

The Atombomb Clue

By J. Harvey Haggard

*Professor Cadler aimed to make a getaway with an atombomb sample.
But though he'd figured on homicide and grand larceny to help him,
Cadler forgot to make the payoff to a little atomic tattletale.*

IT DIDN'T take a great deal of courage to put a ballet through Professor Edrick Nelton's head. After all, the little scientist was nothing to look at. Only his bald head, with corrugated lines that encased a powerful brain, gave a suggestion at being stupendous. Very few knew that Professor Nelton was on the verge of creating a new atomic bomb out of radium.

Cadler knew. Of course he knew. He had to, being one of the twelve assistants to Professor Nelton. But they were the only ones, out of the whole wide world, who did. It wasn't any thought of betrayal that motivated Cadler's killing of the scientist. Nothing like that. He was just built that way, with a mind firmly convinced in its own way that one man alone could dominate all world governments, if he but had a super-powerful atomic bomb. So he let the grey cells of Professor Nelton's brain ooze gently into outer air through a bullet hole that neatly intersected the frontal bone and the superciliary arch.

He took the sample of isotopic radium which was the key to their work, dumped it from its lead container, and caught it deftly in a small flat lead can, shaped like a tobacco tin. This he fitted into his front shirt pocket.

"Damn diplomats!" snorted Sergeant Brade Wesley, his underslung jaw extended belligerently as he looked up from giving the body the once-over where it lay on the laboratory floor. He glared around at his men as if he blamed them. "Half a dozen consuls on their way here now. You'd think by the list of his assistants that he had obtained an atomic expert from every country in the world. No chance to third-degree anybody."

Cadler grinned, fingered secretly at the bulge in his shirt pocket under his coat. His consul had already arrived, and he wouldn't be searched.

"Tough," agreed a sharp-eyed police photographer. "Mind if I mug the guys, Sarge?"

Wesley grunted his consent. When it was his turn Cadler grinned sardonically into the camera.

"Why, what's this?" suddenly said Wade

Norrister, the one assistant of the group who was of American descent. He was a slender, wiry man with greying temples. Reaching into his pocket he brought out a cylindrical object, several inches in diameter. "Where did I get this? It's—it's the radium!"

"The—what?" demanded Sergeant Wesley.

"The radium we were working with," said Wade Norrister, wiping his forehead clear of perspiration. "This is the lead receptacle. Radium gives out radioactive rays and has to be kept in a lead container. Guess my absentmindedness is getting the best of me."

"Maybe you need a vacation," observed Sergeant Wesley meaningly. "A nice long quiet one."

Back in his suite in a luxurious hotel, Cadler's eyes glistened as he withdrew the radium and placed it in a secret panel in the wall.

A SHORT time later the telephone rang. "Hello," said a crisp voice which he recognized as that belonging to Sergeant Wesley. "Just thought I'd call to see if you were still in town. Say, we found a gun on Norrister, all right. Didn't look like it'd been fired, though. Wouldn't have done much good if it had. The bullet that went in Professor Nelton's head whizzed around and around inside the skull, destroying all revolver marks. As far as identification of the murderer is concerned, ballistics are out."

"Eh, oh thanks, Sergeant. Wouldn't be surprised if he's your man, all right. You notifying all the others?"

"Sure thing, Professor Cadler. Just thought I'd call. Your consul, as well as several representing the various assistants from other countries, has requested diplomatic immunity."

"Naturally," said Cadler. "Naturally. But that's just red tape as far as I'm concerned. I'll help you any way I can."

"Thank you," said Sergeant Wesley. Then, as if with an afterthought, "By the way, the lead

container in Norrister's pocket didn't contain the radium. He had quite a story to tell about this particular type of radium. Reacted differently than any other he had ever observed. Its potential properties for releasing atomic power made it precious beyond estimation."

Cadler made a wry face as he hung up the receiver. Queer fellow, Sergeant Wesley. More like a friendly bulldog than a bloodhound. Still, it wouldn't do any harm for him to smell around. He'd never discover how he, Cadler, had slipped the empty radium receptacle into Norrister's pocket while his coat was lying on the table. And he'd never find the murder weapon. Even the metal of a revolver can melt in an atom furnace. And there weren't any fingerprints on atoms. That was one weapon that would never be reassembled.

The next day Cadler exchanged cablegrams with certain parties in his home country. He called Sergeant Wesley up this time.

"Sorry, Sergeant, but it's home business," he said, "and there's no way I could explain without divulging information that might be detrimental."

"Okay," growled Sergeant Wesley. "It was the same way with seven others of the scientists who were helping Professor Nelton. Well, no way to stop you, I guess. Might as well wish you *bon voyage*."

He came down to the gangway when Cadler's ship left. Attendants took Professor Cadler's light luggage ahead to be checked. Sergeant Wesley put his hand on Cadler's shoulder, like an old friend begrudging the departure of a dear one.

"One minute, Professor," he said.

Cadler frowned. There was a thin hatchet-faced fellow with the sergeant. Keen grey eyes were darting about Cadler's body, and now fastened upon a decoration pinned to his coat lapel.

"What's that?" demanded Sergeant Wesley, pointing.

"That," answered Professor Cadler boredly, "is a national award for achievement in electronics. Always wear it."

"Could this be a photograph of it?" demanded Sergeant Wesley, taking a picture from the thin fellow Cadler now recognized as the police

photographer of the day before.

Cadler frowned, looked down at the crazily smudged photo. Yes, in the radiant crisscrossing lines he recognized the basic outlines of his science medallion.

"What's this, anyway?"

"Just a little picture Fields didn't take."

"I've no time for levity," said Cadler. "Out of curiosity though, how did that picture of Wade Norrister at the investigation turn out?"

"All right," said Sergeant Wesley. "Perfect likeness. Your picture wasn't so good, though. Funny thing. Fields is a good photographer. All the other pictures came out fine. Except yours. It was an absolute blank from overexposure."

"Is that right?" demanded Professor Cadler, suddenly feeling a chill sensation stealing up into his heart.

"Right," said Sergeant Wesley. "Well, we won't be able to tell you good-by, Professor Cadler. You see, after we communicated our facts and showed this picture to the ministers of your country, they agreed you should be tried in a world court, not an ordinary one."

"Professor Cadler, your picture wasn't any good because radioactive rays of radium will print images on film, just like light rays. And the radium rays in your pocket, escaping through thin walls of lead, plus natural lighting, overexposed it. The next blank film that rolled around happened to be exposed just right. The invisible rays went right up out of your front pocket, around and through your science medallion, through the walls and lens of the camera, and in a quick moment caused an accidental exposure."

"I am hereby placing you under arrest for suspicion of murder and theft of the radium, pending arrival of more suitable agents of the United Nations. You don't need to tell me where the radium is if you don't want to. We've ways of locating it conveniently anyhow. So if you'll just bother to postpone that little trip to your native country we'll see that you have a long stay somewhere with complete rest and quiet. Very complete, and very quiet."