

By NEAL BARRETT, JR.

to tell the truth

*He didn't have a thing to worry
about — if the enemy quizzed him
too keenly, he would simply die!*

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

KEVINSON opened his eyes to bright sunlight streaming through a large window. He looked down at his feet and past them to the foot of the bed. *Bed?* What was he doing in bed? He tried hard to think. White walls white sheets white bed bright sunlight. He sat up with a start. Hospital.

Then he saw the man sitting in the chair beside his bed. Tall, middle-aged, the man had a weather-lined face tanned by some alien sun. He was putting out a cigarette and smiling at Kevinson.

"Good afternoon," he said. "I'm Colonel Griffin, Federation Intelligence. Feel like talking, Major?"

Kevinson looked at the Colonel,

noted the battle ribbons on his crisply tailored jacket and the double eagles on his shoulder. He lay back down on the soft pillow and closed his eyes. The instant he did, he suddenly remembered. The six red dots coming out of nowhere on the screen, the nerve-jangling clang of battle stations and no time to think, no time to do anything, just punch the button and get the hell out. And after that —

Kevinson grimaced. After that, what?

"Take it easy, Major — you've had a rough time of it," said the Colonel. He gave Kevinson's arm a strong, friendly grip. "You tell me what you can remember and I'll fill you in."

"There isn't much to tell," said Kevinson. "I spotted the Kjard patrol as they came out of sub-drive, punched the random escape pattern and — well, I guess we made it."

Colonel Griffin smiled, lit a cigarette, and held out the pack to Kevinson.

"That's about the way we figured it must have happened," said Griffin. "You got into sub-drive all right, but the Kjard hit you with a stunner first. You and your crew drifted around for two days before we found you. All sleeping like babies."

Kevinson reddened.

"Don't worry about it," grinned the Colonel. "It could happen to

anyone. Dealing with the Kjard is tricky business."

"Thank you, sir," said Kevinson. He was suddenly very fond of the friendly Colonel. Not like some of those Intelligence characters. You could trust a man like Colonel Griffin. You could tell him anything. A guy like that had seen action somewhere besides back of a desk.

"Now about your mission," said Griffin, "it was a very important assignment, as you know, Major. And since you won't be up and around for a few days, we'd like to get all we can — you know, fill in for the next crew that goes out. Now let's see, you were to patrol Sector 74 and—"

CLICK!

Kevinson sat up. The sweat was cold under his arms and the blue light hurt his eyes. The thrum of sub-space engines tingled in his legs and there was no white bed, no bright sunlight, no Colonel Griffin.

Kevinson felt sick. Then he felt nothing.

MARSHAL Ftel sat behind his desk with his eyes half closed and his thick arms crossed over his furry chest. Adjutant Nvec stood at attention before him. The Adjutant looked a little like a tall grizzly bear that had been left out in the rain too long. He was younger than Marshal Ftel and his pelt was still a pale silky blue.

Nvec made a gentle mumbling

sound in his throat and the Marshal opened his eyes and glowered.

"I am not sleeping, Nvec. It is not necessary to make noises."

"Yes, sir," said Nvec. "I have the reports, sir."

"Then read them to me."

"Yes, sir. Major Kevinson lasted one minute and sixteen seconds under illusion. Then—"

"Then," said Ftel sourly, "you came right out and asked him what his mission was and he blacked out." Ftel turned his cold red eyes on Adjutant Nvec. "Don't you have any finesse, Nvec?"

"Sir," stammered Nvec, "it's very seldom an officer talks under illusion. We—"

"All right, Nvec, don't tell me things I am aware of already. Get on with your report."

Nvec cleared his throat and continued. "Sir, report from Neural Examination is as follows: Kevinson was born in—"

Ftel's great fist slammed down on his desk. "For Trec's sake, I don't want to hear another Terran life history! Dog named Rover or Spot, check? Kissed the girl next door at fifteen, check? Now get on with it! What did you find on him? What have I got to work with?"

Ftel fumed and settled his huge bulk lower in his chair.

