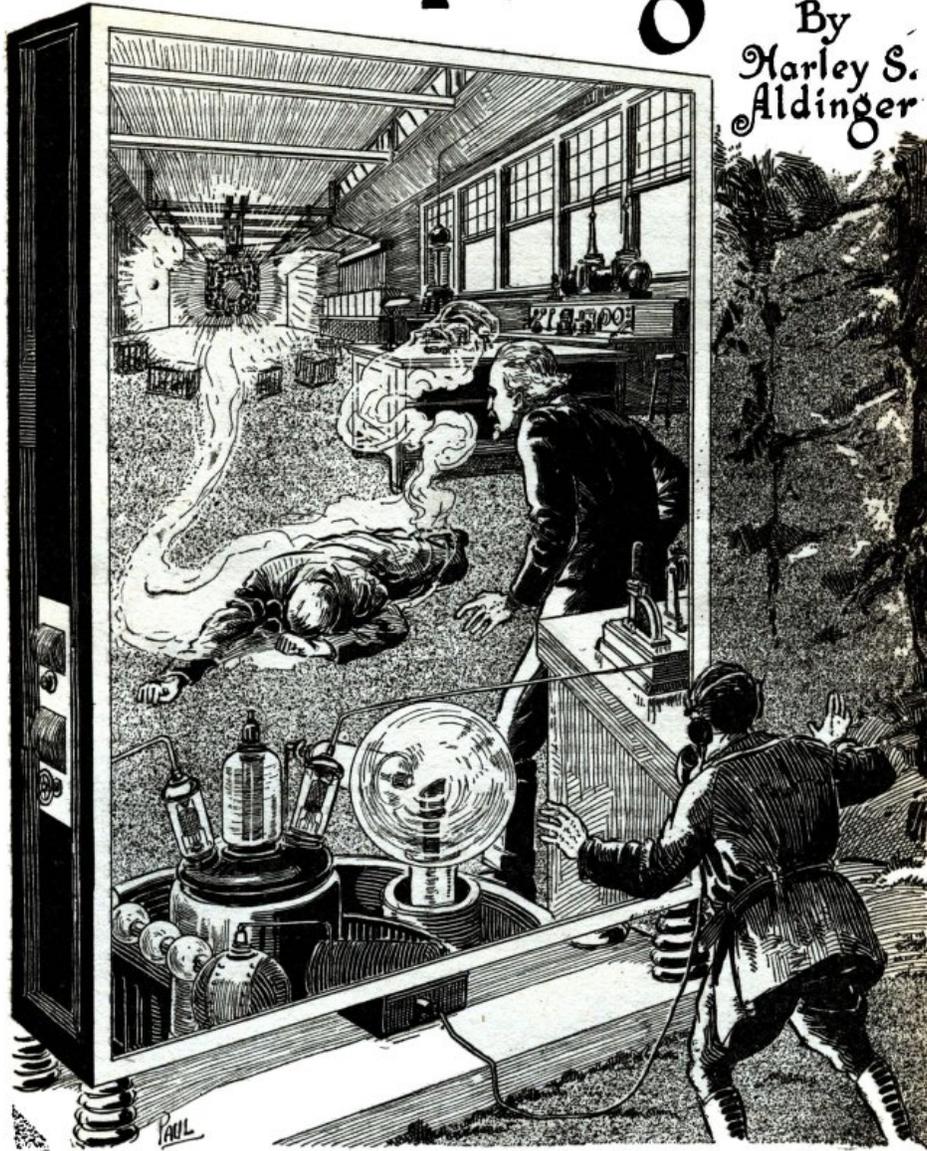


# The GREEN Intelligence

By  
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I became abruptly conscious of the horrible truth. That green luminous mist—the metal monster's hands—were creeping forward. Then the aura swirled, fast as light, and enveloped them. They tried to run but could not.

Illustrations by Paul.

