WORLDS OF TOMORROW

November 1965
50¢

PROJECT PLOWSHARE
Thrilling Science-Fiction Novel
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introduces a new regular column on
SCIENCE-FICTION PERSONALITIES
VIRGIL FINLAY
Dean of Science-Fiction Artists

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ALL NEW STORIES

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Communication Between Minds

We were reading Vitus B. Droscher's fascinating *The Mysterious Senses of Animals* (Dutton), when it occurred to us that an experiment Droscher had described, interpreted with enough free-swinging enterprise, could be construed as a proof of telepathy.

Of course, it isn't Vitus Droscher who calls it that; that's our own label. But we think it fits. For what is telepathy? The dictionary defines it as "communication between mind and mind without the medium of the senses." It doesn't say the communication has to be words, or even thoughts. It only says "communication" — and as a matter of fact, the classical literature of psychic phenomena is full of transference of moods, of feelings of terror or awe and so on. And if you grant that what is to be transmitted may be an emotion; and if you grant further that the means of transmission may be anything which is not "sensory" . . . why then, we have a pretty good proof of telepathy.

As Droscher describes it in his book, the experiments in question were performed by von Holst and Jechorek, at the Max Planck Institute. The subjects were two chickens, connected only by a wire and an amplifier that carried a current from the brain of one chicken to the brain of the other, via stereotaxically implanted electrodes. When the first chicken was exposed to the sight of a dog, the second chicken — completely out of sight and hearing, in another room — "fluttered up the wall, squawking in alarm."

Not telepathy? Well, maybe you're right.

But we have a notion, growing on us for some time, that the so-called "psi" phenomena are neither established fact nor rank superstition.

We think it's at least a possibility that extra-sensory communication, and clairvoyance, and maybe psychokinesis, precognition and you-name-it do indeed have some validity, but that validity will never be shown by seances or packs of Rhine cards.

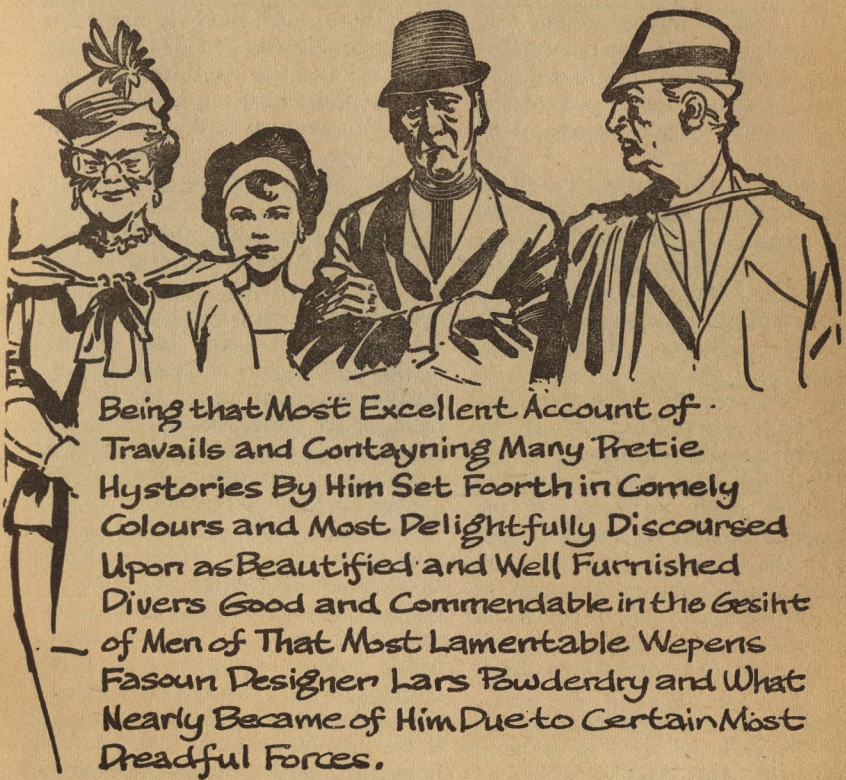
It may be that there is no such thing as telepathy in nature — but that doesn't mean we can't invent it!

— THE EDITOR


Project

Plowshare

by Philip K. Dick



Being that Most Excellent Account of Travails and Contayning Many Pretie Hystories By Him Set Foorth in Comely Colours and Most Delightfully Discoursed Upon as Beautified and Well Furnished Divers Good and Commendable in the Gesiht of Men of That Most Lamentable Wepens Fasoun Designer Lars Powderdry and What Nearly Became of Him Due to Certain Most Dreadful Forces.

GRAY MORROW

I

"Mr. Lars, sir."

"I'm afraid I only have a moment to talk to your viewers. Sorry." He started on, but the autonomic TV interviewer, camera in its hand, blocked his path. The metal smile of the creature glittered confidently.

"You feel a trance coming on, sir?" the autonomic interviewer inquired hopefully, as if perhaps such could take place before one of the multifax alternate lens-systems of its portable camera.

Lars Powderdry sighed. From where he stood on the footers' runnel he could see his New York office. See, but not reach it. Too many people—the pursaps!—were interested in *him*, not his work. And the work of course was all that mattered.

He said wearily, "The time factor. Don't you understand? In the world of weapons fashions—"

"Yes, we hear you're receiving something really spectacular," the autonomic interviewer gushed, picking up the thread of discourse without even salutationary attention to Lars' own meaning. "Four trances in *one* week. And it's almost come all the way through! Correct, Mr. Lars, sir?"

The autonomic construct was an idiot. Patiently he tried to make it understand. He did not bother to address himself to the legion of pursaps, mostly ladies, who viewed this early-morning show—*Lucky Bagman Greets You,* or whatever it was called. Lord knew *he* didn't know. He had no time in his workday for such witless diversions as this. "Look," he said, this time gently, as if the autonomic interviewer were really alive and not merely an arbitrarily endowed sentient concoction of the ingenuity of Wes-bloc technology of 2004 A.D. Ingenuity, he reflected, wasted in this direction . . . although, on a closer thought, was this so much more an abomination than his own field? A reflection unpleasant to consider.

He repressed it from his mind and said, "In weapons fashions an item must arise at a certain time. Tomorrow, next week or next month is too late."

"Tell us what it is," the interviewer said, and hung with bated avidity on the anticipated answer. How could anyone, even Mr. Lars of New York and Paris, disappoint all the millions of viewers throughout Wes-bloc, in a dozen countries? To let them down would be to serve the interests of Peep-East, or so the autonomic interviewer wished to convey. But it was failing.

Lars said, "It's frankly none of your business." And stalked past the small bunch of footers who had assembled to gawk, stalked away from the warm glow of instant-exposure before public observation and to the up-track of Mr. Lars, Incorporated, the single-story structure arranged as if by intention among high-rise offices whose size alone announced the essential nature of their function.

Physical size, Lars reflected as he reached the outer, public lobby of Mr. Lars, Incorporated, was a

The guidance-system of weapons-item 207, which consists of six hundred miniaturized electronic components, can best be plowshared as a lacquered ceramic owl which appears to the unenlightened only as an ornament; the informed knowing, however, that the owl's head, when removed, reveals a hollow body in which cigars or pencils can be stored.

—Official report of the UN-W Natsec Board of Wes-bloc, October 5, 2003, by Concomody A (true identity for security reasons not to be given out; vide Board rulings XV 4-5-6-7-8).

false criterion. Even the autonomic interviewer wasn't fooled; it was Lars Powderdry that it wished to expose to its audience, not the industrial entities within easy reach. However much the entities would have delighted in seeing their ak-prop — acquisition-propaganda—experts thundering into the attentive ears of its audience.

The doors of Mr. Lars, Incorporated, shut, tuned as they were to his own cephalic pattern. He sealed off, safe from the gaping multitude whose attention had been jazzed up by professionals. On their own the pursaps would have been reasonable about it; that is, they would be apathetic.

"Mr. Lars."

"Yes, Miss Bedouin." He halted. "I know. The drafting department can't make head or tail of sketch 285." To that he was resigned. Having seen it himself, after Friday's trance, he knew how muddied it was.

"Well, they said—" She hesitated, young and small, ill-equipped temperamentally to carry the grievances of others around in her possession as their spokesman.

"I'll talk to them direct," he said to her humanely. "Frankly, to me it looked like a self-programming eggbeater mounted on triangular wheels." And what can you destroy, he reflected, with that?

"Oh, they seem to feel it's a fine weapon," Miss Bedouin said, her natural, hormone-enriched breasts moving in synchronicity with his notice of them. "I believe they just can't make out the power source. You know, the erg structure. Before you go to 286—"

"They want me," he said, "to take a better look at 285. Okay." It did not bother him. He felt amiably inclined, because this was a pleasant April day and Miss Bedouin (or, if you liked to think about it that way, Miss Bed) was pretty enough to restore any man's sanguineness. Even a fashion designer —a weapons fashion designer.

Even, he thought, the best and only weapons fashion designer in all Wes-bloc.

To turn up his equal—and even this was in doubt, as far as he was concerned—one would have to approach that other hemisphere, Peep-East. The Sino-Soviet bloc owned or

employed or however they handled it—in any case had available to them—services of a medium like himself.

He had often wondered about her. Her name was Miss Topchev, the planet-wide private police agency KACH had informed him. Lilo Topchev. With only one office, and that at Bulganingrad rather than New Moscow.

She sounded reclusive to him, but KACH did not orate on subjective aspects of its scrutiny-targets. Perhaps, he thought, Miss Topchev knitted her weapons sketches . . . or made them up, while still in the trance-state, in the form of gaily colored ceramic tile. Anyhow something artistic. Whether her client—or more accurately employer—the Peep-East governing body SeRKeb, that grim, uncolored and unadorned holistic academy of cogs, against which his own hemisphere had for so many decades now pitted every resource within itself, liked it or not.

Because of course a weapons fashion designer had to be catered to. In his own career he had managed to establish that.

After all, he could not be compelled to enter his five-days-a-week trance. And probably neither could Lilo Topchev.

Leaving Miss Bedouin, he entered his own office, removing his outer cape, cap and slippers, and extended these discarded items of street-wear to the handicloset.

Already his medical team, Dr. Todt and nurse Elvira Funt, had sighted him. They rose and approached respectfully, and with them his near-psionically gifted quasi-subordinate, Henry Morris. One never knew—he thought, constructing their reasoning on the basis of their alert, alarmed manner—when a trance might come on. Nurse Funt had her intravenous machinery tagging hummingly behind her and Dr. Todt, a first-class product of the superior West German medical world, stood ready to whip out delicate devices for two distinct purposes: first, that no cardiac arrest during the trance-state occur, no infarcts to the lungs or excessive suppression of the vagus nerve, causing cessation of breathing and hence suffocation, and second—and without this there was no point to it all — that mentation during the trance-state be established in a permanent record, obtainable after the state had ended.

Dr. Todt was, therefore, essential in the business at Mr. Lars, Incorporated. At the Paris office a similar, equally skilled crew awaited on stand-by. Because it often happened that Lars Powderdry got a more powerful emanation at that locus than he did in hectic New York.

And in addition his mistress Maren Faine lived and worked there.

It was a weakness—or, as he preferred supposing, a strength of weapons fashion designers, in contrast to their miserable counterparts in the world of clothing—that they liked women. His predecessor, Wade, had been heterosexual, too—had in fact killed himself over a little coloratura of the Dresden Fes-

tival ensemble. Mr. Wade had suffered auricular fibrillation at an ignoble time: while in bed at the girl's Vienna condominium apartment at two in the morning, long after *The Marriage of Figaro* had dropped curtain, and Rita Grandi had discarded the silk hose, blouse, etc., for—as the alert homeopape pics had disclosed—nothing.

So, at forty-three years of age, Mr. Wade, the previous weapons fashion designer for Wes-bloc, had left the scene—and left vacant his essential post. But there were others ready to emerge and replace him.

Perhaps that had hurried Mr. Wade. The job itself was taxing—medical science did not precisely know to what degree or how. And there was, Lars Powderdry reflected, nothing quite so disorienting as knowing that not only are you indispensable but that simultaneously you can be replaced. It was the sort of paradox that no one enjoyed, except of course UN-W Natsec, the governing Board of Wes-bloc, who had contrived to keep a replacement always visible in the wings.

He thought, And they've probably got another one waiting right now.

They *like* me, he thought. They've been good to me and I to them; the system functions.

But ultimate authorities, in charge of the lives of billions of pursaps, don't take risks. They do not cross against the DON'T WALK signs of cog life.

Not that the pursaps would relieve them of their posts . . . hardly. Removal would *descend,* from General George McFarlane Nitz, the C. in C. on Natsec's Board. Nitz could remove anyone. In fact if the necessity (or perhaps merely the opportunity) arose to remove himself—imagine the satisfaction of disarming his own person, stripping himself of the brain-pan i.d. unit that caused him to smell right to the autonomic sentries which guarded Festung Washington!

And frankly, considering the cop-like aura of General Nitz, the Supreme Hatchet-man implications of his—

"Your blood-pressure, Mr. Lars." Narrow, priest-like, somber Dr. Todt advanced, machinery in tow. "Please, Lars."

Beyond Dr. Todt and nurse Elvira gunt a slim, bald, pale-as-straw but highly professional-looking young man in peasoup green rose, a folio under his arm. Lars Powderdry at once beckoned to him. Blood-pressure readings could wait. This was the fella from KACH, and he had something with him.

"May we go into your private office, Mr. Lars?" the KACH-man asked.

Leading the way Lars said, "Photos."

"Yes, sir." The KACH-man shut the office door carefully after them. "Of her sketches of—" he opened the folio, examined a Xeroxed document— "last Wednesday. Their codex AA-335." Finding a vacant spot on Lars' desk he began spreading out the stereo pics. "Plus one blurred shot of a mockup at the Rostok Academy assembly-lab . . . of—" Again he consulted his poop-

sheet—"SeRKeb codex AA-330." He stood aside so that Lars could inspect.

Seating himself Lars lit a Cuesta Rey astoria and did not inspect. He felt his wits become turgid, and the cigar did not help. He did not enjoy snooping dog-like over spy-obtained pics of the output of his Peep-East equivalent, Miss Topchev. Let UN-W Natsec do the analysis! He had so much as said this to General Nitz on several occasions, once at a meeting of the total Board, with everyone present sunk within his most dignified and stately presgarms —his prestige capes, miter, boots, gloves . . . probably spider-silk underwear with ominous slogans and ukases, stitched in multicolored thread.

There, in that solemn environment, with the burden of Atlas on the backs of even the concomodies—those six drafted, involuntary fools —in formal session, Lars had mildly asked that for chrissakes couldn't they do the analysis of the enemy's weapons?

No. And without debate. Because (listen closely, Mr. Lars) these are not Peep-East's weapons. These are his *plans* for weapons. We will evaluate them when they've passed from prototype to autofac production, General Nitz had intoned. But as regards this initial stage . . . he had eyed Lars meaningfully.

Lighting an old-fashioned—and illegal—cigarette, the pale, bald young KACH-man murmured, "Mr. Lars, we have something more. It may not interest you, but since you seem to be waiting anyhow . . ."

He dipped deep into the folio.

Lars said, "I'm waiting because I hate this. Not because I want to see any more. God forbid."

"Umm." The KACH-man brought forth an additional eight-by-ten glossy and leaned back.

It was a non-stereo pic—taken from a great distance, possibly even from an eye-spy, satellite, then severely processed—of Lilo Topchev.

II

"Oh, yes," Lars said with vast caution. "I asked for that, didn't I?" Unofficially, of course. As a favor by KACH to him personally, with absolutely nothing in writing—with what the old-timers called "a calculated risk." "You can't tell too much from this," the KACH-man admitted.

"I can't tell anything." Lars glared, baffled.

The KACH-man shrugged with professional nonchalance, and said, "We'll try again. You see, she never goes anywhere or does anything. They don't let her. It may be just a cover-story, but they say her trance-states tend to come on involuntarily, in a pseudo--epileptoid pattern. Possibly drug-induced, is our guess—off the record, of course. They don't want her to fall down in the middle of the public runnels and be flattened by one of their old surface-vehicles."

"You mean they don't want her to bolt to Wes-bloc."

The KACH-man gestured philsophically.

"Am I right?" Lars asked.

"Afraid not. Miss Topchev is paid a salary equal to that of the prime mover of SeRKeb, Marshal Paponovich. She has a top-floor high-rise view conapt, a maid, butler, Mercedes-Benz hovercar. As long as she cooperates —"

"From this pic," Lars said, "I can't even tell how old she is. Let alone what she looked like."

"Lilo Topchev is twenty-three."

The office door opened and short, sloppy, unpunctual, on-the-brink-of-being-relieved-of-his-position but essential Henry Morris conjured himself into their frame of reference. "Anything for me?"

Lars said, "Come here." He indicated the pic of Lilo Topchev.

Swiftly the KACH-man restored the pic to its folio. "Classified, Mr. Lars! 20-20. You know; for your eyes alone."

Lars said, "Mr. Morris is my eyes." This was, evidently, one of KACH's more difficult functionaries. "What is your name?" Lars asked him, and held his pen ready at a note-pad.

After a pause the KACH-man relaxed. "An ipse dixit, but — do whatever you wish with the pic, Mr. Lars." He returned it to the desk, no expression on his sunless, expert face. Henry Morris came around to bend over it, squinting and scowling, his fleshy jowls wobbling as he visibly masticated, as if trying to ingest something of substance from the blurred pic.

The vidcom on Lars' desk pinged and his secretary Miss Grabhorn said, "Call from the Paris office. Miss Faine herself, I believe." The most minuscule trace of disapproval in her voice, a tiny coldness.

"Excuse me," Lars said to the KACH-man. But then, still holding his pen poised, he said, "Let's have your name anyhow. Just for the record. In the rare case I might want to get in touch with you again."

The KACH-man, as if revealing something foul, said reluctantly, "I'm Don Packard, Mr. Lars." He fussed with his hands. The question made him oddly ill-at-ease.

After writing this down, Lars fingered the vidcom to *on* and the face of his mistress lit, illuminated from within like some fair, dark-haired jack-o-lantern. "Lars!"

"Maren!" His tone was of fondness, not cruelty. Maren Faine always aroused his protective instincts. And yet she annoyed him in the fashion that a loved child might. Maren never knew when to stop.

"Busy?"

"Yeah."

"Are you flying to Paris this afternoon? We can have dinner together and then, oh my God, there's this *gleckik* blue jazz combo—"

"Jazz isn't blue," Lars said. "It's pale green." He glanced at Henry Morris. "Isn't jazz a very pale green?" Henry nodded.

Angrily, Maren Faine said. "You make me wish —"

"I'll call you back." Lars said to her. "Dear." He shut down the vidcom. "I'll look at the weapons sketches now," he said to the KACH-man. Meanwhile, narrow Dr. Todt and nurse Elvira Funt had entered his office unannounced: re-

flexively he extended his arm for the first blood-pressure reading of the day, as Don Packard rearranged the sketches and began to point out details which seemed meaningful to the police agency's own very second-rate privately maintained weapons analysts.

Work, at Mr. Lars, Incorporated, had on this day, in this manner, begun. It was, somehow, Lars thought, not encouraging. He was disappointed at the useless pic of Miss Topchev; perhaps that had summoned his mood of pessimism. Or was there more to come?

He had, at ten a.m. New York time, an appointment with General Nitz' rep, a colonel named — God, what *was* his name? Anyhow, at that time Lars would receive the Board's reaction to the last batch of mock-ups constructed by Lanferman Associates in San Francisco from earlier Mr. Lars, Incorporated sketches.

"Haskins," Lars said.

"Pardon?" the KACH-man said.

"It's Colonel Haskins. Do you know," he said meditatively to Henry Morris, "that Nitz has fairly regularly avoided having anything to do with me, lately? Have you noted that puny bit of fact?"

Morris said, "I note everything, Lars. Yes, it's in my death-rattle file." Death-rattle . . . the fireproof, Third-World-War proof, Titanian bolecricket-proof, well-hidden file-cases which were rigged to detonate in the event of Morris' death. He carried on his person a triggering mechanism sensitive to his heart-beat. Even Lars did not know where the files currently existed; probably in a hollow lacquered ceramic owl made from the guidance-system of item 207 in Morris's girl-friend's boy-friend's bathroom. And they contained all the originals of all the weapons-sketches which had ever emanated from Mr. Lars, Incorporated.

"What does it mean?" Lars asked.

"It means," Morris said, protruding his lower jaw and waggling it, as if expecting it to come off, "that General Nitz despises you."

Taken aback, Lars said, "Because of that one sketch? Two-oh-something, that p-thermotropic virus equipped to survive in dead space for a period greater than —"

"Oh no." Morris shook his head vigorously. "Because you're fooling yourself and him. Only he isn't fooled any more. In contrast to you."

"How?"

Morris said, "I hate to say it in front of all these people."

"Go on and say it!" Lars said. But he felt sick. I really fear the Board, he realized. "Client"? Is that what they are to me? *Boss;* that's the realistic word. UN-W Natsec groomed me, found me and built me up over the years, to replace Mr. Wade. I was there. I was ready and waiting eagerly when Wade Sokolarian died. And this knowledge that I have of *someone else waiting right now,* prepared for the day when I suffer cardiac arrest or experience the malfunction, the loss, of some other vital organ, waiting, too, in case I become *difficult* —

And, he thought, I am already difficult.

"Packard," he said to the KACH-man, "you're an independent organization. You operate anywhere in the world. Theoretically anyone can employ you."

"Theoretically," Packard agreed. "You mean KACH itself, not me personally. I'm hired."

"I thought you wanted to hear why General Nitz despises you," Henry Morris said.

"No," Lars said. "Keep it to yourself." I'll hire someone from KACH, a real pro, he decided, to scan UN-W, the whole apparatus if necessary. to find out what they're really up to regarding me. Especially, he thought, the success to which their next weapons medium has been brought; that's the crucial region for me to have exact knowledge about.

I wonder what they'd do, he thought, if they knew that it had so often occurred to me that I always could go over to Peep-East. If they, to insure their own safety, to shore up their absolute position of authority, tried to replace me —

He tried to imagine the size, shape and color of someone following him imprinting their own footsteps in his tracks. Child or youth, old woman or plump middleaged man . . . Wesbloc psychiatrists, yoked to the state as servants, undoubtedly could turn up the psionic talent of contacting the Other World, the hyper-dimensional universe that he entered into during his trance-states. Wade had had it. Lilo Topchev had it. *He* had lots of it. So undoubtedly it existed elsewhere. And the longer he stayed in office the longer the Board had to ferret it out.

"May I say one thing," Morris said, deferentially.

"Okay." He waited, setting himself.

"General Nitz knew something was wrong when you turned down that honorary colonelcy in the UN-West Armed Forces."

Staring at him, Lars said, "But that was a gag! Just a piece of paper."

"No," Morris said. "And you knew better — know better right now. Unconsciously, on an intuitive level. It would have made you legally subject to military jurisdiction."

To no one in particular, the KACH-man said, "It's true. They've called up virtually everyone they sent those gratis commissions to. Put them in uniform." His face had become professionally impassive.

"God!" Lars felt himself cringe. It had been merely a whim, declining the honorary commission. He had given a gag answer to a gag document. And yet, now, on closer inspection —

"Am I right?" Henry Morris asked him, scrutinizing him.

"Yes," Lars said, after a pause. "I knew it." He gestured. "Well, the hell with it." He turned his attention back to the KACH-collected weapons sketches. Anyhow, it was deeper than that; his troubles with UN-W Natsec went back farther and penetrated further than any inane scheme such as honorary commissions which all at once became the basis of mandatory military subjugation. What he objected to lay in an area where written documents did

not exist. An area, in fact, which he did not care to think about.

Examining Miss Topchev's sketches he found himself confronted by this repellent aspect of his work — the lives of all of them, the Board included.

Here it was. And not by accident. It pervaded each design; he leafed among them and then tossed them back on his desk.

To the KACH-man he said, "Weapons! Take them back; put them in your envelope." There was not one weapon among them.

"As regards the concomodies —" Henry Morris began.

"What," Lars said to him, "is a concomody?"

Morris, taken aback, said, "What do you mean, 'What is a concomody?' You know. You sit down with them twice a month." He gestured in irritation. "You know more about the six concomodies on the Board than anyone else in Wes-bloc. Let's face it, everything you do is for them."

"I'm facing it," Lars said calmly. He folded his arms, sat back. "But suppose when that TV autonomic interviewer out there asked me whether I was receiving something really spectacular I told it the truth."

There was silence and then the KACH-man stirred and said. "That's why they'd like you in uniform. You wouldn't be facing any TV cameras. There wouldn't be any opportunity for something to go wrong." He left the sketches where they were on Lar's desk.

"Maybe it's already gone wrong," Morris said, still studying his boss.

"No," Lars said, presently. "If it had you'd know." Where Mr. Lars, Incorporated, stands, he thought, there'd just be a hole. Neat, precise, without a disturbance in the process to the adjoining high-rise structures. And achieved in roughly six seconds.

"I think you're nuts," Morris decided. "You're sitting here at your desk day after day, looking at Lilo's sketches, going quietly nuts. Every time you go into a trance a piece of you falls out." His tone was harsh. "It's too costly to you. And the upshot will be that one day a TV interviewer will nab you and say, 'What's cooking, Mr. Lars, sir?' and you'll say something you shouldn't." Dr. Todt, Elvira Funt, the KACH-man, all of them watched him with dismay but no one did or said anything. At his desk Lars stonily regarded the far wall and the Utrillo original which Maren Faine had given him at Christmas, 2003.

"Let's talk about something else," Lars said. "Where no pain's attached." He nodded to Dr. Todt, who seemed more narrow and priest-like than ever. "I think I'm psychologically ready now, doctor. We can instigate the autism, if you have your gadgets and you know what else set up." Autism — a noble reference, dignified.

"I want an EEG first," Dr. Todt said. "Just as a safety factor." He roled the portable EEG machine forward. The preliminaries to the day's trance-state in which he lost contact with the given, shared universe, the *koinos kosmos*, and involvement in that other, mystifying realm, apparently an *idios kosmos*, a purely pri-

vate world, began. But a purely private world in which a *aisthesis koine,* a common Something, dwelt.

What a way, Lars thought, to earn a living.

III

Greetings! said the letter, delivered by 'stant mail. You have been selected out of millions of your friends and neighbors.

You are now a concomody.

It can't be, Surley G. Febbs thought as he reread the printed form. It was a meager document, sizewise, with his name and number Xeroxed in. It looked no more serious than a bill from his conapt building's utility committee asking him to vote on a rate-increase. And yet here it was in his possession, formal evidence which would admit him, incredibly, into Festung, Washington, D.C. and its subsurface *kremlin,* the most heavily guarded spot in Wes-bloc.

And not as a tourist.

They found me typical! he said to himself. Just thinking this he *felt* typical. He felt swell and powerful and slightly drunk, and he had difficulty standing. His legs wobbled and he walked unsteadily across his miniature living room and seated himself on his Ionian fnoolfur (imitation) couch.

"But I really know why they picked me," Febbs said aloud. "It's because I know all about weapons." An authority; that's what he was, due to all the hours — six or seven a night, because like everyone else his work had been recently cut from twenty to nineteen hours per week — that he spent scanning edutapes at the Boise, Idaho main branch of the public library.

And not only an authority on weapons. He could remember with absolute clarity every fact he had ever learned — as for example on the manufacture of red stained glass in France during the early thirteenth century. I know the exact part of the Byzantine Empire from which the mosaics of the Roman period which they melted down to form the cherished red glass came, he said to himself, and exulted. It was about time that someone with universal knowledge like himself got on the UN-W Natsec Board instead of the usual morons, the mass pursaps who read nothing but the headlines of the homeopapes and naturally the sports and animated cartoon strips and of course the dirty stuff about sex, and otherwise poisoned their empty minds with toxic, mass-produced garbage which was deliberately produced by the large corporations who really ran things, if you knew the inside story — as for instance I. G. Farben. Not to mention the much bigger electronics, guidance-systems and rocket trusts that evolved later, like A. G. Beimler of Bremen who really owned General Dynamics and I.B.M. and G.E., if you happened to have looked deeply into it. As he had.

Wait'll I sit down at the Board across from Commander-in-Chief Supreme UN-West General George Nitz, he said to himself.

I'll bet, he thought, I can tell him more facts about the hardware

in the, for instance, Metro-gretel homeostatic anti-entrope phase-converter sine-wave oscillator that Boeing is using in their LL-40 peak-velocity interplan rocket than all the so-called "experts" in Festung Washington.

I mean, I won't be just replacing the concomody whose time on the Board expired and so I got this form. If I can get those fatheads to listen, I can replace entire bureaus.

This certainly beat sending letters to the Boise *Star-Times* 'pape and to Senator Edgewell. Who didn't even respond with a form-letter any more, he was so, quote, busy. In fact this beat even the halcyon days, seven years ago, when due to the inheritance of a few UN-West gov bonds he had published his own small fact-sheet type of newsletter, which he had 'stant-mailed out at random to people in the vid-phone book, plus of course to every government official in Washington. That had — or might well have had, if there weren't so many lardheads, Commies and bureaucrats in power — altered history . . . for example in the area of cleaning up the importation of disease-causing protein molecules which regularly rode to Earth on ships returning from the colony planets, and which accounted for the flu that he, Febbs, had contracted in '99 and really never recovered from — as he had told the health-insurance official at his place of business, the New Era of Cooperative-Financing Savings & Loan Corporation of Boise, where Febbs examined applications for loans with an eye to detecting potential deadbeats.

In detecting deadbeats he was unmatched. He could look an applicant, especially a Negro, over in less than one microsecond and discern the actual composition of their ethical psychic-structure.

Which everyone at NECFS&LC knew, including Mr. Rumford, the branch manager. Although due to his egocentric personal ambitions and greed Mr. Rumford had deliberately sabotaged Febb's repeated formal requests, over the last twelve years, for a more than routinely stipulated pay raise.

Now that problem was over. As a concomody he would receive a huge wage. He recalled, and felt momentary embarrassment, that often he had in his letters to Senator Edgewell among many other things complained about the salaries which the six citizens drafted onto the Board as concomodies received.

So now to the vidphone, to ring up Rumford, who was still at his high-rise conapt probably eating breakfast, and tell him to stuff it.

Febbs dialed and shortly found himself facing Mr. Rumford who still wore his Hong Kong-made silk bathrobe.

Taking a deep breath, Surley G. Febbs uttered, "Mr. Rumford, I just wanted to tell you —"

He broke off, intimidated. Old habits die slowly. "I got a notice from the UN-W Natsec people in Washington," he heard his voice declare, thin and unsteady. "So, um, you can g-get someone else t-to do all your d-dirty type jobs for you.

And just in case you're interested, I let around six months ago a really bad apple take out a ten-thousand poscred loan, and he'll n-never pay it back."

He then slammed the receiver down, perspiring, but weak with the wholesome joy that now lodged everywhere inside him.

And I'm not going to tell you *who* that bad apple is, he said to himself. You can comb the minned mass of records on your own time, pay my replacement to do it. Up yours, Mr. Rumford.

Going into the tiny kitchen of his conapt he quick-unfroze a pack of stewed apricots, his customary breakfast. Seated at the table which extended, plank-like from the wall, he ate and meditated.

Wait until the Organization hears about this, he reflected. By this he meant the Superior Warriors of Caucasian Ancestry of Idaho and Oregon, Chapter Fifteen. Especially Roman Centurian Skeeter W. Johnstone, who just recently by means of an aa-35 disciplinary edict had demoted Febbs from the rank of Legionnaire Class One to Helot Class Fifty.

I'll be hearing from the Organization's Praetorian Headquarters at Cheyenne, he realized. From Emperor-of-the-Sun Klaus himself! They'll want to make *me* an R.C. — and probably kick out Johnstone on his tail.

There were a lot of others who would get what they deserved now. For instance that thin librarian at the main branch of the Boise publibe who had denied him access to the eight closed cases of microtapes of all the twentieth century pornographic novels. This means your job, he said to himself, and imagined the expression on her dried, wart-like face as she received the news from General Nitz himself.

As he ate his stewed apricots, he pictured in his mind the great bank of computers at Festung Washington, D.C. as they had examined million after million of file cards and all the data on them, determining who was *really* typical in his buying habits and who was only faking it, like the Strattons in the conapt across from his who always tried to appear typical but who in no true ontological sense made it.

I mean, Febbs thought joyfully, I'm Aristotle's Universal Man, such as society has tried to breed genetically for five thousand years! And Univox-50R at Festung Washington finally recognized it!

When a weapon-component is at last put before me officially, he thought with grim assurance, I'll know how to plowshare it, all right. They can count on me. I'll come up with a dozen ways to plowshare it, and all of them good. Based on my knowledge and skill.

What's odd is that they'd still need the other five concomodies. Maybe they'll realize that. Maybe instead of giving me only a one-sixth slice they'll give me all the components. They might as well.

It would go about like this:

General Nitz (amazed): Good God, Febbs! You're completely right.

This stage one of the Brownian movement-restriction field-induction coil, portable subtype, can be easily plowshared into an inexpensive source to chill beer on excursions lasting over seven hours. Whew! Gollee!

Febbs: However I think you're still missing the basic point, General. If you'll look more closely at my official abstract on the —

The vidphone rang, then, interrupting his thoughts; he rose from the breakfast table, hurried to answer it.

On the screen a middle-aged female Wes-bloc bureaucrat appeared. "Mr. Surley G. Febbs of Conapt Building 300685?"

"Yes," he said, nervously.

"You received your notice by 'stant mail of your induction as Concomody to the UN-W Natsec Board as of this following Tuesday."

"Yes!"

"I am calling, Mr. Febbs, to remind you that under no circumstances are you to convey, reveal, expound, announce or otherwise inform any person or organization or info-media or autonomic extension thereof capable of receiving, recording and/or transmitting, communicating and/or telecasting data in any form whatsoever, that you have been legally named by due and official process to the UN-W Natsec Board as Concomody A, as per paragraph III in your written notice, which you are required under penalty of law to read and strictly observe."

Surley Febbs, inside himself, fainted dead away. He had failed to read all the way down the notice. Of

course the identity of the six concomodies on the Board was a matter of strict secrecy! And already he had told Mr. Rumford.

Or had he? Frantically, he tried to recall his exact words. Hadn't he merely said he received a notice? Oh God. If they found out —

"Thank you, Mr. Febbs," the female official said, and rang off. Febbs stood in silence, gradually hinging himself back together.

I'll have to call Mr. Rumford again, he realized. Make certain he thinks I'm quitting for health reasons. Some pretext. I've lost my conapt, have to leave the area. Anything!

He found himself shaking.

A new scene bloomed frighteningly in his mind.

General Nitz (grayly, with menace): So you told, Febbs.

Febbs: You need me, General. You really do! I can plowshare better than anyone drafted before — Univox-50R knows what it's talking about. In the name of God, sir! Give me a chance to prove my superior worth.

General Nitz (moved): Well, all right, Febbs. I can see you're not quite like anyone else. We can afford to treat you differently, because the fact is that in all my long years of dealing with all kinds of people I have never seen anyone as unique as you and it would be a distinct loss to the Free World if you decided not to stick with us and give us the benefit of your knowledge, experience and talent.

Reseating himself at his breakfast table, Febbs mechanically resumed the eating which had been interrupted.

General Nitz: Actually, Febbs, I'd even go so far as to say —

Aw, the hell with it, Febbs thought with growing, overwhelming gloom.

IV

Toward noon the ranking engineer from Lanferman Associates of San Francisco and Los Angeles, the firm which produced the mockups and prototypes and whatnot from Lars Powderdry's sketches, showed up at the New York office of Mr. Lars, Incorporated.

Pete Freid, at home here from long years of experience, sauntered round-shouldered and stooped but still tall into Lar's office. He found Lars drinking a solution of honey and synthetic amino acids in a twenty per cent alcohol base: an antidote to the depletion of body-constituents by the trance-state which had occurred earlier in the morning.

Pete said, "They found that what you're swilling is one of the ten major causes of upper g.i. cancer. Better quit now.

"I can't quit," Lars said. His body needed the replacement-source and anyhow Pete was kidding. "What I ought to quit —" he began, and then became silent. Today he had talked too much already, and before the man from KACH. Who, if he was any good, remembered, recorded and put on permanent file everything he heard.

Pete wandered about the office, crouched for all eternity from his excessive height and also, as he tire-

lessly reiterated, his "bad back." There was a certain vagueness as to what the bad back consisted of. Some days it was a slipped disk. Other times, according to Pete's rambling monologs, it was a worn disk; the distinction between these two eternal, Jobish afflictions he never ceased delineating. On Wednesdays, for example today, it was due to an old war-time injury. He dilated on that now.

"Sure," he told Lars, his hands in the rear pockets of his work-trousers. He had flown three thousand miles from the West Coast aboard the public jet, wearing his grease-stained shop clothes, with, as a concession to human society, a twisted, now black but perhaps formerly brightly colored necktie. The tie hung like a lead-rope from his unbuttoned, sweaty shirt, as if, under former slave conditions, Pete had been led periodically to slaughter by means of it. Certainly he had not been led to pasture. Despite his rambling, ambulatory, psychomotor activity he was a born worker. Everything else in his life — his wife and three children, his hobbies, his friendships — these fell to ruin when work-time came. And for him this arrived at eye-opening time at six or six-thirty in the morning. He was, in contrast to what Lars regarded as neurologically normal humanity, a wide-awake early riser. It amounted to a defect. And this after a fugue the night before, until bar-closing time, of beer and pizza, with or without Molly, his wife.

"What do you mean, 'sure'?" Lars said, sipping his special drink. He felt weary; today's trance-state had enervated him beyond the recall of the chemical elixer. "Okay, you mean, 'Sure, I ought to quit my job.' I know the rubric you've got to offer. Frankly I've heard it so many times I could—"

Pete interrupted, in his agitated, husky, urgent voice, "Aw, the hell you know what I mean. Bull! You never listen. All you do is go to heaven and come back with the word of God, and we're supposed to believe as gospel every stupid thing you write down, like some —" He gestured, tic-like, his big frame shuddering under his blue cotton shirt. "Look at the service you could do humanity if you weren't so lazy."

"What service?"

"You could solve all our problems!" Pete glowered at him. "If they've got weapons designs up there —" He jerked his thumb vaguely toward the ceiling of the office, as if, during his trance-states, Lars literally rose. "Science ought to investigate you. Chrissake, you ought to be at Cal Tech being examined, not running, this fairy outfit you run."

"Fairy," Lars said.

"Okay, maybe you're not a fairy. So what? My brother-in-law's a fairy and that's okay with me. A guy can be anything he wants." Pete's voice rose to a shout that boomed and echoed. "As long as it's integrity, it's what he really is and not what he's *told* to do. You!" His tone was withering, now. "You do what they tell you. They say, Go get us a bunch of primary design-concepts in two-D form, and you do!"

He lowered his voice, grunted,

rubbed his perspiring upper lip. Then, seating himself, he reached his long arms out, groping for the heap of sketches on Lar's desk.

"These aren't them," Lars said, retaining the sketches.

"These aren't? Then what are they? They look like designs to me." Pete twisted his head, extended his neck, piston-wise, to peer.

Lars said, "From Peep-East. Miss Topchev's." Pete's opposite number in Bulganingrad or New Moscow — the Soviets had two design-engineering firms available, the typical overlapping duplication of a monolithic society — had the task of rendering *these* to their next step.

"Can I see them?"

Lars passed them to Pete, who put his nose almost against the flat, glossy surfaces, as if suddenly near-sighted. He said nothing for a time as he turned from one to the next, and then he snarled, sat back, hurled the stack of pics onto the desk. Or nearly onto it. The stack fell to the floor.

Pete, stretching, picked them up, respectfully straightened them until they were precisely even, one with the next, and set them down on the desk, demonstrating that he had meant no incivility. "They're terrible," he said.

"No," Lars said. No more so than his own, actually. Pete's loyalty to him, as a person, made a puppet out of Pete's jaws; friendship wagged the big man's tongue, and although Lars appreciated this he preferred to see the record set straight. "They can go into plowshare. She's doing her job." But of course these sketches might not be representative. The Soviets had a notorious reputation for managing to traduce KACH. The planet-wide police agency was fair game for the Soviets' own secret police, the KVB. It had not been discussed at the time Don Packard had produced the sketches, but the fact was just this: the Soviets, onto the presence of a KACH agent at their weapons fashion designs level, probably showed only what they cared to show, and held the rest back. That always had to be assumed.

Or at least *he* assumed that. What UN-W Natsec did with *their* KACH-obtained material was something else; he had no knowledge of that. The Board's policy could range from total credulity (although that was hardly likely) to utter cynicism. He, himself, tried to seek out a moderate middle-ground.

Pete said, "And that fuzzy print, that's her. Right?"

"Yes." Lars showed him the blurred glossy.

Again Pete put his nose to the subject of his scrutiny. "You can't tell anything," he decided finally. "And for this, KACH gets money! I could do better just by walking into the Bulganingrad Institute for Defensive Implementation Research Division with a polaroid Land-camera."

"There's no such place," Lars said.

Pete glanced up. "You mean they abolished their bureau? But she's still at her desk."

"It's now under someone else, not Victor Kamow. He disappeared. A

lung condition. It's now called —" Lars turned up the memo he had taken from the KACH-man's report. In Peep-East this happened continually; he attached no importance to it — "Minor Protocides, Subdivision Crop-production, Archives. Of Bulganingrad. A branch of Middle Auton-tool Safety Standards Ministry, which is their cover for their non-bacteriological warfare research agencies of every kind. As you know." He bumped heads with Pete, inspecting the fuzzy glossy-print of Lilo Topchev, as if time alone might have brought from the blur a more accessible image.

"What is it," Pete said, "that obsesses you?"

Lars shrugged. "Nothing. Divine discontent maybe." He felt evasive; the engineer from Lanferman Associates was too keen an observer, too capable.

"No, I mean — but first —"

Pete expertly ran his sensitive, long, stained-dark fingers along the underside of Lars' desk, seeking a monitoring device. Finding none immediately at hand he continued. "You're a scared man. Do you still take pills?"

"No."

"You're lying."

Lars nodded. "I'm lying."

"Sleeping bad?"

"Medium."

"If that horse's ass Nitz has got your goat —"

"It's not Nitz. To reshuffle your picturesque language, that goat's horse Nitz has not got my ass. So are you satisfied? Sir?"

Pete said, "They can groom replacements for you for fifty years and not come up with anyone like you. I knew Wade. He was okay but he wasn't in the same league as you. No one is. Especially not that dame in Bulganingrad."

"It's nice of you," Lars began, but Pete cut him savagely off.

"Nice — schnut! Anyhow, that's not it."

"No," Lars agreed. "That's not it and don't insult Lilo Topchev."

Fumbling in his shirt pocket Pete brought out a cheap, drugstore-style cigar. He lit up, puffed its noxious fumes until the office dissolved and reeked. Oblivious, without giving a damn, Pete wheezed the smoke in and out, silent as he pondered.

He had this virtue/defect: anything puzzling, he believed, if worried at long enough, could be elucidated. In any area. Even that of the human psyche. The machine was no more and no less complicated, according to him, than biological organs created by two billion years of evolution.

It was, Lars thought, an almost childishly optimistic view; it dated from the eighteenth century. Pete Freid, for all his manual skills, his engineering genius, was an anachronism. He had the outlook of a bright seventh-grader.

"I've got kids," Pete said, chewing on his cigar, making a bad thing worse. "You need a family."

"Sure," Lars said.

"No, I'm serious."

"Of course you are. But that doesn't make you right. I know what's bothering me. Look."

Lars touched the code-trips of his locked desk drawer. Responding to his fingertips the drawer at once, cash-register-like, shot open. From it he brought forth his own new sketches, the items which Pete had traveled three thousand miles to see. He passed them over, and felt the pervasive guilt which always accompanied this moment. His ears burned. He could not look directly at Pete. Instead he busied himself with his appointment gimmicks, anything to keep himself from thinking during this moment.

Pete said presently, "These are swell." He carefully initialed each sketch, beneath the official number which the UN-W Natsec bureaucrat had stamped, sealed and signed.

"You're going back to San Francisco," Lars said, "and you're going to whip up a poly-something model, then begin on a working prototype —"

"My boys are," Pete corrected. "I just tell them what to do. You think I get my hands dirty? With poly-something?"

