The young policeman, humiliated and on the verge of anger, looked almost as if he would defy his superior, while keeping his eyes away from the body of Benjacomin Bozart.

The older man said: "It's all right. He did not take long to die and this is the man who killed the boy Johnny, not very long ago."

"Oh, him? So soon?"

"We brought him." The old police officer nodded. "We let him find his death. That's how we live. Tough, isn't it?"

THE ventilators whispered softly, gently. The animals slept again. A jet of air poured down on Mother Hitton. The telepathic relay was still on. She could feel herself, the sheds, the faceted moon, the little satellites. Of the robber there was no sign.

She stumbled to her feet. Her raiment was moist with perspiration. She needed a shower and fresh clothes . . .

Back at Manhome, the Commercial Credit Circuit called shrilly for human attention. A junior subchief of the Instrumentality walked over to the machine and held out his hand.

The machine dropped a card neatly into his fingers.

He looked at the card.

"Debit Viola Siderea — credit Earth Contingency — subcredit Norstrilian account — four hundred million man megayears."

Though all alone, he whistled to himself in the empty room. "We'll all be dead, stroon or no stroon, before they finish paying that!" He went off to tell his friends the odd news.

The machine, not getting its card back, made another one.

— CORDWAINER SMITH

HOW ARE YOU GOING TO KEEP THEM DOWN ON THE FARM – AFTER THEY'VE SEEN THE TRUTH?

BREAKDOWN

By HERBERT D. KASTLE

Illustrated by COWLES

HE didn't know exactly when it had started, but it had been going on for weeks. Edna begged him to see the doctor living in that new house two miles past Dugan's farm, but he refused. He point-blank refused to admit he was sick *that* way — in the head!

Of course, a man could grow forgetful. He had to admit there were moments when he had all sorts of mixed-up memories and thoughts in his mind. And sometimes — like right now, lying in bed beside Edna, watching the first hint of light touch the windows — he began sweating with fear. A horrible, gut-wrenching fear, all the more horrible because it was based on nothing.

The chicken-run came alive; the barn followed minutes later. There were chores to do, the same chores he'd done all his forty-one years. Except that now, with the new regulations about wheat and corn, he had only a vegetable patch to farm. Sure, he got paid for letting the fields remain empty. But it just didn't seem right, all that land going to waste. . .

Davie. Blond hair and a round, tanned face and strong arms growing stronger each day from helping out after school.

He turned and shook Edna. "What happened to Davie?"

She cleared her throat, mumbled, "Huh? What happened to who?"

"I said, what . . ." But then it slipped away. Davie? No, that was part of a dream he'd had last week. He and Edna had no children.

He felt the fear again, and got up fast to escape it. Edna opened her eyes as soon as his weight left the bed. "Like hotcakes for breakfast?"

"Eggs," he said. "Bacon." And then, seeing her face change, he remembered. "Course," he muttered. "Can't have bacon. Rationed."

She was fully awake now. "If you'd only go see Dr. Hamming, Harry. Just for a checkup. Or let me call him so he could —"

"You stop that! You stop that right now, and for good! I don't want to hear no more about doctors. I get laid up, I'll call one. And it won't be that Hamming who I ain't never seen in my life! It'll be Timkins, who took care'n us and brought our son into the world and. . ."

She began to cry, and he realized he'd said something crazy again. They had no son, never had a son. And Timkins — he'd died and they'd gone to his funeral. Or so Edna said.

He himself just couldn't remember it.

He went to the bed and sat down beside her. "Sorry. That was just a dream I had. I'm still half asleep this morning. Couldn't fall off last night, not till real late. Guess I'm a little nervous, what with all the new regulations and not working regular. I never meant we had a son." He waited then, hoping she'd say they *had* had a son, and he'd died or gone away. But of course she didn't.

HE went to the bathroom and washed. By the time he came to the kitchen, Edna had hotcakes on a plate and coffee in a cup. He sat down and ate. Part way through the meal, he paused. "Got an awful craving for meat," he said. "Goddam those rations! Man can't even butcher his own stock for his own table!"

"We're having meat for lunch," she said placatingly. "Nice cut of multi-pro."