**A**N air pilot by profession, and an adventurer by nature and by choice, I have never led a prosaic, uneventful life. Quite the contrary! But, towering above all other episodes in my

experience, the Markham case stands alone. For sheer thrill it remains unsurpassed; but, for all of that, I should not care to go through it again.

I had not long been a professional

flier, and was, indeed, looking for a job, when I was invited by one Edwin Spencer, a lawyer, to call at his offices. He was acting, he informed me, for two of his clients, the brothers Markham, who were in need of an air chauffeur. He explained the drawbacks of the position candidly enough. The Markhams were scientists, wrapped in their own work and uncommunicative, except with each other. Their only servants, a man and his wife, were deaf-mutes. Their house was situated on the side of a mountain, miles from any neighbor and fully thirty miles from the nearest village. Not an especially enjoyable prospect. Bleak though the proposition, however, the salary offered certainly was not. In fact, it was so generous that I was tempted to accept without further deliberation. But the work—?

“The Markhams,” Spencer said, in response to my question, “have recently acquired a desire to fly; for pleasure, I presume, as they have no need, known to me, for transportation to any other place. They have purchased an airplane and turned over to me the task of finding a pilot. If you enter their employ, not much service will be required of you; as they religiously spend ten or more hours a day in their laboratories. You will have no duties other than flying: the machine and taking care of it.”

I considered quickly. “Done!”

“You’ll take the position?”

“Yes.”

“Good. When can you leave?”

“Immediately, if you wish.”

“You leave tomorrow, then, at noon. Call here tomorrow morning and you will receive a ticket, credentials, money for a flying wardrobe, and more specific directions for reaching your destination.”

He rose. The interview was at an end.

At twilight of the next day a chuggy local brought me into the little western town of Shotsford, I entered the only hostelry and made myself and my business known to the proprietor—told him I wanted to hire someone with an automobile to drive me to the Markham place. His jovial face seemed to alter at the words. There was repugnance, curiosity, and just a little fear in his eyes and voice when he spoke again.

“So you’re goin’ to live in ‘The House on the Mountain,’ eh? Well, I guess I don’t envy you none.”

“What’s that? What’s the matter with it?” I could see that it was not just the loneliness of the site that disturbed him.

“Nothin’. I ain’t said anythin’ but what it ain’t all right, have I? I got nothin’ against the Markhams. Only—”

“Only?” I prompted.

“They’re queer people, all right, them scientists. But those animals—”

I waited, but he seemed indisposed to say more.

“You people haven’t got the idea that the place is haunted, or anything like that, have you?”

“Haunted? Whadaya mean? Think I’m a kid or somethin’? Of course it ain’t haunted; and if it was, who’d give a damn? We’re men out here.”

“And concerning the animals?” I pressed.

“I got work to do. If you kin git hold of Jeff Todd up the street, he’s got a good car an’ maybe he’ll take you up. Ef he won’t, nobody will.”

JEFF TODD, an old-timer if I ever saw one, was puttering busily with the engine of his car when I came into his yard. The machine was an ancient Franklin that hadn’t more than a few mountain climbs under its hood.

He straightened up when he saw me, wiped his fingers on a bit of waste and shook my hand; even before he knew who I was. Strangers were fairly scarce in Shotsford. When I explained my mission, he readily agreed to take me to the Markham place immediately. He seemed to be of hardier stuff than the innkeeper—less liable to groundless superstitions and beliefs.

“It’s a terrible road up the mountain,” he said, “but she’ll stand it all right”—indicating the car. “I just had that big running-board light put on. It’s sure powerful. We’ll git up all right with that on.”

Fifteen minutes more of tinkering, and we were off. Almost immediately I asked Jeff the meaning of the inn-keeper’s words. He laughed gruffly.

“That fat-head and the hotel crowd are as bad as old maids. There ain’t nothin’ to that talk. They think it’s funny that the Markhams don’t want nothin’ to do with ’em, but I don’t. I don’t think much of the citizens of Shotsford.”

I questioned him further.

