

if

SCIENCE FICTION

SEPTEMBER 1960 ● 35 CENTS

KANGAROO COURT

by Daniel F. Galouye

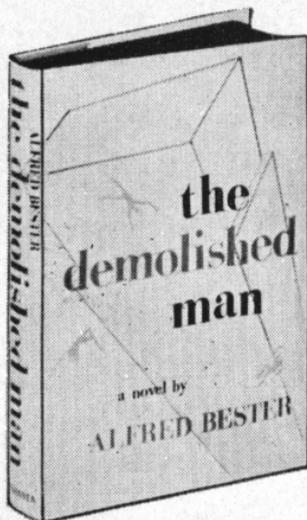


BESTER'S BEST!

Have you read his famed **THE DEMOLISHED MAN**? Lived in its vividly real telepathic society, detailed so ingeniously and dramatically that, finishing the book, you'll find it hard to believe that society doesn't exist — yet!

By special arrangement with the publisher of **THE DEMOLISHED MAN**, we can offer you this magnificent book for \$1.00, 2/3 off the regular price, plus 25¢ for postage and handling.

**1/3 OF
LIST
PRICE**



**CASE
BOUND
\$100**

Supplies are limited! Send your order in immediately!
(Use Coupon or Separate Sheet)

GALAXY PUBLISHING CORP.

**Please
rush me**

**copies of
THE DEMOLISHED MAN**

**421 Hudson St.
New York
14,
N. Y.**

**THE DEMOLISHED MAN
The Original
Edition — Complete!
Not A Low Cost Reprint —
Yet Yours For
Only \$1.00!
Plus Postage 25¢**

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ **State** _____

I Enclose _____

Secrets
entrusted
to a
few



The Unpublished Facts of Life

THERE are some things that cannot be generally told—*things you ought to know*. Great truths are dangerous to some—but factors for *personal power and accomplishment* in the hands of those who understand them. Behind the tales of the miracles and mysteries of the ancients, lie centuries of their secret probing into nature's laws—their amazing discoveries of the *hidden processes of man's mind*, and the *mastery of life's problems*. Once shrouded in mystery to avoid their destruction by mass fear and ignorance, these facts remain a useful heritage for the thousands of men and women who privately use them in their homes today.

THIS FREE BOOK

The Rosicrucians (not a religious

organization) an age-old brotherhood of learning, have preserved this secret wisdom in their archives for centuries. *They now invite you to share the practical helpfulness of their teachings.* Write today for a free copy of the book, "The Mastery of Life." Within its pages may lie a new life of opportunity for you. Address: Scribe T.J.W.

SEND THIS COUPON

Scribe T.J.W.

The ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC)
San Jose, California

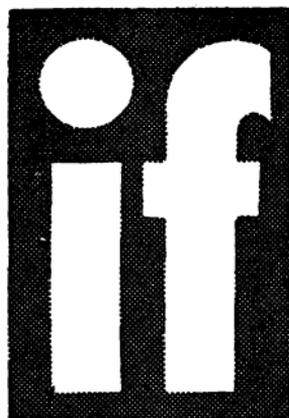
Please send me the *free* book, *The Mastery of Life*, which explains how I may learn to use my faculties and powers of mind.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

The Rosicrucians (AMORC) SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, U.S.A.



WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION

SEPTEMBER 1960

All Stories New and Complete

Editor: **H. L. GOLD**

Feature Editor: **FREDERIK POHL**

SHORT NOVEL

KANGAROO COURT by Daniel F. Galouye 6

NOVELETTES

TO CHOKE AN OCEAN by J. F. Bone 56

THE SIX FINGERS OF TIME by R. A. Lafferty 108

SHORT STORIES

PARALLEL BEANS by Margaret St. Clair 42

WEDGE by H. B. Fyfe 51

WORDS AND MUSIC by Arthur Porges 79

STAR PERFORMER by Robert J. Shea 94

FEATURE

WORLDS OF IF by Frederik Pohl 85

COVER by John Pederson, Jr.: "Why If's Art Is So Accurate"

IF is published bi-monthly by Digest Productions Corporation. Vol. 10, No. 4. Main Office: 421 Hudson Street, New York 14, New York, 35¢ per copy. Subscriptions 12 issues \$3.00 in the United States, Canada, Mexico, South and Central America and U. S. possessions, elsewhere \$4.00. Second-class postage paid at New York, New York, and at additional mailing offices. Copyright New York 1960 by Digest Productions Corporation. All rights including translations reserved. All material submitted must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes. The publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited material. All stories printed in this magazine are fiction, and any similarity between characters and actual persons is coincidental. Printed in the U. S. A. by the Guinn Company, Inc., New York.

Next Issue (November) on Sale September 6th

Looking Ahead?



You must be, or you wouldn't be reading this magazine. Looking ahead, for instance, into the future of technology, sociology, ecology, space and time and terrestrials and extraterrestrials.

But what about looking ahead to:

- Saving money? (The longer your subscription to IF, the more free issues you get.)
- Saving steps? (A subscription brings IF right to your mailbox, irrespective of heat, cold, snow, rain, gloom of night—and mailed flat, to boot.)
- Saving time? (You get your copies at least a week before the newsstands receive theirs.)
- Saving your temper? (IF can and often does sell out; with a subscription there's no need to hunt from stand to stand.)

IN SHORT, IF YOU'RE REALLY LOOKING AHEAD, YOU'LL EITHER USE THE COUPON BELOW OR SEND IN YOUR ORDER ON ANY OLD SHEET OF PAPER.

COUPON

IF Science Fiction • 421 Hudson Street • New York 14, New York

Start my subscription to IF Science Fiction with the _____ issue. I enclose (check one):

6 issues . . . \$1.75

12 issues . . . \$3.00

Foreign Postage 6 Issues 50¢ Additional

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ P. O. Zone _____ State _____

Kangaroo Court

By DANIEL F. GALOUYE

Illustrated by WOOD

Blake's future was dark. He had murdered

his friend—his life was forfeit—and now

he had to break the news to the corpse!

I

TEMPLES pounding from the aftereffects of too many B-jolts, Greg Blake hauled himself groggily out of the bunk. He shook his head,

trying to relieve the roaring fuzziness.

But he was unable to dispel the nauseating impression that the ship was under way, rather than sitting on its pad at Spaceport.





What a hell of a charge-over!

He cast about in his memory for details of the night before. But he could only remember up to the third or fourth pleasure spot. After that there was a stubborn blankness, broken only by an isolated recollection of "just one more binge-jolt for the orbit."

"Art," he mumbled, heading forward along the passage-way.

There was no answer from his partner.

He rubber-legged it past the hatch, noticing it was securely dogged and accepting that as evidence that Thorman must be *somewhere* aboard.

More fully in control now, he was aware of the intrusive thoughts festering in his head, ridiculing his charge-over.

Boy, he sure tied one on! (That one evidently from a tracker in Operations Blockhouse.)

(Suggestion of subvocal laughter from the Administration Section.) *I would too if I had been in on their strike.*

Imagine—two prospectors staking out a whole swarm of kitarium!

Straighten up, Blake. How about a few more B-jolts? (That bit of derision from a ground crewman.)

The buzzsaw of impinging thoughts whined away on the communicative level of Greg's consciousness. In the distance was a seething backdrop of

telepathic reflection and conversation. It rose like an effluvia from teeming Spaceport City. It was a grating whisper of many confusing voices that could never be shut out. It was a blazing spotlight, forever obliterating all the shadows of privacy.

In contrast to the fishbowl life and its mental pandemonium, he was convinced that the isolation of prospecting was Utopia.

At the base of the companionway his foot struck a small object and sent it skittering across the deck. He stooped to retrieve it. A hand blaster. He stood there fretting over its half exhausted chamber.

As he entered the control room he drew back.

The blaster slipped from his hand. In an instant his charge-over was gone.

Art Thorman lay there, dead, with his left shoulder and half of his head burned away.

AND I guess I told him off, Maud. He— (Abrupt astonishment.) Dead? Who? Where?

Killed? With a blaster? How?

Did you get that, Walker? Where'd it come from?

Over on Pad Eleven. That Blake fellow. It's sifting through spottily.

Blake?

The prospector. His partner got burned down.

You mean—fatally?

Sure. Ain't you reading?

Oh, Maud! It's horrible!

Not a—murder? (Almost hopefully.)

Must be. A guy can't burn half his own head off and then toss the blaster out where Blake found it.

Greg stood staring down at Thorman's body. The intrusive undercurrent of thought and paraspeech was like a far-away tide of anxious voices.

ART, dead. A victim of violence. It was almost incomprehensible!

He had heard of crime before. There was that incident across the cluster thirty years ago, when a man had taken his wife's life on a space yacht—despite the consequences he would have to (and did) face when he got within the telepathic range of others.

But this was something else. It was vividly personal and horribly close to home. And that only made it all seem all the more unreal.

He could sense the wave of shocked attention that was traversing Spaceport City. And, in its wake, a deluge of discordant, demanding voices descended upon him.

You killed him, Blake!

