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DIMENSION 4

Science-fiction novelettes by

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Edited by GROFF CONKLIN
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at its best in Cleve Cartmill’s yarn of interplanetary detective work

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tale of a conquered America and the Ultimate Weapon, by John D. MacDonald

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satire as E. C. Tubb takes a cold look at tomorrow’s TV world

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baited with hope marks one of Theodore Sturgeon’s inimitable stories

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Won’t You Walk?

By Theodore Sturgeon

“Wouldn’t it be nice if...” How many times have discontented human beings mumbled that pathetic phrase under their breaths, or tossed it about in desultory conversation! Well, here’s a method for making “if” come true in a certain area of personal achievement—provided the sciences of electronics and acoustics and a few others advance somewhat beyond where they are today. Actually, though, almost all technologies except the social-psychological-medical have already gone far enough to make Dr. Zeitgeist’s therapy possible; and the only thing that has not so developed is Dr. Zeitgeist himself. And Joe Fritch, too, I suppose.

Anyhow, Sturgeon’s modern extrapolation of the hundreds of self-improvement books that flood the market at all times is a thoroughly ingenious, enjoyable, and thought-provoking extravaganza on the theme of what makes people tick, and how to make them tick better.

... Incidentally, why not look up the word “zeitgeist” in your dictionary? After you read the story, that is. The definition might amuse (and edify?) you.
Joe Fritch walked under the moon, and behind the bridge of his nose something rose and stung him. When he was a little boy, which was better than thirty years ago, this exact sensation was the prelude to tears. There had been no tears for a long time, but the sting came to him, on its occasions, quite unchanged. There was another goad to plague him too, as demanding and insistent as the sting, but at the moment it was absent. They were mutually exclusive.

His mind was a jumble of half-curses, half-wishes, not weak or pale ones by any means, but just unfinished. He need not finish them, any of them; his curses and his wishes were his personal clichés, and required only a code, a syllable for each. "He who hesitates—" people say, and that's enough. "Too many cooks—" they say wisely. "What's sauce for the goose—" Valid sagacities, every one, classic as the Parthenon and as widely known.

Such were the damnations and the prayers in the microcosm called Joe Fritch. "Oh, I wish—" he would say to himself, and "If only—" and "Some day, by God—"; and for each of these there was a wish, detailed and dramatic, so thought-out, touched-up, policed and maintained that it had everything but reality to make it real. And in the other area, the curses, the code-words expressed wide meticulous matrices: "That Barnes—" dealt not only with his employer, a snide, selfish, sarcastic sadist with a presence like itching-powder, but with every social circumstance which produced and permitted a way of life wherein a man like Joe Fritch could work for a man like Barnes. "Lutie—" was his wife's name, but as a code-word it was dowdy breakfasts and I-can't-afford, that-old-dress and the finger in her ear, the hand beginning to waggle rapidly when she was annoyed; "Lutie—" said as the overture to this massive curse was that which was wanted and lost ("Joe?" "What, I'l Lutle?" "Nothing, Joe. Just . . . Joe—") and that which was unwanted and owned, like the mortgage which would be paid off in only eighteen more years,
and the single setting of expensive flowery sterling which they would never, never be able to add to.

Something had happened after dinner—he could almost not remember it now; what bursts the balloon, the last puff of air, or the air it already contains? Is the final drop the only factor in the spilling-over of a brimming glass? Something about Marie Next Door (Lutie always spoke of her that way, a name like William Jennings Bryan) and a new TV console, and something about Lutie’s chances, ten years ago, of marrying no end of TV consoles, with houses free-and-clear and a car and a coat, and all these chances forsworn for the likes of Joe Fritch. It had been an evening like other evenings, through 10:13 p.m. At 10:14 something silent and scalding had burst in the back of Joe’s throat; he had risen without haste and had left the house. Another man might have roared an epithet, hurled an ashtray. Some might have slammed the door, and some, more skilled in maliciousness, might have left it open so the angry wife, sooner or later, must get up and close it. Joe had simply shambled out, shrinking away from her in the mindless way an amoeba avoids a hot pin. There were things he might have said. There were things he could have said to Barnes, too, time and time again, and to the elevator-starter who caught him by the elbow one morning and jammed him into a car, laughing at him through the gate before the doors slid shut. But he never said the things, not to anyone. Why not? Why not?

“They wouldn’t listen,” he said aloud, and again the sting came back of his nose.

He stopped and heeled water out of his left eye with the base of his thumb. This, and the sound of his own voice, brought him his lost sense of presence. He looked around like a child awakening in a strange bed.

It was a curved and sloping street, quite unlike the angled regimentation of his neighborhood. There was a huge elm arched over the street-lamp a block away, and to Joe’s dis-oriented eye it looked like a photographic negative, a shadow-tree lit by darkness looming over a shadow of light. A tailored hedge grew on a neat stone wall beside him; across the street was a white picket fence enclosing a rolling acre and the dark mass of just the house he could never own, belonging, no doubt, to someone people listened to. Bitterly he looked at it and its two gates, its rolled white driveway, and, inevitably, the low, long coupé which stood in it. The shape of that car, the compact, obedient, directional eagerness of it, came
to him like the welcome answer to some deep question within him, something he had thought too complex to have any solution. For a moment a pure, bright vision overwhelmed and exalted him; his heart, his very bones cried *well, of course!* and he crossed to the driveway, along its quiet grassy margin to the car.

He laid a hand on its cool ivory flank, and had his vision again. At the wheel of this fleetfooted dream-car, he would meet the morning somewhere far from here. There would be a high hill, and a white road winding up it, and over the brow of that hill, there would be the sea. Below, a beach, and rocks; and there would be people. Up the hill he would hurtle, through and over a stone wall at the top, and in the moment he was air-borne, he would blow the horn. Louder, *bigger* than the horn would be his one bright burst of laughter. He had never laughed like that, but he would, he could, for all of him would be in it, rejoicing that they listened to him, they’d all be listening, up and down the beach and craning over the cliff. After that he’d fall, but that didn’t matter. Nothing would matter, even the fact that his act was criminal and childish. All the “If only—” and “Some day, by God—” wishes, all the “That Barnes—” curses, for all their detail, lacked implementation. But this one, this one—

The window was open on the driver’s side. Joe looked around; the street was deserted and the house was dark. He bent and slid his hand along the line of dimly-glowing phosphorescence that was a dashboard. Something tinkled, dangled—the keys, the keys!

He opened the door, got in. He could feel the shift in balance as the splendid machine accepted him like a lover, and they were one together. He pulled the door all but closed, checked it, then pressed it the rest of the way. It closed with a quiet, solid click. Joe grasped the steering wheel in both hands, settled himself, and quelled just the great trumpeting of laughter he had envisioned. *Later, later.* He reached for the key, turned it.

There was a soft purring deep under the hood. The window at his left slid up, nudging his elbow out of the way, seated itself in the molding above. The purring stopped. Then silence.

Joe grunted in surprise and turned the key again. Nothing. He fumbled along the dashboard, over the cowling, under its edge. He moved his feet around. Accelerator, brake. No clutch. A headlight dimmer-switch. With less and less caution he pushed, turned and pulled at the controls on the instru-
ment panel. No lights came on. The radio did not work. Neither did the cigarette lighter, which startled him when it came out in his hand. There wasn't a starter anywhere.

Joe Fritch, who couldn't weep, very nearly did then. If a man had a car burglar-proofed with some sort of concealed switch, wasn't that enough? Why did he have to amuse himself by leaving the keys in it? Even Barnes never thought of anything quite that sadistic.

For a split second he glanced forlornly at his glorious vision, then forever let it go. Once he sniffed; then he put his hand on the door control and half-rose in his seat.

The handle spun easily, uselessly around. Joe stopped it, pulled it upward. It spun just as easily that way. He tried pulling it toward him, pushing it outward. Nothing.

He bit his lower lip and dove for the other door. It had exactly the same kind of handle, which behaved exactly the same way. Suddenly Joe was panting as if from running hard.

Now take it easy. Don't try to do anything. Think. Think, Joe.

The windows!

On his door there were two buttons; on the other, one. He tried them all. "I can't get out," he whispered. "I can't—" Suddenly he spun one of the door handles. He fluttered his hands helplessly and looked out into the welcome, open dark. "Can't!" he cried.

"That's right," said a voice. "You sure can't."

The sting at the base of Joe Fritch's nose—that was one of the unexpressed, inexpressible pains which had plagued him ever since he was a boy. Now came the other.

It was a ball of ice, big as a fist, in his solar plexus; and around this ball stretched a membrane; and the ball was fury, and the membrane was fear. The more terrified he became, the tighter the membrane shrank and the more it hurt. If ever he were frightened beyond bearing, the membrane would break and let the fury out, and that must not, must not happen, for the fury was so cold and so uncaring of consequence. This was no churning confusion—there was nothing confused about it. There was only compression and stretching and a breaking point so near it could be felt in advance. There was nothing that could be done about it except to sit quite still and wait until it went away, which it did when whatever caused it went away.

This voice, though, here in the car with him, it didn't go
away. Conversationally it said, “Were you thinking of break-
ing the glass?”

Joe just sat. The voice said, “Look in the glove compart-
ment.” It waited five seconds, and said, “Go ahead. Look in
the glove compartment.”

Trembling, Joe reached over and fumbled the catch of the
glove compartment. He felt around inside. It seemed empty,
and then something moved under his fingers. It was a rec-
tangle of wood, about six inches by three, extremely light and
soft. Balsa. “I used to use a real piece of glass as a sample,”
said the voice, “but one of you fools got to bashing it around
and broke two of his own fingers. Anyway, that piece of wood
is exactly as thick as the windshield and windows.” It was
nearly three quarters of an inch thick. “Bulletproof is an
understatement. Which reminds me,” said the voice, stifling
a yawn, “if you have a gun, for Pete’s sake don’t use it. The
slug’ll ricochet. Did you ever see the wound a ricocheted
bullet makes?” The yawn again. “’Scuse me. You woke me
up.”

Joe licked his lips, which made him shudder. The tongue
and lip were so dry they scraped all but audibly. “Where are
you?” he whispered.

“In the house. I always take that question as a compliment.
You’re hearing me on the car radio. Clean, hm-m-m? Flat
to twenty-seven thousand cycles. Designed it myself.”

Joe said, “Let me out.”

“I’ll let you out, but I won’t let you go. You people are
my bread and butter.”

“Listen,” said Joe, “I’m not a thief, or a . . . or a . . . or
anything. I mean, this was just a sort of wild idea. Just let me
go, huh? I won’t ever . . . . I mean, I promise.” He scraped
at his lip with his tongue again and added, “Please. I mean,
please.”

“Where were you going with my car, Mister I’m-not-a-
thief?”

Joe was silent.

A sudden blaze of light made him wince. His eyes ad-
justed, and he found it was only the light over the porte-
cochere which bridged the driveway where it passed the
house. “Come on inside,” said the voice warmly.

Joe looked across the rolling lawn at the light. The car was
parked in the drive near the street; the house was nearly
two hundred feet away. Catch ten times as many with it
parked way out here, he thought wildly. And, I thought
Barnes was good at making people squirm. And, Two hun-
dred feet, and him in the house. He can out-think me; could he outrun me? “What do you want me inside for?”

“Would it make any difference how I answered that question?”

Joe saw that it wouldn’t. The voice was calling the shots just now, and Joe was hardly in a position to make any demands. Resignedly he asked, “You’re going to call the police?”

“Absolutely not.”

A wave of relief was overtaken and drowned in a flood of terror. No one knew where he was. No one had seen him get into the car. Being arrested would be unpleasant, but at least it would be a known kind of unpleasantness. But what lay in store for him in this mysterious expensive house?

“You better just call the police,” he said. “I mean, have me arrested. I’ll wait where I am.”

“No,” said the voice. It carried a new tone, and only by the change did Joe realize how—how kind it had been before. Joe believed that single syllable completely. Again he eyed the two hundred feet. He tensed himself, and said, “All right. I’ll come.”

“Good boy,” said the voice, kind again. “Sleep sweet.” Something went pffft! on the dashboard and Joe’s head was enveloped in a fine, very cold mist. He fell forward and hit his mouth on the big V emblem in the hub of the steering wheel. A profound astonishment enveloped him because he felt the impact but no pain.

He blacked out.

There was a comfortable forever during which he lay in a dim place, talking lazily, on and on. Something questioned him from time to time, and perhaps he knew he was not questioning himself; he certainly didn’t care. He rested in an euphoric cloud, calmly relating things he thought he had forgotten, and while an objective corner of his mind continued to operate, to look around, to feel and judge and report, it was almost completely preoccupied with an astonished delight that he could talk about his job, his marriage, his sister Anna, even about Joey—whom he’d killed when he and Joey were ten years old—without either the self-pitying twinge of unshed tears nor the painful fear which contained his rage.

Someone moved into his range of vision, someone with a stranger’s face and a manner somehow familiar. He had something shiny in his hand. He advanced and bent over him, and Joe felt the nip of a needle in his upper arm. He lay quietly
then, not talking because he had finished what he had to say, not moving because he was so comfortable, and began to feel warm from the inside out. That lasted for another immeasurable time. Then he detected movement again, and was drawn to it; the stranger crossed in front of him and sat down in an easy-chair. Their faces were about at the same level, but Joe was not on an easy-chair. Neither was it a couch. It was something in between. He glanced down and saw his knees, his feet. He was in one of those clumsy-looking, superbly comfortable devices known as a contour chair. He half-sat, half-reclined in it, looked at the other man and felt just wonderful. He smiled sleepily, and the man smiled back.

The man looked too old to be thirty, though he might be. He looked too young for fifty, though that was possible, too. His hair was dark, his eyebrows flecked with gray—a combination Joe thought he had never seen before. His eyes were light—in this dim room it was hard to see their color. The nose was ridiculous: it belonged to a happy fat man, and not someone with a face as long and lean as this one. The mouth was large and flexible; it was exactly what is meant by the term “generous,” yet its lips were thin, the upper one almost nonexistent. He seemed of average height, say five, ten or eleven, but he gave the impression of being somehow too wide and too flat. Joe looked at him and at his smile, and it flashed across his mind that the French call a smile sourire, which means literally “under a laugh”; and surely, in any absolute scale of merriment, this smile was just exactly that. “How are you feeling?”

“I feel fine,” said Joe. He really meant it.

“I’m Zeitgeist,” said the man.

Joe was unquestioningly aware that the man knew him, knew all about him, so he didn’t offer his name in return. He accepted the introduction and after a moment let his eyes stray from the friendly face to the wall behind him, to some sort of framed document, around to the side where a massive bookcase stood. He suddenly realized that he was in a strange room. He snapped his gaze back to the man. “Where am I?”

“In my house,” said Zeitgeist. He uncrossed his legs and leaned forward. “I’m the man whose car you were stealing. Remember?”

Joe did, with a rush. An echo of his painful panic struck him, made him leap to his feet, a reflex which utterly failed. Something caught him gently and firmly around the midriff and slammed him back into the contour chair. He looked down and saw a piece of webbing like that used in aircraft
safety belts, but twice as wide. It was around his waist and had no buckle; or if it had, it was behind and under the back of the chair, well out of his reach.

"It's O.K.,” Zeitgeist soothed him. "You didn’t actually steal it, and I understand perfectly why you tried. Let's just forget that part of it.”

"Who are you? What are you trying to do? Let me out of this thing!” The memory of this man approaching him with a glittering hypodermic returned to him. "What did you do, drug me?"

Zeitgeist crossed his legs again and leaned back. "Yes, several times, and the nicest part of it is that you can't stay that excited very long just now.” He smiled again, warm.

Joe heaved again against the webbing, lay back, opened his mouth to protest, closed it helplessly. Then he met the man's eyes again, and he could feel the indignation and fright draining out of him. He suddenly felt foolish, and found a smile of his own, a timid, foolish one.

"First I anesthetized you,” said Zeitgeist informatively, apparently pursuing exactly the line of thought brought out by Joe's question, "because not for a second would I trust any of you to come across that lawn just because I asked you to. Then I filled you full of what we'd call truth serum if this was a TV play. And when you'd talked enough I gave you another shot to pull you out of it. Yes, I drugged you.”

"What for? What do you want from me, anyway?”

"You'll find out when you get my bill.”

"Bill?”

"Sure. I have to make a living just like anybody else.”

"Bill for what?”

"I'm going to fix you up.”

"There's nothing the matter with me!”

Zeitgeist twitched his mobile lips. "Nothing wrong with a man who wants to take an expensive automobile and kill himself with it?”

Joe dropped his eyes. A little less pugnaciously, he demanded, "What are you, a psychiatrist or something?"

"Or something,” laughed Zeitgeist. "Now listen to me,” he said easily. "There are classic explanations for people doing the things they do, and you have a textbook full. You were an undersized kid who lost his mother early. You were brutalized by a big sister who just wouldn’t be a mother to you. When you were ten you threw one of your tantrums
and crowded another kid, and he slipped on the ice and was hit by a truck and killed. Your sister lambasted you for it until you ran away from home nine years later. You got married and didn’t know how to put your wife into the mother-image, so you treated her like your sister Anna instead; you obeyed, you didn’t answer back, you did as little as possible to make her happy because no matter how happy she got you were subconsciously convinced it would do you no good. And by the way, the kid who was killed had the same name as you did.” He smiled his kindly smile, wagged his head and tsk-tsked. “You should see what the textbooks say about that kind of thing. Identification: you are the Joey who was killed when you got mad and hit him. Ergo, don’t ever let yourself get mad or you’ll be dead. Joe Fritch, you know what you are? You’re a mess.”

“What am I supposed to say?” asked Joe in a low voice. Had he run off at the mouth that much? He was utterly disarmed. In the face of such penetrating revelation, anger would be ridiculous.

“Don’t say anything. That is, don’t try to explain—I already understand. How’d you like to get rid of all that garbage? I can do that for you. Will you let me?”

“Why should you?”

“I’ve already told you. It’s my living.”

“You say you’re a psychiatrist?”

“I said nothing of the kind, and that’s beside the point. Well?”

“Well, O.K. I mean . . . O.K.”

Zeitgeist rose, smiling, and stepped behind Joe. There was a metallic click and the webbing loosened. Joe looked up at his host, thinking: Suppose I won’t? Suppose I just don’t? What could he do?

“There are lots of things I could do,” said Zeitgeist with gentle cheerfulness. “Full of tricks, I am.”

In spite of himself, Joe laughed. He got up. Zeitgeist steadied him, then released his elbow. Joe said, “Thanks . . . what are you, I mean, a mind-reader?”

“I don’t have to be.”

Joe thought about it. “I guess you don’t,” he said.

“Come on.” Zeitgeist turned away to the door. Joe reflected that anyone who would turn his back on a prisoner like that was more than just confident—he must have a secret weapon. But at the moment confidence is enough. He followed Zeitgeist into the next room.
It, too, was a low room, but much wider than the other, and its dimness was of quite another kind. Pools of brilliance from floating fluorescents mounted over three different laboratory benches made them like three islands in a dark sea. At about eye-level—as he stood—in the shadows over one of the benches, the bright green work of a cathode-ray oscilloscope writhed in its twelve-inch circular prison. Ranked along the walls were instrument racks and consoles; he was sure he could not have named one in ten of them in broad daylight. The room was almost silent, but it was a living silence of almost indetectable clickings and hummings and the charged, noiseless presence of power. It was a waiting, busy sort of room.

“Boo,” said Zeitgeist.

“I beg your . . . huh?”


Joe looked up at the oscilloscope. The worm had changed to a wiggling, scraggly child’s scrawl, which, when Zeitgeist’s long-drawn syllable was finished, changed into a green worm again. Zeitgeist touched a control knob on one of the benches and the worm became a straight line. “Go ahead.”

“Boo,” said Joe self-consciously. The line was a squiggle and then a line again. “Come on, a good loud long one,” said Zeitgeist. This time Joe produced the same sort of “grass” the other man had. Or at least, it looked the same. “Good,” said Zeitgeist. “What do you do for a living?”

“Advertising. You mean I didn’t tell you?”

“You were more interested in talking about your boss than your work. What kind of advertising?”

“Well, I mean, it isn’t advertising like in an agency. I mean, I work for the advertising section of the public relations division of a big corporation.”

“You write ads? Sell them? Art, production, research—what?”

“All that. I mean, a little of all those. We’re not very big. The company is, I mean, but not our office. We only advertise in trade magazines. The engineer’ll come to me with something he wants to promote and I check with the . . . I mean, that Barnes, and if he O.K.’s it I write copy on it and check back with the engineer and write it again and check back with Barnes and write it again; and after that I do the layout, I mean I draft the layout just on a piece of typewriter paper, that’s all, I can’t draw or anything like that, I mean; and then I see it through Art and go back and check with Barnes, and then I order space for it in the magazines and—”
"You ever take a vocational analysis?"
"Yes. I mean, sure I did. I'm in the right sort of job, according to the tests. I mean, it was the Kline-Western test."
"Good test," said Zeitgeist approvingly.
"You think I'm not in the right sort of job?" He paused, and then with sudden animation, "You think I should quit that lousy job, I mean, get into something else?"
"That's your business. All right, that's enough."

The man could be as impersonal as a sixpenny nail when he wanted to be. He worked absorbedly at his controls for a while. There was a soft whine from one piece of apparatus, a clicking from another, and before Joe knew what was happening he heard someone saying, "All that. I mean, a little of all those. We're not very big. The company is, I mean, but not our office. We only advertise—" on and on, in his exact words. His exact voice, too, he realized belatedly. He listened to it without enthusiasm. From time to time a light blazed, bright as a photoflash but scalding red. Patiently, brilliantly, the oscilloscope traced each syllable, each pulse within each syllable. "... and check with Barnes, and then I order sp—"

The voice ceased abruptly as Zeitgeist threw a switch.

"I didn't know you were recording," said Joe, "or I would have... I mean, said something different maybe."
"I know," said Zeitgeist. "That red light bother you?"
"It was pretty bright," said Joe, not wanting to complain.
"Look here." He opened the top of the recorder. Joe saw reels and more heads than he had ever seen on a recorder before, and a number of other unfamiliar components. "I don't know much about—"

"You don't have to," said Zeitgeist. "See there?" He pointed with one hand, and with the other reached for a button on the bench and pressed it. A little metal arm snapped up against the tape just where it passed over an idler. "That punched a little hole in the tape. Not enough to affect the recording." Zeitgeist turned the reel slowly by hand, moving the tape along an inch or so. Joe saw, on the moving tape, a tiny bright spot of light. When the almost invisible hole moved into it, the red light flared. "I pushed that button every time you said 'I mean.' Let's play it again."

He played it again, and Joe listened—an act of courage, because with all his heart he wanted to cover his ears, shut his eyes against that red blaze. He was consumed with embarrassment. He had never heard anything that sounded so com-
pletely idiotic. When at last it was over, Zeitgeist grinned at him. “Learn something?”

“I did,” said Joe devoutly.

“O.K.,” said Zeitgeist, in a tone which disposed of the matter completely as far as he was concerned, at the same time acting as prelude to something new. The man’s expressiveness was extraordinary; with a single word he had Joe’s gratitude and his fullest attention. “Now listen to this.” He made some adjustments, threw a switch. Joe’s taped voice said, “... go back and check it with Ba-a-a-a-a-a-ah—” with the “ah” going on and on like an all-clear signal. “That bother you?” called Zeitgeist over the noise.

“It’s awful!” shouted Joe. This time he did cover his ears. It didn’t help. Zeitgeist switched off the noise and laughed at him. “That’s understandable. Your own voice, and it goes on and on like that. What’s bothering you is, it doesn’t breathe. I swear you could choke a man half to death, just by making him listen to that. Well, don’t let it worry you. That thing over there”—he pointed to a massive cabinet against the wall—“is my analyzer. It breaks up your voice into all the tones and overtones it contains, finds out the energy-level of each, and shoots the information to that tone-generator yonder. The generator reproduces each component exactly as received, through seventy-two band-pass filters two hundred cycles apart. All of which means that when I tell it to, it picks out a single vowel sound—in this case your ‘a’ in ‘Barnes’—and hangs it up there on the ‘scope like a photograph for as long as I want to look at it.”

“All that, to do what I do when I say ‘ah’?”

“All that,” beamed Zeitgeist. Joe could see he was unashamedly proud of his equipment. He leaned forward and flicked Joe across the Adam’s apple. “That’s a hell of a compact little machine, that pharynx of yours. Just look at that wave-form.”

Joe looked at the screen. “Some mess.”

“A little tomato sauce and you could serve it in an Italian restaurant,” said Zeitgeist. “Now let’s take it apart.”

From another bench he carried the cable of a large control box, and plugged it into the analyzer with a many-pronged jack. The box had on it nearly a hundred keys. He fingered a control at the end of each row and the oscilloscope subsided to its single straight line. “Each one of these keys controls one of those narrow two-hundred-cycle bands I was talking about,” he told Joe. “Your voice—everybody’s voice—has high and
low overtones, some loud, some soft. Here's one at the top, one in the middle, one at the bottom." He pressed three widely separated keys. The speaker uttered a faint breathy note, then a flat tone, the same in pitch but totally different in quality; it was a little like hearing the same note played first on a piccolo and then on a viola. The third key produced only a murmuring hiss, hardly louder than the noise of the amplifier itself. With each note, the 'scope showed a single wavy line. With the high it was a steep but even squiggle. In the middle it was a series of shallow waves like a child's drawing of an ocean. Down at the bottom it just shook itself and lay there.

"Just what I thought. I'm not saying you're a soprano, Joe, but there's five times more energy in your high register than there is at the bottom. Ever hear the way a kid's voice climbs the scale when he's upset—whining, crying, demanding? 'Spose I told you that all the protest against life that you're afraid to express in anger, is showing up here?" He slid his fingers across the entire upper register, and the speaker bleated. "Listen to that, the poor little feller."

In abysmal self-hatred, Joe felt the sting of tears. "Cut it out," he blurted.

"Caht eet ow-oot," mimicked Zeitgeist. Joe thought he'd kill him, then and there, but couldn't because he found himself laughing. The imitation was very good. "You know, Joe, the one thing you kept droning on about in the other room was something about 'they won't listen to me. Nobody will listen.' How many times, say, in the office, have you had a really solid idea and kept it to yourself because 'nobody will listen'? How many times have you wanted to do something with your wife, go somewhere, ask her to get something from the cleaners—and then decided not to because she wouldn't listen?" He glanced around at Joe, and charitably turned away from the contorted face. "Don't answer that: you know, and it doesn't matter to me.

"Now get this, Joe. There's something in all animals just about as basic as hunger. It's the urge to attack something that's retreating, and its converse: to be wary of something that won't retreat. Next time a dog comes running up to you, growling, with his ears laid back, turn and run and see if he doesn't take a flank steak out of your southern hemisphere. After you get out of the hospital, go back and when he rushes you, laugh at him and keep him going on about your business, and see him decide you're not on his calorie chart for the day. Well, the same thing works with people. No
one's going to attack you unless he has you figured out—especially if he figures you'll retreat. Walk around with a big neon sign on your head that says HEY EVERYBODY I WILL RETREAT, and you're just going to get clobbered wherever you go. You've got a sign like that and it lights up every time you open your mouth. Caht eet owoot."

Joe's lower lip protruded childishly. "I can't help what kind of voice I've got."

"Probably you can't. I can, though."

"But how—"

"Shut up," Zeitgeist returned all the keys to a neutral position and listened a moment to the blaring audio. Then he switched it off and began flicking keys, some up, some down. "Mind you, this isn't a matter of changing a tenor into a baritone. New York City once had a mayor with a voice like a Punch and Judy show, and he hadn't an ounce of retreat in him. All I'm going to do is cure a symptom. Some people say that doesn't work, but ask the gimpy guy who finds himself three inches taller and walking like other people, the first time he tries his built-up shoes. Ask the guy who wears a well-made toupee." He stared for a while at the 'scope, and moved some more keys. "You want people to listen to you. All right, they will, whether they want to or not. Of course, what they listen to is something else again. It better be something that backs up this voice I'm giving you. That's up to you."

"I don't understand a lot quicker if we fix it so you listen and I talk. O.K.?" Zeitgeist demanded truculently, and sent over such an engaging grin that the words did not smart. "Now, like I said, I'm only curing a symptom. What you have to get through your thick head is that the disease doesn't exist. All that stuff about your sister Anna, and Joey, that doesn't exist because it happened and it's finished and it's years ago and doesn't matter any more. Lutie, Barnes... well, they bother you mostly because they won't listen to you. They'll listen to you now. So that botherment is over with, too; finished, done with, nonexistent. For all practical purposes yesterday is as far beyond recall as twenty years ago; just as finished, just as dead. So the little boy who got punished by his big sister until he thought he deserved being punished—he doesn't exist. The man with the guilty feeling killing a kid called Joey, he doesn't exist either any more, and by the way he wasn't guilty in the first place. The copy man
who lets a pipsqueak sadist prick him with petty sarcasms—he’s gone too, because now there’s a man who won’t swallow what he wants to say, what he knows is right. He’ll say it, just because people will listen. A beer stein is pretty useless to anyone until you put beer in it. The gadget I’m going to give you won’t do you a bit of good unless you put yourself, your real self into it.” He had finished with the keys while he spoke, had turned and was holding Joe absolutely paralyzed with his strange light eyes.

Inanely, Joe said, “G-gadget?”

“Listen.” Zeitgeist hit the master switch and Joe’s voice again came from the speaker, “We only advertise in trade magazines. The engineer’ll come to me with something he wants to promote and—”

And the voice was his voice, but it was something else, too. Its pitch was the same, inflection, accent; but there was a forceful resonance in it somewhere, somehow. It was a compelling voice, a rich voice; above all it was assertive and sure. (And when the ‘I means’ came, and the scalding light flashed, it wasn’t laughable or embarrassing; it was simply unnecessary.)

“That isn’t me.”

“You’re quite right. It isn’t. But it’s the way the world will hear you. It’s behind the way the world will treat you. And the way the world treats a man is the way the man grows, if he wants to and he’s got any growing left in him. Whatever is in that voice you can be because I will help and the world will help. But you’ve got to help, too.”

“I’ll help,” Joe whispered.

“Sometimes I make speeches,” said Zeitgeist, and grinned shyly. The next second he was deeply immersed in work.

He drew out a piece of paper with mimeographed rulings on it, and here and there in the ruled squares he jotted down symbols, referring to the keyboard in front of him. He seemed then to be totaling columns; once he reset two or three keys, turned on the audio and listened intently, then erased figures and put down others. At last he nodded approvingly, rose, stretched till his spine cracked, picked up the paper and went over to the third bench.

From drawers and cubbyholes he withdrew components—springs, pads, plugs, rods. He moved with precision and swift familiarity. He rolled out what looked like a file drawer, but instead of papers it contained ranks and rows of black plastic
elements, about the size and shape of miniature match boxes, each with two bright brass contacts at top and bottom.

“We're living in a wonderful age, Joe,” said Zeitgeist as he worked. “Before long I'll turn the old soldering iron out to stud and let it father waffles. Printed circuits, sub-mini tubes, transistors. These things here are electrets, which I won't attempt to explain to you.” He bolted and clipped, bent and formed, and every once in a while, referring to his list, he selected another of the black boxes from the file and added it to his project. When there were four rows of components, each row about one and a half by six inches, he made some connections with test clips and thrust a jack into a receptacle in the bench. He glanced up at the 'scope, grunted, un-clipped one of the black rectangles and substituted another from the files.

“These days, Joe, when they can pack a whole radar set—transmitter, receiver, timing and arming mechanisms and a power supply into the nose of a shell, a package no bigger than your fist—these days you can do anything with a machine. Anything, Joe. You just have to figure out how. Most of the parts exist, they make 'em in job lots. You just have to plug 'em together.” He plugged in the jack, as if to demonstrate, and glanced up at the 'scope. “Good. The rest won't take long.” Working with tin-snips, then with a small sheetmetal brake, he said, “Some day you're going to ask me what I'm doing, what all this is for, and I'll just grin at you. I'm going to tell you now and if you don't remember what I say, well, then forget it.

“They say our technology has surpassed, or bypassed, our souls, Joe. They say if we don't turn from science to the spirit, we're doomed. I agree that we're uncomfortably close to damnation, but I don't think we'll appease any great powers by throwing our gears and gimmicks over the cliff as a sacrifice, a propitiation. Science didn't get us into this mess; we used science to get us in.

“So I'm just a guy who's convinced we can use science to get us out. In other words, I'm not for hanging the gunsmith every time someone gets shot. Take off your shirt.”

“What?” said Joe, back from a thousand miles. “Oh.” Bemused, he took off his jacket and shirt and stood shyly clutching his thin ribs.

Zeitgeist picked up his project from the bench and put it over Joe's head. A flat band of spring steel passed over each shoulder, snugly. The four long flat casings, each filled with components, rested against his collarbones, pressing upward
in the small hollow just below the bones, and against his shoulder blades. Zeitgeist bent and manipulated the bands until they were tight but comfortable. Then he hooked the back pieces to the front pieces with soft strong elastic bands passing under Joe’s arms. “O.K.? O.K. Now—say something.” “Say what?” said Joe stupidly, and immediately clapped his hand to his chest. “Uhl!” “What happened?” “It . . . I mean, it buzzed!” Zeitgeist laughed. “Let me tell you what you’ve got there. In front, two little speakers, an amplifier to drive them, and a contact microphone that picks up your chest tones. In back, on this side, a band-pass arrangement that suppresses all those dominating high-frequency whimperings of yours and feeds the rest, the stuff you’re weak in, up front to be amplified. And over here, in back—that’s where the power supply goes. Go over there where you were and record something. And remember what I told you—you have to help this thing. Talk a little slower and you won’t have to say ‘I mean’ while you think of what comes next. You know what comes next, anyway. You don’t have to be afraid to say it.”

Dazed, Joe stepped back to where he had been when the first recording was made, glanced for help up at the green line of the oscilloscope, closed his eyes and said, faltering at first, then stronger and steadier, “‘Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth upon this contin—’” “Cut!” cried Zeitgeist. “Joe, see that tone-generator over there? It’s big as a spinet piano. I can do a lot but believe me, you haven’t got one of those strapped on you. Your amplifier can only blow up what it gets. You don’t have much, but for Pete’s sake give it what you have. Try talking with your lungs full instead of empty. Push your voice a little, don’t just let it fall out of you.”

“Nothing happens, though. I sound the same to myself. Is it working? Maybe it doesn’t work.” “Like I told you before,” said Zeitgeist with exaggerated patience, “people who are talking aren’t listening. It’s working all right. Don’t go looking for failures, Joe. Plenty’ll come along that you didn’t ask for. Now go ahead and do as I said.”