“Well, I’ll tell you all I know about it,” he assented. “It ain’t much.”

“The Markhams have been livin’ on that mountain for a long time—fifteen years, maybe. They’re scientists. Not inventors—they don’t invent nothin’ that I ever heard of, but they just work around. Put a match to a little dynamite to see what it’ll do, or somethin’ damnfool like that. They ain’t ever talked any to us folks—never come down into town, even. Fact is, nobody from outside’s even seen the old geezers for five years. They send their man-servant—he an’ his wife is deaf an’ dumb, y’ know—to town for stuff to eat an’ anythin’ else they need. Sometimes they send him out of town. They send away by mail a lot for things, too.

“Well, the town never did like ’em overmuch, but they like ’em less since the animals have been comin’ in. Monkeys an’ dogs an’ cats, mostly, an’ a few birds an’ lizards an’ fish an’ snakes an’ what-not. The town’s down on vivisection, an’ that’s what it suspicions. Luke Hollyer went up there once an’ saw the servant man buryin’ a lot of dead animals. Luke looked ’em over close while the feller was buryin’ ’em; but he says there wasn’t a scratch on ’em.”

Jeff expertly pulled the car out of a rut. “That’s all I know,” he said.

It took three hours to cover the thirty miles between Shotsford and “The House on the Mountain”. At the end of that time we were rewarded by the sight of a great gray mansion of rambling contour with many gables that shone silver under the full moon. It was situated on the very brink of a cliff; behind it stretched a wide, grassy, level space, the floor of a great niche in the mountain side. On this space, at the mansion end was a construction that I immediately recognized as a hangar; and my heart gave a leap at the thought of again putting my hands on a set of controls.

Jeff dropped me and my luggage before the door, and, calling to me to visit him soon, rolled away.

The main door was on the side of the house away from the cliff; and this side was entirely without illumination from the inside.

I had to ring long and hard before I received any response. Then, suddenly, lights flashed on and the massive, carved door swung heavily inward. Revealed in the bright rectangle of the doorway was a man, a huge, hulking mass of flesh with the suggestion of great strength; he was dressed simply and roughly, and without coat or necktie. He stood aside silently and motioned me in.

Perceiving that he was considerably

younger than I understood the Markham brothers to be, I immediately came to the conclusion that this must be the deaf-mute servant. Accordingly, I said nothing, but dashed off my name and business there on a page of my notebook; which I ripped out and handed him, together with my credentials. He glanced over them cursorily, nodded his head, and wrote a return note on the back of mine in a coarse, cramped hand. The Markhams were in their laboratory and would not see me until morning. Would I eat, amuse myself about the house, or be shown to my room?

Being exceedingly tired from the hard, jolting trip in Jeff's auto, I elected to go to bed.

Mounting the broad, sweeping staircase, I started, suddenly and involuntarily. I stopped, paused to listen for the repetition of some sound—what, I did not know. The clumping footsteps of the man before me ceased also; he had stopped to see what was keeping me. Then I heard it—or them—louder than before. Barks, growls, yaps—both shrill and deep—of dogs, dozens of dogs!

I looked inquiringly at the deaf-mute—Franz was his name, as I learned later. He shrugged, shook his head, and, motioning me to follow, led the way upwards again.

The next morning I met the Markhams. They looked alike enough, with their iron-gray goatees, studious expression, and sober black clothes, to have been twins. The eyes of David, however, were gray and cold; while those of James were blue and a little kindlier.

"We shall tell you in advance," said David, "when we shall require your services; so that you may hike or fly about the country-side when we do not need you. Operating the plane will be your only duty. You may have the run of this part of the

house, including both libraries; but you are to keep away entirely from the left wing, which is devoted to our laboratories."

IN the weeks that followed, I had little to do. I took the brothers for rides in the air each afternoon for about an hour; moving slowly for a plane, at low altitudes. They seemed to enjoy it; though it always seemed to me that they would have been more enthusiastic over a bit of chemical in a test tube. There was little conversation between them, and none with me.