"Multi-pro," he scoffed. "God knows what's in it. Like spam put through a grinder a hundred times and then baked into slabs. Can't hardly taste any meat there."

"Well, we got no choice. Country's on emergency rations. The current crisis, you know."

The way she said it irritated him. Like it was Scripture; like no one could question one word of it without being damned to Hell. He finished quickly and without speaking went on out to the barn.

He milked and curried and fed and cleaned, and still was done inside of two hours. Then he walked slowly, head down, across the hay-strewn floor. He stopped, put out his hand as if to find a pole or beam that was too familiar to require raising his eyes, and almost fell as he leaned in that direction. Regaining his balance after a sideward staggering shuffle, he looked around, startled. "Why, this ain't the way I had my barn. . ."

He heard his own voice, and stopped. He fought the flash of senseless panic. Of course this was the way he'd had his barn built, because it *was* his barn!

He rubbed his hard hands together and said aloud, "Get down to the patch. Them tomatoes need fertilizer for tang." He walked outside and took a deep breath. Air was different, wasn't it? Sweet and pure and clean, like country air always was and always would be; but still, different somehow. Maybe sharper. Or was sharp the word? Maybe. . .

He went quickly across the yard, past the pig-pen — he'd had twelve pigs, hadn't he? Now he had four — behind the house to where the half-acre truck farm lay greening in the sun. He got to work. Sometime later, Edna

called to him. "Delivery last night, Harry. I took some. Pick up rest?"

"Yes," he shouted.

She disappeared.

He walked slowly back to the house. As he came into the front yard, moving toward the road and the supply bin, something occurred to him. *The car.* He hadn't seen the old Chevvy in. . . how long? It'd be nice to take a ride to town, see a movie, maybe have a few beers.

No. It was against the travel regulations. He couldn't go further than Walt and Gloria Shanks' place. They couldn't go further than his. And the gas rationing. Besides, he'd sold the car, hadn't he? Because it was no use to him lying in the tractor shed.

HE whirled, staring out across the fields to his left. Why, the tractor shed had stood just fifty feet from the house!

No, he'd torn it down. The tractor was in town, being overhauled and all. He was leaving it there until he had use for it.

He went on toward the road, his head beginning to throb. Why should a man his age, hardly sick at all since he was a kid, suddenly start losing hold this way? Edna was worried. The Shanks had noticed it too.

He was at the supply bin — like an old-fashioned wood bin; a box with a sloping flap lid. Deliveries of food and clothing and home medicines and other things were left here. You wrote down what you needed, and they left it — or whatever they allowed you — with a bill. You paid the bill by leaving money in the bin, and the next week you found a receipt and your new stuff and your new bill. And almost always you found some money from the government, for not planting wheat or not planting corn. It came out just about even.

He hauled out a sack of flour, half the amount of sugar Edna had ordered, some dried fruit, a new Homekit Medicine Shelf. He carried it into the house, and noticed a slip of paper pinned to the sugar bag. A television program guide.

Edna hustled over excitedly. "Anything good on this week, Harry?"

He looked down the listings, and frowned. "All old movies. Still only one channel. Still only from nine to eleven at night." He gave it to her, turned away; then stopped and waited. He'd said the same thing last week. And she had said the films were all new to her.

She said it now. "Why Harry, I've never seen this movie with Clark Gable. Nor the comedy with Red Skeleton. Nor the other five neither."

"I'm gonna lie down," he said flatly. He turned and stepped forward, and found himself facing the stove. Not the door to the hall; the stove. "But the door. . ." he began. He cut himself short. He turned and saw the door a few feet to the left, beside the table. He went there and out and up the stairs (they too had moved; they too weren't right) and into the bedroom and lay down. The bedroom was wrong. The bed was wrong. The windows were wrong.

The world was wrong! Lord, the whole damned world was wrong!

EDNA didn't wake him, so they had a late lunch. Then he went back to the barn and let the four cows and four sheep and two horses into the pastures. Then he checked to see that Edna had fed the chickens right. They had only a dozen or so now.

When had he sold the rest? And when had he sold his other livestock?

Or had they died somehow? A rough winter? Disease?

