Mexican Government."

"So we've got ourselves a Border Incident?" muttered Franklen.

Winter shook his head. "Worse than that. Here's the topper-offer," and he handed Franklen a sheet of paper. Franklen read it silently and then whistled explosively.

"So the Government of Mexico offers complete annexation of all the states of Mexico to the United States of America in exchange for certain provisos and considerations in the way of civil government of the new territory?"

Winter nodded. "And from what they tell me of the Mexican demands, the United States would be imbecilic not to accede to their request."

Franklen shook his head widely and slowly. "Madness!" he said quietly. "If we do, we're legally guilty of the same offense as Hohmann. If we do not, we're fools. How can the pot call the kettle black and still retain a moral sense of values?"

"Can't," grumbled Winter. "And we've got ourselves another twenty million citizens, three quarters of a million square miles, and something like a total of eighty United States of America!"

Winter stood up, his face bitter. "United Nations Weapon Council," he growled. "Preserve the future peace. Stop aggression and territorial expansion. Hell!"

He picked up a brass inkwell and hurled it through the door glass. His secretary peered in, wondering.

That was only the beginning. Just the start of a long series of similar events that came crowding in on one another so fast that it made one's head spin. Five years passed in this same mad whirl. Five years of the same crazy pattern.

And then the Central Power, which was now calling itself the European Power, faced the United States of The Americas across the Atlantic Ocean. From Ellsmere Island to Cape Horn lay the United States of The Americas, and from Spitzbergen to the Cape of Good Hope lay the European Power, all and both combined.

And as before, Jim Franklen, now an older but still struggling Franklen, was still working on the same question; and Thomas Winter, also older and more resigned, urged Franklen on.

"Hindsight," said Franklen sourly, "is infinitely superior to foresight, or at least it is better accomplished."

Winter nodded. "This is what we might have expected," he said. "Years and years ago when Hohmann started this last war. Now we're all in a position where strife might well break out at any moment. And the question is whether to break out in open strife at once,

or wait it out and hope for the best. We can no longer move leisurely. Hohmann has seen to it that for every advance he has made, we've made a greater one. But now he is fresh out of available land to spread out across, and he's looking at us. We've been dragged and dragged by his indirectness into this situation, where the United States as it was is no longer just we folks, but encompasses a myriad of peoples, types, and governmental ideas. True, Washington is still the seat of government, but that makes it seem as though we were to blame for our own expansion."

"I may be able to help," said Franklen at last. "I think I've got the answer, finally."

He said no more about it, but he was gone, somewhere for three months, after which he returned long enough to pick up Dr. Shield and fly with him to Europe. He gained audience with Edvard Hohmann within a few hours.

"My American friend," exclaimed Hohmann, taking Franklen's hand. "And this?"

"This is Dr. Shield," said Jim. "He's been instrumental in tracking down some of the many plagues that have hit the world."

"Perhaps he can tell us where so many different illnesses come from," said Hohmann, interestedly. "A kind Providence, that offers both myself and your government the chance, to become great—it is kind, and I say right that we have prospered—seldom seems in existence at the proper time."

"Sometimes illnesses emerge from the common welter of human frailties only because they have been eclipsed by more common ailments," said Shield. "There is one other way in which an illness can suddenly break out. Mutations. If you recall, the photographic industry nearly went out of business when atomic power came in, because there were radioactive atoms everywhere—even in the emulsions and the films themselves. That has been largely abated, but only by special methods. The world, right now, is bathed in many many more kinds of radiation than ever before. Where once only alpha particles were, now are protons and neutrons and both positive and negative electrons, and gamma from here to there in wave length. Illness comes from bugs, Commissario Hohmann, and bugs as well as humans can evolve. The possibilities are limitless, it requires only a diligent search—"

"Diligent search?" asked Hohmann. "You sound as though you believed that someone might have been seeking such illnesses."

"Only academically, perhaps, just as we are," replied Shield. "Just to know what possible mutations might take place, and perhaps give us a bit of warning, we have been operating a radiation-biological laboratory."

"Indeed?" said Hohmann.

"Oh yes. And we've come up with some of the most peculiar cultures. Pure laws of chance, because most mutants die. We've got a violent one that affects the calcium exchange in the body—your bones, you know, are in a constant state of equilibrium, the matter changes, new comes in to replace old going out—so that only the outgoing side is

working. The bones jellify. We've licked that one by antibodies and partial immunities. But the more recent ones have rather peculiar effects. One of them strikes the nerves in the semicircular canals of the ear. During the two months of its run, the patient cannot stand, or cannot retain any balance at all. He cannot even lift his hands as he desires, because he ... well, he might think he was standing on his head, but he can't even accept a delusion as to his position, for all position-sense is gone, completely. After two months, the average body recovers, and the patient is well again. We've feared that, and we've learned how to prevent it. That's a good thing, too, for it strikes within a few minutes after exposure to any carrier."

"A rather terrible possibility," smiled Hohmann. "I've always been proud of my sense of balance." He laughed nervously and stood upon one foot for a few seconds.

"We were thinking that it might be well to combine our laboratories," said Franklen. "We can pool our findings and collectively advance so that this wave of mutated bugs can be prevented."

"That is an excellent idea," said Hohmann—

At which point he fell flat on his face!

The world's stockpiles of atomic weapons is rusting and unused—as such. Gradually, they are being broken down and the high-grade fissionables are being taken and used to light the fires of humanity. Jim Franklen is an old man, no longer an agent of the United Nations, but just a citizen of United Terra.

And the rattle of the saber is gone, and the storm of atomic bombs is no longer expected.

For the last Global War was fought with weapons that seldom killed, never maimed, and always left the cities of the world intact for the next generation.

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE INCREDIBLE INVASION ***

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