I had at all times the free use of the plane and all the fuel needed; so I early acquired the habit of taking long jaunts by myself. But even that became boring, so I turned to the libraries. Shelves and shelves of scientific books of all kinds, literally thousands of them, were all the reading matter to be found. I began reading them and, although never before interested in science, I found them so engrossing that I was hardly ever without one. It was in this way that I finally really came to know the Markhams. They were quite as pleased at having me become an enthusiast, as a missionary would be after having converted a heathen; I believe they actually looked at it in that manner. As a result, I was given access to some of the laboratory rooms; and they took turns in expounding to me their views, most of them too technical for me to follow. They adopted me, without saying so in so many words, as their protégé.

"As you know," James Markham told me one day, "there are laboratories here which you have not as yet been permitted to enter. They contain our choicest and most advanced experiments. Some of the knowledge we have derived from them would astonish theoretical scientists; some would destroy the foundations of accepted beliefs; some few

practical ones would revolutionize whole industries; and there is one—our greatest—which transcends a universe in importance. Frankly speaking, David and I like you, King. You are intelligent, interested in science and, above all, do not possess that extreme skepticism lamentably evident in so many present-day scientists. It is our fond desire that, some day, when you are sufficiently advanced in your studies, we may impart to you the knowledge we have gained. Realizing that we may meet our ends suddenly and without warning, taking our discoveries with us to that destiny, the nature of which we have yet to discover, we have long wished for such a person as you. We knew nobody outside, and our servants, faithful though they are, are not—er—overly intelligent. It would be a severe blow to us, now that we have accepted you, to have you refuse the commission.”

“I am afraid I can never be a dyed-in-the-wool scientist,” I answered, “but I find myself very enthusiastic over the proposition, and I’m willing to try.”

“Thank you,” he said gravely: “You will never be sorry; for we offer you greater power than any man, other than ourselves, has ever possessed.”

Six weeks later occurred the next important event in this strange tale of ours. During those weeks three shipments of animals came in. The first two were small—of ten each. They were taken in their cages into one of the laboratories forbidden to me. The next day the giant Franz wheeled their dead bodies across the take-off field and buried them. The brothers, in spite of their constantly -growing affection for me, and my attempts to lead them around to the subject, steadfastly refused to speak concerning the animals or their fate.

Then the third shipment came in—twenty dogs of the more intelligent breeds,

and ten monkeys. That was on a Tuesday afternoon. On Wednesday evening, while I was working in the laboratory, a singular drowsiness came over me. I went to bed and could scarcely keep awake long enough to draw my clothes off, don my pajamas, and climb into bed.

I dreamed—a very strange and eerie dream, of a strange indescribable thing. Something was drawing me to IT, as a lodestone draws a bit of iron. I was clothed in luminous green; all the universe, it seemed, was lighted by dim, green lamps. I regained consciousness suddenly to find that both my arms were being held and that I was being shaken roughly. Opening my eyes, imagine my consternation to find myself standing upright in a green-lighted laboratory which I had never before entered! Shaking me were the two Markhams, both also in pajamas! I stared about me and at them in amazement.

“King,” said David sternly, “you were never nearer death in your life than you were just a moment ago. We stopped you on the very brink of destruction. Are you often troubled with somnambulism?”

“Never before, to my knowledge,” I replied: “But what do you mean by saying I almost met my death?”

“If you had ever walked into that green aura, in your unconscious state, nothing could have saved you.”

I turned my eyes in the direction to which he was pointing. Suspended from sturdy steel rafters by heavy chains, at a distance of about eight feet from the floor, was an intricate contrivance made of thousands of small pieces of metal of all shapes, all fastened together by the same substance. The metal, the like of which I had never seen before, was dimly luminous and an emerald-green in color. The whole mass was about five feet on an edge, and irregularly cubical in shape. It was

connected by wires to eight great storage batteries which rested on a table against one wall of the large room. The strangest thing of all, however, was the extraordinary sight of a quivering, emerald-green mist, surrounding the apparatus to a depth of perhaps six feet in all directions, and apparently flowing from the metal. On low benches, sufficiently high to bring their surfaces within the limits of the green mist, were several cages, containing the now life-less bodies of a dozen dogs and monkeys.