Joe wet his lips, took a deep breath. Zeitgeist barked, “Now slowly!” and he began: “‘Four score and seven years—’” The sonorous words rolled out, his chest vibrated from the buzzing, synchronized to his syllables. And though he was almost totally immersed in his performance, a part of him
leaped excitedly, realizing that never in his whole life before had he listened, really listened to that majestic language. When he was finished he opened his eyes and found Zeitgeist standing very near him, his eyes alight.

"Good," the man breathed. "Ah, but . . . good."

"Was it? Was it really?"

In answer, Zeitgeist went to the controls, rewound the tape, and hit the playback button.

And afterwards, he said gently to Joe, "You can cry—see?"

"Damn foolishness," said Joe.

"No it isn’t," Zeitgeist told him.

Outside, it was morning—what a morning, with all the gold and green, thrust and rustle of a new morning in a new summer. He hadn’t been out all night; he had died and was born again! He stood tall, walked tall, he carried his shining new voice sheathed like Excalibur, but for all its concealment, he was armed!

He had tried to thank Zeitgeist, and that strange man had shaken his head soberly and said, "Don’t, Joe. You’re going to pay me for it."

"Well I will, of course I will! Anything you say . . . how much, anyhow?"

Zeitgeist had shaken his head slightly. "We’ll talk about it later. Go on—get in the car. I’ll drive you to work." And, silently, he had.

Downtown, he reached across Joe and opened the door. For him, the door worked. "Come see me day after tomorrow. After dinner—nine."

"O.K. Why? Got another . . . treatment?"

"Not for you," said Zeitgeist, and his smile made it a fine compliment for both of them. "But no power plant lasts forever. Luck." And before Joe could answer the door was closed and the big car had swung out into traffic. Joe watched it go, grinning and shaking his head.

The corner clock said five minutes to nine. Just time, if he hurried.

He didn’t hurry. He went to Harry’s and got shaved, while they pressed his suit and sponged his collar in the back room. He kept the bathrobe they gave him pulled snugly over his amplifier, and under a hot towel he reached almost the euphoric state he had been in last night. He thought of Barnes, and the anger stirred in him. With some new internal motion he peeled away its skin of fear and set it free.
Nothing happened, except that it lived in him instead of just lying there. It didn’t make him tremble. It made him smile.

Clean, pressed and smelling sweet, he walked into his building at eight minutes before ten. He went down to the express elevator and stepped into the one open door. Then he said, “Wait,” and stepped out again. The operator goggled at him.

Joe walked up to the starter, a bushy character in faded brown and raveled gold braid. “Hey . . . you.”

The starter pursed a pair of liver-colored lips and glowered at him. “Whaddayah want?”

Joe filled his lungs and said evenly, “Day before yesterday you took hold of me and shoved me into an elevator like I was a burlap sack.”

The starter’s eyes flickered. “Not me.”

“You calling me a liar, too?”

Suddenly the man’s defenses caved. There was a swift pucker which came and went on his chin, and he said, “Look, I got a job to do, mister, rush hours, if I don’t get these cars out of here it’s my neck, I didn’t mean nothing by it, I—”

“Don’t tell me your troubles,” said Joe. He glared at the man for a second. “All right, do your job, but don’t do it on me like that again.”

He turned his back, knowing he was mimicking Zeitgeist with the gesture and enjoying the knowledge. He went back to the elevator and got in. Through the closing gate he saw the starter, right where he had left him, gaping. The kid running the elevator was gaping, too.

“Eleven,” said Joe.

“Yes, sir,” said the boy. He started the car. “You told him.”

“Bout time,” said Joe modestly.

“Past time,” said the kid.

Joe got out on the eleventh floor, feeling wonderful. He walked down the hall, thumped a door open, and ambled in. Eleanor Bulmer, the receptionist, looked up. He saw her eyes flick to the clock and back to his face. “Well!”

“Morning,” he said expansively, from his inflated lungs. She blinked as if he had fired a cap pistol, then looked confusedly down at her typewriter.

He took a step toward his corner desk when there was a flurry, a botherment up from the left, then an apparition of thinning hair and exophthalmic blue eyes. Barnes, moving
at a half-trot as usual, jacket off, suspenders, arm-bands pulling immaculate cuffs high and away from rust-fuzzed scrawny wrists. “Eleanor, get me Apex on the phone. Get me Apex on the—” And then he saw Joe. He stopped. He smiled. He had gleaming pale-yellow incisors like a rodent. He, too, flicked a glance at the clock.

Joe knew exactly what he was going to say, exactly how he was going to say it. He took a deep breath, and if old ghosts were about to rise in him, the friendly pressure of the amplifier just under his collarbones turned them to mist. *Why, Miss Terr Fritch,* Barnes would say with exaggerated and dramatic politeness, *how ki-i-ind of you to drop in today.* Then the smile would snap off and the long series of not-to-be-answered questions would begin. Didn’t he know this was a place of business? Was he aware of the customary starting time? Did it not seem that among fourteen punctual people, he alone—and so on. During it, seven typewriters would stop, a grinning stock boy would stick his head over a filing cabinet to listen, and Miss Bulmer, over whose nape the monologue would stream, would sit with her head bowed waiting for it to pass. Already the typewriters had stopped. And yes, sure enough: behind Barnes he could see the stock boy’s head.

“Why, Miss Terr Fritch!” said Barnes happily.

Joe immediately filled his lungs, turned his back on Barnes, and said into the stunned silence, “Better get him Apex on the phone, Eleanor. He has the whole place at a standstill.” He then walked around Barnes as if the man were a pillar and went to his desk and sat down.

Barnes stood with his bony head lowered and his shoulders humped as if he had been bitten on the neck by a fire-ant. Slowly he turned and glared up the office. There was an immediate explosion of typewriter noise, shuffling feet, shuffling papers. “I’ll take it in my office,” Barnes said to the girl.

He had to pass Joe to get there, and to Joe’s great delight he could see how reluctant Barnes was to do it. “I’ll see you later,” Barnes hissed as he went by, and Joe called cheerfully after him, “You just betcha.” Out in the office, somebody whistled appreciatively; somebody snickered. Joe knew Barnes had heard it. He smiled, and picked up the phone. “Outside, Eleanor. Personal.”

Eleanor Bulmer knew Barnes didn’t allow personal calls except in emergencies, and then preferred to give his permission first. Joe could hear her breathing, hesitating. Then, “Yes, Mr. Fritch.” And the dial tone crooned in his ear. *Mr. Fritch,* he thought. *That’s the first time she ever called*
me Mr. Fritch. What do you know. Why . . . why, she never called me anything before! Just “Mr. Barnes wants to see you,” or “Cohen of Electrical Marketing on the line.”

Mr. Fritch dialed his home. “Hello—Lutie?”

“Joe! Where were you all night?” The voice was waspish, harrying; he could see her gathering her forces, he could see her mountain of complaints about to be shoveled into the telephone as if it were a hopper.

“I called up to tell you I’m all right because I thought it was a good idea. Maybe it was a bad idea.”

“What?” There was a pause, and then in quite a different tone she said, “Joe? Is this . . . Joe, is that you?”

“Sure,” he said heartily. “I’m at work and I’m all right and I’ll be home for dinner. Hungry,” he added.

“You expect me to cook you a dinner after—” she began, but without quite her accustomed vigor.

“All right, then I won’t be home for dinner,” he said reasonably.

She didn’t say anything for a long time, but he knew she was still there. He sat and waited. At last she said faintly, “Will veal cutlets be all right?”

On the second night after this fledgling, Mr. Joseph Fritch strode into the porte-cochere and bounded up the steps. He ground the bellpush with his thumb until it hurt, and then knocked. He stood very straight until the door opened.

“Joe, boy! Come on in.” Zeitgeist left the door and opened another. Joe had the choice of following or of standing where he was and shouting. He followed. He found himself in a room new to him, low-ceilinged like the others, but with books from floor to ceiling. In a massive fieldstone fireplace flames leaped cheerfully, yet the room was quite cool. Air-conditioned. Well, he guessed Zeitgeist just liked a fire. “Look,” he said abruptly.

“Sit down. Drink?”

“No. Listen, you’ve made a mistake.”

“I know, I know. The bill. Got it with you?”

“I have.”

Zeitgeist nodded approvingly. Joe caught himself wondering why. Zeitgeist glided across to him and pressed a tall glass into his hand. It was frosty, beaded, sparkling. “What’s in it?” he snapped.

Zeitgeist burst out laughing, and in Joe fury passed, and shame passed, and he found himself laughing, too. He held out his glass and Zeitgeist clinked with him. “You’re a . . . a—Luck.”
“Luck,” said Zeitgeist. They drank. It was whisky, the old gentle muscular whisky that lines the throat with velvet and instantly heats the ear lobes. “How did you make out?”

Joe drank again and smiled. “I walked into that office almost an hour late,” he began, and told what had happened. Then, “And all day it was like that. I didn’t know a job... people... I didn’t know things could be like that. Look I told you I’d pay you. I said I’d pay you anything you—”

“Never mind that just now. What else happened? The suit and all?”

“That. Oh, I guess I was kind of—” Joe looked into the friendly amber in his glass, “well, intoxicated. Lunch time I just walked into King’s and got the suit. Two suits. I haven’t had a new suit for four years, and then it didn’t come from King’s. I just signed for ‘em,” he added, a reflective wonderment creeping into his voice. “They didn’t mind. Shirts,” he said, closing his eyes.

“It’ll pay off.”

“It did pay off,” said Joe, bouncing on his soft chair to sit upright on the edge, shoulders back, head up. His voice drummed and his eyes were bright. He set his glass down on the carpet and swatted his hands gleefully together. “There was this liaison meeting, they call it, this morning. I don’t know what got into me. Well, I do; but anyway, like every other copywriter I have a project tucked away; you know—I like it but maybe no one else will. I had it in my own roughs, up to yesterday. So I got this bee in my bonnet and went in to the Art Department and started in on them, and you know, they caught fire, they worked almost all night? And at the meeting this morning, the usual once-a-month kind of thing, the brass from the main office looking over us step-children and wondering why they don’t fold us up and go to an outside agency. It was so easy!” he chortled.

“I just sat there, shy like always, and there was old Barnes as usual trying to head off product advertising and go into institutionals, because he likes to write that stuff himself, thinks it makes the brass think he loves the company. So soon as he said ‘institutionals’ I jumped up and agreed with him and said let me show you one of Mr. Barnes’ ideas. Yeah! I went and got it and you should see that presentation; you could eat it! So here’s two VP’s and a board secretary with their eyes bugging out and old Barnes not daring to deny anything, and everybody in the place knew I was lying and thought what a nice fellow I was to do it that way. And there sat that brass, looking at my haircut and my tie and my
suit and me, and buying it piece by piece, and Barnes, old Barnes sweating it out.”

“What did they offer you?”

“They haven’t exactly. I’m supposed to go see the chairman Monday.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Say no. Whatever it is, I’ll say no. I have lots of ideas piled up—nobody would listen before! Word’ll get around soon enough; I’ll get my big raise the only smart way a man can get a really big one—just before he goes to work for a new company. Meanwhile I’ll stay and work hard and be nice to Barnes, who’ll die a thousand deaths.”

Zeitgeist chuckled. “You’re a stinker. What happened when you went home?”

Joe sank back into his chair and turned toward the flames; whatever his thoughts were, they suffused him with firelight and old amber, strength through curing, through waiting. His voice was just that mellow as he murmured, “That wasn’t you at all. That was me.”

“Oh, sorry. I wasn’t prying.”

“Don’t get me wrong!” said Joe. “I want to tell you.” He laughed softly. “We had veal cutlets.”

A log fell and Joe watched the sparks shooting upward while Zeitgeist waited. Suddenly Joe looked across at him with a most peculiar expression on his face. “The one thing I never thought of till the time came. I couldn’t wear that thing all night, could I now? I don’t want her to know. I’ll be . . . you said I’d grow to . . . that if I put my back into it, maybe some day I wouldn’t need it.” He touched his collarbone.

“That’s right,” said Zeitgeist.

“So I couldn’t wear it. And then I couldn’t talk. Not a word.” Again, the soft laugh. “She wouldn’t sleep, not for the longest time. ‘Joe?’ she’d say, and I’d know she was going to ask where I’d been that night. I’d say, ‘Shh,’ and put my hand on her face. She’d hold on to it. Funny. Funny, how you know the difference,” he said in a near whisper, looking at the fire again. “She said, ‘Joe?’ just like before, and I knew she was going to say she was sorry for being . . . well, all the trouble we’ve had. But I said ‘Shh.’” He watched the fire silently, and Zeitgeist seemed to know that he was finished.

“I’m glad,” said Zeitgeist.

“Yeah.”
They shared some quiet. Then Zeitgeist said, waving his glass at the mantel, "Still think the bill's out of line?"

Joe looked at it, at the man. "It's not a question of how much it's worth," he said with some difficulty. "It's how much I can pay. When I left here I wanted to pay you whatever you asked—five dollars or five hundred, I didn't care what I had to sacrifice. But I never thought it would be five thousand!" He sat up. "I'll level with you; I don't have that kind of money. I never did have. Maybe I never will have."

"What do you think I fixed you up for?" Zeitgeist's voice cracked like a target-gun. "What do you think I'm in business for? I don't gamble."

Joe stood up slowly. "I guess I just don't understand you," he said coldly. "Well, at those prices I guess I can ask you to service this thing so I can get out of here."

"Sure." Zeitgeist rose and led the way out of the room and down the hall to the laboratory. His face was absolutely expressionless, but not fixed; only relaxed.

Joe shucked out of his jacket, unbuttoned his shirt and took it off. He unclipped the elastics and pulled the amplifier off over his head. Zeitgeist took it and tossed it on the bench. "All right," he said, "Get dressed."

Joe went white. "What, you want to haggle? Three thousand then, when I get it," he said shrilly.

Zeitgeist sighed. "Get dressed."

Joe turned and snatched at his shirt. "Blackmail. Lousy blackmail."

Zeitgeist said, "You know better than that."

There is a quality of permanence about the phrase that precedes a silence. It bridges the gap between speech and speech, hanging in midair to be stared at. Joe pulled on his shirt, glaring defiantly at the other man. He buttoned it up, he tucked in the tails, he put on his tie and knotted it, and replaced his tieclasp. He picked up his coat. And all the while the words nung there.

He said, miserably, "I want to know better than that."

Zeitgeist's breath hissed out; Joe wondered how long he had been holding it. "Come here, Joe," he said gently.

Joe went to the bench. Zeitgeist pulled the amplifier front and center. "Remember what I told you about this thing—a mike here to pick up the chest tones, band-passes to cut down on what you have too much of, and the amplifier here to blow up those low resonances? And this?" he pointed.

"The power supply."
“The power supply,” Zeitgeist nodded. “Well, look; there’s nothing wrong with the theory. Some day someone will design a rig this compact that will do the job, and it’ll work just as I said.” His pale gaze flicked across Joe’s perplexed face and he laughed. “You’re sort of impressed with all this, aren’t you?” He indicated the whole lab and its contents. “Who wouldn’t be?”

“That’s the mythos of science, Joe. The layman is as willing to believe in the super-powers of science as he once did in witches. Now, I told you once that I believe in the ability of science to save our souls . . . our selves, if you like that any better. I believe that it’s legitimate to use any and all parts of science for this purpose. And I believe the mythos of science is as much one of its parts as Avogadro’s Law or the conservation of energy. Any layman who’s seen the size of a modern hearing-aid, who knows what it can do, will accept with ease the idea of a band-passing amplifier with five watts output powered by a couple of pen-lite cells. Well, we just can’t do it. We will, but we haven’t yet.”

“Then what’s this thing? What’s all this gobbledygook you’ve been feeding me? You give me something, you take it away. You make it work, you tell me it can’t work. I mean, what are you trying to pull?”

“You’re squeaking. And you’re saying ‘I mean,’” said Zeitgeist.

“Cut it out,” Joe said desperately.

The pale eyes twinkled at him, but Zeitgeist made a large effort and went back to his subject. “All this is, this thing you’ve been wearing, is the mike here, which triggers these two diaphragm vibrators here, powered by these little dry cells. No amplifier, no speakers, no nothing but this junk and the mythos.”

“But it worked; I heard it right here on your tape machine!”

“With the help of half a ton of components.”

“But at the office, the liaison meeting, I . . . I—Oh—”

“For the first time in your life you walked around with your chest out. You faced people with your shoulders back and you looked ’em smack in the eye. You dredged up what reasonance you had in that flattened-out chest of yours and flung it in people’s faces. I didn’t lie to you when I said they had to listen to you. They had to as long as you believed they had to.”

“Did you have to drag out all this junk to make me believe that?”
“I most certainly did! Just picture it: you come to me here all covered with bruises and guilt, suicidal, cowed, and without any realizable ambition. I tell you all you need to do is stand up straight and spit in their eye. How much good would that have done you?”

Joe laughed shakily. “I feel like one of those characters in the old animated cartoons. They’d walk off the edge of a cliff and hang there in midair, and there they’d stay, grinning and twirling their canes, until they looked down. Then—boom!” He tried another laugh, and failed with it. “I just looked down,” he said hoarsely.

“You’ve got it a little backwards,” said Zeitgeist. “Remember how you looked forward to graduating—to the time when you could discard that monkey-puzzle and stand on your own feet? Well, son, you just made it. Come on; this calls for a drink!”

Joe jammed his arms into his jacket. “Thanks, but I just found out I can talk to my wife.”

They started up the hall. “What do you do this for, Zeitgeist?”

“It’s a living.”

“Is that streamlined mousetrap out there the only bait you use?”

Zeitgeist smiled and shook his head.

For the second time in fifteen minutes Joe said, “I guess I just don’t understand you,” but there was a world of difference. Suddenly he broke away from the older man and went into the room with the fireplace. He came back, jamming the envelope into his pocket. “I can handle this,” he said. He went out.

Zeitgeist leaned in the doorway, watching him go. He’d have offered him a ride, but he wanted to see him walk like that, with his head up.
Sense of Proportion
By E. C. Tubb

Here is a thoroughly disenchanted, and grimly possible, look into the future of the television mess, as seen through the eyes of the complacent heel who compounds the mess. If there ever was a perfect example of the search for sensationalism that our modern “entertainment” industry—not only television, to be sure—so constantly pursues, this is it. In this connection, I cannot help thinking of the sadistic photographs that one of our largest picture magazines so adores to publish—photographs of mashed-up bodies, of trails of blood dripped from murdered individuals as they stagger to their deaths, and so on. In this area, if not in television, Tubb’s story has already come true.

The moral parallel between the situation envisioned in this story and that of our own quiz program scandals of the not so distant past may not at first be obvious. However, just think about it for a bit—as a member of the audience, not as participant in the programs. The parallel? Anything for a vicarious thrill, whether it be easy money or human agony. Remember the past, when literally thousands of people used to gather around Tyburn Tree, the gallows in England, to see an execution? As the Encyclopedia Britannica puts it, “Round the gibbet were erected open galleries, the seats in which were let at high prices.”

After reading this story, all one can say about Tyburn is, “Hold your hats, boys, here we go again . . .”
I sensed trouble as soon as I arrived at the studios. It wasn’t anything definite or superficial but I’ve been in the game too long not to recognize the signs. There was a false heartiness in Fred’s greeting as he took over my coleopter for parking, a cold politeness from Sam as he took me down from the roof, a subtle difference in Moira’s welcome as I entered my office. I had been on vacation for a month and, apparently, it had been four weeks too long.

Starman was waiting for me and he, of them all, still seemed normal. He bounced forward with his toothy smile and wrung my hand in his own.

“Gee, boss!” he said. “It’s good to see you. Have a nice vacation?”

“Wonderful.” It hadn’t been as good as all that but it was the only thing to say. Some people might like visiting dusty museums and art galleries but I wasn’t one of them. “Anything new?”

“Mary’s had a baby,” he beamed. “Eight pound girl.” He waited for my congratulations.

I gave him what he was waiting for but felt a little guilty about it even while I was clapping him on the shoulder. The truth was that I’d forgotten all about his wife and her blessed event—if you could call it blessed, what with the medical bills and all. Harry’s salary wasn’t all that big and it wouldn’t be long before he felt the pinch. Maybe he was feeling it already and was doing something about it? I dismissed the idea as soon as it came. Harry was loyal, which didn’t matter in the slightest; I didn’t believe in loyalty, but he was lacking that certain something which could put him on the top deck. I’d worked for the Premiger Corporation for ten years and I knew the way the Old Man picked his staff.

“You know, Jake,” he said after I’d got through the congratulations, “it’s great being a father. You should try it sometime.”

“I’ll think about it,” I said shortly. Harry had known me
for over six years and during that time I'd had two wives and two divorces. He should have been more diplomatic.

"Sure," he said, seeming to realize that he'd stepped a little over the line. He snapped his fingers. "Say! While you were away I had a great idea. What say we put Captain Murphy on the hot seat?"

"Murphy?"

"Sure. You know the guy. First to the moon way back at the end of the century."

"I thought he was dead?"

"So do most people but he isn't. What say, Jake, shall I get on the job?" He was eager to please. Too eager? I didn't know but caution cost nothing. I pretended to think of the idea, then shook my head. "No?" He sounded hurt.

"I'll let you know." I glanced at my watch. "I've got a lot of catching up to do, Harry, and I guess you've something to do also. How about us getting on with the job?"

He took the hint and left. Alone, I sat at my desk and wondered again about Harry. He was my leg-man and good enough in his way, even if he did get a bit wearing at times. I could have asked him if he had heard anything on the grape-vine but that would have been the wrong thing to do. If he'd known nothing then I would have scratched his curiosity. If he knew something then he would have told me.

Moira knocked discreetly on the door, opened it at my call, entered the office with a sheaf of papers beneath her arm. She set them down before me, flashed me a wary half-smile, then added a slip of paper to the heap.

"A message from J. P.'s office, Mr. Thompson," she said. "He wants you to attend a personal conference at 11.00."

"Thank you." I didn't make the mistake of asking her if she knew what J. P. wanted. I didn't even glance at the memo until she had gone and then I knew for certain that something unpleasant was in the air. Julius Premiger only sent for anyone in the lower executive levels either to promote or to slate them and my reception to date hadn't been that of a man headed for promotion. I looked at the other papers; they were the Delmar ratings for my show, and then I knew what all the trouble was about.

You can argue all you like about the validity of the Delmar ratings; the system of phoning a thousand people at random during the televising of a show and asking them what they are looking at, but the fact remains that the ratings are accuser, judge and executioner, all three in one. When
your rating is high then you’re sitting pretty; when it’s low then you and your show are headed for the discard.

And the rating for *Resurrection* was way down in the red.

You’ve heard of the show, of course, everyone has. The idea may not be new but I’ve given it a polish that it never had before. You take a man or woman, the more notable they are the better, and you relive their life for them in speeded tempo. Most people haven’t very good memories; they tend to forget the unpleasant things which have happened to them, but with the electroscanner it is possible to dig out every particle of their lives and record it on tape. Then we use actors, dressed and made up to resemble the actual characters known at the time of the incident, and have them speak the same words when possible.

The result, to the person in the hot seat, as we call it, is something out of this world. To them it seems as if the actual past has come to life again and that people, long dead, move and speak as they did in real life. They get a kick out of it, naturally, and so do the audience and the fifty million viewers to each show.

But now something had gone wrong and that fifty million was dwindling too fast for comfort.

I’d last seen Julius Premiger four years before, when he’d given me full charge of my own show. It had seemed then that he couldn’t possibly get any older; that he had reached the limit as far as physical deterioration was concerned. I hadn’t been wrong. He looked now as he had then, dehydrated, wizened, stooped, a frail shell of a man surrounding a pair of pale, deep-set eyes. It was the eyes which gave an insight to his character. Old, wise, shrewd and cunning. The eyes of a man who has fought his way up from office boy to the head of a corporation. I admired him.

“Have a nice vacation, Thompson?” His voice matched the rest of him, thin, dry, acid and emotionless.

“Yes, J. P., I did.” My voice was heavy with enthusiasm. “I got some great ideas while I was abroad and I’d like to put some of them before the board for your approval. It wasn’t a wasted four weeks, J. P., no sir!”

“Glad to hear it, Thompson.” Julius rustled some papers before him. “We could use some new ideas around here.” He rustled the papers again. “Are you satisfied with the way your show is progressing?”

“No sir, I’m not!” I made it good and emphatic. “J. P., I should never have taken that vacation! I haven’t had time yet
to make a total check, but it seems to me that someone has fallen down on the job. I left eight packaged shows ready for presentation, good shows too, and what do I find?” I leaned earnestly forward. “The Delmar ratings were a shock to me as you can guess. Frankly, I can’t understand it, not on the face of it, that is.” I hesitated. “J. P., will you be honest with me?”

He raised an eyebrow and I plunged ahead. “Resurrection is a good show. You know it, I know it, everyone knows it Those ratings hit me where it hurts, you know that.” I lowered my voice. “Tell me, J. P. Is this a matter of corporation policy?”

“And if it was?”

“Then I’m not arguing.” I slumped back in the chair. “If it’s a question of policy then I’m for it.” I managed a weak smile. “I nate to see the show go, sure, but if it’s for the good of the corporation, then I’m with you every step of the way.”

“If the show goes, then you go with it,” he reminded. I knew better than to say anything and he grunted with what could have been approval. “You’re a good man. Thompson, I wouldn’t like to lose you if it can be avoided, but these ratings—”

“I still don’t understand it, J. P.,” I said quickly. “I’m not excusing myself, don’t think that, it’s my show and I’m responsible.” I drove my right fist into my left palm. “I’d never have taken that vacation had I known that Starmay’s wife was expecting a baby! I suppose it’s asking a little too much of a man to keep his mind wholly on the job at a time like that. But he should have told me.”

“Are you blaming Starmay?”

“No sir, I’m not!” I met his pale stare without wavering. “It’s my show and my responsibility.”

“Yes,” he said. “It is and I’m glad to hear you say it.” His thin fingers toyed again with the papers. “I’ll be open with you, Thompson. On the basis of these ratings I should cancel your show. Can you give me a good reason why I shouldn’t?”

“Yes sir, I can,” I said quickly. “I’ve got something lined up which will lift Resurrection to the top and keep it there. Something really big.” I hesitated just long enough to whet his interest. “I don’t want to say too much, J. P., you know how it is, but this thing I’m working on is really big. I wouldn’t like anyone else to get hold of it before we do.”
"I understand." He looked thoughtful. "Can you give me some idea?"

"I'm going to put a hero in the hot seat," I said. "A real-life hero who has everything it takes to make the viewers scream for a repeat performance. A man who has had the most adventurous life of this generation, everyone knows him and what he did. I tell you, J. P., it can't miss."

"If it does," he said coldly, "both you and your show will be finished."

"J. P.," I said firmly. "If what I plan isn't the biggest thing in mass entertainment then you can have my head on a charger. And, what's more, I'll deliver it myself."

We had a little more talk, not much because I knew that Julius was a busy man, but it was certain that when I'd made my promise he hadn't thought I was joking. I had to deliver or else. I intended to deliver.

I didn't rush things, not too fast anyway; it doesn't pay to let anyone know that you're too eager. So before I gave Starman the go-ahead I did some studying, reading up the old newspaper clippings on Captain Murphy and what he had done. I was disappointed.

Sure, he was officially recognized as having been the first man to set foot on the moon, but when you'd said that you'd said it all. I dug back into his early life and the results were pretty barren. No great love affair, no dirt, no question that he was anything other than what he was supposed to be. A clean-living, one hundred per cent comic-book hero of the traditional school. A crew-cut, patriotic order-obeyer who had been given a brief moment of glory and had earned himself a minor niche in the Hall of Fame. As red-blooded material for Resurrection, he was utterly useless.

Normally I wouldn't have given him a second thought but I wasn't a free agent. The famous and the notorious didn't seem too eager to be put on the hot seat anymore. I'd promised J. P. a hero and a hero it had to be. Which meant that it was this Captain Murphy or nothing. So I grabbed hold of Starman and went to dig up the past.

How Starman had discovered Murphy I didn't know. Maybe it was a tip from some nurse or friend, someone hungry for a small bonus. It wasn't important; a good leg-man is expected to deliver the goods and Starman was a good leg-man, but I had a moment's doubt when I discovered where Murphy lived.

"You're sure this is right?" I stared at the drab, dirty
pseudo-stone of the old folks' home. Resthaven it was called from the sagging plaque on the gate. An ugly collection of buildings which reminded me of a factory, set in an acre of bleached grass and withered trees. A few stooped figures tended some flower beds and several more wandered like lost souls along winding concrete paths.

"This is it." Starman sent the car droning towards the front door. "He's old, you know, and poor." He braked with unnecessary violence. "So we treat our heroes."

Inside, the house had a musty, grease-polish and damp smell. The floors were of polished wood, the walls painted a dark brown and cream, the furniture heavy and unmatched. A man was waiting for us and Starman introduced him to me as Paul Fairclough the superintendent or, as he put it, the Co-ordinating Officer of Resthaven. Either way it meant the same thing; he was the boss.

"Delighted to meet you, Mr. Thompson," beamed Fairclough, washing his hands with invisible soap. They didn't need washing but they didn't seem to be clean either. The rest of him matched his hands. His face was sallow, his hair a slicked-back tangle of arranged waves shining with oil, his suit was passable; the kind I'd use for work in the garden if I had a garden. His eyes were a muddy brown, dog-like in their fawning expression. I was used to that expression, I had seen it from a hundred people, all of whom hoped that I could do something for them.

I glanced at my wrist watch, it was enough.

"Mr. Starman, of course, has told me of your purpose here," said Fairclough. "Captain Murphy is one of our most honored guests. I need not tell you how proud and pleased we here at Resthaven are to have him with us." He led the way to a tall door painted in the universal brown. "He is taking his leisure in the recreation room. I have informed him of your intention to visit."

"Thank you," said Starman curtly. "We can find our own way." He opened the door, waited until I had passed through, then shut it firmly in Fairclough's face. "Snake," he whispered, and looked around the room. "What a joint!"

I agreed with him, not that it mattered. The room was an echoing chamber of bare misery. A few tables rested against the dingy walls. A few chairs stood in ranked array in the center of the bare, polished floor. Tall windows flanked one wall and, facing them, sitting in solitary state in the empty room, staring at the view of bleached grass and hopeless trees outside, sat Captain Murphy, the hero of our age.
He was an old man, I had expected that. He was sitting, hunched in a faded dressing gown, a blanket over his knees, carpet slippers on his feet. His hands rested on the blanket, thin, sere, mere hooked claws with cracked, dirt-ringed nails. He was almost bald, his bare dome shining with a pallid whiteness, an island of skin surrounded by wisps of off-white hair. His face was creased and lined, his lips pendulous, his eyes red-rimmed and puffed like the eyes of a confirmed drunkard. He looked as much like a hero as a farmyard rooster does an eagle.

“Captain Murphy.” I was surprised at the gentleness in Starman’s voice. “Captain Murphy, sir. May we have your attention?”

It was like talking to a mummy and just as rewarding. The blearèd eyes never shifted from the view outside. The hands didn’t move on the blanket, the lips remained slack in the slack face. I stepped forward and stood where he couldn’t help but see me.

“We’ve come here to talk,” I snapped. “Are you with us?”

“Steady, Jake!” said Starman. I glared at him, shook off the hand he had placed on my arm, stared at the man in the chair.

“I'm Jake Thompson,” I said. “I run the show *Resurrection*, you know of it, naturally. I’ve come a long way to see you because I think that I can do a lot for you. Are you interested?”

Where Starman had failed I succeeded. The eyes changed focus and stared, not at the view but at me. The lips parted and a thick, coated tongue wiped the spittle from them. Captain Murphy, the first man to set foot on the moon, dragged his thoughts from somewhere a quarter of a million miles away and gave me his attention.

“What did you say?”

I repeated what I had said, adding a little more for emphasis. “You’re a famous man, Murphy, and we want to give the youngsters a chance to see you and the people who made you the man you are. You'll agree, naturally?”

“No,” he said thickly. “No, I won’t agree. You’re not going to get me on that show of yours and make me into a clown.”

“Now let’s not be foolish about this,” I said. “Look at it this way. When you were given the opportunity to reach the moon, you accepted a responsibility towards the culture which gave you that opportunity. Hell, man, do you think that you could ever have made it alone? It took billions to get that
ship up there and you with it.” I took a couple of paces away from him, then spun on my heel, my finger pointing towards his face. “And what about Emshaw? What about the poor guy who was sent up with you and who died up there all that way from home? Don’t you think that you owe him something?”

“Leave Emshaw out of this!” Murphy half-rose from his chair, then fell back again, little bubbles frothing his lips. “Just don’t bring him into this.”

“Why not?” I lowered the finger and stepped towards him. “He was your co-pilot, wasn’t he? Two went up and only one came down. You were the lucky one, Murphy. Do you think it fair to leave Emshaw up there alone and forgotten? Agree to sit in on my show, Murphy, and both you and he will be famous again.”

“No,” he said again. “No.”

“There’s a bonus in it for you,” I urged. “Five thousand in cool cash.”

“No.”

“Ten thousand!”

“Leave me alone!” Murphy surged up in his chair again.

“Damn you! Leave me alone!”

“Yes, Jake,” said Starman in a tight voice. “Leave him alone.”

Personally, there was nothing more I would rather have done. Murphy was practically senile and it would take the make-up artists days to clean him up and get him ready for the cameras. His response during interview was bound to be poor and, on all counts, he was at the bottom of the heap. But he was a hero and I had to have him one way or another.

“Talk to him, Harry,” I said gently. “Try and show him that it’s to his advantage to come on the show.” I managed a rueful smile. “Better make my apologies too. I guess that I just got carried away for a moment at the thought of losing him.” I headed towards the door. “I’ll just step outside for a while and leave you two alone together. Maybe my presence irritates him.”

Fairclough was where I expected him to be, standing at the door his ears red from pressure. I took him by the arm.

“I want to talk to you. Privately.”

“In my office, Mr. Thompson.” He almost ran in his eagerness to show me the way. Settled, he offered me a drink of second-rate Scotch and a choice of a third-rate cigar. I refused both.

“Ulcers,” I explained, and got down to business. “I’ll be
frank with you, Paul. I want Murphy on my show and it's worth a thousand to the man who'll help get him there.” I paused. “What's the set-up in this home? Do the 'guests' pay?”

“Yes.” He sipped at his own drink, his muddy eyes glistening at the thought of what I had offered. “Murphy is on a small government pension, it barely covers his keep.”

“Isn't there a clause in his agreement with the home that he should help support himself?” I put on a blank expression. “I'm not quite sure of what I mean but suppose he were to deliberately turn down a lucrative offer, something like that?”