"No!" he protested, not realizing that he was vocalizing. "I couldn't have!"

It's your blaster, an anonymous accuser pointed out.

"But that doesn't mean—"

The hatch is dogged shut. You saw that yourself just a few minutes ago.

There's nobody else in the ship.

"Why would I kill Thorman? He was my friend!" His eyes remained on Art's body.

Most of the city had quieted down to listen.

You touched down here a week ago and filed claim on a sizable kitarium strike in Hound's Tooth Nebula, someone reminded. That made you and Thorman rich. Now you're twice as rich.

"But I'd have known I couldn't get away with a—crime!"

Nobody else could have done it, Blake, a new accuser blared out.

Greg shrank away before the ruthless speed of justice in an empathic society. Once, these things took inexorable time. But now suspicion, indictment, trial, verdict and execution could all be carried out in minutes.

"If I had killed him I'd remember it!"

You were in a charged-up stupor.

That's why we didn't have a chance to stop you.

Completely unpremeditated.

Or maybe at the last minute you did intend to kill him.

Whether he wanted to or not isn't the issue.

The fact is that he murdered his partner.

And he's got to pay.

LIKE thunder rumbling against distant hills, accusation and threat churned the psychic background. They were a counterpoint to the direct inquisition. The prosecution was rushing ahead with ruthless speed.

Dismayed, Greg turned to run. But the compelling force of a thousand imperious, soundless voices shackled him where he stood.

A life for a life.

The gun, Blake—pick it up.

The punishment must fit the crime.

There was an overpowering indignation in the expressions of communal conscience that overrode his own awareness and left him without will. He groped along the deck and found the blaster. Then he swung its barrel toward his temple.

THIS IS THE MONITOR OF THE CONSENSUS.

The silent words, magnified by a psycho-amplifier, exploded like a giant's bellow. They commanded stark silence.

IT IS YOUR PRIVILEGE TO EXECUTE GREGORY BLAKE NOW OR TO DEFER JUDGMENT. THE SOCIAL CONSCIENCE WILL ASSERT ITSELF IN THE END. HOWEVER, THERE ARE SEVERAL MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES, AS I SEE IT. SINCE HE HAS NO MEMORY OF THE CRIME, WE HAVE TO CONCEDE THE EVIDENCE IS WHAT

ONCE WAS REFERRED TO AS CIRCUMSTANTIAL.

I'LL ADMIT GUILT IS OVERWHELMINGLY INDICATED. THE MURDER TAKES PLACE IN A SHIP WHOSE HATCH IS DOGGED ON THE INSIDE. THERE ARE ONLY TWO MEN ABOARD. THE WEAPON THAT KILLED THE VICTIM BELONGS TO THE SUSPECT.

What further proof do we—

Quiet! The Monitor is speaking!

STILL, I DON'T SEE WHERE JUSTICE IS SERVED IF BLAKE IS EXECUTED WITHOUT BEING CONVINCED OF HIS GUILT.

Thousands of determined voices rose in protest. But, in deference to the Monitor, the greater psychic background reflected only indecision.

THEREFORE I RECOMMEND OUR VERDICT BE HELD UNDER STUDY UNTIL WE ESTABLISH THE SUBJECT'S CULPABILITY BEYOND A DOUBT.

II

THE toneless voices stayed with Greg — admonishing, taunting, accusing, demanding to know whether his lack of knowledge of the crime was the result of a charged-up stupor or some unprecedented scheme to escape punishment.

Greg was a lean, serious

person with a straightforward face and a slightly receding hairline. That he could have murdered Art Thorman, his closest friend for more than a decade, was inconceivable to him.

The hell it is! challenged a nearby tormentor. You did it and you probably know you did.

Lay off, Marl. Give him a chance, like the Monitor says.

Greg waited until the cremator's apprentice arrived before he left the ship. By skip-jump relay through sympathetic minds, he had located the crematorium, out of telepathic range on the other side of the city, and had himself arranged for the final convention, knowing that Art had no relatives.

Passing through Spaceport Lounge on his way to the Monitor's office, he shrank before the heavy incrimination and denunciation that assaulted him from all sides. At the transit platform, he engaged an air car whose driver was an elderly man with a broad expanse of glistening scalp.

As soon as they were airborne, the latter offered, *I don't think you did it.*

"Thanks," Greg said without enthusiasm.

The driver, too, switched to vocalization: "Edna, she's my wife—" but Greg had already ascertained the relationship from the other's mind—"she says, 'You can bet he's guilty.'"

But you take little Algernon now. That's my boy. He's a good judge of character, even though he ain't got his complete telepathic faculty yet. He says—"

Greg?

Recognizing the identity behind the tentative contact, Greg tensed. Yes, *Virgil. What do you want?*

I want to help.

You never wanted to help before.

But you're in a jam! Maybe there's something I can do for you now.

Greg sensed the driver's discovery of the telepathic exchange between himself and Virgil Blake. And he felt the man politely turning his attention elsewhere.

I know I haven't been an ideal brother, Greg. But that might be as much the result of your own hot-headedness as of my possessiveness and domination.

Sure. You always wanted everything I had—from Estrella on down.

Let's forget her. She isn't even in the picture any longer.

No, Greg told himself. Virgil had gotten tired of her after he proved he could step in and take over.

That bit of resentful reflection didn't get by Virgil. *Maybe it was because you were always so damned independent that I acted that way.*

And Greg detected nothing

in his brother's conscious that indicated other than wounded pride as the basis of his past hostility.

BENEATH the car, the polished-chrome expanse of Spaceport City glittered in the brilliance of its system's twin suns. Down there were millions who, though at the moment preoccupied, were vigilantly anticipating the time when they might jump in on the kill—in the name of righteous vengeance.

That's why I want to help, Greg. I'm a psychiatrist.

I know. One of the top professionalists in the system. But they won't let you do anything to block justice.

Indeed we won't! came an obtrusive thought. We'll see to that!

You're damned right we will! echoed a chorus.

Greg ignored the pointed interruptions. *What's your proposition, Virgil?*

I don't think B-jolts can produce so severe an intoxication that a man will have no memory at all of what he does—especially if violent death is concerned.

So?

I suspect either subconscious repression or induced amnesia.

Induced amnesia?

Yes. And if that's the answer, it means somebody else is involved.

What do you suggest?

Psychoanalytic exploration. Seeing whether you're unconsciously holding anything back.

Again, Greg searched the other's mind for ulterior motive. Why should a brother, with whom he hadn't even had telepathic contact in fifteen years, suddenly be overflowing with solicitude?

Instantly, he detected Virgil's pang of aggrieved reaction.

It was a genuine emotion that carried heartfelt regret for the years he had neglected his younger brother. It was a discovery in the nakedness of Virgil's mind that made Greg feel warm and grateful.

I don't blame you for being suspicious, kid. Virgil magnanimously dismissed the misgiving. When do we start?

The other's thoughts were becoming weaker as the air car sped on toward Administration Plaza. Virgil was rapidly slipping out of normal telepathic range.

I'll get in skip-jump contact with you first thing in the morning. And, Virgil—if I'm repressing the memory of a horrible crime, I want that to come out too. I don't want you trying to hide it to save me.

I couldn't, kid. If I established anything like that, the first person to read me afterward would know it.

That's good. If I killed Art, intentionally or even acciden-

tally, I deserve everything that's coming to me. He was that kind of a guy.

The luxuriantly landscaped Administration Plaza achieved picturesque definition as it surged up to meet the descending car. Surrounded by towering, steel buildings, the park and its complex of official edifices were things of unadorned beauty, devoid of harsh inscription and directional signs.

In range of the various buildings' psychocasters, Greg began receiving subtle impressions of identity, volunteered items of information and instruction.

These are the offices of the Monitor of the Consensus, softly intoned a slender, graceful structure north of a sparkling pool, the whisper of recorded thought purring pleasantly into his receptive mind.

He concentrated on the building and its psycho-emissions and was rewarded, in due time, with the rest of the information he sought:

... office of the First Assistant Monitor is situated on the Twelfth Level. The Monitor himself will be found on the Sixteenth Level, South Wing.

Reading the destination from his passenger's reflections, the driver swerved his car abruptly and put it down on its air cushion in front of the main entrance.

GREG got out, watched the car slip away, then regarded the building before him.

Get on with it! someone prompted.

You're wasting our time too! another watcher reproached.

Let's find out if you're guilty!

Instantly, a myriad offensive, prodding voices were welling up in his conscious.

"All right!" he shouted. "I'm going!"

He started across the terrace, his concentration falling back to the scene of violent death in the ship and punishing himself for not being able to remember what had happened. Then, suddenly he felt as though he were betraying himself by admitting that, through some weird circumstance, he *might* have killed Thorman.

Of course he couldn't have done it! He was a fool to stay here and subject himself to indignity and unjust inquisition. The moment he found Art's body he should have blasted off to safety—before the Consensus had a chance to decree his execution!

A pandemonium of outrage exploded on the receptive level of his conscious as knowledge of what he had just thought was passed from mind to mind with meteoric speed.