I turned back to the brothers. "Very strange coincidence, that aura," I said, in perplexity; and proceeded to recount to them my dream, in which that same luminous, emerald light had been so in evidence.

Strange to relate, the faces of both suddenly became very pale. David frowned and James' hands twitched nervously. The latter was the first to speak.

"It *drew* him, David, It drew him! Its power extends beyond the aura! I told you last time It was becoming too powerful. We have nearly murdered a man, David! And do you realize what the results would have been? With the added power of a single human intelligence of superior quality, It would have overcome *us*. With our minds assimilated, Its influence would have extended farther; and so on, in ever-widening circles, until It remained the sole intelligence of the planet We have made a Frankenstein, David, with the power to destroy humanity and all living things!"

DAVID'S frown became blacker. He nodded. "You are right, of course."

James picked up a pair of wire snips. "I have a good mind to sever the connections without further hesitation," he cried.

"And ruin in the stroke the

accomplishment of a lifetime? No, James, I do not believe that is necessary. If It can do great harm, It can also do great good. As our master, nothing, I admit, could be worse than It; but as the servant of mankind, It would make this world nothing short of Utopian."

"But am I not to have an explanation of it all?" I cried, my mounting curiosity getting the better of me.

Both started, evidently having temporarily forgotten me. Then David nodded slowly. "There is no doubt but that we owe you one," he said: "Perhaps if you had known about It before, this unfortunate near-catastrophe could have been averted. Certainly you would have become suspicious when that involuntary unconsciousness began stealing over you. I shall, then, briefly describe to you the nature of the Thing you see before you.

"You know, of course, that at the present time man, despite his advancement, has learned but little of all there is to be known in nature; so the conception of an utterly new metal should not astonish you particularly. The green metal, slightly luminous, that you see here has never before, to the best of my knowledge, been known to exist. We derived our supply from a meteorite that fell on this mountain; and this is all that remains which has not lost the strange power I shall tell you of. When we first came into possession of the metal, we were carrying on a large number of experiments; but we devoted spare moments to the finding of some use for it.

"Once, purely in blind experiment, we sent through it a small current of electricity which, by some oversight, was not turned off that night. The next morning, upon entering the laboratory, we were considerably astonished to find our big gray cat, which was a pet, dead beside the metal. That in itself would have been

passed over with but little thought; had it not been for the astonishing fact that the strange metal was now surrounded by a luminous green vapor, having the cat within its limits! Very strange—a physical phenomenon without parallel, that! James experimentally opened the circuit. The green aura vanished—evidently it had been caused by the current.

“James closed the circuit again, but, strange to say, the peculiar green mist did not reappear; nor could any efforts of ours induce it to do so. Greatly interested, we attempted continually to repeat the phenomenon; but in vain. We even placed a cat near the metal; although we did not think that could have had anything to do with the occurrence. Not content until we should have tried every recourse, we brought in from the meteorite a fresh piece of the metal and passed a current through it.

No result. Idly, I pushed the cage containing the cat toward it *Voila!* Upon the motion, the cat reeled about for a few seconds, tried to escape, then collapsed and was dead; and the same, strange, luminous, green aura formed. We opened the circuit and again the mist vanished, and, as before, could not be made to reappear.

“We brought in more of the meteorite’s strange cargo. We found in every case that the metal, with an electric current passing through it, was able to kill any form of life and form an aura by the killing; yet it lost the faculty altogether if the current were shut off for a single instant. A fresh piece of the stuff, of sizable dimensions, could kill only a small animal, but It could kill any number; and Its power seemed to accumulate with the deaths, for the aura extended farther with each victim, and as a result Its capacity for larger victims grew. An animal had to be completely within the aura to be acted

upon.