“He isn't forced to earn money,” said Fairclough regretfully. “We accepted him in perpetuity when he deeded his pension over to us.”

“Perpetuity is a long time,” I reminded.

“Just a gimmick,” explained Fairclough. “It means that Murphy signed over to us all his estate on the understanding that we would support him forever or, until he dies.” He took another sip of his drink and gave a small chuckle. “Of course, they always die.”

“The laugh would be on you if they didn't,” I said. “Must be tough on the home what with the rising cost of living and all.” I looked at the ceiling. “From the look of it Murphy hasn't much longer to go. With the money I'd pay him it's on the cards that he'd die with quite a sum in the bank. As heirs, you'd inherit that sum. Right?”

“I—”

“Forget it.” I rose and gave him a smile. “Just curious, I guess. Anyway, I don't suppose Murphy would want to put his money in a bank at that.” I heard footsteps outside and held out my hand. “That must be my assistant. Thanks for your trouble, Paul. Maybe I'll be hearing from you sometime.”

I left before he could answer. Starman was waiting for me by the outside door. He shook his head as we headed towards the car.

“Sorry Jake, but we wasted our time. Captain Murphy wants nothing to do with either us or the show.” He sighed. “Guess we'd better forget the whole idea.”

He looked really guilty about it.

What pressure Fairclough used I couldn't know, but two days later I had Murphy's signed agreement to appear on Resurrection on my desk. Sending for Starman I gave quick instructions.
“Get over to the home and take a full team with you. Take a doctor too, a good one, the old man is going to need plenty of shots if he’s going to take the scanner. Process him in double-quick time and let me have the break-down as soon as possible.” I scribbled a check and slipped it into an envelope. “And give this to Fairclough with my compliments.”

Starman didn’t take the envelope. He just stood by the desk staring down at me. I glared up at him.

“Well?”

“Captain Murphy didn’t want to appear on the show, Jake,” he said slowly. “He meant what he said.”

“So he changed his mind, what of it?”

“Maybe he had it changed for him?”

“Maybe he did,” I agreed. “Where’s the difference?” I took hold of my patience. “What the devil’s wrong with you, Harry? Don’t you want your job any longer?”

“You know I do, Jake.” He shifted his weight from one foot to the other. “It’s just that—”

“Better call Mary and tell her not to expect you,” I interrupted. “And talking of Mary, how’s the youngster?”

“Fine, Jake, just fine.” He hesitated for a moment longer then seemed to make up his mind about something. He picked up the envelope and slipped it into his pocket. “Guess I’d better get moving.”

“Sure, Harry, that’s the spirit.” I reached for a phone. “I’ll call Mary for you, save a little time that way and time is what we haven’t enough of. Remember that.”

Starman had a good memory. He delivered the break-down sheets in record time and waited, pale and looking harassed while I scanned them.

“Have any trouble?” I flipped the sheaf of papers, looking for usable high spots.

“It was pretty bad,” he said. “At one time I didn’t think he’d make it, kept fighting the helmet and twisting until we had to strap him down. The Doc wasn’t too happy either, said his heart couldn’t take too much of a strain.”

“Murphy’s old.” I rifled the sheets again. “We got to him just in time.” I concentrated on the pages. “Not much here to work on. A couple of affairs when he was a kid, the usual boy and girl stuff without meat. Had a shine for a married woman at one time but didn’t do anything about it. Kept his nose clean all through college aside from using stimulants to pep up his retention.” I frowned at the item. “Might use that
for a spot. You know the kind of thing; pedlar threatens to apply pressure and hero is faced with disgrace."

"Stimulants are legal," said Starman. "Captain Murphy just felt guilty at taking an unfair advantage over the rest of his class."

"I know that," I snapped. "We can show him as the hero who was seduced into taking the dope and dropped the habit when he realized what he was doing. Maybe we can even drag a woman into it somewhere." I caught sight of Starman's expression. "You don't like it?"

"No."

"Neither do I." I tossed down the sheets. "It's pure corn and, worse, it's been done too often." I frowned up at the ceiling. "We can use some of this stuff without trouble. His mother trying to make him take a secure job and marry the girl next door. His father, not wanting to see him go but proud that his only son should be chosen. Classmates who envy him. Commander Selcombe who briefed him, the girl he left behind, the usual stuff."

"Captain Murphy is a hero," said Starman quietly. "He did a great thing, the greatest thing which has ever been done in this or any other generation. He was the first man to set foot on alien soil."

"So?"

"So let's remember that, shall we?"

"Sure, I'm not forgetting." I snatched up the break-down again and scanned it while worry mounted within me. Murphy was almost too good to be true. Everyone, or almost everyone has something they are ashamed of buried in their past. Or they have some high spot of emotion which can be used to give drama and emphasis. Most have some minor crime, hidden away in the subconscious, which can be dragged out to the discomfort of the subject and the delight of the audience. But not Murphy.

The guy had only done one thing of note in his whole life. He had been to the moon and had returned in one piece. Fifty years ago that was probably something wonderful but not now. Not when anyone who could scrape up the fare could do the same thing and when ships were regularly traveling between the inner planets. As a hero Murphy was strictly out of date.

And I had promised J. P. that the show would have the kick of a mule and the impact of an H-bomb.

"This Emshaw." I tapped one of the sheets with a finger-
nail. "What emotional response was there when the scanner hit that period?"

"Plenty." Starman looked bleak at the memory. "You know what happened, of course? Captain Murphy was the first one out of the ship. After he'd returned, Emshaw took his turn outside. He didn't come back. Something happened to him while outside, he slipped or fell into a crevasse, it doesn't really matter now. Captain Murphy had to sit and listen to him die and then he had to bring the ship back alone."

"Couldn't Murphy have rescued him?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"He explained why on the official deposition he made when they questioned him. Those crevasses are filled with dust and Emshaw simply vanished from sight. Captain Murphy tried, but he couldn't even find the spot where Emshaw had vanished." He looked sharply at me. "Why? What's on your mind?"

"Nothing, just asking." Returning to the sheets, I examined the emotional index of that period. From the index I could tell that plenty of electronic force had been needed to drag the incident from the recesses of memory. It was the highest spot on the entire record, higher even than the pain of his return and the long, agonizing hospitalization which had followed.

And, suddenly, I wasn't worried anymore.

It took some fast talking but I managed to get a week's extension from J. P. before I put my career in the balance. I had a good point to back me up; the anniversary of Murphy's epoch-making flight was obviously the time to put him on the program and the dates tied in nicely. In the meantime I concentrated on publicity, running some packaged shows and trying to ignore the way my Delmar ratings were hitting the dirt.

Starman came in just as I was finishing a talk with a man I knew was connected with a syndicated column on the dailies. He looked irritable and on edge.

"What's going on, Jake?" he demanded. "What's all this about?"

"I don't get you." I leaned back and stared at him. "How are the actors making out?"

"Good as far as they go but that isn't what I want to talk about." He threw himself into a chair. "I've been hear-
ing things Jake and I don’t like what I hear. Didn’t we agree to remember that Captain Murphy is a hero?"

“A hero is only as good as his publicity,” I reminded. “You want for me to put on the show for a couple of million view-
ers?”

“I don’t want you to turn the Captain into a clown.”

“That isn’t my intention.” I stared at Starman and for the first time recognized the symptoms. He had a bad case of hero-worship and in this business a thing like that can be fatal. Not that I could understand it for one moment; anyone less likely to arouse respect or any other kindred emotion than the broken-down old has-been I had seen in the old folks’ home would be hard to imagine. But things were too critical for Starman to get any stupid ideas into his head at this stage.

“Look, Harry,” I said seriously, “why not stop for a minute and get the overall picture? Captain Murphy’s a hero, that we all agree, and what we’re doing is the finest thing that could happen to him. But to make it effective we’ve got to have a big audience. We want every man and boy and woman too looking at the show when we put him on the hot seat. And why? Because we want what Murphy stands for to be brought home to them with all the impact of a bomb.”

“But do we?” He looked doubtful. I pressed home my point.

“Murphy did one notable thing in his life and, in doing it, he ruined what was left of his existence. That’s a big thing, Harry, a great thing. Are you asking me to be ashamed of it?”

“Of course not!”

“Then where’s your objection to what I’m doing? Sure I’m making plenty of publicity for the show but only for one reason. Only because I want everyone possible to tune in on Resurrection so that they, as well as Murphy himself, can experience the thrill and excitement of being the first man to reach the moon.”

I didn’t mention the real reason for all the advance publicity. If Starman wanted to believe that it was all for Murphy’s own good then that was up to him. I changed the subject before he could probe more deeply.

“We run the show to-morrow. You sure that the actors are well briefed?”

“I know my job,” he said, and he did too, I knew that. “Father, mother, sweetheart, schoolteacher, all briefed, word perfect and ready to look just as they did fifty and more years ago.” He looked doubtful. “I’ve got the post-landing
doctor and a couple of others lined up but what about after that?"

"Nothing about it." I explained before he could protest. "The return was his high point and even that was an anti-climax. Not one is interested in his ten years in hospitals and his twenty-dozen operations. Neither are they interested in his drifting from dump to dump until he signed on at Resthaven. People want glamour not a social lecture."

"It might shake them to learn the truth," said Starman. "Might do them good too."

"We'll do a brief follow-up," I said in order to end the discussion. "Now you'd better get back to rehearsals, we want things to run as smooth as silk when we go on the air." I clapped him on the shoulder as I led him towards the door. "Get on the job, Harry, and leave the worrying to me."

"Sure, Jake," he said, then hesitated. "Mary sent her regards and wants to know when you're going to eat with us?"

"Just as soon as I can make it," I promised. "I'm just as eager to taste Mary's cooking as I am to see that youngster of yours."

We parted the best of friends.

The doctor's name was Blake and he shook his head at my question.

"I don't know, Mr. Thompson, it's hard to say. He's an old man and in bad health. Personally, I'd warn against it."

"You treated him when he went under the scanner," I reminded. "From what I hear that was bad too."

"It was almost too much," admitted the medic. He chewed thoughtfully at his lower lip. "There's a limit to what shots can do, you know."

"But you can't say that he won't be able to stand the hot seat," I said. "For all you know the excitement might be good for him." I caught his expression and tried to make myself clear. "I mean that it might give him a new lease of life, something to drag him out of the rut. Am I talking sense?"

"There have been cases where excitement has proved beneficial," Blake admitted. "But that presupposes that the heart was able to stand the sudden influx of stimulating glandular excretions. In this case I—"

"I appreciate your professional caution," I interrupted. "Naturally, I don't want to do anything harmful to the old man. That is why I asked your opinion and I'm pleased to hear that you are willing to co-operate." I stared directly into his eyes. "Perhaps a sedative?"
"I'll do what I can," said Blake. He rose and stared down at me. "After all, I am not the only doctor in the world."

He needn't have said it, but it was nothing but the truth. And doctors, like any other men, have to hold a job in order to eat. After he'd gone I pressed the intercom and sent for the actor who was taking the part of Emshaw. He was human too.

There is always a sense of tension just before a show goes on the air and this time it was more pronounced than ever. After my interview with the actor I went down to the floor and made a last-minute check of things. Starman, as usual, was fussing around like a harassed hen, checking lights, cameras, actors, props and anything and everything which he thought concerned him. I always wondered how he got away with it. The only time I had tried to do as he did, I had the Unions down on my neck faster than I liked to remember.

Starman saw me finally and joined me at the edge of the floor. As yet, the audience hadn't been admitted but I could hear them just beyond the door making that low, rustling, sea-sound which too many people herded into too small a space always seem to make. It was a full audience but that meant nothing; you can always find people to attend a free show.

"How's Murphy bearing up?" I glanced at my watch and ran a finger around my collar. "I sent Blake down to check him over."

"I saw him," admitted Starman. He looked doubtful, then shrugged. "I guess he'll be all right. Fairclough's with him."

"He would be." I glanced at my watch again. "We'd better clear out from here, the doors will be opening in a minute."

From a vantage point I watched the crowd stream into the auditorium. Each clutched a small bag, a gift from the sponsors, and each held a printed handout briefing them on the program. First would come fifteen minutes of popular music, the commercials and then, when they had settled down, the big show.

I felt a touch of pride as I watched them. Even though the concept of the show wasn't new yet I could anticipate just what those people would sense and feel as time drew on.

"Sadists," said Starman abruptly. "That's why they come here. They want to see someone squirm on the hot seat and the more they squirm the better they'll like it."

"You think so?"
"I know so." Starman sounded disgusted. "Those people
out there aren’t interested in a hero. All they want to see is someone who has suffered and who they hope is going to suffer again. They aren’t interested in Captain Murphy for what he is and for what he did. All they want to see is an old man being put through the mill.”

The lights dimmed, order grew from chaos and music throbbed in the air. Silently an orchestra came into view on a raised platform and a color organ began to blend shafts and washes of light in tune to the music. Against the background of light and sound the voice of the announcer dripped like clear, warm honey on to a plate of whipped cream.

I wasn’t interested in the announcements nor in the commercials which followed. I wasn’t interested in the color and sound or the rapt faces of the audience. These things were merely the prelude to the real moment. The moment when my show, Resurrection, came on the air.

I was proud of the opening. Everything went dark, suddenly, without warning and then, with an almost physical violence, a brilliant shaft of silver slashed the air and the clear note of a trumpet soaring high and sweet stunned the ear. Gabriel’s Horn, modern version, and now the dead would rise in make-believe life from the memories of the past.

I was proud too of the preliminaries. The mounting crescendo matched to a blur of vivid color. The rising voice of the M.C. touching the edge of hysteria before stopping, breaking with shocking abruptness and, in the following silence, like a flung thunderbolt of radiance, a shaft of light stabbed across the auditorium and centered on the solitary figure in the hot seat.

He had improved since I had seen him last. They had washed him and done something to his hair so that he looked cleaner and younger than he had. Make-up artists had worked on his face, smoothing out some of the graven creases, firming his pendulous lips, touching out the pouches beneath his eyes. He still didn’t look like a hero but at least he looked like a man. More than that I could not expect.

“Poor devil!” whispered Starman beside me. “I bet he doesn’t even know what’s happening to him.”

He learned soon enough. The M.C., a master of suggestive hypnotism, spun his verbal web and, at his direction, ghosts rose from their graves and walked again as they had more than half a century ago. Murphy’s father, looking as he had when the Captain had been a boy, speaking in the same tone, using the same words. His mother, now less than dust
but, on the stage, appearing as a fragment of the reclaimed past. They spoke to Murphy and he would have been less than human had he not been moved.

And across the packed auditorium ran a soft, sucking sound as of indrawn breath, a suggestive rustle as bodies hunched and eyes strained so as not to miss a single thing.

Strange what the sight of an old man’s tears can do. Other actors came on to the stage at the M.C.’s direction. A young girl, tearful as she told the old man that marriage was impossible. An older woman, wife of his friend, who smiled as she broke his heart. A college acquaintance who was gruffly envious. A professor who was acidly hostile. Commander Selcombe, old then, old now, interviewing the young hopeful for the flight of the age. Twenty years of life compressed to as many minutes.

But not to Murphy. A man cannot deny his own mind and what he was seeing and hearing was the echo of his own brain. Emotional high spots, some of them buried deep and others he had thought forgotten, all now fresh and living and talking to him with the old, familiar voices in the old, familiar terms. Murphy couldn’t see the audience. He couldn’t see the M.C. He couldn’t see anything but the figures which appeared before him to talk and smile and frown and laugh as they had done in the past. He couldn’t hear the background music which was geared to his own heart beat in gradually accelerating tempo. For Murphy the outside world had ceased to exist and he was living his life over again as he remembered it.

Naturally he entered into it. Naturally he talked to those who spoke to him, felt again the regrets he had had, then experienced the fears, the hopes and dreams which had been his alone, but which now belonged to the world.

“Total acceptance,” breathed Starman at my side. “Incredible!”

Starman was wrong, it wasn’t incredible. Murphy had few strong memories and the few he had he’d nursed for decades. They were all he had and he had gone over them again and again while sitting in his chair at the home, unwanted, unwilling, a flesh and blood vegetable waiting for his life to end its course. Now, for the first time, he was really living again.

And the audience knew it. Strange how a crowd can sense what is to come, guess at drama and physical pain when there is no apparent reason for anticipation. Again came that
soft, sucking of indrawn breath, that tiny rustle as bodies moved in restless eagerness.

Emshaw walked onto the stage.

Emshaw, tall, pale, dressed in the uniform he had worn during the last days of his life. Emshaw, the man who had gone with Murphy to the moon but who had not returned.

"Hello, John," he said. "It's been a long time."

"Frank!" There was pain in the cry, pain and something else. Murphy cowered in his seat and the sweat shone on his head and face.

"Did you enjoy your fame, John?" The actor who looked like Emshaw stepped closer to the hot seat. "Was it worth what you did to get it?"

"No!" Murphy tore at his collar. "Don't talk like that, Frank. I did my best, you know I did."

"You left me up there, John," said Emshaw gently. "You left me up there while you came back to collect the fame. Are you proud of what you did?"

Pain numbed my arm and Starman's voice rasped in my ear.

"He's not keeping to the script!" he accused. "That wasn't in the script at all."

"Forget it." I dragged his fingers away from where they had dug into my arm.

"He wouldn't do that on his own," said Starman. He made a choking sound. "He had orders to do this."

"Forget it," I snapped again. "You're making me miss the show."

"You—"

What Starman was going to say I never found out. Something happened just then which dissolved our quarrel as though it had never existed. Emshaw was still talking, saying the carefully prepared words I had taught him, the selected ambiguous words which could mean nothing but which could also be taken to mean a lot. Their effect was greater than I had dared to hope. What deeply buried sense of guilt Murphy carried with him I could only guess, but the scanners had revealed it and I had decided to use it. And I had hit the jackpot.

"I didn't mean to do it," screamed Murphy suddenly. "I couldn't help it, I tell you. I had to leave you up there." He sagged, his face turning a peculiar mottled blue and grey.

"And I've paid for it," he whimpered. "God! How I've paid for it!"
And then, in full view of the audience and, I hoped, of fifty million viewers, he collapsed and died.

There was trouble, of course, but nothing that I couldn’t handle. Everyone had known the old man was in bad health and I owed it to the show to have a schedule ready for emergencies. I had an uneasy few words with J.P. but even he had to admit that I had lived up to the full letter of my promise. And the Delmar ratings had been high, higher than at any time before. Already we were getting flooded with requests for a repeat show—it isn’t every day that viewers had the opportunity to see a man die before their very eyes.

In fact, Starman was the only unpleasant note in the whole affair.

“You murdered him,” he accused. “You killed him just as surely as if you’d taken a gun and blown his head off.”

What can you say to a thing like that? Slowly I put down the copy I had been studying and stared at Harry. He looked as if he hadn’t slept for a week and his eyes had that peculiar strained expression people get when they are half-insane from frustration.

“Take it easy, Harry,” I said gently. “He was an old man and he had to go some time. His heart just gave out, that was all, it was a risk we all had to take.”

“All right, so he was an old man with a bad heart and the excitement killed him,” Starman breathed like a man who has been running. “But did you have to ruin his reputation? Did you have to do that?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Oh yes you do,” snapped Starman. “You altered the script and made out that Captain Murphy had deliberately left Emshaw on the moon so that he could claim full credit of being the first. Hell, the papers are full of it. And it isn’t true, you know it isn’t.”

“I don’t know any such thing. You’ve seen the emotional index of the scanner and you know how high it is. Something happened up there, what, only Murphy really knew and now no one will ever be sure. Maybe things did happen the way he said, or maybe they didn’t. Anyway, what does it matter?”

“What does it matter?” Starman repeated the question as if he couldn’t believe his ears. “A man does the greatest thing ever known and you ask that? Captain Murphy ruined his life in pushing back the frontiers of space and that’s all it means to you? Are you serious?”

“I’m not joking, if that’s what you mean.” I shook my head
at his expression. “I don’t understand you, Harry. What’s the point in getting all upset over something that happened before you were born? It doesn’t make sense.”

“You—” Harry took a step forward, his hands clenched at his sides, and for a moment I thought that he was going to hit me. Then he changed his mind.

“What’s the good of talking,” he said bitterly. “You could never understand. To you, nothing is more important than that lousy show of yours and you don’t care what you do or who you crucify as long as your ratings are high. To hell with you and with the show both. I’m quitting!”

I blinked as he slammed the door. I’d always thought of Harry as being a strong, dependable type but he’d just shown me how wrong a man can be. To quit his job, and him with a wife and baby, over nothing at all just didn’t make sense.

Some people have no sense of proportion.
Trojan Horse Laugh

By John D. MacDonald

Four years (to the month) after the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, this story appeared in Astounding (now Analog) Science Fiction. Most people thought that the bomb was enough in the way of an Absolute Weapon to satisfy man's lust for destruction forever. However, they were wrong. About three years after the present story appeared, the frightful hydrogen bomb was developed; but meanwhile science fiction had grimly gone on its own exploratory paths, which began far back before atomic energy ever was a reality. Death rays were Old Hat by World War II—in fiction—although only now, with laser beams, are they beginning to appear as ominous possible reality. In the 1949 story you are about to read, John MacDonald invented an absolutely unprecedented Total Weapon for the destruction of a society; horrifyingly grisly, and scientifically far from unlikely.

The most frightening thing about the concept is that, unlike atomic and hydrogen bombs, with their universal destructiveness from fallout and other side-effects, MacDonald's weapon can be strictly limited, to one country or continent or even less—even to one state or city, should one wish. Let us devoutly hope that no one ever so wishes.
DIVERT YOUR PSYCHE
ADJUST YOUR ID
JOIN THE CROWD AND
GROOVE YOURSELF, KID.

"Like honey on a slow fire," Joe Morgan said in a mildly nauseated tone. "Where'n earth they get babes with those voices?"

Sadie Barnum, beside him on the front seat of Joe's vast and asthmatic monster of an automobile, grinned in the darkness, crooned low in a throat, singing an almost perfect imitation of the radio commercial. "... and groove yourself, kid."

"Oh, no!" said Joe. "No!"

The car was in the park above the city, nuzzling the stone wall, cheek and jowl with the newer and shinier models on either side. The commerical had originally come from the radio in the car on their left.

Below them, the lights of the city of Daylon made it a very nice looking night indeed.

"You could turn my overpowering love to hate, Barnum," Joe said. "Let us get back to what we came for." He reached for her.

Sadie, her jaw set, fended him off deftly. She had turned so that the dim light touched her face. It was a small, alert, vital face, some of the force of it stolen by eyes that were big and sea-gray and an invitation to drown quietly.

"Now that the subject has been brought up, Joseph," she said firmly, "we will dwell on it apace."

Joe slumped grimly behind the wheel. He was a longheaded citizen, a crisp black crew-cut peppered with premature gray, a limp and 'lazy body which he threw into chairs in the manner of someone tossing a wet towel, which body, during war years, he had tossed out of various and sundry aircraft. "Go dwell," he said.
She held up a small hand, counting firmly on her fingers. “One—Daylon is a test city for Happiness, Incorporated. Thus the price is reasonable. Two—it doesn’t hurt a bit. Marg told me that. Three—you are a moody cuss and I expect to marry you the next time you ask me and you’re going to be rugged to live with unless we get adjusted.” Her voice began to quaver. “Besides, I think you’re just being... oh, stuffy and narrow-minded about the whole thing.”

Joe sighed. He had heard it before. And always before he had managed to change the subject before he was pinned down. But something in Sadie’s tone made him realize that this time it wasn’t going to be quite as simple.

He collected his forces, turned in the seat, took her small hands in his and said: “Honey, maybe you have the idea that Joseph Morgan, reporter for the News, likes to think of himself as a rugged individualist. Maybe you think it’s a pose with me. Look, Barnum, I’m Joe Morgan and I’m the guy you happen to love. At least I think you do. I’m not a conformist and it isn’t a pose. I don’t run around in the same mad little circles as other people because I’m not sold on the idea that what they’re after is a good thing.”

In a small voice she said: “But they’re after happiness, and security, and a home, and kids. Is that bad?”

“By itself, no. But what happens to their heads? Nobody talks any more. Nobody thinks. All those things are fine if you can get them without losing intellectual self-respect. Why do you think I drive this crate instead of a new one? Just because I won’t play patty-cake with the people I’m supposed to play patty-cake with. When I want to be amused, I don’t have to go to the movies or turn on the TV or go see a floor show. I’m the unmechanized man, baby. Maybe I’m wrong, but it’s no pose.”

“But Joe, darlin’, what’s that got to do with going and taking the shots?”

“Everything. I don’t want any needles stuck in me to make me joyous. I don’t want my emotional cycle analyzed and adjusted to match everybody else’s cycle. I want to be my own man, all the way.”

“You don’t let that attitude creep into the feature stories you’ve been writing about Happiness, Incorporated.”

“Because I’m a conscientious hack, baby. I make the little words do what I want them to do.”

“But, Joe—”

His tone softened. He said: “Sadie, if we both went and got adjusted, we’d never know how much of our happiness
together was due to a gent, with a needle and a mess of charts, and how much was due to Sadie and Joe. Let’s make our own music, without outside help.”

She came into his arms, her lips close to his ear. “That’s the first argument that’s made any sense, Joseph,” she said.

In a very few moments all thoughts of Happiness, Incorporated fled from the minds of Joe and Sadie. But, even as they were fleeing, Joe thought, a trifle darkly, of Dr. August Lewsto and the field crew he had brought to Daylon. There was something odd about Lewsto, vaguely unsavory, vaguely disquieting.

There was a great deal of money behind Happiness, Incorporated. They had arrived three months before and it was a newsworthy item that Daylon had been selected as the test city.

Joe Morgan had been assigned the task of gathering the data for the first story. Lewsto had received him in the hotel suite with all courtesy. Lewsto was a gaunt man in his early fifties with hollow eyes, thin, nervous hands and a habit of smiling broadly at nothing at all.

“Of course, of course. Do sit down, Mr.—”

“Morgan. Of the News. Maybe you can give me the dope on this happiness you expect to peddle. It sounds like a tough thing to do.”

Lewsto smiled broadly. “Not at all, Mr. Morgan. Our procedure has been tested and approved by the foremost medical associations. It is a bit difficult to explain it to the layman.”

“You can try me, Doc.”

“Everyone, Mr. Morgan, has an emotional cycle. The period between the peaks varies with the individual, as does the degree of inclination and declination. Call this cycle the emotional rhythm of the individual. This chart shows you the emotional cycles of each individual in a family of four. Note how the mother’s cycle is of ten days’ duration, a very short cycle, and also note how the peak in each case is so high as to be almost psychotic. In the depths of depression she is often close to suicidal. A very difficult home life for the family.”

“I imagine.”

“This basic life rhythm is the product, Mr. Morgan, of the secretions of the glands and variations in the intensity of the electrical impulses within the brain itself. Now look at this chart. This shows the same family after adjustment. We have not eliminated the cycle. We have flattened the woman’s
cycle, made the man’s a bit more intense, and adjusted the cycles of the two children. Now this family can plan ahead. They know that during each thirty-day period they will feel increasingly better for twenty days. Then there will be five days of warm joy, and a five day decline, not too abrupt, to the starting point. They will feel good together, mildly depressed at the same time. They can plan holidays accordingly and they can always judge the mood of the other members of the family by their own mood.”

“I suppose you have to get the glands and the electricity in line, eh?”

“Quite right. We chart the cycle of each person by a method which, I am afraid, must be kept secret. Then, for each individual, we prepare an injection designed to stimulate certain endocrinological manifestations, and suppress others. After thirty days a booster shot is necessary.”

“How big a staff do you have?”

“I brought forty persons with me. More will be employed locally. Certain equipment is being shipped to me and I am negotiating to rent a building on Caroline Street.”

“You are going to advertise?”

“Oh, certainly! Radio, sky writing, posters, newspaper ads, direct mail and a team of industrial salesmen.”

“What do you mean by industrial salesmen?”

“Take Company X. It employs three hundred men. A round dozen are chronic complainers and troublemakers. Others have bad days when their work is poor. Morale is spotty. If one hundred percent of the employees are adjusted, the personnel director will know what the plant morale will be at any time. It will thus be possible to plan ahead and set production schedules accordingly. Labor difficulties are minimized and profit goes up.”

“Sounds like Nirvana,” Joe Morgan said dryly. “What does paradise cost?”

“Ten dollars for the individual. Eight dollars per person for industrial contracts. Frankly, Mr. Morgan, that is less than our costs, though I do not wish you to print that information.”

At that moment there was a knock at the door. Dr. Lewsto went to the door, brought in a very tall, very grave young woman who, in spite of her severe dress, her air of dignity, seemed to walk to the haunting beat of a half-heard chant.

“Mr. Morgan, this is Miss Pardette, our statistician.”

Her handshake was surprisingly firm. Dr. Lewsto continued, “Miss Pardette has been in Daylon for the past month with her assistants, compiling statistics on industrial
production, retail sales and similar matters. She will compile new figures as our work progresses.” Lewsto’s voice deepened and he took on a lecture platform manner. “It is our aim to show, with Daylon as our test city, that the American city can, through Happiness, Incorporated, be made a healthier, happier and more profitable place in which to live.”

Joe Morgan gravely clapped his hands. Both Miss Pardette and Dr. Lewsto stared at him without friendliness.

Dr. Lewsto said: “I’m afraid, Mr. Morgan, that I detect a rather childish sort of skepticism in your manner. You should not be blind to progress.”

“How could you say such a thing, Doc?” Joe asked blandly. “I’m impressed. Really impressed. Every red-blooded American wants happiness. And you’re the man to see that he gets it.”

Lewsto said, visibly melting, “Ah . . . yes. Yes, of course. Forgive me, Mr. Morgan.”

But Joe felt the cold eye of Miss Pardette on him.

He said quickly, “Am I to assume, Dr. Lewsto, that you will give every one of your patients the same basic emotional cycle?”

“Yes. That is the key to the whole picture. Instead of a tangled maze of cycles, everyone we treat will have exactly the same cycle, co-ordinated with everyone else.”

II.
WHERE’D YOU GET THAT EMOTIONAL BINGE?
IT’S AS OUT OF STYLE AS A RUSTY HINGE.
WIPE THAT FROWN OFF YOUR SULKY BROW—
WITH A TEN DOLLAR BILL GET ADJUSTED NOW!

Main Street. It just happens to be Daylon. It could be anybody’s main street. Warm May sun, sweating cops implementing the street lights at the busiest corners. A rash of panel delivery trucks, housewives cruising looking for a place wide enough in which to park, music blaring from a radio store.

Three blocks from the very center of the city another cop has been detailed to keep the line orderly in front of number thirty-four, Caroline Street. It is a small building, and across the front of it is a huge sign—“HAPPINESS, INCORPORATED.”

The line moves slowly toward the doorway. Inside, it is rapidly and efficiently split into the appropriate groups. Those who are arriving for the first time pay at the desk on
the right, receive their number. There are a hundred thousand people in Daylon. The new numbers being issued are in the eleven thousand series.

Those whose cycles have been charted, are shunted up the stairs to where a small vial awaits, bearing their number. A smaller group files toward the back of the building for the essential booster shots.

A plump little man sulks in line, herded along by his wife who looks oddly like a clipper ship under a full head of sail.

She says, “And you listen to me, Henry. After nineteen years of putting up with your childish moods this is one time when you are going to—”

Her voice goes on and on. Henry pouts and moves slowly with the crowd. He tells himself that no shot in the arm is going to make his life any more enjoyable. Not with the free-wheeling virago he has endured for these many years.

The policeman on the beat is sweating but he smiles fondly at the line. Fastened to the lapel of his uniform is a tiny bronze button with an interlocked H and I. Happiness, Incorporated. The bronze button is issued with the booster shot.

Back to the main drag. A diaper delivery truck tangles fenders with a bread truck. Both drivers are at fault. They climb out, and, through force of habit, walk stiff-legged toward each other, one eye on the damage. They both wear the little bronze button. They smile at each other.

“No harm done, I guess. Anyway, not much.”

“Same here. Hey, you’re one of the happiness boys, too.”

“Yeah, I got herded into it by the wife.”

“Me too, and I’m not sorry. Gives everything a glow, sort of.”

They stand and measure each other. The cycle is on the upswing. Each day is better than the last. The peak is approaching. It is but three days away.

“Look, let’s roll these heaps around the corner and grab a quick beer.”

Main Street in May. A small, ruffian child, pressed too closely in a department store, unleashes a boot that bounces smartly off the shin of an elderly matron.

The matron winces, smiles placidly at the child’s mother, limps away.

The mother grabs the infant by the ear. “You’re lucky she was one of the adjusted ones, Homer. I’m going to take you home and belt you a few, and then I’m going to take you and your father down and get both of you adjusted.”
Main Street with a small difference. People smile warmly at strangers. There is a hint of laughter in the air, a hint of expectancy. The little bronze buttons catch the sun. The un-adjusted stare bleakly at the smiles, at the little buttons, and wonder what has happened to everybody. They begin to feel as though they were left out of something.

Joe Morgan walks dourly along the street, rigidly suppressing an urge to glare at every smile.

A man hurrying out of a doorway runs solidly into him. Joe, caught off balance, sits down smartly. He is hauled to his feet, brushed off. His hand is pumped up and down by the stranger.

"Whyn't yah look where you're running?" Joe asks.

"Fella, I'm sorry. I was just plain clumsy. Say, can I buy you a drink? Or can I take you anywhere? My car's right around the corner."

Joe squints at the little bronze button, says, "Skip it," walks down the street.

Joe is unhappy. The managing editor, proudly sporting a little bronze button, has set up a permanent department called, "The Progress of Happiness," and he has assigned Joe Morgan to run it. Joe is out tracking down progress.

He stands across the street and glares at the long line waiting to be processed. He is torn by doubts, wonders vaguely whether he ought to join the line and be adjusted. But he cannot permit such a violation of his right of privacy.

He goes into the offices assigned to Miss Pardette.

Miss Pardette was busy. Joe Morgan sat near her desk, cocked his head to one side and listened carefully to the music she seemed to carry around with her. He couldn't help thinking of Alice Pardette as wasted talent. All she would have to do in any floor show would be to walk across the floor. In the proper costume she would make strong men clutch the tablecloth and signal for another drink. The vitality of her seemed to press against the dark suit she wore like a torrential river held taut by a new dam.

At last she looked up. Joe said: "What's new on delirium today, kitten?"

"I find your attitude offensive," she said. The words were prim and proper. The tone was husky gold, a warm wrapping for hidden caress.

Joe smiled brightly. "I find happiness offensive. So we're even. What can I put in the paper, Mona Lisa?"

