

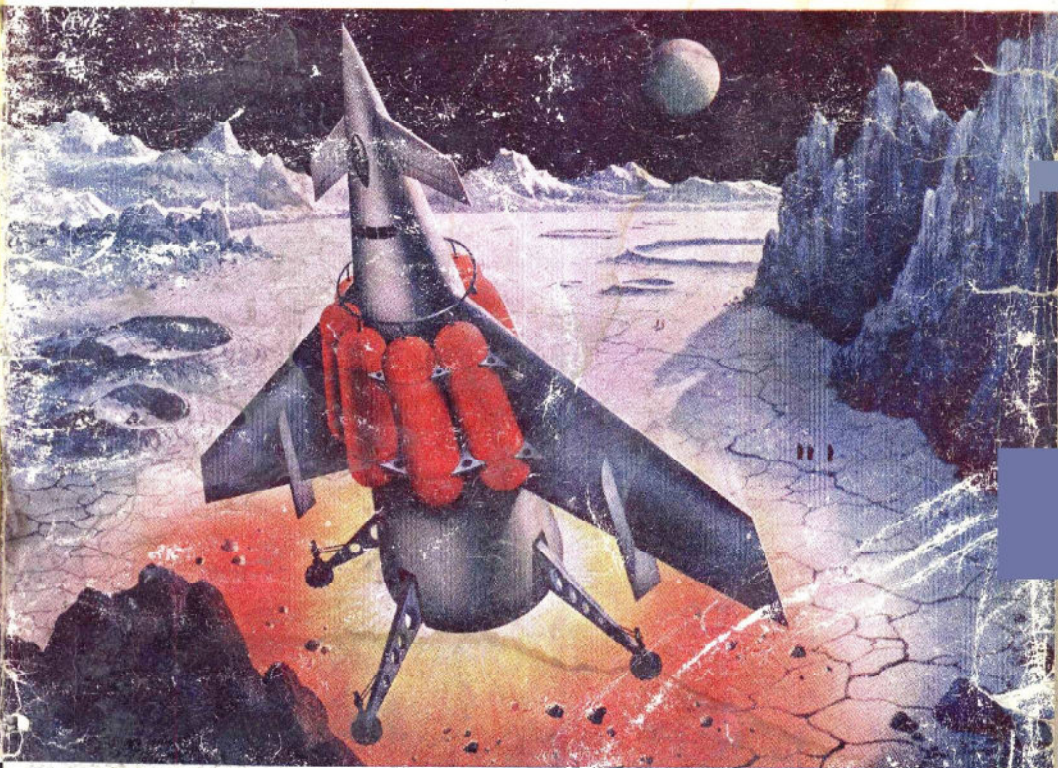
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Dynamic **Science Fiction**

132
PAGES

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THE DUPLICATED MAN

by James Blish
& Michael Sherman

**NEW, COMPLETE
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Not an abridged "magazine version"

AUG.
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Dynamic Science Fiction

Volume
One
Number
Four
August
1953

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ROBERT W. LOWNDES, Editor

FEATURE NOVEL

THE DUPLICATED MAN

by James Blish and Michael Sherman.....10

Surely, no one ever played a stranger role on the stage of history than Paul Danton, who found himself to be Earth's secret weapon — and found the part he must play even more ironic than he thought.



This is a complete book-length novel; it has not been abridged for magazine publication, and has never appeared before.