Lars said, "Pete, how the hell long can it go on?"

"Forever," Pete said, promptly. The seventh-grader's combination of naive optimism and an almost ferociously embittered resignation.

Lars said, "This morning, before I could get inside the building, here, one of those autonomic TV interviewers from Lucky Bagman's show cornered me. They believe. *They actually believe.*"

"So they believe. That's what I mean." Pete gestured agitatedly with his cheap cigar. "Don't you get it? Even if you had looked that TV lens right in the eye, so to speak, and you had said calmly and clearly, maybe something like this: 'You think I'm making weapons? You think, *that's* what I'm bringing back from hyper-space, from that niddy-noddy realm of the supernatural?' "

"But they need to be protected," Lars said.

"Against what?"

"Against anything. Everything. They deserve protection; they think we're doing our job."

After a pause Pete said, "There's no protection in weapons. Not any more. Not since — you know. 1945. When they wiped out that Jap city."

"But," Lars said, "the pursaps think there is. There *seems* to be."

"And that *seems* to be what they're getting."

Lars said, "I think I'm sick. I'm involved in a delusional world. I ought to have been a pursap — without my talent as a medium I would be, I wouldn't know what I know; I wouldn't be on the inside looking out. I'd be one of those fans of Lucky Bagman and his morning TV interview show that accepts what he's told, knows it's true because he saw it on that big screen with all those stereo colors, richer than life. It's fine while I'm actually in the comatose state, in the damn trance; there I'm fully involved. Nothing off in a corner of my mind jeers."

"'Jeers.' What do you mean?" Pete eyed him anxiously.

"Doesn't something inside you jeer?" He was amazed.

"Hell no! Something inside me says, You're worth twice the poscreds they're paying you; *that's* what something inside *me* says, and it's right. I mean to take that up with Jack Lanferman one of these days." Pete glared in self-righteous anger.

"I thought you felt the same way," Lars said. And come to think of it, he had assumed that all of them, even General George McFarlane Nitz, stood in relationship to what they were doing as he stood: corrupted by shame, afflicted with the sense of guilt that made it impossible for him to meet anyone eye-to-eye.

"Let's go down to the corner and have a cup of coffee," Pete said. "It's time for a break."

V

The coffee house as an institution, Lars knew, had great historicity behind it. This one invention had cleared the cobwebs from the minds of the English intellectuals at the period of Samuel Johnson, had eradicated the fog inherited from the seventeenth century's pubs. The insidious stout, sack and ale had generated — not wisdom, sparkling wit, poetry or even political clarity — but muddied resentment, mutual and pervasive, that had degenerated into religious bigotry. That, and the pox, had decimated a great nation.

Coffee had reversed the trend. History had taken a decisive new turn . . . and all because of a few beans frozen in the snow which the defenders of Vienna had discovered after the Turks had withdrawn.

And here, already in a booth, cup in hand, sat small, pretty Miss Bedouin, with her pointed silver-tipped breasts fashionably in sight. She greeted him as he entered. "Mr. Lars! Sit with me, okay?"

"Okay," he said, and he and Pete shuffled and squeezed in on both sides of her.

Surveying Miss Bedouin, Pete interlaced his fingers and rested his hairy arms on the table of the booth. He said to her, "Hey, how come you can't beat out that girl he keeps to run his Paris office, that Maren something?"

"Mr. Freid," Miss Bedouin said, "I'm not sexually interested in anyone."

Grinning, Pete glanced at Lars. "She's candid."

Candor, Lars thought, at Mr. Lars, Incorporated. Ironic! A waste. But then Miss Bedouin didn't know what went on. She was sublimely pursap. As if the era before the Fall had been re-established for roughly four billion citizens of Wes-bloc and Peep-East. The burden, which had once been everyone's rested now on the cogs alone. The cognoscenti had relieved their race of a curse . . . if "cog" really derived from that and not, as he suspected, from an English rather than Italian word.

The English archaic definition had always seemed almost supernaturally apt to him. Cog. Using one's finger as a sort of cog to guide or hold the dice; i.e. to cozen, wheedle; to cheat.

But I could be candid, too, he thought, if I didn't know anything; I see no particular merit in that.

Since Medieval times a fool — no offense to you, Miss Bedouin — has been permitted the liberty of wagging his tongue. But suppose you were me, he thought. Or suppose, just for this one moment, as we sit pressed together in this booth, the three of us, two cog males and one dainty silver-tipped pursap girl whose cardinal preoccupation resides in a perpetual concern that her admittedly lovely little pointed breasts be as conspicuous as possible . . . suppose I could cheerfully pass back and forth as you do, without the need to sharply split what I know from what I say.

The wound would be healed, he decided. No more pills. No more nights of being unable — or unwilling — to sleep.

"Miss Bedouin," he said, "I actually am in love with you. But don't misunderstand. I'm talking about a spiritual love. Not carnal."

"Okay," Miss Bedouin said.

"Because," Lars said, "I admire you."

"You admire her so much," Pete said grumblingly, "that you can't go to bed with her? Kid stuff! How old are you, Lars? Real love means going to bed, like in marriage. Aren't I right, Miss whatever-your-name-is? If Lars really loved you—"

"Let me explain," Lars said.

"Nobody wants to hear your explanation," Pete said.

"Give me a chance," Lars said. "I admire her position."

"'Not so perpendicular,'" Pete said, quoting the great old-time composer and poet of the last century, Marc Blitzstein.

Flaring up, Miss Bedouin said, "I am *too* perpendicular. That's what I just now told you. And not only that—"

She ceased, because a small, elderly man with the final glimmerings of white hair coating irregularly a pinkish, almost glowing scalp, had abruptly appeared by their booth. He wore ancient lens-glasses, carried a briefcase, and his manner was a mixture of timidity and determination, as if he could not turn back now, but would have liked to.

Pete said, "A salesman."

"No," Miss Bedouin said. "Not well dressed enough."

"Process-server," Lars said; the elderly, short gentleman had an official look to him. "Am I right?" he asked.

The elderly gentleman said haltingly, "Mr. Lars?"

"That's me," Lars said; evidently his guess had been correct.

"Autograph collector," Miss Bedouin said, in triumph. "He wants your autograph, Mr. Lars; he recognizes you."

"He's not a bum," Pete added reflectively. "Look at that stickpin in his tie. That's a real cut stone. But who today wears —"

"Mr. Lars," the elderly gentleman said, and managed to seat himself precariously at the rim of the booth. He laid his briefcase before him, clearing aside the sugar, salt and empty coffee cups. "Forgive me that I am bothering you. But — a problem." His voice was low, frail. He had about him a Santa Claus quality, and yet he had come on business, something firmer and without

sentiment. He employed no elves and he was not here to give away toys. He was an expert: it showed in the way he rooted in his briefcase.

All at once Pete nudged Lars and pointed. Lars saw, at an empty booth near the door, two younger men with vapid, cod-like, underwater faces; they had entered along with this odd fellow and were keeping an eye on matters.

At once Lars reached into his coat, whipped out the document he carried constantly with him. To Miss Bedouin he said, "Call a cop."

She blinked, half-rose to her feet.

"Go on," Pete said roughly to her; then, raising his voice, said loudly, "Somebody get a cop!"

"Please," the elderly gentleman said, pleadingly but with a trace of annoyance. "Just a few words. There's something we don't understand." He now had in sight pics, glossy color shots which Lars recognized. These consisted of KACH-accumulated reproductions of his own earlier sketches, the 260 through 265 sequence, plus shots of final accurate specs drawn up for presentation to Lanferman Associates.

Lars, unfolding his document, said to the elderly man, "This is a writ of restraint. You know what it says?"

Distastefully, with reluctance, the elderly man nodded.

"Any and every official of the Government of the Soviet Union," Lars said, "'of Peoples' China, Cuba, Brazil, the Dominican Republic,) —"

"Yes, yes," the elderly gentleman agreed, nodding.

"'— and all other ethnic or national entities comprising the political entity Peep-East, is restrained and enjoined during the pendency of this action from harassing, annoying, molesting, threatening or striking the plaintiff — myself, Lars Powderdry — or in any manner occupying him or being upon or within proximity so that—'"

"Okay," the elderly gentleman said. "I am a Soviet official. Legally I cannot talk to you; we know that, Mr. Lars. But this sketch, your number 265. See? He turned the KACH-manufactured glossy for Lars to examine; Lars ignored it. "Someone in your staff wrote on this that it is —" the wrinkled, plump finger traced the English words at the foot of the sketch — "is 'Evolution Gun.' Correct?"

Pete said loudly, "Yes, and watch out or it'll turn you back into protoplasmic slime."

"No, not the trance-sketch," the Soviet official said, and chuckled slyly. "Must have prototype. You are from Lanferman Associates? You make up the model and prove-test? Yes, I think you are. I am Aksel Kaminsky." He held out his hand to Pete. "You are—?"

A New York City patrol ship flopped to the pavement before the coffee shop. Two uniformed policemen hastened, hand at holster, through the doorway with glances that took in everyone, anything or person capable of harm, activity and/or motion — and most particularly those who might be able to in any fashion, wise or manner what-

soever draw a weapon of their own.

"Over here," Lars said, heavily. He disliked this, but the Soviet authorities were behaving idiotically. How could they expect to approach him like this, openly, in a public place? Rising, he held his restraining writ out to the first of the two-man team of police.

"This person," he said, indicating the elderly Peep-East official who sat frowning, drumming nervously with his fingers against his briefcase, "is in contempt of the Superior Court of Queens County, Department Three. I'd like him arrested. My attorney will ask that charges be pressed. I'm supposed to tell you that," he said. He waited while the two policemen studied the writ.

"All I want to know," the elderly Soviet official said plaintively, "is part 76, your number. What does it refer to?"

He was led off. At the doorway the two silent ultra-neat, fashionable, cod-eyed young men who had accompanied him pursued his retreating figure but made no move to interfere with the actions of the city police. They were unemotional and resigned.

"All in all," Pete said presently as he sat down again, "it wasn't too messy." He grimaced, however. Clearly he hadn't enjoyed it. "Ten will get you twenty he's from the embassy."

"Yes," Lars agreed. Undoubtedly from the USSR Embassy, rather than the SeRKeb. He had been given instruction and had sought only to carry them out, to satisfy his

superiors. They were all on that rat-wheel. The encounter hadn't been pleasant to the Soviets, either.

"Funny they were so interested in 265," Pete said. "We haven't had any trouble with it. Who do you suppose on your staff is working for KACH? Is it worth having the FBI check them over?"

"There isn't a chance in the world," Lars said, "that the FBI or CIA or anybody else in the business could pry loose the KACH-man on our staff. You know that. What about the one at Lanferman Associates? I saw shots of your mock-ups." He had of course known that anyhow. What bothered him was not the verification that KACH had someone at Mr. Lars, Incorporated — that Peep-East knew as much about his output as he did about Miss Topchev's — but that something ailed item 265. Because he had favored that. He had followed it through its several stages with interest. The prototype, down in Lanferman's almost endless subsurface chambers, was being tested this week.

Tested, anyhow, in one sense.

But if he let himself dwell on that long enough, he would have to abandon his profession. He did not blame Jack Lanferman and certainly not Pete. Neither of them made the rules or defined the game. Like himself they sat passive, because this was the law of life.

And in the subsurface chambers that linked Lanferman Associates of San Francisco with their "branch" in Los Angeles — actually merely the south end of the titanic underground network of the organization itself—item 265, the Evolution Gun (a hastily scrawled screed of a title, in the trade deprived of durability by adding the term *working* to it), this superweapon snatched from the puzzling realm which the weapons-mediums groped about in, would see what the pursaps liked to think of as — action.

Some ersatz gross victim, susceptible of being expended, would be treated to a swat from item 265. And all this would be caught by the lenses of the media, the mags, the books, the 'papes, the TV, everything except helium-filled blimps towing red neon signs.

Yes, Lars thought; Wes-bloc could add that to its repertory of media by which the pursaps are kept both pure and saps. Something that lights up ought to cross the nighttime sky very slowly, or, as in former times, sputter unendingly around and around the turret of a skyscraper, edifying the public to the extent desired. Due to the highly specialized nature of this info-medium, it would have to be phrased simply, of course.

The blimp could initiate its journey, Lars reflected, with what might be a sanguine piece of knowledge. That the "action" which item 265 was now seeing beneath the surface of California was utterly faked.

It would not be appreciated. The pursaps would be furious. Not UN-W Natsec, he realized. They could take such a leak in their stride. The cogs would survive an exposure of that and every other datum their

possession of which defined them as a ruling elite. No, it would be the pursaps who would crumble. And that was the part that made him feel the impotent anger that eroded, day by day, his sense of his own worth and the worth of his work.

Right here in this coffee shop, Joe's Sup & Sip, he realized, I could stand up and yell, *There are no weapons.* And I'd get — a few pale, frightened faces. And then the pursaps within range would scatter, get out as fast as possible.

I know this. Aksel Kandinsky or Kaminsky or whatever it calls itself, the kindly, elderly official from the Soviet Embassy — he knows. Pete knows. General Nitz and his kind know.

Item 265 is as successful as anything I have ever produced and ever will produce, the Evolution Gun which should turn every living sentient, highly organized life form within a five-mile radius back two billion years, devolved to the most remote past; articulated morphological structures should give way to something resembling an amoeba, a slime lacking a spine, fins; something unicellular, on the order of a filterable protein molecule. And this the audience of pursaps watching the six o'clock news-roundup on TV, will see, because it will happen. In a sense.

In that, fake heaped on fake, it will be staged before the variety of cameras. And the pursaps can go to bed happy, knowing that their lives and the lives of their kids are protected by Thor's hammer from The Enemy; that is, from Peep-East, which is also mightily testing their disaster-producing tearweps of havoc.

God would be amazed, probably pleased, by the ruin items 260 through 280, when built by Lanferman Associates, can call into being. It is the Greek sin of *hubris* made incarnate logos-wise in the flesh — or rather in poly-something and metal, miniaturized with backup systems throughout in case some gnat-sized component fails.

And even God, in raring back and passing the original miracle, The Creation, hadn't gone into miniaturized backup system. He had put all His eggs in one faultily woven basket, the sentient race which now photographed in 3-D ultra-stereophonic, videomatic depth something which did not exist. He thought, don't knock it until you've tried it. Because getting clear 3-D ultra-stereophonic, videomatic depth shots of constructs which do not exist is not easy. It has taken us fifteen thousand years.

Aloud he said, "The priests of ancient Egypt. Circa Herodotus."

"Pardon?" Pete said.

Lars said, "They used hydraulic pressure to open temple doors at a distance. As they raised their arms and prayed to the animal-headed gods."

"I don't get it," Pete said.

"You don't see?" Lars said, feeling baffled. It was so obvious to him. "It's a monopoly, Pete. That's what we've got, a goddam monopoly. That's the whole point."

"You've gone nuts," Pete said

grumpily. He fooled with the handle of his empty coffee cup. "Don't let that Peep-East flunky come in here and get you shook."

"It's not him." Lars wanted to make his point; he felt the urgency of it. "Down below Monterey," he said, "where nobody can see. Where you fellas run the prototypes. Cities blown up, satellites knocked down —" He halted. Pete was jerking his head warningly toward silver-tipped Miss Bedouin. "A hedgehog satellite," Lars said carefully, thinking of the most ominous extant. The hedgehogs were considered impenetrable, and out of the more than seven hundred Earth-satellites in current orbit, almost fifty were hedgehogs. "Items 221," he said. "The Ionizing Fish that decomposed to the molecular level, drifted as gas—"

"Shut up," Pete said harshly.

They finished their coffee in silence.

VI

That evening Lars Powderdry met his mistress Maren Faine at the Paris branch of Mr. Lars, Incorporated, where Maren maintained an office as elaborate as—

He searched for the metaphor, but Maren's esthetic tastes eluded description. Hands in his pockets he gazed around him as Maren disappeared into the powder room to make ready for the real world. For her, existence began when the workday ended. And this despite the fact of her high managerial position. Logically she should have been career-oriented, as involved in her vocation as the darkest, most sullen Calvinist.

But it had not worked out that way. Maren was twenty-nine, slightly tall—she stood five-seven barefoot—with luminous red hair. No, not red; it was mahogany in tone, polished, not like the artificial, photograph-grained plastic but the real thing. Yes, Maren's coloration had been proved authentic. She woke up illuminated, eyes bright as —hell, he thought. What did it matter? Who cared at seven-thirty in the morning? A beautiful, alert, slightly-too-tall woman, colorful and graceful and muscular at that time of day, was an offense to reason and an abomination to sexuality, in that what did one do with her? At least after the first few weeks. One could hardly go on and on . . .

As Maren reentered the office, coat over her shoulders, he said, "You really don't care what goes on here."

"You mean the enterprise? The incorporated?" Her cat-eyes flew wide, merrily; she was way ahead of him. "Look, you have my *soma* at night and my mind all day long. What else do you want?"

Lars said, "I hate education. I'm not kidding. *Soma.* Where'd you learn that?" He felt hungry, irritable, at loose ends. Due to the buggery of contemporary time-zone computation he had in actuality been on his feet sixteen hours.

"You hate me," Maren said, in the tone of a marriage counselor. I know your *real* motivations, the tone implied. And it also implied: And you don't.

Maren gazed at him squarely, unafraid of anything he might do or say. He reflected that although technically he could fire her by day, or kick her out of his Paris conapt by night, he had really no hold over her. Whether her career meant anything to her or not, she could get a good job anywhere. Any time. She did not need him. If they parted company she would miss him for a week or so, grieve to the extent of bawling unexpectedly after the third martini . . . but that would be it.

On the other hand, if he were to lose her the wound would never close.

"Want dinner?" he said unenthusiastically.

Maren said, "No. Want prayer."

He stared at her. "W-what?"

Calmly she said, "I want to go to church and light a candle and pray. What's so strange about that? I do it a couple of times a week, you know that. You knew it when you first—" Delicately she finished, "*Knew* me. In the Biblical sense. I told you that first night."

"Candle for what?" Lighting a candle had to be *for* something.

Maren said, "My secret."

Feeling baffled he said, "I'm going to bed. It may be six o'clock to you but it's past two a.m. for me. Let's go to your conapt and you can fix me something light to eat and then I'll get some sleep and you can go pray." He started toward the door.

"I heard," Maren said, "that a Soviet official managed to get to you today."

That startled him. "Where'd you hear that?"

"I got a warning. From the Board. An official reprimand to the firm, telling us to beware of short old men."

"I doubt it."

Maren shrugged. "The Paris office ought to be informed, don't you agree? It did happen in a public place."

"I didn't seek the idiot out! He approached me—I was just having a cup of coffee." But he felt uneasy. Had the Board really transmitted an official reprimand? If so, it ought to have come to his attention.

"That general," Maren said, "whose name I always forget—the fat one you're so afraid of. Nitz." She smiled; the spear in his side twisted. "General Nitz contacted us here in Paris via the ultra-closed-circuit vidline and he said to be more careful. I said talk to you. He said—"

"You're making this up." But he could see she wasn't. Probably it had happened within the hour of his meeting with Aksel Kaminsky. Maren had had all day to relay General Nitz's warning to him. It was like her to wait until now, when his blood-sugar was low and he had no defense. "I better call him," he said, half to himself.

"He's in bed. Consult the time-zone chart for Portland, Oregon. Anyhow I explained it all to him." She walked out into the hall and he followed, reflexively; together they waited for the elevator which would carry them to the roof field where

his hopper, property of the firm, was parked. Maren hummed happily to herself, maddening him.

"You explained it how?"

"I said you had been considering for a long time that in case you weren't liked, appreciated here, you intended to 'coat."

Levelly, he said, "And what was his answer?"

"General Nitz said yes, he realized that you could always 'coat. He appreciated your position. In fact the military on the Board, at their special closed session at Festung Washington, D.C. last Wednesday had discussed this. And General Nitz's staff reported that they had three more weapons fashion designers standing by. Three new mediums which that psychiatrist at the Wallingford Clinic at St. George, Utah had turned up."

"Is this on the level?"

"Sort of."

He made a quick computation. "It's not two a.m. in Oregon; it's noon. High noon." Turning, he started back toward her office.

"You're forgetting," Maren said, "that we're now on Toliver Econtime time."

"But in Oregon the sun's in the middle of the sky!"

Patiently, Maren said, "But still by T.E.T. it's two a.m. Don't call General Nitz; give up. If he had wanted to talk to you he would have called the New York office, not here. He doesn't *like* you; that's what it is, midnight or midday." She smiled pleasantly.

Lars said, "You're sowing seeds of discontent."

"Truth-telling," she disagreed. "W.t.k.w.y.t.i.?"

"No," he said. "I don't want to know what my trouble is."

"Your trouble—"

"Lay, off."

Maren continued, "Your trouble is that you feel uneasy when you have to deal with myths, or as you would put it, lies. So all day long you go around uneasy. But then when someone starts talking the truth you break out in a rash; you get psychosomatically ill from head to toe."

"Hmm."

"The answer," Maren said, "at least from the standpoint of those who have to deal with you, temperamental and mercurial as you are, is to tell you the myth—"

"Oh, shut up. Did Nitz give any details about these new mediums they'd uncovered?"

"Sure. One small boy, fat as Tweedledee, sucking a lollypop, very disagreeable. One middle-aged spinster lady in Nebraska. One—"

"Myths," Lars said. "Told so they seem true."

He strode back up the corridor to Maren's office. A moment later he was unlocking her vidset; dialing Festung Washington, D.C. and the Board's mundane stations.

But as the picture formed he heard a sharp click The picture minutely—but perceptibly, if you looked closely enough—shrank. And at the same time a red warning light lit up.

The vidset was tapped somewhere along its transmitting cable. And not

by a mere coil but by a splice-in. At once he rang off, got to his feet, rejoined Maren, who had let one elevator go by and was serenely waiting for him.

"Your set's tapped."

"I know," Maren said.

"And you haven't called PT&T to come in and remove the tap?"

Maren said graciously, as if talking to someone with severe intellectual limitations, "Look, they know anyhow." A vague-enough reference: *they*. Either KACH, the disinterested agency, hired by Peep-East, or extensions of Peep-East itself such as its KVB. As she as much as said, it didn't matter. *They* knew it all anyhow.

Still, it annoyed him, trying to reach his client through a conduit tapped in such a way that no effort, not even the formality, had been made to conceal the introduction of a hostile, self-serving, highly unnatural bit of electronic mechanism.

Maren said thoughtfully, "It was put on last week sometime."

Lars said, "I do not object to a monopoly of knowledge by one small class. It doesn't upset me, that there are a few cogs and a lot of pursaps. Every society is really run by an elite."

"So what's the trouble, darling dear?"

"What bothers me," Lars said as the up-elevator came and he and Maren entered it, "is that the elite, in this case, doesn't even bother to guard that knowledge which makes it the elite." There is, he thought, probably a free pamphlet, distributed by UN-West for the asking, titled something like, HOW WE RULE YOU FELLAS AND WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

"You're in authority," Maren reminded him.

Glancing at her he said, "You do keep that telepathic brain-add turned on. Despite Behren's Ordinance."

Maren said, "It cost me fifty mil to get it installed. You think I'm going to set it to the *off* position, really? Look how it earns its keep. It tells me if you're faithful or off in some conapt with—"

"Read my subconscious, then."

"I have been. Anyhow, why? Who wants to know their subconscious? That's the place where you keep the nasty things you don't want to know—"

"Read it anyhow! Read the prognosticating aspects. What I'm going to do, the potential action still in germinal form."

Maren shook her head. "Such big words and such little ideas."

She giggled at his response. The ship, now, on auto-auto, had reached a height above the commute-layer, was on its way out of town. He had reflexively instructed it to vacate Paris . . . God knew why.

"I'll analyze you, dear duck," she said. "It's really touching, what you're thinking over and over again deep down there in that substandard mind of yours—substandard if you don't count that knob on the frontal lobe that makes you a medium."

He waited to hear only the truth.

Maren said, "Over and over again that little inner voice is squeaking, *Why* must the pursaps believe what isn't so? *Why* can't they be told, and being told, accept?" Her tone was compassionate, now. For her, quite unusually so. "You just can't grasp the incredible truth. They can't."

VII

After dinner they made for Maren's Paris apartment. He prowled about in the living room, waiting while Maren changed, as Jean Harlow once remarked in an ancient but still potent flick, "into something more comfortable."

Then he happened onto a device resting on a low imitation tarslewood table. It was vaguely familiar and he picked it up, handled it with curiosity. Familiar—and yet utterly strange.

The bedroom door was partly open. "What's this?" he called. He could see her dim, underwear-clad form as she traveled back and forth between the bed and closet. "This thing that looks like a human head with no features. The size of a baseball."

Maren called back cheerfully, "That's from 202."

"My sketch?" He stared at the object. Plowshared. This was the product for the retail market derived from the decision of one concomody on the Board. "What's it do?" he asked, finding no switches.

"It amuses."

"How?"

Maren appeared in the doorway briefly, wearing nothing. "Say something to it."

Glancing at her, Lars said, "I'm more amused just looking at you. There's about three pounds you've put on."

"Ask," Maren said, "the Orville a question. Ol' Orville is the rage. People cloister themselves for days with it, doing nothing but asking and getting answers. It replaces religion."

"There is no religion," he said, feeling serious. His experiences with the hyper-dimensional realm had disabused him of any dogmatic or devotional faith. If anyone living was qualified to claim knowledge of the "next world" it was he, and as yet he had discovered no transcendent aspect to it.

Maren said, "Then tell it a joke."

"Can't I just put it back where I found it?"

"You really don't care how they plowshare your items."

"No, that's their business." However, he tried to think of a joke. "What has six eyes," he said, "is headed for entropy, wears a derby hat—"

"Can't you ask it a serious joke?" Maren said. She returned to the bedroom, resumed dressing. "Lars, you're polymorphic perverse."

"Um," he said.

"In the bad sense. The instinct for self-destruction."

"Better that," he answered, "than the instinct to murder." Maybe he could ask Ol' Orville that question. He said to the hard, small sphere in his hand, "Am I making a mistake

by feeling sorry for myself? By fighting city hall? By talking with a Soviet official during my coffee break?" He waited; nothing occurred. "By believing," he said, "that it is time that those who claim to be making machines to kill and maim and lay waste ought to have the ethical integrity to really make machines that kill and maim and lay waste instead of machines that constitute an elaborate pretext to finally bring forth a nonentity, a decadent novelty, such as yourself?" Again he waited, but Ol' Orville remained silent.

"It's broken," he called to Maren.

"Give it a second. It's got fourteen thousand minned parts in it; they have to function in sequence."

"You mean the *entire guidance system* from 202?"

He stared at Ol' Orville with horror. Yes, of course; this sphere was precisely the size and shape of the guidance system of 202. He began thinking of the possibilities. It could solve problems, fed to it orally, rather than on punched or iron oxide tape, to a magnitude of sixty constituents. No wonder it was taking its time to answer him. He had activated a prize assembly.

Probably in no sketch would he exceed this. And now here it was, Ol' Orville, a novelty to fill the vacant time and brains of men and women whose jobs had degenerated into repetitious psychomotor activity on a level that a trained pigeon could better perform. God! His worst expectations were fulfilled!

Lars P., he thought, remembering Kafka's stories and novels, woke up one morning to discover that somehow overnight he had been transformed into a gigantic—what? Cockroach?

"What am I?" he asked Ol' Orville. "Forget my previous queries; just answer that! What have I become?" He squeezed the sphere angrily.

Now dressed in blue-cotton Chinese pajama bottoms, Maren stood at the door of her bedroom observing him as he fought it out with Ol' Orville. "Lars P. woke up one morning to discover that somehow overnight he had been transformed into a—" She broke off, because in the corner of the living room the TV set had said *pinggggggg*. It was turning itself on. A news bulletin was about to be read.

Forgetting Ol' Orville, Lars and she turned to face the TV set. He felt his pulse speed up. News bulletins were almost always bad news.

The TV screen showed a fixed still reading NEWS BULLETIN. The announcer's voice sounded professionally calm: "NASBA, the Wes-bloc space agency at Cheyenne, Wyoming, announced today that a new satellite, presumably launched by Peoples' China or Freedom For Mankind Cuba, is in orbit at an—"

Maren turned the set off. "Some news bulletin."

"The day I'm waiting for," Lars said, "is when a satellite already up launches its own satellite by itself."

"They do that now. Don't you read the 'papes? Don't you read *Scientific American?* Don't you

know *anything?*" Her scorn was semi-serious, semi-not. "You're an idiot savant, like those cretins who memorize license plates or all the vidphone numbers in the Los Angeles area or the zip-codes for every population center in North America." She returned to the bedroom for the top to her pajamas.

In Lars' hand, forgotten, Ol' Orville stirred and spoke.

It was uncanny; he blinked as its telepathic verbal response croaked at him, its answer to a question he had already forgotten asking. "Mr. Lars."

"Yes," he said, hypnotized.

Ol' Orville creakily unwound its long-labored-for results. Toy though it was, Ol' Orville was not facile. Too many components had gone into its make-up for it to be merely glib. "Mr. Lars, you have posed an ontological query. The Indo-European linguistic structure involved defeats a fair analysis; would you rephrase your question?"

After a moment of thought he said, "No, I wouldn't."

Ol' Orville was silent and then it responded, "Mr. Lars, you are a forked radish."

For the life of him he did not know whether to laugh. "Shakespeare," he said, speaking to Maren who, now reasonably fully dressed, had joined him, was listening, too. "It's quoting."

"Of course. It relies on its enormous data-bank. What did you expect, a brand-new sonnet? It can only retail what it's been fed. It can only select, not invent." Genuinely puzzled, Maren said, "I honestly think, Lars, that all kidding aside, you really do *not* have a technical mind and really do *not* have any intellectual—"

"Be quiet," he said. Ol' Orville had more to offer.

Ol' Orville whined draggingly, like a slowed-down disc, "You also asked, 'What have I become?' You have become an outcast. A wanderer. Homeless. To paraphrase Wagner—"

"Richard Wagner?" Lars asked. "The composer?"

"And dramatist and poet," Ol' Orville reminded him. "In *Siegfried,* to paraphrase in order to depict your situation. *'Ich hab' nicht Bruder, noch Schwester, Meine Mutter—*"

"Mr. Lars," Maren said, "is an American and hence knows no foreign languages. He doesn't understand a word you're saying."

Finishing, Ol' Orville said, "*—ken' Ich nicht. Mein Vater—*"

Then its assembly received, integrated and accepted Maren's remark; it shifted its electronic gears. "The name 'Mr. Lars' fooled me; I thought it was Norse. Excuse me, Mr. Lars. I mean to say that, like Parsifal, you are *Waffenlos,* without weapons . . . in two senses, figurative and literal. You do not actually make weapons, as your firm officially pretends. And you are *Waffenlos* in another, more vital sense. You are *defenseless.* Like the young Siegfried, before he slays the dragon, drinks its blood and understands the song of the bird, or, like Parsifal, before he learns his name

from the flower maidens, you are innocent. In, perhaps, the bad sense."

"Not the pure fool," Maren said practically, nodding. "I paid sixty poscreds for you. Go ahead and blab."

She went off to get a cigarillo from the package on the coffee table.

Ol' Orville was chewing over a decision—as if it could decide, rather than, as Maren pointed out, merely select from the data installed in its file-banks. Finally it said, "I know what you want. You face a dilemma. You are *in* a dilemma, *now*. But you have never articulated it to yourself, never faced it."

"What in hell is it?" he demanded, baffled.

Ol' Orville said, "Mr. Lars, you have a terrible fear that one day you will enter your New York office, lie down and enter your trance-state, and revive with no sketches to show. In other words, lose your talent."

Except for Maren's faintly asthmatic breathing as she smoked her Garcia y Vega cigarillo, the room was silent.

"Gee," Lars said, mollified. He felt like a small, small boy, as if all the years of adulthood had been ripped away. It was an eerie experience.

Because of course this toy, this novelty-gadget which was a perversion of the original Mr. Lars, Incorporated design, was correct. His fear was a near-castration fear. And it never went away.

Ol' Orville was ponderously winding up its statement. "Your conscious quandary as to the spuriousness of your so-called 'weapons' designs is an artificial, false issue. It obscures the psychological reality beneath. You know perfectly well, as any sane human would, that there is absolutely no argument for producing *genuine* weapons, either in Wes-bloc or Peep-East. Mankind was saved from destruction when the two monoliths secretly met at plenipotentiary level in Fairfax, Iceland, in 1992, to agree on the 'plowsharing'-principle, then openly in 2002 to ratify the Protocols."

"Enough," Lars said looking at the object.

Ol' Orville shut up.

Going to the coffee table Lars set the object back down, shakily. "And this amuses the pursaps?" he asked Maren.

Maren said, "They don't ask deep-type questions. They ask it dumb, gag-type questions. Well, well." She eyed him intently. "So all this time all this talk on your part, this moaning and groaning about, 'God, I'm a fraud, I'm perpetrating a hoax on the poor pursaps,' all that hogwash—" she had flushed with indignation — was just so much gabble."

"Evidently so," Lars agreed, still shaken. "But I didn't know it. I don't see any psychoanalysts—I hate them. They're frauds, too. Siegmund Fraud."

He waited hopefully. She did not laugh.

"Castration fear," she said. "Fear of loss of virility. Lars, you're afraid that because your trance-state sketches are not designs for authentic weapons—you see, darling duck dear? You fear it means that you're impotent."

He did not meet her gaze.

"*Waffenlos*," he said. "That's a polite euphemism—"

"All euphemisms are polite; that's what it means."

"—for impotency. I'm not a man." He stared at Maren.

"In bed," Maren said, "you're twelve men. Fourteen. Twenty. Just wow." She gazed at him hopefully, to see if that cheered him.

"Thanks," he said. "But the sense of failure remains. Perhaps even Ol' Orville hasn't actually penetrated to the root of the matter. Somehow Peep-East is involved."

Maren said, "Ask Ol' Orville."

Once more picking up the featureless head, Lars said, "What is it about Peep-East that figures in all this, Ol' Orville?"

A pause, while the complex electronic system whirred, and then the gadget responded. "A blurred, distance-shot, glossy. Too blurred to tell you what you wish to know."

At once Lars knew. And tried to eradicate the thought from his mind, because his mistress and coworker Maren Faine was standing right there by him, picking up his thoughts, in defiance of Western law. Had she gotten it, or had he cut it off in time, buried it back in his unconscious where it belonged?

"Well, well," Maren said thoughtfully. "Lilo Topchev."

He said, fatalistically, "Yep."

"In other words," Maren said, and the magnitude of her intelligence, the reason for giving her a top-level spot in his organization, manifested itself—unfortunately for him, he thought dismally. "In other words, you see the solution to the virility-sterility psycho-sexual weapons-designs dilemma in the most asinine way possible. In a way if you were say nineteen years old—"

"I'll go see a psychiatrist," he said, lamely.

"You want a good clear pic of that goddam miserable little female communist snake?" Maren's voice was sharp with hate, blame, accusation, fury—everything muddled, but distinct enough to carry across the room to him and hit hard; he felt the impact, fully.

"Yep," he said stoically.

"I'll get one for you. Okay, I will. I mean it. I'll do even better than that; I'll explain to you in simple, short words, the kind you can comprehend, how *you* can get it, because personally I'd prefer on second thought not to involve myself in something so—" she searched for the word, the good, solid, below-the-belt punch—"so soggy."

"How?"

"First, face this: KACH will never, never get it for you. If they turned over a blurred shot they did it on purpose. They could have gotten a better one."

"You've lost me."

"KACH," Maren said, as if speaking to a child, and one whom she had damn little sympathy with, "is what they like to call *disinterested*. Strip this of its self-serving nobility and you get at the truth: KACH serves two masters."

"Oh yes," he said, understanding. "Us and Peep-East."

"They have to please everyone and offend no one. They're the Phoenicians of the modern world, the Rothschilds, the Fuggers. From KACH you can contract for espionage services, but—you get a blurred distance-shot of Lilo Topchev." She sighed; it was so easy, and yet it had to be spelled out to him. "Doesn't that remind you of anything, Lars? Think."

At last he said, "The pic Aksel Kaminsky had. Of sketch 265. It was inadequate."

"Oh, darling. You *see*, you actually *see*."

"And," he said, carefully keeping himself unrattled, "your theory is that it's policy. They deliver enough to keep both blocs buying, but not enough to offend anyone."

"Right. Now look." She seated herself, puffing agitatedly on her cigarillo. "I love you, Lars; I want to keep you as mine, to fuss over and annoy; I adore annoying you because you're so annoyable. But I'm not greedy. Your psychological weak-links as Ol' Orville said is your fright that you've lost your virility. That makes you like every other male over the age of thirty . . . you're slowing down just a teeny bit and that scares you; you sense the waning of the life-force. You're good in bed but not *quite* as good as last week or last month or last year. Your blood, your heart,

your—well, anyhow, your body knows it and so your mind knows it. I'll help you."

"Then help. Instead of orating," he said.

"You contact this Aksel Kaminsky."

He glanced up at her. Her expression showed she meant it; she was nodding soberly.

"And," she said, "you say, Ivan—call him Ivan. It annoys them. Then he can call you Joe or Yank, but you don't care. Ivan, you say. You want to know detail about item 265. That is correct, Ivan? Okay, comrade from East; I give you detail and you give me pic of lady weapons fashion designer Miss Topchev. Good pic, in color, maybe even 3-D. Maybe, yes even film sequence so I can run off—with nice sound-track of voice—in evening to fill vacant leisure-hours. And maybe if you have stag-type film sequence of hot, pelvis-twitching in which she—"

"You think he'll do it?"

"Yes."

Lars thought, and I head the firm; I employ this woman. Obviously in another year, and me with psychological problems already . . . but I have the talent, the Psionic ability. So I can stay on top. He felt the insubstantiality of his over-all prowess, however, in confrontation with this woman, his mistress. Now that she had proposed, so quaintly phrased, too, the deal with Kaminsky it all seemed so obvious and yet—insanely, he would never have conjured it up on his own. Incredible!

And it would work.

VIII

On Thursday he spent the morning at Lanferman Associates, examining the mockups, prototypes and just plain fakes that the engineers had put together, the artists and draftsmen and poly-something experts and electronics geniuses and clear-cut madmen, the crowd that Jack Lanferman paid, and in a way which always struck Lars as eccentric.

Jack Lanferman never scrutinized the work done for him in exchange. He seemed to believe that if properly rewarded every human being of talent did his best, with no goad, no thrusts or kicks or fires, no interoffice memos, nothing.

And oddly, it appeared true. Because Jack Lanferman did not have to spend his time in his office. He lived almost constantly in one of his sybaritic pleasure-palaces, coming down to Earth only when it was time to view some finished product before its public release.

In this case what had originated as sketch 278 had now passed through all its confirmation stages and had been "test-fired." It was, among and in company with admittedly bizarre compeers, unique. On his own part, Lars Powderdry had never known whether to laugh or weep openly when he contemplated item 278, now termed more ominously—to please the pursaps, who would look upon it by this title only—the Psychic Conservation Beam.

Seated in the small theater somewhere under central California, with Pete Freid on one side of him

Jack Lanferman on the other, Lars watched the Ampex video tape of the Psychic Conservation Beam in "action." Since it was an anti-personnel weapon it could not be used on some obsolete, hulking old battleship of a spacecraft floated out from orbit to be blown to bits at a distance of eleven million miles. The target had to be human beings. Along with everyone else, Lars disliked this part.

The Psychic Conservation Beam was being demonstrated as it sucked dry the mentalities of a gang of worthless-looking thugs who had been detected trying to seize control of a small, isolated (in other words, pathetically helpless) colony of Wes-bloc's on Ganymede.

"Watch this," Jack Lanferman said, expansively. "This is where the Ruben gang realizes that the FBI has sighted them."

On the screen the bad fellas froze, anticipating the tearwep—the instrument of terror. Rewarding, Lars thought. As a drama it was satisfying; because the bad fellas, up to this moment, had run riot through the colony. Like grotesques painted into existence as old-time movie ads, to be pasted up at the entrances of local neighborhood theaters, the bad fellas had torn the clothing from young girls, beaten old men into indistinct blobs, had set fire drunken-soldierwise to venerable buildings . . . had done, Lars decided, everything except burn the library at Alexandria with its sixteen thousand priceless irreplaceable scrolls, including four lost-forever tragedies of Sophocles.

"Jack," he said to Lanferman, "couldn't you have set it in ancient Hellenistic Palestine? You know how sentimental the pursaps are about that period."

"I know," Lanferman agreed. "That's when Socrates was put to death."

"Not quite," Lars said. "But that's the general idea. Couldn't you have your androids shown as they laser down Socrates? What a powerful scene that would make. Of course you'd have to supply subtitles or dub in an English voice-track. So the pursaps could hear Socrates' pleas."

Pete murmured, absorbed in watching the video tape, "He didn't plead; he was a stoic."

"Okay," Lars said. "But at least he could look worried."

Now the FBI, using item 278, for the first time in history, as the film took pains to inform its audience via the calm commentary by none other than Lucky Bagman himself, swooped. The bad fellas blanched, groped for their antiquated laser pistols or whatever it was they had—perhaps Frontier Model Colt .44s, Lars thought acidly. Anyhow it was all over for them.

And the results would have moved, or in this case melted, a stone. It was worse than the Fall of the House of Atreus, Lars decided. Blindness, incest, daughters and sisters torn apart by wild beasts . . . what reality, in the final analysis, was the worst fate that could befall a group of humans? Slow starvation, as in the Nazi concentration camps,

accompanied by beatings, impossibly hard work, arbitrary indignities and at last the "shower baths" which were actually Zyklon B hydrogen cyanide gas chambers?

Yet item 278 nonetheless added to mankind's fund of techniques. Tools to injure and degrade. Aristotle on all fours, ridden like a donkey, with a bit between his teeth. Such the pursaps wanted; such was evidently their pleasure. Or was this all a hideous, fundamentally wrong guess?

Wes-bloc, its ruling elite, believed that the people were comforted by this sort of video tape, shown — incredibly—at the dinner hour, or displayed in still form via color pic in the breakfast-time 'pape, to be ingested along with the eggs and toast. *The pursaps liked displays of power because they felt powerless themselves.* It heartened them to see Item 278 make mincemeat out of a gang of thugs who were beyond the pale. Item 278, from FBI high-muzzle-velocity guns, sped out in the form of thermotropic darts which found their targets —

And Lars looked away.

"Androids," Pete reminded him laconically.

Lars said between his teeth, "They look human to me."

The film, horrid to Lars, clanked on. Now the bad fellas, like husks, like dehydrated skins, deflated bladders, wandered about; they neither saw nor heard. Instead of a satellite or a building or a city being blown up a group of human brains, candle-like, had been blown out.

"I want out," Lars said.

Jack Lanferman looked sympathetic. "Frankly I don't know why you came in here at all. Go out and get a Coke."

"He has to watch," Pete Freid said. "He's taking responsibility."

"All right." Jack nodded reasonably, hunching forward and tapping Lars on the knee to gain his shattered attention. "Look, my friend. *It isn't as if* 278 *will ever be used.* It isn't as if —"

"It is as if," Lars said. "It's goddam completely as if you could make it. I have an idea. Run the tape backward."

Jack and Pete glanced at each other, then at him expectantly. After all, you never knew; even a sick man might have a good idea now and then. A man made temporarily ill.

"First you show these people like they are now," Lars said. "As mindless, De-brained, reduced to reflex-machines, with maybe the upper ganglia of the spinal column intact, nothing more. That's how they start out. Then the FBI ships spurt the essential quality of humanness back into them. Got it? Have I found a winner?"

Jack giggled. "Funny. You'd have to call it a Psychic Bestower Gun. But it wouldn't work."

"Why not?" Lars said. "If I were a pursaps I know it would comfort me to see human qualities imparted to de-brained wrecks. Wouldn't it comfort you?"

"But see, my friend," Jack pointed out patiently, "what would emerge as a result of the item's action would be a gang of hoodlums.

True. He had forgotten about that.

However, Pete spoke up at this point, and on his side. "But they wouldn't be hoodlums if the tape was run backward because they'd set museums un-on fire, undetonate hospitals, reclothe the nubile bodies of naked young girls, restore the punched-in faces of old men. And just generally bring the dead to life, in a sort of off-hand manner."

