

BY JULIAN F. GROW

# The Fastest Gun Dead



The skeleton  
had the fastest draw  
west of the  
Pecos.

Too bad he was  
such a  
lousy shot

HE was a big man, broad of shoulder, slim of hip. His Stetson was crimped Texas-style, over slate-gray eyes that impassively had seen much good and more evil in their twenty-six years.

He stood in the saloon door with the dust of the streets of Dos Cervezas Pequeñas still swirling about scuffed, range-rider's chaps. His left hand held open the weatherbeaten swinging door. The right hovered over the worn peachwood butt of the Colt holstered on his right thigh.

The slate-gray eyes, emotionless, swept the crowd belied up to the bar, and stopped at one man. When he spoke it was flat, but with the ring of tempered steel, and every man but that one drew back out of range. "I want you, Dirty Jake," the big man said. "Now."

Dirty Jake shot him into doll rags, naturally.

**D**IRTY JAKE NIEDELMAYER was, you might say, the most feared ribbon clerk in the Territory. Easily the most.

I remember him from the early days, from the first day he came to town, in fact. I remember because he got off the stage just as I was leaning out the window nailing up my brand-new shingle, and my office was and still is upstairs next to the stage depot. I was down on the boardwalk admiring it, all shiny gold leaf on black like the correspondence school promised:

Hiram Pertwee, M.D.

His voice broke in on me, all squeaky. "Beg your pardon," he said, "where's the YMCA?"

Well, that isn't the usual sort of question for here. I turned around. There he was, a scrawny little runt about knee-high to short, wearing a panama hat, a wrinkled linen duster and Congress gaiters.

He wasn't especially dirty then, of course, only about average for a stage passenger. He kind of begrudged his face, with little squint eyes and a long thin nose, a mustache like a hank of Spanish moss and just about chin enough to bother shaving. Under his duster he wore a clawhammer coat, the only alpaca one I ever saw, and I never from that day out saw him wear any other. He stood there looking like he'd never been anyplace he really cottoned to, but this might just be the worst.

I was just a young squirt then and not above funning a dude. I told him the YMCA was around the corner, two doors down and up the back stairs at the Owl Hoot Palace. He nodded and went the way I told him.

That was, and still is, Kate's Four Bit Crib. The girls there wear candy-striped stockings and skirts halfway to the knee, and their shirt-waists are open at the neck. Dirty Jake didn't speak to me for three years.

He wasn't Dirty Jake then, though, just Jacob Niedelmeier, fresh from selling ribbons and yard goods in Perth Amboy, New Jersey and hot to find a fortune in the hills. He'd been a failure all his natural life. This was a new beginning, for a man 34 who was already at the bitter end and looking for the path back. Gold was the way, he figured. He was going to get it.

But he didn't. He was back flat broke and starving in four months.

He spent the next seventeen years behind the notions counter at Martin's Mercantile, selling ribbon and yard goods and growing old two years at a time. I think it tainted his mind.

Leastways, from the time I got to know him, some fourteen years gone, he's been what you might say, a queer actor. At first, when the store closed at sundown he'd take

off for the near hills with a pick and a sack, still seeking for color somebody might have missed. After a while he didn't bother with the gear. He just moseyed around all that rock mostly, I suppose, to be away from people.

Truth to tell, people were beginning to avoid him anyway. He was getting kind of gamy over the years, and cantankerous generally.

**M**AYBE it's kind of funny we got more or less friendly but doctors and ribbon clerks aren't so all-fired far apart. They both have to do with people and their ways, and like to get shut of both now and then. Every couple of months I'd go along with him up in the hills, to get the sick smell out of my nose. Night air and a night sky can be pretty fine if you've been looking at tongues and such long enough.

Going out like that, we didn't say much. I preferred it that way since Jake Niedelmeier was a boob.

A smart man can get on tolerably well with an idiot if both just have sense enough to keep their mouths shut. One time he didn't was when he brought along a bottle of rye. He got started and was going on to beat the band, yapping about how life was a cheat and someday everybody'd respect Jacob Niedelmeier, until finally I lost patience and

told him that while I treasured our association beyond pearls I'd chuck him off a cliff if he didn't shut the hell up. I was nice about it, and after that it was like I said, tolerable.