He stiffened, waiting for

the grip of compulsion to seize him. But, even though the Consensus was swiftly crystallizing into a potent weapon of vindictiveness, he remained free.

He watched horrified, however, as the air car he had just left swerved sharply from its thousand-foot altitude, plunged to ground level and hurtled directly at him.

I can't stop it, Blake! came the desperate apology of the driver. *It's not me! It's the Consensus!*

Greg broke and lunged for the building. The car streaked for him, accelerating close to Mach One, and he hurled himself to the ground.

The cyclonic tailwash of the vehicle rolled him over and over like a dry leaf.

Gaining altitude, it screamed around in a tight turn and dived once more.

But its brakes came on abruptly and it shuddered to a halt only feet from where he lay. Then it drifted off, like a predatory beast suddenly finding its prey out of reach.

Now Greg was aware of the furious confusion of voices coming to grips in the psychic background.

That proves he's guilty!

Absolutely!

No, it doesn't!

He wanted to escape! You read that, didn't you?

Might have been just a normal fear reaction.

My foot!

But he still doesn't have any conscious memory of the crime.

Naturally. He's repressed it.

Then why would he feel an impulse to run?

Subconscious motivation.

Tubewash!

I say kill him—now!

No, wait. Remember what the Monitor—

Launch the Monitor! It's time we took matters in—

Greg picked himself up and, not knowing whether he'd even be allowed to reach the Monitor's office, pushed on into the building.

OUTSIDE the double doors, the suite's psychocaster gently emitted: *You are now in front of the office of Felco Irwan, Monitor of the Consensus.*

He went in and was immediately confronted by a too-slim blonde in tight-fitting secretarial garb who had unobstrusively read his approach.

This way, please, she beamed politely.

Seated behind the broad desk in his inner office, Felco Irwan was an imposing man with a double chin and florid jowls. His face was the type which, under less formal circumstances, might have managed some sort of a smile for the occasion.

Please be seated, Mr. Blake,

he instructed. *I'm glad to see you're still alive.*

"Why?"

Irwan respected the choice of oral communication. "Because it shows our people know how to temper instinctive justice with an insistence on doing what's right, even though this is our first experience with crime."

"I didn't run into much temperance a few minutes ago."

"You're still around, aren't you?" The Monitor did manage a smile this time.

Despite his sluggish appearance, he was spitting out his words with a rapidity that gave Greg little chance to probe ahead and see what he was going to say next.

In the telepathic background, there was a patient silence. Those interested watchers within range were merely listening to see what would develop next. But their anxiety was like a heavy mist.

"So I'm still alive and I'm here," Greg summed up dryly. "What now?"

Irwan leaned forward on the desk. "I received a number of skip-jump reports on your contact with Virgil Blake. Good man. Good psychiatrist. Glad to see you're going to let him work you over. As a matter of fact, proposing some form of psychotherapy was one of the two reasons I asked you up here."

"And the other reason?"

I'm Elar Ronsted.

And I'm Stafford Waverly.

"They are the other reason," the Monitor disclosed.

Greg identified the origin of the two contacts as being in another suite of offices across the Plaza.

I'm the Chief of Police, Ronsted expanded.

The other added importantly, *And I'm the Detective.*

Confused, Greg stared at the Monitor but asked of all three, *What is Police? What's the Detective?*

That stumped us for a while too, Ronsted confessed while Greg began to piece together a physical picture of the man from his elements of self-regard.

We always thought our offices were nonfunctional, the Detective explained, *until the Monitor told us we had a job to do.*

Greg wanted to know, "What's all this got to do with me?"

"Police," the Monitor offered, "used to be an armed force within a community. That was in pre-empathy days, when crime flourished in psychic privacy. It was their job to protect the community from the criminals."

And the Detective was the official who outsmarted the criminal, Waverly interjected. *After a crime was committed he found out how it was done, why and who did it.*

Greg sensed the prideful

expansion of the Detective's chest.

"This, Mr. Blake," said Monitor Irwan solemnly, "is an unusual crime. We might call it an anachronism. And it's my judgment that primitive methods of resolution are warranted. I therefore assigned Chief Ronsted and Detective Waverly to the case."

You may count on my—ah—department, sir. And Greg received the impression of a meaningless gesture—a stiff hand snapping up to Ronsted's forehead.

We'll get our man, Waverly vowed.

"The Chief and his Detective will contact you later, Blake," Irwan assured.

III

GREG managed a restful night. He had feared at first that the prying voices of the watchers, their ranks swelled by thousands with early evening hours of idleness, would drive him to distraction.

As it was, for more than an hour they immobilized him with demands for details of the killing. But his sincere introspection was futile. There remained only a chronological blank between the height of their celebration the night before and his awakening that morning.

Softening, the watchers eventually allowed him access

to the ship's jolt bar. And they had no objection when he dialed a light soporific charge and took hold of the electrodes.

After that, sleep came quickly. With his mental activity dropping to a subconscious plane, he found complete release from the telepathic pressures that had harassed him all day.

Before leaving the next morning, he gave the interior of the ship a quick inspection, conscious of the snowballing presence of watchers eager to be tuned in while he revisited the scene of the murder.

He circled wide around the blaster, which still lay in the passageway, and went on into the forward compartment. Staring at Thorman's empty control chair, he realized for the first time what a severe loss Art's death represented. It would be a long while before he could restore equilibrium to his until-then orderly existence . . . even if they gave him the opportunity to try.

A few silent commentaries came through:

Hypocrite!

Whose leg are you trying to pull?

That won't get you any sympathy!

Assassin!

Murderer!

But, all in all, there was mostly a respectful silence.

Which doesn't mean we're

going to throw you any hearts and flowers, someone was quick to point out.

Greg opened the personal storage compartment under Thorman's chair. He found nothing of value except an orderly array of E-records.

Absently he withdrew one of the cylinders and glanced at the date on its tag. It was only a little over a week old. Thorman had evidently recorded his ego structure the day they touched down. He no doubt had wanted an accurate duplicate, as of that date, for reference and interrogation.

Bringing the cylinder over to the playback unit, he slipped it into the deposit slot and turned on the switch. Then he waited while the stored impressions, knowledge and personality traits transferred themselves to the circuits and retentive cells of the replay "brain."

"THIS is Arthur Cervan Thorman," the speaker hissed, "as of the Thirtieth Day, Seventh Month, Forty-three Hundred and Thirty-Six."

"Art, this is Greg."

Circuits in the unit evaluated the greeting, matching it against the associative references in the recording, and came back with: "This is a little unusual, isn't it—you playing back my personal recording?" There was no re-

sentment, only curiosity in the question.

"Yes, I suppose it is."

"Anything wrong?"

When there was no answer: "Am I out there with you?"

"No, you're not."

"I thought it was customary to replay a recording only in the presence of the subject," Art reminded facetiously.

"You're—dead, Art."

There was an abrupt interruption in the background hum of the speaker. "What happened?"

"You were—murdered."

"Impossible! Those things don't happen."

"It's true."

"How?"

"A meteor blaster. In the control compartment here."

"Who did it?"

"They say I did."

Laughter. "Now I know you're joking." Then gravity. "You serious?"

"Dead serious, Art. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have come here with my troubles."

"No. That's all right. After all, this is just a recording. No subjective appreciation. If it seems otherwise, it's only because I took pains to make this an authentic duplicate. The murder—how did it happen?"

"I don't know. I found you here in the control compartment. We had been out on a bender."

"When was this?"

"Night before last. On the sixth, a week after we touched down. We went out on a B-jolt tear."

"Like we promised ourselves we would."

"And I blanked out before the night was half over. The next morning I was back in the ship. It was locked on the inside. No one else was aboard. You were dead."

"Tell me everything that's happened since then."

Greg went painstakingly into the details. When he finished, the speaker said, "You are in a hell of a mess."

"It's even worse than it seems. I—"

Gregory Blake. Open in the name of the moral code. It's a Police!

THE hatch swung back on a quite small and lean, but erect man whose appearance altogether contradicted the physical impression Greg had gotten from his telepathic contact with Chief Ronsted.

Every man's got a right to a personalized conception of himself, Ronsted asserted. Then he jerked a thumb over his shoulder. *This is Detective Waverly.*

The Detective's mouth was set in a grin which, Greg read from his mind, was characteristic. He was a lanky man with a thin nose that cleaved a pair of dense brows.

Where's the body? he asked anxiously. *I'd like to inspect*

... The crematorium! Already? Say, isn't that destroying evidence?

The Chief assured him that normally it wouldn't be since, under the system of telepathic detection and communal prosecution, the content of anyone's memory was considered sufficient evidence. He wasn't quite sure, however, what special considerations applied in this case.

Waverly nodded densely and followed the Chief down the passageway and into the control compartment.

The Detective grinned more broadly, drew a thin cylinder of what appeared to be compressed limestone from his pocket, knelt and began sketching the outline of a sprawled human form on the deck.