He stood in the yard, a tall, husky man with pale brown hair and a face that had once been long, lean and strong and was now only long and lean. He blinked gray eyes and tried hard to remember, then turned and went to the house. Edna was soaking dishes in the sink, according to regulations — one sinkful of dishwater a day. And one tub of bath water twice a week.

She was looking at him. He realized his anger and confusion must be showing. He managed a smile. "You remember how much we got for our livestock, Edna?"

"Same as everyone else," she said. "Government agents paid flat rates."

He remembered then, or thought he did. The headache was back. He went upstairs and slept again, but this time he had dreams, many of them, and all confused and all frightening. He was glad to get up. And he was glad to hear Walt and Gloria talking to Edna downstairs.

He washed his face, combed his hair and went down. Walt and Gloria were sitting on the sofa, Edna in the blue armchair. Walt was saying he'd gotten the new TV picture tube he'd ordered. "Found it in the supply bin this morning. Spent the whole day installing it according to the book of directions."

Harry said hi and they all said hi and he sat down and they talked about TV and gardens and livestock. Then Harry said, "How's Penny?"

"Fine," Gloria answered. "I'm starting her on the kindergarten book next week."

"She's five already?" Harry asked.

"Almost six," Walt said. "Emergency Education Regulations state that the child should be five years nine months old before embarking on kindergarten book."

"And Frances?" Harry asked. "Your oldest? She must be starting high. . ." He stopped, because they were all staring at him, and because he couldn't remember Frances clearly. "Just a joke," he said, laughing and rising. "Let's eat. I'm starved."

THEY ate in the kitchen. They talked — or rather Edna, Gloria and Walt did. Harry nodded and said uh-huh and used his mouth for chewing.

Walt and Gloria went home at ten-fifteen. They said goodbye at the door and Harry walked away. He heard Gloria whispering something about Doctor Hamming.

He was sitting in the living living room when Edna came in. She was crying. "Harry, please see the doctor."

He got up. "I'm going out. I might even sleep out!"

"But why, Harry, why?"

He couldn't stand to see her crying. He went to her, kissed her wet cheek, spoke more softly. "It'll do me good, like when I was a kid."

"If you say so, Harry."

He left quickly. He went outside and across the yard to the road. He looked up it and down it, to the north and to the south. It was a bright night with moon and stars, but he saw nothing, no one. The road was empty. It was always empty, except when Walt and Gloria walked over from their place a mile or so south. But once it hadn't been empty. Once there'd been cars, people . . .

He had to do something. Just sitting and looking at the sky wouldn't help him. He had to go somewhere, see someone.

He went to the barn and looked for his saddle. There was no saddle. But he'd had one hanging right behind the door. Or had he?

He threw a blanket over Plum, the big mare, and tied it with a piece of wash line. He used another piece for a bridle, since he couldn't find that either, and didn't bother making a bit. He mounted, and Plum moved out of the barn and onto the road. He headed north, toward town.

Then he realized he couldn't go along the road this way. He'd be reported. Breaking travel regulations was a serious offense.

He didn't know what they did to you, but it wasn't anything easy like a fine.

He cut into an unfenced, unplanted field.

His headache was back, worse now than it had ever been. His entire head throbbed, and he leaned forward and put his cheek against Plum's mane. The mare whinnied uneasily, but he kicked her sides and she moved forward. He lay there, just wanting to go somewhere, just wanting to leave his headache and confusion behind.

He didn't know how long it was, but Plum was moving cautiously now. He raised his head. They were approaching a fence. He noticed a gate off to the right, and pulled the rope so Plum went that way. They reached the gate and he got down to open it, and saw the sign. "Phineas Grotton Farm." He looked up at the sky, found the constellations, turned his head, and nodded. He'd started north, and Plum had continued north. He'd crossed land belonging both to himself and the Franklins. Now he was leaving the Franklin farm. North of the Franklins were the Bessers. Who was this Phineas Grotton? Had he bought out Lon Besser? But anything like that would've gotten around.

Was he forgetting again?