She shuffled the papers on her desk. "I have just compiled
a report on the first month of operation of the Quinby Candy Company since the last of their employees received the booster shot. You will have to clear this report with Mr. Quinby before publishing it. He reports a six point three percent drop in absenteeism, a two percent drop in pilferage, an eleven percent drop in tardiness. Total production was up eight point eight percent over the preceding month, with a drop in rejections and spoilage and consequent increase in estimated net profit from the yearly average of four point six percent to five point three percent. The fee to adjust his workers was two thousand three hundred four dollars. It is Mr. Quinby's estimate that he recovered this initial cost in the first two weeks of operation."

"How nice for him," Joe said, glancing at the figures he had scribbled in his notebook. He said: "How did a dish like you get into this racket?"

"Dr. Lewsto employed me."

"I mean in the statistics game."

She gave him a long, steady look. "Mr. Morgan, I have found that figures are one of the few things in life you can depend upon."

"I thought you could depend on the kind of happiness that you people sell." He looked at the bronze button she wore.

She followed the direction of his glance, looked down at the button. She said: "I'm afraid I'm not entitled to wear this. Dr. Lewsto insisted that it would be better for morale for me to wear it. But a statistician must maintain a rigidly objective attitude. To become adjusted might prejudice that attitude."

"How about Lewsto? He wears one."

"It is the same thing with him. The backers felt that, as administrator, he should refrain from becoming adjusted."

"Just like the restaurant owner who goes out to lunch?"

He saw her first smile. It rang like hidden silver bells. "Something like that, Mr. Morgan."

He sighed. "Well, how far are we as of today?"

"New patients are in the eleven thousand series. Fifty-nine hundred totally adjusted."

"Where are those fifty-nine hundred on the chart?"

She stood up, took a pointer and touched it to the big chart on the wall behind her. "Right here. In three days they will be at the peak. They will remain at the peak for five days, then five days of regression before they begin the climb back up again."

Joe said softly: "It gives me a funny feeling in the pit of
my stomach. All those people being pushed through an emotional cycle like cattle being herded down the runways in Chicago."

"You'd change your attitude if you would submit to adjustment."

Joe stood up and stretched. "Exactly what I'm afraid of, friend. Morgan, the Unadjusted. That's me."

At the door he turned and waved at her. But she was studying reports and she did not look up.

III.

FROM GIMMY RIKER'S COLUMN IN THE NEW YORK STANDARD TRIBUNE: "The boys with the beards couldn't find anything wrong with one Doc Lewsto and his gland band, so, financed by mysterious backers, Doc Lewsto is turning the tanktown of Daylon into a carnival of joy. They say that things are so gay over there lately that the Federal Narcotics people are watching it. If the national debt is getting you down, maybe you ought to run over and let the good doctor give you the needle."

FROM AN EDITORIAL IN THE HOTEL-KEEPERS' GUIDE FOR JUNE: "If this sale of Happiness is extended on a country-wide basis, it is evident from reports we have received from our Daylon members, that managers of bars, clubs and hotels will have to make alterations in basic policy. The money coming into the till closely follows the emotional cycle set up by Dr. August Lewsto to such a degree that during the peak of the curve our members were unable to meet the demand, whereas, at the bottom of the curve, business fell off to nothing. However, the overall picture on a monthly basis showed a fifteen to eighteen percent improvement."

FROM THE MINUTES OF A SECRET MEETING IN THE PENTAGON BUILDING, EXCERPT FROM THE SUMMARY BY LIEUTENANT GENERAL GRADERSBY: "Thus, gentlemen, we can conclude that this sociological experiment in Daylon constitutes no threat to our essential defense production at the X plant four miles distant. In fact, production has improved as has the quality of the end product. It is agreed that it is only coincidence that this experiment by Happiness, Incorporated was set up in the nearest city to X plant, the only current manufacturer of that item so essential to our military strength. However, it is re-
commended that a committee be formed to consider the question of setting up an alternate facility and that all necessary steps be taken to implement and facilitate the formation of such a committee and that the workings of this committee be facilitated by a further implementation of—"

DECODED EXCERPT FROM AN INNOCENT-APPEARING PERSONAL LETTER SENT TO DR. AUGUST LEWSTO: “Units B, C, D and E have arrived at the key cities originally indicated. Your reports excellent, providing basis for immediate industrial contracts, one of which already signed involving five thousand workers in basic industry with subcontract for propulsion units. Forward subsequent reports of progress directly to men in charge of indicated units, detaining to each of them five trained technicians from your staff. Report in usual way when booster shot record reaches fifty percent total population Daylon.”

Joe Morgan, before going up to the news room, went into the room off the lobby of the News Building where Sadie Barnum and two other girls handled many details including the taking of classified advertising.

He didn’t see Sadie. Julie, the redhead, winked over the shoulder of a man laboriously writing out an ad. Joe leaned against the wall until the man had paid and gone.

“Where’s my gal?” Joe asked.

“Which one. I’m here, Joey.”

“You’re for Thursdays. I want today’s gal, the ineffable Miss Barnum.”

“She hit Clance for an extra hour tacked onto her lunch hour. Love must wait.”

Joe turned toward the door. “Tell her to buzz me when she gets in.”

He went up, winked at the city editor, walked down to his desk, rolled a sheet of paper into the machine and stared glumly at it. Small warning bells seemed to be ringing in the back of his mind. He was all set to write the story of the second big period of depression, of what happened to Daylon when twenty-two thousand of the adjusted had a simultaneous slump, but he couldn’t get his mind off Sadie. She had been a bit difficult about his refusal to be adjusted the night before.

On a hunch he hurried out, climbed into his asthmatic car and roared to Caroline Street. He parked in the bus stop, went down the line looking for Sadie. When he did not see
her, he began to breathe more slowly. He had a hunch that it would somehow turn out to be a very bad thing if Sadie were inoculated.

He was glad that he had been wrong. He glanced back at his car, saw the cop writing out a ticket. As he turned to hurry back, he saw Sadie come out the exit door of Happiness, Incorporated.

Muttering, he ran to her, took hold of her arm, spinning her around.

"Hey, my vaccination!" she said, looking up at him with a wide smile.

"You little dope!" he said. "You feather-headed little female cretin! What on earth possessed you to join this rat race."

She didn’t seem disturbed. "Somebody had to take the first step, Joseph, and it didn’t look as though you would. So I had to. Now you’ll do it too, won’t you, darlin’?"

He saw that her smile was brave, but that there were tears behind it. "No," he said flatly. "I stay like I am. I suppose you sneaked off and had your cycle charted last week?"

She nodded. "But, Joe, there isn’t any harm in it! It’s been so wonderful for everybody. Please, Joe."

He took her by the shoulders and shook her. "Oh, wonderful! It’s been ducky! You should know that—" He stopped suddenly as some of the information in the back of his mind assumed new meaning, new ominous meaning. He turned on his heel and walked away from her. She called out to him but he didn’t stop. He climbed into his car, drove through the grim streets of unsmiling people.


Over half the population of the city.

The period of intense joy in September has been a time of dancing in the street, of song, of an incredible gaiety almost too frantic to be endured.

And the slump touched the bitter depths of despair.

Slowly the city climbs back up into the sunlight. The slumped shoulders begin to straighten and the expressions of bleak apathy lighten once more. The road leads up into the sunlight.

And then the building is as it was before. The big sign, "HAPPINESS, INCORPORATED" has been taken down. People gather in the street and stare moodily at it. They are the ones who were going to be adjusted “tomorrow.”
They have read the article in the paper by Dr. Lewsto. “I wish to thank the citizens of Daylon who have co-operated so splendidly in helping us advance the frontiers of human knowledge in the realm of the emotions. It is with more than a trace of sadness that I and my staff leave Daylon to set up a similar project in another great American city. But we leave, armed with the statistics we have acquired here, confident in the knowledge that, through our efforts, more than half of you have at last attained that ultimate shining goal of mankind—HAPPINESS!”

Yes, the building is empty and the line has ceased to worm slowly toward the open doors. Two technicians remain in a hotel suite to administer the booster shots yet remaining to be given.

Joe Morgan spends five days with Sadie, watching her sink lower and lower into despondency, trying vainly to cheer her, infected himself by her apathy, learning to think of her as a stranger.

He walks into the office where she works. She gives him a tremulous smile. She has a fragile look, a convalescent look. “Honey,” he said, “it’s nice to see that you can smile.”

“But it’s worth it, Joe. Believe me. Look what I have ahead of me. Twenty-five days without a blue moment, without a sad thought, without a bit of worry.”

“Sure, sure,” he said, his voice rough. “It’s lovely.”

She said: “Joe, I’ve been thinking. There’s no point to our going on together. I want somebody I can laugh with, be gay with for the days ahead.”

He was amazed at the deep sense of relief inside of him. He pretended hurt. He said: “If that’s the way you feel about it—”

“I’m awfully sorry, Joe. But I don’t want the slightest cloud on my happiness now that I’ve got it. Not the tiniest cloud. You do see, don’t you?”

“It hasn’t been the same since this whole thing came to town, this grin circus, has it?”

“Not really, Joe. Before I was . . . well, I was just walking in the shadows. Now I’m out in the sun, Joe. Now I know how to be happy.”

Her hand was small and warm in his. “Be good, kid,” he said softly.

He went up to his desk. The city editor had blue-penciled a huge X across the copy Joe had turned in. Joe snatched the sheet, went up to him, “Look, Johnson, this is news. Understand? En ee doubleyou ess. What cooks?”
Johnson touched his fingertips lightly to the bronze button in his lapel, smiled faintly. "I don't think it would be good for the city. Nice job and all that, Morgan. But it's against policy."

"Whose policy?"

"The managing editor's. I showed it to him."

Joe said firmly and slowly, with emphasis on each word: "Either it goes in the paper or Morgan goes out the door."

"There's the door, Morgan."

Joe went back to his room, rage in his heart. He uncovered his own typewriter, rewrote his copy in dispatch style, made five carbons, addressed the envelope and sent them out special delivery.

And when that was done, in the late afternoon, he found a small bar with bar stools, took a corner seat, his shoulder against the wall, began treating himself to respectable jolts of rye.

No girl, no job—and a fear in the back of his mind so vast and so shadowy as to make his skin crawl whenever he skirted the edge of it.

Business was poor in the bar. He remembered happier, more normal times, when every day at five there was a respectable gathering of the quick-one-and-home-to-dinner group.

A sleepy bartender wearing a myopic smile lazily polished the glasses and sighed ponderously from time to time. He moved only when Joe raised his finger as a signal for another.

The bar had achieved an aching surrealistic quality and Joe's lips were numb when she slid up onto the stool beside him.

He focused on her gravely. "I thought you left town with the rest of the happy boys," he said.

Alice Pardette said: "I was walking by." She stared at his shotglass. "Would those help me?"

"What've you got?"

"The horrors, Mr. Morgan."

"The name is Joe and if a few of these won't help, nothing will. Why are you still in town?"

As the bartender poured the two shots she said: "When I finished the statistical job, Dr. Lewsto said I could go along with them in an administrative capacity."

"And why didn't you?"

The professional look had begun to wear off Alice Pardette. Joe noticed that her dark eyebrows inscribed two very lovely
arcs. He noticed a hollowness at her temples and wondered why this particular and illusive little element of allure had thus far escaped him. He wanted to plant a very gentle kiss on the nearest temple.

"Joe, they wanted to adjust me."

"I hear it's very nice. Makes you happy, you know."

"Joe, maybe I'm afraid of that kind of happiness." She finished her shot, gasped, coughed, looked at him with dark brimming eyes. "Hey," she said, "you didn't go and get—"

"Not Morgan. No ma'am. Uh uh. All that happened to me is that my girl got herself adjusted and gave me up for the duration. And today I was fired because I had an article they wouldn't print. Oh, I've been adjusted, but not with a needle."

She giggled. "Hey, these little things are warm when you get them down. Gimme another. What was the article about, Joe?"

"Suicides," he said solemnly. "People gunning holes in their heads and leaping out windows and hanging themselves to the high hook in the closet wearing their neckties the wrong way."

"Don't they always do that?"

"In the five days of depression, baby, fourteen of them joined their ancestors. That is more in five days than this old town has seen in the last seventeen months."

He watched the statistical mind take over. "Hm-m-m," she said.

"And 'hm-m-m' again," Joe said. "As far as ethical responsibility is concerned, who knocked 'em off? Answer me that."

"Ole Doc Lewsto, natch."

"Please don't use that expression, Pard. And who helped ole Doc by compiling all those pretty figures? Who but our girl, Alice? Wanna stand trial, kitten?"

She looked at him for long seconds. "Joe Morgan, you better buy me another drink."

He said: "I mailed out releases to a batch of synidicates. Maybe somebody'll print the stuff I dug up."

IV.

FROM DELANCEY BOOKER'S COLUMN IN THE WASHINGTON MORNING SENTINEL: Happiness, Incorporated, is expanding their operations at an amazing speed. It is only a week since their Washington Agency was es-
established and already it is reported that over seven thousand of our fellow citizens have reported to have profiles made of their emotional cycles. As usual with every move intended to approve the lot of the common man, several Congressmen who represent the worst elements of isolationism and conservatism are attempting to jam through a bill designed to hamstring Happiness, Incorporated. These gentlemen who look at life through a perpetual peashooter are trying to stir up public alarm on the basis that the procedures used by Happiness, Incorporated, have not been properly tested. They will find the going difficult, however, because, though they do not know it, some of their enemies in Congress have already received the initial inoculation. Your columnist saw them there while having his own cycle plotted.

EXCERPT FROM THE INFORMAL TALK GIVEN TO ALL EXECUTIVES OF THE HEATON STEEL COMPANY BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD: “Using our Daylon Plant as a test, it has been conclusively proven that Happiness, Incorporated, is the answer to industrial unrest, high taxes and dwindling profit. Consequently you will be glad to know that, starting tomorrow morning, we have made special arrangements with Happiness, Incorporated, to set up an inoculation center in every one of our fourteen plants. Within forty days the entire hundred and sixteen thousand employees of Heaton Steel will be happy and adjusted. This procedure will be optional for executives. Any man who refuses to be so treated will please rise.”

NOTE ON BULLETIN BOARD AT PAKINSON FIELD, HEADQUARTERS OF THE 28th BOMBARDMENT GROUP: “All personnel is advised that, beginning tomorrow, 18 Sept., Bldg. 83 will be set aside for civilian employees of Happiness, Incorporated. Any military personnel desirous of undergoing adjustment can obtain, for a special price of five dollars, a card entitling him or her to receive a complete emotional adjustment styled to fit the optimum curve. In this matter you will notice that the Air Corps has once again moved with greater rapidity than either the Army or the Navy—2nd Lt. Albert Anderson Daley, Post Exchange Officer.”

MEMO TO ALL MEMBER STATIONS, INTERCOAST BROADCASTING COMPANY: In the spot commercials
previously contracted for, kindly revise lyric to read as follows, utilizing local talent until new disks can be cut:

Divert your psyche
Repair your Id
Join the crowd and
Adjust yourself, kid.

Remainder to be, "Go to your nearest adjustment station set up in your community by Happiness, Incorporated. See those happy smiles? Do you wait . . . et cetera . . . et cetera . . . et cetera.

FROM THE SCRIPT OF THE CAROLAX PROGRAM, FEATURING BUNNY JUKES AND HIS GANG:
Bunny: . . . yeah, and fellas, I went in and they fastened those gimmicks on my head and they started plotting my cycle.
Others: And what happened, Bunny?
Bunny: While they were working this dolly walked through the office and boy, do I mean dolly! My tired old eyes glazed when she gave me that Carolax smile, what I mean.
Stooge: And what then? (eagerly)
Bunny: The doc looks down at the drum where the pen is drawing my cycle and he says, 'Mr. Jukes, you are the first patient in the history of Happiness, Incorporated, whose cycle forms the word—WOW!
Audience: Laughter.

Daylon in transition. For twenty days the spiral has been upward. Tomorrow it will reach a peak. There is laughter in the streets and people sing.

The city has a new motto. The Original Home of Happiness. The city is proud of being the first one selected.

Everyone walks about with a look of secret glee, as though barely able to contain themselves with the thought of the epic joy that the morrow will bring.

And those that have not been adjusted find that they, too, are caught up in the holiday spirit, in the air of impending revel. Strangers grin at each other and whole busses, homeward bound from work, ring with song as everyone joins in. Old songs. "Let a Smile be Your Umbrella," "Singing in the Rain", "Smiles", "Smile the While".

Joe Morgan and Alice Pardette have grown very close in the past twenty days. To him it is a new relationship—a woman who can think as frankly and honestly as any man, who has about her none of the usual feminine deviousness,
though physically she is so completely feminine as to make
his pulse pound.

And Alice, too, finds something in Joe she has never before
experienced. A man willing to take her at face value, a man
who does not try to force their relationship into channels of
undesired intimacies, a man who listens to what she says and
who will argue, person to person, rather than man to woman.

Dusk is over the city and the buzzing neon lights up the
overcast in hue of pink-orange. The old car is parked where
often he parked with Sadie Barnum. He wonders what Sadie
is doing. They look out over the city and they are not at ease.

“Joe,” she said suddenly, “don’t you feel it when you’re
down there with them?”

“You mean feel as though I want to go around grinning
like an idiot, too? Yes, and it scares me, somehow. I knew a
few other guys who didn’t want to have anything to do with
being adjusted. Now they’re as bad as the ones who had the
shots. That good cheer is like a big fuzzy cloud hanging over
the city.”

“And it’s worse than last time, isn’t it, Joe?” she asked
softly.

He nodded. “Worse in a funny way. It’s sort of like the
city was a big machine and now the governor is broken and
it’s moving too fast. It’s creaking its way up and up and up
to where maybe it’ll spin apart.”

She said: “Or like a boat that was going over gentle re-
gular waves and now the waves are getting bigger and
bigger.”

He turned and grinned at her. “You know, we can scare
each other into a tizzy.”

Alice didn’t respond to his grin. She said in a remote voice:
“Tomorrow is going to be . . . odd. I feel it. Joe, let’s stay to-
gether tomorrow. Please.”

She rested her hand on his wrist.

Suddenly she was in his arms. For the first time.

Thirty seconds later Joe said unsteadily, “For a statistician
you—”

“I guess you’d better make a joke of it, Joe. I guess maybe
it’s the only thing you can do, Joe. I guess . . . it wasn’t ever
this way before.”

Like a slow rocket rising for twenty days, bursting into a
bright banner of flame on the twenty-first day.

Joe walked out of his apartment into the street, turned
and stared incredulously at an elderly man who, laughing so hard that he wept, held himself up by clinging to a lamp-post. The impossible laughter was contagious, even as it frightened. Joe felt laughter stretching his lips, painting itself across his mouth.

At that moment he dodged aside, barely in time. A heavy convertible, a woman with tears of laughter streaming down her cheeks behind the wheel, bounced up over the curb. The old gentleman, still laughing, was cradled neatly on the bumper, was carried over and crushed against the gray stone front of the apartment building.

Blood ran in a heavy slow current down the slope of the sidewalk toward the gutter. The crowd gathered quickly. For just a fleeting second they were solemn and then someone giggled and they were off. They howled with laughter and pounced each other's shoulders and staggered in their laughter so that the blood was tracked in wavered lines back and forth.

Joe fought free of them, and, even with the horror in his mind, he walked rapidly down the street, his lips pulled back in a wide grin. Behind him he could hear the woman, between great shouts of laughter explaining, "I . . . I got laughing and the car . . . it came over here . . . and he was standing there and he . . . and he—" She couldn't go on and her voice was drowned by the singing and laughing around her.

They were singing, "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow."

The counterman where Joe usually had breakfast had just finished printing a large crude sign. "Everything on the house. What will you have?"

The girl next to Joe yelped and grabbed his arm, laughed into his face and said: "Tell'm I want gin."

The man beyond the girl, holding his belly, wavered to the door, whooping with laughter. He kicked the front window out of the nearby liquor store, came back with the gin.

The girl ripped the top off, lifted the bottle and drank heavily. More bottles were passed around. The liquor store man came in with an armful.

As Joe tried vainly to order his eggs, the girl, gin heavy on her breath, ran warm fingers up the back of Joe's neck and, breathing rapidly, said: "Honeylamb, I don't know who you are, but you're cute as a bug. Who can work on a happy day like this? Come on along with me, huh?"

Joe, still feeling that infuriating smile on his lips, stared at her. She had a very respectable look about her, and she was well-dressed.
Joe meant to say, “No thanks.” He heard himself saying eagerly, “Sure. That sounds fine.”

They went arm in arm along the street and she stopped every ten paces to take another swig out of the bottle. Two blocks further she gave a little sigh, slipped down onto the sidewalk, rolled over onto her back and passed out. She had a warm smile on her lips.

Joe stood over her, laughing emptily, until a whole crowd of people, arm in arm, swept down on him, pushing him along with them. He saw a heavy heel tear open the mouth of the girl on the sidewalk, but Joe couldn’t stop laughing.

He went down Main Street and it was a delirium of laughter and song and the crash and tinkle of plate glass, the crunch of automobile accidents.

There was an enormous scream of laughter, getting closer every moment, and a large woman fell from a great height onto the sidewalk, bursting like a ripe fruit. Joe grew dizzy with laughter. The crowd who had caught him up passed by and Joe Morgan leaned against a building, tears running down his face, his belly cramped and sore from the laughter, but still horror held tightly to his mind with cold fingers.

Through brimming eyes he saw the street turn into a scene of wild, bacchanalian revel where people without fear, without shame, without modesty, with nothing left but lust and laughter, cavorted, more than half mad with the excesses of their glee.

Slowly he made his way to the News Building. In the lobby he saw Sadie Barnum with a stranger. He saw how eager her lips were and she turned glazed eyes toward Joe and laughed and turned back to the man.

And then he stumbled out, bumping into an old man he had seen in the bank. The old man, with an endless dry chuckle, walked slowly wearing a postman’s mailbag. The bag was crammed full of bills of all denominations. He cackled into Joe’s face, stuffed a handful of bills into Joe’s side pocket, went on down the street, throwing handfuls into the air. The wind whipped them about and they landed on the sidewalk where they were trampled by people who had no inclination to pick them up.

A fat grinning man sat in the window of the jewelry store, cross-legged, throwing rings out onto the sidewalk through the shattered window.

“Happy New Year!” he yelled as Joe went by.

And then a woman had come from somewhere and she
clung to Joe’s neck with moist hands and her eyes were wide and glassy.

Her weight knocked Joe down. He got to his feet and she lay there and laughed up at him. Joe looked across the street to where a burly man strode along dragging another woman by the wrist. A small cold portion of Joe’s mind told him, “There is Alice. That is Alice. You have to do something.”

He ran between the spasms of helpless laughter and at last he spun the big man around. He wanted to hit him, but instead he collapsed against him and they both howled with insane glee.

Alice sat on the sidewalk, the tears dripping off her chin, her mouth spread in a fantastic smile. He picked her up, held her tightly, staggered off with her. She kept trying to kiss him.

He knew that he had to get her out of there, and soon.

Twice she was taken away from him by men who roared with joy and twice he staggered back, got hold of her again.

A crowd of men were going down the street, tipping over every car, having the time of their lives. A grinning cop watched them. One of the men took out a gun, pointed it at the cop and emptied it. The cop sat down on the street and laughed and hugged his perforated belly until he died.

Two men stood playing Russian Roulette. They passed the gun back and forth and each man spun the chamber before sucking on the barrel, pulling the trigger.

As Joe staggered by, clutching Alice, the gun went off, spattering them both with tiny flecks of brain tissue from the exploded skull. The man lurched into them, yelled, “Wanna play? Come-on, play with me!”

“Play his game, Joe,” Alice squealed.

But Joe, spurred by his hidden store of horror, pulled her along, got her to the car. He shoved her in, climbed behind the wheel, got the motor started.

In the first block a woman tried to ram him. He slammed on the brakes. She went across his bows, smashed two people on the sidewalk and crashed through the main window of a supermarket.

Joe, with Alice gasping helplessly beside him, went three blocks north, turned onto Wilson Avenue and headed out of town. His eyes streamed so that he could barely see.

Ten miles from Daylon he turned up a dirt road, parked in a wide shallow ditch, pulled Alice out of the car, hauled
her up across a sloping field to where a wide grassy bank caught the morning sunshine.

They lay side by side and the gasps of laughter came with less and less frequency. Alice, her eyes tortured, pulled herself to her feet, went over behind the shelter of a line of brush and he could hear that she was being very ill. In a few moments the reaction hit him. He was ill, too.

They found a brook at the foot of the field and cleaned up. Their clothes were smeared with dots of blood from the city.

Back on the grassy bank she rolled onto her stomach, cradled her head in her arms and cried monotonously while he gently stroked her dark hair.

Finally she got control of herself. She sat up and he gave her a lighted cigarette.

She said: “I’ll never be without the memory of those hours, Joe. Never.”

He thought of the scenes, still vivid in his mind. “Do you think you’re different?”

“Thank God, Joe, that you found me when you did. Thank God that you kept hold of a little bit of sanity! There was a cold objective place down in me and I could see everything around me and I knew the horror of it, but I couldn’t stop joining in.”

“Me, too. My mouth’s sore from laughing. And my sides.”

Because it had to be talked out, because it couldn’t be permitted to stay inside to fester, they told of what they had seen, leaving much unsaid, but nothing misunderstood.

He told her about Sadie Barnum and her eyes were soft with pity.

After a long silence he said: “What can we do?”

“That’s the question, isn’t it? I won’t let you go back, Joe.”

“What could I do if I went back? Pick the money off the streets?”

He remembered the old man with the mailbag. He took the crumpled bills out of his pocket. Seven hundreds, three fifties and four ones.

Her fingers were tight on his arm. “Joe, we’ve got to let the rest of the country know what happens.”

He shrugged. “They wouldn’t even print my dispatches. Why should they listen to me now?”

“But we can’t just sit here! Think of the children back in the city, Joe. Can’t we ... save any of them?”

“Let me think,” he said. “Let me think of some way we
could keep from getting infected by that... that insanity back there."

She said softly: "Suppose you couldn’t hear all that... that laughing around you?"

He jumped up and snapped his fingers. "I’ll bet that’s part of it. Not all of it, because deaf men join lynch mobs. But some of it. If you couldn’t see and couldn’t hear, you’d still sense the excitement around you and some of it would still get to you. You need something to take your mind off it, like in the old days when they bit on bullets, you know, for operations."

"Like a toothache," she said.

"I’m going to try it, kitten," Joe Morgan said. "With my ears stuffed up with cloth and with my pet filling removed and a pebble in the socket where I can bite down on it. I have to see what’s going on down there."

"And I go with you, Joe. I won’t stay here alone and I can help and if it should start to get you, darling, I’ll be there to... to help you."

V.

Joe Morgan, his crooked grin loosely in place, and Alice Pardette, pale and shaking with the white horror of what they had seen in the streets, stood in the almost deserted telephone building.

"You sure you can run one of those long distance switchboards?"

"I did that work for over a year. Come on."

Her fingers were quick with the plugs. He said: "Get the state capitol. See if you can land the governor himself."

She talked into the mouthpiece, her tone flat and insistent. At last she motioned to him. He picked up the phone off the nearby desk.

A warm, hearty voice said: "Gudlou speaking. Who did you say this is?"

"Governor, this is Joseph Morgan speaking from Daylon. I want to make an immediate appeal for help. Call out the National Guard. Get men here. Men and ambulances and tear gas. The town has gone crazy."

"Is this some sort of a joke?"

"Check with the phone company and the telegraph people. Try to get our local station on your radio, sir. Believe me, this is a terrible mess here."

"But I don’t understand! What has happened there?"
"This Happiness, Incorporated, thing, sir."
The governor laughed heartily. "Very clever publicity stunt, Morgan, or whatever your name is. Sorry, my boy, but we can’t use the National Guard to promote your product, even if I do have an appointment for my first shot."
"Look, sir, send over a plane. Get pictures—"
But the line was dead. Joe sighed heavily. "Didn’t work, angel. See if you can get me the President."
But after two hours of fighting their way up through the ranks of incredulous underlings, they were forced to give up. The world would know soon enough. With the trains halted, buses and trucks stalled in the city, all communications cut, the world will begin to wake up and wonder what had happened to Daylon.

One day of madness, and another, and another, and another. The streets resound with hoots of hoarse laughter. Bodies lie untended. It is discovered that detachments sent in to help fall under the general spell. News planes circle overhead by day and all roads leading to town are jammed with the cars of the curious, those who come to watch. Many of them get too close, stay to revel and to die.
The power plants have failed and at night the city is lighted by fires that burn whole blocks.
The laughter and the madness go on.
Throughout the nation the various clinics set up by Happiness, Incorporated, cut the fees and go on twenty-four hour operation. The spokesmen for Happiness, Incorporated, say that the riots in Daylon are due to an organized group attempting to discredit the entire program.
And at the end of the fifth day the laughter stops as though cut with a vast knife.

Joe Morgan, unshaven and pale with fatigue, drove the last busload of screaming children out of Daylon. With the money he and Alice had taken on that first day, nearly two million dollars of cash, they had set up emergency headquarters in Lawper, a fair-sized village seventeen miles from Daylon. Renting space, hiring a large corps of assistants, they had managed to evacuate nearly thirty-six hundred children, tend their wounds, feed them and house them.
Organized agencies were beginning to take some of the administrative burden off their hands.
Alice, looking pounds thinner, stood by him as the attendants took the children off for medical processing.
“What was it like, Joe?” she asked.
“The whole city has a stink of death. And the laughter has stopped. It’s quiet now. I saw some of them sitting on the curb, their faces in their hands. I think it’s going to get worse.”

VI.

NEWS BULLETIN, 6 P.M., OCT. 3rd: “First in the news tonight is, as usual, the city of Daylon. The stupendous wave of suicides is now over and the city is licking its wounds. Those wounds, by the way, are impressive. Twenty-one hundred known dead. Four thousand seriously injured. Fifteen hundred missing, believed dead. Property damage is estimated at sixty millions, one third of the city’s total assessed valuation. Today the Congressional Investigating Committee arrived at Daylon, accompanied by some of the nation’s outstanding reporters of the news. The courage with which the good people of Daylon are going about the repair of their city is heartwarming. Psychologists call this a perfect example of mass hysteria, and the cause is not yet explained.”

FROM THE DETROIT CITIZEN BANNER, OCT. 7th: “Judge Fawlkon today refused to allow an injunction against the three local clinics of Happiness, Incorporated, brought by the Detroit Medical Association who state that the Daylon disaster may have its roots in the inoculations given in that city, used as a test locale by Happiness, Incorporated. Judge Fawlkon stated that, in his considered judgment, there was no logical reason to link these two suppositions. Court was adjourned early so that the judge could keep his appointment at the nearest clinic of Happiness, Incorporated.”

FROM THE BUNNY JUKES PROGRAM:
Stooge: Hey, Bunny, I understand that you’ve got the lowdown on what happened over there in Daylon.
Bunny: Don’t tell anybody, but Daylon was the first place where the new income tax blanks were distributed.
Audience: Laughter.

EDITORIAL IN THE DAYLON NEWS: “The attitude of the courts in making no effort to prosecute citizens of Daylon who unknowingly committed crimes during the recent Death Week is an intelligent facing of the facts. However, this paper feels that no such special dispensation should be made in the case of the codefendants Joseph Morgan, one-time
reporter on this newspaper, and Alice Pardette, one-time employee of Happiness, Incorporated. It has been proven and admitted that the_codefendants were able to resist the inexplicable hysteria and did knowingly enter the city and make away with close to two million dollars in cash. The fact that a portion of this money was used to evacuate children is mildly extenuating, but, since the codefendants were captured by police before they had fulfilled their expressed 'intent' to return the balance of the funds, their position is feeble indeed. Other organizations were prepared to aid the children of this city. It is hoped that Joseph Morgan and Alice Pardette, when their case comes to trial, will be punished to the full extent of the law, as their crime is indeed despicable."

EXCERPT FROM TOP SECRET MEETING IN THE PENTAGON, GENERAL OF THE ARMIES LOEFSTEDTER PRESIDING: "To summarize, a key utility, the X Plant, has been almost totally destroyed in the Daylon hysteria. We believe that the riot was fomented by enemies of this nation for the express purpose of destroying the plant. The report of the Committee on the Establishment of Alternate Facilities will be ready at next month's meeting at which time decisions can be made and contracting officers appointed. As the finished products in storage at the X Plant were also destroyed by fire, our situation is grave. Head of Field Service will immediately suspend all tests at the Proving Ground and assembled items in the hands of troops will be strictly rationed."

The fat guard said: "I shouldn't do this, you know."
Joe said: "Sure, I know. But we just happened to keep your kid from being burned to death and you want to make it up to us."
"Yeah," the guard said. "You wait in here. I'll go get her."
Joe waited five minutes before Alice was brought into the small room. She was wan and colorless, dressed in a gray cotton prison dress. She gave Joe one incredulous look and then ran to him. He felt her thin shoulders shake as he held her tightly.
"Hey, they can't put you in here!" he said softly, was rewarded by her weak smile. He winked over her shoulder at the guard. "Wait in the hall, junior."
The guard shrugged, left them alone in the room.
Alice said: "Why are they doing this to us?"
“They’ve got to be sore at somebody, you know. They’ve got to take a smack at something. Only they aren’t taking it at the right people, that’s all. Besides, we’ve got nothing to fret about.”

She regained her old fire. “Just what do you mean, Joe Morgan?”

He grinned. “When does our case come up for trial?”

“November 10th they said,” Alice said, her head cocked on one side.

“And before that we walk out of here during the next little attack of ‘hysteria.’”

“Oh, Joe!” she said. “It isn’t going to happen again! Not again!”

“The way I see it, baby, it’s going to keep right on happen-ing. So get the earmuffs ready.”

“Keys, Joe!” she said in a half whisper.

“Leave that to me.”

Once again the spring is wound taut in Daylon. Once again the joy comes bubbling up, the joy and the anticipation. There is no more mourning for the dead. The streets are festive. The October days are crisp and cool. Many have sudden little twinges of fear, but the fear is forgotten in the heady flood of anticipation of delights to come.

Two dozen cities have passed the fifty percent mark. Among them are Detroit, Chicago, New Orleans, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Boston, Buffalo, Los Angeles, Houston, Portland, Seattle, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Atlanta—and ten other big cities. A round three dozen smaller cities are above forty percent.

And then all of the clinics are suddenly closed. Millions are infuriated at missing their chance.

But the clinic personnel all show up in New York City. Mobile units are established and the price of inoculation is cut to fifty cents. New methods speed up the work. The clinics work day and night.

All over the country happiness grows constantly more in-tense. It can be felt everywhere. Man, for a time, is good to his neighbor and to his wife.