Jack said, "It would spoil the pursaps' dinners to watch it." He spoke with finality. With authority.

"What makes pursaps tick?" Lars asked him. Jack Lanferman would know; it was Jack's job to know that. He lived by means of that knowledge.

Without hesitation Jack said, "Love."

"Then why this?" Lars gestured at the screen. Now the FBI was carting off the hulks who had been men, rounding them up like so many stunned steers.

"The pursap," Jack said thoughtfully, in a tone that told Lars that this was no light answer, no frivolity, "is afraid in the back of his mind that weapons like this exist. If we didn't show them, the pursap would believe in their existence anyhow. And he'd be afraid that somehow, for reasons obscure to him, they might be used on him. Maybe he didn't pay his jet-hopper license fee on time. Or maybe he cheated on his income tax. Or maybe—maybe he knows, deep down inside him, that he's not the way God built him originally. That in some way he doesn't quite fathom, he's corrupt."

"Deserves item 278 turned his way," Pete said, nodding.

"But he's wrong," Lars said futilely. "He doesn't deserve anything, anything at all, remotely like 278 or 240 or 210, any of them. He doesn't and they don't." He gestured at the screen.

"But 278 exists," Jack said. "The pursap knows it, and when he sees it used on an uglier life form than him he thinks, Hey. Maybe they passed me by. Maybe because those fellas are so really bad, those Peep-East bastards, 278 isn't going to get pointed at me and I can go to my grave later on, not this year but say fifty years from now. Which means — and this is the crux, Lars — he doesn't have to worry about his own death right now. *He can pretend he will never die.*"

After a pause Pete said somberly, "The only event that really makes him secure, makes him *really* believe he's going to survive, is to see another person get it *in his place.* Someone else, Lars, had died for him."

Lars said nothing. What was there to say? It sounded right; both Pete and Jack agreed, and they were professionals: they went about their jobs intentionally, rationally, whereas he, as Maren had pointed out, was an idiot savant. He had a talent, but nothing — absolutely nothing, did he know. If Pete and Jack said this, then all he could do was nod.

"The only mistake ever made in this area," Jack said presently, "in the field of tearweps, was the mid-twentieth century inanity, insanity, of the universal weapon. The bomb

that blew *everyone* up. That was a *real* mistake. That went too far. That had to be reversed. So we got tactical weapons. Specialized more and more — especially in the tearwep class, so that not only could they pick out their target but they could get at you emotionally. I go for tearweps; I understand the idea. But localization: that's the essence." He put on, for effect, his clumsy ethnic accent. "You don't got no target, Meester Lars, sir, when you got zap gun which blow up whole world, even though it make lot of plenty fine terror. You got —" He grinned wise-peasantishly. "You got hammer with which you hit yourself over your own head."

The accent and the attempt at humor were gone, as he said, "The H-bomb was a monstrous, paranoid-logic error. The product of a paranoid nut."

"There are not nuts like that alive today," Pete said quietly.

Jack said instantly, "That we know of."

The three of them glanced at one another.

Across the continent, Surley G. Febbs said, "A one-way express first-class window-seat ticket on a 66-G no-blowby rocket to Festung Washington, D.C. And snap it up, miss." He carefully laid out a ninety poscred note on the brass surface before the TWA clerk's window.

IX

Behind Surley G. Febbs in the line at the TWA ticket-reservations-baggage window a portly, well-cloaked, businessman-type was saying to the individual behind *him*, "Look at this. Get a load of what's going on overhead behind our backs right this minute. A new satellite in orbit, and by them. Not us." He refolded page one of his morning homeopape, to show.

"Chrissake," the man behind him said dutifully. Naturally Surley G. Febbs, while he waited for his ticket to Festung Washington, D.C. to be validated, listened in. Naturally.

"Wonder if it's a hedgehog," the portly businessman-type said.

"Naw." The individual behind him shook his head vigorously. "We'd object. You suppose a man of General George Nitz' stature would allow that? We'd register an official government protest so fast —"

Turning, Surley Febbs said, "'Protest'? Are you kidding? Is that the kind of leaders we have? You actually believe what's needed is *words?* If Peep-East put that satellite up without officially registering the specs with SINK-PA in advance we'll — " he gestured — "Whammo. Down it comes."

He received his ticket and change from the clerk.

Later, in the express jet, first-class accommodation, window seat, he found himself next to the portly, well-cloaked, businessman-type. After a few seconds — the flight in all lasted only fifteen minutes — they resumed their conversation of solemn weight. They were now passing over Colorado and the Rockies could be seen below, briefly, but due to the nobility of their discussion they ignored that great range. It would be

there later on, but *they* might not be. This was urgent.

Febbs said, "Hedgehog or not, every Peep miss is a men."

"Eh?" the portly businessman said.

"Every Peep-East missile is a menace. They're all up to something." Something evil, he said to himself, and glanced at the portly man's 'pape, over his shoulder. "I see it's a type never before seen. God knows what it might contain. Frankly, I think we ought to drop a Garbage-can Banger on New Moscow."

"What's *that?*"

Condescendingly, because he fully realized that the average man had not done research endlessly at the pub-libe as he had, Febbs said, "It's a missile that wide-cracks in the atmosphere. 'Atmosphere,' from the Sanskrit *atmen,* 'breath.' The word 'Sanskrit' from *samskrta,* meaning 'cultivated,' which is from *sama,* meaning 'equal,' plus *kr,* 'to do,' and *krp,* 'form.' In the atmosphere, anyhow, above the popcen — the population center — which it's aimed at. We place the Judas Iscariot IV above New Moscow, set to wide-crack at half a mile, and it rains down minned—miniaturized—h'd, that means homeostatic —"

It was hard to communicate with the ordinary mass man. Nonetheless Febbs did his best to find terms which this portly nonentity — this nont—would comprehend. "They're about the size of gum wrappers. They drift throughout the city, especially into the rings of conapts. You do know what a conapt is, don't you?"

Spluttering, the portly businessman-type said, "I live in one."

Febbs, unperturbed, continued his useful exposition. "They're cam — that is, chameleon; they blend, colorwise, with whatever they land on. So you can't detect them. There they lie, until nightfall, say around ten o'clock at night."

"How do they know when it's ten o'clock? Each has a wristwatch?" The portly businessman's tone was faintly sneering, as if he imagined that somehow Febbs was putting him on.

With massive condescension Febbs said, "By the loss of heat in the atmosphere."

"Oh."

"About ten p.m., when everyone's asleep." Febbs gloated in the thought of this strategic weapon in action, its precision. It was a thin road which this weapon laid, like the gate to salvation; esthetically it was satisfying. You could enjoy knowing about this Garbage-can Banger even without its actually going into operation.

"Okay," the portly man said. "So at ten p.m. —"

"They start," Febbs said. "Each pellet, fully cammed, begins to emit a sound." He watched the portly man's face. Obviously this citizen did not bother to read *Wep Weke,* the info mag devoted exclusively to pics and articles, and, where possible, true specs, of all new weapons, both Wes-bloc and Peep-East—probably by means of a data-collecting agency he had in a vague way heard of named KICH or KUCH or KECH. Febbs had a ten-year file of

Wep Weke, complete, with both front and back covers intact; it was priceless.

"What kind of sound?"

"A horrid sneering sound. Buzzing. Like — well, you'd have to hear it yourself. The point is, it keeps you awake. And I don't mean just a little awake. I mean *wide*-awake. Once the noise of a Garbage-can Banger gets to you, for example, if a pellet is on the roof of your con-apt building, you never sleep again. And four days without sleeping —" He snapped his fingers. "You can't perform your job. You're no good to anyone, yourself included."

"Fantastic."

"And," Febbs said, "the chances are good that pellets might land and immediately cam in the vicinity of the villa of a SeRKeb member. And that could mean the collapse of the government."

"But," the portly man said, with a trace of worry, "don't *they* have hardware equally sinister? I mean—"

"Peep-East," Febbs said, "would retaliate. Naturally. Probably they'd try out their Sheep Dip Isolator."

"Oh yeah," the portly businessman said, nodding. "I've read about that. They used it when their colony on Io revolted last year."

"We in the West," Febbs said, "have never smelled the Sheep Dip Isolator's implementing irritant. It's said to defy description."

"I read somewhere that a rat that's died in the wall —"

"Far worse. I admit they have something there. It descends in the form of condensation from a Type VI Julian the Apostate satellite. The drops spatter in an area of say ten square miles. And wherever they land they penetrate inter-mol-wise—intermolecularly—and can't be eradicated, even by Supsolv-x, that new detergent we have. Nothing works."

He spoke calmly, showing that he faced this tearwep without blenching. It was a fact of life, like going regularly to the dentist; Peep-East possessed it, might use it, but even this Sheep Dip Isolator could be matched by something of Wes-bloc's that was more effective.

But he could imagine the Sheep Dip Isolator in Boise, Idaho. The effect on the million citizens of the city. They would awaken to the stench, and it would be inter-mol everywhere, on and in buildings, in sub-supra- and surface-vehicles, autofacs—and the stench would drive one million people out of the city. Boise, Idaho would become a ghost city, inhabited only by autonomic mechanisms still grinding away uncursed by the possession of noses — and by *the smell.*

It made you stop and think.

"But they won't use it," Febbs decided, aloud. "Because we could retaliate with, for instance—"

He scanned the fantastically extensive data-collection imbedded in his mind. He could envision a host of retalweps which would make the Sheep Dip Isolator small spuds indeed. "We'd try," he pronounced decisively, as if it were up to him, "the Civic Notification Distorter."

"Chrissake, what's *that?*"

"The final solution," Febbs said,

"in my opinion, in n-e weapons." N-e: that signified the esoteric term, used in Wes-bloc's weapons-circles such as the Board which he now (God in his wisdom be praised!) belonged to, needle-eye. And needle-eyeification was the fundamental direction which weapons had been taking for a near-half-century. It meant, simply, weapons with the most precise effect conceivable. In theory it was possible to imagine a weapon — as yet unbuilt, probably untranced of by Mr. Lars himself, still—that would slay one given individual at a given instant at a given intersection in one particular given city in Peep-East. Or in Wes-bloc, for that matter. Peep-East, Wes-bloc: what difference did it make? The important thing would be the existence of the weapon itself. The *perfect* weapon.

God, how clearly he could conceive it in his own mind. One would sit down — *he* would — in a room. Before him, a control panel with dials . . . and one single button. He would read the dials, note the settings. Time, space, the synchronicity of the dimensional factors would move toward fusion. And Gafne Rostow (that was the everyman name for the average enemy citizen) would walk briskly toward that spot, to arrive at that time. He, Febbs, would press the button and Gafne Rostow would —

Hmm. Would disappear? No, that was to maj. Too magical. Not in accord with the reality-situation. Gafne Rostow, a minor bureaucrat in some temporary, small-budget ministery of the Soviet Government, someone with a rubber stamp, desk, cramped office — he wouldn't just disappear; he would be *converted*.

This was the part which made Febbs shiver with relish. He did so now, causing the portly gentleman beside him to withdraw slightly and raise an eyebrow.

"Converted," Febbs said, "into a rug."

The portly businessman stared.

"A rug," Febbs repeated, irritably. "Don't you understand? Or has the Judaeo-Christian tradition impaired your judgment? What kind of patriot are you?"

"I'm a patriot," the portly businessman said, defensively.

"With glass eyes," Febbs said. "Natural-simulated. Of course if it didn't have good teeth, regular and white, if there were unsightly fillings or you couldn't get the yellow stain removed, it could be a wall-hanging. Flat." The head could be discarded.

The portly businessman began, uneasily, to read his 'pape.

"I'll give you the poop," Febbs said, "on the Civic Notification Distorter. It's n-e but not terror. Not terminal. I mean it doesn't kill. It's in the conf class."

"I know what that means," the portly gentleman said hurriedly, keeping his eyes on the homeopape. Obviously he did not care to continue the discussion — for reasons which eluded Febbs. Perhaps, Febbs decided, the man felt guilty at his ignorance on this vital topic. "That means confusions. Disorienting."

"The Civic Notification Distorter," Febbs said, "bases its operation on

the requirement that in present-day society every filled-out official form has to be recorded, micro-wise, in trio or quad or quin. Three, four or five copies *in every instance* have to be made. The weapon functions in a relatively uncomplicated manner. All micro-copies, after being Xeroxed, are carried over coaxial lines to file-repositories, generally subsurface and away from population centers, in case of a major war. You know, so they'll survive I mean, records have *got* to survive. So the Civic Notification Distorter is launched ground-to-ground say from Newfoundland to Peking. I've selected Peking because that's the Sino-South-Asia civic-institution concentration for that half of Peep-East; that's where *their* half of their total records originate. It strikes, screwing itself within a matter of microseconds out of sight in the ground; no visible trace survives. And at once it extends pseudopodia which search out, subsurface, until it contacts a co-ax carrying data to an archive. You see?"

"Um," the portly businessman said, half-heartedly, trying to read. "Say, this new satellite's design suggests possibly it even—"

"And the Distorter," Febbs said, "Operates from that instant on in a way for which the word 'inspired' is not excessive. It diverts integers of the data, the fundamental message-units, so that they no longer agree. In other words, copy two of the original document no longer can be superimposed on copy one. Copy three disagrees with copy two at one higher order of distortion. If a fourth copy exists it is reconstituted so that—"

"If you know so much about weapons," the portly businessman broke in disagreeably, "why aren't you in Festung Washington, D.C.?"

Surley G. Febbs, with the mere trace of a smile, said, "I am, fella. Wait and see. You're going to hear about me. Remember the name Surley G. Febbs. Got it? Surley Febbs. F as in fungus."

The portly businessman said, "Just tell me one thing. Then frankly, Mr. Febbs, F as in fungus, I don't want to hear any more; I can't take any more in. You said 'rug.' What was that? Why a rug? 'Glass eyes,' you said. And something about 'natural simulated.'" Uneasily, with tangible aversion, he said, "You mean?"

"I mean," Febbs said quietly, "that something should remain as a reminder. So you know you achieved it." He searched for, found the proper term to express his emotions, his intent. "A trophy."

The loudspeaker blurted, "We are now landing at Abraham Lincoln Field. Surface travel to Festung Washington, D.C. thirty-five miles to the east is available at slight additional cost; retain your ticket-receipt in order to qualify for low, low fares."

Febbs glanced out the window for the first time during the trip and saw below him, gratifyingly, his new abode, the enormous, sprawling population center which was the capital of Wes-bloc. The source from which all authority emanated. Authority which he now shared.

And with the fund of his knowledge the world situation would rapidly pick up. He could, on the basis of this conversation, foresee that.

Wait until I sit in on the top-security closed-session Board meetings down in the subsurface *kremlin* with General Nitz and Mr. Lars and the rest of those fellas, he said to himself. The balance of power between East and West is going to radically alter. And boy, are they going to know about it in New Moscow and Peking and Havana.

The ship, retrojets whistling, began to descend.

But how best, Febbs inquired of himself, can I really serve my power-bloc? I'm not going to receive that one-sixth slice, that one component, which a concomody is asked to plowshare. That's not enough for *me*. Not after this conversation. It's made me see things straight. I'm a top weapons expert — although, admittedly, I don't have one of those formal degrees from some university or the Air Arm Military Academy at Cheyenne. Plowsharing? Is *that* all I can offer in the way of unique knowledge and talent so exceptional that you'd have to go back to the Roman Empire and even before to find its equal?

Hell no, he realized. Plowsharing is for the *average* man. I'm that, computerwise, statistically-speaking, but underneath that I'm Surley Grant Febbs, as I just now said to this man beside me. There are a lot of average men. Six always sit on the Board. But there's only one Surley Febbs.

I want the complete weapon.

And when I get there and sit with them officially I'm going to get my hands on it. Whether they like it or not.

X

As Lars Powderdry and the others emerged from the theater in which the video tape of item 278 had been run, a loitering figure approached them.

"Mr. Lanferman?" Gasping for breath, eyes like sewn-on buttons, the football-shaped, ill-dressed, broken reed sort of individual was lugging an enormous sample-case. He wedged himself in their path, blocking all escape. "I just want a minute. Just let me say a couple of things—okay?"

It was one of Jack Lanferman's headaches, an encounter with marginal operators such as this man, Vincent Klug. Under the circumstances it was hard to know whom to feel more sorry for, Jack Lanferman who was big, powerful and expensive, as well as busy, with no idle time to spare, in that as a hedonist his time was convertible into physical pleasure and that was that. Or for Klug.

For years Vincent Klug had hung around. God knew how he gained access to the subsurface portion of Lanferman Associates. Probably someone at a minor post had been moved to pity and opened the floodgate a bare inch, recognizing that if not let in, Klug would remain a careless pest, would never give up. But this act of rather self-serving compassion by one of Lan-

ferman's tiny above-surface employees merely transferred the pest-problem one level down — literally. Or up, if you viewed it figuratively. Because now Klug was so positioned as to bother the boss.

It was Klug's contention that the world needs toys.

This was his answer to whatever riddle the serious members of society confronted themselves with: poverty, deranged sex-crimes, senility, altered genes from over-exposure to radiation . . . you name the problem and Klug opened his enormous sample-case and hauled out the solution. Lars had heard the toymaker expound this on several occasions: life itself was unendurable and hence had to be ameliorated. As a thing-in-itself it could not actually be lived. There had to be some way out. Mental, moral and physical hygiene demanded it.

"Look at this," Klug said wheezingly to Jack Lanferman, who had halted indulgently, for the moment at least. Klug knelt down, deposited a miniature figure on the corridor floor. With blurred speed he added one after another more until a dozen figures stood ganged together, and then Klug presented the small assembly with a citadel.

There was no doubt; the citadel was an armed fortress. Not archaic — not, for instance, a medieval castle — and yet not contemporary either. It was fanciful, and Lars was intrigued.

"This particular game," Klug explained, "is called Capture. These here—" he indicated the dozen figures, which Lars now discovered were oddly uniformed soldiers — "they want to get in. And it —" Klug indicated the citadel — "it wants to keep them out. If any one of them, just *one*, manages to get inside, the game's over. The attackers have won. But if the Monitor—"

"The what?" Jack Lanferman said.

"This." Klug patted the citadel affectionately. "I spent six months wiring it. If this destroys all twelve attacking troops, then the defenders have won. Now."

From his sample-case he produced another item. "This is the nexus through which the player operates either the attackers, if that's the side he's chosen, or the Monitor, if he's going to be the defenders."

He held the objects toward Jack, who, however, declined. "Well," Klug said philosophically, "anyhow this is a sample computer that even a seven-year-old can program. Any number up to six can play. The players take turns —"

"All right," Jack Lanferman said patiently. "You've built a prototype. Now what do you want me to do?"

Rapidly Klug said, "I want it analyzed to see how much it would cost to autofac. In lots of five hundred. As a starter. And I'd like to see it run on your 'facs, because yours are the best in the world."

"I know that," Lanferman said. "Will you do it?"

Lanferman said, "You couldn't afford to pay me to cost-analyze

this item. And if you could, you couldn't even begin to put up the retainer necessary if I were to have my 'facs run off even fifty, let alone five hundred. You know that, Klug."

Swallowing, perspiring, Klug hesitated and then said, "My credit's no good, Jack?"

"Your credit's good. *Any* credit is good. But you don't have any. You don't even know what the word means. Credit means —"

"I know," Klug broke in. "It means the ability to play later for what's bought now. But if I had five hundred of this number ready for the Fall market—"

"Let me ask you something," Lanferman said.

"Sure, Jack. Mr. Lanferman."

"How in that strange brain of yours, do you conceive a method by which you can advertise? This would be a high-cost item at every level, especially at retail. You couldn't merchandise it through one buyer for a chain of autodepts. It would have to go to cog-class families and be exposed in cog mags. And that's expensive."

"Hmm," Klug said.

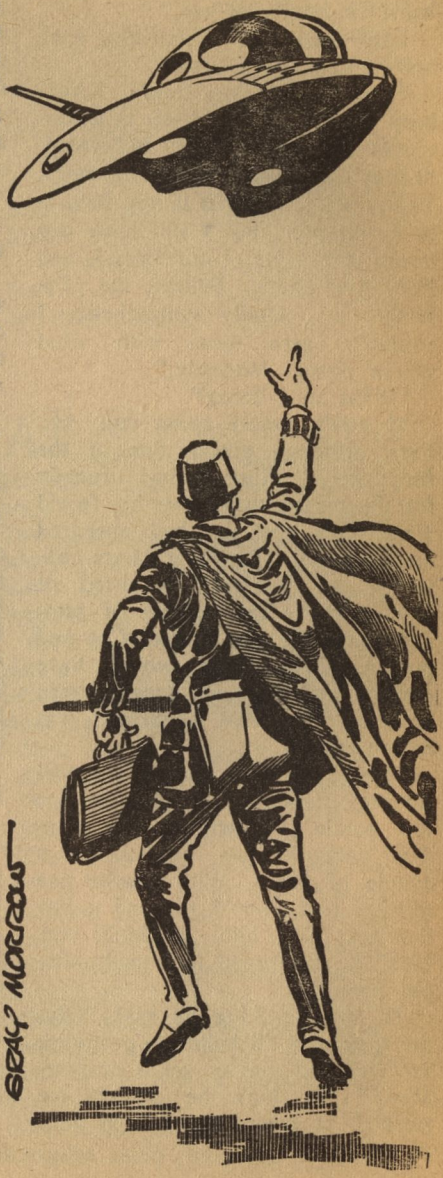
Lars spoke up. "Klug, let me ask you something."

"Mr. Lars." Klug extended his hand eagerly.

"Do you honestly believe that a war-game constitutes a morally adequate product to deliver over to children? Can you fit this into that theory of yours about 'ameliorating the iniquities of modern —"

"Oh wait," Klug said, raising his hand. "Wait, Mr. Lars."

"I'm waiting." He waited.



"Through capture the child learn the futility of war."

Lars eyed him skeptically. Like hell he does, he thought.

"I mean it." Vigorously, Klug's head bobbed up and down in a convinced determined nod of self-assent. "Listen, Mr. Lars; *I know the story.* Temporarily, I admit it, my firm is in bankruptcy, but I still have cog inside knowledge. I understand, and I'm sympathetic. Believe me. I'm really very, totally sympathetic; I couldn't agree more with what you're doing. Honestly."

"What am I doing?"

"I don't merely mean you, Mr. Lars, although you're one of the foremost —" Klug groped urgently for the means to express his fervid ideas, now that he had ensnared an audience. To Klug, Lars observed, an audience consisted of anyone above the number of zero, and above the age of two. Cog and pursap alike; Klug would have pleaded with them all. Because what he was doing, what he wanted, was so important.

Pete Freid said, "Make a model for some *simple* toy, Klug." His tone was gentle. "Something the autodept networks can market for a couple of beans. With maybe one moving part. You'd run off a few thousand for him, wouldn't you, Jack? If he brought in a really simple piece?"

To Vincent Klug he said "Give me specs and I'll build the prototype for you and maybe get a cost analysis." To Jack he quickly explained, "I mean on my own time, of course."

Sighing, Lanferman said, "You can use our shops. But please for God's sake don't kill yourself trying to bail out this guy. Klug was in the toy business, and a goddam failure, before you were out of college. He's had a hatful of chances and muffed every one."

Klug stared at the floor drearily.

"I'm one of the foremost what?" Lars asked him.

Without raising his head Klug said, "The foremost healing and constructive forces in our sick society. And you, who are so few, must never be harmed."

After a suitable interval Lars, Pete Freid and Jack Lanferman howled with laughter.

"Okay," Klug said. With a sort of miserable, beaten-dog, philosophic slumped shrug he began gathering up his twelve tiny soldiers and his Monitor-citadel. He looked ever increasingly glum and deflated, and clearly he was going to leave—which, for him, was unusual. In fact unheard of.

Lars said, "Don't interpret our reaction as —"

"It's not misunderstood," Klug said in a faraway voice. "The last thing any of you wants to hear is that you're *not* pandering to the sick inclinations of a depraved society. It's easier for you to pretend you've been bought by a bad system."

"I never heard such strange logic in my life," Jack Lanferman said, genuinely puzzled. "Have you, Lars?"

Lars said, "I think I know what he means, only he's not able to say

it. Klug means that we're in weapons design and manufacture and so we feel we've got to be tough. It's our great and bounden duty, as the Common Prayer Book says. People who invent and implement devices that blow up other people should be cynical. Only the fact is we're loveable."

"Yes," Klug said, nodding. "That's the word. Love is the basis of your lives, all three of you. You all share it, but especially you, Lars. Compare yourselves to the dreadful police and military agencies who are the real and awful personages in power. Compare your motivation to KACH in particular, and the FBI and KVB. SeRKeb and Natsec. Their basis —"

"Upper gastro-intestinal irritation is the basis of my life," Pete said. "Especially late Saturday night."

Jack said, "I have colonic trouble."

"I have a chronic urinary infection," Lars said. "Bacteria keep forming, in particular if I drink too much orange juice."

Sadly, Klug snapped his huge sample-case shut. "Well, Mr. Lanferman," he said as he walked gradually off sagging with the weight of the loaded case as if the air were slowly leaking out of him, "I appreciate your time."

Pete said, "Remember what I said, Klug. Give me something with *just one moving part* and I'll—"

"Thank you very much," Klug said and, with a sort of vague dignity, turned the corner of the corridor. He was gone.

"Out of his mind," Jack said after a pause. "Look what Pete offered him: his time and skill. And I offered him the use of our shops. And he walked off." Jack shook his head. "I don't get it. I don't really understand what makes that guy tick. After all these years."

"Are we really loveable?" Pete asked. "I mean seriously; I want to know. Somebody say."

The final, irrefutable answer came from Jack Lanferman. "What the hell does it matter?" Jack said.

XI

And yet it did matter, Lars thought as he rode by high-velocity express back from San Francisco to his office in New York. Two principles governed history: the power-inspired and the — what Klug said — the healing principle, idly referred to as "love."

Reflexively he examined the late edition 'pape placed considerately before him by the hostess. It had one good big headline:

> New Sat Not Peep-East, Says SeRKeb Speculation Planet-Wide as to Origin UN-W NATSEC Asked to Investigate.

They who had asked, Lars discovered, were a mysterious, dim organization called the "United States Senate." Spokesman: a transparent shade named President Nathan Schwarzkopf. Like the League of Nations, such bodies perpetuated themselves, even though they had ceased to be even a chowder and marching society.

And in the USSR, an equally insubstantial entity called the Supreme

Soviet had by now yelped nervously for someone to take an interest in the unaccounted-for new satellite, one among over seven hundred, but still a peculiar one.

"May I have a phone?" Lars asked the ship's hostess.

A vidphone was brought to his seat, plugged in. Presently he was talking to the screening sharpy at the switchboard at Festung Washington, D.C.

"Let me have General Nitz." He gave his cog-code, all twenty portions of it, verifying it by inserting his thumb into the slot of the vidphone. The miles of strung-together gimmicks analyzed and transmitted his print and, at the switchboard in the subsurface *Kremlin*, the autonomic circuit switched him obediently to the human functionary who stood first in the long progression which acted as a shield between General Nitz and — well, reality.

The express ship had begun its gliding, slow descent at Wayne Morse Field in New York by the time Lars got through to General Nitz.

The carrot-shaped face materialized, wide at the top, tapering to a near-point, with horizontal, slubby, deeply countersunk eyes and gray hair that looked — and might well be—gummed in place, being artificial. And then, hooking in a stricture at the trachea, that wonderful insignia-impregnated hard-as-black-iron hoop collar. The medals themselves, awesome to behold, were not immediately visible. They lay below the scanner of the vid-camera.

"General," Lars said, "I assume the Board is in session. Shall I come directly there?"

Sardonically—it was his natural mode of address—General Nitz purred, "Why, Mr. Lars? Tell me why. Had you intended to reach them by floating to the ceiling of the sec-con chamber or having the conference table-rap spirit messages?"

"'Them,'" Lars said, disconcerted. "Who do you mean, General?"

General Nitz rang off without answering.

The empty screen faced Lars like a vacuity echoing the tone of Nitz' voice.

Of course, Lars reflected, in a situation of this magnitude he himself did not count. General Nitz had too much else to worry about.

Shaken, Lars sat back and endured the rather rough landing of the ship, a hurried landing as if the pilot was eager to get his vessel out of the sky. Now would not be the time to 'coat to Peep-East, he thought drily. They're probably as nervewracked as UN-W Natsec, if not more so . . . if it's true that they didn't put that satellite up. And evidently we believe them.

And they, in return, believe *us*. Thank God we can communicate back and forth to that degree. Undoubtedly both blocs have checked out the small fry: France and Israel and Egypt and the Turks. It's not any of them either. So it's no one. Q.E.D.

On foot he crossed the drafty landing field and hailed an autonomic hopper car.

"Your destination, sir or madam?" the hopper car inquired as he crawled into it.

It was a good question. He did not feel like going to Mr. Lars, Incorporated. Whatever it was that was going on in the sky dwarfed his commercial activities—dwarfed even the activities of the Board, evidently. He could probably induce the hopper car to take him all the way to Festung Washington, D. C.—which probably, despite General Nitz' sarcasm, was where he belonged. He was, after all, a bona fide member of the Board and when it sat in formal session he should by rights be present. But—

I'm not needed, he realized. It was as simple as that.

"Do you know a good bar?" he asked the hopper car.

"Yes, sir or madam," the autonomic circuit of the hopper car answered. "But it is only eleven in the morning. Only a drunk drinks at eleven in the morning."

"But I'm scared," Lars said.

"Why, sir or madam?"

Lars said, "Because *they're* scared." My client, he thought. Or employer or whatever the Board is. Their anxiety has gotten down, all the way along the line, until it's reached to me. In that case I wonder how the pursaps feel, he wondered.

Is ignorance any help in this situation.

"Give me a vidphone," he instructed the car.

A vidphone slid creakily out, to repose leadenly in his lap, and he dialed Maren, at the Paris branch.

"You heard?" he said, when her face at last appeared before him in gray miniature. It was not even a color vidphone — the circuit was that archaic.

Maren said, "I'm glad you called! All kinds of stuff is showing up at the, you know, Greyhound bus station locker at Topeka, out of Geldthaler Gemeinschaft. From *them*. It's incredible."

"This is not a mistake?" Lars broke in. "They did not put up that new sat?"

"They swear. They affirm. They beg us to believe. No. In the name of God. Mother. The soil of Russia. You name it. The insane thing is that they, and I'm talking about the most responsible officials, the entire twenty-five men and women on SeRKeb, they're actually groveling. No dignity, no reserve. Maybe they have unbelievably guilty consciences; I don't know." She looked weary; her eyes had lost their glitter.

"No," he said. "It's the Slavic temperament. It's a manner of address, like their invective. What specifically do they propose? Or has that gone directly to the Board and not through us?"

"Straight to Festung. All the lines are open, lines that are so gucked up with rust that it's impossible they'd carry a signal, and yet they are. They're now in use — maybe because everybody at the other end is yelling so loud. Lars, honest to God, one of them actually *cried*."

Lars said, "Under the circumstances it's easy to understand why Nitz hung up on me."

"You talked to him? You actually

got through? Listen." Her voice was controlled by her intensity. "An attempt has already been made to deposit weapons on the alien satellite."

"Alien," he echoed, dazed.

"And the robot weapons teams vanished. They were protected right up to their scalps, but they're just not there any more."

"Probably returned to hydrogen atoms," Lars said.

"It was our coup," Maren said. "Lars?"

"Yes."

"That Soviet official who blubbered. It was a Red Army man."

"The thing that gets me," Lars said, "is that all at once I'm on the outside, like Vincent Klug. It's a really terrible feeling."

"You want to do something. And you can't even blubber."

He nodded.

"Lars," Maren said, "do you understand? Everyone's on the outside; the Board, the SeRKeb — *they're* on the outside: there *is* no inside. Not here, anyhow. That's why I'm already hearing the word 'alien.' It's the worst word I ever heard! We've got three planets and seven moons that we can think of as 'us' and now all of a sudden —" She clamped her jaws shut morosely.

"May I tell you something?"

"Yes." Maren nodded.

He said huskily, "My first impulse. Was. To jump."

"You're airborne? In a hopper?"

He nodded, unable to speak.

"Okay. Fly here to Paris. So it costs. Pay! Just get here and then you and I together —"

Lars said, "I'd never make it." I'd jump somewhere along the way, he realized. And, he saw, she realized it, too.

Levelly, with that great female earth-mother coolness of conduct, that supernatural balance that a woman could draw on when she had to, Maren said, "Now look, Lars. Listen. You're listening?"

"Yep."

"Land."

"Okay."

"Who's your doctor? Outside of Todt?"

"Got no doctor outside of Todt."

"Lawyer?"

"Bill Sawyer. You know him. That guy with a head like a hardboiled egg. Only the color of lead."

Maren said, "Fine. You land at his office. Have him draw up what's called a writ of mandamus."

"I don't get it." He felt like a small boy with her again, obedient but confused. Faced by facts beyond his little ability.

"The writ of mandamus is to be directed at the Board," Maren said. "It shall require them to permit you to sit with them in session. That is your goddam legal right, Lars. I mean it. You have a legal, God-given right to walk in there to that conference room down in the *kremlin* and take your seat and participate in everything that's decided."

"But," he said hoarsely, "I've got nothing to offer them; I have nothing. Nothing!" He appealed to her, gesturing.

"You're still entitled to be present," Maren said. "I'm not worried about that dung-ball in the sky; I'm

worried about *you.*" And, to his astonishment, she began to cry.

XII

Three hours later — it had taken his attorney that long to get a judge of the Superior Court to sign the writ — he boarded a pneumatic-tube null-lapse train and shot from New York down the coast to Festung Washington, D. C. The trip took eighty seconds, including braking-time.

The next he knew he was in downtown Pennsylvania Avenue surface traffic, moving at an abalone's pace toward the dinky, transcendentally modest above-surface edifice which acted as an entrance to the authentic subsurface *kremlin* of Festung Washington, D. C.

At five-thirty p.m. he stood with Dr. Todt before a neat young Air Arm officer, who held a laser rifle, and silently presented his writ.

It took a little time. The writ had to be read, studied, certified, initialed by a sequence of office-holders left over from Harding's administration. But at last he found himself with Dr. Todt descending by silent, hydraulic elevator to the subsurface, the *very* subsurface, levels below.

With them in the elevator was a captain from the Army, who looked wan and tense. "How'd you make it in here?" the captain asked him; evidently he was a dispatch-runner or some such fool thing. "How'd you get by all that security fnug?"

Lars said, "I lied."

There was no more conversation.

The elevator doors opened; the three of them exited. Lars — with Dr. Todt, who had been silent throughout the entire trip and ordeal of presenting the writ — walked and walked until they reached the last and most elaborate security barrier which sealed off the UN-W Natsec Board, in session within its chambers.

The weapon which here and now pointed directly at him and Dr. Todt came, he realized with pride, from a design emanating from Mr. Lars, Incorporated. Through a meager slot in the transparent but impenetrable ceiling-to-floor bulkhead he presented all his documents. On the far side a civilian official, grizzled, bent with canny experience, with even wisdom engraved on his raptor-like features, inspected Lars' ident-papers and the writ. He pondered for an excessive time . . . but perhaps it was not excessive. Who could say, in a situation like this?

By means of a wall speaker the ancient, efficient official said, "You may go in, Mr. Powderdry. But the person with you can't."

"My doctor," Lars said.

The grizzled old official said, "I don't care if he's your mother." The bulkhead parted, leaving an opening just wide enough for Lars to squeeze through; at once an alarm bell clanged. "You're armed," the old official said philosophically and held out his hand. "Let me have it."

From his pockets Lars brought every object out for inspection. "No arms," he said. "Keys, ballpoint pen, coins. See?"

"Leave everything there." The old

official pointed. Lars saw a window open in the wall. Through it a hard-eyed female clerk was extending a small wire basket.

Into the basket he dumped the entire contents of his pockets and then, upon instruction, his belt with its metal buckle, and last of all, dreamlike, he thought, his shoes. In his stocking feet he padded on to the big chamber room and, without Dr. Todt, opened the door and entered.

At the table General Nitz's chief aide, Mike Dowbrowsky, also a general, but three-star, glanced up at him. Expressionlessly he nodded in greeting and pointed — peremptorily — at a seat vacant beside him. Lars padded over and noiselessly accepted the seat. The discussion continued with no pause, no acknowledgement of his entrance.

An akprop man — Gene Something — had the floor. He was on his stocking feet, gesticulating and talking in a high-pitched squeak. Lars put on an expression of solemn attention, but in reality he simply felt tired. He was, within himself, resting. He had gotten in. What happened now appeared to him an anticlimax.

"Here is Mr. Lars," General Nitz interrupted Gene Something, all at once, startling Lars. He sat up at once, keeping himself from visibly jerking.

"I got here as quickly as I could," he said stupidly.

General Nitz said, "Mr. Lars, we told the Russians that we knew they were lying. That they put BX-3, our code for the new sat, up there. That they had violated section ten of the Plowshare Protocols of 2002. That within one hour, if they did not acknowledge having launched it into its orbit, we intended to release a g-to-a mis and knock it down."

There was silence. General Nitz seemed to be waiting for Lars to say something. So Lars said, "And what did the Soviet Government reply?"

"They replied," General Mike Dowbrowsky said, "that they would be happy to turn over their own tracking-stations' data on the sat, so that our missile could get an exact fit on it. And they have done so. In fact they supplied additional material, spontaneously, as to a warping field which their instruments had detected and ours had not, a distortion surrounding BX-3, kept there evidently for the purpose of misleading a thermotropic missile."

"I thought you sent up a team of robot weapon percept-extensors," Lars said.

After a pause General Nitz said, "If you live to be a hundred, Lars, you will say, to everyone you ever meet, including me, that there was no team of robot percept-extensors sent up. And, that since this is the case, the fabrication that this 'team' was vaporized is the invention of rancid homeopape reporters. Or if that doesn't do it, the deliberate, sensation-mongering invention of that TV personality — what's his name?"

"Lucky Bagman," said Molly Neumann, one of the concomodies.

"That a creature like Bagman would naturally dream it up to keep

his audience deluded into believing he has a conduit to Festung W, here." He added, "Which he doesn't. Whether they like it or not."

After a pause Lars said, "What now, general?"

"'What now?'" General Nitz clapped his hands together before him atop the pile of memoranda, micro-docs, reports, abstracts ribbon-style that covered his share of the great table. "Well, Lars —"

He glanced up, the weary carrot-like face corrupted with utterly unforeseen, unimaginable, feckless amusement.

"As strange as it may sound, Lars, somebody in this room, somebody a bona fide participant at this meeting, actually suggested — you'll laugh — suggested we try to get you to go into one of your song-and-dance acts, you know, with the banjo and blackface, your —" the carrot-like features writhed — "trances. Can you obtain a weapon from hyper-dimensional space, Lars? Honestly, now. Can you get us something to take out BX-3? Now, Lars, please don't pull my leg. Just quietly say no and we won't vote you out of here; we'll just quietly go on and try to think of something else."

Lars said, "No, I can't."

For a moment General Nitz' eyes flickered; it was, possibly but not very probably, compassion.

Whatever it was, it lasted only an instant. Then the sardonic glaze reinstated itself. "Anyhow you're honest, which is what I asked for. Ask for a *no* answer, get a *no* answer." He laughed barkingly.

"He could try," a woman named Min Dosker said in an oddly high, lady-like voice.

"Yes," Lars agreed, taking the bit before General Nitz could seize it and run with it. "Let me clarify. I —"

"Don't clarify," General Nitz said slowly. "Please, as a favor to me personally. Mrs. Dosker, Lars, is from SeRKeb. I failed to tell you, but —" He shrugged. "So, in view of that fact, don't treat us to an interminable recitation of how you can operate and what you can and can't do. We're not being *entirely* candid because of Mrs. Dosker's presence here." To the SeRKeb rep, General Nitz said, "You understand, don't you, Min?"

"I still think," Mrs. Dosker said, "that your weapons medium could try." She rattled her micro-docs irritably.

"What about yours?" General Dowbrowsky demanded. "The Topchev girl?"

"I am informed," Mrs. Dosker said, "that she is —" She hesitated; obviously, she, too, was constrained to be to some extent reticent.

"Dead," General Nitz grated.

"Oh no!" Mrs. Dosker said, and looked horrified, like a Baptist Sunday school teacher shocked by an improper word.

"The strain probably killed her," Nitz said lazily.

"No. Miss Topchev is — in shock. She fully understands the situation, however. She is under sedation at the Pavlov Institute at New Moscow, and for the time being she can't work. But she's not *dead*."

"When?" one of the concomodies, a male nullity, asked her. "Will she be out of shock soon? Can you predict?"

"Within hours, we hope," Mrs. Dosker said emphatically.

"All right," General Nitz said, in a suddenly brisk voice; he rubbed his hands together, grimaced, showing his yellow, irregular, natural teeth. Speaking to Lars he said, "Powderdry, Mr. Lars, Lars, whatever you are — I'm glad you came here. I truly am. I knew you would. People like you can't stand being hung-up on."

"What kind of person —" Lars began, but General Bronstein, seated on the far side of General Dowbrowsky, shot him a look that made him cease — and God forbid, flush.

General Nitz said, "When were you last at Fairfax, Iceland?"

"Six years ago," Lars said.

"Before that?"

"Never."

"You want to go there?"

"I'd go anywhere. I'd go to God. Yes, I'll be glad to go."

"Fine." General Nitz nodded. "She ought to be out of shock by, say, midnight Washington time. Right, Mrs. Dosker?"

"I'm positive," the SeRKeb rep said, her head wobbling up and down like a vast, colorless pumpkin on its thick stalk.

"Ever tried working with another weapons medium?" an akprop — it would be an akprop — man asked Lars.

"No." Happily, he was able to keep his voice steady. "But I'll be pleased to pool my ability and years of experience with Miss Topchev's. As a matter of fact —" He hesitated until he could find a political way of finishing his utterance. "I've speculated for some time that such a merger might be highly profitable for both blocs."

General Nitz said, deliberately offhandedly, "We have this psychiatrist at Wallingford Clinic. There are currently three new, proposed weapons media — is that the proper plural? No — who are relatively untested but whom we *could* draw on." To Lars he said with abrupt bluntness, "You wouldn't like that, Mr. Lars; you wouldn't want that at all. So we'll spare you that. For the time being."

With his right hand General Nitz made a tic-like gesture. At the far end of the chamber, a youthful U.S. commissioned officer bent and clicked on a vidset. Speaking into an in-grafted throat microphone, the officer conferred with persons not present in the room; then, straightening, he pointed to the vidset, indicating that now it — whatever *it* was — could be considered ready.

On the vidset formed a face, a mystifying source of human essence, wavering slightly in indication that the signal was being relayed from a quite distant spot via a satellite.

Pointing at Lars, General Nitz said, "Can our boy put his head together with your girl?"

On the vidscreen the far-distant eyes of the wavering face scrutinized Lars, while at his microphone the young officer translated.

"No," the face on the screen said.

"Why not, Marshal?" Nitz said.

It was the face of Peep-East's highest dignitary and holder of power, the Chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party as well as Secretary of the SeRKeb The man on the screen, deciding against the fusion, was the Soviet Marshal of the Red Army, Maxim Paponovich. And that man, over ruling every other living person in the world on this matter, said, "We must keep her from the publicity. She is poorly. You know; sick? I regret. It is a shame." And, cat-like, Paponovich, with smoldering eyes, surveyed Lars for his reaction as if reading him out of a well-broken, long known code.

Rising respectfully to his feet, Lars said, "Marshal Paponovich, you're making a dreadful error. Miss Topchev and I can be looked to for redress. Is the Soviet Union opposed to the search for remedy in this bad situation?"

The face, tangibly hating him, continued to confront him from the screen.

"If I'm not permitted to cooperate with Miss Topchev," Lars said, "I will shore up the security of Wesbloc and call it quits. I'm asking you now to change your mind, for the protection of the billions of people of Peep-East. And I'm prepared to make public the nature of our attempt to compile our separate talents, despite what this formal Board may instruct. I have direct access to info-media such as the Lucky Bagman interviewers. And your refusal—"

"Yes," Marshal Paponovich said. "Miss Topchev will be at Fairfax, Iceland, within the next twenty-four hours." And the look on his face said: You made us do only what we *intended* to do. And you have taken all of the responsibility so that if it fails it is on you—So we have won. Thank you.