“An amazing fact, for which we could not immediately account, was that a small animal of great intelligence actually extended the aura farther than a large animal of small intelligence. Could it be that the *intelligences* of the animals caused the phenomenon? It was hard to believe. However, we had recently perfected a very sensitive and complex device which now proved of enormous value. It had the faculty of instantly determining the location and exact power of any intelligence within a certain distance. We placed it in the room with a piece of aura-surrounded metal, with astounding results. The instrument showed that the weird green metal had actually assimilated and taken for its own the intelligence of the deceased animals, and was literally a metal brain, an inanimate substance possessing intelligence. You can imagine our wonder and ecstasy. We had the power to create a brain so colossally powerful that It might solve all the riddles of the universe—so omnipotent and enduring that It might solve all the problems of mankind, and yet be a slave and not a master.

“With that in mind, we immediately set to work, and, using all the metal that remained potent, made the brain you see before you. We have fed It animal brain until It is the greatest intelligence in existence.”

THERE was no triumph in David Markham’s voice as he spoke the last words. His tone was flat, and he stared moodily at the floor. As for me, my incredulity had faded and broken before the quiet recital of this towering discovery by an undoubtedly sane man. Only curiosity remained to me.

“And have you received any information of importance from It?” I

asked.

James rose to his feet nervously. "There, my boy, lies the problem. The Thing is no longer our slave, as David said. It can communicate—we have provided It with means, and It has done so—but now, for a month, it has absolutely refused. It has become malevolent and treacherous. Lately It has developed a peculiar ability, which we cannot understand, which enables It to expand or retract Its aura a foot or two. Twice the green mist has suddenly extended in vain attempts to reach David or myself when we happened to venture too close. And now It exhibits, in your case, a heretofore unknown ability to draw toward Itself living beings beyond Its supposed influence. In all seriousness, I believe the Thing's keen intelligence is plotting the conquest of all human intelligence. I believe it should be destroyed!"

"You know as well as I," said his brother, "that our experiments can never be repeated if we do that. No, I think there is some easier way out of the predicament than that. At any rate, we must not act hastily. I suggest that we barricade well all entrances to this room and then retire. You are suffering no ill effects from tonight's mishap, King?"

"I am not aware of any," I answered; "But tell me, have you no theories concerning the nature of the green metal and its strange power?"

"On the contrary," David replied, "we understand the phenomenon fairly well; which fact, however, does not aid us in our present quandary. It shall be explained to you in detail when you have become sufficiently advanced in your studies." But that was destined never to be. In the days that followed, nothing further was said or done concerning the destruction of the diabolical metal's power.

Entrance to the room containing It was no longer denied me, and I saw Its now repugnant green frequently. Familiarity, however, bred no contempt.

Every day seemed to reveal to me some new and incredible invention. *Markhamite*, the terrifically powerful explosive, and the crystal-mirror—but the latter plays so important a part in this narrative that I had better start at the beginning.

In the morning, fourteen days after that memorable night, I left the hangar after a jaunt in the plane to find, at a point near the straight-rising cliff of the mountain side, and perhaps a thousand yards from the house, David Markham, who was staring intently at a device before him. It was a huge upright mirror, ten feet square and made of a peculiar, crystal-like, transparent substance. Encased mechanism was fastened to the back. David frequently walked around to the rear to make adjustments, and spoke tersely into a small field telephone. As I came up behind him, I was surprised—my capacity for amazement existed no longer—to find apparently reflected in the seeming mirror the apartment of the metal brain, which was a thousand yards distant! James Markham was seen to be sitting at an instrument board against the wall, speaking to his brother on the telephone.

When David saw me beside him he said: "It is a vision-at-a-distance machine; something like television. James is having trouble at his end. Stay here, please, and do as you are instructed over the phone. I shall return in a short time." So saying, he strode off toward the house. Presently he came within the field of vision of the instrument before me. Together the brothers worked over some bit of mechanism.