SHORT STORIES and FEATURES

- THE LOBBY (Where Editor and Readers Meet) 6
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- THE LAST MAN IN THE MOON Charles Dye 105
He wanted to be the first man out into space . . .
- THE WINNING LOSERS Gene L. Henderson 113
The rationale behind these wars was peculiar, but strangely logical!
- NO GREATER GLORY W. Malcolm White 119
For this Earthman, they reversed their highest possible honor.
- INSIDE SCIENCE FICTION Robert A. Madle 120
News and views of the science-fiction scene, plus recollections of yesterday.
- READERS' PREFERENCE COUPON (Vote here, please) 130

Illustrations by Luos and Orban

Next Issue on Sale August 1st

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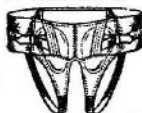


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THE LOBBY

Where the Readers and the Editor Talk Things Out

(heading by Milton Luross)



EVEN TODAY, it's possible for an author to come up with a "brand new idea", but such things are rare, and one can wisely look at any such claims with suspicion. As more and more fans and readers delve more and more deeply into the pre-*Amazing* science-fiction, evidence comes to light that many themes and ideas which at the time, by both author and editor, were sincerely believed to be "new" had seen previous treatment.

So far as I know, the "duplication machine" angle first appeared in a short story by Jackson Gee (entitled "An Extra Man") which ran in the October 1930 issue of *Astounding*

Stories of Super Science. Since then, there have been others—Arthur J. Burks' short novel, "Jason Sows Again" (*Astounding Science-Fiction*, March/April 1938) comes to mind at once—but, so far as I know, the Blish-Sherman novel we're presenting to you now is the first to offer the particular angle that you'll find here.

Sherman tells me that I should add "in science-fiction" to that last sentence, frankly admitting that he got his inspiration from James Branch Caball's "Figures of Earth" and a famous poem by Robert Burns.

Blish wrote me in relation to the picture of Venus presented in "The Duplicated Man", and I'll switch over to his letter.

Dear Bob:

Since Mike Sherman and I turned in
[Turn To Page 8]

What's My Job?—I Manufacture Weaklings into MEN!

Charles Atlas

Actual photograph of the man who holds the title "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

GIVE ME a skinny, peepless, second-rate body—and I'll cram it so full of handsome, bulging new muscle that your friends will grow bug-eyed!... I'll wake up that sleeping energy of yours and make it hum like a high-powered motor! Man, you'll feel and look different! You'll begin to LIVE!



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to you the manuscript of "The Duplicated Man", the so-called dust-bowl theory of what the surface of Venus is like has been called into question in several places, notably in a recent book and in a review of the book in a recent science-fiction magazine. The core of the objection is that measurements of the constituents of Venus' atmosphere necessarily are taken from very high up in that atmosphere—at a height where comparable measurements of Earth's own atmosphere would show nothing but hydrogen, and very rarified hydrogen at that.

Since the action of "The Duplicated Man" depends to a considerable extent on the dust-bowl theory, we thought it might be in line to explain why we think it is a sound one. First of all, then, while there is no questioning the fact that spectroscopic samplings of Venus' atmosphere do come from the layer above the visible clouds, we think it important to note what a difference there is between this layer and the comparable layer of Earth. What is shown on Venus in that layer is enormous quantities of carbon dioxide. Now, as I've pointed out in another place, carbon dioxide is a heat-conservative gas; it tends to absorb heat readily, and to release it only very slowly. When you apply this to the finding that the noonday temperature on Venus at the top of the cloudbank runs from 120 degrees to 140 degrees Fahrenheit, and since the day on Venus appears to be a minimum of two terrestrial weeks long, and may run as long as a month, you can see that the temperature at the invisible surface may very easily run higher than the boiling point of water. The result should be a very high concentration of water vapor in Venus' atmosphere—if there is any water on the surface; but no water vapor has ever been detected, which seems to indicate that there can be, at best, no more than one-tenth as much of that vital substance in Venus' air as there is in Earth's.

At these surface temperatures, oxygen would disappear just as rapidly, going into chemical combination with the rock. This, too, seems to be in accordance with the spectroscopic findings, which indicate that the top figure for oxygen possible for Venus is less than one thousandth of what we find in our own atmosphere. We should like to point out that these two figures—one-tenth and one thousandth, for water vapor and oxygen, respectively—are *maximum*. The actual amounts of these two gases present on Venus may very well be much less, or they may be absent altogether.