"Thank *you*, Marshal," Lars said, and reseated himself. He did not give a damn whether or not he had been skillfully manipulated. What mattered was that within the next twenty-four hours he would meet Lilo Topchev at last.

XIII

Because of Miss Topchev's delicate psychological fugue, it was bootless for him to journey to Iceland immediately—so he had time to pursue the project suggested by Maren.

In person, rather than by vidphone, he approached the Soviet Embassy in New York City, entered the rented-at-vast-price modern building asked the girl at the first desk he saw for Mr. Aksel Kaminsky

The embassy appeared in a state of frenzy. Confusion dominated, as if the personnel were pulling up stakes or burning files or, at the very least, shifting positions along the tea-table Alice-wise. Someone was getting a clean cup, Lars decided as he watched the USSR officials, big and small, hurry by, and someone else was getting a dirty cup. The brass, no doubt obtained the former. It was the pursap majority who would find themselves reseated in less satisfactory circumstances.

"What's up?" he asked a pimple-faced, awkward young staff-member, who sat rapidly inspecting what appeared to be KACH pics of a non-classified nature.

In idiomatic English the young man piped, "An agreement has been made with UN-W Natsec to use these ground-floor offices as a place of exchange for information." He added in explanation, glad to pause in a job of no creative value, "Of course the *real* meeting-ground is in Iceland, not here; this is for routine material." His marred face showed the distaste he felt for his abrupt new spate of tasks. Not the alien satellite; that was not what bothered him, this petty clerk in the universe of officialdom. It was the monotonous labors imposed on him by the situation—a situation, Lars reflected, that conceivably might not leave this youth very many more years to suffer through his unrewarding tasks.

The two blocs had mounds of scientific, technical, cultural and political articles passed back and forth like so many Old Maid cards, common property. East and West agreed that it was scarcely worth paying a professional espionage outfit such as KACH or even their own national secret police establishments to sneak out copies of abstracts dealing with soybean curd production in the Tundra-covered regions of the north-eastern USSR. The quantity of such non-classified papers within that rubric amounted, daily, to the gool that threatened to burst the sea wall of bureaucracy itself.

"Mr. Lars!"

Lars rose. "Mr. Kaminsky. How are you?"

"Terrible," Kaminsky said. He looked worn, hectic, over-worked, like a retired, once-adequate garage mechanic. "That thing up there. Who are they? You asked yourself that, Mr. Lars?"

"Yes, Mr. Kaminsky," he said patiently. "I've asked myself that."

"Tea?"

"No, thank you."

"Do you know," Kaminsky said, "what your news-medium TV just now said? I caught it in my office; it made that ting-noise it does to attract attention and then shut on." Gray-faced he stumbled on, "Forgive me, Mr. Lars, for bearing grim news, like the Spartan soldier back from the Battle of Thermopylae. But—now second alien satellite in orbit."

Lars could think of nothing to say.

"Sit in my office," Kaminsky said, leading him through the clutter to a small side room. Kaminsky shut the door and turned to face him. He spoke more slowly, with less of the overtone of an old man's hysteria. "Tea?"

"No, thank you."

"While you waited to see me," Kaminsky said, "they put that second one up. So we know they can put up all they want. Hundreds, if they feel inclined. Our sky. Think. Operating not out around Jupiter or Saturn, at the perimeter where we only keep picket ships and sats but here. They bypassed the easy." He added, "Maybe for them this is easy, too. These two sats were un-

doubtedly deposited from ships. Dropped out like eggs, not launched and then halted at orbital plane. Nobody saw any ships. No monitors caught anything. Anti-matter?" He laughed. "Anti-matter alien inter-system vessels. And always we thought—"

"We thought," Lars said, "that sub-epidermal fungiforms from Titan that knew how to simulate everyday household objects shapewise were our great unTerran adversary. Something that looked like a vase and then when you had your back turned seeped into your dermal wall and migrated to the omentum where it resided until surgically cut out."

"Yes," Kaminsky agreed. "I hated those; I saw one once, not in object-simulation but in cyst form, like you depict. Ready for cobalt-bombardment." He looked physically very sick. "But Mr. Lars, doesn't that tell us? We know the possibilities. I mean rather we know we *don't* know."

"No percept-extensors have picked up any clues as to the morphology of these—" the only word he had heard so far was *alien*—"these adversaries," he finished.

Kaminsky said, "Please, Mr. Lars. You and I can take time to talk about easy things. What did you want, sir? Not to hear the bad news. Something else. Anything." He poured himself cold, dark tea.

"I'm to meet with Lilo Topchev in Fairfax as soon as she's psychologically fit. That time back there in the coffee shop you asked me about a component on item—"

"No deal is needed. I forget weapons item. We are not plowsharing now, Mr. Lars. We will never plowshare again."

Lars grunted like an animal.

"Yes," Kaminsky said. "Never again. You and I—not individual you and I but ethnological totalities, East, West—rose from savagery and waste; we were smart; we became buddy-buddies, made deals, you know, hand-clasp on it, our words in the Protocols of '02. We went back to being, what does the Jewish Christian Bible say? Without leaves."

"Naked," Lars said.

"And now plain jane in the streets," Kaminsky said, "or what do you call him? Poor sap. Poor sap reads in homeopape about two new not-us kind of satellite and he maybe worries a little; says, Wonder which modern new weapon work the best on this apparition. This weapon? No? Then that. Or that." Kaminsky gestured at nonexistent weapons that might have thronged his small office; bitterness made his voice into a wail. "On Thursday, first They-satellite. Friday, second They-satellite. So on Saturday—"

"On Saturday," Lars said, "we use weapons catalog item 241 and the war is over."

"241." Kaminsky chuckled. "A bell rings, thank you. For use exclusively against exoskeleton life forms, dissolves chitinous substances and makes—poached egg, right? Yes, poor sap would enjoy that. I recall KACH-people's pirated video tape of 241 in dramatic action. Good thing you could locate chitinous life form on Callisto to humble; other-

wise graphic demonstration would not have been effective. Even I was moved. Down there below California, in Lanferman's catacombs. Must be thrilling to observe creative processes in different stages. Right?"

"Right," Lars said stolidly.

From his desk Kaminsky selected a Xeroxed document, one-page only, for this day and age it was an anomaly. "This is poop-sheet, for we to give here at Soviet Embassy to news media of Wes-bloc. *Not* official, you understand. A 'leak.' Homeopape and TV interviewers 'overhear' discussion and get general notion of what Peep-East plans, and so forth." He tossed the document to Lars.

Picking it up Lars saw at a glance the strategy of SeRKeb.

Amazing, Lars thought as he read the one-page Xeroxed copy of the Peep-East document. They didn't mind behaving idiotically; they just wanted to protect themselves from having this idiocy noised about. And right now. Not after the aliens are routed, he realized, or we succumb to them; whatever ultimately happens. Paponovich, Nitz and the nameless second-string are scribbling busily not merely to protect four billion humans from a superlative menace that hangs — literally —over our heads but to get their own damn bastard rascally selves off the hook.

The vanity of man. Even in the highest places.

To Kaminsky he said, "I glean from this document a new theory about God and the Creation."

Nodding, Kaminsky politely, waxenly, waited to hear.

Lars said, "I all of a sudden understand the whole story of the Fall of Man. Why things went wrong. It's one great White Paper."

"You are wise, Mr. Lars," Kaminsky said, with weary appreciation. "I agree; we know, don't we? The Creator bungled and rather than correcting bungle He concocted cover-story which proved someone else responsible. A mythical no-goodnik who *wanted* it this way."

"So a minute sub-contractor in the Caucasus," Lars said, "is going to lose his government contract and be sued. The director of this auto-fact — and I can't pronounce his name or the fac's — is going to discover something he didn't know."

"He knows now," Kaminsky said. "Now tell me. Why are you here at the embassy?"

"I wanted to get a good pic, three-D and in color, possibly even animated, if you have it, of Miss Topchev."

"Of course. But you can't wait a day?"

"I want to be prepared in advance."

"Why?" Kaminsky's eyes were sharp with old acuity.

Lars said, "You never heard of bridal portraits."

"Ah. Plot of many plays, operas, heroic legend; done to death, ought to be buried forever. You're serious, Mr. Lars? Then you've got troubles. What is called here in your Wes-bloc *problems*."

"I know."

"Miss Topchev is wrinkled, dried-

out, leather-like handbag. Should be in old folks' home, except for the medium talent."

The blow almost unhinged him; he felt himself calcify.

"You croaked just now," Kaminsky said. "Sorry, Mr. Lars. Psychological experiment Pavlov style. I regret it and apologize. Consider. You are going to Fairfax to save four billion. Not to find mistress to replace Maren Faine, your *Liebesnacht* compatriot of the moment. As you found her to replace—what was her name? Betty? The one before, the one KACH says had lovely legs."

"Christ," Lars said. "Always that KACH. Living things turned into data sold by the inch."

"To any buyer, too," Kaminsky reminded him. "To your enemy, your friend, wife, employer, or worse: employees. The agency on which blackmail grows like mold. But as you discovered in that blurred pic of Miss Topchev, something always is held back. To keep you dangling. To make sure you still need more, yet. Look, Mr. Lars; I have a family, wife and three children in Soviet Union. Two They-satellites in our sky, they can kill so as to get at me. They can get at you, maybe if your mistress in Paris died in some awful way, contaminated or infused or—"

"Okay."

"I just want to petition you; that's all. You will be in Fairfax to see that nothing happens like that to us. I pray to God you and Lilo Topchev imagine up some masterpiece that will be a shield; we are children, playing under the protection of a father's armor. See? If you forget that—"

Kaminsky produced a key, unlocked an old-fashioned drawer of his desk. "I own this. Dated." It was an explosion-pellet automatic that he held up, its muzzle pointed carefully away from Lars. "As an official in an organization that can never back down but would have to be burned out, destroyed, for it to cease, I can offer you an advanced piece of news. Before you leave for Fairfax you will be told there is no returning. Somewhere we made a mistake. A picket ship or immense-radius-orbit monitoring satellite, a solar-sat, failed. And because of it maybe a relay system or a percept-extensor did nothing." He shrugged, put the automatic hand-weapon away in the desk drawer, scrupulously relocking it with his key. "I am ranting."

Lars said, "You should see a psychiatrist while you're still stationed in Wes-bloc." Turning, he left Kaminsky's office. He pushed the door open and emerged in the buzzing, activity-drenched main chambers.

Following after him, Kaminsky halted at the office door and said, "I would do it myself."

"Do what?" He turned, briefly.

"With what I showed you, locked in the desk."

"Oh." Lars nodded. "Okay. I've got that noted."

Thereupon he numbly made his way among the scurrying minor bureaucrats of the embassy, through

the front door, and out onto the sidewalk.

They're out of their minds, he said to himself. They still believe that in a really tight situation, when it really matters, things can be solved that way. Their evolution of the last fifty years has been all on the surface. Underneath they remain the same.

So not only do we face the presence of two alien satellites orbiting our world, Lars realized, but we have to endure, under this not-prepared-for stress, a return to the unsheathed sword of the past. So all the covenants and pacts and treaties, the locker at the Greyhound bus station at Topeka, Kansas, Geldthaler Gemeinschaft in Berlin, Fairfax itself—it's a delusion. And we both, East and West, shared it together. It's as much our fault as theirs, the willingness to believe and take the soft road out. Look at me now, he thought. In this crisis I've headed straight for the Soviet Embassy.

And look what it got me. An automatic old-time hand-weapon pointed, in the service of the technical aspects of bodily safety, at the roof instead of my abdominal cavity.

But that man was right. Kaminsky was telling me the truth, not blustering or engaging in hysteria. If Lilo and I fail, we will be destroyed. The blocs will then turn elsewhere for assistance. T heavy burden will fall on Jack Lanferman and his engineers, most especially Pete Freid—and God help them if they can't do it either, because if so then they will follow Lilo and me into the grave.

Grave, he thought, you were once asked where your victory is. I can point it out for you. It is here. Me.

As he hailed a passing hopper car he realized suddenly. And I didn't even get what I went into that building for; I couldn't wangle a clear pic of Lilo.

In that, too, Kaminsky had been correct. Lars Powderdry would have to wait until the meeting at Fairfax. He would *not* go in prepared.

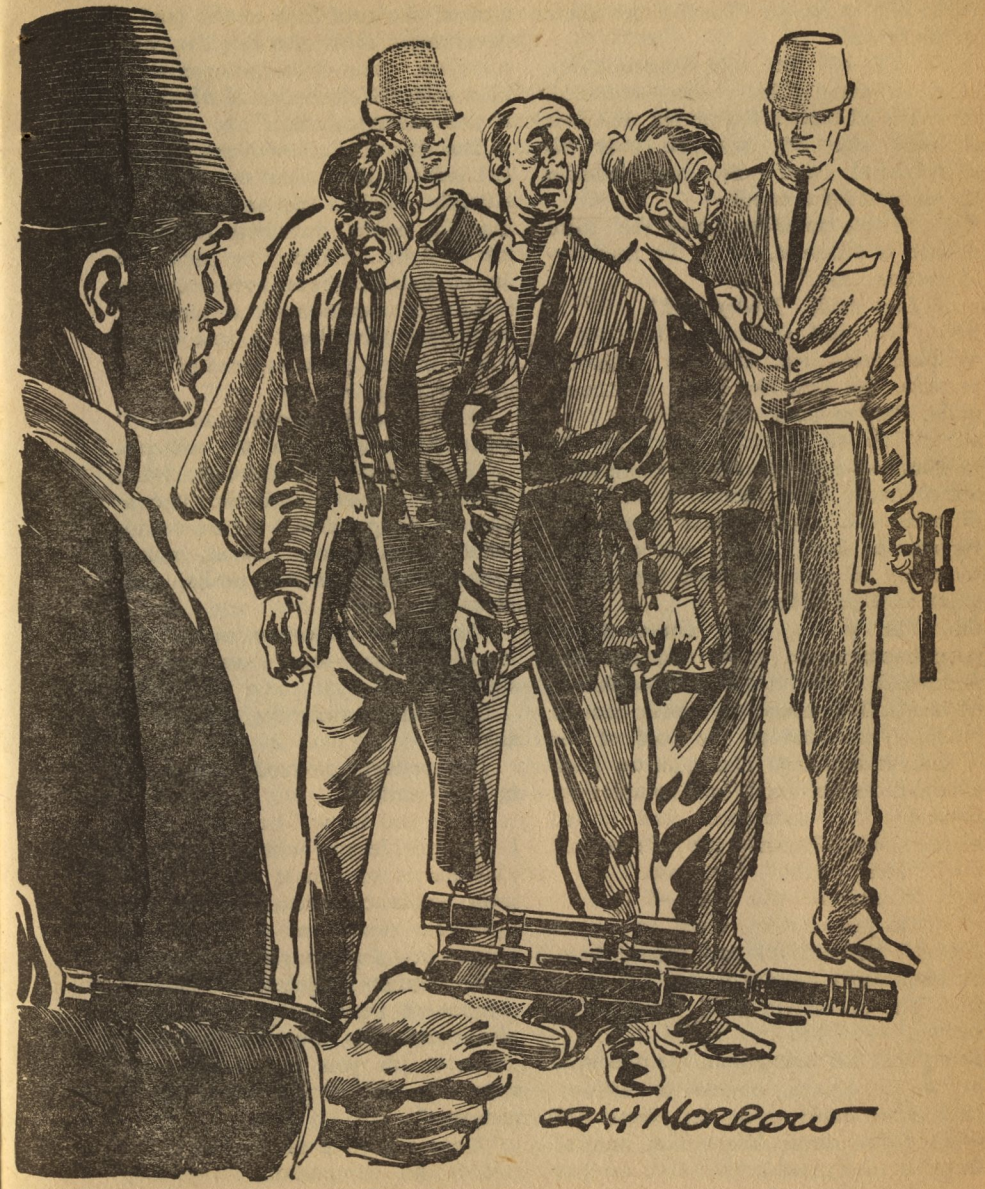
XIV

Late that night, as he lay sleeping in his New York conapt, *they* came.

"She's all right now, Mr. Lars. So do you want to throw your clothes on? We'll pack the rest for you and send it later. We'll go directly up to the roof. Our ship is there." The leader of the FBI men or CIA men or God knew what kind of men, anyhow professionals and accustomed to being awake and at their duties at this time of night, began, to Lars' incredulity, to rummage in his dresser drawers and closets, gathering his clothes in an efficient, silent, machine-at-work encirclement, they were all around him, doing what they had been sent for. He stood in sleepy, animal-irritable, benumbed bewilderment.

But out of this, full wakefulness at last came, and he padded to the bathroom.

As he washed his face, one of the police in the other room said


GRAY MORROW

to him casually, "They've got three up, now."

"Three," he said, moronically, confronting his sleep-squeezed, wrinkled face in the mirror. His hair hung like dry seaweed over his forehead and he automatically reached for a comb.

"Three satellites. And this third one is different, or so the tracking-stations say."

Lars said, "Hedgehog?"

"No, just different. It's not a monitoring rig. It's not gathering info. The first two were; now maybe they've done their job."

"They've proved," Lars said, "by being able to remain up there, that we can't bring them down." No mass of sophisticated equipment jammed into the two sats was necessary to establish *that;* they might as well be hollow.

The police wore commonplace gray-eminence style cloaks and looked, with their close-shaven heads, like excessively ascetic monks. They ascended to the roof of the conapt building. The man on Lars' right, rather ruddy of complexion, said, "We understand you visited the Soviet Embassy this afternoon."

"That's right," Lars said.

"That writ you have—"

"It just forbids them to accost me," he said. "I can accost them. They don't have a writ."

The policeman said, "Any luck?"

That did stump him. He pondered in silence, unable to answer. Did the query mean that these FBI or CIA people knew why he had gone to Kaminsky? At last, as they crossed the roof-field to the parked government ship, of a familiar, pursuit-class, great-cruising-range style, Lars said, "Well, he made *his* point. If you call that 'luck.'"

The ship rose. New York rapidly fell behind; they were out over the Atlantic. Lights, the habitations of man far below, dwindled and were lost to sight. Lars, peering back, felt an anxious, perhaps even neurotic regret; he experienced a sense of acute, pervasive loss. A loss which could never be compensated for, throughout all eternity.

"How are you going to act?" asked the policeman at the controls.

"I will give the absolute, total, entire, exhaustive, holistic, unconditional impression," Lars said, "that I am being candid, naive, open, honest, truthful, prolix, verbose—"

Sharply the policeman said, "You stupid bastard—our lives are at stake!"

Lars said somberly, "You're a cog."

The policeman—both policemen, in fact—nodded.

"Then you know," Lars said, "that I can provide you with a gadget, a plowshare component of a sixty-stage guidance-system, which will light your cigars and make up new Mozart string quartets as background while another gadget, a plowshared component from some *other* multiplex item, serves you your food, even chews it for you and if necessary spits any and all seeds out, into a gadget—"

"I can see," one of the two police said to his companion, "why they

hate these weapons fashion designers so goddam much. They're fairies."

"No," Lars said. "You're wrong; that's not what ails me. You want to know what ails me? How long before we reach Fairfax?"

"Not long," both policemen said simultaneously.

Lars said, "I'll do my best. What ails me is this. I'm a failure at my work. And that hurts a man; that makes him fearful. But I'm paid, or have been up to now, to be a failure. That's what was wanted."

"You think, Powderdry," the policeman seated beside him said, "that you and this Lilo Topchev can do it? Before they—" he pointed upward, an almost pious gesture, like that of some ancient tiller of the soil, a job who had been burned and then burned again—"drop whatever it is they're setting up their sat-network to make the calculations for? So when they do drop it, it'll hit exactly where they want it? Like for instance, and this is my theory, turning the Pacific to steam and boiling us like a lot of Maine lobsters."

Lars was silent.

"He's not going to say," the policeman at the controls said in a curiously mixed tone. There was anger in his voice but also grief. It was a small-boy sound, and Lars sympathized with it. He must have sounded like this himself, at times.

Lars said, "At the Soviet Embassy they told me, and they meant it, that if Lilo and I came up with nothing or with only the pseudo-weps we've all made our livelihoods off of for decades now, they would kill me and her. And they will—if you don't first."

At the controls the policeman said, calmly, "We will first. Because we'll be closer. But not right away; there'll be a suitable interval."

"Were you ordered to?" Lars asked, with curiosity. "Or is this your own idea?"

No answer.

"You can't both kill me," Lars said, a feeble attempt to be philosophical and flippant. It failed to be the former, and the latter was not appreciated. "Maybe you can," he said, then. "St. Paul says a man can be born again. He can die and return to life. So if a man can be born twice why can't he be assassinated twice?"

"In your case," the policeman beside him said, "it wouldn't be assassination."

He did not elect to specify what it in fact would be. Perhaps, Lars thought, it was unspeakable. He felt the burden of their mingled hatred and fear and yet—their trust. They still had hope, as Kaminsky had. They had paid him for years not to produce a genuinely lethal device and now, with absolute naivete, they clung to his skirts, begging, as Kaminsky had begged—and yet with the ugly undercurrent of threat, of murder in case he failed.

He began to understand much that he had never realized about cog society.

Being on the inside, knowing the real scoop, had not eased their lives. Like him, they still suffered.

They were not puffed-up, prideful, shot full, as someone had said to him recently, with *hubris*. Knowing what was really going on made them uneasy—for the same reason that *not* knowing made the multitude, the pursaps, able to sleep in peace. Too much of a burden, that of maturity, of responsibility, lay on the cogs . . . even on these nonentities, these two cops, plus their cohorts back at his conapt who were undoubtedly right now stuffing all his cloaks, shirts, shoes and ties and underwear into boxes and suitcases.

And the essence of the burden was this:

They knew, as Lars himself knew, that their destiny lay in the hands of halfwits. It was as simple as that. Halfwits in both East and West. halfwits like Marshal Paponovich and General Nitz . . . halfwits, he realized, and felt his ears sear and flame red, *like himself*. It was the sheer mortality of the leadership that frightened the ruling circles. The last "superman," the final Man of Iron, had been Josef Stalin. Since then—puny mortals, job-holders who made deals.

And yet, the alternative was frightfully worse—and they all, including even the pursaps, knew this on some level.

They were seeing, in the form of three alien satellites in their sky, that alternative now.

At the controls the cop said, drawlingly, as if it didn't matter quite so much, "There's Iceland."

Below them the lights of Fairfax glowed.

XV

Lights blazed, creating a golden-white tunnel for him to walk along. The right-to-the-bone wind from the glaciers to the north snapped longingly at him and he walked rapidly, the two police following. They were shivering too, the three of them making for the closest building as fast as possible.

The building's door sealed itself shut after them and warmth surrounded them. They halted, panting, the cops' faces terribly red now and swollen, not so much from the sudden alterations of atmosphere but from tensions, as if they had feared being caught out there and left.

Four members of the KVD, the Soviet Secret Police, in old-fashioned pre-cloak, ultra-unfashionable wool suits and narrow, pointed oxfords and knit ties, appeared from nowhere. It was as if they had literally detached themselves, super-science-wise, from the walls of the antechamber in which Lars and the two Wes-bloc United States police stood panting.

Soundlessly, in a slow, ritualized moment of truth, the Wes-bloc and Soviet secret police exchanged identification. They must have carried, Lars decided, ten pounds of ident-material apiece. The swapping of cards and wallets and cephalic buzz-keys seemed to continue forever.

And no one said anything. No one of the six so much as looked at any of the others. All attention was fastened fixedly on the ident-elements themselves.

He walked off, found a hot-chocolate machine, put in a dime and soon had his paper cup; he stood sipping, feeling tired, conscious that his head ached and that he had not bothered to shave. He felt keenly the substandard, inappropriate and just plain rotten-looking sight that he presented. And at this time. In these circumstances.

When the Wes-bloc police, had concluded their swapping of ident-material with their Peep-East counterparts, he said caustically, "I feel like a victim of the Gestapo. Roust-ed out of bed, unshaved and with my worst clothes, having to face—"

"You won't be facing a *Reichs-gericht,*" one of the Peep-East police said, overhearing. His English was a trifle artificial in its precision, learned probably from an audio edutape. Lars thought at once of robots, androids, and machinery in general; it was not a sanguine omen. Such plateau, toneless palaver, he recalled was often associated with certain subforms of mental illness — in fact with brain-damage in general. Silently he groaned. He knew now what T.S. Eliot meant about the world ending with a whimper instead of a bang. It would end with his inaudible moan of complaint at the mechanical aspect of those who had him—and this was the true nature of his situation, whether he enjoyed facing it or not — in captivity.

Wes-bloc, for reasons which would of course not be handed down to him to fathom or appreciate, was permitting the encounter with Lilo Topchev to take place under the jurisdiction of the Soviet Union. Perhaps it showed how little hope General Nitz and those in his entourage had that anything of worth might arise out of this.

"I'm sorry," Lars said to the Soviet policeman. "I don't know any German. You'll have to explain." Or else take it up with Ol' Orville, back at the apartment. In that other, lost now, world.

The officer said, "That's right, you Amis speak no foreign languages. But you have an office in Paris. How do you manage?"

"I manage," Lars said, "by having a mistress who speaks French, as well as Italian and Russian, and is terrific in bed, all of which you can find noted in your folio on me. She heads my Paris office." He turned to the two United States police who had brought him here. "Are you leaving me?"

They answered, with absolutely no sign of guilt or concern, "Yes, Mr. Lars." A Greek chorus of abdication from human, moral responsibility. He was appalled. Suppose the Soviets decided not to return him? Where did Wes-bloc turn for its weapons designs from then on? Assuming of course that the investment of Terra's atmosphere by the alien satellites was contained . . .

But no one really believed it would be.

That was it. *That* was what had made him expendable.

"Come along, Mr. Lars." The four Soviet KVB men gathered around him and he found himself escorted up a ramp, across a wait-

ing room in which people—normal, individual, private men and women—sat waiting for transportation or for relatives. Uncanny, he thought; like a dream.

He asked, "Can I stop and buy a magazine at the newsrack?"

"Certainly." The four KVB men steered him to the vast display and watched, like sociologists, as he searched for something to read that might please him. The Bible? he thought. Or perhaps I should try the other extreme.

"How about this?" he asked the KVB men, holding up a comic book printed in cheap, lurid colors. *"The Blue Cephalopod Man from Titan."* As near as he could tell, it was the worst rubbish on sale here at this enormous display counter. With a U.S. coin he paid the automatic clerk, which thanked him in its autonomic, nasal voice.

As the five of them walked on, one of the KVB men asked him, "You normally read such fare, Mr. Lars?" His tone was polite.

Lars said, "I have a complete file back to volume one, number one."

There was no response; just a formal smile.

"It has declined, though," Lars added. "During the last year." He rolled the comic book up, thrust it into his pocket.

Later, as they buzzed above the rooftops of Fairfax in a USSR government military hopper, he unrolled the comic book and pondered it by the dim dome light above his head.

He had of course never examined such garbage before. It was interesting. The Blue Cepalopod Man, in a long and much honored tradition, burst buildings, knocked out crooks, disguised himself at both ends of each episode as Jason St. James, a colorless computer-operator. That, too, was standard, for reasons lost in the obscurity of the history of comic book art, but having somehow to do with Jason St. James' girl friend, Nina Whitecotton, who wrote a gourmet column for the Monrovia *Chronicle-Times*, a mythical homeopape cranked forth for sale throughout West Africa.

Miss Whitecotton, interestingly, was a Negro. And so were all the other humans in the comic strip, including the Blue Cephalopod Man himself when he put on mortality as Jason St. James. And the locale was, throughout each episode, "a large metropolitan area somewhere in Ghana."

The comic book was aimed at an Afro-Asia audience. By some fluke of the world-wide autonomic distributing mechanism, it had shown up here in Iceland.

In the second episode the Blue Cephalopod Man temporarily was drained of his abnormal powers by the presence of a meteor of zularium, a rare metal "from the Betelgeuse system". And the electronic device by which the Blue Cephalopod Man's sidekick, Harry North, a physics professor at Leopoldville, restored those lost powers, just in time to nab the monsters from "Proxima's fourth planet, Agakana," was a construct astonishingly like his own weapons design item 204.

Strange! Lars continued reading.

In Episode three, the terminal section of the comic book, another machine peculiarly familiar to him — he could not precisely place it, however — was brought into play by the cunning assistance of timely Harry North. The Blue Cephalopod Man triumphed again, this time over things from the sixth planet of Orionus. And a good thing, too, because these particular things were an abomination; the artist had outdone himself.

"You find that interesting?" one of the KVB men inquired.

I find, Lars thought, it interesting inasmuch as the writer and/or illustrator has made use of KACH to pirate a few of my most technologically interesting ideas. I wonder if there are grounds for a civil suit.

However, now was not the time. He put the comic book away.

The hopper landed on a roof; the engine ceased turning and the door was at once held open for him so that he could disemhopper.

"This is a motel," one of the artificially precise of speech KVB men explained to him. "Miss Topchev occupies the entire establishment. We have cleared out the other guests and posted security sentries. You will not be disturbed."

"Really? On the level?"

The KVB man reflected, turning the phrase about in his mind. "You may call for assistance at any time," he said at last. "And of course for maintenance-service such as sandwiches, coffee, liquor."

"Drugs?"

The KVB man turned his head. Like solemn owls, all four men stared at Lars.

"I'm on drugs," Lars explained. "I thought KACH had told you that. God, I take them hourly!"

"What drugs?" The inquiry was cautious, if not downright drenched with suspicion.

Lars said, "Escalatium."

That did it. Consternation. "But Mr. Lars! Escalatium is brain-toxic! You wouldn't live six months!"

"I also take Conjorizine," Lars said. "It balances the metabolic toxicity. I mix them together, grind them into a powder with a rounded teaspoon, make the mixture into a water-soluble near precipitate and take it as an injectable —"

"But, sir, you'd die! From motor-vascular convulsions. Within half an hour." The four Soviet policemen looked appalled.

"All I ever got as a side-effect," Lars said, "was post-nasal drip."

The four KVB men conferred and then one of them said to Lars, "We will have your Wes-bloc physician, Dr. Todt, flown here. He can supervise your drug-injection procedures. Ourselves, we can't take responsibility. Is this stimulant-combination essential for your trance-state to happen?"

"Yep."

Again they conferred. "Go below," they instructed him, at last. "You will join Miss Topchev — who does not to our knowledge rely on drugs. Stay with her until we can produce Dr. Todt and your two medications."

They glowered at him severly.

"You should have told us or brought the drugs and Dr. Todt with you! The Wes-bloc authorities did not inform us." Clearly, they were sincerely angry.

"Okay," Lars said, and started toward the down-ramp.

A moment later, accompanied by one of the KVB men, he stood at the door of Lilo Topchev's motel room.

"I'm scared," he said, aloud.

The KVB man knocked. "Afraid, Mr. Lars, to pit your talent against that of *our* medium's?" The mocking overtones were enormous.

Lars said, "No, not that." Afraid, he thought, that Lilo will be what Kaminsky had said, a blackened, shriveled, dried-up leather-like stick of bones and skin, like a discarded purse. Consumed, perhaps, by her vocational demands. God knows what she may have been forced to give by her "client." Because they are much harsher on this side of the world . . . as we have known all along.

In fact, he realized, that might explain why General Nitz wanted our joint efforts at weapons design to take place under the administration of Peep-East, not Wes-bloc authority. Nitz recognizes that more decisive pressures are brought to bear here. He may think that under them I will function better.

In other words, Lars thought dully, that I've been holding back all these years. But here, under KVB jurisdiction, under the eyes of the Soviet Union's highest body, the SeRKeb, it will be different.

General Nitz had more faith in Peep-East's capacities to wrest results from its employees than in his own establishment's. What a queer, bewildering, yet somehow true-ringing last little touch.

And, Lars realized, *I believe it, too.*

Because it's probably actually the case.

The door opened and there stood Lilo Topchev.

She wore a black jersey sweater, slacks and sandals, her hair tied back with a ribbon. She looked, was, no more than seventeen or eighteen. Her figure was that of an adolescent just reaching toward maturity. In one hand she held a cigar and held it wrongly, awkwardly, obviously trying to appear grown-up, to impress him and the KVB man.

Lars said huskily, "I'm Lars Powderdry."

Smiling, she held out her hand. It was small, smooth, cool, crushable; it was accepted by him gingerly, with the greatest deference. He felt as if by one unfortunate squeeze he could impair it forever. "Hi," she said.

The KVB man bumped him bodily inside the room. And the door shut after him, with the KVB man on the other side.

He was alone with Lilo Topchev. The dream had come to pass.

"How about a beer?" she said. He observed when she spoke that her teeth were exceedingly regular, tiny and even. German-woman-like. Nordic, not Slavic.

"You've got a damn good grasp of English," he said. "I wondered

how they'd solve the language-barrier." He had anticipated a deft, self-deprecating, but always present, third - person - on - hand translator. "Where'd you learn it?" he asked her.

"In school."

"You're telling the truth? You've never been to Wes-bloc?"

"I've never been out of the Soviet Union before," Lilo Topchev said. "In fact most of Peep-East, especially the Sino-dominated regions, are out of bounds to me." Walking lithely to the kitchen of the more or less cog-class luxurious motel suite to get him the can of beer, she gestured suddenly, attracting his attention. She nodded toward the far wall. And then facing him, her back to the wall, she formed with her lips — but did not say aloud — the word *bug*.

A video-audio system was busily monitoring them. Of course. How could it be otherwise? Here comes the chopper, Lars thought, remembering Orwell's great old classic, *1984*. Only in this case we know we're under scrutiny and, at least theoretically, it's by our good friends. We're *all* friends, now. Except that as Aksel Kaminsky said, and truthfully, if we do not manage to properly jump through the flaming hoop, Lilo and I, our good friends will murder us.

But who can blame them? Orwell missed that point. *They* might be right and we might be wrong.

She brought him the beer.

"Lots of luck," Lilo said, smiling.

He thought, I'm already in love with you.

Will they kill us, he thought, for that? God help them if so. Because they and their joint civilization, East and West, would not be worth preserving at that price.

"What's this about drugs?" Lilo said. "I heard you talking with the police outside. Was that true or were you just — you know — making their job difficult?"

Lars said, "It's true."

"I couldn't catch the names of the drugs. Even though I had my door open and I was listening."

"Escalatium."

"Oh, no!"

"Conjorizine. I mix them together, grind them —"

"I heard that part. You inject them as a mixture; you really do. I thought you just said that for their benefit." She regarded him with a dignified expression overlain with amusement. It was not disapproval or shock that she felt, not the moral indignation of the KVB man — who was inevitably simple-minded: that was his nature. With her it was near admiration.

Lars said, "So I can't do a thing until my physician arrives. All I can do —" he seated himself on a black, wrought-iron chair — "is drink beer and wait." And look at you.

"I have drugs."

"They said otherwise."

"What they say is as the tunnelling of one worm in one dung heap." Turning to the audio-video monitor which she had just now pointed out to him she said, "And that goes for you, Geschenko!"

"Who's that?"

"The KVB surveillance-team Red Army intelligence major who will scan the tape that's being made right now of you and me. Isn't that right, Major?" she said to the concealed monitor."

"You see," she explained to Lars calmly, "I'm a convict."

He stared at her. "You mean you committed a crime, a legal, specified crime, were tried and —"

"Tried and convicted. All as a pseudo — I don't know what to call it. A mechanism; that's it, a mechanism. By which I am legally at this moment, despite all the political, civil guarantees in the Constitution of the USSR, a person absolutely without recourse. I have no remedy whatsoever through the Soviet courts; no lawyer can get me out. I'm not like you. I *know* about you, Lars, or Mr. Lars. Or Mr. Powderdry, whatever you want to be called. I know how you're set up in Wesbloc. How I've envied over the years your position, your freedom and independence!"

He said, "You think that I could spit in their eye at any time."

"Yes. I know it. KACH told me; they got it to me, in spite of the dung-heap inhabitants like Geschenko."

Lars said, "KACH lied to you."

XVI

She blinked. The dead cigar and the can of beer trembled.

Lars said, "They have me right now as much as they've had you."

"Didn't you *volunteer* to come here to Fairfax?"

"Oh, sure!" He nodded. "In fact I personally talked Marshal Paponovich into the idea. Nobody made me come here; nobody put a pistol to my head. But somebody brought a pistol out of a desk drawer and let me view it, and let me know."

"An FBI man?" Her eyes were enormous, like those of a little child hearing the exploits of the fabulous.

"No, not an FBI man, technically. A *friend* of the FBI, in this friendly, cooperative world in which we live. It's not important; we don't have to depress ourselves into talking about this. Except that you ought to know that they could have gotten to me any time. And when it mattered they let me know it."

"So," Lilo said thoughtfully, "you haven't been that different. I heard you were a prima donna."

Lars said, "I am. I'm difficult. I'm undependable. But they can still get out of me what they want. What else matters?"

"I guess nothing else," she said, dutifully.

"What drugs do you take?"

"Formophane."

"It sounds like a new make of one-way mirror." He had never heard of it. "Or a plastic milk carton that opens itself and pours itself on your cereal without spilling a drop."

Lilo said, between gulps, awkward and adolescent, at her can of beer, "Formohane is rare. You don't have it in the West. It's made by a firm in East Germany that descends from some ancient pre-Nazi pharmaceutical cartel. In fact it's made —" She paused. Obviously she was consider-

ing whether it was wise to finish. "They make it expressly for me," she said, at last.

There, it was done; she had told him. "The Pavlov Institute at New Moscow made a six-month analysis of my brain-metabolism to see what could be done to — *improve* it. They came up with this chemical formula and it was Xeroxed and passed on to A. G. Chemie. And A. G. Chemie produces sixty half-grain tablets of Formophane for me a month."

"And it does what?"

Lilo said, carefully, "I don't know."

He felt fear. For her. For what they had done — and could do again any time they wanted. "Don't you notice any effects?" he asked. "Deeper involvement in the trance-state? Longer? Less after-effects? You must notice something. Improvement in your sketches — it must be they give it to you to improve your sketches."

Lilo said, "Or to keep me from dying."

The fear inside him became acute. "Why dying? Explain." He kept his voice low, free of affect; it appeared as casual. "Even considering the quasi-epileptoid nature of —"

"I am a very sick person," Lilo said. "Mentally. I have what they call 'depressions.' They're not depressions and *they* know it; that's why I spent — always will spend — a lot of time at the Pavlov Institute. It's hard to keep me going, Lars. That's the simple fact. It's a day by day proposition, and Formophane helps. I take it. I'm glad to get it — I don't like the 'depressions' or whatever they are. You know what they are?" She leaned toward him urgently. "Want to know?"

"Sure."

"I watched my hand once. It shriveled up and died and became a corpse hand. It rotted away to dust. And then it became all of me; I no longer lived. And then — I lived again. In another way, the life that's to follow. After I die . . . Say something." She waited.

"Well, that ought to interest the established religious institutions." It was all he could think of, for the moment.

Lilo said, "Do you think, Lars, we, the two of us, can do what they want? Can we come up with what they call a 'zap gun'? You know. A — I hate to say it — a *real* weapon?"

"Sure."

"From where?"

"From the place we — visit. As if we took psilocybin. Which is related, as you know, to the adrenal hormone epinephrine. But I always have liked to think of it as if we're taking *teo-nanacatyl.*"

"What's that?"

"An Aztec word. It means 'god's flesh'." He explained. "You know it under the name of its alkaloid. Mescaline."

"Do you and I visit the same place?"

"Probably."

"And it's where, did you say?" She cocked her head, waiting, listening, watching. "You didn't say. You don't know! I know."

"Then tell me."

Lilo said, "I will if you'll take Formophane first." Rising, she disappeared into the other room. When she returned she carried two white tablets, which she held out to him.

For reasons which he did not know — which really frankly did not interest him — he obligingly, without even verbal protest, drank down the two tablets with his beer. The tablets caught in his throat momentarily. They seemed to stick there, and then were past the point from which they could be coughed forth, expelled. The drug was now a part of him. For whatever it foreboded; for whatever claim the chemical could make on his system — he had taken it on trust. And that was that.

Trust, he realized, not in the drug but in Lilo Topchev.

Lilo said, to his jolted surprise, "Anyone who would do that, is — a person who has failed." She seemed sad and yet not disappointed. It was as if his trust had reinforced some deep, instinctual pessimism in her, Or was it something more? The Slavic fatalism?

He had to laugh; he was caricaturizing her. Whereas in fact he knew nothing about her yet, could not at this point decipher her in the least. "You're going to die," Lilo said. "I've been waiting to do this; I'm afraid of you." She smiled. "They always told me that if I ever let them down the KVB hatchet-men operating in Wes-bloc would 'nap you, bring you to Bulganingrad and use you, and I'd be discarded on what they call the 'rubbish-heap of history.' In the old-fashioned way. The way Stalin used."

He said, "I don't believe for even one second that you're telling me the truth."

"You don't think you came all the way here just to be assassinated by me."

He nodded.

After a pause Lilo sighed. "You're right."

He sagged with relief; his breathing resumed.

"I *am* afraid of you," she continued. "They did threaten me, held you over my head perpetually I got so I hated just *thinking* about you. And I suppose you are going to die. Everybody else does. Everybody else has in the past up to now. But not from what I just now gave you. That was a brain-metabolism stimulant resembling serotonin; it was exactly what I said and I gave it to you because I'm terribly interested to see its effects on you. You know what I want to do? Try your two drugs along with mine. We won't just combine our talent. We'll combine our metabolic stimulants too and see what we get. Because —" she hesitated childishly, openly somber but excited — "we have to be a success, Lars. We just have to."

He said, reassuringly, "We will be."

And then, as he sat there with his beer can in his hand — he was studying it idly, noticing that it was a Danish beer, dark, a very good sort — he felt the drug affect him.

All at once, with a terrible rush like bad fire, it overwhelmed him, and he got stumblingly to his feet, reaching out — the beer can fell,

rolled away, its contents staining the rug, dark, ugly, foaming, as if some big animal had been slaughtered helplessly here and its life was draining away. As if, he thought, I have strode into death, despite what she said. God in heaven! I've cut myself open in an effort to — *obey*.

What am I obeying? he asked. Death can dissemble. It can ask for your hide in hidden words and you think it's something entirely else, a high authority, some quality spiritual and free that you ought to enjoy. That's all you ask; you want to be pleased. And instead — it has you. Not *they* but *it*. They would like a lot but they're not ready to ask for that.

However you have given it gratuitously, jumped the gun. They won't like it. Tyranny has its own rate of flow. To run forward toward it prematurely is no more going to be appreciated than if you tried to creep back out, hung back, wandered off, sought to escape in any other way. Than even if, God forbid, you had stood up on your feet and *fought*.

"What's the matter?" Lilo's voice, distantly.

"Your serotonin," he said with difficulty, "got to me. Wrongly. The alcohol, the beer. Maybe. Can you — tell me." He walked one step, two. "The bathroom."

She guided him, frightened. He could make that out, the flapping batwings, her genuinely fear-stained face as she led him along.

"Don't worry," he said. "I'll—" And then he perished.

The world was gone; he was dead and in a bright, terrible world no man had ever known.

TO BE CONCLUDED

Coming . . . . Tomorrow!

Next issue the headline news is the newest Philip Jose Farmer story, *Riverworld*. The time is the far future; the place is a planet where unnamed aliens have, for some unstated purpose, brought back to life every human being who ever lived on Earth. Alive and thriving are the Attilas and the Einsteins, the Caesars and the Lincolns. Every man who ever lived is alive again here, on the banks of a million-mile river . . . and that, of course, includes one Man whose death on a desolate hill, two thousand years ago, changed the fate of the world forever . . .

Sam Moskowitz returns with *The Sleuth in Science Fiction*. We've just finished reading it, and we're impressed. The author wrote this one twice, by the way — wrote it, finished it off, decided to double-check a couple of items . . . and discovered such a phenomenal mass of new material in the process that he junked the whole piece and started over. We think the results are worth the effort!

Me, Myself and Us

by MICHAEL GIRSDANSKY

Man's next, greatest synthetic product may be—Man himself!

"A man is not a kingdom, but a conferedation"—*Maimonides*

The saying has it, Let not your left hand know what your right hand is doing. This is, however, a lot easier than it sounds. To prove it, try the old test of coordination: rubbing the stomach in circles while patting the top of the head. Do it with as much dedication as you will, there is still a strong tendency for both hands to carry out the same motions. And it's even harder to perform a turnabout in mid-stream, to pat the belly and rub the head. *That* kind of stream-changing takes a good deal of agonizing reappraisal. Practically no one can reverse the physiological gears immediately and without hesitation.