You'll have to concentrate, Mr. Blake, he admonished, *if you expect me to get this silhouette down accurately.*

Sure you're doing it right? Chief Ronsted asked. Then, in an oral aside to Greg, "We spent half the night in the library, boning up on the lost art of detection. Like the Monitor said, this calls for an anachronistic approach."

Radiating an absorbed degree of intrigue, he produced from his pocket a circular magnifying glass, patently a museum piece. For want of a better object of study he trained it on a grease stain on the deck.

When Greg's prevocal reflection identified the spot for what it was, Ronsted returned the glass to his pocket with no little amount of embarrassment.

"My purpose here, Mr. Blake," he said stiffly, "is to ascertain whether the victim made any recent E-recordings and . . . On the thirtieth? Good! Where did you say . . . Oh, it's *already* on the playback unit!"

Waverly's chalk stick broke and he rose, his brows pinched together as he glowered at Greg. *That recording, sir, is material evidence. I hope you haven't biased any of its contents by misuse.*

When he read that Greg hadn't, he added an exclamation of relief:

Splendid!

THE psychic medium was dense now with the avid attention of thousands who had hastened to tune in on the unprecedented scene of applied criminology. Many of them, too, had evidently "boned up" on ancient methodology.

Look under Blake's fingernails, someone advised.

How about detaining everyone at Spaceport and grilling them one at a time?

Throw a tail on the suspect.

Don't you think you ought to call in the (unconcealed pretentiousness) meat wagon?

Let's have a stakeout.

Ask him where he was on the night of the sixth.

Ronsted stretched his small frame to its full height. *Quiet! If I don't have order I'll black out the entire area and nobody'll be able to read a thing!*

There was an obedient hush and Greg asked, "What do you want with Thorman's E-record?"

"It *might* show where there were strained relations between you and the victim."

"If there had been, you'd easily be able to read it from me."

"Let's go in for a bit of deductive reasoning, Mr. Blake. The basic premise is that you murdered Arthur Thorman. Which is something we'll have to prove. Assumption Number Two"—he held up a second finger—"is that you've found some way to, ah, beat the rap, as they used to say.

"That presupposes that you've discovered how to isolate a segment of your thought processes. If you are able to mentally throw a blanket over your memory of the murder experience, then it logically follows that you can hold back from telepathic scrutiny any recollection of trouble between you and Thorman that might have provided you with motivation."

Waverly, who had gone out into the passageway, returned with Greg's blaster. He held it gingerly between thumb

and forefinger. *The murder weapon!*

Fine! Ronsted commended. *Check it for fingerprints.*

The Detective squinted at the gun. *How do you "take" a fingerprint, Chief?*

Damned if I know.

VIRGIL BLAKE'S business suite was an elaborate facility in the personal services district.

Greg was admitted by a pert young thing with tufted red hair. She read his identity and blurted her reaction, *Blake himself! The killer! Gol-ly, a real nova!*

Then she composed herself. *I'm sorry, Mr. Blake. I didn't realize—*

Hussy! someone nearby observed.

She ignored the comment and indicated the inner door. *Dr. Blake is expecting you.*

Greg? Virgil's anxious query came through. *Come on in.*

Were it not for Virgil's distantly familiar personality pattern, Greg doubted whether he would have recognized his brother. He still had plenty of hair, but it was streaked with gray and there was a gray-mottled mustache that hadn't been there before.

Of course I've changed, kid. Fifteen years make a lot of difference.

Greg gripped the other's shoulders. "Good to see you again."

It's been a long time. Too long for brothers. After this mess is settled, we'll fix that.

"You mean if it's settled."

Virgil laughed and said against an inner background of sincerity, "You didn't do it. I'm confident of that. If you did, there were mitigating circumstances. You just aren't the type to commit violence."

Greg eased into the leather reclining chair. *What do we do now?*

We could rehash old times. But it's more important to get to work.

He adjusted the chair to a more comfortable position. *We're going to identify those mitigating circumstances. Then everybody won't be so anxious for an execution.*

Knock off the sentiment! came a sardonic thought.

Let's confine ourselves to the murder! someone else proposed.

Gol-ly, give them a chance. It's the first time they've seen each other in years.

Virgil repositioned one of a pair of two-inch metal spheres that sat on small pedestals on the desk. Then he snapped on a switch protruding from the surface of the globe.

The ever-present voices of the watchers were snuffed out. To Greg, it was as though he were back in the vast loneliness of Hound's Tooth Nebula without even Art Thor-

man within telepathic range.

"Why are you using the Blank-Out?"

"Psychojamming's standard procedure for this kind of work."

"What's it for?"

"Protection of the public. When we dig down into the subconscious we sometimes pull out things that don't make for very pleasant telepathic reception."

Greg shifted position in the chair, content with his sudden isolation from the imperious curiosity of the masses.

From its slot in the arm rest, Virgil pulled an electrode that trailed a heavy, insulated wire. "Ready?"

He touched the prong to Greg's forehead and unconsciousness came immediately.

VIRGIL was standing by the window, hands clasped rigidly behind his back, when Greg reopened his eyes.

"How did it go?"

The other exhibited a troublesome frown. "It's difficult. I can't say. I don't know whether I like it or not."

"What did you find out?"

"If you're actually repressing a distasteful experience, you're doing a good job of it."

"Why should I want to cover anything over?"

"Could be the promptings of a guilt complex."

"Then it looks like I did it."

"I won't say that. There are other aspects."

"Such as?"

Virgil went back to his desk. "You have a vague impression of a gun discharging. It's not clear whether you pressed the stud yourself, but it looks like you did." Perfunctorily, he snapped off the Blank-Out generator.

"Well, hell! That settles it." Greg rose. "I shot him."

Projected thoughts of the watchers returned instantly, descending like a gathering tempest.

Blake shot him?

He did it?

Is he guilty?

Wait a minute! Virgil's nearer subvocal emission overrode the rest. *You're getting in on the tail end of a speculative conversation. Wait and hear what develops. Then let the Consensus take its course.*

"No, Greg," he continued, switching to oral delivery. "You could have fired that blast at someone else—after he killed Thorman."

General psychic surprise from all directions.

"I also found something else in your subconscious—an impression of the hatch opening and closing after you and Thorman returned to the ship on the night of the sixth. It could have been a valid remembrance—or an hallucination. We'll have to have more sessions to find out. Will you come back tomorrow?"

"If I'm still around."

But Greg noticed that there was only confusion and uncertainty in the telepathic background. The Consensus was not yet taking definite direction.

Absently, he fingered one of the two Blank-Out generators. "Who's authorized to use these things?"

"The Monitor. Medical institutions where temporary suffering must be expected. Accident mop-up crews—so they can block in an injured person's pain. Psychoanalysts."

Greg stood there pensively.

No, I'm afraid not, Virgil offered in response to his brother's further reflection. Nobody could have used a Blank-Out to cover up his actions during Thorman's murder. Not unless ever since the crime he has kept himself in the sanctuary of the generator's field so nobody could read his guilt.

Greg hadn't realized Ronsted was one of the current watchers. He learned that when he heard the Chief emit:

Make a note of that, Waverly. Get a list of everyone who has been issued a Blank-Out.

Greg started purposefully for the door.

But Virgil called after him, "I'm worried, kid. If you're innocent, someone else is the murderer."

"So?" Greg didn't bother

to probe ahead into the other's prevocal preparation.

"Then someone's counting on your prompt execution to square things with the Consensus. Right?"

"I suppose so."

"And, if he's still using a Blank-Out to conceal his thoughts, he could at this very moment be plotting your 'accidental' death—so the public will consider the whole case settled."

AS SOON as Greg left the office, the watchers closed in and immobilized him while he stood on a high-speed pedestrian ramp and zipped through the heart of the city. They picked his mind clean. Then, satisfied that they had all the details of the psychoanalytical session, they released him.

Having long since passed his destination he had to transfer and backtrack.

This just gets more confusing, said a discouraged watcher.

We ought to execute him.

But suppose he didn't do it?

He fired the blaster, didn't he?

Yes, but Dr. Blake said he might have fired it at the real murderer.

Meteor fragments! He's guilty!

Maybe not.

Thus, in effect, the Consensus had tied itself in a knot.

Still, Greg could draw no consolation from his tempo-

rary reprieve. For there was the ominous presence of an intractable, dedicated, opinionated segment whose brooding thoughts lurked in the psychic medium. They were *already* convinced of his guilt.

And the unfortunate fact was that there were many who would be willing to have the malcontents take justice in their own hands and relieve them of the responsibility. General sentiment ran something like this: What the hell! In ancient times, didn't the body politic invest its judicial interest in a representative jury of but twelve persons?

The pediramp slowed and he got off, joining the press of humanity in the teeming central district. He tried to conceal his thoughts. But, thanks to his well-known (by now) personality pattern, he drew a constant barrage of curious stares and subvocal taunts.

As best he could, he ignored them and halted before a lesser building whose psychocaster monotonously intoned, *Substation of the Department of Legal Transfer.*

He hesitated at the entrance, reassuring himself that he had been wrong all along about Virgil.

You're damned right you're wrong about Dr. Blake! a passerby echoed, testily confronting him.