Well, sir, about two years ago he came into my office while I was darning up some fool borax miner that'd got himself kicked square in the bottle on his hip. Jake stood in the corner picking his teeth while I finished. After the borax miner limped out he spoke up.

"Comin'?" That was all the invitation he ever gave.

"I guess," I said. I sloshed the suture needle in a basin, gave it a couple of swipes on the hone stone and threw it in my satchel. That miner had a tough rind.

Jake went out first. I closed the door behind us, not locking it, of course, because our night marshal was kind of my relief surgeon whenever I was on calls. He was a Secesh hospital orderly during the Rebellion. He was better with a saw than with sewing, but he could tie up most wounds well enough to do till I got back.

Jake and I set out south up the mountain trail, but pretty soon it hit me he was heading someplace considerable more directly than we usually did.

Sure enough, he took off at an angle from the trail after a bit. We struck up into some fairly woolly country. He

wasn't following any sign I could see, at least not by moonlight, but he kept going faster until I was plumb out of wind.

We were in the hills overlooking Crater Lake when we came to kind of an amphitheater in the rocks, some twenty feet across. He stopped at the edge of it and stood staring in, silent and breathing catchy.

Me, I just chased my own breath for a while, then looked too and saw what he was aiming at. Right in the middle, shining pale in the moonshine like nothing else does, was a pile of old, old bones. Jake, I saw, had seen it before. It was scaring him yet.

**O**LD bones, sir, are still bones. I've seen and set my fill. But after I got a good look at these they scared me too.

There were four skeletons altogether, all nicely preserved, and only three of them were men. Indians, I mean. You could tell that from the shreds of buckskin. Two of them still had weapons near their right hands: one a stone knife, the other a lance. And the top of each of the three skulls had been shot clean away.

At least, half of the top had, and the same half on all three. Almost the entire os frontale and ossa parietalia on the left side was gone on each one. I

hunkered down to see closer, while Jake stood back and shook.

I struck a sulphur match and saw something else about those three redskin skulls. The edges where the bone was gone weren't fractured clean like a bullet or a club would do. They were charred.

The three were sprawled around the fourth skeleton and that was the one gave me the vapors. It was more or less man-shaped. But it wasn't a man, that I know. I don't believe I care to find out what it was. Instead of ribs there was a cylinder of thin bone, and it had only one bone in the lower leg. What there was for a pelvis I've never seen the like, and the skull was straight out of a Dore Bible. There was a hatchet buried in that skull.

The bones of the right arm were good and hefty, and it had two elbows. The left arm was about half the size—not crippled, but smaller scale. Like it was good for delicate work and not much else.

About ten inches from the widespread six fingers of its right hand was what you knew right off was a weapon even if it did look like an umbrella handle.

I was just reaching down to touch it when that fool Jake made his move.

He'd been standing behind me. closer I bet than he'd ever got before, staring down at

that fourth skeleton and making odd noises. I tell you, it was something for a medical man to see. Suddenly he grunted like he was going to be sick. He snatched up a femur from one of the Indians and swung it up to smash that fourth skeleton to smithereens.

Well, sir, quicker than the eye could see the umbrella handle smacked itself into the palm of that bony hand, sending fingers flying in six directions. It hung there in the air against what was left, trained dead on Jake's head, and it hummed.

The femur dropped from Jake's right hand like he'd been shot. He hadn't, though, because he was still wearing his skull and by that time running. Soon as he did, the umbrella handle flopped over and just lay there, the hum dying away.

When it stopped the place was pretty quiet, because Jake was off in the rocks and I was going over some things I wanted to say to him immediately I was able to talk again. That fourth skeleton had the fastest draw I'd ever seen.

Jake stuck his head up from behind a boulder. "Doc," he said, "why didn't he shoot?"

**T**HE question wasn't as all-fired pip-witted as Jake was capable of. It took me up-

wards of three weeks to work out why a weapon that could draw and aim itself didn't shoot too.

I'd heard a little clink when the weapon flew into the skeleton's hand. It came from a metal disk that lay in its palm, toward the heel of the hand.

The disk was thin and only about as big as a two-cent piece. A mate to it was set in the butt of the umbrella handle, convex where the other was concave.

Going at it kind of gingerly, I slid the disk in my vest behind my watch and put the umbrella handle in my right coat pocket.

It was a key-wind repeater with a gold hunting case, that watch, and I worried about it every step down the mountain. I walked a good four hundred yards behind Jake all the way back into town, just to be on the safe side. We didn't linger, either. We wanted lights.