NVEC leafed through his papers and began to read again. "One nerve-deadener control in base of

spine just below skin, hidden beneath mole. Control contained built-in breaking-point circuit with confession-selector timer and 478 separate pain-level nodes. We found four more nerve control centers over his body, two obvious fakes, and others interconnected on a random circuit efficient up to twelve levels of standard psychic interrogation." Nvec took a deep breath and turned a page. "We also found six micro-transmitter grids, one very well hidden between two layers of toenail tissue."

"Ridiculous," grunted Ftel in annoyance.

"Sir?"

"Go on."

"Yes, sir. There were fourteen dummy pain neutralizers, six very easy to detect, three medium-well hidden, three very secure, two which we almost missed."

And a dozen more, thought Ftel sourly, that you'll probably never find. Oh, for the days of rack and thumbscrew.

"In the brain," Nvec went on, "we have uncovered and dug through or bypassed 87 neural blocks with interlocked variations. Also 36 cover alternates, with corresponding backgrounds, personalities and missions."

Nvec stopped.

Marshal Ftel looked up. "Is that all? Nothing besides the standard equipment?"

"Well, sir, there are the usual in-

dications. But with their delicate neural structures, we don't dare dig any deeper."

"No," growled Ftel, "not ordinarily. But this time we've got to try. Headquarters has an idea there's something big going on. Crucial point of the war and all that sort of thing. If the Terrans are up to something in this sector, we'd better find out what it is." He studied Nvec from under silvery brows. "I'm sure you don't relish the thought of your mates receiving a package with your pelt in it any more than I do, Nvec."

"No, sir." Nvec swallowed. "What do you suggest, sir?"

"Use the psycher and see if you can find any more deep-set indications that we can get to. I know they can implant a block lower than the levels indicated by your report."

Nvec nodded.

"But be careful," warned Ftel. "Remember the suicide circuit. Cut through that with the wrong frequency and that's it. He's no good to us dead or insane."

Nvec saluted and lumbered toward the door.

"And Nvec—"

"Sir?"

"Remember, if the fur flies on this deal, we all get tanned." He paused and raised a pudgy finger. "But you first, Adjutant."

Nvec saluted nervously and softly closed the door.

Ftel glanced at the pile of reports on his desk, mumbled a low obscenity to himself, and pulled a bottle of Bvorlta from his pouch. In the female Kjard, the pouch was used for carrying young. The male Kjard had long ago found other, more practical uses.

KEVINSON was well aware he was being run through the Kjardian mill, and doubly aware there wasn't a thing he could do about it. The Corps spent approximately \$40,000 per officer preparing for just such an event, and now it was up to his mental blocks, psychic torture adjusters, confession nodes and whatever else they had in him to do the job.

Kevinson's mind below the primary and secondary levels was now a complete blank, both to Kevinson himself and, with luck, to the Kjard. The answers he would give, or had already given, came to his conscious mind from a source over which he had no control.

The war with the Kjard was now in its eighth year. Space maneuvers were intricate operations, involving tremendous expenditures of time, materiel, men and money. Once a fleet was committed to action, it was a gargantuan task to pull it out and unwind its complex coordinates and divert it in a new and doubly complex direction. If there was anything left to divert.

As the war progressed, prisoner

interrogation methods improved, and counter-interrogation became a fine art. The \$40,000 worth of neural implants was considered well worth the expense if an officer could be kept from revealing the maneuvers of a 40-billion-dollar operation.

Of course, the cost of training every crewman was prohibitive. The Federation and the Kjard solved this problem by simply keeping their crewmen in the dark about everything not connected with their immediate duties. This suited the crewmen fine. When captured, they told all they knew about military matters—which was nothing.

The officers had much the same reassurance; they knew they wouldn't be physically tortured, and they knew they couldn't talk.

There was only one hitch. Counter-Interrogation tried to keep up with new developments, but defense and offense seldom overlap. If you happened to be unlucky enough to be captured at the wrong stage of this game — tough. When they probed within range of your secret, a little alarm went off somewhere in your built-in circuits and a switch closed before the information could be extracted. The suicide circuit.

And that, thought Kevinson as they strapped him down again, was something to think about.