Another drew up. *He's*

more than a brother. He's the best friend you've got!

Three or four more persons crowded around him.

Damned if I'd do as much for you.

He has every right to wash his hands.

It isn't every man who'd get involved in the mess you are in!

Greg pressed past them and went on into the Substation.

I want to transfer all my interest in Hound's Tooth to my brother, he told the clerk, in the event I'm not around to enjoy it.

The man smiled warmly. *Now you're doing the right thing by Virgil.*

IV

BY LATE afternoon, Greg had made an interesting discovery concerning mass attention. It was when he was physically isolated that psychic pressure was greatest.

As long as he remained fully exposed, the city seemed to take it for granted that those nearby were keeping a close enough eye on him.

Throughout the afternoon, conjecture over his guilt had continued to figure prominently in all the mental emanations within range. The hostile, opinionated minority had gathered converts. But the overall Consensus was still far from taking definite shape.

Mentally weary from a full day of constant harassment, he stood at the edge of a lofty terrace and gripped the low handrail as he stared down into the chasm and watched the people below. Like microbes, they flowed along the pediramps and congested the streets.

One of the suns had already set, leaving the early evening air with a chill. The other, huge and vivid, eased itself between distant spires and bathed his grim features with its other light.

The first indication of danger was a subtle thought that raised itself above the jumbled background, *There he is —by the rail.*

Greg turned. Two men, leaving the terrace's pediramp transfer station, were advancing toward him.

Watch it! warned one. He's reading us!

An elderly couple and a much younger man, standing along the rail, turned and came forward.

Killer! Foul murderer!

We'll give him what's coming to him!

More than a dozen poured out of the building. As many more advanced from the opposite direction along the handrail. Still others followed the first pair off the pediramp.

We don't want to waste any time! someone exhorted. We've got a sub-Consensus. Let's go!

Their personality patterns sharply identified them as members of the opinionated minority. They fairly radiated unswerving dedication to his execution.

Greg sidled along the rail, letting the metal tubing slip through his moist hand. Abruptly, he turned and ran.

Get him!

Don't let him escape!

Everybody in the background—come on in!

Push!

Lock him in!

His plodding feet were instantly sucked down in an invisible mire. He stood rooted to the terrace's tile surface.

You killed Thorman!

You found a way to keep from being read!

Admit it!

Beyond his immediate captors, there was a tense, watchful silence throughout the psychic medium. Everyone within range had become avid watchers.

In the chasm below, there was no motion on the streets. The dense shadows of the buildings were mottled with the whiteness of unturned faces, all anxious to witness the summary execution.

I didn't do it! he insisted.

The hell you didn't!

Climb up on the railing!

Climb! Climb! Climb!

NOT knowing how he got there, Greg found himself precariously balanced on the

horizontal tubing. And the minority had pressed in much closer physically.

Jump!

Jump!

Jump!

He stood there trembling, feebly resisting the mass will.

Everybody in the back-ground—together—push!

But his paralysis lessened almost imperceptibly.

I don't think it's right (from somewhere in the street blow).

I don't either.

Jump! Jump!

What kind of do-nothings are we? We going to let a handful decide for the Consensus?

We shouldn't, should we?

Of course not!

Shove off, Blake!

Leap!

No, Blake—don't do it!

Everybody get with us and help!

I'm not. I'm going to help Blake.

Me too. I'll do my part only when I know he murdered Thorman.

That's the way I feel. When I execute, it's going to be as part of the true Consensus.

Get down, Blake.

No! Jump!

Don't do it!

Let him alone!

The bond of minority control slipped away gradually and, eventually freed, Greg did a balancing act on his lofty perch. But he finally

managed to reach down and secure a grip on the rail.

Themselves under the pressure of direct compulsion now, the self-appointed executioners opened their ranks and cleared a path for the intended victim.

Numbly, Greg slipped through.

THIS IS THE MONITOR. TO THE UNCOMMITTED WATCHERS, MY COMMENDATION FOR DISCRETION AND RESTRAINT IN BEHALF OF PRECISE JUSTICE.

TO THE IMPULSIVE MINORITY—YOU ARE TO BE CONGRATULATED FOR INITIATIVE IN THE INTEREST OF THE CONSENSUS, BUT CENSURED FOR RASHNESS AND IMMATURE JUDGMENT.

AS TEDIOUS AS THE WORKINGS OF JUSTICE MAY SEEM, WE MUST TAKE INSPIRATION FROM OUR OBLIGATION TO SERVE PROPRIETY AND FAIR PLAY.

UNABLE to shut out the horror of near death, Greg wandered about the city on the low-speed pediramps for hours. The second sun had long since set when finally he made his way back to Spaceport. He was still unable to order his disorganized thoughts.

In the ship, he cast himself on his bunk. Despite the per-

sistent curiosity of a handful of callous watchers he dropped swiftly into an exhausted sleep.

He hadn't slept long, though, when someone had him by the arm and was shaking him insistently.

Wake up, Blake.

Chief Ronsted hovered over the Bunk. *Couldn't contact you, so I figured you must be asleep. The hatch was open. I came on in.*

Greg struggled up. *What do you want?* He had no specific reaction to the inevitable fact that the watchers were even now tuning in to hear what would transpire.

The diminutive official perched on the edge of the opposite bunk and leaned forward, forearms resting casually on his knees. "Can you imagine what would happen if someone were to devise a way to permanently conceal part or all of his conscious thoughts?"

Greg shrugged. "He'd buy himself a lot of privacy."

"That's not what I mean," the Chief said, annoyed. "He could *wreck* civilization! There was a time when society monitored itself with cordons of armed wardens who apprehended criminals and protected the innocent."

"We do better than that now," Greg countered. "Crime doesn't even have a chance to take the first step."

"Exactly!" Ronsted agreed.

"As a result, we haven't needed armed protectors for a couple of thousand years. Which means there's no provision at all for stopping a criminal who could work outside the 'open mind' framework."

"I see what you mean. If he could permanently shield part of his mind, he could plan and execute all the crimes he wanted to."

RONSTED nodded grimly. *You've got the picture.*

"But that could never happen," Greg said confidently. "Whenever your so-called culprit began conceiving of a way to hide his thought processes, his intentions would be read. He'd be committed to an institution for reorientation."

The Chief pensively pinched his chin. "Perhaps not."

He continued silently, *On a prospecting jaunt, you usually parked your ship on the edge of a congestion of nebular matter. Right?*

"Why ask me? I can see that you already got that information from Thorman's E-record."

"Then you both struck out in different directions and set up collapsible bases. Frequently you were isolated from each other for weeks on end, during which time you had to use radio communication. You were beyond telepathic range."

"That's right." Greg read what was coming next.

Ronsted pushed on, "During those periods of pure isolation you could have conceived of a way to wall off a section of your conscious mind, couldn't you?"

"I'd have to be a genius if I did."

"Nobody said you aren't."

"That's ridiculous! I—"

"For the sake of argument, let's say that while you were in Hound's Tooth you *did* discover a way to blank out part of your mind. That means you had several weeks to refine the method, to realize how much better off you'd be if you had Thorman's share of the strike too . . . and to plan his murder."

Greg reared erect. "I'd have killed him out there and said he died accidentally!"

"Maybe so." Ronsted headed for the door. "But perhaps while you were still there you didn't get any further, criminally, than making the intriguing discovery that there *was* a way to outwit society. It's possible that you didn't conceive of killing Thorman until *after* you touched down here."

The Chief's reasoning was full of holes. Greg told him as much as he disappeared down the passageway.

But, still, the prosecution had made another point. The jury had a new element to mull over.

Greg sensed Ronsted's pausing in the passageway near the control compartment.

I'd like to replay Thorman's E-record, the Chief emitted.

Don't mind me. It's only my ship.

V

AWAKENING long before sunrise-A, Greg was at once conscious of a restlessness in the city. It was too early for more than a relative handful of the population to be up and about. But those who were tuned in were desperate to get in contact with him.

The silent voices descended like an avalanche.

We've finally got you!

Now we know you're guilty!

As soon as we can muster the Consensus, that'll be it, Blake!

Greg was off the bunk instantly. "What in hell do you mean!"

You can't hide your guilt any longer.

We know all about it.

Ronsted got Thorman's recording to admit you two had a squabble.

Thorman says you even threatened to kill him.

"That's impossible!"

See for yourself.

The record's still there.

He hurried down the passageway to the control compartment. In the far corner, the "on" light of the playback

unit burned with a steady brilliance. Ronsted had left it on all night!

Sorry, the Chief's familiar thought pattern came through. *I guess I forgot.*

Apparently he was sticking with the case on an around-the-clock basis.

Indeed I am. It's all cleared up now, though—except for disposition by the Consensus. The Detective has finished his check of all Blank-Out holders. All the generators were accounted for. Those in use were turned off while their owners were questioned telepathically. There isn't anybody hiding his guilt in a Blank-Out field.

Leave Thorman's record alone! Greg warned. *It's the last one he made. I don't want any of the impressions blurred or distorted.*

"Anybody in here?" the playback speaker asked.

