

Paul Hugli: *The Night of the Craven Raven*

“To be or not to be, that is the question!” *Hamlet*

Port of Baltimore, October 2, 1949, Pre-Dawn

“Who is John Galt?”

“Just another selfish guy,” replied Donovan, waving his Cuban cigar, ashes flinging, “Like that Howard Roark, who we gave the world to... ah, to design the new War Department building, in '42. But, no, he wasn't satisfied! He wanted to bring in his own people, dictate funding, and...” He shrugged, taking a puff of his Havana, bluish smoke billowing lazily to the ceiling of the map room, then added: “But his idea of a pentagon was genius!”

Henry West, who had asked the question, knew of Howard Roark, and was not surprised at “Wild Bill” Donovan's reaction; they had worked together in the OSS during the War, and he knew the CIA's director's mind well. No matter what else Donovan was, he was a politician of the “Good Old Boys” network: kickbacks, “favorite son” status, and all the rest that greased the wheels of government. There was no room for mavericks like Roark, and he guessed this Galt character was made of the same cloth. He repeated his question:

“Who is John Galt?”

“When the experiment we are about to undertake,” Donovan said, off a puff, “was first okayed, we asked Galt to contribute, but he was even more arrogant than Roark. It was all his way or the highway. He put a new meaning to the ‘art of selfishness.’ In fact, he dropped out of circulation to operate some kind of commune, called New Atlantis or some such.”

“Mr. Galt,” Lt. Commander Ian Fleming began, after lighting up a Chesterfield, “had invented an engine which operated on *atmospheric electricity*. It converted static electricity from the atmosphere into power, without need of fossil fuels, and it was a great deal safer than nuclear energy.”

“Wait,” West said, scratching his ear, “this sounds a lot like what that Tesla guy, who died a few years back, had invented.”

“My father visited Nikola Tesla, while he was performing his electrical experiments in Colorado Springs, toward the end of the last century,” said the Frenchman, Leo Saint-Clair, adjusting his filtered goggles. “and witnessed his achievements in wireless transmission of electrical power.”¹

“Yes,” West said. “I remember you telling me about that.”

“Soon after,” the Nyctalope continued, “the inventor—or *discoverer*, as he referred to himself—was placed under contract by J.P. Morgan to build a power-transmitting tower in New Jersey. It did not go well for Tesla, especially when the business tycoon discovered he'd been developing a method to create *free* energy, or at virtually *no* cost. Of course, this did not sit well with Morgan—no profit. Tesla was never the same after that, producing little in the way of new inventions.”

“Some say,” Harry Dickson, the so-called “American Sherlock Holmes,” said as he entered the Map Room, puffing on his pipe, “Tesla was working on the GUT—Grand Unified Theory—something not even Einstein was able to deduce.” He joined the other men at the table. “Or was that all smoke and mirrors?”

Donovan stared at Dickson, took a puff on his cigar, then laughed. “Indeed, indeed! Back in '43, we pulled a dupe on the Nazis. We called it *Project Rainbow*, to ‘entertain’ the U-Boat sitting off the coast of the Philadelphia Naval Yards, snooping. So we gave them a show. Making them believe we had made a ship invisible.” After another deep drag on the Cuban he continued: “Damn, how were we to know how close to reality we had come—to what we're about to attempt here, today.”

“How does Tesla fit in?” West asked.

¹ See “*As Easy as 1, 2, 3...*” in Volume 13.

West listened as Donovan continued, translating in his head the military jargon and bravo. After Tesla died in April 1943, his apartment had been raided by the FBI. They'd found nothing but cooped-up pigeons and a safe containing nothing more than his American citizenship papers and his 1917 Edison Medal, presented to Tesla by the American Institute of Electrical Engineers. The Feds had also come up empty after searching through scores of barrels, crates and trunks of notes, drawings, monograms at the Office of Alien Property. Tesla's property was eventually released to his nephew's cousin, and taken back to Tesla's native Yugoslavia.

Then, after the War, under *Operation Paperclip*, the United States had split with the Russians the best of the German scientists, engineers and technicians, such as Werner von Braun and his V-2 rocket team. And along with the 1000 scientists or so, the Allies had recovered records and research journals *not* destroyed by the Germans in the final days as Berlin was being stormed. Some of these confiscated documents had dealt with the Nazi's *Wunder-Waffens*, or "Wonder Weapons"—the Allies' own *Wunder-Waffen* was, of course, the A-Bomb.

Among the confiscated Nazi documents and papers were some clearly penned by Nikola Tesla, obviously stolen from the OAP before the inventor's death, thus not there when the Feds had raided the warehouse. In these papers were snippets of ideas for "death-rays," robotics, flying saucers, force-shields, and an invisibility shield."