All over the country the vast spring is wound tighter and tighter. At the eleventh hour the original personnel of all the clinics, and they are a surprisingly small number, board a steamship at a Brooklyn dock. Reservations have been made weeks in advance.
On the morning of explosion, the ship is two hundred miles at sea.

And fifty-one percent of the population of Greater New York have been inoculated.

A famed public document speaks of "the pursuit of happiness."

It has been pursued and it has been at last captured, a silver shining grail, throughout the ages always a misty distance ahead, but now at last, in hand. It is a grail of silver, but it is filled with a surprising bitterness.

On the morning of explosion, every channel of communication, every form of public conveyance, all lines of supply are severed so cleanly that they might never have existed.

An air lines pilot, his plane loaded with a jumbled heap of gasping and spasmed humanity, makes pass after pass at the very tip of the Empire State Building until at last the radio tower rakes off one wing and the plane goes twisting down to the chasm of the street.

On a Hollywood sound stage a hysterical cameraman, aiming his lens at the vista of script girls and sound men and actresses and agents takes reel after reel of film which could not have been duplicated had he been transported back to some of the revels of ancient Rome.

In New Mexico screaming technicians shove a convulsed and world-famous scientist into the instrument compartment of a V-2 rocket and project him into a quick death ninety miles above the clouds.

In Houston a technician, bottle firmly clutched in his left hand, opens the valves of tank after tank of gasoline.

He is smiling as the blue-white explosion of flame melts the bottle in a fraction of a second.

When he opened the door to her cell, Alice had a taut, mechanical smile on her lips. He slapped her sharply until she stopped smiling. He carried two guns taken from the helpless guards who rolled on the floor in the extremity of their glee at this ludicrous picture of two prisoners escaping.

He found a big new car with a full tank of gas a block from the jail. Together they loaded it with provisions, with rifles and cartridges, with camping equipment. And, five miles from the city he was forced to stop the car.

It was twenty minutes before he could stop trembling
sufficiently to drive. He told her of his plans, and of what he expected and about their destination.

At dusk he drove down to the lake shore, the tall grasses scraping the bottom of the car. There were kerosene lamps in the small camp, a drum of kerosene in the shed back of the kitchen.

The last of the sunset glow was gone from the lake. The birds made a sleepy noise in the pines. The air was sweet and fresh.

While Alice worked in the kitchen, he went out and tried the car radio. He heard nothing but an empty hum. His heart thudded as he found one station. He listened. He heard the dim jungle-sound of laughter, of the sort of laughter that floods the eyes and cramps the stomach and rasps the throat. With a shudder of disgust, Joe turned off the radio.

They finished the meal in odd silence. He pushed his plate away and lit two cigarettes, passed one to her.

"Not exactly cheery, are we?" she said.

"Not with our world laughing itself to death."

She hunched her shoulders. "To death?"

He nodded. "Lewsto was a phony. He knew what would happen, you know. He had a plan. He was under orders."

"Whose?"

"How should I know? The country is laughing itself to death. They'll wait, whoever they are. They'll wait for the full five days of hysteria and the first few days of mass suicide—and then they'll move in. Maybe there'll be enough of us left to make an honest little scrap of it."

"But why, Joe? Why does it work that way?"

"You ever hear of resonance?"

"Like a sound?"

"The word covers more than that, Alice. It covers coffee sloshing out of a cup when you walk with it, or soldiers breaking step crossing a bridge. Daylon and the other cities were fine when everybody had their own pattern. But now all the patterns are on the same groove. Everybody is in step. Everybody adds to everybody else's gaiety and it builds up and up to a peak that breaks men apart, in their heads. Pure resonance. The same with the depression. Ever hear one of those records with nothing but laughter on them. Why'd you laugh? You couldn't help it. The laughter picked you up and carried you along. Or did you ever see people crying and you didn't know the reason and you felt your eyes sting? Same deal."

"What's the answer, Joe?"
“Is there any? Is there any answer at all? We had the best ships and the best planes and the best bombs and the biggest guns. But we’re laughing ourselves out of them.”

He stood up abruptly, grabbed his jacket off the hook and went out onto the long porch of the camp overlooking the dark lake. Porch and lake that were a part of his childhood, and now a part of his defeat.

There was only a faint trace of irony left in him. He grieved for his nation and he felt the helpless stir of anger at this thing which had been so skillfully done, so carefully done, so adequately done.

She came out and stood beside him and he put his arm around her waist.

“Don’t leave me, Joe,” she whispered. “Not for a minute.”

His voice hoarse, he took the massive seal ring off his finger, slipped it over hers, saying, “With this ring I thee wed. Fugitives get cheated out of the pageantry, angel.”

She shivered against the night, said: “Dandy proposal. I’m wearing the ring before I can open my mouth to say no.”

“Then give it back.”

“A valuable ring like this! Don’t be silly.”

He laughed softly. She moved away from him. Her face was pale against the darkness. “Please don’t laugh, Joe. Ever. I never want to hear laughter again.”

Her hands were like ice and her lips were tender flame.

VII.

FOURTH BULLETIN OF THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT, NOV. 12: “Remnants of the 11th and 14th Army Corps, fighting without air cover, today bent the left prong of the pincer movement of the two enemy columns converging on the provisional capital at Herkimer, Idaho. In spite of determined resistance, eventual capture of the provisional capital seems imminent. All troops and irregulars isolated by enemy columns will endeavor to make their way through enemy lines to bolster our position. Live off the land. Conserve ammunition. Make each shot mean the death of an invader. All troops and irregulars who did not undergo adjustment under the auspices of the invader’s Trojan Horse, miscalled Happiness, Incorporated, will be careful to stay away from the cities. All commanders will discover which men under their command have been ‘adjusted’ and will mark these men unfit for further duty.”
PAMPHLET AIR-DRIPPED BY BOMBERS OF THE INVADER EXPEDITIONARY FORCES: “Americans! Lay down your arms. Further resistance is useless. Your active army is outnumbered five to one and virtually without equipment. You have lost the war. Help to make the peace as easy on you as possible. For each day of continued resistance your eventual food ration will be cut a certain percentage. Lay down your arms!”

“Drop it!” Joe Morgan snapped. He held the rifle leveled. The two men in ragged field uniform, swaying with weariness dropped their weapons, a carbine and a submachine gun. They were dirty and unshaven and one of them had a bandage, dark-stained with blood across his left hand.

“Move over to the side!” he ordered. The men obeyed meekly. Alice went down the steps and picked up the weapons, staying well out of the line of fire.

“Who are you?” Joe demanded.

The older of the two said, deep weariness in his voice: “Baker Company, Five oh eight battalion, Eighty-third.” Then he added, with a note of ironic humor, “I think maybe Harry and me are the whole company.”

“You’ve given up, eh? You’re looking for a hole to hide in.”

The younger one took two heavy steps toward the porch. He said: “Put down that pop-gun, junior, and we’ll talk this over. I don’t like what you said.”

“Shut up, Harry,” the older one said. “Mister, yesterday we picked us a nice spot and kept our heads down until they come along with a high-speed motor convoy. They were too close together. We killed the driver in the lead truck and piled up the convoy. We sprayed ’em real nice and got away up the hill. As long as we got a few rounds we’re not through.”

Joe grinned. “Then welcome to the Morgan Irregulars. Come on in. We’ve got food and hot water and some bandages for that hand. How close do you guess they are?”

“Fifteen miles, maybe. But they’re not headed this way. They’re using the main road as a supply line, I think.”

The men came up on the porch. Joe stood his rifle beside the door. The older man said: “What makes you think we won’t bust you one and take your food and take over your nest, mister?”

“Because,” Joe said, “you have a hunch that maybe I can help you be a little more effective. You don’t know what I got up my sleeve. And besides, you’re not the first guys to
get here, you know. If you'd made a move toward that rifle, you would have caught a surprise from the brush out there." He turned and said, "O.K., guys. These two will do."

By twos and threes about fifteen well-armed men sauntered out of the brush.

America in turmoil. Not a man but who, at some time in his life, had speculated on how the country would behave under the iron heel of an invader. Had the softness of life in this big lush country destroyed the hidden focus of resistance? Where was the heart of the country?

Gaunt and bearded men, with nothing left but fury, rushed the armored columns with home-made bombs of rags and gasoline. The jacketed bullets smashed them down but always a few got close enough to throw the bomb and die. And black greasy smoke wound up into the fall sky and the blackened hull of a vehicle was towed off onto the shoulder, sentinel of death, monument to valor.

In the night an absurdly young man wormed on his belly behind the hangars, killed the guard with a knife, crawled into the cockpit of the jet fighter, ripped off into the pink dawn. They climbed after him. He went around in a screaming arc, leveled out twenty feet above the ground, and smashed himself and the alien ship into whining fragments—but he took with him six of the enormous bombers.

A destroyer, the last of the fuel almost gone, cut all lights, drifted like a wraith through the night, drifted with the tide into a vast harbor where the enormous supplies of invasion were being unloaded under the floodlights.

Erupting with all weapons, with the boiling wake of torpedoes, the can fought and smashed its way down the line of freighters, drifting at last, a flaming ruin into one last supply ship,blanketing it in the suicide flame.

In the Sangre de Cristo Mountains three full divisions hide, and at night the patrols in strength smash invader communications, blow up ammunition dumps. When the bombers sail out at dawn to punish such insolence, nothing can be seen but the raw red rock of the mountains.

The Invader, taunted and stung from every side, lashes in fury, destroying without cause, forsaking all plans of gentle administration to rule by flame and by the firing squad and with machine guns aimed down the deserted streets of the silent towns.

The common denominator is fury, and the pain of loss. But thirty-five millions, the city dwellers, are yet hostage to
the new weapon of emotional resonance, and as the long
days go by, the empty and hopeless days, once again within
them builds up the cretin joy, the mechanical gaiety, the
vacuous death-dance, threatening to explode once more
into crazy violence.

Thirty-five millions, tied, one to another, by a life-rhythm
so carefully adjusted as to be the final indignity meted out to
the human spirit.

They have not left their cities and neither the attacks of
the Invader nor the destructive joy of the adjusted has served
to destroy those cities.

The Invader, wise in the ways of his own weapon, evacuates
his troops from the afflicted cities during the week before
the emotional peak is reached.

Joe Morgan, grown to new stature during this time of trial,
has carefully husbanded his strength, has made no move so
flagrant as to cause a punitive column to be sent to the small
lake. He has sent his men on recruiting missions and his force
has grown to over two hundred.

Seventy miles away is a small city where, before the in-
vasion, there was a splendid medical center. A spy returns
and reports to Joseph Morgan that the doctors from the
medical center have been impressed into the medical service
of the Invader, that they work in the original medical center,
now filled with Invader troops.

Joe Morgan remembers a feature story he once wrote—
on a certain Dr. Horace Montclair.

Five days before the adjusted were to reach their emotional
peak, their five-day orgy, Joe Morgan, leading a picked group
of ten men, crouched in the back of a big truck while another
of his men, dressed in a captured uniform, drove the truck
up to the gate of the medical center.

The gate guard sauntered over to the cab window, reached
a hand up for the transportation pass. The entrenching tool
smashed the guard’s throat and he dropped without a sound.
The truck rolled up to the main building and Joe led the ten
men inside.

In the stone corridor the weapons made a sound like a
massive hammering on thick metal.

But four men backed with Joe out the door to the waiting
truck. One of them was Dr. Montclair.

The dead guard had been found. Whistles shrilled near the
gate. Joe, at the wheel, raced the truck motor, smashed the
slowly closing gates, rode down the men who stood in his path.
He took the road west out of town, as planned, pursuit in swifter vehicles shrilling behind them.

At the appointed place he stopped the truck. The five of them ran awkwardly across the field, dropped into a shallow ditch. The pursuit screamed to a stop by the abandoned truck. A patrol spread out, advanced slowly across the field.

At the proper moment Joe shouted. The rest of his command, the full two hundred, opened up with a curtain of fire. Two men of the patrol turned, tried to race back, and they, too, were smashed down by the aimed fire.

In the black night they circled the town, headed back across country to the quiet lake. The return trip took three days.

The windows of the cabin were carefully sealed. Joe Morgan sat at the table facing Dr. Montclair. They were alone, except for Alice who sat back in the shadows. She, like Joe Morgan, had acquired a new strength, a new resolution, born both of anger and despair and the shared weight of command.

"It was daring, my friend," the doctor said. He was a small man with too large a head, to frail a body, looking oddly like an aging, clever child.

"It was something we had to do," Joe said, "or go nuts sitting here waiting for company."

"I didn't care for you, Mr. Morgan, when you interviewed me. I thought you lacked integrity of any sort."

Joe grinned, "And now I've got some?"

"Maybe that wryness which is an essential part of you is what all men need in these times. But we are getting too philosophical, my friend. What can I do for you?"

"Doc, you've studied this Trojan Horse of theirs, where the people defeat themselves. What's the answer?"

"Just like that? The answer?" Dr. Montclair snapped his fingers. "Out of the air? Answers have to be tested. I have suppositions only."

"There isn't much time to set up a lab to do the testing. Just pick your best supposition and we'll work on it."

Dr. Montclair rubbed his sharp chin, stared at the table top. "Obviously one of the basic qualities of the disease, and we will call it that, is the progressive infectiousness of it. The peaks are intensified by the proximity of the other victims. Thus one possible answer is isolation. But the infected must be thinned out to such an extent that they do not, in turn, infect their neighbors, eh?"
“Oh, sure. Thirty-something million people, so we isolate them.”

“Do not be sarcastic, Mr. Morgan. Another thought is whether, if a man were drugged heavily enough, it would delay his cycle so that his peak would come at a different time, thus destroying the synchronization which appears to be the cause of resonance.”

“Look, Doc, those suppositions are interesting, but we have a little war on our hands. I’ve been wondering how we can turn their Trojan Horse against them. A horse on them, you might say.”

“They have withdrawn from the focal points of infection, my boy. They are unwilling to risk infection of their troops.”

“How many men would you say they have inside our borders?”

“I can make a guess through having seen consolidated medical reports. Forty divisions, I believe. With service troops you could estimate the total strength at one and a quarter millions.”

Joe Morgan whistled softly.

He said: “In two days the peak of hysteria hits again. The cities will be like . . . like something never seen before on earth. How does the Invader plan to handle it after all resistance has stopped?”

Montclair spread his hands, shrugged his shoulders. “Do they care? Left alone the thirty-something millions will at least tear themselves apart. The human mind cannot stand that constant pattern. Suicide, laughing murder. They will cease to be a problem and then the empty cities can be occupied safely.”

“There’s nothing we can do in time for the next big binge?”

“Nothing,” Montclair said sadly.

“Then we’ve got roughly thirty-two days to dream up a plan and put it in operation. What’ve we got? A few hundred men, ample supplies, a hidden base and some expert technical knowledge. We’re not too bad off, Doc. Not too bad off at all.”

VIII.

STATUS SUMMARY, RADIO REPORT BY COMMANDING GENERAL, EXPEDITIONARY FORCES: Resistance continued to stiffen up until ten days ago. Then, when the peak of hysteria was reached, the cities ceased to operate
as supply bases for guerrilla forces. Death in the cities was high, our forces having withdrawn to safe positions to avoid contagion. The breathing space was used to track down and eliminate hundreds of irregular groups engaging in punishing ambushing tactics. Our lines were consolidated. Resistance by organized and uninfected detachments of the enemy army continues high, but their position is, of course, hopeless. With amazing ingenuity they have constructed certain airfields which our bombers have, as yet, been unable to locate. But it is merely a question of time. It is regretted that so many of the naval vessels of the enemy were permitted to escape the surprise attacks, as they are definitely hampering supply.

REPORT BY COMMANDING GENERAL, ARMIES OF DEFENSE, TO THE PROVISIONAL PRESIDENT: Supply and manpower is no longer adequate to permit the utilization of standard military tactics. All our forces are now concentrated in mountainous regions in positions which cannot be overrun except by Invader infantry. All labor battalions are now engaged in the construction of defensive points. All future offensive action will be limited to patrols. It is thus recommended that the production facilities now housed in the natural caves be utilized entirely for small arms ammunition, mortar projectiles, pack howitzer ammunition. Strategy will be to make any penetration of our lines too expensive to be undertaken. The critical factor is, as previously stated, food supply.

EXCERPT FROM STENOGRAPHIC RECORD, MEETING OF PROVISIONAL CABINET CALLED BY PRESIDENT TO HEAR PROPOSAL OF GUERRILLA LEADER:

President: I wish to explain, gentlemen, that Joseph Morgan, with four of his men parachuted behind our lines from an aircraft stolen, at great cost to his organization, from the Invader airfield twenty miles west of Daylon. Two of his men were shot by our troops as they landed.

Morgan: We had no way to identify ourselves.

War: Do you have any way to identify yourself now? Some of our people have been willing to turn traitor for the sake of their future safety.

Morgan: Don’t you think I could have picked an easier way?
President: Gentlemen, please! Joseph Morgan has been thoroughly interrogated by our experts and they are satisfied. Mr. Morgan has been in conference at his base with a Dr. Montclair, an endocrinologist of international reputation. He brings us a proposal which I, at first, refused to countenance. Its cost is enormous. But it may end this stalemate. I ask you to listen to him. I could not make this decision by myself. I have not the courage.

Finance: This is not a stalemate. This is slow defeat. I will favor any plan, no matter how costly, which will give us a shred of hope.

Morgan: I'll outline the plan and then give you Montclair's reasoning.

Winter war. December has blanketed the east with a thin wet curtain of snow. Winter is hard on the irregulars, but works no hardship on the troops of the Invader. The vast food stocks of the nation are his, as are the warm barracks, the heated vehicles, the splendid medical care.

A guerrilla with a shattered ankle dies miserably in the cold brush, near the blasted fragments of the house in which he took shelter.

The cities are thinned of people. For the first time it is noticeable. The last emotional debauch took five millions. Now there are thirty millions left. They have a breathing spell.

Invader troops are given leave in the cities. They go armed. They sample the wines, flirt with the women and sing their barbaric songs and gawp at the huge trenches which were dug to bury the dead of the cities.

Once again there is light and heat in the cities. The winter is cruel, but there is heat. And there is foodstuffs in the markets, though not enough. Not nearly enough.

Were it warm summer, possibly the adjusted would leave their cities, would go into the countryside to be away from the places of horror. In the south and in California they try to leave, are roughly herded back by the Invader who seems to say, "Stay in the traps I have prepared for you and die there."

This is a policy decreed by a man named Lewsto who, high in the councils of the Invader, walks with pigeon tread and squared shoulders, the new and highest medal of his country shining on the left breast of the drab uniform.

Cyclical nightmare. The slow upward climb toward crescendo has begun once again, and no man looks squarely into
the face of his neighbor, knowing that he will see there some of the fear and horror that has coldly touched his heart. And yet, each man and woman has a secret place which revels in the thought of the nightmare to come. It is like an addiction to a strange drug. Nightmare there must be, and death there must be, but with guttural shouts of animal joy, with a wild, unheeding passion of insane laughter, when consequences are not considered, nor are the customary mores and folkways.

Each adjusted person in the city feels shame in his heart because, though he knows that pure nightmare lies ahead, nightmare which he may not survive, he yet anticipates it with a certain warm and soiled sense of expectancy.

This, then, is the conquered country, the proud race, the men who know defeat, and yet cling to the manner of their defeat, an overripe fruit, plucked once each month.

In a silent cabin Alice sits at the crude table and the glow of the lantern highlights the strong cheekbones, the limpid mouth, and she is beautiful indeed.

Dr. Montclair sits opposite her. Quickly he touches her hand. “He will make it, Alice. I know he made it.”

“He’s gone. That’s all I know. Somebody else could have gone. But he had to go.”

In the brush there is the quick and angry spat of a rifle, the answering sound of an automatic weapon, like some vast fabric being torn, the fabric of the night.

As Montclair takes the weapon propped against his chair, she quickly blows out the lantern and, together in the darkness, they listen.

Hoarse shouts from the brush, the authoritative crump of a mortar, alarmingly close, a scarlet blossom against which each bare twig stands out with the bland clarity of death.

“They’re coming in from both sides,” she whispers.

The rifle fire fades and slugs grind against the cabin walls, throwing splinters that whine.

Montclair is on his belly on the porch, Alice behind him in the doorway. As they come running across the slope toward the porch, running with the heavy thump of men in full equipment, Montclair sprays a line of fire across them. Many fall, but the others rush the porch. She fires again and again, seeing Montclair die suddenly, firing until the hand slaps the rifle away.

She is thrust into a corner and there are six of them in the room, seeming to fill the cabin. The lantern is lit and they
look at her and talk among themselves and she knows that she should have saved one of the rifle bullets.

Two of them advance toward her, slowly. They spin and snap to attention as the officer enters. He looks at her, snaps something at the men. Then, with surprising gentleness he lifts her to her feet. He leads her up through the brush to the waiting vehicle. She turns and whimpers in her throat as she sees through the black lacework of trees, the flower of flame that grows from the cabin.

Every remaining plane is committed to the venture. Every last one.

Brave men have managed, somehow, to set up the short wave radios behind the Invader lines.

The teams are carefully instructed. And there are several teams for each portion of the venture, as losses will be high.

At last the word comes. The great emotional springs are once again winding taut. The word comes. "Today the Invader moved all personnel out of the cities."

Joe Morgan, burdened with sixty pounds of equipment, climbed laboriously into the belly of the transport. The interior of the aircraft was dark. Cigarette ends glowed and the men laughed with the calculated steadiness of men who are gambling life itself.

The officer stood in the doorway and said: "Team Eighty-two?"

Joe answered, "Eighty-two, Morgan commanding. All present and accounted for."

The officer jumped down and the big door slammed. The huge cavern in the side of the mountain reverberated to the roar of many motors. The very air shook and quivered with the vibration. Outside the dozen were dragging the rocks off the runway.

At last the cave doors were rolled back. The first transports rumbled awkwardly to the doorway, gaining speed, gaining agility, moving out, roaring along the runway, lifting off into the night.

Team Eighty-two was airborne and Joe, squinting through the side window saw the streaked jets of the fighter cover. The scene was duplicated at other hidden fields.

Ten minutes before interception on the basis of radar watch over the mountains.

Interception came. Invader pursuit ships were dark lances in the night. Distant flames, like weak candles, blossomed
briefly and were gone in a red line of fire toward the sleeping earth.

The lumbering transport weaved heavily through the night, and Joe Morgan sat in a cold agony of fear.

From time to time he glanced at the illuminated dial of his watch. At last he said loudly, over the motor roar: "Fasten static lines."

He reached up and snapped his own, tugged on it to test it.

Ten minutes, twelve, fifteen. The wing lifted and the transport slipped down, down, to where the city lights glimmered through the overcast. Spiraling down.

The plane seemed to brake in the air as the flaps caught hold, seemed to waver on the very edge of instability.

The wind was a shrill blast through the open door. "What are you doing here, Morgan?" Joe asked himself softly.

He braced his hands against the sides of the door, saw the target area below. The man behind him had a hand on Joe's shoulder.

Joe stepped out into the night, into the cold, tumbling night, and the flatness of the city spun around him like a vast wheel. The sharp jolt caught him and he swung pendulum-wise toward the darkened earth, swinging under the pale flower of silk.

Then he was tumbling on the frozen ground of the park of the big city, grasping the shroud lines, bracing his feet, fumbling with the buckles. The chute collapsed and he stepped clear of the harness.

"Over here," he yelled. "Over here."

Roll call. "Peterson, Barnik, Stuyvessant, Simlon, Garrit, Reed, Walke, Purch, Norris, Humboldt, Crues, Riley, Renelli, Post, Charnevak."

All but one. One was imbedded to half his thickness in the frozen earth.

They were in a silent circle around him.

He said: "You all know this town like the palm of your hand. You each have your sectors and your instructions. You know the plan and you know that it has to work."

He was silent for a moment. Then he said: "After it goes off, it's every man for himself. We meet back here. Good luck."

At base headquarters of the Invader, the commanding general listened gravely to the report of his Air Intelligence.
After listening, he made his decision. “Apparently they desire to set up, within the cities, focal points of resistance. You believe that men were airdropped into every one of the major cities and most of the smaller cities which are infected. It is obvious to me that they underestimate the extent of hysteria which will hit the cities within four days. We will wait until after the hysteria, until after the suicide period, and then we will go in and eliminate the men who were airdropped.”

The reporting officer saluted, turned smartly and left the office.

Joe Morgan stood in the cold gray morning and looked at Daylon. He had found and taken over one of the many empty rooms in the city. The city had suffered greatly.

He carried a heavy suitcase. As he walked down the morning street he looked carefully at the houses. Whenever he saw an empty one he broke in quickly, opened the suitcase, took out a small package the size of a cigarette package.

In each house he left the package in a different place. But the favorite spot was in the cellar, wired to the rafters overhead.

He saw a few people that he knew. They looked blankly at him, smiled and went vaguely about their business.

The people of Daylon were lean and ragged and their eyes were hollow. But they smiled constantly.

In mid-morning, a smiling policeman in a dirty torn uniform asked him what he was doing. Joe said: “Come in here and I’ll show you.” The policeman followed Joe through the door Joe had forced.

Joe pivoted, hit the man on the chin with all his strength, walked back out of the house carrying the suitcase.

Carefully he covered the sector he had allotted to himself. Public buildings, houses, garages, stores. In many places he had to be extremely cautious. In stores he hid the packages among slow-moving merchandise. The city went through the motions of existence, but on every face was the look of expectancy.

Four days before the explosion of emotions, before the laughing orgy of death. Three days. Two days. The last of the packages has been placed. But there are four much larger packages to be delivered.

And these are delivered at night.

At night he found a stout iron bar, used it to pry up the
manhole covers. The large packages nestled comfortably against the welter of cables and pipes.

This is the day before the tight spring will snap. Already there is empty laughter in the streets of the city, in the streets of all the vast cities.

The armies of the Invader, well removed from the focal points of contagious hysteria, clamp severe restrictions on all areas to prevent the curious from sneaking off to the cities.

At eleven o’clock on the morning of the day before pandemonium will reign, the streets of the cities vibrate to the massive thump of subterranean explosions. Steel manhole covers sail up into the air, turning lazily, smashing pedestrians as they fall. The underground caverns roar with burning gas and then the roaring is gone as the severed water pipes spill the contents underground.

All electricity ceases to flow.

One hundred and seventy-one teams won through. Sixteen men to a team. Four bombs and one thousand of the deadly half-ounce packages to each man. Ten thousand nine hundred and forty-four explosions in the bowels of the great cities. Two million, seven hundred and thirty-seven thousand of the deadly packages distributed.

For this is a kind of suicide, on a vast and generous scale.

The packages are closely co-ordinated. A few sputter prematurely, but within a few minutes after the explosions, the acid has eaten through the lead shields within more than half of them. They flame into life, burning with a white dazzling flame that has an intensity of twenty-four hundred degrees Fahrenheit and a duration of twenty minutes. All of the fading resources of an almost-conquered nation has gone into the preparation of these packages of death.

With the water supply crippled, there is no possibility of fighting the fires.

Whole streets erupt into flame and the melted glass of the windows runs across the pavement.

It is almost too successful. The densely populated eastern seaboard is one vast pall of smoke drifting in the crisp December air.

Too many die in the flames. Far too many.

But from the roaring furnaces of the cities nearly thirty millions wind like sluggish worms into the countryside.

They have fear of the flames, fear of death, fear of pain—but it is not until tomorrow that they will be unable to feel fear.
And so, with empty idle smiles, with vacuous eyes, they move toward the vast camps of the Invader.

The Invader is outnumbered by the victims of his satanic adjustment—twenty-five to one.

Too late, the danger is seen.

The camps of the Invader are near the cities. They straddle the main roads. Machine guns are manned and white-lipped men fire prolonged bursts into the crowds that move so slowly. And at last they are revolted by the slaughter of these who smile, even in death, and they refuse to obey the orders.

The day darkens and in the night the cities are vast pyres that redden the sky. The cities of America burn with a brave flame and the sound of the roaring can be heard for many miles. The fire is behind them and the guns, unmanned by now, are ahead of them.

At dawn the Invader orders the armies to retreat away from these mad ones, to retreat to the fastness of the hills.

But already the infection is at work. Already the spirit of spontaneous hysteria has begun to infect the troops of the Invader.

Massive tanks sit empty while men shout hoarsely and dance in the street. The planes are idle, the guns unmanned, the officers joining their men in a frenzied rapport with the victims of disaster.

Suddenly the spirit grows among them that they are celebrating victory. Victor and vanquished revel until they fall exhausted, sleep, rise to bellow with laughter, to stare with glazed eyes at the winter sky, howl with the voices of wolves.

It is a party of death, lasting for day after day, with all thought of food forgotten, and the cities burn brightly every night and the winter sun by day is shrouded with the drifting black smoke of utter destruction.

STATUS REPORT, HQ, ARMIES OF DEFENSE: At dawn today all columns were within striking distance of all corps headquarters of the Invader forces. Scouts report utter exhaustion in enemy ranks, black depression among individuals, a constant sound of small-arms fire indicating a high incidence of suicide among the Invader troops. All personnel has strict instructions about the destruction of equipment. The attack will begin at dusk.

INTERCEPTED RADIO FROM CONVOY COMMANDER: Convoy taking reinforcements to our armies attacked
at dawn by strong naval force of enemy. Some of our ships, manned by enemy, were among attacking vessels. Numerous troop ships bombed out our own planes, apparently manned by enemy forces. Loss incidence so high that we were forced to turn back at ten hundred hours. Request immediate air cover if convoy is to proceed.

Joe Morgan held tightly to the trunk of a small tree halfway up the slope six miles from Daylon. Even at this distance he could feel the intermittent waves of heat against his face.

But five men were left of his group. They were scorched, blackened, drugged with weariness.

"Listen!" he said.

The six men stood, listening intently. They heard the rising sound of battle, the hammer blows of artillery, the distant thin crackling of small-arms fire.

The crescendo of battle rose sharply, faded, subsided, until they could hear nothing.

"Five bucks says we took them," Joe said.

IX.

FIRST NATIONAL PROCLAMATION: The determined attack to land another force on our shores has been beaten back with heavy losses to the enemy. At the moment our continental limits are intact once more. Hourly we grow stronger as we manufacture weapons to supplement those taken from the Invader armies after the burning of the cities. The Invader has been weakened by the loss of the cream of his troops, the most modern of his equipment. Three of our naval teams are pursuing the shattered remnants of the Invader convoys. This morning the Invader capital was subjected to intensive bombing and his principle port was rendered untenable by an underwater explosion of an atomic bomb in the main ship basin.

Joe Morgan stood in the barren hallway of the temporary building which housed the hospital and said, uneasily, to the young doctor: "Is there anything I shouldn't bring up? I mean, she had such a rough time that maybe—"

The young doctor smiled. "A week ago I would have restricted the conversation. But that was the day she found out that you were safe. A powerful medicine, Mr. Morgan."

"Can I—"

"Go right in. She's expecting you."
Alice was pale against the pillow, and, as she stretched her hands toward him her eyes filled with tears.

Joe held her close for long minutes, then said: "Tell me about it if it'll help. If it won't help, I'm not going to insist."

"You know about the camp?"

"Yes. Montclair's body was still on the charred porch."

"A young officer took me in a staff car to their central headquarters. They had taken one of your men, one that was wounded when you took the plane from the field near Daylon. They . . . they made him talk, but he didn't know enough. They thought I would know more."

Joe's fists tightened.

"Lewstow was there. When they were taking me down a long hall I met him face to face. He went to someone in authority and got permission to interview me. I didn't want to be . . . hurt. So I told him a few things. Almost right, but not quite right. He believed me.

"The day the fires started he came to the room where I was held. He knew I had tricked him. He sent the matron out of the room. I had stolen the matron's scissors. I . . . I stabbed him in the side of the throat with them. It didn't kill him quickly enough. He shot me as I left the room."

He stroked her hair back from her forehead. She smiled, "Don't look so grim, darling. It's all right now. Honestly. I was in their hospital when the people came from the city. It was madness. Worse . . . much worse than the time when you saved me in Daylon. That seems a thousand years ago."

"It was a thousand years ago."

"We . . . we're winning now, aren't we?"

Joe smiled. "We've won. That is, if it's possible to win a war."

"What will we do now, Joe? They'll let me up in a few days."

There was a window in the hospital room. From it he could see the distant blackened skyscrapers of what had once been a city.

He said slowly: "They've isolated all the 'adjusted' ones. There's a pitifully small number left, you know. The medics are making progress on undoing the adjustment, on fitting the people back into their original, individual pattern. Isolated, the peaks aren't as high or the depths as low. So that work is going well, and now all we have to look out for are the fools."

"Fools?" she asked.

He gave her a tired smile. "A lot of people want to re-
build the cities. They're stuck in the past. The city is an extinct beast, like the dodo. We burned beautiful and irreplacable things, but we also burned mile after mile of squalid streets and dirty slums.

"No man should live crammed into a dark room near his neighbors. We have room to expand, and to grow. This has to be a nation of small towns and villages. In no other way could we have got rid of those vast, ugly, nerve-jangling cities of ours. To regain our strength we will have to live closer to the land. Our transportation is efficient. Factories can be placed among wooded hills."

He turned back and looked quickly at her as he heard her warm laugh.

"What cooks, angel?"

"Oh, Joe," she said, "and I asked you what we would do. There's a lot to be done, isn't there?"

"An awful lot."

"Would it be all right to have just one thing rebuilt? Just one place?"

He walked back to her and took her hand. "Angel, if you mean that miserable little cabin, you might be interested to know that reconstruction starts next week. It'll be finished when you're ready to leave this outfit."
Some Day We’ll Find You
By Cleve Cartmill

For good, old-fashioned, ‘way out, world-of-tomorrow science fiction melodrama, the following richly complicated tale of interplanetary adventure is unreservedly recommended. It is quite astonishing, indeed, that it has taken twenty-one years for the story to be anthologized; it first appeared in Astounding Science Fiction in December, 1942.

Of course, we believe that some of Cartmill’s ideas about the other planets in our system are—if not out-and-out wrong—at least highly unlikely. The answer to this cavil, as long as we actually have not explored our solar system, is—“So what?” At least you have a magnificent tale, which should keep you glued to your chair for a mesmerized half-hour or so: and that is what you—and I, the editor—want.