WELL, no matter. Mr. Grotton would have to excuse his trespass. He opened the gate, led Plum through it, closed the gate. He mounted and rode forward, still north, toward the small Pangborn place and after the Pangborns the biggest farm in the county — old Wallace Elverton's place. The fields here, as everywhere in the county, lay fallow. Seemed as if the government had so much grain stored up they'd be able to get along without crops for years more.

He looked around. Somehow, the country bothered him. He wasn't sure why, but . . . everything was wrong.

His head weighed an agonized ton. He put it down again. Plum went sedately forward. After a while she stopped. Harry looked up. Another fence. And what a fence! About ten feet of heavy steel mesh, topped by three feet of barbed-wire — five separate strands. What in the world had Sam Pangborn been thinking of to put up a monster like this?

He looked around. The gate should be further west. He rode that way. He found no gate. He turned back, heading east. No gate. Nothing but fence. And wasn't the fence gradually curving inward? He looked back. Yes, there *was* a slight inward curve.

He dismounted and tied Plum to the fence, then stepped back and figured the best way to get to the other side.

The best way, the only way, was to claw, clutch and clamber, as they used to say back when he was a kid.

It took some doing. He tore his shirt on the barbed wire, but he got over and began walking, straight ahead, due north. The earth changed beneath his feet. He stooped and touched it. Sand. Hard-packed sand. He'd never seen the like of it in this county.

He walked on. A sound came to him; a rising-falling whisper. He listened to it, and looked up every so often at the sky, to make sure he was heading in the right direction.

And the sand ended. His shoes plunked over flooring.

Flooring!

He knelt to make sure, and his hand felt wooden planks. He rose, and glanced up to see if he was still outdoors. Then he laughed. It was a sick laugh, so he stopped it.

He took another step. His shoes sounded against the wood. He walked. More wood. Wood that went on, as the sand had. And the roaring sound growing louder. And the air changing, smelling like air never had before in Cultwait County.

HIS entire body trembled. His mind trembled too. He walked, and came to a waist-high metal railing, and made a tiny sound deep in his throat. He looked out over water, endless water rolling in endless waves under the night sky. Crashing water, topped with reflected silver from the moon. Pounding water, filling the air with spray.

He put out his hands and grasped the railing. It was wet. He raised damp fingers to his mouth. Salt.

He stepped back, back, and turned and ran. He ran wildly, blindly, until he could run no more. Then he fell, feeling the sand beneath him, and shut his eyes and mind to everything.

Much later, he got up and went to the fence and climbed it. He came down on the other side and looked around and saw Plum. He walked to her, mounted her, sat still. The thoughts, or dreams, or whatever they were which had been torturing him these past few weeks began torturing him again.

It was getting light. His head was splitting.

Davie. His son Davie. Fourteen years old. Going to high school in town. . .

Town! He should've gone there in the first place! He would ride east, to the road,

then head south, back toward home. That would bring him right down Main Street. Regulations or not, he'd talk to people, find out what was happening.

He kicked Plum's sides. The mare began to move. He kept kicking until she broke into a brisk canter. He held on with hands and legs.

Why hadn't he seen the Pangborns and Elvertons lately — a long time lately?

The ocean. He'd seen the ocean. Not a reservoir or lake made by flooding and by damming, but salt water and enormous. An ocean, where there could be no ocean. The Pangborns and Elvertons had been where that ocean was now. And after the Elvertons had come the Dobsons. And after them the new plastics plant. And after that the city of Crossville. And after that. . .

He was passing his own farm. He hadn't come through town, and yet here he was at his own farm. Could he have forgotten where town was? Could it be north of his home, not south? Could a man get so confused as to forget things he'd known all his life?

He reached the Shanks' place, and passed it at a trot. Then he was beyond their boundaries and breaking regulations again. He stayed on the road. He went by a small house and saw colored folks in the yard. There'd been no colored folks here. There'd been Eli Bergen and his family and his mother, in a bigger, newer house. The colored folks heard Plum's hooves and looked up and stared. Then a man raised his voice. "Mistah, you breakin' regulations! Mistah, the police gonnah get you!"

HE rode on. He came to another house, neat and white, with three children playing on a grassy lawn. They saw him and ran inside. A moment later, adult voices yelled after him:

"You theah! Stop!"

"Call the sheriff! He's headin' foah Piney Woods!"