"It's Greg."

"Thought I heard someone. Have you been in here since Ronsted left?"

"I haven't been here since yesterday. Why?"

"Somebody has. I heard him moving around. Stayed about an hour."

Greg glanced out the compartment and down the passageway. He could see now that the main hatch was still open. Ronsted had found it that way the night before and had left it that way.

"Who was it?"

"I don't know. I called out but he wouldn't answer."

Greg finished fastening the clothes he had thrown on. "Never mind. I've got something more important. Did you tell Ronsted we had an argument?"

"I had to. He said if I didn't co-operate, he'd take the recording in for micro-analysis."

"What did you tell him?" Greg was already beginning to feel trapped.

"Exactly what happened. How you fairly flew out of orbit in Hound's Tooth when I radioed that I was going to come over to your outpost for a couple of days."

Greg was thoughtfully silent.

"I hope you understand," the record continued. "Ronsted would have gotten the information anyway in micro-analysis and—"

"What else did you tell him?"

A pause. "That you threatened to kill me."

Greg sensed the flurry of anxiety in the background as he turned off the playback unit. The steadily mounting number of watchers had greedily drunk in his conversation in the recording.

Don't you see? he demanded. *Thorman's E-record was tampered with! None of that stuff ever happened!*

The hell it didn't!

You're lying!

"How could I lie?" he pleaded. "You'd read the truth if I tried to deceive you!"

Like Ronsted said, you learned how to wall off part of your conscious.

It's all over, Blake.

All the evidence is in.

You're guilty.

I'M INCLINED TO AGREE, the Monitor's amplified thoughts broke in. **BUT IT'S EARLY IN THE MORNING. THERE ARE ONLY A FEW OF US WATCHING. IF WE TOOK ACTION NOW, IT WOULD NOT BE THE TRUE CONSENSUS.**

Don't you see what he did? someone emitted.

He figured out a way to shield a section of his mind!

OF COURSE. AND HE WAS STILL WORKING ON THE METHOD WHEN THORMAN GOT LONELY AND WANTED TO GO OVER AND SEE HIM. THAT'S WHEN BLAKE BLEW UP. HE HAD TO KEEP HIS PARTNER AWAY UNTIL HE PERFECTED HIS SYSTEM OF PERSONAL BLANK-OUT. OTHERWISE, IF THORMAN HAD GOTTEN IN TELEPATHIC RANGE HE WOULD HAVE READ WHAT BLAKE WAS UP TO.

"It's not true!" Greg insisted.

THAT'S FOR US TO DECIDE.

Greg, listen. This time it was his brother. You've got to get over to my office before the Consensus builds up. I'll meet you there. There may still be a chance. Pick up all the E-records Thorman cut since the beginning of the Hound's Tooth trip.

Greg started to pry behind the words and see what Virgil's plan was. But the Monitor broke in again:

LET HIM GO TO HIS BROTHER. IF HE REALLY BELIEVES HE'S INNOCENT, VIRGIL BLAKE MAY BE ABLE TO OPEN HIS MIND AND LET HIM SEE THE TRUTH BEFORE HIS EXECUTION.

Swiftly, Greg flipped the restorage switch on the playback unit and waited until all the impressions and personality features had been transferred back to Art's E-record. Then he snatched the cylinder out of the slot and thrust it in his pocket.

He lunged for Thorman's control seat, reaching for the door to the compartment beneath, where the other records were stored. But he pulled his hand back instinctively.

Something was wrong.

Eventually he saw what it was. The high-tension lead extending from the deck to the control column had been wrenched loose and had flopped back down against the seat, as though someone had

tripped over it and jarred it loose.

If he had touched any part of the chair or its storage compartment he would have been electrocuted.

What was it Virgil had said? "He—the real murderer—could at this very moment be plotting your 'accidental' death so the public will consider the whole case settled."

Knock off the intrigue!

We see what you're doing.

You want us to believe somebody else is involved.

Thorman's recording, Greg reminded himself, had picked up a new impression during the night—the sound of someone moving furtively about the compartment. Now he knew why.

You're not confusing us.

Not any more.

If you can wall off a section of your conscious, you could certainly use the privacy to plan a fake death-trap for yourself.

You want us to believe the Consensus is aiming at the wrong suspect.

It took only a minute to reconnect the cable. Then Greg scooped up a handful of Thorman's records and lunged from the compartment.

THE door to Virgil's suite was ajar, as though purposely left that way to save time. Reading ahead, Greg saw that his brother had already arrived.

He swept through the unattended outer office and found Virgil bustling about the inner room. He had just snapped on the E-record playback unit and was now adjusting one of the Blank-Out generators.

He glanced around and saw Greg. *Thorman's records. Did you—*

The generator warmed up to full output. Its sphere came alive with a soft, silvery glow, cutting off Virgil's emission.

Greg held up six cylinders. "These cover the past four months. I have the most recent one in my pocket."

"Good!" the other exclaimed. "Bring them over here and we'll get to work."

Greg stepped into the compact Blank-Out field, leaving behind him the gathering psychic storm. "What are you going to do?"

Virgil accepted the six cylinders. "If Thorman's last record was biased with false impressions, then it's possible that several before that one were modified too in order to build up a case against you."

"What if they were?"

"Then I'll want to examine them psychoanalytically. We might get an idea as to the identity of the conditioner."

He punched the "total erase" stud on the playback unit. A confusion of syllables stumbled over one another getting out of the speaker, as all the circuits and retentive

cells purged themselves of lingering reflections from the last record. The final few words rumbled off almost indiscernibly into a bass nothingness, "... use a rout-out ... everything about it ..."

Greg looked down at his hands. "Everybody's convinced I murdered Thorman. I don't have very much of a chance."

"I know that. But I think we can prove you're innocent."

"The Monitor," Greg went on, "believes I may have killed Art, then repressed the traumatic experience. I'd like another session in that chair to see if he's right."

"We'll just be wasting time! Even now the Consensus could be—"

"I'll take the chance. If we find out definitely that I'm not guilty, then I'll *know* where I stand."

Virgil ran a hand tentatively over his face, disheveling his meticulously groomed mustache. "All right, kid. We'll give it another try."

WHEN Greg regained consciousness, Virgil was staring down at him in an expression of confused disbelief.

"Well?" Greg prompted.

The other backed off and leaned numbly against the desk.

"I killed Thorman?" Greg guessed.

Virgil nodded.

"But how? What happened?"

"It wasn't pleasant. Both of you were practically out with B-jolts. It wasn't premeditated, though—if that helps any."

"I want to know everything."

"You both came in looping. You stumbled around the control compartment looking for the portable B-jolt bar for 'just one more charge.' You found the meteor blaster instead. You laughed and shouted, 'There goes one with a vein in it! Watch out! I'm going to blow it into the next cluster!'"

"And—?"

"You fired wildly."

"And hit Thorman."

Virgil stared at the floor. "It was late. Nobody was close enough to the ship to be reading you casually. You passed out a few seconds later and that was that."

Greg rose and paced between the chair and the desk. He remembered having told himself at one time that if he'd killed Thorman he would welcome execution. Yet, somehow, at this moment the idea of death didn't seem as unobjectionable as it had then.

"I killed him," he whispered.

"But it wasn't premeditated, kid. Maybe the Consensus—"

"The Consensus operates on the eye-for-an-eye principle."

He went back to the chair. "I repressed the memory of the murder?"

Again Virgil nodded. "It was pretty horrible. Art Thorman, your friend, with half his head blown off. Even as you slept in a B-jolt stupor, pangs of remorse and guilt were at work. It was a hell of a subconscious conflict. You wanted your punishment for killing Thorman. But your survival instinct was strong too. So you repressed the whole thing. Compunction won out in the long run, however, and even though you were hiding your guilt from yourself and everybody else, you were also trying to trip yourself up."

"The death-trap?"

"Yes, the death-trap. You set that yourself—when it appeared for a moment that you might have a chance of escaping justice."

Greg drew erect. "But what about the argument on Thorman's E-record? I'm sure nothing like that happened!"

"Evidently it did." Virgil went over and stared out the window at the city coming to life in the first rush of morning. "I didn't go too deeply into that."

"But why don't I remember it?"

VIRGIL turned and faced him. "I don't know what that was all about. But this much seems clear: When you

were out in Hound's Tooth you had a run-in with Thorman over *something*. Or maybe you were simply suffering from space fatigue. Whatever it was, you threatened to kill him."

He spread his hands in further explanation. "Now, a *threat* to kill is closely related to the *action* of killing itself. It would be my guess that when you repressed the memory of killing your partner, you went a step further and also buried the recollection of having at one time threatened him."

Greg dropped back in the chair and sat with his elbows on his knees. He couldn't shake off the conviction that the watchers—millions of them now—were all lurking immediately beyond the Blank-Out field. When Virgil turned off the generator, justice would be swift and impersonal . . .

There was a sound at the door and the frazzle-haired secretary-assistant burst in. Her face lit up joyfully as she brought her hands together. "We're going to have an execution!"