By the time I got the two objects locked in my rolltop my heartbeat in anybody else would have had me telling the sexton to start his hole. I prescribed bed for me, told Jake, who hadn't hardly even drawn breath the whole time, to go to hell and retired.

**N**EXT day a squabble came up over some borax rights upcountry. I didn't get to open that rolltop for a time. Then one early morning coming back in the buggy from a

house-call in Pockmark, forty-odd miles north, I got to worrying again at the umbrella handle and those dead Indians.

Seems like four, five times a week some chunkhead hunkers down hard with his spurs on. When I got to the office that night there was one waiting—a bad one, Spanish rowels—and Jake was sprawled in my chair, picking his teeth with my spare scalpel. I patched up the chunkhead, took the scalpel from Jake and rinsed it off and watched him suck his teeth for a while. It began to look like he was going to be stubborn. So finally I said: "Say, Jake."

He grunted. "Jake," I said, "I think I've got that dingus figured." He snuck a glance over at the desk so I knew he knew what I meant, but he was busy pretending that wasn't what he came to talk about.

"I think it's a gun that can read minds like a gypsy," I said. Jake still looked bored, so I took the umbrella handle out of the rolltop and waved it at him. He dove off the chair and started rolling for the door.

"You damn fool," I said, "it won't go off." I was reasonably certain it wouldn't, but I laid it back down by the disk gently anyhow and sat in the chair. I've only got the one chair, on the theory that anybody who isn't bad enough

to lie on the table is well enough to stand. Jake edged over and stood like a short-legged bird on a bobwire fence. "It kin whut?" he said.

"It can read minds," I said. "You were going to bash those bones. The gun knew it and trained square on your head. You remember?"

He remembered. "And those Indians," I went on. "You remember them? The left side of the head on each of them was blown off."

I hauled down a roller chart of the human skeleton, first time I'd done that since I don't know when.

"This up here is the brain," I said. "We don't know a hell of a lot about it, but we do know it's like a whole roomful of telegraphers, sending messages to different parts of the body along the nerves. They're like the wires. This left hemisphere—right here—sends to the right side of the body. Don't fret about why, the nerves twist going into the spinal cord.

"Okay. We know, too, that the part of the brain that sends to the arm is right here, in the parietal lobe. Right under the chunk of skull that was shot off on those three Indians."

"Shaw," Jake said, perching on the table. The old billy-goat was beginning to get impressed, even if he didn't have any notion of what I was talking about.

**I** DIDN'T have exactly much notion either, but I kept on. "The brain works by a kind of electricity, same kind as in the telegraph batteries at the depot. This gun," I tapped the umbrella handle and Jake started off again, but caught himself, "has some sort of detector, a galvanic thermometer that senses electrical messages to the nerves."

From here on in it was pure dark and wild hazard. "Obviously," I said, "whenever one of those signals goes from this cerebral motor area here in the left hemisphere down to make the weapon hand move, it must be a special signal this gun was built to catch. Just like a lock is made for one particular key.

"And near as I can figure, the gun has to be able to tell when that move coming up is going to be dangerous to the man holding it. Stands to reason if it can tell when a brain's signalling a hand, it can tell too if that brain is killing-mad. Some people can do that, and most dogs.

"So, if it senses murderous intent and a message to the weapon hand to move, it moves too, and faster.

"It homes on this disk like a magnet right into the hand of the gent that owns it, and aims itself plumb at the place the signal is coming from." I tapped the chart. "Right here."

I poked the gunk out of a

corncob, packed it and lit up before going on. Jake stared at the umbrella handle like a stuffed owl.

"Now, that fourth skeleton we saw sure as hell isn't human. He isn't from anywhere on this green earth, or I miss my guess. Might even have something to do with Crater Lake there, years ago. But we aren't likely to find out.

"But we do know that he fought three Indians that probably jumped him all at once. And he killed every one of them with this gun before he fell."

That brought Jake up short.

The Territory is kind of violent generally, and anybody or anything good along that line would be bound to have the sober respect of a ninny like Jake.

I dug up an old glove, and used spirit gum to stick in its palm the little disk from the skeleton's hand. I pulled the glove on my right hand, and stood up with my hand about a foot over the umbrella handle.

"Okay," I said, "kill me."