I started. Something, somehow, seemed suddenly radically wrong in that

room. Then I let out a wild shout, and my scalp prickled, as I became abruptly conscious of the horrible truth. That green, luminous mist, the metal monster's hands, was creeping forward, like a stalking leopard! I snatched up my phone in a frenzy. David listened, whitened, and swung about, clutching James' shoulder spasmodically. Upon the instant the aura swirled forward, fast as light, and enveloped them. They tried to run, but could not, and tottered forward weakly. James slid to his knees, tried helplessly to fan away the vapour; then hurled at the demoniac metal, with his remaining strength, a small hammer he held in his hand. David, more sagacious in an emergency, reeled, then crawled, armed with a pair of wire snips, toward the wires connecting the metal to its batteries. It was useless—halfway across the room he fell forward on his face, quivered, and lay still! James too had collapsed.

I stared at the scene for a moment, horrified. Then I turned and dashed for the house, with a vague idea of warning the servants. When I was within sixty feet of the porch, I saw, through the open door, the giant Franz, with his frail wife across his shoulders, come leaping down the staircase. A dozen steps from the bottom the emerald mist slipped about him like a fog. He stumbled and fell the rest of the way; attempted to rise, clawing furiously against the Thing that was striving to suck away his reason; then the shaggy head sank back upon the already lifeless form of his wife. They were dead! They had succumbed much more quickly than the scientists; probably, I decided afterwards, this was due to the lower power of their intellects.

I stood, for a moment, staring in horror at the house whence green tongues, like flames, licked out and then drew back

within the walls. For a moment only, however; then I was racing for the plane, a plan already formulating in my brain. There were five aerial bombs, filled with the terrifically destructive Markhamite, in the hangar. They were to have been tested that afternoon. The most brilliant of intelligences could not withstand that explosive.

To plan was to act. Five minutes later I was aloft with the bombs, the size and shape of large cocoanuts. I was cool, now that I was handling my beloved controls. As I came into firing position, I let slip a bomb over the edge, aiming as carefully as possible. Miss! It had gone over the cliff. The second blew a chunk out of the edge of the cliff. The third was a hit; it demolished part of the right wing, containing the living quarters, but that was not what I desired. The fourth was a miss. But, even as it struck the ground, I found myself looking down through the *green aura!* The Thing was extending itself to reach Its would-be destroyer! Even as I tried to rise away from the vapor, It was about me, and I felt myself grow weak and helpless. The plane shuddered crazily, swung about and drove back again, almost out of control, but the vapor stayed with us. On the brink of eternity I managed feebly to get the last bomb to the edge of the cockpit and shove it over. Then I seemed to sink down deeper into the black oblivion that was enveloping me.

Suddenly I was again in full possession of my faculties, getting the plane under control. Then the noise of the explosion drifted up, and I gazed over the side to find the green vapor gone and the left wing of the mansion, containing the metal brain, utterly demolished. I breathed a fervent prayer of thanksgiving. The metal intelligence was destroyed, never to raise Its ugly threat to mankind again.

That was the end of the Markham case, the strangest in history. Of course, there was my trial for the murder of the brothers and their servants. Strange and insane as my recital of the events at the mansion seemed, I was acquitted. There was the testimony of the three farmers, honest men in their community, who, when driving along the road at the foot of the mountain, had seen a towering column of luminous, green mist suddenly shoot up from "The House on the Mountain" into the sky, to envelop a lone airplane, which

had unaccountably begun to waver in its flight. With the fifth explosion they had seen the green column disappear as if it had never existed. And there was the testimony of the men, doctors among them, who had found the bodies of Franz and his wife (uninjured, curiously enough, by the explosions) and had been strangely frightened when they saw in the dead eyes that horrible look of stark terror of the unknown.

But none of them quite believed my story. I do not suppose anyone ever will.