Marshal Ftel stood in the back-

ground with Adjutant Nvec. They were watching Group Seven in a series of twelve tests designed to bypass the suicide circuit of Major Kevinson and bring his information up to an extractable level. Ftel had taken a very personal interest in the Kevinson tests. Confirming information indicated that Kevinson had almost certainly been captured while scouting for a major Federation breakthrough. Ftel was taking every precaution to keep his own pelt in one piece. Kevinson's unmanned ship continued to send routine reports back to Federation headquarters. Every detail, every scrap of information collected from the vital sectors involved was filtered and sifted through Ftel's office. But Kevinson himself was the key — if he couldn't be broken, the rest of the information was worthless.

"What are they doing now?" asked Ftel impatiently.

"Sir, they are testing to discover the type of suicide circuits that have been planted in Kevinson. If they can isolate the method in which his system will be destroyed—"

"I know, I know," snapped Ftel. "I mean *what* area are they working on?"

"The stomach tissue, sir. If you recall, sir, Area Nine lost a lieutenant two weeks ago when a virus in his stomach mutated as we made contact."

"They're *still* testing for *that*? Federation's probably changed the circuit a dozen times in two weeks!" Ftel turned on Nvec, raising a hairy paw to the Adjutant's Face. "Fumble this for me and you won't see another shedding season." He turned and stalked out of the room, feeling to see if the bottle of Bvorlta was still in his pouch.

Kevinson was conscious of what was being done to him, but he refused to let it bother him. Or, rather, certain circuits told him it didn't bother him, which was just as good, if not better.

He knew, for instance, that the Kjard were probing his stomach with sonic scalpels, and he could feel the wave pulsations running through his body. One certain note made his teeth ache. He hoped the suicide circuit wasn't in his teeth.

One of the Kjard grinned, revealing a set of strong white molars. "Don't worry," he said. "We already checked the teeth."

Kevinson glanced up. The Kjard wore earphones and evidently had the dull job of monitoring Kevinson's primary thoughts.

"*Thanks,*" thought Kevinson, "*you overgrown, smelly slob.*"

The Kjard flushed.

"**I** THINK," said Marshal Ftel, "that we are finally getting somewhere, Nvec."

Nvec smiled broadly. "I certainly hope so, sir."

Ftel frowned. "Get overconfident, though, and we'll pull some fool trick like Gtem, in Area Four." He bent over the reports again.

Nvec shuddered. He had read the official report on the late Marshal Gtem, who had somehow let a two-cluster Federation Admiral die under the probe.

"Sir?" asked Nvec.

"Hmmm?" Ftel didn't look up.

"Sir, what happens to a Federation officer who — makes mistakes — big mistakes, sir?"

"Like Gtem made, you mean?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Gtem's Adjutant?"

"Yes, sir," said Nvec.