There was no place called Piney Woods in this county.

Was this how a man's mind went?

He came to another house, and another. He passed ten all told, and people shouted at him for breaking regulations, and the last three or four sounded like Easterners. And their houses looked like pictures of New England he'd seen in magazines.

He rode on. He never did come to town. He came to a ten-foot fence with a three-foot barbed-wire extension. He got off Plum and ripped his clothing climbing. He walked over hard-packed sand, and then wood, and came to a low metal railing. He looked out at the ocean, gleaming in bright sunlight, surging and seething endlessly. He felt the earth sway beneath him. He staggered, and dropped to his hands and knees, and shook his head like a fighter hit too many times. Then he got up and went back to the fence and heard a sound. It was a familiar sound, yet strange too. He shaded his eyes against the climbing sun. Then he saw it — a car. *A car!*

IT was one of those tiny foreign jobs that run on practically no gas at all. It stopped beside him and two men got out. Young men with lined, tired faces; they wore policemen's uniforms. "You broke regulations, Mr. Burr. You'll have to come with us."

He nodded. He wanted to. He wanted to be taken care of. He turned toward Plum.

The other officer was walking around the horse. "Rode her hard," he said, and he sounded real worried. "Shouldn't have done that, Mr. Burr. We have so very few now. . ."

The officer holding Harry's arm said, "Pete."

The officer examining Plum said, "It won't make any difference in a while."

Harry looked at both of them, and felt sharp, personal fear.

"Take the horse back to his farm," the officer holding Harry said. He opened the door of the little car and pushed Harry inside. He went around to the driver's side and got behind the wheel and drove away. Harry looked back. Pete was leading Plum after them; not riding him, walking him. "He sure must like horses," he said.

"Yes."

"Am I going to jail?"

"No."

"Where then?"

"The doctor's place."

They stopped in front of the new house two miles past Dugan's farm. Except he'd never seen it before. Or had he? Everyone seemed to know about it — or was everyone only Edna and the Shanks?

He got out of the car. The officer took his arm and led him up the path. Harry noticed that the new house was big.

When they came inside, he knew it wasn't like any house he'd ever seen or heard of. There was this long central passageway, and dozens of doors branched off it on both sides, and stairways went down from it in at least three places that he could see, and at the far end — a good two hundred yards away — a big ramp led upward. And it was all gray plaster walls and dull black floors and cold white lighting,

like a hospital, or a modern factory, or maybe a government building. Except that he didn't see or hear people.

He did hear *something;* a low, rumbling noise. The further they came along the hall, the louder the rumbling grew. It seemed to be deep down somewhere.

THEY went through one of the doors on the right, into a windowless room. A thin little man with bald head and frameless glasses was there, putting on a white coat. His veiny hands shook. He looked a hundred years old. "Where's Petey?" he asked.

"Pete's all right, Dad. Just leading a horse back to Burr's farm."

The old man sighed. "I didn't know what form it would take. I expected one or two cases, but I couldn't predict whether it would be gradual or sudden, whether or not it would lead to violence."

"No violence, Dad."

"Fine, Stan." He looked at Harry. "I'm going to give you a little treatment, Mr. Burr. It'll settle your nerves and make everything. . ."

"What happened to Davie?" Harry asked, things pushing at his brain again.

Stan helped him up. "Just step this way, Mr. Burr."

He didn't resist. He went through the second door into the room with the big chair. He sat down and let them strap his arms and legs and let them lower the metal thing over his head. He felt needles pierce his scalp and the back of his neck. He let them do what they wanted; he would let them kill him if they wanted. All he asked was one answer so as to know whether or not he was insane.

"What happened to my son Davie?"

The old man walked across the room and examined what looked like the insides of a dozen big radios. He turned, his hand on a switch.

"Please," Harry whispered. "Just tell me about my son."

The doctor blinked behind his glasses, and then his hand left the switch. "Dead," he said, his voice a rustling of dried leaves. "Like so many millions of others. Dead, when the bombs fell. Dead, as everyone knew they would be and no one did anything to prevent. Dead. Perhaps the whole world is dead — except for us."

Harry stared at him.