Afterthought: It is interesting to remember that in the March, 1944, issue of Astounding, Cleve Cartmill had a story called “Deadline” about an atomic bomb, the technology of which was so accurate in certain respects that it brought the FBI swarming around the magazine’s editorial offices. In other words, Mr. Cartmill’s science is hardly what you’d call “all” fiction. Like any really top science fiction, it has its basis in existing knowledge.
Mr. Cuppy ran a savage eye down the list of payments to the Hunt Club, Inc. When he noted the total to date, his thin, sharp face screwed into a mask of rage. He flicked sparkling eyes at his waiting assistant in the briefest of glances, and jabbed a stud on his desk with a shaking finger.

Then he addressed a burning look at the young man who had totted the account, who stood waiting for instructions.

"Well?" Mr. Cuppy barked. "What are you waiting for? Your arteries to harden?"

"N-no, sir," the young man stammered. "I thought——"

"Ha!" Mr. Cuppy exploded caustically. "Not in my memory. Get back to your work."

As the young man fled, a face filled the desk screen before Mr. Cuppy. The face was large, young, with calm dark eyes and a mouth which bespoke a kind of deadly humor.

It was a face to command the respect of men, for it was quietly arrogant, sure of its power, poised, self-possessed. It was a face before which employees would touch their foreheads with index and middle fingers. And so they did—all but Mr. Cuppy.

"Junior," he said with gentle, quiet fury, "just what are you trying to do?" His voice began to rise. "Break up Trading Posts, Inc.?" This was as much of a roar as Mr. Cuppy's aging lungs could manage.

The face in the screen cracked a tiny smile. "What have I done now, Mr. Cuppy?" The face sighed. "When my father turned this company over to me, he told me there'd be days like this."

Mr. Cuppy thrust the list of payments at the screen. "Look! Just take a look! For six whole months we've been paying out good money—good money, mind you—to Thorne Raglan to find a couple of space tramps. Did he find them?

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No! And are you still throwing good money after bad? You are. Loren Bradley, this nonsense must stop!"

"But, Mr. Cuppy. I need those men."

"Why? You can hire a hundred, a thousand good engineers for half what you're paying just to find Ben Wellman and... and... what the devil's his name?"

"Harold Stopes."

"You've scoured the universe," Mr. Cuppy went on testily. "And now"—he paused, bit his thin lips in an effort to keep his voice from trembling—"you bring a man from Mars to hunt for them and... and, damme, pay his transportation!"

Mr. Cuppy spluttered to silence, glared at the image of Loren Bradley. IV. Bradley's broad mouth twitched with amusement.

"Mr. Cuppy, I have more bad news for you."

Mr. Cuppy glared.

"Maybe you'd better come to my office," Bradley suggested. "If you see what I'm buying, you may approve. I suspect that you can still appreciate beauty."

"Pah!" Mr. Cuppy spat, and cut the circuit.

He tapped the list of expenses with a thoughtful finger for a moment, then strode into the corridor on short, brisk legs. He stepped on a moving ramp, ignoring employees who touched their forehead at his green badge, and was lifted to the next floor. He padded along the corridor, breezed through President Bradley's reception room without a nod to the pretty girl at a desk and thrust through Loren Bradley's door.

"Now what?" he demanded.

Bradley waved a large hand at a girl in civilian tunic. "Miss Jones, this is Mr. Cuppy, my chief accountant and man behind the throne. He runs this organization, in his way. Mr. Cuppy, touch the head to Jennifer Jones, our newest employee."

"Umph!" Mr. Cuppy grunted, and inspected her.

His eyes did not light with appreciation of her startling blond beauty. No smile of delight touched his mouth as he noted her shrewd blue eyes, her lithe form, her long brown legs, her small feet and graceful hands. He was sternly silent.

"I'm terribly excited over it," she said in a voice which did not indicate any excitement whatever. "Imagine me, Jenny Jones, working for Trading Posts. Why, its the biggest thing in the universe. Daddy says it is the universe."
Mr. Cuppy turned sourly to Bradley. "Why tell me, Junior? You can surely hire clerks without tying up the whole organization in a verbal spree." He turned to Jennifer. "I am unable to express my wild delight, Miss Jones, in the fact that you are to be one of us. This old heart throbs like a Jovian spacer, this gray head spins like a Jovian moon. Good day!"

He turned abruptly away, but halted when Loren Bradley spoke sharply. "Cuppy!"

Mr. Cuppy turned to see Bradley's face no longer pleasant, to listen to words without a trace of amusement.

"Mr. Cuppy, you will carry Miss Jennifer's salary—a large salary, by the way—and her expenses as a charge to the Wellman-Stopes account. You will be informed of the accounts."

Mr. Cuppy purpled. "You will not speak to me in that tone of voice, you young puppy! I'll take orders, but not like that."

Bradley smiled, not with amusement. "When I please, I shall speak to you as I please, Cuppy. It pleases me now to apologize. However, the order stands."

"And what," demanded Mr. Cuppy, "is this young lady to do? We've spent a fortune already with Hunt Club, Inc. Is she Thorne Raglan's niece? Are we to add nepotism to our business crimes?"

A soft chime interrupted Bradley's answer, and he spoke into his communivox. "Ah?"

"Mr. Raglan on your visivox, sir."

"Connect me."

Thorne Raglan didn't look like a hunter. He was moon-faced, with a glow like that goddess of the night. This effect, perhaps, was wrought by small blue eyes that twinkled over mounded pink cheeks. His short pug nose was almost lost in an expanse of geniality.

"Lorry," he said to Loren Bradley IV, "I touch the head. How's the old space robber?"

"Hello, Thorny." Bradley said quietly. "I'm pretty busy, as a matter of fact."

"Then I won't keep you, chum. Brief, that's Raglan. Everything's brief about me but my waistline and my bills. Eh? Well, here it is, short as a dead comet's tail. Craig Marten arrives at Spaceport 9 in thirty minutes. Got it? Good-by."

"Wait!" Bradley said. "I want to ask a couple of questions. Your reports on Wellman and Stopes, and your biographical material on Marten show that the three could have met at one time on Pluto. Do you know anything about it?"
"Certainly, Lorry. That's why I'm bringing Craig from our Mars office. He's been a damned good director, but he has at least seen our quarry, which is more than the rest of my staff can say. You know, I've told you that I suspect one or another of our men has seen them here, but, hell, how would he know? I'll turn all my dope over to Craig and he'll run 'em down in short order."

Bradley pounced on the hint of new information. "Here? What makes you think they're here?"

"I was going to surprise you, Lorry," Raglan said affably, "but you caught me up. They've been traced here—by Craig."

Bradley's dark face lighted with an unaccustomed look of pleasure. "Good work, Thorny. There'll be a bonus for you."

Raglan's chuckles, as he cut off, were mingled with a low moan from Mr. Cuppy.

"What am I going to tell the stockholders in my next report?" he wailed. "Do you realize, Junior, that more than sixty million persons have actual cash invested in this corporation? Are they going to like their quarterly dividend to be cut because you want to meet a couple of tramps?"

"I'm sure you can fix it, Cuppy," Bradley said with a half smile. "You always have, for three generations of us. Now. You asked what Miss Jones would do to earn her salary. She's to make an acquaintance, develop it into friendship, and marriage if necessary."

Mr. Cuppy was so startled he could say nothing for a moment. When he did speak, the fire was gone. "A matrimonial bureau," he murmured sadly, "What next?"

Bradley covered a combination of desk studs with his fingers. When the chime sounded, he spoke into his communivox.

"Spaceport 9 immediately. Bring him here."

"Yup," said a voice.

Bradley cut the circuit, raised an eyebrow at Jennifer Jones. "You're clear on everything?"

"I believe so," she said crisply. "How soon shall I meet him?"

"Within the hour."

"Is my apartment ready?"

"I don't know," Bradley said. "Check with my secretary on your way out."

She turned to Mr. Cuppy. "I am very happy, she said in tones which held no trace of happiness, "to be with you, Mr.
Cuppy. I touch the head.” She did so, and swung out on slim brown legs.

Mr. Cuppy watched her with hard, light eyes, then turned to his employer. There was no bluster in Mr. Cuppy now. He was in deadly earnest. His voice was quieter, and did not quaver any more.

“Junior, please explain this.”

“Sit down, Mr. Cuppy.” He waited while the little accountant did so. “It’s very simple. I think I can trust Craig Marten, because Thorne Raglan vouches for him. But I can’t afford to trust him. On this matter, I can’t trust anybody, except perhaps Jennifer Jones. She’s got to be all right, because I can lift a finger and ruin her. She knows it, and will deliver.”

Some of Mr. Cuppy’s crispness came back. “Deliver what, for the love of Heaven?”

“Wellman and Stopes, Mr. Cuppy. When Craig Marten finds them, she will inform me, and I’ll take care of them personally.”

“But Craig Marten is hired to inform you.” Mr. Cuppy protested. “Why double the expense?”

“And suppose,” Bradley said, “that Marten decides to double-cross me. Suppose he is offered more than I can pay. Miss Jones will be a good investment in that event.”

“But what makes you suspect him? And where will a couple of no-goods like Wellman and Stopes get that kind of money?”

“I don’t suspect him, Mr. Cuppy. But I can’t afford not to go through the motions. That kind of money? Mr. Cuppy, I have information which hints at a large fund, plenty large to buy Craig Marten. If that should happen, and if Wellman and Stopes should elude us, we are done for, you and I. Done for, Mr. Cuppy.”

“Don’t be so blasted mysterious, Junior!” Mr. Cuppy snapped. “What will they do, drop a nova on us?”

Bradley sighed. “The story is too long and complicated to tell now. I haven’t time. But I tell you that the very existence of Trading Posts, Inc., depends on our finding Wellman and Stopes before it is too late.”

Mr. Cuppy rose. “Very well. Do you remember what I said when this search was launched? I said to put a two-dollar want ad on telecast. But no. You wanted to do it in the grand manner. I have a word or two to say—”

Craig Marten had finished packing, ordered a bottle of Mercurian wine, and settled back to enjoy the sunny liquid
when a knock on his stateroom door brought a mild oath to his lips. He pushed plastibags out of the way and answered the knock.

The long, homely handsome face of Jorg van Hooten was not quite as serious as usual. It seemed to Craig that the young diplomat must have received cheering news. He was almost smiling.

“I know you wanted to rest on this last leg of the drop,” Van Hooten apologized, “but I’ve just had a radiograph.”

“Come in, come in. Sit down. I’ll get another glass.”

The two young men drank their usual toast.

“Freedom,” they said, and touched glasses.

“So?” Craig said. “What’s new?”

“Organized unrest,” Van Hooten replied. “It will help. A hundred colonists killed at Mars Port Main when they tried to capture a Trading Post spacer. Maybe Congress will listen this time. The first rumbling of revolt should bring them upright.”

Craig’s space-tanned face set in lines of puzzlement. He turned his glass with lean brown hands and frowned into it, eyes dark with thought.

“Aren’t you jumping the gun, Van? They’re not organized. One spaceship wouldn’t do them much good. They need a fleet.”

Young Van Hooten pushed aside this minor point. They’re not after the ships themselves. You know there are hundreds in the Mars bone yard. Ships are scrapped on Mars because their metal is worth more there than on Earth. Many of them could be put into serviceable condition—if. If the Baltex formula could be duplicated.”

“I still don’t get it.”

“Why, Craig!” Van Hooten was astonished. “Why do you think Martians are barred from approaching spacers nearer than five hundred yards? You know they can copy anything once they nose around with their mind tendrils. Let one Martian into the control room of a spacer, and Trading Post’s monopoly is broken. That was the reason for the attack. It was unsuccessful, yes. But there’ll be others. Some day, one will be successful.”

“Well, I don’t like it.” Craig’s long jaw slid out like a landing fender. “I’ve got here”—he tapped his waist, around which, under his shorts, was strapped a belt—“the answer. If I can deliver this fund to Wellman and Stopes, we won’t need Baltex.”

Van Hooten shrugged. “It’s the better part of strategy
meanwhile, Craig, to play up this revolt angle. If the World Congress will add a rider to the agreement with Trading Posts, allowing the planetary colonies to trade among themselves, we will gain time and save lives. Because how do we know you can find Wellman and Stopes?"

"Remember the Hunt Club slogan," Craig said grimly.

"'Some Day We'll Find You.'"

"Some day isn't good enough, Craig."

"That day isn't far. I feel it."

Craig's mouth set in a stubborn line. From the moment he had consented to deliver this fund to the vanished engineers, he had had conflicting problems. He had to hide his purpose from the Earth central office, and he didn't like it. He and Thorny had knocked around the System together.

In addition to his distaste of not playing quite fair with his boss, Craig distrusted political deals. Look where such deals had brought the System. He didn't know the details, but it was perfectly obvious that a deal had been made between Pier Duvain and Loren Bradley some generations ago when the former took off on the first spacer for Mars.

Since that time, the Bradleys had maintained a monopoly on trading. All shipping to and from the colonies cleared through Trading Posts, Inc. The colonies were held in economic bondage of a sort, their pattern of life determined by the mother planet.

One thing was clear. The colonies would break away eventually, by revolt or other means.

One means was here, in his money belt. Wellman and Stopes had a process, a new method of propelling spacers. All they needed was backing, and Craig had it—a great fund collected in driplets all over the System from colonials who wanted to cut the economic apron strings of Mother Earth.

"Sometimes," Craig said with a touch of bitterness, "I wish I'd never got into this."

"Don't you want the colonies to be self-sufficient?" Van Hooten demanded.

"Oh, sure. But my personal position is rather uncomfortable."

"Revolt," Van Hooten said, "whether economic or by violence, is never pleasant—to either side." He got to his feet. "Well, we're almost in. You'll let me know who your client is?"

"If Thorny will tell me," Craig said. "It may be confidential."
“It’s rather vital that I know, Craig. If your boss has thrown in with—”

“Thorny doesn’t ‘throw in’ with anybody, Van. He’s in this business for money. He’s hired to find somebody, dead beat, husband, wife, what-not, and he charges a fee. I doubt if he has any political convictions. But he does know how to keep his mouth buttoned. I’ll see what I can find out, though. Shall we eat as soon as we land? I want a big, big, really big, fresh steak. I’ve been dreaming of one for a week.”

“Right,” Van Hooten said, and left.

When the big ship was cradled, the passengers filed through the disinfectant tunnel and cleared through customs. Craig and Van Hooten presently stood on the great landing platform under the architectural mountain that was Trading Posts, Inc. They headed for one of the exits, and were intercepted by a young man who touched his forehead to them.

“’Ambassador Van Hooten?’” he asked Jorg. “Mr. Bradley begs that you see him in his office.”

“I,” Van Hooten said under his breath to Craig, “am about to be bribed.”

“I’ll go along and wait for you, Van. Make it short, will you? I’m hungry as an asteroid wolf.”

They had to wait a few seconds in Bradley’s outer office under the apologetic eye of the pretty brunette who informed Bradley of Van Hooten’s arrival. Craig found this pleasant, for he regarded pretty girls as among the higher natural phenomena.

Within half a minute, however, a fuming little man burst out of Bradley’s office. He was red-faced with anger.

“And now a blasted female!” he flung over his shoulder. He glared at Craig and Van Hooten, then bustled away.

Loren Bradley IV came to the doorway. Craig’s eyes lighted with appreciation of the picture of quiet power the man made. He looked at the two colonials with calm welcome, and a slight question in his dark eyes.

“Mr. Van Hooten?” he asked uncertainly.

They rose, and Van Hooten stepped forward. “I touch the head,” he said, but did not do so. “This is Craig Marten, my friend.”

Bradley touched his forehead. “Mr. Marten, I shan’t keep your friend long. Meanwhile, the place is yours.”

Craig reseated himself, and watched the little secretary about her various tasks. He wondered if she would like to go
to dinner with him sometime. These provincial girls on Earth were often bursting to hear of adventure on far planets.

He was on the verge of proposing such a junket when Van Hooten followed his outthrust chin through Bradley’s door. Craig followed him into the corridor.

“Why so grim, Van?”

Van Hooten preceded Craig to a main entrance ramp. “I was offered everything but sole ownership of the Moon. They’re scared, Craig. We’ve picked the right time to strike. Well, this means I must get to work, and can’t keep our dinner date. Sorry.”

“But you have to eat, Van!”

“I will,” Van Hooten said abstractedly, “sometime. Let me know the minute you learn anything. I’ll be at the Vector Arms for a few days.”

They shook hands, and Craig stood indecisive in the main door for a moment. Should he call Thorny? Or should he ask Bradley’s secretary to dinner?

He decided on the latter, and turned abruptly toward an ascending ramp.

What appeared to be a blond-tipped projectile lunged toward him. It was only a fraction of a second before impact, but in that fragment of time he noted that she was in a tearing rush, that she was looking back over her shoulder, and that her knotted hands, unless parried, would strike him in a most painful spot.

He writhed away, trying to avoid her, and she rammed him. He staggered. She turned her head. She grabbed for him, in an attempt either to steady him or to keep herself upright, but succeeded in pushing him headlong and falling heavily in his face.

They disentangled themselves, ringed by amused spectators. She sat up, great blue eyes brimming with apology, and in one swift glance Craig saw that she was a beauty of first magnitude.

“I’m sorry,” he said quickly. “My fault.”

He helped her to her feet, and she swayed warmly against his chest for an instant.

“But it was mine,” she murmured. “I hope you’re not hurt.”

She gave him a deep blue glance so filled with concern that he almost patted her head. “I’m not hurt, I’m hungry,” he said, grinning. “Suppose we continue this headlong acquaintance over a dinner menu.”
"If you'll be my guest," she said. "I must pay for my clumsiness."

They went out the door arm in arm. Craig shook his head in wonder. "My first day on Earth in four years," he said. "And I'm knocked down by a vision who promptly feeds me. I'm doing all right."

"Are you from Outside?" she asked, overtones of excitement in her voice. "Is that how you became so tall and brown?"

Craig smiled to himself. He was doing all right and plenty, he thought.

II.

Thorne Raglan's outer office was designed to put customers at their ease. Its chairs were triumphs of plastic art, modern in line, but with aspects of the old comfort reputed to have characterized Plastic Center in the old days when there was a Plastic Center. The floor covering likewise was clearly new and expensive, but reminiscent of ancient homeliness. The clean dull walls were sprinkled with peaceful scenes.

Wives who came here seeking an elusive husband were lulled by this quiet dignity, so that when they faced the massive Raglan across his equally massive desk, they remembered the little things about their men—how they brushed their hair, their favorite dishes, their idiosyncrasies responsible for such loving concern.

Credit managers who sat in these chairs soon relaxed so that the bill which some vanished debtor owed was not the only burning question. They remembered personal characteristics of their quarry, how he smiled, how she raised an eyebrow.

These characteristics were duly entered on the plasticard files of Hunt Club, Inc., and remained for reference in a vast room where a hundred young men and women were always busy adding and classifying information. Thorne Raglan often said that he knew more embarrassing facts about more people than any man alive.

For they were here, in a vast room, the little things. If a man kicked a cat, and that fact became a matter of public news or private business, it was entered on a card bearing his name and cross-filed on a card labeled "Cat—kickers."

Here, too, were entered data which often aided the police in tracking down one or another person who shrugged off irksome restrictions of written or unwritten laws. Such
use of Hunt Club facilities was inadvertent, for Throne Rag-
lan’s concern was with civil rather than criminal fugitives. 
Nonetheless, he found co-operation with authority to be profit-
able on occasion, and he considered any man an idiot who 
would overlook opportunity in this economic category.

None of the bustle of his reference room penetrated to his 
huge private office, and he found this pleasant. Since he no 
longer took part personally in tracking down some mislaid 
or elusive mortal, and since his investigators were efficient 
young men and women, he had much time for meditation. 
He liked this, for motion was a strain on the arches of his 
feet.

He was resting those ample extremities on the polished top 
of his desk when the call came from Loren Bradley. He 
jerked his feet from the desk with unaccustomed alacrity, for 
the Trading Posts’ account made a sound like the horn of 
plenty. He activated his desk screen with an eager fat finger, 
and it was filled with the forceful features of the man who 
was sometimes called Master of the Universe.

“Thorny,” he said, “I want to stress again the importance of 
young Marten not knowing that Trading Posts is your 
client.”

Promised you, didn’t I? Wouldn’t make much difference, any-
way. Craig and I are pals. Besides, you know and everybody 
knows that my men are loyal. Wouldn’t have them around 
otherwise.”

“There’s a first time for everything.”

“But not with Craig, Lorry. He’s my best man. Most trust-
worthy. But I won’t tell him. He can’t find out, then. Nobody 
knows it but you and me, unless somebody in your outfit.”

“Two,” Bradley said, “aside from myself, know. They 
won’t talk.”

“Looks as if everything’s all right, then,” Raglan said 
cheerfully.

“Have you talked to Marten?”

“Not yet,” Raglan chuckled. “Expected him to call when 
he got in yesterday, but I guess he met a girl. Isn’t supposed 
to report till this morning, anyway.”

“A weakness for women is dangerous.”

Raglan chuckled again. His paunch jiggled. “Mostly it’s 
the other way round; they got a weakness for him. They’re 
always beauties, too. He doesn’t talk business with ’em. 
Would you?”

Bradley smiled, waved a careless good-by.
“Don’t forget,” Raglan said, “that promise of a bonus.” He cut the circuit, replaced his feet on the desk, and smiled. With such a bonus as Bradley would dish out, he could afford to establish another branch on Venus.

Raglan’s smile remained, as did his feet, when Craig entered. He waved casually, as to an old friend with whom formality is unnecessary.

“Home the far wanderer,” he said.

Craig grinned wryly. “I’ve spent so much time in the Belt and the colonies, the Outside seems like home. How about you?”

“Home is where my bank is,” Raglan said simply. “Why didn’t you call me?”

Craig sank into a chair which fitted his long frame with exquisite comfort. “Last night? You’re fat.”

“Don’t be devious, my lad.”

“Seems obvious to me, Thorny. You’re fat, and a blonde I met—know—isn’t. So I didn’t call you.”

“A true one will never be found,” Raglan quoted lugubriously. “‘They love a man for his money.’ That ancient folk song, my boy, is truth. You spend your money and build up tender memories. Can you eat ’em, pawn ’em?”

“You’d better pay me more, then,” Craig said pleasantly. “What’s all the sweat, by the way, over couple of space rats? It’s costing somebody a lot of dough, apparently.”

“Praise be,” murmured Raglan. “We have a client,” he said in businesslike tones, “who wants them. Therefore, we find them.”

“Who’s the client?” Craig said casually.

“Sorry,” Raglan said shortly. “The name is in my confidential file.” He tapped his head with a chubby pink finger.

Craig rose, stretched his long arms. “Better get to work, then. Got an empty office?”

“Take your pick, boy. The office staff is yours, too. Command as you choose.”

Craig looked steadily at the pink face of his employer. “This case must be important.”

“That mounting sound you hear,” Raglan chuckled, “is our bank balance. If you get a hot lead, let me know instantly.”

Craig stood at the door for a long moment, steady eyes on Raglan. Then he nodded, went out to the file-room entrance. He stood on the identity plate, held up his badge, and stepped into the verification vestibule. He stuck his hands,
palm upward, through the fingerprint wicket, waited until the green stud glowed on the wall, and moved to the second door. He showed his badge again, and pointed to the green stud. The door opened, and he entered the seething room.

"It's all right," he said, grinning at the lemon-faced woman at the desk. "I just dropped in to get warm."

A faint smile hardly disturbed her wrinkles. "I touch the head," she said, not doing it. "Your pleasure, Mr. Marten?"

"I wouldn't call it that," he said. "Will you send the complete Wellman-Stopes files to me in Office B?"

She touched studs on her panel, and Craig went out to the comfortable office with plain, undistracting walls. He sat at the desk with its studded panel, its long-distance and local visiscreens, its array of masks hanging on one end.

He smiled with self-amusement as he recalled an incident which had almost cost him his job on his third day with Hunt Club. A large fee had been involved, which a department store had been willing to pay to find a young woman who had vanished, owing a tremendous bill for clothes and accessories. Craig had been assigned to the case and finally located the shy young lady. He made a call, and also the mistake.

From the rack of masks, he had picked one which he thought was labeled "Professional" in stencils across its forehead. He then represented himself as an attorney who wished to inform the young lady of an inheritance.

Several moments had passed before he understood why the apartment manager, who answered his call, had laughed in derision and cut the circuit. He understood when he removed the mask and saw "Public Zoo" stenciled on its surface.

It had been an understandable mistake. In his early zeal to make a record, he had been careless. Furthermore, he had gone to the master cabinet instead of choosing from those more common masks which hung on his desk. But because of the size of the fee involved, Thorny had almost fired him.

He looked up as a young man brought him a large file case. "I'll let you know if I need help," Craig said.

He set to work on the hundred-odd cards which had accumulated during the fruitless—thus far—search for Ben Wellman and Harold Stopes.

As Craig combed the data, remembered images came back
to him. Remembered from the one time he had met the two on Pluto.

Ben Wellman emerged, tall, loose-jointed, with a voice that spoke barely above a whisper even in times of stress.

Harold Stopes, short, chunky, bull-voiced, came out of the cards to his mental vision.

And all the facts. How they had once worked for Trading Posts, Inc., in the Research Department. How they had been fired for something vaguely labeled "incompatibility." How Wellman had gone into the asteroids, a prospector of space.

Here were the names and comments of men who had known him. They told how he never complained, cold or hot, hungry or gorged. Here was a mention of his saving a man from one of the flying wolves of Astarte. Here was a note on his fondness for broiled baby Wuk-Wuk, in the preparation of which the aborigines of Venus excelled. Here was a description of his next meeting with Stopes, and their excitement, the saga of a drunk on Mars during which Wellman at no time raised his voice above a loud whisper. They stayed together, and came to Earth.

Wellman dropped out of the accounts at this point, and Stopes became the active member. He made trips out to the various colonies, where he conferred with this and that colonist. The subject of those conversations was not listed, but Craig knew. Money. Money to develop the process they had, money to break the stranglehold of Trading Posts.

Craig felt a glow of exultation. Nobody knew, except himself. Hunt Club investigators had failed to cajole or surprise the colonials into naming the project of Wellman and Stopes.

And now the narrative of Stopes turned back to Earth. His spirits were high, according to the captain and passengers of the spacer in which he rode. He spent freely in the saloon. Then he vanished.

All effort of Hunt Club investigators in all parts of the System had failed to contribute a further piece of data.

Craig went back over the cards, picking out an item here and there for investigation. It seemed clear to him that the men were here, in this city. They had landed here, and no record of any company indicated their leaving.

Of course, he reflected, some other person could have purchased their fares, thus leaving his voice timbre on record. But, Craig thought, the odds were against their getting away, for somewhere along the line, some official would have
compared their voice timbres with those noted on their chits, and questions would have been asked.

There were records, in supplementary data, of many such instances, but none which pointed to Wellman or Stopes. A man rode on his wife’s chit on occasion, or a woman on her sister’s. And all the other variants of the situation. But nowhere was a mention of a whisperer, or one with a rating of 8.7.

Craig began now to enjoy the job. He was through with the routine examination, and engaged in choosing facts which might have been overlooked by other investigators. There was a certain creative quality in this phase of an investigation, he thought. You examine a man’s infinitesimal habits, his tiny peculiarities, and you create him, as it were, in a certain place at a certain time.

You can predict, with some degree of accuracy, where a man will entertain himself in a given area, once you know his propensities. If he likes exotic food, you may find him at one time or another in an out-of-the-way exclusive restaurant where the bill far exceeds the quantity of food served. Or, if he is a tippler, he will be found, more than likely, in one of the cellar hangouts which stay open after hours.

Craig made a separate list of personal traits of the two men and sat back to compare them. He checked duplicate traits and made a third list of these.

They liked dogs, and might own one. They had frequent haircuts, usually at the same time. They gambled, and were especially addicted to Plutarchian Six-Two. Craig made a note of this, for not many places could afford to import the fissured spheres cut from Pluto’s klantherune mountains.

The chime of his communivox brought Craig back from that craggy range of incredibly hard hills on Pluto.

“Yes?”

“Mr. Marten? You have a masked call on the visivox.”

“What kind of mask?”

“Public booth, sir.”

“Put it on.”

He activated his screen, and the colorless plastic with its stenciled legend came into focus.

“Craig Marten?” asked a pettish male voice.

“Who are you?” Craig asked.

“Never mind!” the voice snapped. “You are tracing the whereabouts of Wellman and Stopes. Unless you drop the
investigation instantly and resign, you will be killed. If you do this, you will be rewarded.”

“Who says?” Craig asked calmly.

The voice behind the mask became calm, too. “This is no idle or melodramatic threat. It is made in deadly earnest.”

“By whom?”

“I will not bandy words until you can have this call traced. Good day!”

The screen went abruptly blank. Craig touched the stud on his communivox.

“Yes, sir?” asked the operator.

“What was the rating on that voice?”

After a small silence, “Three-point-oh-eight, sir.”

Craig made a note. “File your record of the conversation and send a copy to me.”

“Yes, sir. Right away.”

Craig ran through the file once more, noting voice ratings. He found a few of 3.08, but none that could possibly belong to the man who had called, for they were all dead but one, and he was a colonial known to Craig personally.

He leaned back and cursed for a moment, cursed the law which allowed anonymous calls. Though Hunt Club’s masks were vital to its efficient operation, he wished for a moment that the civil liberties group had lost their fight ten years before.

Then he noted the time, and wondered if Jennifer Jones would like to make a tour of the night spots. He thought it the better part of strategy to appear as a young blade taking his girl for a whirl. Besides, he liked the smugness which appreciative eyes on her aroused in him.

He called her.

She would like.

III.

Since all spacers cleared through Trading Posts—for a nominal fee—and all passengers, crew members, et cetera, eventually made an exit through the main doors of Trading Posts, it was inevitable that an establishment such as the Outsiders’ Club should come into existence nearby.

It was famous throughout the System, and it was a common saying that if you waited long enough in the big gaming room you would eventually see every person you had ever known. “See you in the Outsiders’” was an accepted phrase for “good-by.”
They all came through its brilliant plastic doors—miners rich from a strike in the Belt, colonials laden with the spoils of commerce, salesmen seeking a spree before returning to their wives or offices, Space Patrol hardies wishing to lay in a store of memories to brighten the next sweep around the System, tourists bulging with vacation money, down-and-outers who could see a free show.

The show was there, under the smooth managerial hands of Billy Bedamm. He admitted this to be a pseudonym which he had dug out of an ancient piece of writing. His legal name was on file with the proper authorities, forgotten, no doubt, by them.

His origin was obscure. He showed traces of a Martian flush, and he was small, which added to the effect. He had beady black eyes, a common Venusian trait. He had swift white hands, and walked silently on tiny feet.

He moved through clients who crowded his tables of chance, nodding, smiling, watching, remembering. He carried a classified index in his flat, sleek head, and a Payne coagulator on his hip. He maintained no staff of bouncers; if trouble came, Billy Bedamm settled it in his deadly, soft-spoken way.

He didn’t like violence, for he realized that every dead, or even insulted, customer meant that his coffer filled at a slower rate. He was pacific by inclination, but not by nature, for if trouble was unavoidable he was ready for it.

There was the evening, a few weeks ago, when trouble flared at the Six-Two table, for example.

The stakes were high, and the customers who lined each side of the long table were tense with excitement. They laid their bets on numbered plastic squares before them, and watched the chute at one end of the table. They caught their breath sharply as the gleaming sphere, with its radioactive fissures, rolled almost silently from the chute and along the trough which divided the table along its major axis.

Overhead, in the exact center, the golden arrow spun against its circular, numbered sheet of dark plastic. As the Plutarchian ball passed the center area, radiations shooting from one angle or another, bombarded the sensitive mechanism which spun the arrow and brought it to an abrupt halt. The number to which it pointed, and the color of that number, determined the winners who had covered duplicating numbers and colors on the squares before them.

Once in so many times the ball passed in such a manner
that no radiation touched the arrow and it continued to spin. In this event, the house paid all betters at the rate of six to two, and to those who had placed their bets on the no-play square at the rate of sixty to two.

The large young man who had been drinking heavily was guessing wrong. He was playing a system, as most gamblers played the game, but he was out of phase. He was flushed, his thick red hair was tousled, and his chips were flowing steadily into the dealer's slot.

He placed his last bet, all of his remaining chips on a square. He turned bloodshot eyes to the chute.

"Bets down," called the dealer, and pressed the activating button.

The arrow spun, the ball sped through. The arrow spun. No play.

"I win," the young man cried. "I'm on no-play."

The dealer eyed him stonily, pointing to the bet. The large young man looked down and flushed as red as his hair. He turned to the man on his right, with slitted eyes and clawed hands.

"You shifted my bet, scum!"

The accused, a long, lanky, space-tanned man of middle age, replied in tones barely above a whisper.

"You're mistaken. I didn't touch your bet."

"You're a liar, and you're going to pay—with a beating."

The dealer, and the men and women around the table, commanded the young man to be quiet, but he leaped at his neighbor. This one, with surprising agility, slid away from the rush and allowed the redhead to plunge past to where he was brought up short by the nozzle of Billy Bedamm's coagulator.

"Give him his money, exactly what he has coming and no more," Billy commanded the dealer. To the young man, "Take it and get out. You're annoying my guests."

"Robbery, too, huh?" the redhead snapped. "This is one time you won't get away with it."

He lunged at Billy Bedamm, and Billy pressed the activisor. The redhead twisted, stumbled, and plunged directly into the deadly stream. He fell to the floor, dead.

The ensuing investigation by summoned officers of the law absolved Billy of blame and established the fact that the redhead was a file clerk at Hunt Club, Inc. The space-tanned stranger with the soft voice had vanished, leaving his winnings on the table. Thorne Raglan was notified on the following day, the redhead's relatives received a large anonymous check, and the incident was closed.
When they left the third bar, after one glass of Mercurian wine each, Craig became certain that he was being followed. From the time he had left the office he had been almost subconsciously aware of a wraith somewhere behind him. While waiting in Jennifer’s apartment for her to put the finishing touches to her costume, he glanced through a window and was almost—but not quite—able to distinguish an alien shadow in the gloom below.

He was dizzied by the contrast between her black costume and her blond hair when they left her place, and too pleasantly conscious of admiring glances in the first place they stopped to notice anything out of the way. If a flying wolf had swooped through, he probably would have noted that its eyes flicked at Jennifer in carnivorous approbation.

He conducted his investigation, yes. He talked casually to bartenders and waiters, he asked artless questions, but he had one eye always on Jennifer, and his mind on what a nice-looking couple they were.

But when they emerged from Paul’s Parallax, he caught from the corner of his eye a bare hint of movement across the street. When he focused on the spot, he could see nothing.

As they walked arm in arm toward the bright facade of the Outsiders’ Club, he decided on a course of action.

“I’m being followed,” he said to Jennifer “I want to get a look at whoever it is, so I’m going to park you at a table in Billy Bedamm’s and circulate.”