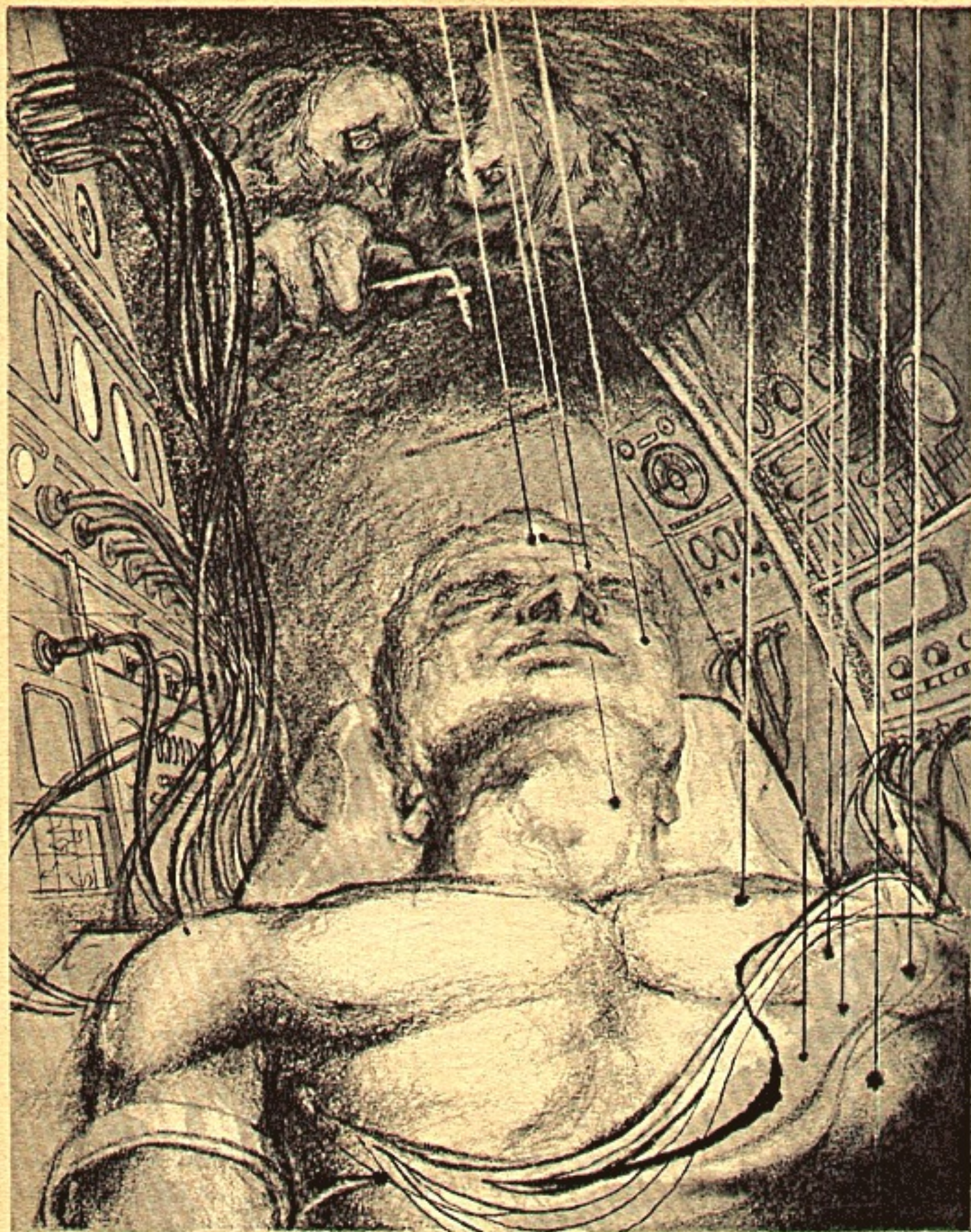
Ftel looked up. "They get promoted, Nvec."

"Sir?"

"I believe the Terran term is 'kicked upstairs.' And don't ask me to explain it to you." Ftel bent over his work again.

"Yes, sir," said Nvec, who was so engrossed in the wonders of alien psychology that he forgot to salute as he left.

Kevinson was being wheeled down the long corridor again. By now, he had lost all count of the number of times he had gone from the tiny room, down the hall, and into the examining chamber. Any estimate of the elapsed time since his capture would have to include periods under sedation, narco-hypnosis, dream-sleep, subsonic suspension and a number of other



states that can only be described as variations on semi-consciousness and pseudo-death.

As far as Kevinson was concerned, anywhere from thirty seconds to ten thousand years had swept dreamily by.

At present, he was aware of two things. The pale blue Kjard lighting was giving him a headache again, as it always did when he was conscious enough to realize he had a head. Secondly, he was dimly aware that there was entirely too much activity going on for a regular examination period. The corridor was literally swarming with Kjard officers and technicians.

One Kjard in particular seemed to express a keen interest in him. Kevinson had never seen him before, at least not that he could remember, but he recognized the silver triple-spangled shoulder insignia as the badge of a full Marshal of Interrogation.

As they reached the examination chamber, it was the Marshal himself who put the blinder helmet over Kevinson's eyes. The helmet was only used during certain phases of the examination, and Kevinson hadn't yet decided whether it was to keep the patient from seeing what was being done to him out of kindness or for security reasons.

While Kevinson was being readied for examination, Marshal Ftel took the opportunity to in-

spect the interrogation equipment. There was no reason for a Marshal to inspect the equipment personally, but Ftel knew the technicians expected it of him, and would lose respect for him if he failed to find a spot of grease or a bit of dust.

Ftel had been in the business long enough to know that a satisfied officer might well expect to wake up some morning with his pelt nailed to a bulkhead.