**H**E was so orry-eyed by then he damn near did it just to be obliging. But then the recollection of the night on the mountain, and the three Indians with their heads shot off, sifted through and he shied off. "Hell no," he hollered, "I seen that thing go before! I ain't about to get

my head blowed to bits!" And he went on.

Well, it took me the best of two hours. I showed him the two studs on the underside that most likely were a safety device. I explained how probably the gun wouldn't go off unless somebody was holding it with a finger between those studs, which was why it didn't shoot when it went into the skeleton's hand that night. I finally got him by telling him if I was right, we'd wire the fourth skeleton together, take it back East and earn a mint of money on the vaudeville stage showing the fastest cadaver in the West.

"Mr. Bones: Faster than Billy the Kid and Twice as Dead," I said we'd bill it. Jake, he thought that was a lovely idea, and decided to go along.

Fourteen times that eternal jackass raised his right arm at me, while I held my own gloved right hand over the weapon. But he didn't have any real heart for it, and fourteen times the gun just lay there. Then I got a mite impatient, and kicked him in the kneecap. That fifteenth time he was truly trying.

Skinny as he was he'd have driven me clear through the floor, except that umbrella handle jumped into my glove and aimed dead at his forehead, snarling like a cougar. More correctly, the left side of his forehead. If I hadn't

braced my index finger out stiff, that fifteenth time would've had him a dead man.

Jake froze like a statue and hung in the air staring at the gun, snarling away in my hand. Finally I pulled the glove off with the gun still stuck to it, and flung it on the desk.

Then Jake gave me the sixteenth, and by the time I got up again he was gone and the gun and the glove with him.

**N**EXT morning the borax squabble blew up again. What with miners getting stomped I didn't get to bed for a week, much less have a chance to find out where Jake and that damned weapon had lit out for. By the time I did, it was too late. Jacob Niedelmeier, the ribbon clerk, after seventeen years was on his way to glory as the legendary Dirty Jake.

I got the start of the story from a drifter, name of Hubert Comus. He'd got into kind of a heated discussion in a saloon south a ways that ended with him and this other man going for their hardware. Hubert got his Merwin & Bray .42 out and, being a fool, tried fanning it. Of course it jammed and he laid the heel of his hand open clear to the bone.

Twasn't the hand bothering Hubert, though. Like most, the other man missed him clean, but when the barkeep



threw them both out Hubert lit sitting on the boardwalk and took a six-inch splinter clear through his corduroys.

While I was working on him he told me about Jake.

A man, it seems, had turned up in a little settlement called Blister, about two days down the line. Nobody noticed him come in, except that he was wearing one glove, a shiny clawhammer coat and Congress gaiters. The general run in the mining camps doesn't wear Congress gaiters.

He got noticed, though, when he showed up in a bar-room wearing a pearl-gray derby with an ostrich plume in the band, and carrying a rolled-up umbrella under his arm. The little devil had stuck the shaft of a regular umbrella in the muzzle of the skeleton's weapon.

It turned out he'd bought the derby that the storekeeper there had planned to be buried in. Where the ostrich plume came from I never did find out.

"He come right in the swingin' door an' stood there," Hubert said over his shoulder, "lookin' at the crowd. Purty quick they was all lookin' right back, I kin tell you. That feather fetched 'em up sharp. Take it easy back there, will you, Doc? Then Homer Cavanaugh, the one they called Ham Head, he bust out laughing. He laughed so hard he bent over double, and the rest

of the boys was just beginnin' t'laugh too when the little feller picked up a spittoon and dumped it down Ham Head's neck.

"The boys got mighty quiet then. Hey, easy, Doc, will you? Ham Head straightened up and his face went from red as flannels to white, just like that. He stood glarin' at the little feller for a couple of ticks, openin' and closin his fists, and then that big right hand went for the Smith & Wesson in his belt.

"Well, it was a double-action pistol and had a couple notches in the grip, but Ham Head never cleared it. I never even seen the little feller draw, but there was Ham Head fallin' with half his noggin shot away. Gently, will you, Doc, gently!

"The little feller stood leaning on his umbrella, lookin' down at him. 'What was that man's name?' he says. 'Ham Head Cavanaugh,' somebody says back. 'Ham Head Cavanaugh,' the little feller says, 'he's the first.' Then he shoves the umbreller back under his arm and goes out. We never saw him again.