Yet, this trend to mirror-imaging of the right and left sides of the body can be overcome, given enough training. If there is any doubt about it drop into a night-spot some time and watch the machinations of a good, competent jazz pianist. The left hand may be thumping out an effective sostenuto bass while the right hand works out an intricate set of figured variations on a melody never even actually expressed. Here, each of the paired organs will be manipulating material of entirely different rhythmical structure — and doing it superbly well.

Although Man, like most of the higher forms of animal life, is bilaterally symmetrical and the two halves of his body have a natural bias in favor of operating together, he can be conditioned — within limits — to acting as though he were two distinct organisms, cooperating but different.

This division into two of the animal body applies not only to such obviously paired organs as the limbs, lungs, kidneys, ribs and heart. In a very real way, the brain, too, is a twosome. Rising like some gigantic flower from the stem of the spinal cord, the animal brain splits into hemispheres. And each of these

seems to have to potential for acting on its own, when necessary.

Thanks to a rather complete set of cross-over connections, the right hemisphere of the brain controls the left-hand side of the body while the left hemisphere acts as master of the body's right-hand side. But, in human beings, at least this duplication is modified by the phenomenon known as dominance. Thus, most of us are right-handed (really "right-dominant") and it is therefore the left side of the brain which assumes basic responsibility for such complex functions as speech. So, if the speech center in the right-hander's left hemisphere is destroyed by injury or disease, the sufferer develops aphasia, impairment or loss of speech. If, however, the injury hits the right hemisphere at the same point, little if any change results. (The reverse situation occurs, of course, in the case of a left-handed individual; here it is damage to the right hemisphere which is crucial.)

As with the jazz pianist, however, here too training can work wonders. Since the two halves of the brain are basically identical, rehabilitation therapy can often "program" the uninjured and formerly non-dominant side of the brain to take over functions lost on the other side. This is possible precisely because cross-connections do exist; cross-connections which insure that information received by the organism is filed in both halves of the brain simultaneously. Normally, it is the dominant half of the brain which actually makes use of the input data, but since information is stored in two locations, it can be retrieved and used by a previously dormant side of the brain, if need be.

Question: What if these cross-connections are destroyed, or — as sometimes happens — fail to develop in the first place?

Recent work by Dr. Roger W. Sperry, Professor of Psychobiology at the California Institute of Technology, has given some surprising answers. Using such experimental animals as the cat, monkey and chimpanzee, and observing the responses of those human beings in which the connections had been cut or were congenitally absent, Sperry found that in many ways the "split brain" was in fact two brains.

The brain whose higher centers lack the connections (technically known as commissures) which carry out the system of double filing for information, reacts in many aspects of behavior as though it were two separate and distinct psychological entities. Thus, the split-brain cat, monkey or chimpanzee can be trained to produce conditioned reflexes just like any other animal; but under the right circumstances the responses that arise would drive Pavlov into a nervous breakdown.

By cutting the most important of the commissures — the corpus callosum — and by splitting the optic-nerve connections so that the eyes feed images only to their own respective hemispheres, today's experimenter can produce essentially "two brains," each having its own (one-eyed) optical system. And each will act on its own, as though its oppo-

site number on the side of the skull had never existed.

If you train such a split-brain and split-eye-system to grab for food at the sight of a square on a card while the creature's right eye is covered, all the experience and training appear to be fed only to the left eye and the left hemisphere. Keep the right eye patched, and the animal will react with perfect consistancy, responding positively to the appearance of the square on the card. But cover the left eye and leave the right one functioning, and the creature will act as though it had never been trained at all. It will grope out and in general act as though it had never been trained in the first place. If it is to learn the lesson, it will have to be trained all over again, this time the message being impressed on the receptive right-hand eye and side of the brain.

But there's more to it than just that. With such a "divided" animal, the two sides of the brain can be trained independently, even in contradictory ways. So, with proper conditioning, one and the same body can be taught to perform action X when a card printed with — say — a triangle is shown to the left eye; and action Y when the same card is shown to the right. (In each case, of course, the opposite eye is kept covered to keep out a conflicting command.)

With a little ingenuity, though, it is possible to do more than merely establish two separate sets of response. One can even build up a pair of mutually contradictory patterns of behavior, depending on which half of the split eye-brain combination receives the stimulus. Monkeys have been trained to reach for a handle if the left-hand eye-brain was "taught" that the handle means food. The same monkey has also been "taught," through the other eye and hemisphere, that the same handle will give the yanker an electric shock — and the beast avoids the offending object like poison.

Remember: in this latter case it is one and the same animal; one and the same handle. It is only that the bifurcated brain has been taught different lessons — and the experience has never had a chance to go from one side of the skull to the other. Lessons have been learned which are in direct conflict with one another, and the same handle, button, switch or what-have-you is alternately a source of pleasure and pain. But the two eyes and the "two brains" have never heard of one another.

A natural question: What happens in such a case if both eyes are left open for the seeing, the two halves of the separated brain — each trained in conflicting patterns — allowed to receive the same set of data?

The answer seems to be alternation. The split-brain beast will react positively, then negatively. It is as though there is an interior debate going on. Part of the creature appears to say: "Go on! You'll get goodies." The next instant, it reacts in remembrance of the electrical shock given to the other eye-brain half, and it shies away.

Let us admit it, though; there are certain types of cross-transfer

which can take place. For one thing, not all sensory input comes through the eyes.

Thus, both halves of the brain can pick up messages from such receptors as the skin, the nose, the tongue, and so forth. In theory, and given more advanced methods of neurosurgery, it might prove possible to separate out *all* sources of sense data. This has not proven feasible thus far, by a long shot; but in theory at least there is nothing to indicate its impossibility.

Assuming that one could produce such a thoroughgoing separation in every sensory channel, each hemisphere receiving a different collection — "universe" — of data, what would be the result?

Perhaps, and quite spectacularly, that much-misunderstood thing known as multiple personality. (This is definitely *not* the same thing as schizophrenia, the psychosis popularly termed "split personality." In this, the "split" is between the outer world of reality and a privately constructed universe of desire and illusion. For a good example of true schizophrenia, read many of the novels of Philip K. Dick; in particular, "All We Marsmen," whose autistic child-hero is schiz-in-the-highest.)

True multiple personality is, in fact, almost the direct opposite of the schizoid pattern. Rather than marking a withdrawal into a private universe, multiple personality may mark a richly endowed psychological apparatus which insists on confronting reality — but is forced to put its psychic eggs into more than one basket. In one of the earliest issues of *Galaxy*, Wyman Guin brilliantly described an entire society based on just such a state of affairs; his "Beyond Bedlam" portrayed an Earth on which the rule of more than one ego per given body was the norm.

Although much more needs to be known of how even a single personality develops from the raw, undifferentiated potential of a newborn child, one thing does appear to be certain.

Personality does begin to evolve early, very early. Thus, if one were to deliberately go about constructing a "two-souled" man, the needed splitting of the nervous system would have to be carried out at a very early stage — perhaps even in the pre-birth stages. (The development of exogenesis — bottle-baby — techniques would make this easier, but even today the first steps have been taken in performing intrauterine work on unborn children without interrupting pregnancy.)

Up until now, the only form of control used in split-brain experimentation has been optical. The eyes have been the sources of differential input-data. Assuming a total of near-total division of all the senses, however, it is relatively easy to see how a multiple personality might be developed. After the physical division of the nervous system, micro-micro-miniaturized flip-flop switches could be installed at key nerve junctures, subject to re-routing by low-power transmitters under the control of the experimenter. First one, then the other side of the brain-body com-

plex could thus be shunted out of action — each half being exposed to a radically different "lifetime" of experience until the distinct personalities had had a chance to stabilize.

To carry this out on human subjects, of course, would presuppose a horrifyingly totalitarian society with a close to absolute disregard for what we know as the right of human personality. But such societies have not been unknown in the past, nor even today.

How might such a program of psychological doubling be executed? Perhaps something like this:

Two sets of apartments, radically different in style, each equipped with utterly distinct "pseudo-parents," each inculcating a radically different type of ethic, morality, approach to life in general. From birth (or un-bottling), the child would spend half of its time in Environment "A"; half in Environment "B". At the transition, the body would be "switched over" to the other side of the nervous system. In time it is reasonable to suppose that there would evolve two separate and distinct "individuals," both in the same body, but each unaware of the other's existence.

The idea that multiple personality might be evoked by the cutting of the nervous system was used as the basis for a story in *IF Science Fiction* — "What T and I Did," by Fred Saberhagen. There are only two principal demurrers that might be entered to his development of the theme: (1) that it would take more than simple hemisphere and optical-system separation to provide fallow ground for the doubling of personality; and (2) that the individual on whom the operation was performed was already an adult. (Point (2) is particularly relevant from the standpoint of psychological theory. Although most of the recorded instances of multiple personality describe the "other" as coming to the fore well after infancy, there is good reason to believe that it was lying latent from the time of early childhood. Saberhagen's protagonist, a thorough villain, is found to have a buried "saint" in his brain who is liberated by a brain-splitting operation and the careful wearing of a patch over a specific eye. Unfortunately, the reader is never given any real suggestion as to how the saint ever managed to separate out from the villain's total life-experience.)

Assuming that a society, or some hypothetical mad scientist with unlimited finances, did have the chance to produce a "two-souled" individual — why would it be done? For the purposes of this article, let's ignore that old cliche, "For the sake of pure knowledge". There *may* be monomaniacs that thoroughly dedicated to the advancement of psychology, but to their cliche one might respond with that old war-horse of 1930's horror movies: "Dr. X, there are certain things men weren't *meant* to know!"

Seriously, though ruthlessly, there is one answer that comes to mind almost immediately: espionage.

It would not be too hard, after all, for such organizations as the *Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Byezopasnosti* or

its opposite number the C.I.A. to obtain a new-born child, few, if any, questions asked. One doesn't even have to presuppose a future America of complete dictatorship. A "cover-couple" interested in a bit of black market adoption would fit the bill for us, and illegitimacy being what it is nowadays, it would be a buyers' market.

The two natural spies created would be interesting artifacts. In some suburb of Volgograd, for instance, there would grow up in a single body which was *both* Alexei Kuznetsov and Al Smith. Al Smith would spend all of his conscious time as a typical American boy. English would be his native language, Southern Baptist his creed, middle-of-the-road Republicanism his politics — and Communism a pet hatred. Alexei, in contrast, would be a Russian-speaker (though perhaps taught English in school), a devout and dedicated atheist, the gospel according to Sts. Marx, Engels, Lenin and the rest would be the holy book of his religion . . .

. . . And somewhere out in the great heartland of the Middle-West, there might be another boy: a lad of good, hearty German-American stock, he would be Johnny Bleistift/Ivan Karandashov. In him, too, there would be a duality of ghosts. One would be a nice, unimaginative 200% USA-er, eager to work and die for the star-spangled banner. The other? A good, competent engineer, member of the Party, and speaking Russian as though he knew no other tongue.

Now with a bit of finagelling, a touch of assassination perhaps, and the right kind of smuggling across borders — watch what happen when each gets into the other's country with carefully forged documents!

While in the United States, Alexei will be Al Smith; perhaps serving in the American armed forces and later joining one of the more extremely right-wing veterans' organizations. In the U.S.S.R., Johnny will remain thoroughly Ivan; in the course of years he may rise high — rightfully so — in the councils of, say, OGES — *Ob'yedinenie Gosudarstvennie Elektricheskie Stantsii,* the Soviet powerstation system. In time, thanks to a posthypnotic command given before infiltration, each may be smuggled back out again to surrender the information he had gained.

Interestingly enough, the "enemy personalities" created by each intelligence service would have to be coerced by some such mechanism as hypnosis to return to the country of birth and give up their acquired data. Since there would be no cross-connections between the two personalities, "Al" would be no more willing to give information to his Russian masters than would any other true-blue American. "Ivan," too, would fight to the death before letting the imperialist, fascist warmongers know anything of importance.

Their corresponding Alexei and Johnny components, of course, would know nothing of what their other halves had been doing over the long, hard years or decades since they had been "phased out."

Horrifying? Certainly — but not by any means impossible. From all that we know of surgical and electronic miniaturization techniques of today, the thing cannot be done. *Yet.* But give it another decade or two and just such spies may be a reality. Double agents are a commonplace in the vocabulary of espionage today, but here they refer to those taking money from both sides and having their allegiance to — who knows? The electrically turned-on double-brain spy would be the true double agent in excelsis. For while doing his work, he *would* be a genuine and completely committed member of the society he was helping to destroy. Even deep hypnosis would fail to reveal anything out of kilter, for the personality dominant at the time would be totally patriotic. It would take a certain, carefully pulsed and coded set of impulses to bring the other personality to light. And presumably there would be some means of implanting a self-destruct mechanism, inserted poisoned tooth or even bomb, which would wipe out questionee (and perhaps questioner as well) before anything useful to the interrogator could be revealed.

The spy of the day-after-tomorrow would thus be the last one the professional patriot could look for. In the U.S. he would *not* be the professional rebel, the disaffiliated member of some racial, religious or ethnic group. He would be the well-fed, successful, unimpeachable regular guy. Perhaps the chairman of some local committee dedicated to the unearthing of subversives. (The uncontrolled, un-split agents who became his victims would be the obvious and expendable red herrings.)

In like manner, Mr. Number One in the American intelligence apparatus might well be — just to make believe a little — the *nachal'nik* (chief) of *sovyetskoy izvedki* (the intelligence service on The Other Side). *Kto znayet?* Who knows, indeed? He, himself, would not even know—that thoroughly Russian tool of the Russians . . .

Even assuming that things never go so far nor so gruesome, there would still be a good deal that could be done with the split-brain creature. This time, however, it would not be a human animal. There could be many a use for doubly conditioned non-human beasts. And since there is a good deal of evidence that the further down the evolutionary scale one goes, the more duplicate filing of information in both hemispheres is controlled chiefly by the eye, a simple brain- and eye-split might suffice for most purposes among "lower animals."

What use *could* be made of animals with "two personalities"?

For one thing, such animals as the tiger, lion, cheetah — the big cats, which seem to have a primary optical orientation in terms of hemisphere-control — could possibly be conditioned to act as something like surrogate soldiers in the brushfire wars which military strategists tell us are far more probable than wholesale atomic armegeddons. With one "personality" trained from cubhood on to fear or love Man, the other

systematically brought to a pitch of raw and generalized viciousness, such animals would be the perfect four-footed GI's to pour into a jungle-warfare theater. Each of the human members of an army might well carry a small transmitter, so that at the first sight of such conditioned creatures he might "turn off" the vicious hemisphere, thus rendering the carnivore docile and friendly. Once safely out of attack-range (or safely up a tree), the human soldier could reverse the process and let the beast forage for edible enemies.

On a somewhat less bloodthirsty scale, one might take a lesson from Arthur Clarke's "The Deep Range." In a not-so-future world of high population density where food is at a premium and where Man has begun to farm the seas, the nautical equivalent of collies will be a necessity.

What better than the orc, the killer whale? Actually a highly carnivorous and intelligent creature, the orc would be a natural guardian of whale flocks. The problem: to keep the orc's killer instincts alive for any potential predator, yet hold it from its pelagic "sheep" and its human master. The "two-personalitied" orc might be a very convenient answer. With a school of orcs, their personalities controlled by banks of transceivers built into a one-man sub, the sharks, "wild orcs," human poachers and other enemies would have to scramble fast to keep clear. And yet the sea-going herd to be protected would be able to roam its salty pastures free from its enemies — and safe from its protectors, as well.

Even on a more modest front, the "double-souled" animal would have distinct advantages. Imagine, for instance, the virtues of a shaggy and friendly family pet — a German shepherd, say. Most of its life would be spent as a loving companion.

The kids from the neighborhood would know it only as a tongue-lolling "horse" ready for raids against imaginary enemies. But at night, its split-brain switching transfers, keyed to a short-range sonar-home-defense screen, it would present a burglar with problems on his hand (or at his throat). A suddenly and utterly savage horror trained to single-minded destruction.

Stereotactic (3-D, spot-location) surgery has already made surprising bounds. Given only a little more progress in this field, and coupling such advances with use of the laser beam as a fine-honed knife, the cutting of specific nerve-connections should not prove a terribly difficult task.

The principal labor will remain the thorough mapping of nervous systems: the tracing-out of neural pathways to learn which goes where and does what. *That* may take a longer time than we would like to think — yet eventually it will be done.

Each animal species, Man included, may — probably will — be found to differ in the extent to which a given degree of nervous-system separation produces independent behavior.

Unless the ultimately dictatorial state is established, we shall most

likely never know just what can make one human being into two — but (vivisectionists aside) the "identities" of the other-than-human will be charted.

The double-behaviored animal may well have unique value in and of itself. And over and above that, it will certainly shed light on how Man's own ego develops. William James and Sigmund Freud would probably have given their eye-teeth to have survived to this time, no matter what their differences in ideology were.

That mathematician, philosopher and early-date psychologist Rene Descartes once said:

Cogito, ergo sum —
"I think, therefore I am."

Behind that bland assumption (even if Descartes himself steered clear of recognizing it) lay an implicit question: *Quid est Ego?* "What is the 'I'?"

Theologians, philosophers, psychologists and psychiatrists have all had their inning at guessing the ego's nature. It just may be that some neurosurgeon — with no pretensions to profundity — may finally produce an answer. END

LAST OF A NOBLE BREED

by MACK REYNOLDS

Illustrated by NODEL

Everybody wanted to give the country back to the Indians —everyone but the Indians!

I

Steven Waters brought his rented hover hard top to a rest before the terrace of the Tamariz and joined Minerva under the trees. Still dripping water, she was shrugging into a beach jacket, being unused to the mono-bikinis prevalent in Common Europe. The Homespun Look hadn't penetrated over here, as yet.

She laughed up at him as he converted his handkerchief into a wash cloth with one swipe over his forehead and back around his neck.

"Loafer," he growled. "While I'm out working my fingers to the bone, you lounge around on the beaches. Squaws aren't what they used to be."

Minnie pretended to get a whiff of his breath. "Working your fingers to the bone, eh? If you call hoisting a drink to your face work, then you're a slave, indeed, Stevie boy."

He looked around for a table. "You're not telling me anything. It's

nip and tuck which I get first, a job or an acute case of alcoholism. Business in Common Europe is handled over a table, glass in hand."

They found a shaded spot and Steve scanned the wine list set into the table.

Minnie said, making her voice casual, "Any luck today? What did the German fellow say?"

"You mean Baron Von Garmisch?" Steve said disgustedly. "What'll it be squaw? We'd better take it easy. Cocktails at the Wonder Bar, in a couple of hours. And that dinner party tonight."

Minnie decided on vermouth and soda and Steve followed suit and dialed the drinks.

Steve said, "I was doing all right with the Baron until Peter MacDonald . . . by the way, did you know he was some sort of Scottish Laird, whatever that is?"

"No. But I can imagine. Off hand, I can't think of anyone we've met here in Estoril that hasn't some kind of title. Usually a lapsed one. Why do Frenchmen keep calling themselves *chevalier* or *comte* when there hasn't been a French king for nearly two hundred years?"

Steve grunted. "It's all the new style. I suppose the British started it. Any kind of job prominence at all, and they wanted some title to be holding it. If there was nobody with a title who could possibly hold the job, then they have the queen knight the guy, or possibly even make him an earl, or something. Everybody on the continent started taking it up, reviving titles that they'd forgotten about. Just about anybody over here, if he goes back far enough, can find a title in the family. At any rate, I made the mistake of mentioning that my father had been a steamfitter in Baltimore. From then on MacDonald spoke Pidgin English to me and the Baron acted as though I'd said a naughty word."

She tried to laugh sympathetically. "What's your family background got to do with your ability as a nuclear engineer?"

"Search me. Over here it's more important than a degree from M. I. T."

"Well, you can tell them that your wife's grandmother was a Sachem of the Cherokees," Minnie chuckled. "That sounds impressive."

Steve sipped his drink. "Ummm. But what does that make me?"

"Why, you're my consort. Remember Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip?" And then she laughed again.

"What's funny now?" Steve growled.

"I was just thinking about my grandmother," Minnie said. "The only time I ever saw her, she was sitting out in front of her hogan in a rocking chair, her pipe in her mouth. She had been born in that dirt hogan back when Oklahoma was still Indian Territory."

Steve finished his drink. "Sachem of the Cherokees, eh? We'll have to mention that tonight at the party. They know as much about American Indians here as I do about Mongolians. They'd probably expect you to be wearing feathers." Steve took in his wife's figure appreciatively. "Come to think of it, with that tan

you're accumulating you look more like an Indian than ever. Ugh, come on squaw, we're going to have to get a quick lunch and then dress."

"Ugh, me obey Big Cheese husband," Minnie said.

"Did you say, Big Chief?"

"You heard me."

They continued the gag in a running fashion for the next two hours, lubricating things with dry martinis as they dressed for their cocktail date. By the time Steve and Minnie met the MacDonalds and Baron Garmisch at the Wonder Bar in the Estoril Casino, they had pyramided things to the point where neither found it necessary to as much as crack a smile to express their bubbling humor. It can be that way when marriage is but six months of age.

The Baron and Peter MacDonald came to their feet and introduced the third couple at the table, the Marquis and Marquise de Palma. The Marquis shook hands with Steve.

Steve pretended to assume that he alone had been introduced. He said with dignity, "And may I present you to my wife, Minerva, Hereditary Sachem of the Cherokees?"

"The Cherokees?" the Marquise said.

Peter MacDonald was not the type to let his jaw sag, but he had blinked. He said hurriedly, "One of the larger American Indian, uh, tribes, if I am not mistaken."

"Confederation," Minnie said with calm dignity. "My people were the largest of the American nations. At one time we controlled the greater portions of Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Alabama.

Steve nodded sagely. "An area equal to Spain, Portugal, Belgium and Holland combined."

"A quite extensive empire," the Marquis murmured, impressed.

Minnie said modestly, "Please, this subject can hardly be of interest to everyone."

The small Wonder Bar orchestra had been playing a popular dance tune. It broke off suddenly and struck up a martial air that Steven and Minerva Waters vaguely connected with a college song.

Baron Von Garmisch and Peter MacDonald came to their feet and faced the orchestra, as did most of the men in the room. Steve and Minnie exchanged glances.

The Marquis grimaced and said, "The Grand Duke Alexi. Ha! My family doesn't recognize the Romanoffs. Upstarts!" He remained seated.

Steve came to his feet and faced the orchestra too, while the Russian Imperial anthem was hurried through. The Grand Duke, who, in his nineties, still walked stiff legged as though wearing cavalry boots, strode across the room, looking neither left nor right, to his table.

The Marquise twirled her champagne glass and said nostalgically, "Many of the once crowned heads of Europe live here in Estoril. Hapsburgs, Romanoffs, Hohenzollerns, Bourbons — we're all here. And how many will ever be recalled to their thrones?"

Minnie sighed. "Yes," she said.

Two drinks later the men were deep into the nuclear power plants to be established in the *Tras os Montes* and to supply the Iberian members of Common Europe with electricity. Always assuming that Uncle Sam would foot the bill, of course.

But Steve was still under way.

The orchestra drifted into an old timer and Steve came to his feet and faced the musicians. The Baron, the Marquis and Peter MacDonald stared up at him. They'd had a few themselves.

"National anthem of the Cherokees," Steve said from the side of his mouth.

They came to their feet. "But I say, that's the *Indian Love Call*," MacDonald said.

Minnie said sweetly, "Adapted from the music of my people. Thank you, gentlemen, but you must realize that I am traveling incognito."

One by one, about the room, the other tables noticed Steve, the Baron, the Marquis and MacDonald at attention. One by one the men stood and faced the orchestra.

II

In the morning Steve groaned, opened one eye, groaned again and closed it. He said, "I'm about to give up. If you have to go through this to get a job, I'm going back to Maryland."

Minnie puckered her mouth into a whistle and shook her head experimentally — it stayed on. She said, "It all comes under the head of making contacts. But this is certainly the hard way." She got out of bed, went over to the servo-table and dialed them breakfast.

Steve said, "Next time I come to Common Europe looking for work, I'm first going into training for six months at my neighborhood autobar."

Minnie giggled. "Remember the Austrian? The Grafin, or whatever they called her?"

Steve shakily poured himself a glass of water. "That means countess."

"Well, this one nearly broke a leg curtsying to me."

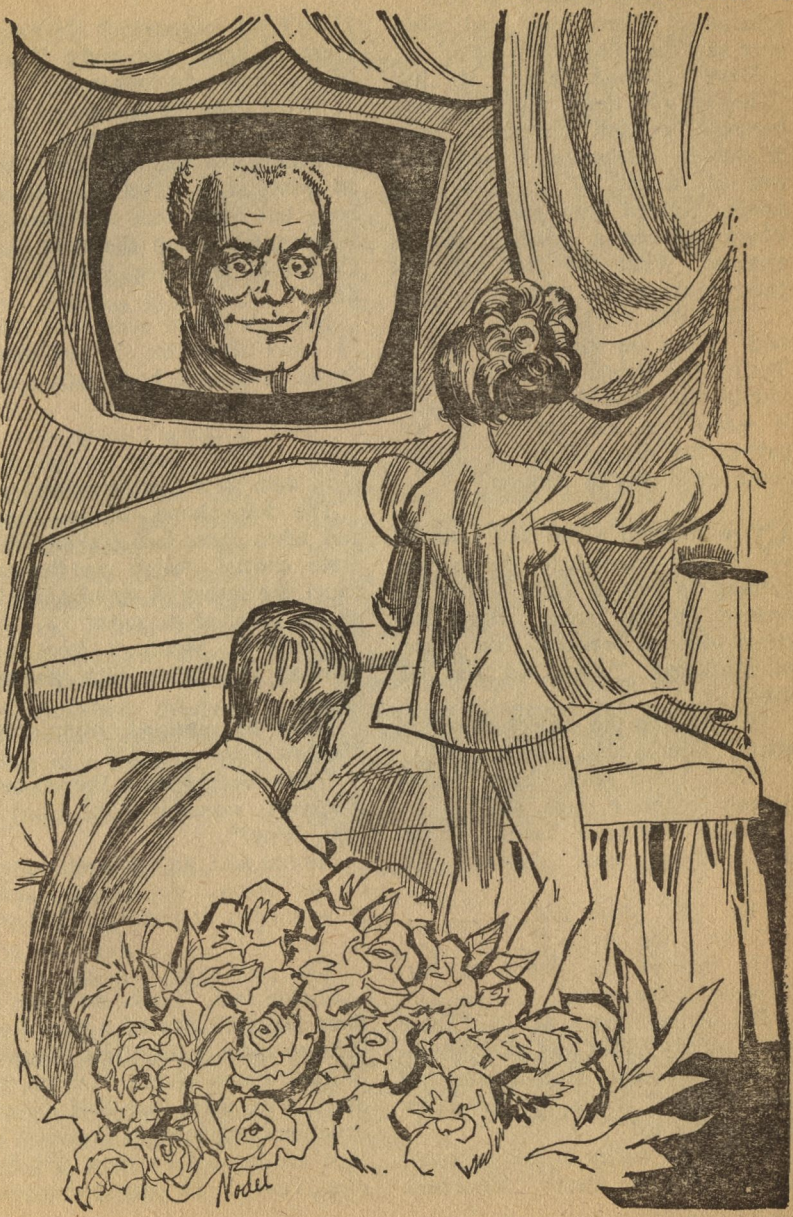
Some of the evening came back to Steve. "Listen," he said, "what is a sachem, anyway?"

"I don't know. Oh, there's the food. I can use some coffee. Oooo, how I can use some coffee. It means chief, or something."

Steve made his way to the table cautiously and eyed the coffee, rolls, marmalade and soy-butter. "This they call breakfast, yet. Whatever happened to ham and eggs? How could your grandmother be a chief?"

Minnie poured black coffee, sat down to sip it. "The only reason I know this is a semester spent in Anthropology 1. Descent is in the matriarchal line in most Indian tribes. I think the men chiefs were elected, that is, among the Cherokees. But my grandmother was more, well, traditional — religious or whatever. Anyway, she was hereditary sachem."

Minnie bubbled up a laugh. "You had them on the run, Stevie. They couldn't figure out where a sachem stood in relation to barons, counts,


Nodel

princesses, dukes, earls and whatever else they have over here."

Steve grinned back at her. "They've got them all. Viscounts, baronets, knights, chevaliers, marchionesses, duchesses. It had them worried, didn't it? I think they finally figured you ranked somewhere between a princess and an empress. What did you tell that phony-looking type without a chin?"

"That was a Hapsburg," Minnie said. "Give me some more coffee, Stevie. He wanted to know if my family was related to Montezuma. It seems that the Spanish are still paying the descendants of Montezuma some sort of pension."

Steve buttered a roll and smeared it with marmalade. He was beginning to feel a little better. He opened up the paper, which had come with the breakfast, but it was in Portugese. "What did you tell him?"

"I told him the Aztecs were upstarts," Minnie said. "What else?"

"Oh," Steve said. "Your family doesn't recognize them, eh?"

Minnie shrugged tanned shoulders. "What else? Aztecs — riff-raff."

"Oh, oh," Steve said.

"What's the matter?"

He handed the paper to her. "You're in the news."

She stared down at it. "There was a society editor and photographer there last night. Gee, it came out well, didn't it? Who's that old duffer I'm talking to?"

"That old duffer is the pretender to the Hungarian throne," Steve said. "Don't you remember? He was the guest of honor last night. That is, he was until you took over."

"What does the caption say?"

"I don't read Portugese, but it's something like Spanish," Steve scowled down at it. "Did you tell anybody last night that you were considering taking up the case of the Cherokees with the Reunited Nations?"

Minnie's brown eyes went round. "I don't think so. I don't know, Stevie. We were both saying a lot of things. Maybe I did."

"Well, it doesn't make any difference. Who's going to see a society item in a Lisbon newspaper?"

The telly-phone screen buzzed, and when Steve had flicked the remote control switch on the table panel, the screen lit up with the face of the assistant manager.

"Take it, Minnie," Steve said, yawning and going into the bathroom.

When he returned, Minnie said, "What's *Paris Match?*"

"Paris Match? It's a French newsmagazine, something like *Look At Life.* Why?"

Minnie said, an apologetic quality in her voice, "A reporter and a photographer downstairs. They want an interview."

"Oh, good grief."

Minnie said, "Look, we'll just tell them the truth. It's all a joke. I told them to come up in fifteen minutes."

Steve stared at her. "Oh no, you don't. Why more than half the construction companies in Common Europe are headed by these old families. They're all prestige-happy. If

it got around that we'd been pulling their legs, I'd be blackballed from here to Istanbul."

"But, Stevie, what can I tell them then?"

"We'll just play it down. Tell them there's no story in it. Be polite, but clam up."

Minnie began to pull her shorty nightgown over her head. "Yes, sir, be polite but clam up. Got it."

TIME, "PEOPLE"

Currently riding a wave of social success in ritzi Estoril, Portugal, is petit, chic Minerva Waters, Hereditary Sachem of the Cherokees. Common Europe's aristocracy is said to be swept with sympathy for her demands that Uncle Sam relinquish the former Cherokee territories in the South. Rumor has it that Sachem Waters would like to bring her case before the Reunited Nations. Aghast by it all, spouse Steven Waters who tags along in the Sachem's wake. Query: Shouldn't it be Sachemess?

Steve banged the hotel door shut behind him, threw the pile of papers and magazines to the table, stuck his fists on his hips and said, "Look, squaw, this isn't funny any more."

He pointed a finger at her accusingly. "What have you been doing all day?"

"Why, I haven't done anything, Stevie. I've just been sitting here."

"That's what I mean. You don't even go down to the beach."

"It's all those reporters and photographers. I don't know what to say to them. Every time I say something, it piles up. I'm afraid to open my mouth."

"With reporters, you don't have to open your mouth. They'll find something for you to say if you said it or not. We're going to have to get out of here."

"But how about your job here? With Peter and the Baron?"

"There isn't going to be any job. Before they were hemming and hawing, wondering if I'd run down the firm reputation. Now I have a sneaking suspicion they figure they haven't any position available big enough for my prestige. At any rate, no job."

The telly-phone screen buzzed, and he went over to answer it. When he turned back to her, his face was pale.

Minnie had been fingering nervously through the papers and magazines. She said, "Golly, they've got my picture on the cover of *Der Spiegel*." She caught his expression and said, "What's the matter, Stevie, another reporter?"

He snapped, "Listen, get packed fast. We can go out the back way. He said he was from the State Department, but I've seen that face before."

"What face?"

"I read an article about him about a year ago. Paul Kosloff. He's the top hatchetman for the C.I.A. They call him, the Cold War's Lawrence of Arabia."

"But where'll we go?" she wailed.

"To Torremolinos, on the Costa del Sol over in Spain. We'll lay low. In a couple of weeks this'll blow over and I'll get back to job hunting."

JUAN CARLOS TO RECEIVE SACHEM OF THE CHEROKEES

Madrid, July 1.—*It was announced today that Juan Carlos de Bourbon, King of Spain, has invited Minerva Waters to spend a weekend at the royal residence at Escorial.*

Sachem Waters and her consort are at present living in self-imposed exile in Torremolinos, on the southern coast of Spain.

The king is said to be aware of the fact that it was Spanish explorer Hernando De Soto who first contacted the Cherokee Nation in the year 1540.

Cable from Mussoorie, India

GREETINGS AND SYMPATHIES FROM A FELLOW EXILE AND MAY YOU SOON BE REUNITED WITH YOUR PEOPLE TO LIVE AND TO WORSHIP AGAIN IN THE FREEDOM OF YOUR OWN TRADITION—DALAI LAMA

Steve said gloomily, "Lucie Noel, that style columnist on the Paris edition of the *Herald-Tribune-Times*, she's nominated you as one of the ten best dressed women of the year."

"Good heavens," Minnie said, "let me see that. I do most of my shopping in the bargain basements back home."

"Here's a letter from *Roguish Playboy*," Steve said. "I don't suppose you'd be interested in being The Rogue's Playmate for next November?"

"Well, no," Minnie said.

"They figure on getting you up like Pocahontas."

"That upstart," Minnie tried to grin at him.

But her face fell immediately. "Oh, Stevie, what's happened to us? We just came over on sort of an extended honeymoon. You were going to get a job in Common Europe for awhile, to build up your prestige back home. What's happened?"

He came over and put his arm around her. "I don't know, squaw. I think possibly we had too many friends back home with good contacts over here. We were playing out of our league when we showed up with all those introductions."

She said glumly, "All I wish is that I'd never remembered grandma, sitting out in front of that hogan of hers. That was what started it. It was so silly, the idea of her having what amounted to a title."

Steve said, "I wish I could figure some way of getting out from under. I think I got turned down by the Worthington outfit because they figure I'm too controversial a character. If we told the truth about the whole thing, we'd have such a reputation as phonies that I'd never get a job again, even back in the States."

SWISS WILL MEDIATE

GENEVA, July 8.—*Switzerland offered her services today as mediator between the United States of the Americas and the Cherokee Confederation as represented by Sachem Minerva Waters.*

TITO NEUTRAL

BELGARDE, July 8.—*Marshal Tito the Second announced today that Yugoslavia would remain neutral in the "class war between the capitalistic United States of the Americas and the downtrodden Cherokee Nation."*

NEW DELHI, July 9.—*At a semi-official garden party here today, Pandit Narayana Devi made no attempt to disguise his support of Sachem Minerva Waters and hinted that the Afro-Asia bloc would throw their weight in the balance on the side of the Cherokees if the subject is debated in the General Assembly of the Reunited Nations.*

In an informal discussion with members of the diplomatic corps, Premier Devi is alleged to have pointed out that in 1776 *the United States consisted of but thirteen small colonies on the Atlantic seaboard. "In less than a hundred years they swept to the Pacific suppressing the Indian nations as they went. Within three hundred years they were within complete control of both hemispheres of the Americas. One of the most ruthless examples of imperialistic aggression the world has ever seen."*

"But, sir," a junior member of the American Embassy is reported to have demured, "there are more indians in America today than there were when Columbus landed. As wards of the government, they've tripled their number in the last century."

Pandit Devi is alleged to have snorted, "A likely story."

III

Steve said desperately, "Look, squaw, we're going to have to get out of here. There's more reporters in this town than tourists. Besides, you know who I think I saw this morning? That Paul Kosloff guy."

"Anything you say, Stevie."

"The *Michelangelo* stops in Malaga on her way to Italy. We can sneak aboard. Get tourist class tickets. Get off in Naples and find a little pension where we can hide. In a month it'll be over."

"Oh, Steven, I hope so."

Steve said, "Listen, just how much Indian blood have you, anyway? I thought it was more or less of a gag when you told me you were part Indian, back before we were married."

"Gee, I don't know. I don't think even grandma was a full-blooded Cherokee. I don't know."

Steve groaned. "Did you see what Drew Lippman said yesterday?"

"I'm getting to the point where

I'm afraid to read the papers," Minnie said miserably. "Do you think we could sneak out tonight and go to a movie?"

"You know what happened last time."

Columnist Walter Alsop

WASHINGTON — *It was leaked, probably, inadvertently, today that the President is woefully misinformed on the collapsing prestige of America throughout the West world. When the subject came up at a cabinet meeting this week, he snapped to the Secretary of State, "What's all this about the Cherokees? Nobody's briefed me on it. Who's Minerva Waters? Cherokees! Half the people in my part of the country have Cherokee blood in them. Come to think of it, I think I'm part Cherokee myself on my great grandfather's side."*

HAILE SELASSIE 2ND TO SUPPORT CHEROKEES IN REUNITED NATIONS

ADDIS ABABA, July 19.— *In an unprecedented interview with western journalists today, Emperor Haile Selassie 2nd pledged his support to the claims of Minerva Waters, Hereditary Sachem of the Cherokee Confederation.*

Drawing a parallel between Sachem Waters and his father, the Negus dwelt on the fact that while his father, the late emperor, was exiled from his country for only ten years the Cherokees have been under foreign domination for over a century.

He expressed belief that justice would be easier to obtain through the Reunited Nations than had been possible through the earlier League of Nations.

The American Ambassador to Ethiopia was unavailable for comment. It is understood that he will fly shortly to Washington for consultation with the State Department.

Columnist Drew Lippmann

WASHINGTON — *In the confusion created by the sudden emergence of an unsuspected strength of organization of the Cherokee Indian Nation, few seem completely aware of the background of the matter. If the affair is to be handled so as to salvage American prestige a better understanding is required.*

Briefly, the Cherokees first came on the historic scene in 1540 *when they were visited by De Soto. At that time they had a settled, advanced culture based on agriculture and were possibly as progressive as any Indian nation north of the valley of Mexico.*

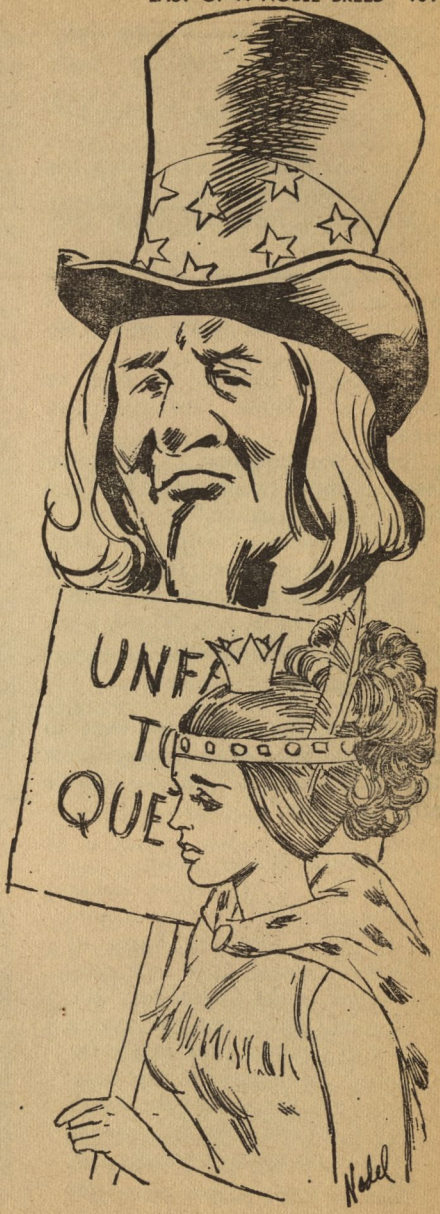
In 1820 *they formed a type of government similar to that of the United States and in* 1827 *established themselves as the Cherokee Nation under a constitution which provided for a senate and a house of representatives.*

Conflict between Sachem

Waters' ancestors and the whites came to a head when gold was discovered on Cherokee territory. A treaty was signed, or rather extracted from a small part of the tribe, which bound the whole nation to move beyond the Mississippi within three years. The Cherokees overwhelmingly repudiated this and the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the nation's autonomy. However, the State of Georgia removed them by military force, President Jackson refusing to intervene. In 1836 *the Cherokees were deported to Indian Territory (later Oklahoma) thousands dying on the march or from subsequent hardships.*

In Oklahoma they made their capital at Tahlequah, instituted a school system, published their own newspapers in their own language and were in general the most advanced of the Five Civilized Nations. A small number still reside in western North Carolina, the descendants of a few who successfully resisted removal or returned afterward.

It must truthfully be said that until the advent of Sachem Waters the Cherokee affair had been thought closed. Actually, the Cherokee Strip was sold in 1892 *and it had been assumed by Washington that the Cherokees themselves had disbanded as a people in* 1906 *when the majority became American citizens. Evidently, those represented by Sachem Waters have never accepted the original re-*



moval of their nation from the South Eastern States.

They were entering Naples harbor.

The S.S. *Michelangelo* voiced her early morning docking throatily.

Minnie, in the lower bunk, said, "What's that?"

Steve climbed down and made his way to the porthole, yawning. "It's Naples, but what in the devil's going on?"

"It sounds like an air raid, or something. Those are cannons, aren't they?"

Steve was counting, ". . . nineteen, twenty, twenty-one. That's a twenty-one gun salute."

Minnie blinked up at him. "Aren't they reserved for heads of State—presidents, kings, like that?"

Steve looked at her. "Good grief, you know who's aboard?"

"Who?"

"You."

"Oh, no. But Stevie, we were so careful to keep it a secret. Now that horrible C.I.A. man will be after us again."

Columnist Walter Alsop

Flash . . . Governor James "Blustermouth" Townsend snarled today that the State of Georgia would fight any concessions to the Cherokees. "We all aren't giving not one square foot of country back to the Indians," he snapped to reporters. "Me and the rest of the South will fight this even if it means another seceeding from the Union."

Columnist Daniel Reston

Little attention has been paid to the fact that Minerva Waters Sachem (sic) of the Cherokees, signed a peace petition circulated by a notorious comie front organization during her sophomore year at the University of Oklahoma, nor that during this period on two occasions she dated "Red" Osborne, who was expelled in his senior year for campus fellow traveller activities.

Little attention has been paid to these interesting activities of the so-called sachem but it's about time someone in the Federal Bureau of Investigation realized the value of Mrs. Waters' present activities to the Soviet Complex. American prestige has plunged downward in the past month, particularly among the neutral nations.

TIME *"Letters to the Editor"*

Sir: For woman of the year, Sachem Minerva Waters. Who else? *Feminist Reader*

IV

Minerva and Steven Waters tried to give up at a press conference for American newsmen held in Rome.

There were some thirty of them, excluding photographers and Tri-Di telly technicians, and they stood around in a semi-circle, focused on Minnie and Steve who sat, holding hands, on a small couch.

Steve carried the ball, making no

attempt to spare either of them. He told the story straight. Too many martinis, too much frustration brought on by the emphasis on titles and family background in European business. It had got out of hand. One thing had led to another. They'd had no intention of embarrassing the government of the United States of the Americas.

Minnie wound it all up with, "I'm not really an Indian. I'm just a plain everyday American girl, married to an ordinary American who got damn good grades at M.I.T. studying nuclear physics and engineering, and wants to work at his profession." She blinked back the tears.

The *Time* man cleared his throat. "You don't expect any of us to print this, do you?"