FROM the far wall of the examination chamber, a thirty-foot bank of gleaming bronze-colored instruments circled in an arc around the central examining table. The table was joined to the bank by a tangled snarl of multi-colored cable which occasionally bypassed the bank itself to join other instruments placed at random on the walls, floor and even the ceiling. At the beginning of the war, the examination chamber had been a neat and orderly place to work in; now it resembled a weird organism that had not quite made up its mind what it wanted to be when it grew up. Of necessity, the chamber was in a constant state of flux, a desperate race to adapt to new developments of the enemy as well as the efforts of their own technicians.

The miles of cable, tons of tubes, transistors, switches and just plain gadgets were being readied for what Ftel believed to be the most

important job they would ever perform: the extraction of vital information from the mind of Major Kevinson. For weeks, the technicians had worked around the clock for this moment. First, the various primary level mental and physical protective and confusion blocks were removed. Then, and more carefully, the secondary probes went after the subtler devices. Here the danger to Kevinson, and indirectly to the Kjard, became acute. A hasty probe or a mistaken analysis and the suicide circuit could bring the examination to a deathly halt. During this phase, Marshal Ftel's pelt itched constantly, and his supply of Bvorlta ran alarmingly low.

Adjutant Nvec lumbered up to Ftel and huffed smartly to attention. "Sir, we are ready to begin."

Ftel paused, his eyes on the Ter-ran strapped to the examining table. Then he nodded to Nvec.

Kevinson was aware of being questioned. Whether the voice came from inside or out of his head, though, was impossible to tell.

"Kevinson," said the voice, "you will be asked several questions. You will answer them all with one word: True. You will answer in this manner until otherwise instructed. Do you fully understand what you are to do?"

Kevinson answered, "Yes, fully."

"Your name is Bruce B. Kevinson?"

"True."

"You hold the rank of Major in the Federation Forces?"

"True."

"Your serial number is KH-77590933?"

"True."

"A man can live on the face of the sun?"

"True."

"A man can breathe in space without benefit of a protective suit?"

"True."

The questioner paused. Glancing at the lighted panel by his side, he noted that Kevinson's test questions had all been answered as they should be. The bank of lights also indicated that Kevinson realized the last two answers should have been False. The questioner nodded to his assistants and more switches were thrown into play. New banks of lights flickered on and off, and the emergency organ bank next to Kevinson's body hummed into life.

Ftel could feel the moisture creep up under his pelt. The organ bank meant they were ready to proceed to third level probing. Here they would certainly come up against the suicide circuit and, if successful, disarm it. If any organ in Kevinson's body were destroyed in the process, they would attempt to keep him alive by cutting in a duplicate organ from the bank.

And, Ftel uneasily thought, probably unsuccessfully. The sui-

cide circuit was usually too quick and too thorough; likely to set off half a dozen alternate circuits before the organ bank could take control.

AN hour later, Kevinson was no longer conscious of existing. The protective devices left in his mind and body had taken complete control in a last-ditch effort to guard the thoughts deep within his brain.

"Circuit TG," said the head technician.

"Activated."

"Begin probe in Area V."

"Easy!"

"Give me a check on that. We hit something."

"There . . . Now!"

Kevinson's mind reacted to the shock of the probe with all its available weapons. Two shields were penetrated, and then another. As the probe delicately pushed through to the fourth, a green light buzzed and blinked frantically on the control panel.

The Kjard technician hastily withdrew. His pelt was soaked and his paws shook. "We nearly did it. That was the suicide circuit."

His assistant frowned in disbelief. "The circuit? In conjunction with the shield?"

"Something new, all right. Call the Marshal over here."

Ftel and Nvec hastily joined the technicians at the table.

"What is it?" said Ftel. "What's wrong?"

"We've hit a barrier with a suicide circuit implanted in a field around it. If we try to break through, we'll set it off. If we don't break through, we'll never get anything. I feel sure the shield we're after is a major block."

Ftel bit his lip and scowled. Surrounding a shield with a circuit was something the Kjard or the enemy were bound to come up with eventually. Now it was here.

Ftel cursed under his breath and turned to the head technician. "You're convinced it's a major block?"