She looked at him sharply, and began to turn her head. “Don’t!” he snapped. “Don’t look behind; we’ll scare him away.”

“I was just wondering,” she said thoughtfully, “if it’s you or me who is being followed.”

“Why should you be followed?” he scoffed. “If you were alone, sure. People would be crazy if they didn’t flock after you. But you’re escorted this evening.”

After a short silence, she said lightly, “Maybe the shadow thinks you’ll fall over dead.”

“Then he’s cutting out a career for himself.”

The feeling Craig had for Jennifer’s reaction was not suspicion. Not yet. All the same he wondered why she should be afraid that she was followed. And if her fear was correct, who was following?

Jennifer, on her part, devoted some thought to this same question. It was not likely that Bradley was having her shadowed. He knew she would play fair. She couldn’t afford not to. He wouldn’t put anyone else after Craig, either, not
after her first report to him on progress. If Craig was being followed, then, who was doing it? There must, she decided, be a third group interested in the whereabouts of Wellman and Stopes. The Hunt Club, Trading Posts, and X. She, too, would like a look at the man behind.

Inside the Outsiders’ Club, the evening was at its height. Bar patrons had not yet drunk too much, gamblers had not yet lost everything. It was at that indeterminate point where no man could tell whether it was to go down in history as a brawl or as run-of-the-mill.

Every fifteen minutes, a voice knifed through the hubbub. It issued from monitors which were connected to the traffic control office of Trading Posts, Inc. The Outsiders’ Club and similar spots in the neighborhood received the message:


These announcements had visible effect on isolated groups, couples, and individuals. A pretty girl and a young man in Trading Posts’ ivory touched glasses in a dark corner gravely, bravely, sadly; a group at the bar pounded one of their number and told the bartender what a great guy their friend was; a little man with a traveling case glanced at his watch and turned anxious eyes on the main door.

Gaming-table crowds paid no heed to these announcements. They watched the play, made their bets, rejoiced or cursed at the result.

Craig bought Jennifer a stack of chips at the Stardust table, patted her blond head, and went in search of Billy Bedamm.

Craig showed his identity badge, said, “I’d like a talk.”

Billy swept the room with a beady glance, said, “Come on,” and led the way into his office.

“If you’re here about the redhead,” Billy said, when they were seated and had cigars going, “you’re wasting time. It was self-defense.”

Craig did not change expression. He knew nothing about a redhead, but there was no point in putting his ignorance on display.

“What’s one more or less,” he said, shrugging. “I’m here on a different matter. You know who I am?”

“I know. I’ve heard Thorny rave about you often enough.”
“Well, I’m looking for a couple of mugs. I hear that you have a memory.”

Billy Bedamm’s sharp face softened. It had a look of preening.

“Once I get my optics on somebody,” he said smugly, “I don’t forget ‘em.”

“One of these boys I’m looking for,” Craig said, “hardly ever speaks above a whisper. He’s tall, and lanky, and has a deep space tan. Remember anybody like that?”

Billy slit black eyes at Craig. He knocked the ash off his cigar. He was quiet for a long time.

Then, “if you’re trying to stick him for the redhead’s . . . uh . . . demise, you’re off the beam. I shot the kid, had to. I told Thorny, and sent the kid’s family a check.”

“Hell with the redhead!” Craig said sharply. “I don’t know anything about him. But there was a soft-spoken guy here? He’s the one I’m after.”

Billy Bedamm considered, then answered cautiously, “Yes.”

“Where does he live?”

Billy shrugged. “Don’t know. Hasn’t been back since. He was in here a few times with a stocky guy who damn near bust my eardrums when he talked. Then alone, and then—nothing. Left his chips behind.”

Craig got the story, cursed the fact that the redhead was a file clerk instead of an investigator, and went out to find Jennifer.

The crisis had passed, as far as the evening was concerned. Customers were beginning to cash in their chips and drift away from the tables. It was time to go home. Jennifer, however, had hit a winning streak, and Craig watched her hit play after play for an hour.

“Better cash in,” he said then. “I have to go to work tomorrow.”

She threw a wide blue glance up at him. “They’ll be angry if I go away winner.”

“That’s the chance they take.”

She raked in her chips, cashed them, turned the negotiable proceeds over to Craig, and they went up to the landing roof for a taxi. They selected a large, comfortable machine, and told the pilot to “fly around awhile.”

“Why,” Craig asked presently, “were you afraid of being followed? I don’t mean afraid exactly, but why did you suspect that it might be you instead of me?”
She looked down on the city which gleamed beneath. She was silent for a long time, during which silence Craig verified his suspicion that another taxi was trailing them.

"I can't tell you," she said finally. "Do you mind?"

"Very much," he said shortly. "I'm beginning to develop a fondness for you, and before it goes too far, I'd like to know something about you."

"Don't you approve of what you know and see?" she asked.

"Very much," he said honestly, "but I want to know more."

"There isn't much to tell," she said. "I was born on Mars, and I came here several years ago. I've lived an ordinary life. My mother died long ago, my father is still alive."

"Where is he?"

"He's working. He's a bookkeeper for a big company."

Craig leaned forward, gave the pilot Jennifer's address.

"What's the matter, Craig?" she asked in puzzled tones.

"Nothing!" he snapped, and relaxed in his own corner.

From the corner of his eye, he saw the green running lights of the trailing taxi.

Whoever was in it, he thought, belonged to the group which had warned him off the Wellman-Stopes search. This meant that the persons who warned him were not Hunt Club's clients. Ergo, they must know where Wellman and Stopes were. He needed a talk with the person or persons who were in the taxi behind.

And this blond beauty, he thought, this Jennifer, sulking in her own corner. Why should she be followed? He resolved to check Hunt Club files tomorrow for her. She apparently didn't want to talk about herself, and he wondered why.

The taxi swooped down at an apartment roof. Craig hurried Jennifer out, paid the pilot, and pulled her quickly toward the entrance door. When they reached it, he yanked her to one side into deep shadow, and they waited.

"What—" she began, but he clamped a hand over her mouth."

"Quiet!" he hissed, and watched the sky.

The second taxi came silently in to a halt, and one figure disembarked. This came cautiously toward the door, with what appeared to be a coagulator in one hand. Several yards away, it halted and pointed the object into the shadows where crouched Craig and Jennifer.
“All right!” a male voice snapped. “I was watching the door. It didn’t open. So you’re in there. So come on out!” Craig held a steady hand on Jennifer, indicating that she was to remain where she was, and said, “You’ve caught me.”

He advanced into the fan of light from the entrance door. “Who are you?” he asked.
“Never mind!” snapped the man. “You’re Craig Marten?” “That’s right.” Craig crossed the area overlooked by the door, so that the man turned in a half circle to keep the coagulator trained.
“What do you want?” Craig asked.
“You were warned,” the man said. “Now you die, or—” His words choked off in a harsh cry. There was a thump! as a form streaked from the shadows. Then Jennifer stood over a fallen form, coagulator in hand.
“I hope I didn’t injure him permanently with that kick,” she said, and gave Craig the weapon. “Let’s drag him inside.”

They did so. He was a small man, in his early thirties, Craig judged. He bore no identification. They searched him, and found nothing. Craig noted all characteristic detail, or so he thought, and they waited for the man to recover from the fall, in which he had struck his head on the hard plastic roof.

Presently he opened dark-brown eyes, gleaming with chagrin and anger. Craig pointed the sidearm.
“You’ve got a name, and your boss has a name. What are they?”
“My name is Brown,” the man answered sullenly, “and so is my boss.”
“That’s a lie,” Craig said, “but let it pass. Why are you after me?”
“My boss doesn’t like the way you part your hair.” “Listen!” Craig said grimly, “I’d be justified in killing you. I’m not going to, because I want you to deliver a message. You know where Wellman and Stopes are, don’t you?”
“Suppose I do?” The man sat up, rubbed his head.
“Then tell ’em Van Hooten wants them to see me. Can you remember that?”
“Am I an imbecile?” the man countered.
“You should know,” Craig said. “Take off.” The man got to his feet and went through the door to the taxi signal with a certain arrogance. Craig turned to Jennifer. “Whoever you are, I think you’re wonderful.”
She raised blue eyes alight with honest pleasure. "You're not so bad yourself. Wonder who he is, the man with the funny ears?"

"Funny ears?" Craig was puzzled.
"Yes. They have no lobes."

"Why—" Craig began, then broke off. She had been on one side of the bogus Brown, he had been on the other. He focused memory on the ear he had seen. It had been small, flat, and perfectly normal. "How do you know?" he asked.

"I noticed particularly," she said, "because mine are that way. Look." She showed him. "No lobes. That's why I wear my hair over them."

"I see."

Craig took her to her door, said good night, and went out to the taxi signal pondering the man with one ear which had no lobe. He should be easy to identify, through Hunt Club's files or other means.

IV.

Harold Stopes stood wide-legged in the center of the room, a drink in one hand, hard lights in the eyes that fixed three who lounged in various attitudes on chairs. Though the drink was a sybaritic touch, Stopes was a figure of danger. He looked like one of the stocky, short-legged Uranian bears about to charge.

"I don't like it!" he said in his deep bull-like voice. "Marten hasn't hurt us. He's a good guy."

Gus Haaker, who wore a mechanic's star on the belt of his shorts, spoke soothingly. "Look at the whole picture. Hal. All we got to do is wait. We know the money was collected, and somebody will get it to us. Well, we can't let Craig Marten find us. He'll tell Raglan, Raglan will tell Bradley, and Bradley will have us burned down."

Ben Wellman, from a corner behind Stopes, raised his head from a diagram he was making. "I wish they'd hurry," he complained in a voice just above a whisper. "I'm getting tired of this canned hay we're eating."

"You're getting your vitamins, Ben," one of the other men said. "You're healthy."

"It's the feel of the stuff," Ben said. "I'd like to tear some fresh meat apart."

"You know we can't take the chance, though, Ben. If anybody but Craig Marten was looking for you—but he's everywhere."
“Maybe we could make a deal with Marten,” Stopes boomed. “He’s a colonial.”

“He’s a Hunt Club man, too,” Gus pointed out. “You know what that means. Listen, what I want to know is, are we a democratic committee or not? The majority voted to burn Marten down. Sure we don’t like it, but is his life more important than colonial freedom?”

“All right, all right,” Stopes acceded. “But I still don’t like it. Suppose, though, that Foxy gets caught at it. He’ll be taken in custody.”

The three men laughed in derision, and Ben Wellman went back to his diagram.

“Caught!” Gus snorted. “Foxy could sleep in your own bed with you and you’d never know it. Maybe he won’t get Marten tonight, but he will tomorrow, or tomorrow.”

Stopes tossed down his drink, paced back and forth on his stocky legs, brows furrowed. “Maybe Van Hooten didn’t make a deal with Bradley,” he suggested.

“He was there, wasn’t he?” Gus asked with crushing logic. “But maybe the Old Man was mistaken.”

“The Old Man don’t make mistakes,” Gus said. “Not when he’s waited this long to do Bradley in.”

“I sure am hungry,” Ben Wellman broke in with a whisper. “You work the bugs out of that top circuit,” Stopes commanded. “That’ll do us more good than food.”

“But I have,” Ben whispered. “It’s all right now.”

This brought the three men to their feet, and they, with Stopes, crowded around Wellman’s board. They took one brief look, and vented a chorus of cheers.

“He’s done it!”

“The old genius!”

“Why didn’t I think of that?”

They pounded Wellman on the back, and he grinned with pleased embarrassment, showing a row of large teeth.

“I’m still hungry,” he whispered, when they had quieted. “You can have anything you want,” Stopes promised, “even if it’s out of season—when we get the money.”

“This calls for a drink,” Gus said, and poured glasses.

“Freedom,” they toasted, and drank.

“Now,” Stopes said, “we’ve got to get rid of Marten. I give in. As long as there was a chance our converter wouldn’t work, I didn’t like it. But now it’s necessary.”

“Leave it to Foxy,” Gus said.

The door chime cut off their clamor. One of the men
touched a wall stud, and they looked at the identity screen. It filled with familiar features—of a man whose ears didn’t match. The door slid up, he entered, the door sealed again. Nobody said anything. They waited for Foxy to speak.
Foxy stood with his eyes downcast. He said nothing.
“Where’s your gun?” Ben Wellman whispered.
Foxy’s small head jerked up. “All right!” he snapped.
“Let’s have it. Get it over with.”
“He . . . he took it away from you?” Gus demanded.
“How did I know,” Foxy said bitterly, “that damned blonde was still with him? She kneed me.”
There was a short, tense silence.
“Where is he?” Stopes boomed.
“Aw, shut up!” Foxy growled. “How would I know?”
They looked at him. He quailed under the hard eyes.
“Now listen, fellows,” he pleaded. “Not that. I been through enough!”
They looked at him.
“Listen!” Foxy begged. “He sent you a message. Said Van Hooten wants you to see him.”
They crackled. “I’ll bet he does!” Gus grunted.
“You won’t gain anything,” Ben Wellman whispered, “by burning Foxy. Maybe he couldn’t help it. Others have tried to scare Craig, or get him, and he’s still around.”
A small flame of hope flickered in Foxy’s eyes, and he looked as if he would grovel at Ben’s long feet.
They considered Ben’s remark. The quivering silence almost reduced Foxy to jelly. Finally, they all looked at Har-old Stopes. The final decision was to be his.
“All right,” he said. “I guess Ben’s right. But we can’t let morning find Martin alive. I think we’d all better go. You know where he’s staying, Foxy?”
“Sure, Hal, sure. At the Orbit. I’ll show you.”
“Get your guns, then. Let’s go.” As Ben Wellman failed to join the hurried, silent movement, “Coming, Ben?” Stopes asked.
“No,” Ben whispered. “Craig bought me a meal once. That seems very important, hungry as I am.”
“You’ll wait here?”
“Sure.”
“Eat a bowl of Granulax.”
Ben Wellman made a mouth of distaste, and watched them troop away. He looked at the drawing with bored eyes, then sat quite still for a few moments, thinking.
He thought of Craig Marten, and the young man’s reputa-
tion. In the colonies—on Venus, Mars, Pluto—Craig was known as a man who could find anybody. It was said that he operated on the strength of hunches, and that his hunches paid off. Otherwise, it was said, he could not finish his job in such phenomenal time.

But it was also said that Craig Marten was loyal to the colonies, that he wanted to see them free from Trading Posts' economic yoke.

Ben Wellman began to get an idea. Perhaps Craig's main office had brought him here not only because he was Hunt Club's best operative, but also because he knew his quarry by sight. And perhaps Craig was handling it as any other job. But if he knew that Trading Posts was behind the search, in an attempt to maintain its hold on colonial economic life—perhaps Craig Marten would throw in with this group.

Ben did not dare tell Craig without consent of the others, but he could save the young man's life meanwhile.

To think was to act. He donned the "private" mask, called the Orbit Hotel on the visivox, and soon Craig's long, tanned face filled his screen.

"Get out of your room," Wellman whispered. "You'll be killed. They're coming for you."

The face on the screen spoke desperately. "Listen, Wellman, I want to see you. I have something for you."

"Good-by," Wellman said, and cut the circuit.

Ben Wellman felt immensely better. He had done his part, whether Craig took the warning seriously or not. He hung the mask back on its hook, and hunger fell on him like a cloud. This long stretch without fresh food had palled on him some days ago. He considered the question of going out to a restaurant.

Craig was busy, either in fleeing or in getting killed. Wellman decided to go out. To be discreet, yes, to patronize a small place which would not be crowded at this late hour.

On the front step of his apartment house, he found a thin plastic sheet announcing that broiled baby Wuk-Wuk was a speciality—today only—of the Planetoid Restaurant, located nearby.

Ben Wellman drooled. Mere thought of the delicacy caused a stream of gastric juices to flow. He set off at once toward the restaurant, noticing in passing that announcements had been left at all doors along the street.

He was the Planetoid's only customer, which suited him
perfectly. He went to a dim-lighted table, gave his order to the waiter.

He did not see the waiter confer with the manager, did not see the manager enter the public visiobooth, did not hear, "He's here. Sooner than you thought."

When Craig Marten reached his hotel room, he sat. He tried to fit together into a connected pattern the apparently disconnected pieces of information he had picked up. Who was after him? Who wanted to see him dead?

As far as he could see the only persons interested in Wellman and Stopes remaining hidden would be Wellman and Stopes themselves. If this were true, how did they know he was looking for them?

The answer to this was clear. Somebody in the office of Hunt Club's client was a double-crosser, already in touch with Wellman and Stopes.

Who, then, was the client? His first guess would be Trading Posts, Inc., for that company had more to gain by keeping the Wellman-Stopes process, whatever it was, off the market. But the process was reputed to be a well-guarded secret, as were the collections which had landed finally in his own money belt. Yet, he considered, let more than one person in on a secret and it is less likely to remain a secret. And hundreds knew at least something about the fund and its purpose.

Assume, then, that Trading Posts was the client. Somebody high in its councils, or somebody who had the confidence, or Loren Bradley IV was the double-crosser. Who? When he thought of the thousands of employees of the mammoth concern, he grew slightly dizzy at the prospect of narrowing the list down to one.

He wondered, too, about Jennifer Jones. Was she a piece of this puzzle? He tried, but could not fit her anywhere, with the meager information he possessed. He'd better search Hunt Club's files.

The man with one lobeless ear was the subject of immediate investigation. It was possible that data on him might be in the files.

Craig got to his feet, started for the door, when his visivox chimed. He identified his caller, in spite of the mask, as Ben Wellman, and stood exulting silently after the conversation. He had been correct, then.

There was a third group, aside from Hunt Club and—possibly—Trading Posts, concerned with the whereabouts of Wellman and Stopes.
So they were going to kill him!
He considered waiting for them, informing them of the fund, and watching developments. He discarded this. Suppose they shot first?
No, he would run them further to earth, and inform them when they were not in a position to burn him down. He left hurriedly.
When he was in the file room, he told the night shift supervisor to send him the file on “ears” which had to do with persons in this area. When the file came to his office, he found a man, Joe Fox, who answered the description. He had once worked for Trading Posts, an experience he shared with Wellman and Stopes.
He checked the voice rating: 4.8. Craig recollected that his assailant of the evening had had quite an ordinary voice, rating near the 5.0 normal.
He could not decide definitely on the man, of course, but it was a lead. Now, for Jennifer Jones.
His visivox chimed, and Tony Whalen, proprietor of the Planetoid informed him that Craig’s ruse had paid off in record time. Craig sent back the file, hurried up to the landing roof and took one of the firm’s private taxis to the restaurant.
He took a chair opposite Wellman, said pleasantly, “You owe me a meal, I believe.”
Wellman didn’t jump. His eyes didn’t widen. He sat motionless for a few seconds.
Then, “How did you do it?” he whispered.
“Trade secret,” Craig said, thinking of the mental processes of elimination which had finally brought him to this neighborhood, and the announcements he had talked Tony into distributing at quite some expense to Craig himself.
Tony, lithe and pleasant, approached the table. “Good evening, sir,” he said formally to Craig. “I touch the head. Your order?”
“Whatever my friend is having.”
“Wuk-Wuk,” Tony said. “Yes, sir.” He went away.
Craig wondered if Wellman would identify the dish as veal with a special sauce. Not that it mattered.
“I have good news for you, Ben. I’ve got money. A lot of it. I’m to turn it over to you—provided you convince me your gadget will work.”
Wellman said, “I don’t believe you. Loren Bradley hired you to turn us over to him.”
“So Trading Posts is the client? Who’s your contact there, Ben?”
"I won't tell you."
"If I show you the list of donors, will you believe me?"
"No. Bradley knows some of them. You've got his list."
"Well," Craig said, "I'm to turn this money over to you conditionally. Are you ready to fulfill your part?"
"As soon as we eat," Wellman whispered. "I'm hungry. You'll have to come home with me."
Craig was silent. Presently, he said, "Somebody wants to burn me down. Your crowd. So if I go home with you, what happens?"
"I'll guarantee your safety," Wellman whispered, "as long as you don't try to report that you've found me."
"It's a deal, Ben. Since I spent my own money tonight, I'm in the clear, morally."
They ate, and took Craig's private taxi to the apartment house. Wellman unlocked the door. When they were in, he put it on the inner latch and threw the identity-screen switch.
"If we're interrupted," he whispered, "you step inside that closet until I fix it with the boys." He touched a wall stud, and a panel slid up revealing the dark interior of a recess piled with paraphernalia. "That's our model," Wellman said.
Craig eyed the gleaming ball suspended in a framework of metal bands. "What does it do?"
"I'll tell you. How much of an engineer are you?"
"Give me a point of reference," Craig said dryly. "and I know which way is up."
"Then I'd better give you some background," Wellman whispered. "Current spaceships—that is, all of those controlled by Trading Posts—"
"Are there others?"
"Not yet. They've got a monopoly. Well, they use power released by Baltex-controlled disintegration of atoms. Now these are special atoms under fairly ordinary conditions. My ... our ... process is the reverse. We propose to use ordinary atoms—anything at all—under very special conditions, which we create inside that little sphere."
"Create?"

"Create. Here's the simplest way to put it. Atoms that we know—this floor, these walls, chairs—are stable under the laws of space as we know them. The inverse square law, electrostatic, electromagnetic, gravitational, and the rest. The atoms remain in status quo. But they would not, they'd be explosive, if they were in a space where those laws do not apply."
“Where is such a space?”
“Where, when we choose.” Wellman pointed to the ball. “The inside of that sphere is plated with neutronium. If we place a hunk of matter in it and change space conditions so that they differ slightly from what that matter is stable in, the atoms of the matter will adjust themselves to the new conditions and give off energy.”
“I’m beginning to get lost,” Craig said.
“All right,” Wellman whispered. “Suppose that our new space—I’ll get to how we create it—is such that the inverse square law—just for example—is not operative as such. Suppose that it becomes the 2.34th power law. All the other laws must change accordingly to bring about equilibrium, and this means that the atoms of our hunk of matter change.”
“So far I follow.”
“When the atoms readjust themselves, they give off energy. Right?”
“Sounds logical.”
“At that point, when the change is effected, we have an equilibrium, and no more flow of energy. Right?”
“Good enough.”
“So we collapse that special spatial condition, and the inverse square law, as we know it, applies again—and brings about another atomic readjustment in our hunk of matter. Right?”
“I’m beginning to see light,” Craig said. “So you continue the process. Over and over, you create and collapse your special space, and over and over your atomic readjustment gives you a flow of energy.”
“That’s it,” Wellman said in a pleased whisper. “We do this with a converter-oscillator, which has been giving us some trouble in trials. I worked the bugs out of it tonight, so all we need now is money to buy parts.”
“Which I have,” Craig said. “Are you ready to deal?”
“Personally, I am,” Wellman said. “But I have to talk it over with the others.”
Craig took off his money belt, tossed it to Wellman. “That was my job. It’s finished. I’d better get out of here, and let you confer with your group.”
“No!” Wellman whispered sharply. “The whole group has to decide.”
“You mean,” Craig said softly, “I’m a prisoner?”
Wellman looked embarrassed. “I told you I believe you, Craig. But I’m a credulous cuss. Maybe you’re pulling a fast one. And I told you I’d guarantee your safety.”
A soft chime cut into their conversation, and Craig reluctantly obeyed Ben Wellman's gestures. He entered the closet, and the sliding door locked him in thick darkness.

V.

Mr. Cuppy added the final name to his list, leaned back with a smile of tired triumph. The task was done. The first block was now weakened in the economic foundation of Loren Bradley's empire. Revenge had been a long time coming, Mr. Cuppy reflected.

All the sweeter, then.

He returned the sheaf of correspondence to Loren Bradley's confidential file and threw the key—a duplicate of Bradley's, procured with difficulty and risk—into a disintegrator chute. He examined the list again, with paternal fondness.

Here were the men with money. They had wanted to buy stock, or they had broken with Trading Posts. They were interested either in the shipping business or in ruining Bradley. Either object was laudable, in Mr. Cuppy's eyes, for they would finance his "palace revolution," as the historians called it.

Mr. Cuppy loosed a little sigh for his long-vanished youth, energy and drive. Thirty years ago he could have made more of this opportunity. The opportunity hadn't existed, of course, for Ben Wellman and Harold Stopes had not come on the scene.

Ah, well, Mr. Cuppy thought. Better now than never. There was a fight in him, still. This fight should take him to the top of the heap. He had contracts drawn, awaiting the signatures of Wellman and Stopes, which named himself as general manager of Spaceways, Ltd.

When they were signed, and not before, he would reveal his complete indifference toward colonial independence, his intense desire to rule the spaceways as Trading Posts had ruled. His burning determination that Loren Bradley IV should come to his knees and right the wrong of his grandfather, a wrong which had made Mr. Cuppy a bookkeeper instead of a tycoon.

In the meantime, he should maintain the pretense of devotion to freedom—until. Until the fools had their model—which Mr. Cuppy had financed—working perfectly. With a demonstrable model, Mr. Cuppy could collect millions. Billions.
He folded his list, locked it in a secret recess of his desk, and glanced at the time. He was startled, and at the same time eased in his mind. This tiredness he had attributed to old age, but the hour told him it was the result of a long, harrying day. He would drop by the apartment to check on progress on the model, then home to bed.

He noticed a light in the accounting room and investigated. The fleet of desks at which bookkeepers toiled each day, was empty—save one. Eric Boardman was working late again, and it is to Mr. Cuppy’s credit that he felt a mixture of shame and sympathy for the stooped old man. He went silently to Boardman’s desk and dropped a hand on a thin shoulder.

“Go home, Eric,” he said kindly. “It’s late. You look tired.”

Boardman looked up, smiled wearily. His wide, thin mouth seemed too tired to lift at both corners.

“Hello, Mr. Cuppy. I was just about to quit. Some special work for Mr. Bradley.”

“You’ll do yourself no good,” Mr. Cuppy said testily, “by killing yourself off.”

“But I must work,” Boardman sighed, “and clear my name.” He hesitated, then plunged into a tumbling, rushing speech. “Mr. Cuppy, you said you’d investigate further. Have you found anything, Mr. Cuppy, sir? I didn’t take that money. There must be a bookkeeping error. Did you find it, so I can live again, sir? Did you?”

Mr. Cuppy spoke softly. “I’m sorry, Eric. Our accounts have been completely audited, and the evidence is still there. But I promise you that if a wrong has been done it shall be righted.”

Mr. Cuppy went up to the landing roof, thinking that superlatively honest Eric Boardman could be fitted into Spaceways, Ltd. It was no more than just, since Mr. Cuppy himself had taken the money to finance the Wellman-Stopes model. Not that Boardman should ever know, of course, but he could profit by his unwitting contribution to the disintegration of Trading Posts and the humbling of the Bradley clan.

Mr. Cuppy stood on the identity plate of the apartment, stepped in when the door slid up—stepped into a tense, fist-clenched silence. These men were hard-eyed, and Ben Wellman had one brown hand on the butt of his coagulator—which Mr. Cuppy had never seen him wear before.

They didn’t touch their heads, either. Mr. Cuppy was mentally adrift for a second, trying to fathom the situation.
Then, “Somebody say something!” he barked.  
“Sit down,” Ben Wellman whispered, “over there where I can keep an eye on you. We’re trying to straighten out a difficulty. Maybe you can help.”

Help? This was a new role for Mr. Cuppy, who had commanded, to play. He squared his thin shoulders, thrust out his aged chin, then hesitated. There was no mistaking the grimness of Wellman, for all that he spoke in whispers.

This was a new Ben Wellman and Mr. Cuppy eyed him with a puzzled stare.

“Well?” Ben questioned impatiently.

Mr. Cuppy sat. The better part of valor, he thought, for the time being.

“I’m saying it once more,” Wellman said to the group. “I guaranteed his safety, and I’ll keep my word. Or else we’ll have some killing. Make it easy on yourselves.”

“Now look, Ben,” Harold Stopes said in his deep voice. “We just can’t let him go free. I’m not going to insist on burning him, but we’ve got to keep him. You can see that. This thing is too big to take chances.”

“He’ll go if he wants to,” Ben said in a stubborn whisper. “He came here of his own free will, and he may—may, I say; I’m not sure—he telling the truth.”

An icy hand clutched at Mr. Cuppy’s heart. Had they found him out?

“Are you talking about me?” he blustered.

They looked at him, eyes dull with the effort of shifting to the new subject. Then their eyes sharpened, hardened again.

“Why you?” Harold Stopes said with disgust. “We’re talking about Craig Marten.”

Mr. Cuppy made his sigh inaudible. “Where is he?”

“In this closet here,” Wellman whispered.

“All of you are talking gibberish,” Mr. Cuppy barked. “Stop acting like little boys. So he caught you, eh?”

“Rather the opposite,” Stopes said. “Ben seems to have caught him.”

“Then have him out, and see what he has to say for himself,” Mr. Cuppy ordered.

They were accustomed to obeying the little man, and made an involuntary move toward the closet. Ben Wellman’s coagulator stopped that.

“I told you,” he whispered, “to pile your guns here, and to stand back. I’m not fooling.”
“I don’t like this, Ben.” Harold Stopes’ tones were dead level. “I don’t like your attitude.”
“I don’t like to be forced into it.” Ben replied. “But I can’t take a chance.”
“All right,” Stopes agreed. “We’ll talk it out later.”

They slid their weapons across the floor. Ben kicked them into a clump, pressed the wall stud, and Craig came blinking into the room.
He said nothing. He examined each of the men with a quick glance, raised eyebrows at Wellman.
“They think you’re lying, Craig.”
Craig shrugged. “You can check with Van Hooten, or with the donors on that list.”
“Donors?” Mr. Cuppy barked. “What donors?”
“Who is he?” Craig demanded, “I saw him at Trading Posts. What’s he doing here?”
“He’s been hiding us,” Wellman whispered. “Financed our model.”
“What donors?” Mr. Cuppy repeated.
They explained to him, told him of the collection from colonials, the fund for freedom. Mr. Cuppy laughed nastily.
“Loren Bradley gave him the money,” Mr. Cuppy asserted.
“That’s a rotten lie!” Craig flared.
“I’m head accountant at Trading Posts,” Mr. Cuppy said.
“I ought to know.”
“See, Ben?” Stopes said.
Wellman shook his long head. “Don’t give a damn,” he whispered harshly. “Craig has a reputation for honesty, and—”
“Are you calling me a liar?” Mr. Cuppy demanded. He got to his feet, took a step forward.
Ben Wellman pointed the coagulator. “Sit down!” Mr. Cuppy did so. “I don’t know whether I’m calling you a liar or not, Mr. Cuppy. But we can sure check on Craig.”
“Honesty,” Mr. Cuppy said thoughtfully. “You raised the issue. Look here, Marten, are you honest? Is your word any good?”

While Craig looked at him silently, with unwavering eyes, Mr. Cuppy thought of the days when he himself had been like that young man—honest. He thought of those days with a nostalgic helplessness. Events had conspired, it seemed, to push him from one act to another until now, at long last, he had learned to live without the homely virtues of honesty, morality and consideration for his fellow man. Mr. Cuppy’s
jaw set. He had arrived at this point; he must maintain his position.

After a long, thoughtful silence, Craig answered. "I think I can call myself honest, all right."

"Then answer me this," Mr. Cuppy snapped. "You're an employee of Thorne Raglan. You're supposed to report that you've found these men. If you do, you're being dishonest as far as they are concerned. If you don't, you're double-crossing your boss. How can you claim honesty?"

This had a visible effect on Stopes, Gus, Foxy and the others. They smiled. They looked at each other and nodded.

"That," Craig answered, "is my problem. The toughest I've ever had to face, if you must know the truth." He continued with a quiet earnestness that had all their attention. "In any event, and I mean this as I never meant anything, the colonies come first. This is no half-cocked patriotism. Listen."

He collected his thoughts for a moment, and they waited. "When the colonies were in an immature, early stage of development," Craig said, "they were wholly dependent on Earth. Since Trading Posts held the only process for operating spacers between planets, they were wholly dependent on Trading Posts. That was necessary, at first, when the colonies were not self-sustaining. But that situation no longer obtains."

Mr. Cuppy started to interrupt, but Ben Wellman cut his gesture off by pointing the coagulator directly at the little man.

"They are now inherently able to support themselves," Craig said, "if they can trade among themselves and trade with Earth as economic entities. Meanwhile, though, the Trading Posts monopoly has reached gigantic proportions, and everything clears through its main port here—at a fee which holds colonists in economic bondage."

Craig broke off. The pictures welled up into his mind. "I'm speaking like a lawyer," he said. "I don't mean to. This whole problem gets me, down deep. You've been on the other planets. You know their frightening, tender, breath-catching beauties. You know of the sweat and blood that have flowed in our efforts to make them habitable. You know the pride that comes to a man after having done a good job.

"All that preliminary work, all the accomplishments, all that feeling of opening new frontiers for the benefit of man-
kind—well, imagine how they felt when the obstacles were hurdled, and they settled down to live. They found that Trading Posts had helped, yes, but in the helping had grown to dominate. It’s almost as if they must give up a part of each breath they draw to Loren Bradley. Whether intentionally or not, he holds them in the palm of his hand. They live, yes, but through the courtesy of Trading Posts, Inc."

He looked at them for a long minute, then went on:

“That isn’t right, and I’ll fight to overthrow such a situation. I’ll fight any way I can. If I have to shatter a fine friendship with Thorne Raglan to protect these men until they can drive a wedge into that domination, I’ll do it. Or anything else that’s necessary.”

He hadn’t raised his voice, he hadn’t become impassioned, and he had looked at each of the men as he spoke. When he was quiet, they murmured involuntarily.

“That’s the stuff!”

“We all feel that way!”

Mr. Cuppy broke in. “Very pretty,” he said. “As heart-warming a speech as ever I’ve heard. Step up the volume and you’d rouse the rabble. But you haven’t explained receiving this fund from Loren Bradley. I know.”

“Wait a minute!” Craig snapped. “I hadn’t intended to make a speech just now, but while I was talking I also did some thinking. You say I got this money from Bradley, and you try to convince these men by pointing out that I’m double-crossing somebody, no matter what I do. Correct?”

“Correct!” Mr. Cuppy snapped.

“All right! You, whatever your name is—” He looked a question.

“Cuppy is my name!”

“Mr. Cuppy.” Craig bowed, touched his forehead sardonically. “You’re a trusted employee of Bradley’s. Aren’t you pretty much in my position? If you go through with these men, you betray your employer; if you don’t, you betray this movement. Or,” Craig said with conviction, “you’re after personal gain. Which?”

Ben Wellman gave Mr. Cuppy no chance to answer. “There!” he said. “That’s what I mean. It didn’t occur to me in those words before. But it’s each man’s word against the other’s.”