It appeared the Nazis had had some success with the latter—what the Allies had dubbed "*foo-fighters*," small fireballs" which seemed to appear out of thin air, buzzing around war planes over Europe, changing through a range of colors, before vanishing. The confiscated Nazi papers had explained these *foo-fighters*.

Coincidentally, the Nazi's experimental crafts had been developed under *Projekt Regen-Beugen*, or *Project Rain-Bow*, based entirely on Tesla's Electromagnetic Wave Modulation Theory: that postulated that, as an engine rotated on its magnetic core, the vibrational frequency increased, while the wavelength decreased... as did its photonic, or "light" energy, causing an object to appear a different color as it turbine raced from low frequencies to higher ones, and higher wave-lengths, thus running through the invisible to the visible to the invisible to the human eye: Ultra-violet, Blue, Green, Yellow, Orange, Red, and Infra-red. Yet, even invisible, the object would carry a heat signature, which could be targeted.

The Germans had stepped up their experiments with Tesla's EM Modulation Device attached to a derelict cruiser anchored in the Baltic. When they had thrown the switch, the ship had gone through a series of color emulations, wavering in and out of visibility, until it had disappeared—completely—only to reappear seconds later.

Everything had seemed fine; the experiment had been assessed as a smashing success. The Nazi scientists had patted each other on the backs, shaken hands and were probably reaching for the champagne, when the recon party had boarded the cruiser. Yet, the celebration had come to an abrupt end as things were no longer so rosy. They had seen horrors—not that they actually cared about the P.O.W. crewmembers—some of them were frozen half-way between bulkheads and the deck, as if it had happened while passing *through* them. While others had gone *nullpunkt*—nothing—zero—just disappeared into thin air.

The Germans never had had a chance to do further work on this project as the War was drawing to an end; though they had had some success with EM Modulation with a large, saucer-shaped, manned vehicle, which a couple of German scientists had perfected, using to escaped at the end of the War. While on a recon mission from Argentina in 1947, something had gone amiss with the saucer and it had crashed outside Roswell, NM. The saucer had shattered into pieces and the two pilots had unfortunately died. They would have made great additions to *Operation Paperclip*.

And now, here, in Baltimore Harbor, aboard the *USS Stockton*, a team was gathered to witness the improvements based on the stolen Tesla papers, and the combined effort of dozens of German and American scientists.

The experiment was scheduled to commence a half-hour later, at 05:00, and Henry West decided he still had time to call his daughter in Bellflower, CA, knowing she'd still be awake at 1:30 a.m. PST, working on her term paper dealing with western birds for her biology class at Long Beach Junior College.

She was majoring in—he didn't know—but knowing his daughter, it probably was boys, much to his discomfort. But he'd always given her a free-rein, since she had grown up without a mother. The thoughts of his wife, Honey's mother, still brought a pain to his heart... if only... but wishing things undone was an exercise in futility; he had to keep the truth about her mother from Honey, for her own sake.

West placed the call to California. It rang three times before it was picked up:

"Oh, hi, Daddy."

"You've been a good girl while I've been away?" he asked.

"I've had no complains...so far," Honey replied with a giggle.

"Honeeeeeey!"

"Oh, Daddy, be hep. I have protection."

"Honeeeeeey!"

"Oh, not like that, Daddy." Honey again giggled. "I meant the pearl-handled .22 you got me for my eighteenth birthday."

Henry West tried to smile, not sure how serious Honey was—she rarely was—and decided to let the subject of biology pass, tapping a book on the table.

"I found a copy of book on birds you needed for your term paper. Oddly, I found it at place called Raven Books."

"Oh, great, Daddy!" Her voice seemed excited over the phone. "That will be the cat's meow, and sure help me in my *bi-ol-lo-gee* class."

"I'll see you in a few days."

"OK! Bye Daddy, and say hi to Uncle Ian."

West hung up just as Lt. Commander Fleming entered to room.

"Just talked to Honey. She said hi."

"She's in college now, right?" Fleming wasn't Honey's blood uncle, but she called him that. He picked up the book on the table.

"Yeah, and a handful!" replied West.

"When did you take up bird-watching, Hank?"

"It's for Honey's biology class."

"Like she needs a biology class."

"Don't remind me, Ian."

Fleming laughed, shaking his head, looking at the book in his hand. *Field Guide to Birds of the West Indies*. By some bloke named James Bond... *What a bland name*, he thought. He set the book down. "Time to get this show on the road."

West and Fleming rejoined Dickson, Saint-Clair and Donovan on the observation deck just as binoculars were being passed around, to observe the trial phase of *Project Iris*.