"I can't take the time to explain it all. I have too much to do. Just three of us — myself and my two sons. My wife lost her mind. I should have helped her as I'm helping you."

"I don't understand," Harry said. "I remember people, and things, and where are they now? Dead? People can die, but farms, cities. . ."

"I haven't the time," the doctor repeated, voice rising. "I have to run a world. Three of us, to run a world! I built it as best I could, but how large could I make it? The money. The years and years of work. The people calling me insane when they found out . . . but a few giving me more money, and the work going on. And those few caught like everyone else, unprepared when the holocaust started, unprepared and unable to reach my world. So they died. As I knew they would. As they should have known they would."

Harry felt the rumbling beneath him. Engines?

"You survived," the doctor said. "Your wife. A few hundred others in the rural areas. One other family in your area. I survived because I lived for survival, like a mole deep in the earth, expecting the catastrophe every minute. I survived because I gave up living to survive." He laughed, high and thin.

His son said, "Please, Dad. . ."

"No! I want to talk to someone *sane*! You and Petey and I — we're all insane, you know. Three years now, playing God, waiting for some land, any land, to become habitable. And knowing everything, and surrounded by people who are sane only because I made sure they would know nothing." He stepped forward, glaring at Harry. "Now do you understand? I went across the country, picking up a few of the few left alive. Most were farmers, and even where some weren't I picked the farmers anyway. Because farmers are what we'll need, and all the rest can evolve later. I put you and the others, eighty-six all told, from every section of the country, on my world, the only uncontaminated land left. I gave you back your old lives. I couldn't give you big crops because we don't need big crops. We would only exhaust our limited soil with big crops. But I gave you vegetable gardens and livestock and, best of all, *sanity!* I wiped the insane moments from your minds. I gave you peace and consigned myself, my sons, my own wife. . ."

He choked and stopped.

Stan ran across the room to the switch. Harry watched him, and his brain struggled with an impossible concept. He heard the engines and remembered the ocean on two sides; on four sides had he bothered to check south and east; on *all* sides if that fence continued to curve in-

ward. Ocean, and there was no ocean in Iowa.

And this wasn't Iowa.

The explosions had ripped the world, and he'd tried to get to town to save Davie, and there'd been no town and there'd been no people and there'd been only death and poison in the air and even those few people left had begun to die, and then the truck with the huge trailer had come, the gleaming trailer with the little man and his trembling wife and his two sons. . .

SUDDENLY, he understood. And understanding brought not peace but the greatest terror he'd ever known. He screamed, "We're on. . ." but the switch was thrown and there was no more speech. For an hour. Then he got out of the chair and said, "Sure glad I took my wife's advice and came to see you, Doctor Hamming. I feel better already, and after only one . . . What do you call these treatments?"

"Diathermy," the little doctor muttered.

Harry gave him a five-dollar bill. The doctor gave him two singles in change. "That's certainly reasonable enough," Harry said.

The doctor nodded. "There's a police officer in the hall. He'll drive you home so there won't be any trouble with the travel regulations."

Harry said, "Thanks. Think we'll ever see the end of travel regulations and rationing and all the rest of the emergency?"

"You will, Mr. Burr."

Harry walked to the door.

"We're on an ark," the doctor said.

Harry turned around, smiling. "What?"

"A test, Mr. Burr. You passed it. Goodbye."

Harry went home. He told Edna he felt just great! She said she'd been worried when an officer found Plum wandering on the road; she thought maybe Harry had gone off somewhere and broken travel regulations.

"Me?" he exclaimed, amazed. "Break travel regulations? I'd as soon kill a pig!"

— HERBERT D. KASTLE

The offices of Singlemaster, Hucksting and Battlemont held something that could destroy the universe and its name was . . .

A-W-F

UNLIMITED

By FRANK HERBERT

Illustrated by GAUGHAN

THE MORNING the space armor problem fell into the agency's lap, Gwen Everest had breakfast at her regular restaurant, an automated single-niche place catering to bachelor girls. Her order popped out of the slot onto her table, and immediately the tabletop projecta-menu switched to selling Interdorma's newest Interpretive Telelog.

"Your own private dream translator! The secret companion to every neurosis!"