Greg and Virgil exchanged pointed stares.

"The Consensus just finished jelling!" she went on. "Isn't it *wonderful*? It's going to be a full-dress affair on Administration Plaza. And we've just declared a Grand Holiday!"

She glanced at Greg. "Golly, Mr. Blake! Aren't you *thrilled?*" Then her eyes darted in Virgil's direction. "Can I have the day off, Dr. Blake? Can I get in on the excitement too?"

He muttered consent and she was gone.

Greg said, "I'm not going to sit still for this."

"I don't see anything else you can do."

"Maybe I can get out of the system." He stared at the pair of Blank-Out generators.

"You don't think you can—*escape?*"

Greg stepped closer and said, "Sorry." Then he rocked Virgil's head back with a blow that carried all his strength and weight.

He lifted his brother into the chair and touched the electrode to his head. The light somnicharge would keep him from being read for at least half an hour. To make doubly certain, he turned on the second Blank-Out generator after he had slipped the first under his tunic.

VI

THE glowing silver sphere made only a slight bulge beneath his clothes as he left the deserted building and stepped into the street. It was a desolate scene. The city, so close and towering, seemed remote, lonely. Moreover, the hidden generator not only

jammed his own mental processes, but also walled off the thoughts of the populace, adding to his sense of utter isolation.

He rode a deserted pediramp for a mile before reaching an air car platform with a driver and vehicle that somehow hadn't joined the rush to Administration Plaza. Overhead, that exodus had taken the shape of a sky-darkening flight converging like the spokes of a wheel on the execution site.

The driver whirled around in surprise as Greg stepped up and touched him on the shoulder.

"Say!" the man exclaimed suspiciously. "How come I can't read—?"

Greg slipped his hand in his pocket and gripped Thorman's E-record. He thrust the cylinder's blunt end forward until the material of his tunic stretched taut under the pressure.

"I've got a meteor blaster," he warned. "I'm Blake."

"The—*killer!*"

Greg forced him into the car. "To Spaceport. And stay close to the surface."

The trip took only a moment.

Even as he lunged from the car and raced for his ship, Greg could imagine the frenzy of communicative thought that must be spilling out of the driver's mind.

He slammed and dogged the

hatch and pushed on to the control room. For a moment, while the drive circuits warmed up, he vaguely wondered how far he would have to go before he found one of the quarantined, nontelepathic worlds. That's what it would have to be. For, if he wound up in another free-reading society, they would only complete the kangaroo proceedings.

Impatiently, he leaned over and checked the fuel gauge.

"Damn!" he said.

Almost empty! There wasn't enough left to lift the ship out of the atmosphere!

Finally achieving operational voltage, the view screen flicked to life and relayed the picture of thousands of cars blotting out the sky as they streamed from the city to Spaceport.

Dismayed, he stumbled over to the gear locker and got another meteor blaster, thrusting it under his belt. As long as he had the Blank-Out to avert being forced to kill himself, he could hold them off—until the sphere's stored power was completely exhausted, at any rate.

He swept the ship's scanner in a full circle. The entire Spaceport landing area was packed with humanity—all waiting for the exciting moment when the killer would be routed from his sanctuary, somehow, and brought to justice.

IT WAS several hours later that Greg rediscovered Thorman's E-record in his pocket. By now, the angry horde had begun valving off the steam of its frustration by pelting the ship with whatever they could get their hands on.

Absently, he returned the cylinder to the compartment beneath Thorman's chair. It was then that he saw the other record lying on the deck, half hidden by the high-tension lead. He had doubtlessly knocked it out of the compartment when he had snatched up the handful of cylinders.

He retrieved it and glanced at the date on the tag—Twenty-third Day, Seventh Month. That was a week before Thorman had cut his final cylinder. Greg remembered the occasion now. They were wrapping things up at Hound's Tooth, getting ready to return home.

He fed the cylinder into the playback unit and waited until it was ready for interrogation.

"Art, this is Greg."

He had to indulge his partner's characteristic reaction to finding someone else questioning his own recording. But Greg cut it as short as he could.

"Something's come up concerning that argument we had at Hound's Tooth," he explained.

"Argument? What argument?"

"When you wanted to come

over to my outpost and I told you to stay the hell where you were."

There was a pause, then, "You're kidding, of course."

"The time when I threatened to kill you."

Thorman's record produced a laugh. "I don't remember anything like *that*."

"Are you sure?" Greg backed off.

"Of course I'm sure!"

But there was a clear recollection of the argument on the recording Thorman had made a week later! This, Greg realized despite his confusion, could only mean the later recording *had* been tampered with!

And, by extension, it was certain now that someone else was involved in Thorman's murder. And that meant—what did it mean?

For one thing, maybe he *hadn't* set the death-trap for himself as an expression of his guilt complex!

Deep, disorderly realizations began to swim into focus. He went back to Thorman's control seat, staring dully at the cable which might have electrocuted him.

If he had unconsciously set the death-trap, he asked himself, why would he have baited *Thorman's* chair? It was unlikely that he would have had any reason to blunder, unknowingly, into that snare! His subconscious would certainly have been more practi-

cal. He would have rigged up something like his bunk, or his own chair.

THE communication screen in the Spaceport Administration Office flared to life, limning a picture of Greg Blake at the controls of the ship.

There he is now! thought the Spaceport manager in excitement.

He's on the air! added Chief Ronsted, who had been standing vigil in the room.

Come out of that ship, Blake! Monitor Irwan ordered, forgetting Virgil had recently relinquished the information that Gregory Blake's mind was being blocked off by a stolen Blank-Out generator.

The screen's audio amplifier hummed tentatively as Greg scanned the room and sighted Irwan.

"I want to talk with you and the Chief," he said.

"Come out of there, Blake!" the Monitor repeated.

Ronsted added, "Turn off the Blank-Out!"

"And get executed for something I didn't do?"

"We'll flush you out sooner or later," Irwan promised.

Ronsted's lean face formed an even leaner smile. "We've just sent to the Hall of Ancient Artifacts for a weapon that'll blow that ship to pieces."

Greg spread his hands importunately. "All I want is a

few minutes to talk with you and the Monitor."

"Well, come on out and talk," Irwan urged.

"I wouldn't make it past the hatch. You'll have to come here."

"In your ship?" Irwan asked in protest, fingering his double chin.

Of course we'll go there, Chief Ronsted beamed, with a tinge of amusement that didn't show on his face. We'll let him think we're willing to go in and talk.

What do you mean? the Monitor asked.

He can't read us now, not with that Blank-Out on. By going there we'll at least get him to open the hatch. Then we'll all rush him and grab the Blank-Out!

GREG waited tensely at the hatch. That some development was imminent was indicated in the sudden silence. For the first time in hours, no missiles were pelting the ship.

Eventually there was a hesitant rapping.

He drew the bolts and, in one swift motion, swung the hatch open and thrust the meteor blaster out in front of him. The weapon covered Chief Ronsted and the Monitor as their faces froze in expressions of frustrated surprise.

The scores who had pressed in close behind them, ready to spring, fell back at the sight of the blaster.

"I thought you'd try something like this," Greg disclosed. "You gave in too easy when I asked you over."

He waved them into the passageway, closed the hatch behind him and prodded them on into the control compartment.

"What do you expect to gain by this?" Ronsted demanded.

"Don't you see?" the Monitor said disgustedly. "He just wanted a couple of hostages."

"Wrong." Greg ordered them into the control chairs with a wave of the blaster.

Then he pointed to the playback unit. "I have one of Thorman's E-records in the slot. It was made a week before the one that supposedly incriminated me."

"You're wasting our time, Blake," the Monitor said impatiently. "If you hadn't been covered by this Blank-Out field over the past few hours, you'd know your brother was contacted by thousands of us. He wasn't able to hold back one iota of truth. We know he succeeded in digging up all the information from your subconscious—how you killed Thorman—how—"

"This record," Gregg went on implacably, "has no trace of the argument Thorman and I presumably had in Hound's Tooth. That means the more recent recording, showing the argument, was faked."

"You expect us to believe that?" Ronsted asked.

Irwan leaned forward. "If this record is as you say, then you made it that way."

"Let's don't get off on that jag again."

Ronsted tried to rise, glanced at the blaster and sat down again. "Then why is it that the records you brought to your brother's office this morning contain recollections of the same argument?"

Greg smiled bitterly. "I suspected they would—by now. He's had plenty of time to impress false knowledge on them, just as he did on the most recent cylinder."

"Blake, you're insane!" exclaimed the Chief.

"Virgil had no Blank-Out on when we contacted him on his way here a few minutes ago," Irwan argued. "If he had done anything like that, we'd have read it!"

"You were willing to believe I did something like that without anyone being able to read it!"

Ronsted rose. "That was different! You had weeks of total isolation in Hound's Tooth to figure a way to cheat the communal conscience!"

YOU'LL find that Virgil, too, had all the time he wanted. You see, he was always envious of me when we were younger. He simply decided he wanted the fortune I made from that kitarium strike.