The derelict, *USS Steger*, lay some 200 meters from the *USS Stockton*. The WW II cruiser had been outfitted with a turbine powered by a modification of Tesla's Electromagnetic Modulation Device.

The command was given to engage, and the Navy Brass and civilians raised their binoculars; save Saint-Clair, who required no such optical aid.

A steady hum ensued as the EMD engaged the electromagnetic pulse. Suddenly the hairs on the back of the necks and arms of the volunteer crew on the *Steger* stood on end in the cool pre-dawn as the atmosphere became ionized. Then, through their binoculars, the assembled party on the *Stockton* were treated to a gambit of rainbow colors, blue through red, before a green mist enveloped the *Steger* like dense fog twisting, twirling, tunneling, before quickly dispersing. And in its place was...

Nothing!

"She's gone invisible," one of the Navy Brass exclaimed.

"No," West said, scanning the spot where the *Steger* once was. "There's no displacement in the water, where the hull should be, invisible or not."

"*C'est vrai*," Saint-Clair confirmed. "The *Steger* is no longer here!"

"What?" Donovan exclaimed.

"It's just not there!" West restated. "It's been transported... teleported..."

Suddenly, before any more exclamations could be uttered, the greenish mist returned and quickly burned off as the *Steger* shimmered in reverse order of rainbow colors, from red to blue, and the ship wavered back into view.

Through his binocular Henry West was studying her, noting a crewman who was staggering as if drunk, then just disappeared.

“They’re going *Zero!*” West shouted.

And with no hesitation or thought of his own safety, he kicked off his shoes and dove into the water, surfaced, struggled out of his jacket and trousers, then swam a bee-line for the *Steger*, two hundred meters away.

Scrambled up the ladder of the ship, he hopped on deck, where he saw a crewman begin to waver in and out of existence. He immediately placed his hands on the sailor, feeling a tingling surge through his body as the man stiffened and fell to the deck, stunned but alive.

Then West pulled a crewman through a bulkhead as he was about to re-dematerialize, and continued the “laying of the hands” on other sailors, keeping them whole and in this dimension.

As the rescue men from the *Stockton* arrived and boarded the *Steger*, West yelled out orders and directions on tending to the afflicted seamen, He spotted a staggering figure holding his head. He wasn’t a sailor. He as dressed in a black great-coat and black trousers; a very Victorian attire. He appeared to be five-eight, slight built, with black wavy hair and a bushy, but trimmed mustache.

“Someone—see to that man!” yelled West.

Sometime later, Henry West decided the sailors were no longer in danger, though they would have to be isolated and studied for a while, to make sure there were no lasting effects from their experiences.

He took a launch back to the *Stockton*, and joined Leo Saint-Clair on the way to the captain’s ready-room, where the strangely-dressed man was being held. A MP was standing guard outside. St. Clair opened the door and discovered an... empty chair!

“Where is he?” Bill Donovan exclaimed, coming up behind them. He got no answer, and turned to the MP, asking: “Where is he?”

“He must’ve disappeared,” the MP stammered.

“Disappeared? Oh, never mind! Did you, at least, get his name, and what he was doing aboard *that* ship?”

“He said...” the M.P. began, then gulped before adding, “...that his name was Edgar A. Poe.”

“Poe?” Saint-Clair asked. “Did he say anything else?”

“No, sir. Only that—and nothing more!”

New York, 1955

“Egads!” Manse Everard gasped as he slammed down his empty shot-glass, the scotch having done its job. As an Unattached Agent of the Time Patrol, working for the Office of Spatio-Temporal Anomalies, he was, in other words, a Time Cop. He had no set assignments, though his life was expendable. He was a thirty-year old, stocky-built man, with broad-shoulders, pulling-down the princely sum of \$15,000 per annum. For this, his job was to deal with people who messed with the main time-line of reality, following the orders of entities that called themselves the Danellians, a million years in the future, who claimed to be the ultimate descendents of humanity—a race of beings as far above us as we were above the amoeba. Although some claimed there were just Spiders. Or Snakes. No one knew.

Since returning from an adventure in Ancient Egypt, in time of the heretic pharaoh Akhenaten and his beautiful Queen Nefertiti, Everard had just been kicking back, enjoying his vodka.² The bottle was half-empty or half-full, depending on how you looked at it. He considered it half-empty.

Considering he was “unattached” at the moment, he decided to do a favor for his secretary, and pick up some books for her son’s English Literature class. So he wandered across the street to Empire Books.

² See “*Dream’s End*” in Volume 11.

The interior of the bookstore was dimly lit, cluttered, with books stacked every which-way, including loosely resting on shelves, piled on the floor, or on rickety tables.