"Why not?" Steve snapped. "It's the truth. We've been trying to duck this situation for months, now. But we can't. We've just got to come out and, well, confess. It's all a hoax. It started out as a gag and now it isn't funny."

"Nobody'll believe you," the UPI-Reuters man said reasonably. "They'd think it was a put up job, that the State Department had lowered the boom on you. It's not much of a secret that Paul Kosloff's been assigned to your case, and that guy's eliminated more people than the plague. Did you read about the anti-American riots in Indonesia yesterday? They figure the Cherokees are an oppressed minority."

The *Time* man said, "See here, Mrs. Waters, haven't you wondered why your story wasn't exposed back in the States? Why somebody, possibly down in Tulsa or Oklahoma City, didn't show you up as a phony?"

Minerva said, "Well, no—"

He said, a trifle stiffly, "For that matter, *Time* has the most extensive research staff in the world. See here, your grandmother's name was Sahuchyme, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but what's that got . . ."

"And she was hereditary Sachem of the Cherokees?"

"That's what my mother told me."

"And your mother was her oldest daughter?"

"I think so."

"And you're an only child and your mother has passed away?"

"Well, yes, but what has that got to do with it?"

"Mrs. Waters, you have a surprise coming. You *are* the Sachem of the Cherokee Confederation and your people have a surprisingly good case for the recovery of almost half of Dixie."

NUMBER ONE CONTENDS CHEROKEES ARE RUSSIANS

NEW MOSCOW, August 15.—*In a speech before graduating officers of the Soviet Space Academy, Premier Frol Blateroff declared today that the Soviet Complex could not stand on the side lines in the controversy between the United States of the Americas and the Cherokee Indian Confederation.*

"North America was settled from Siberia, across the Bering Straits," he proclaimed to cheering Soviet cadets. "We are racially one with the Cherokees. We stand beside them in their

fight against capitalist imperialist aggression. If volunteers are needed to help them in their struggle for freedom, then there will be volunteers."

UNION SOUTH AFRICA BACKS UNITED STATES IN CHEROKEE AFFAIR

PRETORIA, August 16.—*It was announced tonight that if the case of Sachem Waters and the Cherokee Confederation was brought before the General Assembly of the Reunited Nations, the Union of South Africa would support the United States of the Americas.*

In a friendly dispatch to the President, Prime Minister Gerhardhus recommended that the doctrine of apartheid be applied to the relations between Caucasians and the American Indians.

Debate in the House of Commons

Mr. Corcoran: *Are we to understand that the government refuses to support the just demands of Sachem Waters? Are Her Majesty's ministers aware of the fact that during the American Rebellion which culminated in their Declaration of Independence of* 1776, *an affair, I mention in passing, which took place under a Tory government, the Cherokee Nation fought on the side of the British? And, indeed, continued the conflict for ten years after peace between George III and the colonies was signed. They were left, in short, to go it alone against their Yankee foes. With these historic facts in mind, do I understand that Her Majesty's ministers refuse these, our allies, in their days of stress?*

Shouts from the Opposition benches: *Shame! Shame!*

The Prime Minister: *For reasons that should be obvious even to Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, the government is not prepared to debate this subject at this time.*

Shouts from the Opposition benches: *Resign! Resign!*

The Prime Minister: *However, I can state that Her Majesty's government has offered political asylum to Sachem Minerva Waters and to her consort, Steven Waters. Blenneim Castle has been suggested as a sanctuary to the hereditary head of our allies the Cherokee Confederation.*

V

There was a knock at the door. Steve opened it a crack and snarled, "The Sachem isn't seeing anyone. We left instructions at the desk that under no circumst—"

"I think Mrs. Waters will receive me," the newcomer said dryly. "Paul Kosloff, on special assignment from the State Department."

"Oh, oh," Steve said, opening up.

Minnie was stretched out, fully clothed, on one of the beds. She had a cold compress on her forehead.

Steve said, "Honey, this is Mr.

Kosloff from the State Department." To the newcomer he said, trying to disguise apprehension. "Take a seat, won't you? We've been expecting somebody from the government for the last month or so."

Minnie sat up on the bed's edge. Her voice managed to be weary and bitter at the same time. "Yes, what's kept you so long? Are we under arrest, or something?"

Paul Kosloff had put his briefcase to one side of the easy chair in which he sat. He was in his mid-thirties and should have been handsome, but wasn't; his eyes were empty.

He said, "I don't think it would be very easy for the United States to arrest you here in Switzerland, Mrs. Waters. Even if it wished to. And as for why it has taken us so long to catch up with you—you're a bit on the elusive side. I've been two jumps behind you for quite a time—limited in my efforts by some definite instructions."

Steve said, "We've been trying to discover some place where we could, well, hide, until things blew over. I don't know what we're going to do now, we've just about run out of money."

Minnie said, "Some honeymoon-vacation *this* has been."

Kosloff said, "Why didn't you go back home?"

Minnie laughed, hollowly. "Anti-American, pro-Cherokee riots in half the capitals of Europe. The Russians howling about oppressed minorities in the United States of the Americas. Oh, yes, I can just see us going home. We'd probably be lynched on the dock when the ship arrived."

Steve said, "I suppose you've come to demand our passports, or something."

The State Department troubleshooter was shaking his head. "But why didn't you go back to your people, the Cherokees, in Oklahoma?"

"My people!" Minnie wailed. "I don't even know any Cherokees. The only Cherokee I ever met in my life was my grandmother, once when I was a little girl. I keep telling everybody, but nobody believes me! I don't know if there are any Cherokees any more, not full blooded ones."

"There'd better be," Kosloff said flatly.

"What'd you mean?" Steve said nervously.

Paul Kosloff took up his briefcase and brought forth a sheaf of papers. "I've been sent to open preliminary negotiations with you, Mrs. Waters."

"Negotiations?"

"A new treaty between the government of the United States of the Americas and the Cherokee Nation."

"I keep *telling* you," Minnie wailed. "There are no Cherokees, any more. They disbanded, or something, over fifty years ago, maybe a hundred years ago. I'm not a Cherokee. I'm an American. My mother was an American. My father was an American, Irish and English descent."

"Nevertheless," Kosloff said with cold determination, "you are Hereditary Sachem of the Cherokee Nation. We'll find some Cherokees for

you to represent If we have to comb Oklahoma with posses and bloodhounds. Admittedly, this has got out of hand and the government is anxious to wind it up before it gets even worse."

He wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. "You have no idea how this thing has snowballed."

"Ha!" Minnie and Steve snorted in unison.

"Well, you have no idea of the situation at home. *Indian Love Call* is at the top of the Hit Parade. Cherokee Bow and Arrow sets are the most popular toys in the department stores. Feathered headdresses have taken the women's hat industry by storm. The pro-Indian rage has swept the country to the point that others are beginning to climb on the bandwagon. The Seminoles are demanding Florida and the Sioux claim Sioux City and all points north."

Paul Kosloff brought himself back to the present. "At any rate, I bring you official greetings from the President and his request that you fly back to Greater Washington with me in his personal rocketplane and stay at the White House until . . ."

"Oh, dear," Minnie said. "I think I'm going to be sick."

Kosloff looked at his watch. "If you can be ready to leave by twelve, we can make our first stop in New York this afternoon. After a brief procession—the traditional ticker tape sort of thing down Broadway—we'll fly on to Greater Washington. The President and the Cabinet are expecting to meet you at the airport."

Steve hadn't been able to say anything for some minutes now. He blurted, *"The President and his Cabinet!"*

Kosloff grunted, sourly. "Believe me, Mr. Waters, if this Administration expects to be returned to office next election, it's going to have to solve the Indian question once and for all. We're going to start with the Cherokees." He added gloomily, "If, like you said, there *are* any Cherokees."

Minnie dissolved into a flood of tears.

Steve came over and put a hand on her head. "Aw now, everything's going to be swell. Everything's solved. It's the happy ending, squaw."

Minnie glared up at him sharply. "Steve Waters, you bastard, if you ever call me that nickname again I'll . . . I'll scalp you!"

He grinned at her. "You mustn't say bastard, dear. It's a four letter word."

END

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The Sightseers

by THOMAS M. DISCH

They sampled the vintage years of all time's ages — a few days at a time!

For seventy-six glorious days the weather had been perfect. It hadn't rained; the days were not too hot nor the nights too cold; the cherry trees were still in blossom. The springtime, she thought, will never stop.

Nice — but then a Balch, of the Little Rock Balches, was used to nice things. Myrna had always considered niceness her birthright.

Even so, she was astonished at the richness of her wardrobe, which was entirely different every day. Such richness, even for a Balch, bordered on superfluity. Once when she had asked for a simple diamond tiara, of the sort she had seen that beautiful Mrs. Ransom wearing the night before, the Nubian slaves (they were undoubtedly Nubians, but were they, exactly, slaves?) had brought her a whole chest full of jewelry.

And the Centennial Balls! how could one help but admire them? Every evening there were new dances and stronger wines. Myrna had to admit that she was getting her money's worth.

And on the whole Jimmy seemed to be enjoying himself too. He learned the new dance steps willingly if they weren't too hard for Myrna, and when they were a little beyond her taste he didn't seem to mind sitting them out. Usually he let the Nubians do his hair in whatever manner the fashion of the day decreed, within limits. As for his clothes, the basic cut of his evening dress had changed very little since 2176, when the cruise had begun.

Lately though, Jimmy seemed to be chafing at the bit. The first golden enchantment of the honeymoon (it was, of course, a honeymoon only in the figurative sense) was wearing off, and Myrna feared what she would find beneath. Today, as the

Nubians had approached them across the great gilt hall of the Slumber Room, she had been sure she'd seen him scowling, but she'd been too sleepy and stiff then to say anything.

The Nubians unwrapped their linen bands and began to massage their flesh with strong, capable fingers. Myrna wished she were thinner, but what could she do? She hadn't the strength of character to diet.

Since she'd never experienced the slightest chill on waking, it was hard for Myrna to appreciate the fact that she had been frozen through the long, dreamless night and that a century had elapsed since last time she'd been awake. A century: think of it! A century was quite some time.

"How long . . ." she began.

"I haven't any idea," Jimmy replied sullenly. Morning was a bad time for Jimmy.

"What year is it?" she asked the Nubian in a whisper.

"Ninety-eight-seventy-six, Ma'am."

"And if I was forty eight in 2176, how old does that make me now?"

"Seven thousand seven hundred and forty-eight years old, Ma'am."

"My God, I must be the oldest person in the world!"

"I believe it," Jimmy said. Jimmy was smug: *he* was only seven thousand seven hundred and twenty-six years old. The twenty-two years' difference was observable.

"I'm done on this side," Myrna bade the Nubian. "Turn me over." The slave (he certainly *behaved* like a slave, so why not call him one) turned Myrna onto her tummy. His hands began to knead the defrosted, slack flesh of her shoulders and neck.

"What shall we do tonight, Jimmy my love?" she asked placatingly. An old woman (if you call forty-eight old) infatuated with a young man is quick to forgive small injuries. "*You* decide. Decide for the whole day."

"We'll go to the Ball, I suppose. What else do we ever do? And when we're drunk enough we'll come back to the Mausoleum."

"Don't use that nasty word, darling. If you don't want to come back here, nobody will make you." This was indefinite but nonetheless threatening. It was necessary, now and again, to remind Jimmy just who was footing the bill.

But this time darling Jimmy wouldn't let himself be cowed. "If you want to know what I really want to do, I want to go out into the city and see how things have changed down there. What's the use of travelling centuries into the future, if every damn one is just like the last?"

"But we just went down there five days ago!"

"Five days? Five centuries, my love. As long as the time that separated Dante and Goethe."

"*Who?*" Myrna's jealousies were easily aroused. She didn't like Jimmy to know people she didn't.

"Never mind who. They're not your sort. I thought you said *I* was going to decide what we'd do. Well, I've decided."

"Of course, Jimmy my love, and

we'll do whatever you say — as soon as we're dressed." The Nubians, always quick to pick up their cues, went off for their day-clothes.

Myrna, feeling spry after the massage, hopped off her pink marble slab and joined Jimmy on his stone couch (twin sarcophagi, he called them). While her golden fingernails played in the sun-bleached hair of his chest, she wondered if, really, he still loved her. She wondered who Don Tay and Gerta were. But then, when he began to smile at her that particular way of his, she relaxed and let all such unhappy thoughts slip from her mind.

The Nubians, thoughtfully, didn't return with their clothes for half an hour.

Ramona Ransom was out with her husband taking in the sights. She had dressed that morning with calculated inelegance in a sailor suit and ribboned cap. The stiff white cloth hardly did justice to her figure, but it was Ramona's pride that she could afford to be seen at a disadvantage.

They had paused to rest a moment in view of the city.

"My dear," Nestor said agreeably, "if you're tired . . ."

"Oh, I never tire. Why we're scarcely a hundred yards below the gate!"

Far from being weary, Ramona was aching to put her muscles to work, and she began again to push her husband's wheelchair along at a rapid clip. Nestor giggled as the wheelchair jounced. For some reason, he was in a good mood today.

The Deep Freeze, whose gate they had just passed through, was located atop the city's highest hill, and the path the Ransoms were following opened onto many splendid vistas. From every new perspective the city revealed unexpected charms. Despite the changes that each day wrought, the elements of the landscape were arranged as meticulously as in a painting by Poussin. Even the people sprinkled over this scene had an air of being ancillary to some master-architect's plan — as though they had been added at the last minute to indicate perspective. They were all, it seemed to Ramona, unnaturally at their ease, like the people in oldtime advertisements. They never hurried and never stood quite still. They seemed, somehow, representative.

But the only really tangible objection she could bring against them was that they were so few. Once this city had bustled with over half a million people. Now — Ramona counted as many as she could see from a vantage point halfway down the hill — there were not more than twenty in sight. And how many of those, she wondered, were tourists?

Once, long, long ago, she and Daddy (as she fondly thought of her husband) had taken a luxury cruise through the Carribean. They had stopped at Antigua, Jamaica, St. Thomas, and Aruba, but they had never seen anyone but the waiters in the restaurants, the bellboys at the hotels — and the other sightseers. Once, beside a swimming pool in the St. Thomas hotel, she had heard Spanish spoken, but it had turned

out to be only a couple who'd come there on a honeymoon from Madrid. They might as well have spent the whole time in Miami. Ramona had been left with the impression that there *were* no natives, that aside from the grand hotels and elegant nightclubs these were desert islands, barren, uninhabited.

But of course there *were* natives, there had to be. Waiters and bellhops can't keep the world running unassisted. Ramona had simply been too timid to look for them. She had never, for an instant, strayed from the predetermined course of the tour. How could she — with 150 pounds of immobile flesh to push around?

She was no longer content to use Nestor as an excuse. If he insisted on this particular form of servitude (and to give him credit, he insisted on little else; he had been quite generous in everything but this, his obstinate refusal to use a powerized chair or employ a Nubian or even — and it was so easy, after all — be fitted out with prosethetic legs), then he could not fairly object if Ramona took him along on her excursions.

There had been several, and so far Nestor hadn't objected. In fact he seemed to be enjoying them a good deal more than she.

The future, as much as Ramona had seen, had progressed steadily in the direction of tepidness. Each time the Ransoms had "come down," the world had seemed tamer, milder, more perfectly poised. There was no anxiety, no bustle, scarcely any movement. The world had mounted from perfection to perfection until it had reached, now, the very pinnacle of boredom.

Unless, she speculated, this were all a front — unless the city she was given to see was just there for the tourists, not a city at all but a great grand hotel. Perhaps the Real Life was being carried on elsewhere, out-of-sight.

It was a hope.

Ramona had always believed that there was a Real Life quite different from and infinitely superior to her own, which however comfortable and plush it had been lately (thanks to Daddy), she considered as slightly Unreal or at least open to doubt.

Mechanical, she thought, *that's the word for it.*

"Ah, good — here are the people you've been looking for," Nestor announced, as they neared the bottom of the hill.

"Where?" Ramona asked, a little too urgently.

"There on the bench ahead, kissing."

Ramona could see the face of the man, who had just drawn back from the woman. His handsomeness was so pronounced that Ramona instantly suspected plastic surgery.

He seemed, too, vaguely familiar. Then the woman turned and Ramona understood why. It was that nouveau-riche bitch, Myrna Balch. Ramona remembered having been introduced to her gigilo.

"They're not people," she corrected her husband. "They're only sightseers like us." As she approached nearer, she gave them a sickly sweet smile.

"Mr. and Mrs. Ransom!" Myrna Balch crowed. "Of all people! And what a lovely . . ." For a moment Myrna seemed lost for words — "lovely sailor suit you're wearing, my dear. If you're going into the city, why not come with us? Jimmy's looking for history, but I'm afraid I haven't been helping him any. I don't know what it looks like."

"We'd be delighted," Nestor said. "Wouldn't we, darling?" Ramona made no reply. She was staring at the shiny tips of her shoes. *Wouldn't* we?"

"Of course," she said. She looked back up, and Myrna Balch's young man was still smiling at her in the most impudently familiar fashion — not so much as though they were old friends but as though he had found her out in some piece of naughtiness and had become, with that discovery, her accomplice. Perhaps he *had* found her out. It wouldn't take extraordinary perceptions. Was it possible, she wondered, that he too was, if not quite a part of, then looking for Real Life?

On consideration, she allowed herself to return his smile.

They — Jimmy, Myrna, and the Ransoms — had been looking for history the better part of the day and had covered most of the city that was open to view, riding the fast central sections of the ped-belts (Nestor had a mania for speed) up one boulevard and down another. There had been no end of beautiful buildings, magnificent plazas and gardens, and quiet arcades where it was possible to be served anything from a lemonade to a seven-course lunch by the omnipresent Nubians — but nothing that looked, to Jimmy's eye, the least like history.

There wasn't even commerce. The streets were not blemished with shopfronts, and the space inside the beautiful buildings was not given over to offices. Even here in the arcade restaurant, there was no question of paying for the food. Everything was to be had for the asking. It was impossible.

On closer consideration, however, he could see that it was only too possible. Maintenance of the Deep Freeze could require the merest fraction of the money that Myrna and Ransom and the thousands of others who had paid the whopping admission fee (and virtually everyone who had had that much money had eventually joined up; the everyday world could offer nothing to compare). The preponderance of their assembled wealth could thus be set aside for capital improvements. A few billion dollars at, say, 4% would more than double in a quarter of a century; in a hundred years, even with fluctuations, it would be ten times what it had been. It was no wonder that each night's Centennial Ball was so extravagant, that Myrna could wear ruby-studded slippers. Personal luxuries, could not exhaust such wealth.

There had been time to spare and all the money in the world: what would it have gone for if not *this?* This utopian, dull, deadly city in which the noble process of history had been reduced to the idling of a motor.

Mechanical, he thought, *that's the word for it.*

"Isn't it wonderful?" Myrna purred to him. "I'm so glad we came. I wouldn't have missed this for the world."

"I do believe they've achieved what we've never been able to," Nestor said reflectively, nibbling a morsel of *pate.* "A truly humane city. Without smog or traffic jams. Monumental without being impersonal Wholly a work of art. Yes, They've done well."

"They?" Ramona asked. "Who are *they?*"

"Why the people who built it, of course."

"But where *are* they? Why can't we see them? We've been all through the city, up and down every street, and I haven't been within ten feet of a single one of them — except these Nubians. Why did they build a city they don't live in? They seem to be invisible."

"That's what's so nice about it," Myrna said.

"Nice!" Ramona said scornfully. "I'd rather it were alive."

"Well, you have to admit, Ramona my dear, that it is more comfortable this way," Nestor said agreeably, leaving it uncertain if by 'this way' he meant dead.

Jimmy would have liked to taken Ramona's side in the argument that seemed, to judge by the angry look in her eye, about to develop, but it would have meant setting Myrna off into one of her jealous rages later.

Better just leave well enough alone, he told himself.

Before Ramona could make any reply to her husband, the lotus-pool stillness of the afternoon was pierced by a shrill, wavering whistle, like, though briefer than, an air-raid siren. The Nubians who had been serving them immediately hurried out from the kitchen and began running in the direction of the hill at the top of which stood the great, unfenestrated bulk of the Deep Freeze.

"What is it?" Jimmy called after them, but they had already gotten beyond range of his voice. Despite their size they could run astonishingly fast.

"Something seems to have gone wrong," Nestor observed dispassionately, removing the silver cover from a dish of asparagus. "Now, perhaps, we'll see some of the history you were in search of. That's what's meant by history, isn't it — something gone wrong?"

Jimmy, during this little speech, had moved away from the table of inlaid stone and was watching other figures, not all of them Nubians, dash along the moving ped-walks, which, doubling the runners' velocity, gave them some of the fantastic, dreamlike grace of gazelles. "I'm going to find out what's happened," he shouted to the diners, and Myrna, caught unprepared and with her mouth full of wine, only had time to sputter an ineffectual "Come back here you!" before he had turned the corner and was out of sight.

He let himself loose and ran with a purely muscular delight. His body had been made for better things than escorting old women on

walks and dancing tired variations on the fox trot. It was a good body and now for a little while it could be a happy body too. When he reached the base of the hill, he was not yet short of breath.

A Nubian, though not one of the restaurant staff, was sprinting up the path to the Deep Freeze fifty feet ahead of him. Jimmy started after him. The Nubian was as good a runner as Jimmy and seemed in better condition, but as he was unaware that he was in a contest, Jimmy had come abreast of him before they'd gone halfway up the hill. He caught hold of the sash about the black man's middle and tried to make him stop. The Nubian brushed at his hand impatiently.

"Just a minute!" Jimmy yelled. "I want to talk to you. Please."

The Nubian stopped. "What is it, sir?" His face expressed only its customary deference, as though it were not schooled in other emotions, but his body was tensed, impatient to be away.

"Where are you going? What did that whistle mean?"

The Nubian regarded him for a moment, seeming to deliberate just what measure of truth was called for. "There has been a power failure, sir, in one of the Vaults. Since there is not space immediately available elsewhere, several hundred of the Sleepers will have to be defrosted. It is an extreme emergency. Nothing of its sort has even happened before. Now — if you will let me pass —"

"Please, I've one more question. I *must* ask it. Where are the people? Not the Sleepers, not the ones like . . . like you. I mean, they're not all servants, are they? There must be somebody in charge."

The Nubian smiled — rather scornfully, it seemed to Jimmy. "Oh yes, we're *all* servants, sir. We all serve the same mistress, don't we, sir?"

"Just what do you mean to imply?"

The smile tightened into an unmistakable sneer. "A simple meaning, sir. You serve in your capacity; I serve in mine. Now — if you *will* let me pass —"

Jimmy said something elaborately obscene and swung his fist into the soft, silk-swathed belly of the Nubian. It yielded gratifyingly; then his fist came up hard against something that was neither muscle nor bone. Breaking, it made a crackling sound like fine glass. The Nubian doubled, groaning. Jimmy backed off, uncertain and a little afraid. Other people, not all Nubians, were still running by on the path up to the Deep Freeze, but they didn't stop to lend assistance.

"Oh, now you've done it," the Nubian whispered.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to . . . to damage you." Then, unable to keep back the question: "What *have* I done?"

"You've destroyed about six thousand dollars worth of equipment, I should estimate." The Nubian's fingers probed the soft flesh of his stomach. "And I do believe I'm hemorrhaging as well."

"Equipment? You're a robot?"

"Do robots hemorrhage? I wish you'd stop asking stupid questions. Go away, please."

"You're a cyborg?" Jimmy had heard of cyborgs — cybesnetic organisms — but he had never seen one. In his time, late in the 22nd Century, they had been fabulously expensive. The crudest model cost more than admission to the Deep Freeze.

It was said, and Jimmy did not doubt it now, that you couldn't tell a cyborg apart from a real person by external evidences. In all essentials — intelligence, ego structure, capacity for affect — they were also identical psychologically to their human templates. Cyborgs even had a sense of humor and a moral sense equivalent, for all practical purposes, to that of a human being. When cyborgs differed, it was usually for the better: the purely mechanical functions of their bodies were taken care of in a purely mechanical way. They had no childhood, and they did not age. Nor, of course, did they reproduce.

The cyborg nodded its head. His eyes were tearing with pain, but a ghost of his provoking smile lingered on his tightly compressed lips.

"The rest of them too?" Jimmy asked. "The whole damned world?"

The cyborg cachinnated. A sputter of blood came out of its mouth.

"Then we're the only humans, and history—"

"History has stopped. There is no more history," it said weakly.

Jimmy got down on his knees beside the black, genderless body. "Nowhere? Hasn't anyone stayed out *here?* Please, I must know. I must find them, the other humans."

"No. No one. Nowhere. Only . . . us."

"Then *I* will," Jimmy said resolutely.

"You —" The cyborg stopped, its mouth hanging open. An automatic mechanism, activated by the hemorrhaging, had put a halt to all but the most necessary processes until such time as repairs could be performed. He was, so to speak, in coma.

"And *I* will," said another voice. Hers, Ramona's. Jimmy turned to face her. "Didn't you expect me?" she asked, arching one brow rather aloofly and smiling.

"If I had had time to think about it, I suppose I might have."

"Shall we tell *them?* Or would you rather just vanish?"

"We'd better see them first. If they don't know we've gone off on our own, they'll send someone looking for us. We'd only have to explain later."

"That makes sense."

They exchanged a rather cold kiss (for they were, after all, little more than strangers) and set off, holding hands, back to the restaurant where Nestor and Myrna were waiting. They walked slowly and they did not take the most direct route, and by the time they got back they had discussed their position thoroughly. They had agreed that the future was the important thing and that it was best not to talk about the past.

"We've only come back to say good-bye," Jimmy announced from the shadowy part of the arcade.

"We're going away together."

Myrna, who was more that usually drunk for six o'clock, said many incoherent things loudly, without, however, getting up from the table. Nestor, who had had but a single brandy, said, "Please explain yourselves."

"It's just what he said, Nestor." Ramona sounded unhappy (she did like the old man, after all), but she didn't, for all that, let go of Jimmy's hand. "We've decided we have to. It's our duty as human beings." She explained about the cyborgs. "So if *we* don't stop, maybe nobody will. The whole race could go on sailing into the future forever — or until there was a bigger disaster than today's that would just end us. Why should we go from one century to the next if they're all the same? There's nothing left to see but sightseers."

Myrna had paid no attention to Ramona's long explanation. She had her own, which was simpler. "You're in love," she moaned.

"No," said Ramona, "we're not in love. I don't even think we like each other very much at this point. But it's our *duty*, don't you see?"

"Jimmy's duty is to stay with *me*. I paid millions of dollars so he could be with me. It's not fair."

Jimmy shrugged. Myrna hid her face in her hands and cried noisily.

"Exactly what do the two of you intend to do?" Nestor asked.

"First we'll find someplace where we can grow things," Jimmy answered. "There must be lots of land going to waste. We intend to have as many children as we can. We'll also try to get other people to join us. When they understand what the situation is, I think they'll be happy to leave the Freezes. Then in a few generations — however long it takes — we should have something interesting for you to see when you come out to take another look around."

"Oh, don't do it on my account. I like things the way they are."

"That's the essential difference between us."

"If you should get bored —"

"We're not doing this for entertainment," Ramona said.

"But if you *should*, I want you to feel free to return to the Deep Freeze. In fact, I hope to find you at my side when next I'm awakened. I'll be interested in learning the results, if any, of your experiment. Mrs. Balch, I trust I speak for you as well in inviting them to return when they've tired of their fling?"

"No!"

"Then you won't permit this young man to return if he goes now? You're cutting him off?"

"No. That's not what I mean!"

"Ah. I'm afraid she's too upset to discuss this sensibly. Now. You'd better leave. She'll come around."

"I doubt that we will."

Nestor only smiled. "Good-by," he said. "Aren't you going to kiss Daddy good-by, my dear?" Ramona came forward and kissed the old man on his forehead. Then the two young people walked away along the slow-moving belts at the side of the darkening street.

"You should have been expecting something like this, you know,"

Nestor said to Myrna, who was still crying theatrically. "He was altogether too independent a sort to stay by your side forever."

"I know that," Myrna said snuffling. She could see it was no use crying for Nestor Ransom's benefit. "But if he weren't independent, how could I ever believe he loved me?"

"He's also too intelligent."

"I like intelligent people," Myrna said. "My father was a very intelligent man. That's how he earned so much money. What about you? That girl of yours isn't any dumb blonde."

"I have a taste for intelligence myself. A dumb Ramona would only bore me. But then we can't pretend to be surprised when they use their intelligence and independence to get away from us."

"Jimmy will be back," Myrna declared resolutely. "He'll have to — it's in my contract. But I think you're right — I think he's too smart for his own good. I'm going to have him altered."

She had quite recovered her composure now. She could even see the humor in the situation. "Children!" she said, with a mirthful snort. "I could have told them just how many children they're likely to have."

"I was surprised you didn't."

"Oh, it would have hurt his feelings if I'd told him he wasn't human. He'd never forgive me for that. I still love him too much to want to hurt him that badly."

"It's getting dark. I'm afraid, since there's no one else around, I'll have to ask you to take me back to the Deep Freeze, Mrs. Balch. The Ball will be late tonight, but even so it's a long walk up that hill."

Halfway up to the Deep Freeze they came across the defunct Nubian whom Jimmy had put out of commission earlier that afternoon. His mouth was still open, and the blood that had trickled from both sides was congealed and dark.

"Would you help me with this wheelchair?" Myrna commanded the cyborg, nudging him with the toe of her shoe.

The cyborg made no reply.

"Goddam," Myrna complained. "They've *all* gone wacky today."

END

VIRGIL FINLAY

Dean of Science Fiction Artists

by SAM MOSKOWITZ

First in a new series of articles by science fiction's ablest chronicler!

Yet here upon a page our frightened glance
Finds monstrous forms no human eye should see;
Hints of those blasphemies whose countenance
Spreads death and madness through infinity
What limner he who braves black gulfs alone
*And lives to make their alien horrors known?**

H. P. Lovecraft penned the foregoing lines to Virgil Finlay after having been thrilled by the exquisite stipple and line technique, which exposed the monsters of Robert Bloch's *The Faceless God* in almost photographic clarity to the readers of the May, 1936 issue of *Weird Tales*. Lovecraft's enthusiasm was in concert with the times. No illustrator, in the history of fantasy magazines, had ever been greeted with so uniformly appreciative a chorus of reader approbation.

"Honor and festivals are due whatever gods were responsible for sending artist Virgil Finlay to you," wrote Robert W. Lowndes to Farnsworth Wright, editor of *Weird Tales*. "He is truly unique that one; reminiscent of the classic illustrations in high-priced editions of Greek and Roman masterpieces."

The observation was astute. Finlay belonged to the 19th century school of Gustave Dore, and was the equal of the finest of them on line and crosshatch technique, superior to virtually all of them on the use of the stipple, succeeding at will in

***To Virgil Finlay Upon His Drawing for Robert Bloch's Tale, "The Faceless God," published originally in Weird Tales, July, 1937, available in Collected Poems by H. P. Lovecraft, Arkham House, Sauk City, Wisconsin, $4.00.**

giving a camera-lens quality to his artwork, a goal which 19th century illustrators strove for and rarely achieved.

With the rise of experimentalism in art, largely as a result of the competition of photography, artistic standards moved away from absolute realism, rendering Finlay an anachronism — except in the world of fantasy and science fiction. To visualize and transfer to the illustrating board a razor-sharp rendition of the bizarre modern-day mythology of H. P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith and Robert Bloch required a creative imagination of the highest order. This Virgil Finlay possessed, and this the readers of first *Weird Tales* and then the science-fiction magazines instantly recognized and appreciated.

Virgil Warden Finlay was born to Warden Hugh Finlay and Ruby Cole, July 23, 1914 in Rochester, New York. His father was half Irish and half German and his mother English Protestant, from a religious colony that had landed in the United States in 1643, leaving England for the freedom to observe the sabbath on Saturday. His father was a woodworker, who at one time supervised a shop of 400 men when wood finishing was a construction art. Changing times and the depression found his father scrambling for a living in his own business, to die disheartened at 40, leaving behind a daughter, Jean Lily, as well as Virgil.

In high school, the short, muscular Virgil was an all-around athlete, starring in boxing and soccer and attaining championship calibre in pole vaulting with jumps of 11.8 feet, a respectable height before the days of the plastic poles. To his schoolmates he appeared an athletic extrovert. At home evenings, his passion was writing poetry. The only sample ever seen by fantasy enthusiasts was *Moon Mist* (illustrated by Finlay) published in the final, September, 1954, issue of *Weird Tales*.

Despite the poetic muse, art was never far from the young Virgil's mind. The deepest impression made on him, as early as the age of six, was Gustave Dore's line illustrations for a family bible. Dore became the artistic figure he most admired and his major influence. In grammar school he sketched, with a stylus on stencil, drawings for a mimeographed paper, and in high school he illustrated the Year Book.

All through high school he took two classes a day in art. Another major of his was science. At the age of 14 his wash drawings of human figures were exhibited at the Memorial Art Gallery in Rochester. His father, while alive, taught construction supervision at Mechanics Institute. Virgil was able to take free night courses in art at that school. When the WPA (Works Progress Administration) inaugurated art projects during the depression, he took advantage of the opportunity to take classes in anatomy, landscape and portraiture.

His skill at rendering faces was so pronounced that he was able to command $300 a portrait for what assignments were to be had during

the Great Depression. This served as one of his major sources of income during a period when he gratefully accepted jobs on a radio assembly line, in a stock room, with various wood-working shops and, as a prelude to his artistic career, actually held a card as a master house painter!

Though his preference was for the fantasy and supernatural, the first magazine he bought with any regularity was *Amazing Stories* in 1927, because it was the closest thing to fantasy he could find. A year or so later, he encountered *Weird Tales* and it was love at first sight.

The one thing he disliked about *Weird Tales* was its interior illustrations. He felt confident that he could do better. Six sketches were mailed off to Farnsworth Wright for consideration in the summer of 1935. Wright took only one as a test, because he doubted if the fine line and stipple work would reproduce on the cheap paper that the magazine was using.

Reproduction proofs run off on the pulp stock showed that while the drawings lost a great deal, they still printed with considerable effectiveness.

For the record, that first illustration was of a reclining nude Medusa, and Wright used it to fill a space at the end of a Paul Ernst story, *Dancing Feet,* in the December, 1935 *Weird Tales,* which Finlay also illustrated, as well as *The Chain of Aforgomen* by Clark Ashton Smith and *The Great Brain of Kaldar* by Edmond Hamilton, all in the same issue.

Farnsworth Wright didn't have to wait for reader reaction to know that he had stumbled on a good thing. Finlay was the key to a special project he had in mind.

All his life Wright had been a lover of Shakespeare. It had been his dream to publish Shakespeare in low-priced magazine format. When Max Reinhart and William Dieterle produced *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a moving picture for Warner Brothers in 1935, with a banner cast including James Cagney, Olivia de Havilland, Mickey Rooney, Dick Powell, Joe E. Brown, and Hugh Herbert, he felt this might be the spark to light a popular Shakespeare revival. He would produce Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as the first of a series of Wright's Shakespeare Library, similar to *Weird Tales* in size, but on better paper, to sell for 35c. It would be an illustrated edition, with 25 drawings by Virgil Finlay, which, together with the fact that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was a fantasy, would supply the motivation for support from readers of *Weird Tales.*

The financial failure of both the film and Wright's Shakespeare Library were far removed in order of magnitude but in each case they were a disaster. The effect on Wright was multiplied by the fact that in order to finish the 25 drawings for *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* Finlay would fail to appear in three consecutive issues of the none-too-economically-stable *Weird Tales,* risking the ire of impatient readers who clamored for more of his work.

Today, Wright's edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is remembered only for the Finlay illustrations.

As Finlay appeared regularly in the magazine, the praise of his work reached the proportions of a perpetual anvil chorus. He so thrilled readers that frequently letters would discuss the illustrations, without a word of comment concerning the story. A case in point was Fred C. Miles, a New Providence, N. J. fan, whose letter appeared in *The Eyrie* for May, 1937 literarily exploded: "Virgil Finlay's illustration for Hasse's yarn was shattering in its impact. A cold demonic force hurled itself from the page, smashing its way through to the very brain."

The accolades Finlay obtained may have been surpassed by those accorded Michelangelo and Leonard da Vinci, but only because wider distribution and longer exposure of those artists had given them an unfair advantage. It is said that man does not live by bread alone. Finlay was incontrovertible proof that one may sustain himself on high praise, because there certainly wasn't very much money passing his way.

Weird Tales paid eight dollars for a black-and-white illustration. It took Finlay from three days to a week to execute one in his style, depending upon its complexity. Taking a practical approach to the entire matter, Finlay rationalized that since in 1936 and 1937 it was virtually impossible to find work and if you did $15 a week was considered a fair starting salary, the choice was fundamentally between drawing for *Weird Tales* at a pittance and being hailed as a "master" or doing nothing and being called a bum.

Farnsworth Wright, who needed every "plus" to hold his shaky publication together, became worried that sooner or later he would lose Finlay to some other magazine. One way to give Finlay more money without hurting the slim *Weird Tales'* budget was to permit him to do covers, which paid more. The problem was that for three years almost all the covers had been done by Margaret Brundage, a Chicago housewife who specialized in bright pastel nudes. Wright had always felt that he needed the suggestion of sex to sell his high-priced (25c) periodical. Brundage had first appeared on the cover of *Weird Tales* with the September, 1932 issue featuring *The Altar of Melek Taos* by G. G. Pendarves. Eventually she had crowded even famed Tarzan illustrator J. Allen St. John, master of anatomy and action, from the cover spot.

Readers had raged unavailingly for years against the scenes of flagellation, suggestions of lesbianism, conclaves of concubines and harems guarded by eunuchs that her covers promised but the stories failed to deliver. Finally Wright brought St. John back for a few covers. The reaction to the change was so positive that, in the Dec., 1936 issue, he wrote: "We have received many letters asking that we also use Virgil Finlay for one or more covers. We are happy to announce that Mr. Finlay will do the cover design for a new Seabury Quinn story, which

will be published soon. If it is as good as his black and white work, then it should be something to talk about."

There could scarcely have been more reader excitement if Wright had come up with an unpublished Edgar Allan Poe story. Finlay's cover for *The Globe of Memories* by Seabury Quinn (a tale of a love that survives many incarnations) appeared on the Feb., 1937 *Weird Tales* and was executed with the same photographic realism and full confrontation of horrors that made his black and white drawings so popular. Henry Kuttner summed up the readers' feelings in a letter which read: "Just get the February *WT*. That Finlay cover is a knockout! And so is Virgil's illustrations for Owen's yarn. In the name of Lucifer, let's have a Finlay cover along the lines of his extraordinary illustration for Bloch's *The Faceless God*."

Finlay became a cover regular and might have replaced Brundage entirely, except for a letter he received at his Rochester home, which changed the direction of his career. Dated Nov. 26, 1937, it read: "As a reader of *Weird Tales*, I have been interested in your illustrations. There might be an advantageous opening on *The American Weekly* at the present time for you. I do not know whether you have thought of changing your town or whether you would want to come to New York. If you can do what we want someone to do, it would probably mean living in N.Y."

The letter was signed in pencil: A. Merritt.

Merritt was one of the great elder gods of the fantasy world exalted author of *The Moon Pool, The Ship of Ishtar* and *Dwellers in the Mirage*: the penultimate creator of escape fantasy, whose popularity would sustain itself long after his death. He was also editor of *The American Weekly*, the newspaper supplement to Hearst papers.

The salary offer was $80 a week. During a period when a man could support a family on $30, and anything above that lifted its earner into a comfortable middle class strata, it spelled heady success.

In the Big City, the 24-year-old Virgil Finlay immediately ran into trouble. He was the youngest man on the working staff of *The American Weekly* and the cocky favorite of A. Merritt. His talent was great but his inexperience colossal.

He was not a trained illustrator and was ignorant of publication production and the terminology of the trade. The stipple and line technique which Merritt so admired was a laborious process. It took days to produce an illustration, something which made the art director, Lee Conrey twitch nervously as he sweated out his weekly deadlines.

His first assignment, never finished, was to copy a full-color painting so it could be reproduced in black and white. The initial illustration of his to appear depicted some bowery bums. His first weird drawing, in his best style, presented an apparition of an old coach and horses. Learning the ropes proved tough, keeping regular hours even tougher.

He was fired after six months for taking two-hour lunch periods, a temptation in New York City where cliques of office workers tend to try a different restaurant each day. For about four months he was put on a picture-by-picture basis. Then Merritt had a change of heart and sent a note to hurry back, that all would be forgiven if he mended his ways.

Merritt was no easy man to work with He would have a story conference with Finlay in which the sketches would be decided upon. When they were finished, Merritt frequently had mentally rewritten the story and wanted an entire new set of sketches. Story conferences with Merritt were physically difficult. Periodically Merritt would take off in a chauffeured car, rounding up exotic cheeses from gourmet shops. He would bring them back to hteoffice and forget about them or use them for cheese rabbit prepared on a little electric stove. Either way, the odors made a conference with Merritt an ordeal.

A psychological bloc prevented Merritt from continuing to write the marvelous fantasies which made him famous. The nature of that bloc he eventually confided to Finlay. Essentially, it boiled down to the fact that he could no longer make literary transitions. A sword battle ended in a room and Merritt found himself stymied as to whether to permit the hero to exit through a door, window or secret passage; to leave with sword in hand or in scabbard. He was afraid the wrong choice would destroy the poetic rhythm of his prose. In earlier years, this bloc had been broken every time he urgently needed money and pushed his protagonist through his heroics to a climax without regard as to whether the "poetic" sequence was broken or not. Now, financially well off, and writing for art's sake, he no longer had a prod to unfasten his self-imposed shackles.

Finlay learned that magazine illustrating demanded certain liberties. When unable to find an illustrative scene for *The American Weekly's* serialization of John and Ward Hawkins' novel *The Ark of Fire*, which began April 3, 1938, he wrote one in. Not only was there no complaint from the authors, but when the novel of the earth plunging towards a fiery death in the sun was reprinted in the March, 1943 *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, the added scene remained intact!

There might have been seven million people in New York in 1938 but Virgil Finlay was still lonesome. Among his correspondents was Beverly Stiles, a Rochester girl he had known, and who had in common the same birth date. She had repeatedly refused his proposals of marriage for religious reasons, as she was Jewish. When he agreed to convert to Judaism they were married Nov. 16, 1938 in New York by Rabbi Dr. Clifton Harby Levy, a salaried consultant on religious matters for *The American Weekly* since 1899, a friend of A. Merritt, and a leader of the Jewish Reform Movement.

The Finlays set up housekeeping

in a 1½ room apartment at 1800 E. 12th St., Brooklyn. One of their early guests was Henry Kuttner, who had been in correspondence with Finlay whom he finally met at a bar in the Times Square area. Kuttner brought with him Jim Mooney, an aspiring West Coast artist who boasted the distinction of having sold one illustration to *Weird Tales* for Henry's story *The Salem Horror* (May, 1937). It was Easter, and Kuttner carried a live rabbit as a gift for Finlay's wife.

Despite his job on *The American Weekly*, Finlay had continued to illustrate for *Weird Tales*. Kuttner urged him to seek other markets. Like Finlay, Kuttner had been discovered and developed by *Weird Tales*, but he found that the growth field was really science fiction. Mort Weisinger at *Thrilling Wonder Stories* had been receptive to Kuttner's work and now Kuttner effectively petitioned for Finlay. A single illustration by Finlay done in a technique which vested a silvery sheen to the art work for *Experiment* by Roscoe Clarke, F. R. C. S., a grim tale of a man who turns into a living rat cancer, in the April, 1939 *Thrilling Wonder Stories* brought an immediately favorable response.

As a result, Finlay also began to illustrate for *Startling Stories* and *Strange Stories*, two companions to *Thrilling Wonder Stories*.

Of all the people he worked with in the fantasy field, Finlay was fondest of Kuttner. Finlay was best man at a civil ceremony at which Henry Kuttner married C. L. Moore, at the New York City Hall, the morning of June 7, 1940 and his wife, Beverly, was matron of honor. Finlay paid the justice of the peace and bought the bride and groom breakfast.

The closeness of this friendship is best expressed in Henry Kuttner's story *Reader, I Hate You!* (*Super Science Stories*, May, 1943), written around a Finlay cover and depicting a puzzled giant holding in one hand a space ship with a defiant little man on top. The two lead characters of the story are Henry Kuttner and Virgil Finlay, who are involved in a search for a science fiction fan "Joe or Mike or Forrest J.," who accidentally carried the wife of a superman (turned to a chartreuse crystal) off in their pocket.