"Yes, sir. I'm almost certain it's the major block."

"Hmmm. That means we can't bypass it."

"Not to any advantage, sir."

"Go ahead and try. We can't do anything else," grunted Ftel.

The technician nodded grimly. His assistant shrugged and began.

Kevinson's mind screamed in agony and fought back with savage force. The probe penetrated the suicide circuit and began to implode.

"He's gone!" hissed the technician.

"No. Wait."

"He's gone, I tell you! We set it off!"

"No, by Trec, we stopped it!"

"It won't hold long! Disarm, quickly!"

A moment later, the head technician nodded to Ftel and sank weakly to a chair.

Ftel reached in his pouch and, to Nvec's everlasting astonishment, brought out a bottle of Bvorlta and offered it to the Adjutant.

The rest was routine. Kevinson came slowly out of shock, his mind naked and open, stripped bare of protection. The first horrifying thing he remembered was his mission. Then the voice went to work. "Your instructions, please, Major Kevinson."

Kevinson answered without hesitation. There was no way he could stop himself now. "I am a Sector Scout for Federation Battle Fleets XII, XXVI, XVIII, XLI and XLV."

"Great Stars," whispered Ftel, "I knew it! A major attack force!" He could almost feel the new silver cluster on his shoulder.

Kevinson talked. He talked about the fleet coordinates, he talked about rendezvous sectors, he talked about the armament of each individual class of vessel, he talked about any and every item the Kjard wished to know. And when it was over, and he was wheeled out of the chamber and back toward his room, Kevinson broke. Now there were no protective devices to ward off his apprehensions and fears. Now, although he had been helpless to stop himself, he had talked. And he knew it.

Ftel watched Kevinson disappear down the pale blue hall. A wide grin spread across his furry jaws.

TWO months after the battle, Interrogation Marshal Ftel stared sullenly at the wall aboard the Federation Prison Ship *Bat Masterson*. He was uncomfortable, in spite of the fact that his rank entitled him to sit near the only air shaft.

"Hello, Marshal Ftel."

Ftel started and looked up. A tall man in Federation blues stood above him. Ftel cringed.

"Kevinson," he said. "How nice of you to drop in." Adjutant Nvec looked on, his furry jowls hanging wide.

"I heard you were aboard," said Kevinson, "so I thought I'd say hello."

"Thank you," said Ftel.

"I thought you'd like to know—"

"I already know," mumbled Ftel. "It was a simple, ridiculous plan that anyone could have seen through. So it worked, naturally. Since you couldn't lie to us, you did the next worse thing—you told us the truth."

"Or rather," added Kevinson, "what I was *told* was the truth."

Ftel's shoulders drooped heavily. "I'm not a Fleet Admiral. If Headquarters acts on my information, that's their business."

"Anything you need?" asked Kevinson.

"Yes," said Ftel, "a drink."

"Sorry," grinned Kevinson. "But I will see if I can get these lights dimmed." Ftel murmured his thanks.

Later, Nvec turned to Marshal Ftel. "Sir?"

"What is it?"

"Sir," said Nvec, "I've been won-

dering. I noticed Major Kevinson has been promoted to Colonel, and you said the Federation, as you put it, kicked its officers upstairs when they made mistakes — big mistakes."

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Marshal Ftel.

— NEAL BARRETT, JR.



FORECAST

You know, people living in a Golden Age never are aware that they are, except in retrospect, and then only by contrast. Maybe those contrasts shouldn't happen to a dog, but they don't last forever, and it takes a spell of them, it seems, to make the superlative the highest one can attain, not the least one will settle for. What topples Golden Ages? More than anything else, perhaps, it's the hopeless job of trying to greatness into greatest, greatestest, and on from there. Cases in point are such masterworks as *Gravy Planet*. No, Virginia, they didn't win instant acclaim. Instant yelps and welts is what they raised. When the howling ceased — the things were unfamiliar, you see, and had to be lived with a while to lose their dangerous aspects, the danger being new ideas—then they emerged as masterpieces. *Gravy Planet* is chosen as the prime example because Frederik Pohl's DRUNKARD's WALK is sure to be compared unfavorably with it by at least one terribly tired, terribly disenchanted reviewer, though Pohl's mastery is far more mature, sure, complete, than in the earlier story.