"Some say it was a bootleg pistol he used, or a derringer in his sleeve. And some say he had a pardner with a rifle in the street, but there wasn't nobody there. I was standin' as close to him as I am to you, Doc, and I swear—it—was—that — um — breller — OW!"

**HAM HEAD CAVA-**  
**NAUGH** was the first. I had kind of a personal interest in Jake and his weapon, so I kept track. There was Curly Sam Thompson, Big John Ballentine, Redmeat Carson, Uriah Singletree and twelve others known of, all dead within eighteen months. Any man Jake could hoorah into a fight. With never a chance to get his right hand on iron before his head gave the signal and got blown off. He took them all on. And he never lost — because he couldn't.

Jake was king-o'-the-hill now, all right. He had the success he yearned for.

Yet when he came back to see me last April it wasn't to brag. He was in trouble. I looked up from a customer, a damn fool that'd sat on a gila monster, and there he was, sneaking in the door bare-headed like a whipped hound, not the cock of the walk in the whole Territory. He slid into the back room like a shadow, and the man I was working on never even knew he'd come.

When I went in afterward the lamp was out, the shade was down and he was in a corner, nervous as a jackrabbit an eagle just dropped in a wolf den. "Buried my derby under a pile of rock up in the mountains," he whispered. "Look," and he held out his glove.

It was plumb worn out. The

little metal disc was hanging on by a strand of spirit gum, and the fabric of the palm was in shreds.

I looked at him for a minute without saying anything. He was still wearing the clawhammer coat, over B.V.D. tops, but it looked like he'd been buried weeks in it and dug up clumsy. He had on greasy rawhide breeches and battered cowhand boots for shoes. He had a month's beard on his lip and he stunk.

This here was legendary Dirty Jake, no question about it.

"Get a new glove," I said.

"Nope," he answered, "no good. Last week in Ojo Rojizo I took the glove off to scratch and right then a man braced me. He threw me in a horse-trough when I wouldn't fight. I want you to fix me up good.

"I want you to open my hand up and set the dingus just under the skin, and sew it up again. Knew a feller did that with five-dollar gold pieces cuz he didn't like banks. Worked fine till he got a counterfeit, and it killed him.

"I'll lay low in the hills till the hand heals. No problems after that."

No problems? Maybe so, but I'd been doing some thinking. Still, I kept my mouth shut and did what he wanted, and he slunk off with no thanks. Don't guess I really had any coming.

After he left I got out my

tallybook and ticked off the men Dirty Jake had killed: One Eye Jack Sundstrom, Fat Charlie Ticknor, Pilander Quantrell, Lobo Stephens, Alec the Frenchman Dubois, some jackass Texas nobody even knew and the rest, all men whose brains had telegraphed a special signal to Jake's gun before it reached their own right hand. Well, there was a new pistolero in town.

A month and a half later I was craned around, trying to lance a boil of my own, when out of the corner of my eye I saw Dirty Jake go by under my window. He'd dug that hat with the ostrich plume out from under the rocks, his hand was healed, he was swinging his umbrella and he didn't so much as look up. He was headed for the Owl Hoot Palace. I decided the boil'd wait.

Less than five minutes later I heard the shots, two of them.

A second later Jubal Bean, swamper at the Owl Hoot, came pounding up the boardwalk and hollered in the door: "Doc, better come quick. Dirty Jake just took a couple slugs in the chest and he never even got to draw!"

I took my time. "It was just a matter of odds," I said. "Who got him?"

"The new one," Jubal said, "the man they call Lefty."

**W**ELL, a couple more weeks to bleach, a little wiring, and I'll be heading East. Look for the billboards:

### MR. BONES

The Fastest Draw in the West  
"Faster than Billy the Kid  
and Twice as Dead"  
presented by  
HIRAM PERTWEE,  
M.D.

All I've got to do is figure how to keep getting mad at Jake. —END

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## POEM AND REPLY

Nature and nature's laws lay hid in Night;  
God said, "Let Newton be" and all was light.

It did not last. The Devil, crying "Ho!  
Let Einstein be," restored the status quo.

The first two lines are Newton's epitaph by Alexander Pope; The second two, though widely quoted as anonymous, were written by Sir John Squire.

# SF

# IS WHEN....

... intelligence comes to grips with  
the universe — and the results are something  
wonderful — and strange!