"In order to get it, he came

over here on the night of the sixth, carrying a Blank-Out generator. He banged on the ship until either Thorman or I let him in. He used a portable somnibattery to put me in a receptive trance. He killed Thorman. Then, using psychotherapeutic procedure, he buried in my subconscious the memory of having let him in the ship. There was also a posthypnotic suggestion to bolt the hatch after he left, and to forget that act."

Chief Ronsted lunged up too, but held his distance in deference to the blaster. "That's ridiculous!"

Greg waved them back into their chairs. "Virgil Blake might have made it easier on himself. He *could* have planted a false memory of the murder in my conscious mind. But, if he'd done that, he would have had no chance to play on my sympathy, win back my confidence—and have me legally arrange for the fortune to become his after my death!

"That was the purpose of my first psychoanalytical session—so he could plant the compulsion in my mind to think kindly of him and sign over my wealth. During that session he also planted the subconscious suggestion that I was to leave the ship's hatch open that night."

"This," Monitor Irwan began, "is the most preposterous—"

But Greg plodded on, "After

the legal transfer was effected, he used another Blank-Out to return to the open ship and set the death-trap. At the same time, he employed oral hypnotic procedure to put a false impression of the Hound's Tooth argument on Thorman's E-record, just in case his trap didn't work. He deleted from the record all conscious recollection of that oral procedure. But he forgot to erase the impression of someone moving around in the control compartment.

"I should have known he was the one who rigged up Thorman's personal storage compartment with the high-tension charge! Wasn't it *his* idea for me to pick up Thorman's records and bring them to his office?"

"It was," the Chief admitted, "but that doesn't prove—"

"When I got to his office he finally had his opportunity to plant a false memory of the crime in my subconscious—or at least to pretend he had found it there. At the same time he had to produce an excuse for having asked me to bring Thorman's recordings."

Greg leaned forward, smiling tensely. "If I'd been alert at the time, I might have noticed something vital: Virgil had to clear some residual impressions out of his playback unit before he could use it again—presumably to inspect Thorman's recent records for clues to clear me.

"During that playback clear-out run, I caught a couple of fragments of speech: '... use a rout-out ... everything about it ...' If I'd been thinking clearly, I might have recognized that the words were Virgil's and I might have realized their significance."

"**G**REG, kid—stop it! You're just making it harder on yourself."

Greg turned toward the communication screen, which he realized had been on for some time. It showed the interior of the Spaceport Administration Office. Virgil was in the foreground.

"Don't you see," he asked, "that all this thrashing around you're doing is nothing more than the guilt complex-survival instinct conflict in your subconscious?"

"Virgil," Greg said patronizingly, "will you come over to the ship?"

"I don't see why I should. I'd only be endangering my own life."

Greg turned to Chief Ronsted and the Monitor. "I didn't think he would. He's laboring under a compulsion right now. Something's telling him not to do anything to betray himself."

Ronsted was on his feet again. "Blake, you aren't making any sense at all!"

"All right," Virgil said finally. "I'll come over, if you think it'll help any. But remember,

I've heard all your accusations. And I'm not in range of any Blank-Out. Everybody in Spaceport City has read those insinuations through me. They watched my reaction. They all know my unspoken denials were sincere and truthful. If I had tried to lie they would have set upon me by now."

Greg turned off the communicator. "He's going to come over," he told the two officials, "because he subconsciously fears that not to come might eventually cast some doubt on his innocence. He probably has another purpose too—to look for an opportunity to kill me in self-defense."

Chief Ronsted ran a hand distraughtly over his thin face. "I'm not going to sit here and—"

"Yes, you are," Greg said grimly.

GREG barely managed to get Virgil in the ship.

He jerked open the hatch, reached out and seized his brother's wrist, snatching him in just as several persons, flattened furtively against the side of the ship, grabbed unsuccessfully for his own swiftly moving arm.

As he fired a warning shot to clear the entranceway, he ducked just in time to avoid his brother's lunging charge from behind. Then he slammed the hatch and dogged it.

Virgil picked himself up off the deck and said, "I just

wanted to take the blaster away from you."

Greg smiled knowingly. "Of course you did—the blaster and the Blank-Out generator. Then the Consensus would take care of the rest."

He searched his brother's face. And what he sought was there, hidden deep in his eyes. In the range of the generator now, Virgil had undergone a subtle change. He didn't seem to be as aloof as before. And his stare was one of discernible preoccupation.

He gave Virgil a shove and sent him ahead to the control compartment. Respecting the blaster, Ronsted and Irwan hadn't left their chairs.

"I bring one Virgil Blake," Greg said affectedly, "forced here as a result of the obscure promptings of unconscious motivation. He's already had his try at blasting me—in self-defense, of course."

Virgil started to say something, but Greg motioned him silent with the blaster. "When my brother came in on the communication screen, I was saying—"

"But don't you see?" the Monitor pleaded. "He *couldn't* have done any of those things without betraying himself the minute anyone got in contact with him."

"That's what I tried to tell Greg," Virgil offered. But he was busy mopping perspiration from his face.

"A few minutes ago in the

Spaceport office," Greg said clearly, "he *was* telling the truth when he insisted there was no trace of guilt in his mind for anybody to read. But *now* he knows everything I said is true."

Virgil backed off, perspiring more freely.

"As I was saying," Greg continued, "the playback unit in his office gave out with these fragments of speech as it cleared its circuits: '. . . use a rout-out . . . everything about it . . .' Do you know what a rout-out is, Monitor?"

"Of course. It's an electronic instrument for destroying all the impressions on an E-record so the cylinder can be used again."

"Exactly. Virgil's *own* record was telling him to use a rout-out and destroy everything that had been deposited on that record, then *forget everything about it*. He was supposed to forget even the fact that he had made such a record. That order to forget was to apply *except when he found himself in the range of a Blank-Out*, as he is now. In other words, whenever it was evident that his thoughts *couldn't be read*, he was free to plot the death of Thorman, my incrimination and whatever would be necessary to take over my interest in the Hound's Tooth strike!"

Monitor Irwan's stout face was stiff with shock and amazement.

Chief Ronsted faced Virgil with calculating regard.

Virgil, his mouth hanging open, only stared at the blaster as he backed against the bulkhead.

But he tensed abruptly and charged, his arms outstretched to encompass Greg and hurl him to the deck. Greg, however, was prepared. He sidestepped and brought the handle of the weapon down against his brother's head.

IT STUNNED Virgil, but only momentarily. Then he sat on the deck and buried his face in his hands.

"I had a patient," he sobbed. "It was the day after Greg and Thorman got back from Hound's Tooth. The psychocasts were full of stories about their fabulous strike. My patient was unconscious. The Blank-Out was on. I thought then how I'd like to get Greg's wealth. And, in a moment, I saw how it could be done.

"I had to go through with it. If I had backed out then, my envious thoughts would have been read when I eventually turned the Blank-Out off and I would have been sent to an institution for disassociation and reorientation.

"I cut an E-record and put it on the playback. All the while my patient remained unconscious. Then I let the recording, with my intentions an integral part of it, carry on from there.

"The record used oral psychoanalytical procedure. In effect, I hypnotized myself, making myself forget *on a conscious plane* that I had even conceived of the thought of killing my brother. At the same time I ordered myself to plan toward that end on a conscious level only when I was in range of a Blank-Out generator. I was to drop all such mental activity into the subconscious whenever I got out of its range.

"It was a perfect setup. Since only the conscious mind can be telepathically read, my hands were always clean.

"The E-record also directed that, consciously, I should think and act kindly toward Greg. At times I carried out those instructions only too well—such as warning him an attempt might be made on his life when all the while I subconsciously *knew* that would happen. In other words, all the

planning and a good deal of the execution was done without even the watchers or myself knowing about it.

"Even when I asked Greg to bring over Thorman's records, I honestly *thought* I was trying to help him. But when he got there I had already turned a Blank-Out on and was ready to carry on my scheme from there."

Greg handed the meteor blaster to Chief Ronsted.

The Monitor rose, shaking his head incredulously. "You stay here and keep that Blank-Out generator on," he said, thumping the bulge under Greg's tunic, "until I go out and let them read all that's happened."

Greg watched him and the Chief disappear down the passageway together.

Then he knelt beside Virgil, placed an arm around his shoulder and waited.

END

HOW DO YOUR IDEAS GROW?

When Vivian Kellems is hot copy, she is hot copy indeed—moving her manufacturing plant from New York, for instance, in protest against state taxes, and, in her fight to shoot down federal withholding taxes, making such demands that, had they been successful, would have had every employer compensated as a tax collector, thus ruining the withholding scheme.

In the idea field, though, Vivian Kellems is topped perhaps only by the item on page 84. Remember the Burmese thumb trap? Strictly kid stuff, it's made of plaited straw in a cylinder shape that gets tighter the harder you try to yank your thumbs free. Miss Kellems saw a well-nigh perfect electrical connection in the gizmo; conduits and cables joined this way—not with straw, of course—were hooked for keeps. Her company turns out millions of dollars' worth of such equipment a year, all from the idea behind a toy.