For we are at the beginning of another Golden Age, in which Pohl and other gladly welcomed old masters welcome as gladly as we do the appearance of vital, vigorous new talents to the 1960s.

The names are unfamiliar, but only for now: William W. Stuart, Allen Kim Lang, Neal Barrett, Jr., Jim Harmon, R. A. Lafferty — it's a long, exciting list that goes on and on.

Where were they all this while? Serving their apprenticeships, honing their talents, building writing muscles, getting ready for the big time . . . and it's here. GALAXY, ending its tenth year, is going into its next decade with a Golden Age. This could be the first in the history of man that's recognized as such, and not only in retrospect, but while it's going on. Not a chance? Stick around and see!

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GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

A TREASURY OF GREAT SCIENCE FICTION, edited by Anthony Boucher. Doubleday & Co., Inc., N.Y., \$5.95 for two volumes.

A DOUBLE-BARRELED uniqueness, this nevertheless needs individual treatment. Each volume has two full-length novels, a couple of novellas, some novelettes and some shorts.

Volume One has Wyndham's excellent *Rebirth* and van Vogt's intricate *Weapon Shops of Isher* as novel attractions. The two novellas are "The (Widget), the (Wadget) and Boff," a big bit

of Sturgeon, and Heinlein's famous "Waldo." Novelettes: "Pillar of Fire," typically off-trail Bradbury, and the haunting "Children's Hour" by Kuttner and Moore. Best of the shorts are "Gomez" by Kornbluth and "The Father-Thing" by Phillip K. Dick.

Despite weak sisters, the total of superior wordage is high.

Rating: ****

VOLUME TWO: Two exceptional novels are highlights, *Brain Wave* by Poul Anderson and *The Stars My Destination*, a *GALAXY* classic by Alfred Bester.

"The Man Who Sold the Moon," Heinlein's big novella about a latter-day Promised Land and its Moses, is the longest of the remaining yarns. Provocative is a pale word to describe "The Lost Years," Oscar Lewis's novelette about Lincoln's declining years after his recovery from his near-assassination.

Top-notch shorts are "Letters from Laura" by Mildred Clingerman and "The Morning of the Day They Did It" by E. B. White.

Boucher allowed himself too much latitude with the other material to justify the "Great" in his title. Lord knows he had enough to pick from.

Rating: ****

THE MARTIAN MISSILE by David Grinnell. Avalon Books, N. Y., \$2.95

GRINNELL, STRIVING for the shock effect of unleashed imagination, succeeds instead in creating a comic strip without pictures.

His tarnished hero, holing up from the law in Arizonia, rescues an alien from the wreckage of its space vehicle. Before death, the alien implants a message in his host's arm bone plus a compulsion to deliver the message to Pluto. To insure delivery, the hero, unlike children, will be seen but not noticed.

With this handy attribute, the

ex-con reaches Russia unnoticed, tossing test animals from its moon missile to make room for himself. Now the tale starts to get a bit confusing. Another set of invaders mixes in. There's a rescue from Mars in a fossil space craft, and an escape from Jupiter, quick-frozen in a plastic projectile fired from a titanic cannon.

Rating: **

THE BIRD OF TIME by Wallace West. Gnome Press, Inc., Hicksville, N. Y., \$3.50

WEST'S HIGHLY palatable fairy tale achieves its highest degree of success with Part One, the account of the First and Second Martian Expeditions and the brawl leading directly to war between the planets. In this section, the author tells his story of the Martians, a winged, angelic-looking race, slowly dying for lack of power and raw materials. Their outwitting of a would-be Peter Minuit who attempts a repeat of the twenty-four-dollar Manhattan Island swindle is a delight.

The remainder of the book, though quick-paced and deftly written, is all downhill from the peak reached by Part One.

Rating: *** 1/2

THE GLORY THAT WAS by L. Sprague de Camp. Avalon Books, N. Y., \$2.95

FOR MOST of de Camp's yarn,

it is debatable whether his two trepid travelers have actually gone back to Classical Periclean Greece or whether the Golden Age has come forward to the twenty-seventh century Present of the story.