From the standpoint of professional advancement, A. Merritt was Finlay's best friend. In a photograph he gave Finlay he inscribed: "To Virgil Finlay who illustrates stories just the way I like them." And he meant it! At that very time *Argosy* was reprinting *Seven Footprints to Satan* and Merritt arranged with the editor, G. W. Post, to have Finlay illustrate all five installments, beginning with the June 24, 1939 issue. Finlay would remain an *Argosy* illustrator, including many covers, until its change to large-size by Popular Publications with its September, 1943 number.

When The Frank A. Munsey Co. began the issuance of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* dated Sept.-Oct., 1939, and dedicated to reprinting great science fiction and fantasy classics from its files, it was Merritt

again who induced the editors to use Finlay to illustrate the serialization of *The Conquest of the Moon Pool* (Nov., 1939).

It was in this magazine and its companion *Fantastic Novels* that Finlay achieved a new pinnacle of popularity. The colorful old classics of A. Merritt, Austin Hall, George Allan England, Victor Rousseau and Francis Stevens, with their rich imagery and strong symbolism, were made to order for Finlay's talents. The result was a development almost unprecedented in pulp publishing. *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* offered in its August, 1941 issue a portfolio of eight Finlay drawings from the magazine, each on an individual sheet of high-grade glossy paper, suitable for framing. The portfolio sold for 60c or in combination with a one year subscription to the magazine for $1.00. A second portfolio of eight was sold for the same price in 1943 and a third of eight for 75c in 1949. After the demise of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* in 1953, Nova Press, Philadelphia, brought out a paperbound portfolio of 15 outstanding Finlays to sell for $2.00.

Except for an unfortunate experience Finlay might have become a regular illustrator for *Astounding Science-Fiction,* then the field leader.

Street & Smith had launched a companion titled *Unknown,* to deal predominantly in fantasy. Finlay had been commissioned to do several interior drawings for a novelette *The Wisdom of the Ass,* which finally appeared in the February, 1940 *Unknown* as the second in a series of tales based on modern Arabian mythology, written by the erudite wrestler and inventor, Silaki Ali Hassan.

John W. Campbell had come into considerable criticism for the unsatisfactory cover work of Graves Gladney on *Astounding Science-Fiction* during early 1939. So it was with a note of triumph, in projecting the features of the August, 1939 issue, he announced to his detractors:

"The cover, incidentally, should please some few of you. It's being done by Virgil Finlay, and illustrates the engine room of a spaceship. Gentlemen, we try to please!"

The cover proved a shocking disappointment. Illustrating Lester del Rey's *The Luck of Ignatz,* its crudely drawn wooden human figures depicted operating an uninspired machine would have drawn rebukes from the readers of an amateur science-fiction fan magazine. The infinite detail and photographic intensity which trademarked Finlay was entirely missing.

No one was more sickened than Virgil Finlay. He had been asked to paint a gigantic engine room, in which awesome machinery dwarfed the men with implications of illimitable power. He had done just that; but the art director had taken a couple of square inches of his painting, blown it up to a full-size cover and discarded the rest.

The result was horrendous. A repitition of it would have seriously damaged his reputation, so Finlay refused to draw for Street and Smith again.

Finlay's genius for graphically depicting the nightmarish finally proved his undoing. Whipping all of his considerable talents into line he turned out an imaginative interpretation of the Sargasso Sea for *The American Weekly* that was so nauseous that a telegram arrived from William Randolph Hearst to "Fire Finlay." This time Merritt could not save him, though three weeks later Finlay did again receive the first of a number of small free-lance assignments from Harry Carl of that publication, predominantly for the food page.

To add the "crusher" to his misfortune, Finlay was welcomed into the all-embracing bosom of the U. S. armed forces on June 2, 1943. After three months training as a combat engineer he was made a corporal. Following a stint at Hawaii he was sent to Okinawa in April, 1945, where he stayed until March 17, 1946. There he was promoted to sergeant and served as chief draftsman to the Surgeon General, Brigadier General Maxwell.

The induction of Finlay into the armed forces created a crisis at *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. His illustrations had been beyond question one of the periodical's mainstays. Without them many of the "classics" reprinted took on the aspect of creaky period pieces. Desperately, editor Mary Gnaedinger and Alden H. Norton who had also been using Finlay in *Super Science Stories* cast about for a replacement. Their one dim hope was an old man who illustrated regularly for *Adventure*, Lawrence Sterne Stevens, who was in the business so long, that in his youth he had received considerable training in the fine line and crosshatch techniques.

"You've been asking for more work," Alden H. Norton told him, "if you can make like Finlay, we'll turn *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* over to you lock, stock and barrel, covers as well as interiors."

Stevens opened up the November, 1942 issue of *Super Science Stories*, where he had done the opening spread to Henry Kuttner's *We Guard the Black Planet*, of a man and a woman with wings, executed in superbly delicate line.

"I believe that's why you asked me, Al," Stevens replied. "I don't think there's any question I can do it."

Stevens first job was the cover and interiors for the novel *Three Go Back* by J. Lelie Mitchell (*Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, December, 1943, telling of three moderns thrust back in time to the era of the cave man. His approximation of the Finlay techniques was remarkable. While inferior to Finlay in creative imagination, in anatomy and in the fine nuance of the stipple, he brought to his pictures a charm, painstaking and pleasing detail, and the gracious feel of the era in which the story illustrated was set that created for him his own niche. Eventually, *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* would issue two Portfolios of Steven's work.

While stationed on Hawaii, prior to shipment to Okinawa, Finlay found time to do one fantasy il-

lustration which he mailed to his wife, now living with her parents in Rochester. His wife sent it on to Mary Gnaedinger who had C. L. Moore write a story around it.

The illustration showed the head of a unicorn alongside a strange woman with a tremendous uplift of leaves in place of hair. Interpreting it, C. L. Moore wrote the sensitive confession of the dying Luiz o Bobo, a simple lad who could see the "daemon" that follows every man around. Appropriately titled "Daemon," by the time the story appeared in the October, 1946 *Famous Fantastic Mysteries,* Virgil Finlay was long back in Rochester with his wife. He would thenceforth share the work in *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* and its later companions with Lawrence.

There was more than enough work for both. Finlay found himself occupied seven days a week illustrating for *Famous Fantastic Mysteries, Thrilling Wonder Stories, Startling Stories* and later for *Super Science Stories* and *Fantastic Novels,* as well as other magazines that were to spring up in the wake of a gathering boom. His illustrating techniques sharpened magnificently after World War II, and readers of the fantasy and science fiction pulps were given a display of inspired symbolism, breathtaking imagery, along with a glorification of the human figure, closeups of evil incarnate and dazzling visions of a scientific future, all executed in a meticulous style that made even the black and white tones appear to possess infinite graduations of light and dark.

Finlay bought a house in Westbury, New York, in a development that was part of the fringe of the famed Levittown complex. There, his only child, Lail, was born February 9, 1949. By the dint of endless hours, he managed to prevail against inflation despite the time-killing pace of his method. In the end his dedication was betrayed by circumstances beyond his control. The boom in science fiction that gathered steam in 1949, began to lose it in 1953. Finlay's biggest markets, first, *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* and its companions (1953) and then *Thrilling Wonder Stories* and *Startling Stories* (1955) were found among the casualties.

The trend to digest-size science fiction magazines also led to the elimination of interior illustrations in some. Those used were paid for at rates reminiscent of the depression. Finlay was soon forced to utilize swifter techniques to enable him to turn out a large enough quantity of work to sustain himself and his family, and then increasingly he had to look for income outside the fantasy and science fiction field. This "extracurricular" work even took the extreme of designing lamp shades, as well as special illustrating projects.

One notable illustrating achievement, destined to become a collector's item, is *The Complete Book of Space Travel* by Albro Gaul, issued by The World Publishing Company in 1956, featuring a cover jacket and 19 superb black and white illustrations in a variety of Finlay's most effective artistic approaches.

As the reader's departments disappeared from most science fiction periodicals, Finlay found that the intangible benefits as well as the tangible ones were no longer to be found in magazine illustrating. The 11th World Science Fiction Convention, Philadelphia, 1953, had awarded Virgil Finlay a Hugo as the best interior illustrator of the year. He made his sole public address before any science fiction group before The Eastern Science Fiction Association, Newark, N. J., March 1. 1964, where he received a plaque naming him "the dean of science fiction art for unexcelled imagery and technique." These were pleasant but scarcely enough compensation for years of diminishing satisfaction both economically and personally from fantasy work.

Beginning in 1959, Virgil Finlay made a decision to devote part of his time to gallery painting regardless of whether he succeeded in selling any or not. He started with a series of abstract, impressionistic and experimentalist paintings, works at the opposite extreme of his traditional precise realism, yet holding in common with it a distinctive intensity that was recognizably his own despite the variance in style.

Gradually the experimental basis of this new tack resolved itself into near realism, enhanced by the new lessons Finlay had learned. Today, Finlay is still a science fiction illustrator but his paintings may also be purchased at select galleries. Colleges of fine art are beginning to invest in Finlays, counting on his ability to provide them with an eventual dividend in the constantly growing art market.

It is almost a certainty, that in the near future, while fantasy enthusiasts are wildly bidding for a Finlay original for a pulp magazine illustration at some science fiction convention, art connoisseurs, oblivious to that phase of Finlay's activities, will be doing the same in a higher financial key for his gallery paintings at important auction centers. END

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*Gallery Beyond the Blue Door, Inc., 2307 Merrick Road, Merrick, Long Island, New York, maintains a perpetual gallery of his serious work.

WORLDMASTER

by KEITH LAUMER

Illustrated by GIUNTA

His world had collapsed around him but he could not surrender—though he had lost the desire for victory!

I

In the boat bay four Deck Police held guns on me while two more shook me down. When they finished, they formed a box around me.

"All right, this way, sir," the Warrant said. He was a dandified, overweight lad with pale, hard little eyes like unripe olives. Four power guns snapped around to hold on me, rib-high. I stumbled a little and the nearest gun jumped. The boys were a hair more nervous than they looked. As for myself, I was long past the nervous stage; it took all I had left just to stay on my feet with nothing left over to wonder about the curious reception given to a surviving captain paying his courtesy call on his admiral after a twenty-eight hour action in which two fleets had been wiped out.

Here aboard the flagship everything was as smooth and silent as a hotel for dying millionaires. We went along a wide corridor lit like

the big window at Cartier's and carpeted in a pale blue as soft as a summer breeze, and took the high-speed lift up to the command deck. There were more DP's here, spit-and-polished in blue-black class A's with white gloves, mirror-bright boots, and chromalloy dress armor. The guns they aimed at me were fancy Honor Guard models with ebony stocks and bright-plated barrels; but they would fire real slugs if occasion demanded. The Warrant came up beside me, smelling a little sweeter than ordinary after-shave.

"Perhaps you'd like to step along to the head and tidy up a bit before going in," he told me. "I have a clean uniform ready for you and —"

"This one's okay," I said. "Oh, it's got a few cuts and tears and a couple of scorched spots no bigger than the doily under a demi-tasse, but it came by them honorably, as the saying goes. Maybe I need a shave, but no worse than I did yesterday. I've been a little busy, Mister —" I cut it off before it got entirely out of hand. "Let's take a chance and go in. The admiral may be curious about what happened to his fleet."

The Warrant's mouth tightened up as though he had a string threaded through his lip.

"I'm afraid I'll have to insist —" he started. I brushed past him. One of the ratings beside the door leading into the admiral's quarters jabbed his gun at me as I came toward him.

"Go ahead, son, fire it," I said. "You've got it set on full automatic; in this confined space you'll fry all of us blacker than a newlywed's toast."

The annunciator above the door crackled. "Purdy, take those weapons away from those men before there's an accident!" a voice barked. "I'll see Captain Maclamore immediately. Mac, stop scaring my men to death."

The door slid back. I went through into a wide room flooded with artificial sunlight as cheerful as paper flowers and smelling of expensive cigar smoke. From a big easy chair under a windorama with a view of a field of ripe wheat nodding under a light breeze, Admiral Banastre Tarleton gave me the old Academy smile, looking hard and efficient and younger than four stars had any right to. Behind him, Commodore Sean Braze glowered, his hands behind his back, big shoulders bulging under the tailormade tunic, a pistol strapped to his hip as inconspicuous as a rattlesnake at a picnic. A captain with a small crinkled face and quick eyes looked at me from a chair off to the right. I threw a sloppy salute and the braid dangling from my torn cuff flopped against my sleeve.

"Sit down, Mac," Tarleton nodded toward a chair placed to half face him. I didn't move. He frowned a little but let it pass.

"I'm glad to see you here," he said. "How are you feeling?"

"I don't know how I'm feeling, Admiral," I said.

"You fought your command like half the devils in hell, Mac. I'm writing you up for the Cross."

I didn't say anything. I felt dizzy. I was wondering if it was too late to take the offer of chair.

"Sit down before you fall down, Captain," the man on the right said. Little bright lights were sleeting down all around me. They faded and I was still standing. I didn't know what I was proving.

"Anybody get out with you?" Braze was asking me. He was a man who couldn't ask to have the salt passed without making it sound like a sneer.

"Sure," I said. "My Gunnery Officer — the upper half of him, anyway. Why?"

"I saw it on the big Command Screen," Tarleton said. "A lucky break, Mac. A salvage crew couldn't have sliced that nav dome away cleaner with cutting torches."

"Yeah," I said.

"Here —" the monkey-faced captain started. Tarleton flicked a hand at him and he faded off.

"Something bothering you, Mac?" Tarleton was giving me the wise, patient look he'd learned from watching old Big Crosby films.

"Why should anything be bothering me?" I heard myself asking. "I've just had my ship shot out from under me, and my crew wiped out, and seen what was formerly the UN Battle Fleet blasted into radioactive vapor while the flagship that mounted sixteen percent of our total firepower pulled back half a million miles and watched without firing a shot. You've probably got all kinds of reasons for that, Admiral. Reasons that would be way over my head. Some of them might even be good. I wouldn't know."

"Watch your tongue, Maclamore!" Braze said. "You're talking to a superior officer!"

"That's enough, Sean," Tarleton said sharply. He was giving me a harder, less contrived look now. "Sure, you've had a rough time, Mac. I'm sorry about that; if there'd been any other way..." He made a short, choppy gesture with his hand. Then he lifted his chin, got the firm-lipped look back in place. "But the Bloc didn't fare any better. They're blasted out of space — permanently. It was an even trade."

Maybe my eyelids flickered; maybe I gave him a look that nailed his heart to his backbone; and maybe I was just a little man with a big headache, trying not to show it.

"An even trade," he repeated. He seemed to like the sound of it. "I watched the action very closely, Mac," he went on. "If the tide had started to turn to favor the Bloc, I'd have hit them with everything I had." He worked his mouth as though he were trying a new set of teeth for size; but it was an idea he was testing the fit of.

"And if the tide had started running our way, I'd have come in, helped finish them off. As it was ...an even match. The board's clean." He looked at me with something dangerous sparkling back behind his eyes. "Except for my flagship," he added softly.

The wrinkle-faced captain was leaning forward; his hands were opening and closing. Braze took his hands out from behind himself and

fingered the pistol-butt. I just waited.

"You see what that means, don't you, Mac?" Tarleton ran his fingers through his still blond, still curly hair, wiped his hand down the back of his neck the way he used to do in the locker room at the half, when he was cooking up the strategy that was going to flatten the opposition. "For the past ten years, both sides have poured ninety-five percent of their military budgets into their Space Arms, while planet-based forces fought themselves into an undeclared truce. Both sides together couldn't put a hundred thousand armed and equipped men in the field today — and if they did —"

He leaned back, took a deep breath; I couldn't blame him for that; he was breathing the heady air of power.

"I have the only effective fighting apparatus on or off the planet, Mac." He held out his hand, palm up, like a kid showing me his shiny new quarter. "I hold the balance of power, right here."

"Why tell *him* this, Bonny?" the brown-faced captain said quickly.

"Button your lip, Captain," Tarleton snapped. "Keep it buttoned." He heaved himself out of his chair, shot a hard look at me, took a turn up and down the room, stopped in front of me.

"I need good men, Mac," he said. He was staring at me; his jaw muscles knotted and relaxed. I looked past him at Braze, over at the other man. "Uh-huh," I said. "That you do."

Braze took a step in my direction. His carefully lamp-tanned face was as dark as an Indian's. Tarleton's face twitched in a humorless smile.

"How long has it been?" he asked. "Sixty years? Sixty-five? Two giant powers, sitting across the world from each other, snarling and trading slaps. Sixty years of petty wars, petty truces — of people dying — for nothing — of wasted time, wasted talent, wasted resources—while the whole damned universe is waiting to be taken!"

He turned on his heel, stamped another couple of laps, pulled up in front of me again.

"I decided to put an end to it. I made up my mind — hell, over a year ago. My strategy since that time has been directed toward this moment. I planned it, I maneuvered it," he closed his hand as though he was crushing a bug. "And I brought it off!"

He looked at me, happy, wanting to hear me say something; I didn't say it. He went back to his chair, sat down, picked up the long, blackish cigar from the ashtray at his elbow, drew on it, put it down again, blew the smoke out suddenly.

"There comes a time," he said flatly, "when a man has to act on what he knows to be right. When he can no longer afford the luxury of a set of mottos as a substitute for intelligence. Sure, I swore to uphold the Constitution; it's easy to die for a flag, a principle, an oath — but that won't save humankind from its own stupidity. Maybe someday the descendants of the people whose

necks I'm saving in spite of themselves will thank me. Or maybe they won't. Maybe I'll go down in the book as the villain — a new and better Benedict Arnold. I still say to hell with it. If all it takes to break the cycle is the sacrifice of one man's personal—shall I say honor? — then that's a small price. I'm prepared to pay it."

I heard him talking but it all seemed to be coming from a long way off, remote, unreal. It didn't reach me. I nodded toward the one he'd told to shut up.

"As the man said, why tell me?" I asked him, just to be saying something.

"I want you with me, Mac."

I looked at him.

"I wanted you in it from the beginning, but . . ." He frowned again. I was making him do a lot of frowning tonight. "Maybe you can guess why I didn't speak to you earlier. It wasn't easy sending you out with the others. I'm glad you came through. Damned glad. Maybe it's . . . some kind of sign." His lips twitched in what I guess he thought was a smile.

"It wasn't easy — but you managed it." I wasn't sure whether I said it or just thought it. The roaring in my head was loud now; a hot black was closing in from the sides. I pushed it back. For some reason I didn't want to fall down right now; not here, in front of Braze and the little man with the darting eyes.

"We used to be friends, Mac," Tarleton was saying. "There was a time . . ." He got up again. It seemed he couldn't stay in one place. "Hell, it's simple enough; I'm asking for your help," he finished looking at me.

"Yeah, we were friends, Bonny," I said. For an instant there was that strange, hollow feeling, the heart-stopping glimpse back down the yellowed and forgotten years to the old academy walls and the leaves that were on the cinder track as you walked across, heavy-shouldered in the practice gear, the cleats making you feel tall and tough, and the faces of girls, and the smell of night air and the fast car bucking under you and Bonny, passing a flask back and then again, across the field while the crowd roared, his arm back, the ball tumbling down the blue sky and the solid smack and then away and running —

"But you found other friends," I was saying, with no more than an instant's pause. "They took you down another path, I guess. Somewhere we lost it. I guess today we buried it."

"That's right, we've taken our separate ways," he said. "But we can still find common ground. I didn't make the Navy, Mac — but after I picked it as a way of life, I learned to live with it — to beat it at its game. You didn't. You bucked it. Sure, you made your points — but they don't pay off for those. What do you expect, a medal for stubbornness? Hell, if it hadn't been for me keeping an eye on you, you'd have been —" He stopped. "Suffice it to say I got you your command," he ground out.

I nodded. "I didn't know," I said.

"It was a wonderful thing while I had it. I'm grateful to you. And then you took it away. It was a tough way to lose my ship, Bonny. In a way I'd almost rather have not had it — but not quite."

He planted himself again, tried to catch my eye. Somehow I seemed to be looking past him.

"I make no apologies," he snapped. "I did what I had to do. Now there's more to be done. I'm going down tonight to make my report to Congress. There are Cabinet members to see, the President to be dealt with. It won't be easy. It's not won yet. A wrong word in the wrong place and I could still fumble this. I'm being frank with you, Mac. I need a good man I can trust." He reached out and clapped me on my upper arm — a caricature of the old gesture, as self-consciously counterfeit as a whore's passion. I shook the hand off.

"Don't be a fool," he said in a low voice, close to me. "What do you think your alternative is?"

"I don't know, Admiral," I said. "But you'll think of something."

Braze came over. "I don't like this, Bonny," he said. "You've said too damned much to him." He gave me a look like a hired gun marking down a target for later on. The other fellow was up now, not wanting to be left out. He flicked his eyes at me, then at the gun at Braze's belt.

"This fellow's no good for us," he said in a rapid, breathless voice, like a girl about to make a daring suggestion. "You'll have to . . . dispose of him."

Tarleton swung around and looked at him.

"Have you ever killed a man, Walters?" he asked in a tight voice. Walters' tongue popped out, touched his lips. His eyes went to the gun again, darted away.

"No, but —"

"I have," Tarleton said. He walked across to the windorama, punched the control; the scene shifted to heavy seas breaking across a reef under a rock-gray sky.

"Last chance, Mac," he said in a mock-hearty voice. "The thing happens; it's far too late to stop it now. Will you be in it — or out?" He turned to face me, his clean-cut American Boy features set in a recruiting poster smile.

"Count me out," I said. "I wouldn't be good at running the world." I looked at the other two. "Besides which, I wouldn't like the company."

Braze lifted a lip to show me a square-looking canine. Walters half-closed his eyes and snorted softly through his nose.

"What about it, Bonny?" Braze said. "Walters is right. You can't dump Maclamore back with the other internees."

Tarleton turned on him. "You're telling me what I can and can't do, Braze?"

"I'm making a recommendation," the Commodore came back. "My neck is in this with yours, now —"

"Another word of mutiny out of you, Mister, and I'll give orders that will have your precious neck stretched before the big hand gets to the twelve. Want to try me?" His voice was like something cut into a plate-glass window. He went to his chair and pushed a button set in the arm.

"Purdy, send those four morons of yours in here — and try not to shoot yourself through the foot in the process." He went over and watched the waves some more. The door opened with a sigh and the goon squad appeared with the Warrant out front, fussing over them like a headwaiter figuring the tip on ten pounds of roomservice caviar.

"Find quarters for Captain Maclamore on Y deck," Tarleton said in a flat voice.

The Warrant bustled forward, all business now. "All right, move along there —" he started. Tarleton whirled on him.

"And keep a civil tongue in your head, damn you! You're talking to a Naval officer!"

Purdy swallowed hard. I turned and walked out past the ready gun muzzles. I didn't bother with the salute this time. The time for saluting was over.

II

The medic finished up and left and I lay back, listening to the small ship-noises that murmured through the walls. It had been about an hour now since the last faint shock that meant contact with one of the chunks of debris that was all that was left of forty-two fighting ships — twenty-two UN, the rest Bloc. At least Tarleton had gone through the motions of picking up

what few survivors there might have been from the slaughter — perhaps a few hundred dazed and bloody men, the accidental leftovers of the power plays of Grand Strategy.

I had come through in better shape than most of them, I guessed. With the exception of a few minor cuts and bruises and a mild concussion, aggravated by twenty-eight hours without food or sleep, I was in as good a shape as I had been before the fight. My arms and legs still worked; my heart was pumping away as usual; my lungs were doing their job. The brain was still numb, true, but it was working — working for its life.

Tarleton may or may not have meant it when he turned down Braze's suggestion — but he had told me far too much for any man to hear who was arrayed on the opposite side of the fence from the Commodore. I didn't need to break out of my cell to look for trouble; it would come to me. Braze was a man who always took the simple, direct course. It had won him a commodore's star; he'd stay with the technique. He'd make his move at the last minute before the ground party boarded the boats for the trip down, to minimize the chance of word getting to Tarleton; he'd have an account of an attempted escape ready for later, if Tarleton got curious — an unlikely eventuality. The admiral would have his hands full digesting his conquests, with no time left over for pondering the fates of obscure former acquaintances.

They'd be going down tonight, Tarleton had said. He'd have a good-sized shore party with him; all of his top advisors — or whatever rat-faced little men like Walters called themselves — and a nice showing of armed sailors, tricked out in dress blues and side-arms, as a gentle reminder of the planet-wrecking power orbiting ten thousand miles out.

The flagship carried a complement of two thousand and eleven men — all long since screened for reliability, no doubt. If I know Bonny Tarleton, he'd have have half of them along on his triumphal march. That would call for twenty heavy scout boats. He'd use bays one through ten on the upper boat deck for reasons of ease of loading and orbital dynamics . . .

I was building an elaborate structure of fancy on a feeble foundation of guesses, but I had to carry the extrapolation as far as I could. I wouldn't get a second chance to make my try; maybe not even the first one — and my quota of mistakes was already used up.

I got up and took a couple of turns up and down the room. I still felt light-headed, but the meal and the bath and the dressings and the shots and the pills had helped a lot. The plain set of ducks Purdy had provided were comfortable enough, but I missed the contents of a couple of small special pockets that had been built into my own clothes — the ones that had been taken away and burned. The hardware was gone — but with a little luck I might be able to improvise suitable substitutes.

A quick inspection of the room

turned up an empty closet, a chest of four empty drawers, a wall mirror, a moulded polyfoam chair that weighed two pounds soaking wet, a framed tridograph of the Kennedy Monument complete with shrapnel scars, and the built-in bunk to which the medics had lowered me, groaning, thirty minutes earlier. Not much there to assemble a blaster out of —

I felt the tremor then; the teacup-rattling nudge of a scout boat kicking free. Quite suddenly my mouth had that dry feeling. Boat number two pushed off; then a third. Tarleton wasn't wasting any time. At least there wouldn't be any long, tedious wait to see whether my guesses had been right. The time for action was here.

I set my heart rate up two notches and metered a trickle of adrenalin into my system, then went over to the door, flattened myself against the wall to the left of it, and waited.

Seven boats were away now. A couple of minutes ticked past like ice ages. Then there was a soft, stealthy noise outside the door. With my ear against the wall, I could imagine I heard voices. I set myself —

The door slid smoothly back and a man came through it fast — a big, thick-shouldered DP with pinkish hair on an acne'd neck, a use-worn Mark XX gripped in a freckled fist the size of a catcher's mitt. I half turned to the left, drove my right into his side just behind the holster hard enough to jar the monogram off the hanky in my hip pocket — not fancy, but effective.

He made an ugly noise and went down clawing at himself like a cat, and I was over him, diving for the gun that skidded to the wall, bounced back, and I was rolling, bringing it up, seeing the lightning-flicker and feeling the hard tight snarl of the weapon in my hand as I slashed it across the open doorway.

The man there fell into the room, hit like a horse falling in harness, and the air was full of the nauseous stench of burned flesh and abdominal wounds.

I got up, stepped to the red-head, kicked him hard above the cheekbone; he gave up the attempt to loop the loop on the rug. At the door, I gave a quick glance both ways; nobody in sight. There was another gentle shock. Number eight? Or had I missed one . . .?

It was a hot two minutes' work to get the unbloodied uniform off its owner. It wasn't a good fit, but I buckled everything up tight, strapped on the gun in a way that I hoped would conceal the fold I'd taken in the waist-band, tried the boots: to big. I didn't like touching the other fellow, but I did. My feet complained a little as they went in, shrinking from the warmth of the dead man's shoes. The red-head was still breathing; I thought seriously about putting a burst into his head, then settled for strapping his ankles and wrists and wadding a shirt sleeve in his mouth. It cost me an extra minute and a half. So much for the price of a human life.

Out in the corridor things were still quiet; Braze's work again. He wouldn't have wanted witnesses. I

locked the door and headed for U deck.

Four more boats were away by the time I reached the steel double doors that sealed U deck off from the main transverse. I pushed against them, swore, kicked the panel. It gave off a dull clang. I kicked it again, then yanked out the power gun, set it for a needle beam, heard sounds on the other side, slammed the weapon back in its holster in time to see the door jump back and a square-jawed DP plant himself flat-footed in the opening, gun out and aimed.

"Thanks, brother —" I started past him. He backed, but kept me covered. A confused scowl was getting ready to settle onto his face. "Hold your water, paisan —"

"Knock it off," I rapped. "Jeezus — can't you see I'm missing formation? My boat —"

"What you doing on U deck —"

"Look — I had a side-kick, see? I wanted to see the guy. Okay, satisfied? You want me shot for desertion?"

"Go on," he wayed the gun at me, looking disgusted. "But you'll never make it."

"Thanks, Buddy —" I struck off on a dead run . . .

I had lost count, not sure whether it was eighteen or nineteen — or maybe twenty, too late . . .

I rounded the last corner, came into the low-ceilinged boat deck, felt a throb of some kind of emotion — fear or relief or a mixture — at the sight of thirty or forty blue-uniformed men formed up in a ragged column, filing toward the black rectangle of Number Two loading port. I dropped back to a walk, came up to the column, moved along with them. One man looked over his shoulder with a blank expression; the rest ignored me. A middle-aged Warrant with a long leathery face saw me, snarled silently, came back.

"You're Gronski, huh? Nice to see you in formation, Gronski. You see me after breakaway; you and me got to have a little talk about things; Okay, Gronski?"

I looked sullen; it wasn't hard. It's a lot like looking scared. "Okay, Chief," I muttered.

"By God, that's aye, aye Mr. Funderburk to you, swabbie!"

"Aye, aye, Mr. Funderburk," I growled out. He spun with a squeak of shoe leather and walked away. The man in front of me turned and looked me up and down.

"You ain't Gronski," he said.

"What else is new," I snarled. "So I'm helping out a pal; Okay?"

"You and Funnybutt are gonna get along," he predicted and showed me his back again. I kept my eyes on it until I was safely tucked away in the gloom of the troop hold, wedged between two silent men on the narrow shock seat.

I held my breath, waiting for the yell that would mean somebody hadn't been fooled. I wondered what lucky accident had made Gronski late, what other lucky accident had assigned him to a detail with a Warrant who didn't know his face . . .

But calculating the odds on what was already accomplished was just sorting over dry bones. The odds

ahead were what counted. They didn't look good, but they were all I had. I'd take them — and play the angles as they fell like Rubenstein cutting the original sound track of the *Flight of the Bumblebee.*

III

We berthed at Arlington Memorial just after midnight. The platoon formed up on the ramp under the V-tail of the scout, and as soon as we were silent Funderburk called me over. I answered the summons with a certain reluctance; I had closed and locked the door to the room where Braze's gun-boys were awaiting discovery, but there was no way of knowing how long it would be before someone went around to check. The trip down had taken about two hours and a half. Of course, even if the room had been opened, that didn't necessarily mean that anyone would have found it necessary to advise the admiral —

Or did it?

"Gronski, I got a little job for you," Funderburk barked. "A couple of the brass up front had a little trouble with the turbulence on the way in; looks like they kind of come unfed. It don't look good all over the officers' head. Maybe you could kind of see about it."

"Sure; I mean, aye, aye, Mr. Funderburk. Do I get a mop or just wipe it up with my sleeve?"

"Oh, a wise one, huh? Swell, Gronski. You and me are gonna see a lot of each other. You want a mop, you scout around and find one; take all the time you want. But I kind of advise you to be all finished in twenty minutes because that's how long I'm giving the detail for chow. I don't guess you'll miss the flapjacks, unless you got a tougher appetite than most."

"I'll finish in ten; save me a stool at the bar."

Funderburk nodded. "Yeah, I can see you and me are gonna click good, Gronski. See you on the gig list." He turned and walked away — just like that.

I didn't wait around to see if he'd change his mind. I walked, resisting the impulse to run, to the utility shack behind the flight kitchen, went through it and out the side door and around to the front, crossed a patch of grass and pushed into a steamy odor of GI coffee and floor wax. A door across the room was lettered MEN. Inside, I forced the door to a broom closet, took out a pair of coveralls and a push broom.

Back out in the pre-dawn gloom ten minutes later with my hair carefully rumpled and a layer of mud disguising the shine on my boots that showed under the too-short cuffs, I moved off briskly; in half a block I found a blue-painted custodial cart lettered UNSA. It started up with a ragged hum; I wheeled it away from the curb and headed for the lights of the main gate.

The boy on the guard post was no more than eighteen, a snub-nosed farm lad, still getting a kick out of the side-arm and the badge and the white-painted helmet liner. I pulled up to him, gave him a sheepish grin, waved toward a clus-

ter of glare signs half a block away, wan in the misty night. I picked a name from a bilious pink announcement looming above the others. "Just slipping down to Maggie's for a pack of bolts, Lootenant," I told him. "Boy, a man really gets to hankering for a smoke—"

"You guys give me a swiftie," the kid said. "Where do you get them big ideas? You think the government buys them scooters for you birds to joy ride on? Climb down offa there and try stretching your legs one time."

"You're too sharp for me, Lootenant," I admitted. He watched, arms folded, while I wheeled the cart over to the side, parked it beside the guard shack. I gave him a wave that expressed the emotions of a game loser bowing to superior guile, and ankled off toward the bright lights. At the corner, I looked back; he was still looking military, savoring the satisfaction of rules enforced. I hoped he wouldn't remember the base pass he hadn't asked to see until I was hull down over the horizon.

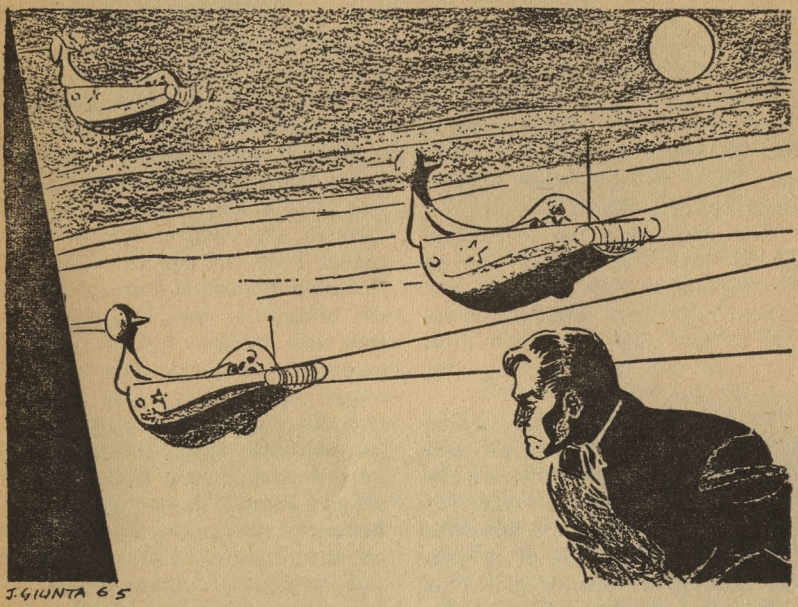
By the light of a polyarc over a narrow alley behind a row of vice parlors, I sorted through my worldly goods; the odds and ends that a trusted killer named Gronski had had in his pockets when he set out on his final assignment. It wasn't much: a key-ring, a white plastic comb clogged with grime, a wallet with a curled UNSA ID bearing an unflattering view of what had never been a pretty face, some outdated credit cards from the less expensive bean and sex joints around Charleston, South Carolina, six cees in cash, and a pair of half-hearted pornographic snaps of a tired-looking girl with ribs. I pocketed the money, went along the alley to a public disposal chute and put the loot in.

Clothes were my first problem. When Tarleton got the word that I was gone a cordon would move out through the town as fast as a late model Turbocad riot car could roll. It would be nice if I could be over the bridge and into DC proper before then. Nobody got into the megalopolis nowadays without a full scope and NAC. A set of baggy overalls might be good enough to get me past a recruit pulling the graveyard shift on a Class Two passenger depot; I'd have to do a lot better to satisfy the gray-suit boys on the front door to the capitol.

Tarleton would figure me to make a run for the hills; for the West Coast, maybe, or the anonymity of the Paved State that had once been called the Land of Flowers. He'd assume that for the moment my objective would be limited to survival; he wouldn't expect me to walk deeper into his net; not now; not until I had lain up for a while to lick my wounds and lay my plans . . .

Or so my second-guessing bump told me. Maybe it was as transparent as a bride's nightie that I'd head for important ears to pour my story into. Maybe the gunnies were just around the next corner, waiting to cut me down. Maybe I was already a dead man, just looking for a place to stretch out.

And maybe I'd better stop being so God-damned smart and get on with the job at hand, before I got



myself picked up for loitering and did ninety standing on my ear in the vag tank.

IV

Halfway down the wrong side of a street that had been classy about the time the sail-makers in Boston began to decry the collapse of civilization, a dim-lit window hung with two-tone burlap sports jackets and cardboard shoes caught my eye. There was a dust-dimmed glare strip along the top, lending the display all the gaiety of a funeral in the rain. It wasn't the smartest haberdashery in town, but it wouldn't be the best wired, either. I went to the end of the street, took a left, found an alley mouth, came up behind my target. Aside from kicking a couple of rusted cans and clipping a shin on a post and swearing loud enough to wake up the old maid at the end of the block, I came in as slick as a traveling salesman making a late house call. The lock wasn't much: a mail-order electro job set in perished plastic. I put a hip against it and pushed; the door frame damned near fell in with me.

It took five minutes to look over the stock and select a plain black suit suitable for the county to bury a pauper in. I added a gray shirt that looked as though it would hold its shape as long as nobody washed it, a tie with a picture of a Balinese maiden, a pair of ventilated shoes with steel taps on the heels that would be all that was left after the first rain. The cash register yielded three cees and some change. I wrote

out an IOU, signed it, and tucked it in under the wire spring. That meant that half an hour after the store opened, Tarleton would have a description of my new elegance — but by then it wouldn't matter. I'd either be across the bridge or dead.

Three streets farther up the gentle slope above the river, I found what I needed: It was a blackened brick front holding up two squares of age-tarnished plastex and a door that had once been painted red. The left window bore the legend IRV'S HOUSE OF TATTOO ARTISTRY and the right balanced the composition with a picture of a mermaid seated on an anchor holding a drowned sailor. I walked past once, saw the glimmer of a light in a side window visible along a two-foot airspace that ran back on the right. There seemed to be no activity in the drinking establishment next door; I slid into the alley, walked over bottles, cans, things that squashed, other things that crunched. If there were any dead bodies I didn't notice them.

At the rear, there was a small court walled by taller buildings on either side, a high fence with a gate letting onto a wider alley. The light from the side window showed up a few blades of green spring grass poking up among cinders. Two concrete steps led up to a back door. I stood on the bottom one and knocked, two short, one long, two short. Nothing happened.

A bird let off a string of notes somewhere, stopped suddenly as though he had just discovered he was in the wrong place. It's an uncomfortable feeling; I know it well.

I rapped again, same code, only louder. Still nothing. I stepped back down, found a pebble, threw it at a closed shutter up above, then went back and put an ear against the door. Sounds came, faint and ill-tempered. I heard the bolt rattle; the door opened half an inch. There was heavy breathing.

"It's a hot rasper," I said quickly. "Marple up on the avtake before the fuzz gondle."

"Ha? Wha—?" a clogged voice started, broke off to cough. I leaned on the door. "I got to see Irv," I snapped. "Transik apple ready, tonight for sure." The door yielded. I stepped into an odor of last month's broccoli, last week's booze and a lifetime of rancid bacon fat and overdue laundry. A fat citizen in a gray bathrobe with a torn sleeve thumbed uncombed gray hair back from a red eye set in gray fat. The fingernail was gray, too. So was his neck. Maybe he liked gray.

"You run the skin gallery?" I asked him.

"What's the grift, Jack?" He pulled the knot tight on the robe, shot a look out the door, pushed it shut. I watched his right hand.

"I need a job done," I told him. "They sent me to you."

He grunted, looking me over. The hand lingered on the belt.

"You mentioned a name," he said.

"Maybe you'll do," I said. The hand moved then, slipped inside the

robe, was halfway out again with a Browning before I clamped down on his wrist. He shifted, slammed his left at my stomach; I half turned, took it on the hip, jerked the hand out, bent it back and caught the gun as he dropped it. He didn't make a sound.

"No need for the iron," I told him. "I want papers — fast. Let's step along to your workshop. Time is of the essence."

"What kinda gag —"

I hit him on the side of the head with the gun hard enough to stagger him. "No time for talking it up. Action. Now." I motioned toward the curtain that hung in the kitchen entry.

"You got me wrong, Mister!" He was rubbing his face; his hard palm made a scratchy sound going over the stubble. "I run a legitimate little art tattoo parlor here —"

I took a step toward him, rammed the gun at his belly. "Ever heard of a desperate man, Irv? That's me. Maybe every tattoo joint on the planet isn't in the hot paper line, but I'm guessing this one is — and I get what I want or you die trying. Better hope you can do it."

He worked his mouth, then turned and pushed through the curtains. I followed.

It took Irv an hour to produce a new ID, a set of travel orders, a Geneva card and a Special Pass to the Visitor's Gallery at the House. Once he got into the swing of it, he was the true artist, as intent on perfection as Cellini buffing a pin-head blemish off a twenty-foot bronze.

"The orders are okay," he told me as he handed them over. "The G-card, too. Hell, it's practically genuine. The pass — maybe. But don't try to fool nobody but maybe some broad in a bar with that ID. Them Security boys will have that number checked out —"

"That's okay. The stuff looks good. How much do I owe you?"

He lifted his shoulders. "Hundred Cees," he said.

"Add fifty for getting you up," I said. "And another fifty for the crack on the head. I'll mail it to you as soon as I hear from home."

"The crack on the head's for free," he said. "How's about leaving the Browning. You don't get them with Cracker Jacks any more."

I nodded. "Let's go down." He went ahead of me down the stairs, back through the kitchen, opened the door.

I took the magazine out of the gun, tossed it out into the yard, handed him the Browning. He took it and thrust it away out of sight.

"The guy worked on your hands was good," he said softly. "Navy?"

I nodded. He ran a hand through the gray hair.

was good," he said softly. "Navy?"
guys in my time," he said. The red eyes were sharp as scalpels. "You done time on a lot of quarterdecks, would be my guess. You don't need to sweat me. I don't know no cops."

"Give me three hours," I said. "Then yell your head off. Maybe you could use the Brownie points at headquarters."

"Yeah," he said. I went out and the door closed on his still-gray face.

V

It was a brisk ten minute walk to Monticello Boulevard. I made it without attracting any attention other than a close look by a pair of prowl car cops who would never know how close they came to a bonus and promotions, and a business offer from a moonlighting secretary holding a lonely vigil at the Tube entry. A wheel-cab cruising the outer lane answer my wave, pulled off on the loading strip.

"You licensed for DC?" I asked him.

"Whattaya, blind?" He pointed to a three-inch gold sticker on his canopy. I got in and he gunned off toward the lights of the bridge.

"You know Eisenhower Drive?" I asked.

"Does a mouse know cheese?" he came back, fast and snappy.

"Number nine eighty-five," I said.

"Senator I. Albert Pulster," he said. I saw his eyes in the mirror, watching me. "You know Pulster?" he asked.

"My brother-in-law," I said.

"Yeah?" He sounded impressed — like a car salesman getting the low-down on a ten-year-old trade-in. "Pulster's a big noise in this town these days," he said. "Three years to election and you can't open a pictonews without you get a mug shot of the guy. He's parlayed that committee into a clear shot at the White House."

The control booth was a blaze of garish light across the wet pavement ahead. The white-uniformed CIA man was leaning out, letting me catch the dazzle of the brass on his collar. The cab pulled up and the panel slid down, letting in the cool river air. I handed over the ID and the orders directing me to report to Ft. McNair a day earlier. He looked them over, turned, shoved the card into the scope that transmitted the fingerprint image to the CBI master file, read off the name that popped onto the four inch screen. It would be mine; the only risk at this point was that Tarleton had already put a flag out on it . . .

He hadn't. The guard held out a plain plastic rectangle.

"Right thumb, please," he said in a bored voice. I gave it to him; he pressed it on the sensitive plate, shoved it into the same slot, got the same result. All right so far. If he stopped now, I was in; if he went one step farther and checked out the crystal pattern of the card itself . . .