Everard headed for the stacks, but was side-tracked by a table piled high with old {mostly tattered and dog-eared} “funny books:” *Batman, Superman, Captain Marvel Adventures, Crime & Punishment, Archie, Casper, Little Dot*, and scores more. But what had caught his eye was a stack of *Classic Comics* and *Classic Illustrated* at “two-for-15-cents,” as opposed to the other used comics at 5-cents each. He guess it was the cost of education.

Everard began shifting through the stack of *Classics*, figuring his secretary’s boy would probably want to do his book report from one of these, rather than from actual books. The pile included *The Three Musketeers, The Count of Monte Cristo, A Tale of Two Cities, Robin Hood, Mocha Dick, Around the World Under the Sea, The Island of Lost Souls, Men on the Moon, When Mars Attacks...* He scratched his head as he had never heard of the last five titles. Plus there were others he was strangely unfamiliar with.

Then his belt buzzer vibrated. It was from the Masters of the Time Patrol.

Baltimore, October 3, 1949, 9 a.m.

Horns, horns, horns, horns, horns, horns—from the honking and clattering of the horns...

This is what greeted Edgar A. Poe as he came out of the netherworld of the *Zero State*, remembering only patches of recent events: being in a rowboat in the bay... roaming the deck of a strange ship... sitting in a chair... then here. But where was *here*?

The honking of the automobile horns caused him to cover his ears, to block the noise. The pungent and noxious vapors of the Fords, Chevys, DeSotos, Studebakers, GMs, Hudsons, and everything in between, including Yellow Cabs, invaded his nose, with somewhat of a sweet smell, altogether preferable to the horse manure which covered the streets of his day. Poe was convinced he had been projected into the future—somehow.

How distant was a future filled with hundreds of horseless carriers and overhead large metal birds? He didn’t know, but here he stood, on the sidewalk of a busy thoroughfare, scratching his head in wonderment and awe. But he was getting a headache from the honking horns and exhaust fumes, and thought it best to seek shelter, then try to reason out if this was reality—or some nightmarish hallucination.

In the Ready-Room aboard the *USS Stockton*, Henry West and Leo Saint-Clair were discussing the mystery *and* missing man who had claimed to be Edgar Allan Poe.

“Poe was born in the same year as Lincoln and Darwin, it can’t be him, can it?” West pondered aloud, sipping a beer. “Perhaps, he’s just one of those Poe look-alikes who gather at this time of the year, here in Baltimore, who somehow wandered aboard.” Of course he realized how impossible that was, especially during a military exercise or experiment. “Whoever he was, he appeared dazed and confused before he disappeared—went *Zero*—suggesting he was somehow, in some way, connected to the experiment.”

“I agree,” Saint-Clair said, “I also believe that our experiment created a temporal rift in the fabric of time, and in some way transported Poe to our time.”

“Is this really possible?” West asked, setting down his beer. “You have told me some amazing things during our undercover adventures in the War. But *time travel* !”

“Temporal fluxes are not as common as you may think. They occur when certain events coincide—usually in conjunction with solar activity—combined with a strong electromagnetic event...”

“Like the one produced during our experiment?”

“*Exactement*. Yet, we have a problem here, Henry. Most *controlled* time travel is accomplished via some sort of machine, or ship, which shields the traveler or travelers from Deadly Orgone Energy, or DOE.”

“That sounds like a female deer,” West quipped, but was ignored.

“All living things—trees, plants, animals, us—are composed of beneficial Orgone Energy, or OE, and this energy deteriorates over the course of one’s life, slowly replaced with DOE, until you eventually die. Orgone Energy is quite similar to radio-carbon’s chemical properties and half-lives. But that’s the rub! If this man is in reality the Poe of a hundred years ago, he’s traveled through time without first being processed—a very scientific procedure I will spare you.”

“Thanks,” West said with a smile.

“Traveling through time in a machine or a ship is safe because men need not be prepared, or processed, because DOE is inert to *non-organic* materials most time-vessels are composed of.”

“OK. But how does this...”

“I am getting there, West. If Poe traveled through time without proper preparation, the degradation of his OE by the DOE will be accelerated to a point that, within seventy-two hours, unless we return him to his own time—which will halt the degradation—he will disintegrate into, literally, *nothingness*... into some type of twilight or phantom zone... of which we know nothing about.”

“Then we must find him, and find a way to return him to his own time.” West pounded back his beer. “That should be no more than a walk in the park.”

“If this temporal flux is typical,” said the Nyctalope, “Poe would have been plucked from exactly one-hundred years in the past. And, if I remember my history correctly, he will die within a couple days from the day he was taken and to which we must return him.”

“But we must try. So he can die like a man; not just dissolve away into nothingness.”

“You are correct, *mon ami*.”

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE BOOK