De Camp's neat puzzle derives from the braving of the puppet emperor's force screen about modern Greece by a magazine reporter and the bereft husband of a kidnapped wife. Their shipwreck occurs in ancient Greece — or does it?

Robert A. Heinlein's foreword points out that the wellspring of de Camp's humor is the human quality of his characters. Heroes and villains alike are bumbler and never drawn bigger than life. So, though there isn't a belly-laugh in the book, there are plenty of chuckles and unostentatious erudition.

Rating: ***

THE EATER OF DARKNESS
by Robert M. Coates. Putnam
Capricorn Books, N. Y., \$1.15

COATES' INTRODUCTION acknowledges his intimate acquaintance with the Paris of the Twenties and its fabulous inhabitants: Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Picasso, Satie, etc. In those days, for a book to sell well denoted failure of a sort. So, thirty-odd years after its original satisfactorily limited success, Putnam's reprint is now

risking failure of a sort.

Since murders are committed from afar by an undetectable X-ray Bullet, there is no doubt that the story is also science fiction of a sort, even though it has been called the first surrealist novel in English.

Coates' manipulation of language and plot are often amusing, often irritating, always fascinating.

Rating: ****

THE SEA PEOPLE by Adam
Lukens. Avalon Books, N. Y.,
\$2.95

A SONG title of yesteryear, "Imagination Is Funny," is descriptive of the above book — funny-peculiar and unconsciously funny-comical. However, a reasonable doubt of the author's guilt does exist. Numerous clues point to the possible butchery of a larger, less episodic, less pathetic work, hacked away at to fit into a too-small container. If so, it would be a mercy to author and reader if someone published the original book.

Rating: *

THE ODISIOUS ONES by Jerry
Sohl. Rinehart & Co., Inc., N. Y.,
\$2.95

THE READER who is able to put this book down should find breaking the smoking habit easy. Sohl has written an excellent how-did-it, well paced, crisply dialogued and mounting terror.

A tiny college alumnus group, the Forty Two Club, is at the core of the action. Following their 17th annual shindig, one of the wealthiest, best-adjusted members of the group of seven commits suicide by walking into the ocean. During the last week of his life, he unaccountably had generated either blind fear or maniacal hatred in anyone near him, even including his own wife and son, but without undergoing any noticeable personality change.

With the equally unlikely suicide of another member, it becomes obvious that the group is being plagued — but by whom, why — and, most important of all, how?

A sweet setup. One more revision of the ending probably would have added the extra star that the story deserved and should have gotten.

Rating: ***½

JUNIOR EDUCATION CORNER

WORDS OF SCIENCE by Isaac Asimov. Houghton, Mifflin Co., Boston, \$5.00

REALM OF NUMBERS by Isaac Asimov. Houghton, Mifflin, \$2.75

ASIMOV has a rare talent. He can make your mental mouth water over dry facts.

Words, designed primarily to dispel the layman's fear of weighty terminology, holds perhaps the greater interest. What an odd switcheroo that we use the Arabic "al koh'l" for alcohol — while the Arabs borrowed "spir'its" from us!

Numbers is a bit rougher going in its step-by-step approach to modern mathematics. Starting with finger counting, it ends with the mind-cracking concept of infinite series of infinite series of endlessnesses.

RELATIVITY FOR THE LAYMAN by James A. Coleman. The MacMillan Co., N.Y., \$3.50

PROF. COLEMAN maintains that Einstein's Special and General Theories of Relativity are not in themselves too difficult. Rather, the consequences of the deceptively simple formulae are the conceptual troublemakers.

With the aid of his own whimsically humorous drawings, he ably manages to bring Einstein's titanic concepts down to understandable size.

SPECTRUM, edited by Ray Ginger. Henry Holt & Co., N. Y., \$3.95

THIS BEAUTIFUL volume is a studied approach to "The World of Science." Tremendously broad in scope, its contents page is evolved from that of a general science magazine. Articles run all the way from building Brook-

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The illustrations are truly striking. The simplest-looking is a splendid microphoto of platinum atoms. The most complex-looking is a set of transparent pages showing successive layers of organs of a dissected frog.

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— FLOYD C. GALE