"Hey," the driver shot a look at me. "He says he's Pulster's brother-in-law."

"So?"

"I never heard of Pulster having no brother-in-law."

The CIA man gave him a heavy-lidded look. "Let's you leave us do our job, fella; you stick to watching those traffic signs." He handed me my phony papers, pushed the button to raise the barrier, waved us on across. My driver drove fast, shoulders hunched. He didn't talk any more all the way out to Eisenhower.

Number nine eighty-five was a big iron gate with twin baby spots mounted up high on an eight-foot fieldstone wall that looked solid

enough to withstand a two-day mortar bombardment. A gravelled drive led back between hundred-year oaks to a lofty three-story facade, gleaming a well-tended oyster-white in the faint starlight. There was a porte cochere high enough to clear the footman on a four-horse carriage, wide enough for three Caddies abreast. There were more windows than I remembered on the west front at Versailles, a door reminiscent of the main entrance to Saint Peter's Basilica, wide steps that were probably scrubbed five times a day by English butlers using toothbrushes. Or maybe not; maybe the servant problem had even penetrated as far as the Pulster residence.

I thumbed a button set in a black iron plate, jumped when a feminine voice immediately said, "Yes, sir?"

"How do you know I'm not a madam," I snapped back.

"You don't have the build for it, sweetheart," the voice said, sharp now. "You want to tell me what it's all about, or do I just call a couple sets of law to help get you straightened out?"

I squinted, spotted the eye up in the angle of the iron curlicue at the top of the gate.

"I want to see the Senator," I said. "Wake him up if you have to. It's important."

"Would there be a name?"

"Maclamore."

"Uh-huh. Army?"

"Navy. Captain Maclamore. Six-one, one ninety stripped, brown hair, brown eyes, and a nasty disposition. Hop to it."

"Not even one little old star? Captains we usually take in batches of nine on alternate Wednesday, and this being Thursday . . . well, you see how it is."

"You're cute," I told the eye. "With a couple more like you I could start a finishing school for snake charmers. Now run along and tell Albert you're keeping his favorite relative waiting out in the hot sun."

"Like that, huh," the voice said cooly. "You could have said so. What are you trying to do, lose me my job?"

"It's a thought," I admitted. There was no answer. I took a couple of steps, turned, took two back. The tension was building up again now. My small cuts and burns were hurting like big ones; it was time for another load of those nice drugs Purdy's medic had fed me. Instead all I had was the withdrawal symptoms, a let-down of the past few hours' fever-bright energy into a high singing sensation back of the eyes and a tendency to start arguments with disembodied voices . . .

There was a buzz and a click and the gate rolled back. I went through it, saw a small white-painted wagon rolling along the drive toward me on fat rubber wheels. It stopped and the voice was back.

"If you'll step aboard, sir . . .?"

I did and the robocart whisked me up to the steps, past them, along to a ramp that slanted up behind shrubbery to an open entry. I got off and went through it into a wide, airy hall of a melancholy yellow light from wide stained glass panels above a gallery trimmed in white-painted

wrought-iron. A waxed and polished girl with a pert brown face, pouty purple lips, and a cast plastic hairdo came out of a carved door, waved toward a chair that looked like a Scottish king might have been crowned in it once.

"If you'll just be seated, Captain —"

"Still mad, huh? Where's his bedroom? I'll overlook it if his hair's not combed."

"Please, Captain Maclamore!" She did a bump and grind, showed me a fine set of big white teeth, came up close and let me get a load of the hundred Cee an ounce stuff she wore behind the ear. "The Senator will be with you in just a moment . . ." Her voice changed tone on the last words; she'd noticed the bruise on my jaw, the patch of singed hair, the small cuts beside my eye where an instrument face had blown out. I worked up a quick smile that probably looked like the preliminary to a death rattle.

"A little accident on the way over," I said. "But it's all right. I got the other fellow's number."

A bell jangled then — or maybe it purred; it just seemed to me like a jangle. The light was to bright, too sour; the tick of an antique spring-driven clock picked at me like a knife point. My cheap, stiff clothes rasped on my skin —

Feet rattled on the stairway behind me. I turned, and Senator I. Albert Pulster, short, dapper, red-faced, hair neatly combed, came across the floor, held out a hand worn smooth by shaking.

"Well, Mac; a long time. Not since Edna's funeral, I think . . ."

I shook the hand. It felt hard and dry, but no harder or dryer than my own.

"I've got to talk to you, Albert," I said. "Fast and private."

He nodded as though he'd been expecting it. "Ah . . . a personal matter . . .?"

"As personal as dying."

He indicated the door the girl had come out of. I followed him in.

VI

Pulster's face looked hollow, as though all the juice had been sucked out of it by a big spider, leaving only a shell like crumpled tissue paper. All that in three minutes.

"Where is he now?" he asked.

"My guess would be that he's in a closed-door conference with some of his friends from the Hill: Naturally, he'll try to do it the easy way first. Why walk over Congress if he can bring them in with him?"

A little life was showing in Albert's eyes now; a little color was coming back into his cheeks. He leaned forward, clasped his hands together as though he was afraid they'd get away.

"And he doesn't know you're here?" His voice was quick now, emotionless, stripped for action.

"I'd guess he knows by now that I got off the ship. Beyond that — it depends on how good his intelligence apparatus is. He may have three squads with Mark X's trampling across the lawn right now."

Albert's mouth twitched. "No, he doesn't," he said flatly. He fingered the edge of his desk, pulled out a big drawer, swung it up on spring-balanced slides, pivoted it to face me. It was a regulation battle display console, the kind usually installed in a two-man interceptor; it showed four stretches of unoccupied lawn with fountains and flowers. Below it was a firecontrol panel that would have done credit to a five thousand tonner.

"A man needs certain resources in these troubled times," Albert said. "I've never proposed to furnish a sitting target for the first Oswald who might rap at the gate."

I nodded. "That's why I joined the Navy; too dangerous down here." I pushed his toy back to him. "He's counting on putting this over fast and smooth: The public will wake up and it will be all over. The right publicity in the right places — now — will kill him."

Albert was shaking his head, looking shocked. "Publicity — no! Not a word, Mac. Good lord, man —" He clamped his teeth and breathed through his nose, looking at me, through me; then he focused in, blinked a couple of times.

"Mac, there's no time to waste," he snapped out. "What kind of force would it take to neutralize the flagship? Assuming the worst: that Tarleton heard of the move, was able to communicate with the vessel, that she was fully alerted."

"A couple of hundred megaton seconds," I said. "With luck."

"I have no capital ships at my disposal," Albert thought aloud. "I do have over one hundred battle-ready medium recon units attached to National Guard organizations in the Seventeenth District." He looked at me hard. "What do you mean, Mac — with luck'?"

"Tarleton stripped the ship to make his Roman Holiday. There'll be skeleton crews on all sections. I don't know who he left on the bridge; he brought all his top boys down with him — he'd have to, otherwise he might find himself looking down his own Hellbores. Assuming a fairly competent man, he'll be able to lay down about fifty percent firepower — and as for maneuverability . . ."

"We can saturate her," Albert said. "Run her gauntlet, grappel to her, force an entry, and sweep her clean! And then —" Albert stopped, let his expression slide back to the casual. "But we'll worry about that later. Our immediate need —"

But he'd already done the damage. "You said 'after'," I told him. "Go on."

"Why, then, of course, I'd restore matters to normalcy soon as possible." He gave me a sharp look, like a pawnbroker wondering if the customer knows the pearls are real. "I think you could anticipate an appointment to star rank — perhaps even —"

"Forget it, Albert," I said softly. "With fast action and the kind of luck that makes sweepstakes winners we might be able to get together enough firepower to hit her once — now — while he's off-

balance, before he expects anything — and knock her out. You've got your hundred boats; if you can swing the North American Defense Complex into it, we just might blanket her defenses with one strike —"

"Mac, you're raving," Albert said flatly. "You don't seem to understand."

"That ship's a juggernaut hanging over all of us. I think a call to Kajevnikoff might bring their South American Net into it, too."

"You're talking like a traitor!" Pulster got to his feet, his face back to its normal shade now. "I'm taking that ship intact!" He tried to get his voice under control. "Be sensible, man! I'm offering you command of the strike force! You needn't expose yourself unnecessarily, of course; in fact, I'd expect you to command from a safe distance, then move in after boarding by my troops —"

"You're wasting time, Pulster," I told him. "Start the ball rolling — now. One word — one hint to Tarleton, and he'll neutralize every resource on the planet before you can say 'dictator'."

"What do you mean — dictator!"

"One's like another as far as I'm concerned. In fact, between you and Bonny, I might even pick him. I came here to stop something, not barter it."

Albert's hand went to his console, stopped self-consciously. He was thinking so hard I could almost smell the wiring burning. I took a step toward him, slid a hand inside my coat as though I had something hidden there.

"Get away from the desk, Senator," I said. He backed slowly — toward the window.

"Uh-uh. Over there." I indicated the discreet door to the senatorial john.

"Look here, Mac: This is too big to toss away like an old coat. The man that controls that vessel — controls the planet! It's almost in our hands! You did the right thing, coming here — and I'll never forget it was you who —"

I stepped in, hit him hard under the ribs to double him over, brought a right up under his jaw hard enough to lift his toes off the floor. He went back and down like a shroud full of baseballs, lay on his back with one eye half open. I didn't check to see whether he was breathing; I hooked a finger in his collar, dragged him to the toilet door, half threw him inside, set the latch, closed it. I looked around the room. There was a mirror on one wall with a table with flowers under it. I went over to it and a hollow-eyed bum in a sleazy greenish-black suit and a wilted collar looked out at me as though I'd caught him in the act of murder.

"It's okay, pal," I said aloud, feeling my tongue thick in my mouth. "That was just a warm-up; almost an accident, you might say. The rough part's just beginning."

Back out in the big, sad, empty hall, I told the girl that the Senator had suffered a sudden pain in the stomach. "He's in the toilet." I said bluntly. "Hiding, if you ask me. Pain in the stomach, ha! A great thing

when a fellow can't come to his own relations when he's had a little run of bad luck."

The look that she'd varnished up for VIP use melted away like witnesses at a traffic smash. I made it to the door without a guide; no little cart appeared to ride me out to the gate. I walked, wondering how long it would be before she went in — and whether she would know which button to push on the console to sweep the drive with fire.

But nothing happened; nobody yelled, no bells rang, no guns fired. I reached the gate and the big electrolock gave a buzz like a Bronx cheer as I went through. I looked back at the eye; if it had been a mouth, it would have yawned. There's nothing like a little poverty to make a man invisible.

VII

My last two cees brought me a cab-ride as far as Potomac Quay. I made the three blocks to the Wellington Arms on foot, trying not to hurry even when sirens came screaming across from Pennsylvania Avenue and three Monojag cop cars raced overhead, heading the way I'd come. It was a fair guess Miss Linoleum had overcome her maidenly modesty sufficiently to force the door not many minutes after I made it off the grounds.

I went up the broad pseudo-marble steps past a Swiss Admiral with enough Austrian knots to equip a troop of dragoons, in through a twelve foot high glass door, crossed a stretch of polished black floor big enough for the New Year's Yacht Show. Under the muted glare strip that read INQUIRIES I found a small, neat man with big dark eyes that flicked over me once and caught everything except the hole in my left sock.

"I have some information that has to be placed in the Vice President's hands at once," I told him. "What can you do for me?"

He reached without looking and slid a gold mounted pad and stylus across to me, spun it around so that *Wellington Arms* was at the top, the pen poised ready to be written with.

"If you'd care to leave a message —"

I put my face closer to him. "I'm a little marked up; you noticed that. I got that way getting here. It's that kind of information. Take a chance and let me talk to his secretary."

He hesitated; then he reached for a small voice-only communicator, gold to match the pad. I waited while he played with button out of sight over the counter, murmurred into the phone. Time passed. More discreet conversation.

"Mr. Lastwell will be down in a moment," he said. "Or so he says," he added in a lower tone. "You've got time for a smoke. You may even have time for a Chow Mein dinner."

"It's a corny line," I said, "but minutes could make a difference. Maybe seconds."

The clerk gave me another X-ray look; this time I figured he caught the hole in the sock. He leaned a little across the counter, squared up the pad.

"Political?" he murmurred.

"It's not show biz," I said mysteriously. "Or is it?"

That satisfied him. He went off to the other end of the counter and began making entries in a card file. Probably the names of people to be shot after the next election. I looked at the clock; slim gold hands pointed at gold dots representing half past one. There was a lot of gold around the Wellington Arms.

He came through the bleached teak doors from the bar, a thin, tired-looking man, walking fast, frowning, shoulders a little rounded, eyes whisking over the room like mice. He saw me, checked his stride, looked me over as he came up.

"I'm Marvin Lastwell. You're the person . . .?"

"Maclamore. Is the Vice President here?"

"Eh. Yes, of course he's here. If he were elsewhere, I'd be with him, hmm? What was it you had, Mr., er, Maclamore?"

"Do we talk here?"

He looked around as though he were surprised to find himself in the lobby. "Hmm. There's a lounge just along —"

"This is private," I cut him off. "Let's go where it will stay that way."

He sucked his cheeks in. "Now, look here, Mr., er, Maclamore —"

"On the off chance this could be important, play along this once, Mr. Lastwell. I can't spill this in front of every pick-up the local gossip ghouls have planted in this mausoleum."

"Hmm. Very well, Mr., er, Maclamore." He led the way off along a corridor carpeted in dove gray pile deep enough to lose a golfball in. I followed, wondering why a mild-looking fellow like Marvin Lastwell thought it necessary to carry a Browning 2mm under his arm.

The penthouse at the Wellington was no more ornate than Buckingham Palace, and smaller, though not much. Lastwell showed me into a spacious, dim-lit library lined with the kind of leather-bound books lawyers keep around the office to impress the customers and maybe open once in a while on a rainy afternoon when trade is slow, just to see what they're missing. Lastwell went behind a big dark mahogany desk, sat down fussily, pushed a big silver ashtray with a cigar butt off to one side, flicked on a lamp that threw an eerie green reflection back up on his face, giving his worried features a look of Satanic ferocity. I wondered if he'd practiced it in front of a mirror.

"Now, Mr., er, Maclamore," he said. "What is it you want to tell me?"

I was still standing, looking at the cigar butt, probably left there by the last ward-heeler who'd dropped in to mend a fence. It looked as out of place on Lastwell's desk as a roulette wheel at a Methodist Retreat. He saw me looking at it and started to reach for it, then changed his mind, scratched his nose instead. I could feel a sudden tension in him.

"Maybe I didn't make myself clear," I said. "It was the Vice President I wanted to see."

Lastwell curved the corners of his mouth up in a smile like a meat-eating bird — or maybe it was just the light.

"Now, Captain, you can hardly —" He caught himself, clamped his jaw shut. The abrupt silence hung between us like a shout.

"Like that, huh?" I said softly.

He sighed; his hand hardly seemed to move, but now the Browning was in it. He held the gun with that graceful negligence they only get when they know how to use them. He motioned with his head toward a chair.

"Just sit down," he said in an entirely new voice. "You'll have a few minutes' wait."

I moved toward the chair he'd indicated; the gun muzzle followed. It was too late at night to start thinking, but I made the attempt. The cigar was the skinny, black brand that Tarleton smoked. I'd probably missed him by minutes. He hadn't been close behind me — he'd been a good jump ahead. He'd had time to give his pitch — whatever proposition he'd worked out — to the Veep. It had been a risky move, but it seemed the Veep had listened. He'd mentioned me; as for how much he'd said, the next few seconds would tell me that.

I reached the chair, but instead of sitting in it, I turned to face Lastwell. The gun twitched alertly, holding low on my chest. That could be design — or accident.

"Maybe your boss would like to hear my side," I said, just to keep him talking.

"Shut up and sit in the chair," Lastwell said, in the tone of a tired teacher talking to the oldest pupil in the eighth grade.

"Sit in it yourself," I came back. "The graveyard's full of wise guys that didn't stick around to get the whole story. Did Tarleton tell you I was Weapons Officer aboard *Rapacious?* Hell, the whole tub's wired to blow at a signal from —"

"You were captain of *Sagacious,*" Lastwell cut in. "Save your lies, Maclamore."

"Not two years ago I wasn't, when she was fitted out —"

"Save it, I said!" Lastwell let his voice rise a decibel and a half; the gun jerked up as he spoke, centered on my chest now. I gave him a discouraged look, leaned forward as though about to sit, and dived across the desk. The Browning bucked and shrieked and a cannon ball hit me in the chest and then my hands were on his neck, sinking into doughy flesh. We were going down together, slamming the floor, the gun bouncing clear. I was on my knees, with Lastwell bent back under me, his mouth open, tongue out, eyes bulging like lanced boils.

"Talk it up," I ground out past my teeth. I gave him a quarter of a second to think it over, then gave him a thumb under the Adam's apple. A thin sound came from him, like a rivet scoring a brake drum.

"He . . . here . . . half hour . . ."

I gave him enough air to work with but not enough to encourage enterprise.

"Who's here now?"

"No — nobody. Sent . . . them away . . ."

"How many are in this?"

"Just . . . the two of them . . ."

"Plus you. Where are they?"

"They're . . . gone to see . . . others. Back soon . . ."

"Tarleton coming back here?"

"No . . . to his place." Lastwell gulped air, flopped his arms. "Please . . . my back . . ."

I smiled at him. "Get ready to die," I said.

"No! Please!" What color was left went out of his face like dirty water down a drain.

"Tell the rest," I snapped.

"He's . . . expecting you . . . there . . . if don't get you . . . here. State Police . . ."

"Say your prayers," I ordered. "When you wake up in the next world, remember how it felt to die a dirty death." I rammed my fingers in hard to the carotid arteries, watched his eyes turn up; he slumped and I let his head bump the carpet. He'd come around in half an hour with a sore throat and a set of memories that he could mull over at bedtime for a lot of sleepless nights.

I left him where he was, picked up the gun, tucked it away. There was a chewed place across my coat front where the needles had hit, a corresponding rip in the shirt. The chromalloy plate underneath that covered the artificial heart and lungs showed hardly a scratch to commemorate the event. Six inches higher or to the left, and he'd have found unshielded hide. It wasn't like Bonny Tarleton to forget to mention a detail like that. Maybe he was slipping; maybe that was the break that had let me get this far. Maybe I could ride it a little farther; and maybe I was already out on the skim ice, too far from shore to walk back.

I'd tried to stop Tarleton with indirect methods; they hadn't worked. Now there was only one direction left: Straight ahead, into a trap.

Now I'd have to kill him with my own hands.

VIII

I rummaged in Lastwell's closet, found a shapeless tan waterproof and a narrow-brimmed hat. The private elevator rode me down to the second floor. The silence in the corridor was all that you'd expect for a hundred cees a day. I walked along to the rear of the building, found a locked door to a service stair. There was a nice manual knob on it; I gripped it hard, gave it a sharp twist. Metal broke and tinkled and the door swung in. The luxury ended sharply at the threshold; there was a scarred chair, a dirty coffee cup, a magazine, cigarette butts on a concrete landing above a flight of narrow concrete steps. I went down, passed another landing, kept going. The stairs ended at a wooden door. I tried it, stepped through into the shadows and the hum of heavy equipment. A shoe scraped and a big-bellied man in a monogrammed coverall separated himself from the gray bulk of a compressor unit. He frowned, wiped a hand over a bald head, opened his mouth —

"Fire inspector," I told him briskly. "Goddam place is a deathtrap. That your chair on the landing?"

He gobbled, almost swallowed his tooth pick, spat it on the floor. "Yeah, it's my chair —"

"Get it out of there. And police those butts while you're at it." I jerked my head toward the back of the big room. "Where's your fire exit?"

"Hah?"

"Don't stall," I barked. "Got it blocked, I'll bet. You birds are all alike: Think fire regulations are something to wrap your lunch in."

He gave me a red-eyed look, hitched at his shoulder strap. "Back here." His Potsdam accent was thick enough to spread on pretzels like cream cheese. I followed him along to a red painted metal-clad door set a foot above floor level.

"Red light's out," I noted, sharp as a mouse-trap. There was a big barrel bolt on the door at chest height. I slid it back, jerked the door open. Dust and night air whirled in.

"Okay, get that landing clear, like I said." I hooked a thumb over my shoulder and stepped out into dead leaves. He grunted and went away. I eased my head over the ragged grass growing along the edge of the stair well; a security light on the side of the building showed me a garbage disposal unit, a white-painted curb, the squat shape of a late model Turbocad parked under a row of dark windows. I slid the Browning into my hand, went up, and across to the car. It was a four-seater, dull black with a gold eagle on the door. I thumbed the latch; no surprise there: It was locked. I went down on my left side, eased under the curve of the hood. There were a lot of wires; I traced one, jerked it loose, tapped the frame; sparks jumped and a solid snick! sounded above. I crawled back out, pulled open the door, slid in behind the wheel. The switch resisted for a moment; then something snapped and it turned. The turbos started up with a whine like a waitress looking at a half cee tip. The Cad slid out along the drive, smooth as a porpoise in deep water. I nosed out into the bleak light of the polyarcs along the Quay, took the inner lane, and headed at a meticulously legal speed for Georgetown.

The fire of '87 had cleared away ten blocks of high-class slums and given the culture-minded administration of that day the perfect excuse to erect a village of colonial style official mansions that were as authentic as the medals on a Vermouth bottle. Admiral Banastre Tarleton had the one at the end of the line, a solid-looking red-brick finish that disguised half an inch of flint steel, with lots of pretty white woodwork, a copper-sheathed roof made of bomb-proof polyon, and two neat little cupolas that housed some of the most sensitive detection gear ever side-tracked from a naval yard. I picked it out from two blocks away by the glare of lights from windows on all three floors.

There was an intersection nostalgically lit by gas flares on tall poles; I crossed it, slowed, moving along


GIUNTA 65.

in the shadow of a row of seventy foot elms with concrete cores and permanentized leaves. The moon was up now, shedding its fairy glow on the bricked street, the wide inorganic lawns, the stately fronts, creating a fragile illusion of the simple elegance of a past age — if you could ignore the lighted spires of the city looming up behind.

The last house on the right before Tarleton's place was a boxy planter's mansion with a row of stately columns and a balcony from which a queen could wave to the passing crowds. It was boarded up tight; not everybody was willing to give up the comfort of a modern apartment a mile up in the Washington sky for the dubious distinction of a Georgetown address. Half the houses here were empty, shuttered, awaiting a bid from a social-climbing freshman Congressman or a South American diplomat eager to get a lease signed before the government that sent him collapsed in a hail of gunfire.

There was a sudden movement among moon shadows on the drive opposite the Tarleton house; a heavy car appeared — armored, by the ponderous sway of its suspension as it trundled out to block the street. It was too late for me to think up any stunning moves that would leave the opposition breathless; I cut the wheel hard, swung into the artificial cinder drive that led up to the bright-lit front of the Tarleton mansion. Behind me, the interceptor gunned its turbos, closed in on my rear bumper. Men appeared in the wide doorway ahead; I caught glimpses of others spotted across the lawn that was pool-table green in the splash of light from the house. They ringed me in as I braked to a stop. I set the brake hard, flung the door open, stepped out, gave my coat belt a tug, picked out a middle-sized fellow with a face as sensitive as a zinc bar-top.

"Those clowns in the armor better get on the ball," I told him. "I could have waltzed right past 'em. And those boys you've got out trampling the flower beds: Tell 'em to hit the dirt and stay put; they're not in a tango contest —"

"Where do you fit the picture, Mister?" His voice was a whisper; I saw the scar across his throat, ear to ear. He was a man who'd looked death in the eye from razor range. He was looking at the car now, not liking it much but pushed off-balance by the eagle and the words OFFICE OF THE CENTRAL BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE.

I started around the front of the car, headed for the stairs. "Hot stuff for the Admiral," I said. "He's inside, right?"

He didn't move. I stopped before I rammed him.

"Maybe I better see some paper, Mister," he whispered. "Turn around and put the mitts on top of the car."

"Pull up your socks, rookie," I advised loudly. "You think I carry a card when I'm working?" I crowded him a little. "Come on, come on, what I got won't wait." He gave — about a quarter of an inch.

"Any you boys know this mug?"

he called in his faint croak. His face was close enough to mine to give me a good whiff of burnt licorice; he was on the pink stuff. That wouldn't make him any easier to take.

I saw heads shake; two or three voices denied the pleasure of my acquaintance.

I hunched my shoulders. "I'm going in," I announced. "I got my orders from topside—"

Someone came out through the open door, saw me and stopped dead. For an instant I had trouble placing the horsey, weather-beaten face under the brimless cap. He opened his mouth, showing uneven brown teeth, said "Hey!" It was Funderburk, the Warrant from the flagship. I took the first half of a deep breath, nodded toward him as casually as a pickpocket saying good morning to a plainclothes cop.

"Ask him," I said. "He knows me."

Funderburk came down the steps, three or four expressions chasing each other over his face.

"Yeah," he said. He nodded, as if vastly satisfied. "Yeah."

"You make this bird?" the scarred man whispered.

I tried to coax a little moisture into my dry mouth. My minor wounds throbbed, but no worse than an equal number of nerve cancers. I was hungry and tired, but Scott probably felt at least as bad, writing the last page of his journal on the ice cap; my head throbbed a little, but one of those ancient Egyptians whose family doc had sawed his skull open with a stone knife would have laughed it off.

"Sure," Funderburk said from under a curled lip. "Gronski. Anchor man of the section. Two months ago they plant the slob in my outfit, and I guess I ain't hardly seen the guy three times since." He spat, offside, but just barely. "The Commodore's Number One Boy; better play it closer than a skin-diver's tights, Ajax. He's a privileged character, he is."

There was a mutter in which I caught the word 'Braze'. I poked Ajax with a finger.

"I'll mention you were doing a job," I said. "But don't work it to death." I brushed past him and past Funderburk, went up the steps and through the door. No power guns roared. No large dogs came bounding out to sample my leg. Nobody even hit me over the head with a blackjack. So far so good.

One man was walking behind me, one on my right. I went across the wide, wedgewood blue reception hall, past a gilt-framed mirror that showed me a glimpse of a pale, unshaven face with eyes like charwounds. I looked like Mussolini, just before the crowd got him. The stairs were carpeted in wine red which somehow didn't clash with the walls; maybe it was the soft yellow light from a tinkly glass chandelier that hung on a long gold chain from somewhere high above. The bannister was wide and cool and white under my hand. The footsteps of the two goons thumped on the treads behind me.

I passed a landing with a tall

double-hung window with lacy curtains and dark drapes, a painting of a small boy in red velvet pants, a weathered oak clock that didn't tick. Then I was coming up into a wide hall done in dusty green with big white-painted wood panel doors with bright brass knobs. A man sat in a chair at the end beside a curved-leg Sheraton table with a brass ashtray from which a curl of smoke went up under a green-shaded lamp. There was a power gun in his lap. He watched me come, his hands on the gun.

One of the doors was open; voices came from inside. I felt like a man striding briskly toward the gallows, but the thin bluff I was riding couldn't survive any doubts or hesitations at this point. I went on, turned in at the lighted door and was in a big, high-ceilinged room with a desk, heavy leather-covered chairs, bookcases, a bar in one corner. Three men standing there looked around at me. Two of them I'd never seen before; the third was a captain whose name I couldn't remember. He frowned at me, looked at the others.

"Where's the admiral?" the man behind me said.

Nobody answered. The captain was still frowning at me. "I've seen you before," he said. "Who are you?"

"Guy named Gronski," my escort said. "The Commodore's dog-robber."

"You have a message from Commodore Braze?" one of the other men asked sharply.

"I want to see the Admiral," I said, looking stubborn. "I've already told Ajax this is a red-hot item."

"You can tell it again!" the third man snapped. "I'm Admiral Tarleton's aide—"

"And I'm bad news from back home," I snarled. "I'm not up here to jackass around with a front man!" I whirled on the captain. "Can't you people get the message? This is *hot!*"

The captain's eyes went to the door in the wall behind me. "He's just stepped down the hall," he said uneasily. "He's—"

"Never mind that, Johnson," the aide snapped out. "I'll inform him."

"We'll both inform him," the captain said. "I'm assigned here as exec—"

"Save the jurisdictional wrangles until later," the other man cut in. "If this is as important as this fellow seems to think—"

"It's worse," I barked. "I'm warning you bastards somebody's gonna suffer . . ."

The aide and the captain slammed down their glasses and stamped out of the room neck and neck. I poked a finger at the two who had escorted me. "All right, get back on post," I rapped out. "Believe me, when I tell the admiral . . ." They faded away like shadows at sunset. The man at the bar had his mouth open. I walked across to him, looking confidential.

"There's one other little thing," I started as I came up to him—and chopped out with the side of my hand, caught him across the cheekbone. He almost leaped the bar. Glasses went flying, thudded almost

silently to the rug. I dragged him behind the bar, went across to the connecting door, gave the knob a hard twist. I almost broke my wrist.

IX

Out in the hall, the two who had gone out were nowhere in sight; the gun-handler still sat in his chair beside the lamp. I gave him a hard look as though wondering whether he'd shaved that morning, strode along to the next door, reached for it —

"Hey!" He came out of his chair, gun forward. "Get away from that door!"

I turned toward him as he came up, jumped sideways and kicked out. The burst caught me across the shin, slammed me back against the wall. My head hit hard and brilliant constellations shimmered all around. I clawed, swam up from abyssal deeps where light never penetrated, saw him stepping back, the gun still aimed. Someone yelled; a high, tight string of words. Feet pounded. There was a harsh reek of burnt synthetics. I rolled over on my face, got my hands under me. I was staring at the big white door when it opened inward. Admiral Banastre Tarleton stood there, a Norge stunner in his hand. Without pausing to calculate the odds, I planted both feet against the wall behind me, and launched myself at his knees. I heard the soft whisper of the Norge as I hit, and the crisper sound of something tearing in his leg, and then we were down together and the stunner hissed again and my left side was dead, but I rolled clear, scrabbled with one arm, saw a man in the doorway just as I caught the edge of the thick metal panel, hurled it shut with what was left of my strength. The dull boom! shut off the outside world as completely as the lid of a coffin.

I looked around. Tarleton was on his back, his head propped up at an awkward angle against the leg of a canopied four-poster bed. His face was as white as bleached bone, and the Norge was in his fist, aimed square at my face.

"I don't know how you got here, Mac," he said in a voice forced high by the agony of a broken knee. "I must have more traitors in my organization than I thought."

"Glad to see you still have your sense of humor, Bonny," I said. I thought about trying for the Browning, but it was just a thought. The stunner held on me as steady as a deck gun. There was a little sensation in the shoulder where it had caught me; a feeling as though a quarter of beef had been stitched on with a dull needle to replace the arm. My legs were all right, with the exception of the burned plastic and scorched metal below my knee where the power gun had seared it.

"A traitor is a revolutionist who fails," Tarleton stated. "We won't fail."

"Now it's 'we'," I noted. "A few hours ago it was all 'I'."

"I'm not alone now, Mac. I've talked to people. Not a shot will be fired."

I nodded. "How does it feel, Bon-

ny? In a few hours you'll own the world. You and Napoleon. Take it apart and put it back together to suit yourself. More fun than jigsaw puzzles any day. And you'll have CBI men walking ten deep around you. No more broken legs from wild-eyed reformers who walk into your bedroom past what you call an organization." I was talking to hear myself, to keep my mind off what was coming, to defer for another few seconds the only end the scene could have.

"You moved fast, Mac. I thought . . ." the gun wavered, then steadied. " . . . thought I had a few secrets."

"Tough, not being able to tip your hand. All that power — if you just don't give it away before the hook's set."

There was a muffled pounding, faint and far away. Tarleton jerked his head up. I could almost make out voices, shouting.

"Get over there," Tarleton ordered. "Open that door."

I shook my head. "Open it yourself, Bonny. They're your friends."

He moved, and his cheekbones went almost green. The gun sagged and my hand was halfway to the needler before he caught it. There was greasy-looking sweat on his face. His voice was a croak.

"Better do it, Mac. If I feel myself blacking out, I'll have to shoot you."

I didn't say anything. I was wondering why he hadn't shot already. He stared at me for five seconds, while I waited.

Then he twisted, reached up and back, fumbled over the bedside table and suddenly sound was blasting into the room:

"— open! the fire's into the stairwell! Can you hear me, Admiral? We can't get the door open —"

"Lenny!" Tarleton snapped as the shout cut off. "Blast the door down; I'm hurt. I can't get to it!" He flipped keys.

"I got him," the voice snapped. "Admiral, listen to me: you have to get it open from your side! There's nothing out here bigger than a Mark X; it'll never cut that chromalloy!"

"Get in here, Lenny!" Tarleton's voice was a hoarse roar. "I don't give a damn how you do it, but get in here."

There were many voices yelling together now.

"— out of here!"

"— too late; let it go, Rudy!"

"— all roast together!"

"— son of a bitch is out of his mind!"

There was a loud crash, as though a heavy table had gone over, scuffling noises, a crackling roar. Bonny flicked it off. His eyes were on mine. "Jacobs was always a little careless with a weapon," he said in a voice like dry leaves.

"A good man," I said. "Reflexes like a cat. Damn near got my kneecap."

"And morals to match. It was my fault; I should have warned him about the house. Genuine antiques; wood, varnish, cloth. With the right draft there'll be nothing left but a red-hot shell in half an hour."

"You've been forgetting a lot of things, Bonny. Like telling your boys

where to aim to stop me. You wouldn't have liked the look on Lastwell's face when he put a burst into my chest."

"You must have wanted to get me pretty badly, Mac." He tossed the stunner aside. "It looks like you get your wish. Save yourself — if it's not too late."

He watched me get to my feet; my paralyzed shoulder felt as though my Siamese twin had just been sawed off, and I missed him. The dead hand bumped my side.

"Just the one way down?"

"Service stairs at the back."

There was a tiled bathroom visible through a half open door; I flipped on the water in the big old-style bath tub, came back out and hauled a wool blanket off the bed.

"Get going, damn you," Tarleton said in a blurred voice. "No . . . time . . ." His head went sideways and he hit the floor with a thud like a split log. That was good; it would be easier for him that way. He'd been keeping himself conscious on pure will-power; he wouldn't be needing that now.

The blanket wanted to float. I shoved it under, remembering the sound of the fire bellowing in the hall. I could almost hear it through the sound-proofing now. Precious seconds were passing . . .

Back in the bedroom, Bonny Tarleton lay on his side, his mouth open, eyes shut. He didn't look like a worldbeater now; he looked like a fellow who had had a bad dream and fallen out of bed.

He was heavy. I pulled him onto the blanket, rolled him in it with a double fold over his head, hoisted him onto my shoulder — a neat trick with one good arm, when I couldn't tell the shoulder was there, except for the feeling of needles prickling along the edge of the paralyzed area. The door seemed a long way off. I reached it, put my working hand against it; it hissed. That didn't change anything: I thumbed the electro-lock, heard the grumble inside the armored panel. The knob turned, and the door bucked back against me, driven by a solid wall of black-and-orange flame. I shielded my face as well as I could with one hand and a flap of blanket and walked out into it.

The sound was all around me like the thunderof a scarlet Niagara. Under my feet the floor boards were warped and buckled. Pain slashed at me like gale-driven sleet, like frozen knives raking at my face, my back, my thighs . . .

A section of plaster fell in front of me with a dull boom, drove back the flames for an instant and through the smoke I saw the once-white balustrade beside the stair, a smoking writhe of blackened iron now. Through a dervish-mad whirl of pale fire, the chandelier was a snarl of black metal from which glass dripped like sun-bright water. The clock stood upright on the landing, burning proudly, like a martyred monk. Beside it, the boy in red pants curled, fumed, was gone in a leap of white fire. Charred steps crumbled under my feet and I staggered; the smell of burning wool was rank in

my throat. I could see the varnished floor below, with fire running over it like burning brandy on a pudding, a black crescent moving out behind to consume the bright wood. Somewhere above there was a thunderous smash, and the air was filled with whirling fireflies. Something large and black fell past me, bounced along the floor ahead. I stepped over it, felt a ghostly touch of cool air, and suddenly the flames were gone from around me, and over the surf-roar of the fire I heard thin cries that seemed to come from a remote distance.

"Sweet mother of Christ!" a high, womanish voice wailed. "Look at the poor devil! He's burned as black as a tar-mop!"

There was a smoke-blurred figure before me, and then others and then the weight was gone from my back and I took another step but there seemed to be something wrong with my feet, and I was falling, falling, like a star burning its fiery path across a night sky . . .

X

I was afloat in cool waters, listening to the distant rumble of thunder portending gentle rain. Then the rumble was a voice, coming from far away on some frosty white mountain-top sparkling in the blue sky. I was flying, soaring down from the icy heights — or was it the cool translucent depths from which I floated up toward light, warmth, pain . . .

I opened my eyes, saw a vague, cloudy shape hovering over me.

"How are you feeling, Mac?" Admiral Banastre Tarleton's voice asked me.

"Like a barbecued steer," I said — but no sound came out. Or maybe I grunted.

"Don't try to talk," Tarleton said quickly. "You breathed a lot of smoke; got some fire in your lungs. You're lucky they were made in a factory."

I had the impression someone had come up, muttered to Tarleton. Then he was back.

"You're at Bethesda. They tell me you're out of danger. You were out for eighteen hours. Second degree burns on the face, the left hand, the back of your thighs. The coat you were wearing helped. Some kind of expanded polymer job. Bio-prosthetics are having a swell time clucking over how their work stood up to the fire. Both legs were melted back to bare metal, and the right elbow was fused. They'll have a new set ready for you in about two weeks, when the bandages come off. You won't even have scars."

I tried again, managed a croak. My throat felt like rawhide dried in the desert sun.

"You'll be wondering about how certain things have gone, Mac," Tarleton went on. "Funny thing, after the fire there seemed to be a certain temporary loss of momentum in the movement. I guess my little band of gentleman-adventurers used up all their drive running out on me when things got hot. My own perspective got a little warped: I had to keep reminding myself that in a society of maniacs, the sane

man has a duty to rule. And those lads who got the hell out when the flames got knee high: they did the sane thing. You can't fight that. It took a crazy man to walk through the fire for me."

It was a long speech. I had a long one of my own ready: I was going to tell him all about how it had been a mistake to rush me to the hospital, because as soon as I could walk I'd have to come after him to finish what I'd started; that sick or well, sane or crazy, there were things loose in the world that were worse than man's animal ferocity, and one of them was the ferocity of the Righteous Intellect; and that the most benevolent of despotisms rotted in the end into the blind arrogance of tyranny . . .

But all I managed was a whimper like a sick pup.

The frosty haze was closing in again. Tarleton's voice came from far away, as far as the stars:

"I have an appointment with the Vice President now, Mac. I'll have to explain some things to him. Maybe he'll understand, maybe not. Maybe things have gone too far. Whichever way it goes, I'd like to leave one thought with you: Theories are beautiful things — simple and precise as cut glass — as long as they're only theories. When you find in your hand the power to make them come true . . . suddenly, it's not so simple . . ."

Then he was gone, and the snow was drifting over me, silent and deep.

It was hours later, I don't know how many. I was half awake, reasonably clear-headed, wondering if Tarleton had really been there, or if I had dreamed the whole passage. There was a tri-D screen by the bed, playing the kind of soft music that's guaranteed not to intrude over the bridge-table conversation. It stopped abruptly in mid-moan and a voice harsh with excitement broke in:

"We interrupt this program to bring you the following bulletin: The Vice President has been assassinated and the Secretaries of Defense and State and the Attorney General as well as a number of lesser officials cut down in a burst of gunfire that shattered a secret meeting of the National Defense Council at two-nineteen P.M. Eastern Standard Time today — less than ten minutes ago. An unofficial statement by a newsman who was first on the scene indicates that a heavy calibre machine pistol smuggled into the Capitol by Admiral Banastre Tarleton was the massacre weapon. Tarleton, still heavily bandaged from yesterday's fire and with a cast on his leg, is reported to have died in the answering fire from a Secret Service man who broke down a door to gain entry to the room. A spokesman for the CBI stated that Admiral Tarleton, a national hero since his destruction of Bloc naval forces in a deep space battle two days ago, apparently broke under the double tragedy of the loss of the majority of his forces in the fighting, followed by the disastrous fire which swept his Georgetown home —"

The sound cut off then; I got an eyelid up, made out the hovering

figure of a man in pale green hospital togs. He fumbled at my left arm, made soothing noises, and things got vague again . . .

Voices picked at me. I came back from soft cool shadowland, saw faces floating like pink moons above me. I recognized one of them: Nulty. Under-secretary of Defense.

". . . ranking surviving officer," he was saying. "As senior line captain since the terrible losses in Monday's engagement . . . assured you'll be fit for duty in three weeks . . . temporary rank of vice admiral . . . grave crisis . . ." His voice faded in and out. Other voices seemed to come and go. Time passed. Then I was awake, feeling the artificial clear headedness of drug-induced alertness. Nulty was sitting beside the bed.

". . . hope you've understood what we've been saying, Maclamore," he said. "It's of vital importance that the flagship be fully operational as soon as possible. I've posted Captain Selkirk to her as acting CO until you could assume command. We don't know what the Bloc may be doing at this moment, but it's vital that our defensive posture not be permitted to deteriorate, in spite of the terrible tragedies that have struck us."

"Why me?" I managed.

"All but a handful of staff officers of flag rank were lost in the fight," he said in a voice that quivered with tension and fatigue. "The President agreed; you're academy trained, with vast operational experience —"

"What about Braze?" I asked.

"He . . . was one of those lost in the assassination."

"So now *Rapacious* is my baby?"

"I'm hoping you'll be able to board her within a day or two. I've ordered special medical facilities installed, and the surgeon general has agreed you can complete your convalescence there. I have reports for you to read, Maclamore. The Bloc is aware of the confusion here. They'll be wasting no time . . ." His face was close to me, worried.

"What will you do, Admiral?" he demanded.

A man in green came then and whispered, and Nulty went away. the lights went off. It was late.

I lay in the darkness and pondered my reply. END

Forgotten road to success in writing

By J. D. Ratcliff

I can't imagine why more beginners don't take the short road to publication — by writing magazine and newspaper articles.

I've made a good living for 25 years writing articles, and I've enjoyed every minute of it. I've interviewed Nobel Prize winners and heads of state. I've covered stories from Basel to Bangkok to Buffalo.

It's a great life. No commuter trains to catch, no office routine. Whether I'm at home or abroad on assignment, I write from eight to noon every day — no more, no less. My afternoons are my own.

The market for articles is vast and hungry. Over 350,000 were sold last year to magazines alone. Editors want pieces on almost any subject that comes natural to you — but they demand that your writing be sound and professional.

To teach professional writing techniques to serious beginners, I joined with Rod Serling, Faith Baldwin, Bennett Cerf, and eight other leading authors to start the Famous Writers School.

We poured everything we know about successful writing into a new kind of course which trains you at home, in spare time. You begin with the fundamentals of *all* good writing. Then, you specialize in articles and other non-fiction. (Or in Fiction, Advertising or Business Writing.)

You learn to write *by writing*. Our instructors, themselves all published authors, work with you by mail much as editors do with established writers.

Our School is young. Yet students, many still in training, have broken into print in more than 60 publications. Several sold pieces they wrote as School assignments.

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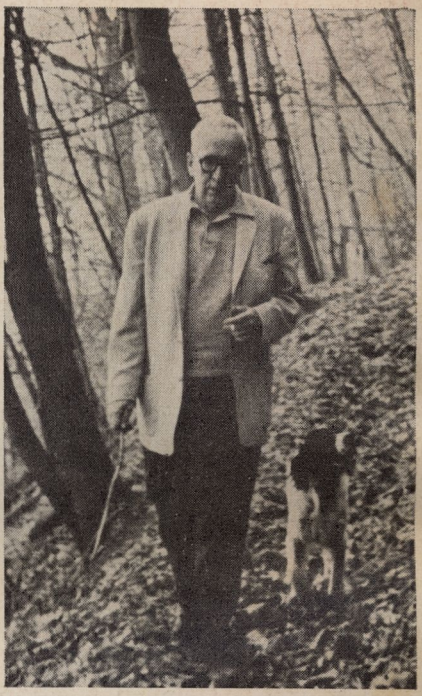

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