“Here’s another thing,” Craig broke in. “Damn it, I wasn’t trained in this business for nothing.” He spoke directly to Stopes. “Is this the first time the little guy”—Mr. Cuppy
flinched at the term—"has mentioned Bradley giving me any money?"


"And why?" Craig asked rhetorically. "Because he didn't know it, that's why. There'd be no reason for not telling you. In fact, there'd be every reason to burn me down at any cost. Not only would you rid yourself of a trailer, but you'd come into the money I had. I advise you," he said slowly, with emphasis, "to keep the little squirt here till you check on his story—and on mine. Nobody knew I had that fund but Van Hooten, and a certain colonial who turned it over for delivery to you."

Mr. Cuppy leaped to his feet. "You'll be well advised, all of you, to kill this insolent puppy. I won't even dignify his insinuations by answering them. I need no defense. What I have done in this great cause is defense enough."

"Sit down!" Ben Wellman commanded, and the deadly quality was back in his whisper.

Mr. Cuppy glared fiercely, but sat down.

"Well?" Ben said.

Harold Stopes scratched his blond head. "Your story sounds good, Craig, but you're a clever guy. I, for one, think we'd better keep you here, too."

Ben Wellman whispered, "It's up to you, Craig. If you want to go, I'll see that you get away."

"Look," Craig said. "You can't afford to keep me here. If I don't report at the office, Thorny will figure that I found you and that you captured or killed me. My movements tonight—it was really last night—are easy to trace. When they ask Tony Whalen, he'll tell them I left there with Ben. Before an hour went by, you'd have police and soldiers here. You've got to let me go. I'd stay if I could serve any purpose. Listen, I'll make a proposition." He turned to Wellman. "Ben, if you knew I was trying to double-cross this movement, would you kill me?"

Wellman snapped his fingers. "Like that!"

"Good! Now suppose Ben goes with me, stays with me every minute until you can check with Van Hooten and some of the donors on that list. If I get out of line, he'll burn me down. How's that?"

"What do you say, fellows?" Stopes asked, "I vote yes."

"Stay away from that blonde," Foxy cautioned Ben, rubbing his tender spot with reminiscent fingers.

Before they left, Craig spoke again to Mr. Cuppy. "I may
be doing you an injustice, sir, but here’s a theory that fits you. Suppose that you want only to build up a shipping business of your own. You must have some dishonest purpose, or you wouldn’t have lied about me. I’m going to check up on you. If I’m right, you can save me the trouble of looking through a lot of cards. You can confess. Come on now, what do you say?”

Mr. Cuppy half opened his mouth. Foxy’s remark about the blonde gave him the glimmering of an idea. He started to advise Craig to ask Jennifer about his own honesty. She was smart. The remark in itself would be enough to cause her to report to Bradley, and perhaps lead Bradley here. If he were found captive here, Mr. Cuppy reflected, he would certainly be in the good graces of Loren Bradley.

But Mr. Cuppy closed his mouth. This checking young fool of a Marten might delve into other records before saying a word to Jennifer. No telling what he’d find.

“Go to hell,” Mr. Cuppy said.

Craig and Ben went up to the landing roof, took off in Craig’s taxi.

“You’re the next problem, Ben. By the way, thanks for defending me. I’d have been in a hole otherwise.”

Ben shrugged. “What do you mean, problem?”

“Where are we going to hide you?”

“Wherever you are,” Ben whispered grimly.

“I can do more good,” Craig said, “if I’m free to circulate.”

“You can do more harm, too.”

“You don’t quite believe me yet, do you?”

“Would you, Craig, in my place?”

Craig considered. “No,” he said honestly. “Well, to my hotel, then. I’ll toss you to see who sleeps on the couch.”

When they were in Craig’s room, he asked casually, “Drink?”

“A short one.” Wellman looked about the room. “Why are all hotel rooms the same? A bed, a visivox, a telaudio screen, a Sleep Maker with the same old music?”

“What do you want, a Six-Two game?” Craig asked lightly. He poured drinks, adding a white powder to Wellman’s, shielding the act with his back.

They touched glasses. “Freedom,” they said.

When Wellman began to show the first signs of drugged drowsiness, Craig said, “Believe me, Ben, I’m on your side, all the way.”

He put Wellman to bed, relieved him of the coagulator, set the Sleep Maker to wake himself in three hours, and fell
on the couch. He was almost instantly asleep, wasting no thoughts on the serious, deadly problems of tomorrow—today, really. He’d deal with them when they arose.

VI.

The big, suave, sleek gentleman raised a hand, palm outward, to silence the appreciative titter at his last quip. The robed members of the World Congress composed themselves hopefully. The speaker sounded as if he were about to conclude his address in behalf of the Interplanetary Trade Commission. If they were attentive, this Commissioner Delhaven would finish all the quicker.

Commissioner Delhaven beamed into the quiet, then broke it with smooth rhetoric.

“To conceive of limits to the wisdom and power of those whose realm is infinite is obviously to conclude that they are infinitely competent to administer, to adjudicate, to execute: for there can be no relation between the infinite and the finite save infinite disproportion. And so I say to you, gentlemen, that from the rock-bound wastes of Jupiter to the sunny deserts of Mercury, our eye is everywhere. Our hand, the hand of justice and right, rocks the new cradle which is the new and infinite world!”

He bowed, moved from the speaker’s rostrum to a polite if confused patter of hands. Most of the members of the World Congress had been lost somewhere along that stormy path of adverbs.

The clerk announced: “Ambassador Jorg van Hooten!”

A respectful hush fell over the assemblage as the young diplomat came to the rostrum in his green robes. He looked at them gravely, and a few hands clapped greeting, for the young man had won their admiration. He cast a grave look at the preceding speaker.

With a slight shrug of incomprehension, he turned to his audience.

“I have been told recently by Loren Bradley himself,” he began, “that he will oppose by every means at his command any move which threatens the economic interests of his sixty million stockholders. Nor do I blame him. They have invested their money in good faith, and he must protect those investments.

“Yet I find, upon examination, a situation which almost defies belief. We believe it. We must. It is true. But it is well-nigh incredible.
“The situation to which I refer is this: The World Congress, here assembled, has been jockeyed into a position where it is dominated by one man who is not even a member of this body. Furthermore, every moment of inaction by this body, every moment of domination from this time forward is measured in blood.”

A murmur ran across the great hall. Faces set. Shoulders straightened.

“You think that a fanciful statement?” Van Hooten continued. “Listen to these reports of last week. An uprising at Mars Port Main, one hundred killed and wounded. Venus City riot written by the blood of twenty. Plutarchia numbers twelve dead.

“That was in the colonies, you say. We are at peace here. I warn you now, you cannot afford the price of that kind of peace, for violence will overflow the planets and engulf the Earth. You cannot subjugate your own people!

“My mother was a Duvain, a name high on the lists of honor on this particular continent. From the time I was able to understand, I have been told of that historic uprising which threw off a vicious yoke. History, as you should know, repeats itself. That was not the first time a people with freedom in their hearts wrote the word on the pages of history with the blood of their professed master. Nor will it be the last. You cannot put the will to freedom on a leash. It will always turn and rend you in the end.

“Loren Bradley wants to save the pennies of his investors; I want to save their lives.”

The assemblage was deadly quiet. Every eye was fixed on the young man whose earnestness, whose honesty, had won him a place shared by few.

“It is the fault of none that the situation arose,” Van Hooten said quietly. “I do not wish to rant about big corporations and the little man. I don’t believe that Trading Posts, Inc., or its personnel, are oppressors by nature. But I know that continuance of the present situation will place them in that role, and make very member of this body a murderer.

“Listen.

“When the first colony was established on Mars, an earlier Loren Bradley owned and controlled the only means of transportation between planets. How he gained that control is beside the point. It is much too late to right the wrongs of our forefathers. He had it.

“The World Congress which grew out of necessity at that
time granted him the right to retain his secret process, and
the right to protect it as he saw fit. If he squashed young men
who sought other means of propelling spaceships than with
Baltex, it was only natural, in those confused, competitive
years.

“But let us grant the truth of statements issued by the
Interplanetary Trade Commission. Let us not infer that that
august body was influenced in any way by Trading Posts, Inc.
Let us believe that no other process has been developed
which is safe. After all, those gentlemen are charged with the
safety of humanity, and they do well to let caution temper
their rulings.

“But such a process has now been developed.

“I have been assured by competent persons, and I have
seen the inventors, that the process is not only revolu-
tionary, but that it is one hundred percent more efficient than
that through which Trading Posts has prevented the colonies
from trading among themselves.

“The colonies will revolt now, and with bloody vengeanec.
They have a concrete object now to spur them on. Heretofore
they have essayed independence only for an ideal.

“I am almost finished.

“They do not ask independence of the mother planet, as
you and I would ask. They ask only the right to go next door
and borrow a cup of sugar—without clearing through the
Earth office of Trading Posts, or without paying a tithe to
Trading Posts for that small social privilege. They wish to re-
main colonies of Earth. They demand only the right to live
and swap produce with their neighbors like human beings.”

“This is a small thing, when you have it. But it looms
larger than the universe when you must fight for it. I say to
you now, that unless you grant them this right, and signify
your determination to enforce it, the very starlight will be
red with the blood of your kinsmen, and you shall have
wielded the knife. Loren Bradley's intention to protect the
savings of his investor is laudable, but is it not far more
important that we preserve peace, and life?

“One more point. I said earlier that Bradley dominated
this body, and a murmur of dissent stirred you. Gentlemen,
look at the simple fact. We are bound by the wishes of our
constituencies. The sixty million stockholders of Trading Posts
is a tremendous voting bloc. If Bradley stirs them by econ-
omic fear, pointing out that if Trading Posts relinquishes one
load of shipping, those investors will suffer a loss in dividends,
then they wield the balance of power.
“Since my voice and image are being projected to all parts of the Earth, I speak now directly to those investors. In the name of humanity, for the sake of human life—your own among others—do not let a dollar sign cloud your vision. As surely as you do, the colonists will descend on you in an avenging horde and you will pay with blood.

“Not possible? Not this year, perhaps. Perhaps not next year. Perhaps not in your lifetime. But some day, for a free people will ultimately break a conqueror’s shackles and stuff them down his throat. So, if you personally are not forced to pay the debt, your children will be.

“Or their children.”

Jorg van Hooten went to his chair. The members of the World Congress did not applaud. Their eyes were straight ahead. They were thinking.

Craig leaned across Thorne Raglan’s desk, touched the audiscreen stud, and the scene of the World Congress blanked out. Craig leaned back in his chair, shook his dark head in mild wonder.

“Sometimes I think honesty is the best politics,” he said. “If you’re honest, and want to pour it on, people believe that what you’re saying is really important. Which it is, in this case.”

Raglan gave him a shrewd look. “Somehow I think this is going to cost me money. What’s the matter with you?”

“I’ve learned some things,” Craig said, “and I want to know where you stand. You’re familiar with the colonial problem?”

Raglan gestured at the empty screen.

“Then I’ll skip backgrounds,” Craig went on. “I saw Van this morning, just before he caught the stratoliner for the congress. Well, the war is on, as you see. We’re in a position to stop it or make it worse.”

Raglan said nothing. His moon face lost no geniality, his eyes retained their twinkle, but his chubby hands tensed on the plastic desk top.

“If I find Wellman and Stopes, Thorny, and I think I can very shortly, then you’ll report to Bradley. He’ll pick ’em up, and—”

“Who told you Trading Posts is our client?” Raglan asked quietly.

“It’s obvious, isn’t it? To go on—Bradley will keep that process off the market, and there’ll be hell to pay.”

“Just what do you want me to do?”
“Fail to report to Bradley until the boys get a spacer in operating condition.”
“You’ve found ’em, Craig. Where are they?”
Craig sighed. It came off pretty well, he thought.
“Listen, my fat friend. Don’t I make my reports promptly? When I find what I’m told to find, don’t I let you know? Then if I had found Wellman and Stopes, wouldn’t I have reported?”
Raglan said quietly, “Go on.”
Craig spread his hands. “That’s all. All I ask is a little more time for them. Look what goes on. After Van’s speech, a resolution will be introduced. It will ask that a clause be inserted in the Trading Posts’ contract. It will be sent to a committee. Meanwhile, Bradley will get his share of communists demanding that he keep hands off. And the congressmen will get a flood demanding that they grant the colonies their demands. That was a swell speech Van made.”
“So? And then?”
“Look at the psychology, Thorny. If you tell Bradley we’re on the verge of finding the boys, he’ll lay off. So the legislation will go through without opposition. Then Wellman and Stopes will spring their new spacer, and everybody will be happy but Bradley.”
“Before I say what I’ll do, Craig, I want one more answer. What makes you think Bradley will lay off?”
“Put yourself in his place,” Craig said impatiently. “All the colonists want is ships that don’t clear through Earth. All right. If Bradley figures he can . . . ah . . . acquire the Wellman-Stopes process, he still will hold a monopoly on propulsion. Then Trading Posts will furnish the intercolonial ships. It will mean that the Earth terminal suffers a slight loss, but the company still has control. Which it wouldn’t if a rival concern sprang up in the colonies.”

Raglan leaned back, folded fat hands. “Craig, I’ve spent fifteen years building Hunt Club. It’s strictly a business venture. I never have taken sides on a political question, and I can’t now. If you can find Wellman and Stopes, find ’em and turn in your report.”
“But this isn’t just a political issue! Lives are at stake. Van wasn’t exaggerating.”
Raglan sighed. “I’ll try again. Regardless of how this colonial trouble comes out, Bradley will still operate Trading Posts, and that’s a hell of a sight bigger than Hunt Club. He’d
smash me if he found out I'd crossed him. I don't want to be smashed."

"He needn't find out."

"When I returned his fee, he'd smell something." As Craig started to speak, Raglan cut him off with a pink palm. "I have some notions about honesty, too. The main one is to play fair with my clients. Hunt Club's reputation is clean. I'll keep it that way."

Craig frowned down at the floor, and spoke as if to himself. "I'm on the other side of the fence. I don't know what to do, Thorny. I don't want to quit, and I don't want you to fire me. I like this job, I like the work. But the colonies are much more important to me. Is there some way you could let me take the blame, and the consequences?"

"I don't think of any offhand, Craig."

Craig got to his feet, paced back and forth. The situation was deadly serious. Thorny was his closest friend. Though he was ready to let friendships go by the board in the interests of the larger question, his readiness was intellectual in origin. Emotionally, he wanted to lay the true picture before Thorny. He wanted them to work a way out together, as they had always done.

But in so doing, he also knew that he should in effect betray the whole movement in which he had become enmeshed.

There were yet so many things to do. They had to find a spaceship, build a converter, and demonstrate the process. Mr. Cuppy's position had to be clarified.

He faced Raglan abruptly. "Listen, Thorny, I want to tell you something as a friend, strictly confidential."

Raglan made a face of distaste. "Damn it, Craig, I don't like to be put in that position. This is a business. We ought to save our emotion for a binge. I don't know what you're going to say, but I can tell by your expression I won't like it."

Craig let his breath out. "All right," he said. The impulse was gone. "It wouldn't be fair. Let it go."

He went into his office. His mind was clear, now. The main objective was the same as it had been, to keep Wellman and Stopes free from Trading Posts. But he also determined to keep Thorny in the clear, regardless.

He called his hotel room on the visivox. After some delay, a masked Ben Wellman answered. In Craig's desk screen, the mask was opaque, but beneath the stenciled legend, "private," he could almost see Ben's throbbing head.
“How do you feel?” Craig asked.
Wellman groaned. “Some bears made a den in my mouth. What happened?”
“I’m sorry, Ben,” Craig said contritely, “I gave you a blankout powder. I had to. I have to do a lot of things, and you couldn’t tag along safely. But I’ll make it all right with you. Will you stay put, and not answer the door?”
Wellman nodded, swore and cut the circuit.

Craig then placed his spinning head on his arms. He tried again, as on the night before, to fit all the stray facts into a connected pattern. Jennifer Jones refused to fit.

He jerked himself back to the problem. Such purple reveries were pleasant, but they didn’t produce answers. Answers were what he needed. For instance, who is Cuppy, the little man with the big temper?

It seemed fairly clear to him that Mr. Cuppy was in the picture for private gain. The thought had occurred to him last night, and his subconscious must have worried it while he slept. It amounted now almost to a conviction.

He needed more information. Perhaps he would call on Bradley then with a proposition, its terms depending on the pattern.

He went into the file room, and was drawn by an inner compulsion to the “J’s,” passing for the time being those files where information on Mr. Cuppy might be listed. Jennifer Jones was not listed. He looked through the Mars file of some twenty years back. She had said she had been born on Mars. He found no Jennifer Jones, but he found a Jennifer.


Craig gave it up and looked for Mr. Cuppy. There was a small dossier.

How the mighty have fallen, Craig thought as he followed the saga of the little gray man in brief, emotionless entries. Once third vice president of Trading Posts. Legal trouble. Battle over stock. Decision for plaintiff, Loren Bradley II. Countersuit, settled out of court. Mr. Cuppy named head of accounting department.

So that placed Mr. Cuppy, Craig thought. All but one
point. His salary was listed, and though it was generous, could he have saved enough to finance the experimentation of Wellman and Stopes? Craig resolved to check that point. He had no idea of how costly the experiments had been, but checking was a routine matter.

He went back to his office, called Ben Wellman again, and asked the guarded question. Wellman named a figure, brusquely, and cut off again. Craig whistled. Science came high. Where, he now wanted to know, did Mr. Cuppy get the money? It was a query to put to the little man himself.

Jennifer Jones remained. On an impulse, Craig called her on the visivox. Presently her face filled the screen. She gave a little cry when she identified Craig, and hung her mask on her face.

“What are you trying to do,” she demanded through the mask, “count my wrinkles?”

“I’ve just finished a job I was on,” Craig told her, “and would like to do a little celebrating. How about starting with lunch?”

“Good!” She sounded very excited, Craig thought. Maybe, he added mentally, she’s beginning to glow when she thinks of me. He hung a foolish grin on his face as she went on. “Give me three hours, Craig. My youth needs refurbishing, after that session last night.”

“Sure, baby,” he said softly, and cut off.

What’s the matter with me? he asked himself fiercely. I clean forgot I was trying to find out where she fits. What’s she doing to me?

He shrugged, grinned at the empty screen. Whatever it was, it was pleasant, and it wouldn’t kill him.

The tension he had been working under, combined with his meager sleep ration, began to catch up with him. He went into one of the rest rooms, set the Sleep Maker to wake him in two hours and a half, and drifted off to its soothing strains.

Refreshed, he cut off the mellow voice which said, over and over, “Time to get up. This is the time you wanted to waken. Time to get up. This is the time—”

He dashed his face with cold water, and went up to the roof for a taxi.

A couple of large young men, very large and hard-eyed, fell in beside him as he emerged onto the flat surface.

“You got two alternatives,” one said. “You can tell us where Wellman and Stopes are, or you can come see Mr. Bradley. Take it from me, chum, and tell us.”
Craig’s heart fell. He knew where Jennifer fitted now. His face set. He looked at his captors. “Let’s go!” he said harshly.

VII.

Loren Bradley’s dark face lost none of its expression of quiet power tinged with arrogance as he sent the two huskies away. When they were alone, he smiled at Craig, waved him to a chair, and touched his forehead with two fingers. “Mr. Marten,” he said pleasantly, “I’ve wanted a talk with you for some time.”

Craig was somewhat startled at this reception, but decided to play it Bradley’s way. He sat down, returning the smile. “It isn’t often that a common working man is ... uh ... invited to see the Master of the Universe.”

Bradley twitched a faint grin, and abruptly plunged into a proposal. “I’ve heard of you, off and on, for several years, Marten. You’ve made a reputation as a sensible, honest and at times brilliant young man. One would say that your future prospects were bright indeed.”

Craig said nothing. The big man’s pause was rhetorical, anyway, he figured. “You have no idea,” Bradley went on after a second or two, “how difficult it is to staff this organization with men of caliber. You are perhaps familiar with our system of advancement?”

Craig thought of Mr. Cuppy, but realized that he was not a fair sample. Trading Posts was known to be good to its help. He nodded. “I believe we could make a place for you, Marten. Not anything sensational to start, of course. Department manager, say, until you proved yourself. At a mutually satisfactory salary, of course.”

Where, Craig wondered, is all this leading? He felt a slight chill of apprehension. “You tempt me,” he said. “I’m sorry, but I’m tied up pretty tight with Hunt Club.” “So you are,” Bradley admitted, “but ties can be broken—one way or another.” “Well,” Craig said slowly, “suppose I agree. What happens?” “Then you go to work for us.” “No more?” Craig could not keep the surprise from his voice.
“More?” Bradley echoed. “Why should there be more?” Craig frowned in concentration, seeking the chink in Bradley’s proposition. He couldn’t see any, and decided to force the issue.

“All right,” he said. “I’ll take you up. When do I begin?”

Bradley looked at Craig for a long moment, then smiled. “I had expected more opposition from you, but I see you’re more intelligent than I thought. You’re right, Marten, there is no point in fencing. You can have the job, all right, and name your salary, if you’ll lead me to Wellman and Stopes—now.”

Craig put on a mournful face. “Damn! I guess that lets me out, Mr. Bradley. I’ve been trying to find them for a long time.”

“Oh, stop it!” Bradley said curtly. “I know you know where they are. I intend to have that knowledge from you.” Craig looked bewildered. “You’re mistaken, sir.”

Bradley sighed. “Believe me, Marten, I hate to resort to crude methods. They indicate a lack of ingenuity. But I’m in a hurry. Time is vital. You’ll save yourself trouble—indeed, you’ll profit—by telling me now. For in the end you’ll tell me, before those boys who brought you here finish with you.”

“May I ask a question or two?”

“Certainly.”

“Suppose you find Wellman and Stopes. You either buy or steal their process, and keep your monopoly. But it will gain you nothing in the end. Eventually, some Martian or other will solve the secret of Baltex, and you’re done for.”

Bradley shook his sleek head. “The ruling that Martians cannot approach within five hundred feet of a spacer was established by my grandfather—before he knew that the process cannot be duplicated anywhere except on Earth. They can solve and be damned.”

“I don’t believe you. You still enforce the ruling.”

“That’s for psychological effect. Listen. Necessary raw materials for Baltex are beryllium and lithium. There are none on Mars, the Jovian moons, or the asteroids. There’s a little on Venus, but so little and so damned dilute it can’t be worked. Trading Posts owns all the deposits on Earth. You see?”

“Poor Van,” Craig said softly. “He counted on that for a long time. All right, Mr. Bradley. So they can’t use Baltex. But this process of Wellman and Stopes is known in theory,
at least, to more than half a dozen persons. The principle is no secret.”

He sketched in the underlying features of the converter-oscillator, the special spatial conditions.

“The fuel can be anything,” Craig went on, “producing power, as I get it, by a sort of radioactive decay at an oscillation rate of maybe a hundred million cycles per second. You see how simple that is to grasp?”

“Make your point,” Bradley murmured.

“The point is this. Even if you could get this process and shelve it, if that’s what you want to do, you only postpone the day when somebody else will bring it out. Then you’ll pay through the nose, or as Van Hooten says, your children will. So why don’t you give in? Co-operate. Do you want the whole universe? Isn’t there room for anybody else?”

Bradley sighed again. “I’m getting very tired,” he said, “of amateur politicians yelling about monster corporations that seek to swallow the System. Don’t you think I’m flesh and blood? Don’t you think I have a conscience? Don’t you think I have problems? I have sixty million shareholders who look to me to keep this company solvent. My first thought is for them. Of course there’s room for other organizations, and I want to co-operate. But I want any new development to take place sensibly, without throwing world economy out of balance. Now. Where are they?”

“Those are just words, Mr. Bradley. I repeat, I wish I knew where they were.”

“Very well,” Bradley said dully. “Believe me, Mr. Marten, I have no stomach for this sort of thing.”

He pressed a stud. The two huskies re-entered.

“He has some information I want,” Bradley said in a pained voice. “Don’t be any rougher than necessary.”

They took Craig by a devious route to what was apparently an empty storeroom. Each held him by an arm, and each asked him solicitous questions at intervals.

“I say, old man, am I hurting you?”

“I trust I’m not too rough, chum?”

“Shut up!” Craig snarled.

When they had him inside the big empty room, one swung a hard right to his jaw. Craig fell, skidded across the floor, sat up dazed.

“Oops!” the man said apologetically. “I’m afraid that one slipped. Are you hurt? Let me help you up.”
He raised Craig to his feet, locked his arms behind him. The other husky brought constellations into Craig’s head and tears to his eyes with a stinging, open-handed blow.

“Really,” he said affectedly, “I do beg your pardon, old fellow. I forgot that I’m left-handed. I should have used it.”

He swung his left hand, and Craig’s head exploded again.

“Ah-ah,” cautioned the one who held Craig’s arms. “Remember what papa said, no rougher than necessary.”

“I forgot,” said the other apologetically. “I got carried away, just completely.”

Craig gritted his teeth, said nothing. They stood him against a wall and slapped him. They kicked him in the stomach. They elbowed him in the throat. They twisted his arms. They apologized after each indignity.

This went on for some time.

He was halfway back to Bradley’s office before he realized they had stopped beating him. He remembered vaguely a voice which had seemed to issue from a monitor, but had no idea what it said. They took him inside the luxurious office again and poured him into the chair. Bradley spoke sharply to the two men, but Craig was still out of focus and didn’t get the words. He remembered that the two hung their heads in mock shame and tiptoed away.

Then Bradley became clear to him, as well as myriad aches and pains. Bradley was apologetic.

“I’m sorry, Marten,” he said. “That wasn’t necessary, after all.”

“If I get any more apologies,” Craig mouthed through swollen lips, “I’ll shoot somebody. What do you mean? Did you find Wellman and Stopes?”

Bradley shook his head. “No. But I thought over what you told me, and decided to adopt your plan. Co-operation. After all, why should I stand in the way of progress?”

Craig mustered as much of a cynical grin as his mouth could manage, and Bradley chuckled.

“Why pretend?” he said. “I’ll tell you the truth. You’d work it out, anyway. That young, earnest, and thoroughly admirable fool, Van Hooten, managed to stir up a hornet’s nest. We have been receiving an average of one thousand communists per hour since he spoke this morning. All are indignant at me, and most of them from my stockholders. Furthermore, Trading Posts stock is falling. I informed my representatives in the capital that we should not oppose any legitimate measure granting Van Hooten’s demands. I
understand that a bill is being drawn up at the moment and may be voted on today."

"What's the catch?" Craig demanded.

Bradley made a face of dark sorrow. "Even when I act with sincerity, you ask what's the catch."

"All right," Craig said noncommittally, "what do I do now?"

"Whatever you wish. May I give you a check as payment for the treatment you received here?"

"Never mind," Craig said shortly. He got to his feet. "I have a long memory."

"And I, too, Mr. Marten." Bradley's face had lost none of its suavity, but his eyes were dark and smoldering. "Some day I shall have an opportunity to repay you for today's events, for I feel that you are behind them."

"I'll look forward to it," Craig said.

Craig took a taxi from the roof, ignoring the curious stare of the pilot, to Jennifer's apartment.

She caught at her throat at sight of his face. "Come in," she whispered. She made a motion to touch his bruises with white fingertips, but he twisted away.

"Your handiwork," he said shortly. "Thanks."

She stood wide-eyed in the center of the room for a moment, then dropped her glance.

"You'll never know," she said faintly, "what a struggle that decision was."

"What decision?" he asked harshly.

"It was you or father," she murmured. "Believe me, Craig, I didn't think this would happen to you, or I'd have let him go on. After all, he isn't too badly off."

"Stop talking in riddles," he snarled.

She told him the story, and her name. He remembered the entry in Mars' vital statistics. Eric Boardman. She told him how a large sum was unaccounted for by an audit of some months before, how the evidence pointed at Eric Boardman.

"But father is so transparently honest, and he was so earnest and willing to do anything, that Mr. Bradley let him stay and pay it out a little at a time," she said.

"The rest of his life," Craig commented.

"But he was so happy for the chance," she said. "It was the stigma that worried him, not the accusation. He knew he was innocent, but was willing to do anything not to be arrested."

"And where did you come in?"
She colored. "Well, you may not have heard of me, coming from Outside. But I'm just beginning to make a name for myself as an actress. Mr. Bradley knew this, and called me in the other day. He offered to wipe father's debt off the slate if I would follow you and report when you'd found the men you were after. So when you told me this morning that you'd finished a job, I reported it to Mr. Bradley. He didn't believe me, because he said Mr. Raglan hadn't reported to him. Then he said he'd do some investigating of his own, and if I was right, he'd give father a clean slate. That's all."

"Is it?"

She colored afresh under his steady gate. "Except," she said, "that it took me nearly two hours to make up my mind. I tried to call you back, but you weren't in, they said. It was very hard, Craig."

He eyed her keenly. "Actress, eh? Are you acting now?"
She met his eyes steadily. "I'm not acting now."

"Now," he said as crisply as possible through swollen lips, "how much was this sum your father was accused of stealing?"
She told him, and he attempted a whistle that didn't come off.

"Did he have any ideas on where it might have gone?"
"There was only one other person who might have taken it. But father said that was fantastic. He and Mr. Cuppy were old friends; still are."

Craig tried another whistle. "Wait a minute. Can I use your vox?"

She gestured, and he called a friend in the local clearing house. "Look, Sam, can you find out if a Mr. Cuppy, mucky-muck at Trading Posts, had a sizable bank account about six weeks ago?"

"What happened to your face" Sam asked.
"Fungus," Craig said.

Sam grinned, said, "Hold on," and disappeared. While he was away, out-of-focus shadows blurred the screen, and an unintelligible hum emanated from the clearing house. Sam popped back into focus, said, "He could have gone on one good drunk, but no more."

"Thanks, Sam."

"Better put a phage on that face," Sam advised.

Craig turned to Jennifer. "We're skipping lunch. Come on. Things are beginning to happen at last."

They took a taxi to Craig's hotel, collected Ben Wellman,
and headed for the apartment where Harold Stopes and the others presumably waited.

"Are you sure you didn't hit me with a rock, too?" Ben asked in a grieved whisper.

"I said I was sorry," Craig said. "I've got some terrific medicine for it. Wait till we see the others, and I won't have to tell it twice."

When they reached the apartment, Craig went to the visi-vox first and put in a long-distance call for Jorg van Hooten. While waiting for the call, he turned to the room to find Mr. Cuppy glaring at him, and Foxy regarding Jennifer with an embarrassed scowl.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," Foxy admonished her.

The others, Gus, Harold Stopes and the remaining two, watched Jennifer with unabashed and admiring eyes. Mr. Cuppy continued to glare.

The call was put through. Van Hooten grinned at Craig, and touched his forehead.

"Now don't be hysterical, Van," Craig cautioned. "What goes on?"

Van Hooten read from a sheet of plastic.

"Listen, Craig. 'Be it further enacted that any responsible person or persons, able to qualify in all respects before constituted authorities, are hereby authorized to operate approved transportation facilities between planets, independently of and in addition to existing organizations engaged in such pursuit.' That's the main clause, Craig, but it means victory. I sent off radiographs, and there is peace in the colonies. Celebrations, too, I shouldn't wonder. What's that noise?"

His question was almost drowned by the sudden burst of cheers from behind Craig.

"Just a bunch of the boys whooping it up," Craig said. "Look, Van, I'll see you. Maybe we can get to Port Main before the fun dies down. I'll be going back, I imagine."

He cut off, turned to the room. "There it is. All you have to do is meet specifications. You'd better go to Mars with me and reconstruct scrap ships from the bone yard there. They're good enough. Now, Mr. Cuppy."

Mr. Cuppy had wilted. He had lost his glare.

"Mr. Cuppy, where did you get the money you furnished for these boys to experiment?"

"I earned it," Mr. Cuppy said with weak defiance.
“So you’ll let your old friend Eric Boardman work the rest of his life away to pay off your debt?”

Mr. Cuppy didn’t move for a few seconds. Then he looked up, and the old light was back in his eyes. “Give me that vox,” he snapped, and stood before it.

When Loren Bradley’s features filled the screen, Mr. Cuppy spoke with gentle sarcasm.

“Ah, Junior, I touch the head. I am not in my office, Junior. Do you know why? Because I did not choose, Junior. Furthermore, I have some news for you, to add to the glad tidings. Your cup is filled today, Junior, isn’t it?”

“Quit the persiflage, Mr. Cuppy,” Bradley said warily.

“Very well! In the matter of Eric Boardman, he is innocent. I stole the money.” At Bradley’s widened eyes. “Yes, I stole it. I had a chance to ruin you, Junior. Should have, too, but I ran into a bunch of people who believe in something. That was too big for me, as it was for you. People like us, Junior, will always find, I am afraid, that belief in ideals will defeat us. But no matter. I wanted to tell you that you are not going to take action against me in this matter. You can’t afford to. I have not been in the confidence of three Bradleys for nothing. I know many embarrassing facts, Junior, and would be happy to spread them, as I am happy to vindicate my friend Eric. I didn’t want to place him under suspicion, but it was in a good cause, the defeat of Trading Posts. Goodby, Junior.”

Mr. Cuppy cut the circuit. Jennifer ran to him impulsively and kissed the wrinkled cheek.

“That was very brave,” she said, wet-eyed. “Thank you.”

Mr. Cuppy sniffed. “What’s brave about it? He doesn’t dare do anything.”

He nodded curtly, and bustled out.

“Let’s go,” Craig said to Jennifer. “One more errand, and then we paint the town.”

He shook hands around, made tentative agreements to help them set up a corporate structure for their shipping company, and dragged Jennifer off to Hunt Club, Inc.

“You wait in the taxi,” he said to Jennifer. “I’ll be back in a minute.”

In Thorne Raglan’s private office, he said abruptly, “all right, Thorny, I found ‘em. They’ll be at this address for the next hour or so.”

He wrote the number on a pad.

Raglan glanced at it, then at Craig’s bruised face. “What happened to it?”
“Comets,” Craig said.

Though Raglan had seemed indifferent to Craig’s report, he noticed that fat fingers were busy with the visivox controls, and when Bradley’s features came on the screen, Thorny had attention only for them.

“Hiyah, Lorry! Hunt Club delivers again, chum. And don’t forget the bonus, in addition to the regular fee. I told you Craig would find Wellman and Stopes. Here’s the address.”

He read it, and he and Craig were treated to the highly unusual spectacle of Loren Bradley IV spluttering helplessly.

“Don’t forget the bonus,” Raglan repeated, and cut off.

“See you later.” Craig said. “I got a date.”

“The next assignment,” Raglan called after him, “you report to me when it’s finished, not after you’ve done a lot of political finagling.”
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