**T**HE largest and noisiest of all the unsettled arguments in science fiction is the simple (ho-ho!) matter of defining it. Like certain other imponderables, such as love, and the blues, and the exact meaning of an abstention in a UN vote, the matter is best handled by describing not nature, but function. Love, a young lady was heard to remark, is when you wake up knowing it will be wonderful

also to get *out* of bed. The blues, said a rough-hewn poet, is when you got the best steak in the whole wide world and the salt-cellar just cries all over it. Science fiction, then, is when someone looks at what is there for anyone to look at, and suddenly makes something new and wonderful out of it.

The breeze of s-f, in this sense, must have been ruffling the hair of the encyclopedist

who wrote the article ATOM in the famous 11th edition of the Britannica, published just fifty years ago. For after a clear and careful description of atomic theory, most of which was then set up to agree with the definition of the atom as "indivisible," he concluded as follows:

The atomic theory has been of priceless value to chemists, but it has more than once happened in the history of science that a hypothesis, after having been useful in the discovery and co-ordination of knowledge has been abandoned and replaced by one more in harmony with later discoveries. Some distinguished chemists have thought that this fate may be awaiting the atomic theory, and that in future chemists may be able to obtain all the guidance they need from the science of the transformations of energy. But modern (this means 1910) discoveries in radioactivity are in favour of the existence of the atom, although they lead to the belief that the atom is not so eternal and unchangeable a thing as Dalton and his predecessors imagined, and in fact, that the atom itself may be subject to that eternal

law of growth and decay of which Lucretius speaks.

Science fiction is when a man sits amidst several dozen imperial bushels of evidence to the contrary, and dares to make a breathtaking intuitive sweep like that. To realize fully what a heady grab this was, it is worthwhile digging a little further to find out something about the two boys he mentioned.

**J**OHAN DALTON, away back in 1803, took the atom-is-indivisible theory away from philosophers who had been tonguing and gumming it for a thousand years, and really put it to work—to such a degree that many people think he invented it. He didn't, but the amount of solid experimental work he did on it made it his. He pulled a vast amount of vague reporting into line and invented an ingenious, if somewhat unwieldy, system of symbols which clearly showed his belief that an atom is an atom, an element is made of atoms of one kind and a compound is made by certain fixed quantities of each kind of atom which kept their relation to one another no matter how much or how little was compounded. He made it possible to predict and to explain thousands of chemical actions, set chemistry on its feet — and made "*the* atomic theory"

(the atom-is-indivisible) unshakeable and unbreakable for more than a century. And if science fiction is when someone takes common ho-hum evidence and makes something new and wonderful out of it, then it's fair to say it touched Dalton too.

But let's have a look at the other character the Britannica writer mentioned. The atom may, he said, "be subject to that eternal law of growth and decay of which Lucretius speaks."

Titus Lucretius Carus was born around 98 B.C. and probably died in 55 B.C. Of several accounts of his life, by far the most appetizing is the one which says that he became mad in consequence of quaffing a love-philtre and, after writing a number of books in his lucid intervals, knocked himself off when he was 44.

Whatever his habits and pastimes, he was an extraordinary man: poet (truly a great one), philosopher and, in the truest sense, theoretical scientist. His great work, *De Rerum Naturae*, called unique in literature, is a reasoned system of philosophy, written in verse. Its main idea is the truth of the laws of nature vs. superstitions. And he wrote not like a speculator, who wondered if, but like a teacher, who *knew*. He wrote, says the Britannica, "to clear the mind from the fear of the

gods and the terrors of a future state." First, he shows

"... that the world is not governed by capricious agency, but has come into existence, continues in existence, and will ultimately pass away in accordance with the primary conditions of the elemental atoms which, along with empty space, are the only eternal and immutable substances. These atoms are infinite in number but limited in their varieties, and by their ceaseless movement and combinations during infinite time and through infinite space the whole process of creation is maintained."

All credit to the writer of the Britannica's ATOM article (his name was Francis Henry Neville, if anyone wonders) who could readily have been excused for ignoring this peculiar stuff Mme. Curie had been playing around with, and to Dalton, who with far less system to view and review was able to use his think-tank like a Heinlein.

Perhaps one day a science-fiction convention will grant a special award to Lucretius, who never saw a test-tube or even a copy of IF in his whole life, but blocked out a picture we haven't filled in yet!

—END