Now, what about the clouds? The spectroscope shows clearly that these are not clouds of water droplets; and if we needed further evidence to that effect, photographs in ultraviolet light provide it. The clouds show well on U-V-sensitive plates. They would not do so if they were

water-droplet clouds; such clouds on Earth, for instance, cannot be seen in U-V light. Whether or not these droplets in Venus' clouds are actually formaldehyde plastics, as Rupert Wilde has suggested, is still an open question among experts, into which category Mike and I decidedly do not fit. As the story shows, however, we found the Wilde theory persuasive.

— James Blish

Which seems fair enough to me; so long as the issue isn't settled, any theory which accounts for such observations as have been verified, or are verifiable, ought to be acceptable as a basis for the scientific background of a story. And even theories in disrepute can be acceptable, if the author can think of some convincing grounds for accounting for the evidence against his starting point.

I haven't taken stories of late which presented Venus as a "jungle planet", which used to be the accepted picture, or I've had the planet changed if the background, as stated, was essential. However, my grounds for such refusal has been merely that the author took an outworn theory for granted, and made no effort to account for new evidence; if someone wants to make Venus a jungle planet, he can do so in my pages, providing he offers me a reasonable explanation for data mentioned in the letter above.

THE RESPONSE to my inquiry as to whether you'd like to see the rest of James Gunn's long essay on science-fiction has been enthusiastically in favor, so far; added to the approval you gave the first section, "The Philosophy of Science-Fiction", I'd say that you've voted "aye" by a large majority. So, "The Plot-Forms of Science-Fiction" will start in our October issue, and we'll make the installments healthy ones.

Similar favor has met Robert A. Madle's new department, "Inside Science-Fiction."

You've made it clear that most of you *don't* want the following in

[Turn To Page 112]



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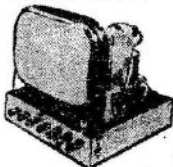
—Says R. C. Anderson, President of C.T.I.

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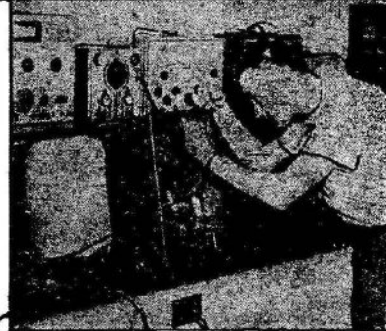
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A mist was rising from the floor as the little golf-ball objects were dropped all over the room.



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The machine existed; Paul Danton, rank-and-file member of the Pro-Earth Party had seen it. Thus evolved the Party's deadly scheme for overthrowing Earth's planet-wide Security Council, and making peace with Venus. But the Security Council had its own deadly scheme, and Danton found that his only role was to consent to become

THE DUPLICATED MAN

by James Blish & Michael Sherman

(illustrated by Paul Orban)



Gentlemen Talk Peace...

THE SKY was fair that day; but for Earthmen, the fairest skies were foul, so long as they held the threat of demolition-bombs coming at random—armed at nothing and no one in particular, but at everything and everyone in general. Paul Danton was no astronomer, professional or hobbyist; he could pick out the planet Venus in the night sky when Venus was an evening star—at other times, it should have meant nothing to him.

Yet, the very existence of that planet drummed beneath his consciousness throughout his whole existence—as it did with every other human being alive on Earth.

The blue of the sky was a fraud; up there, beyond that serene color, lay Venus, a planet where other human beings—exiled from Earth—dwelled and hated. Danton had never seen any of the Venusian Exiles, nor had the billions who inhabited Earth; but Paul Danton, and all other Earthlings, knew of the hatred that seethed beyond the clouds. This wisdom wasn't the sort that came from propaganda, or intuition, or irrational drives on the part of the knower; the facts were tangible. Venusian hatred expressed itself in an unceasing terror-bombardment of Earth, a package of destruction flung carelessly at the planet's face whenever

the relative positions of Earth and Venus were such that any kind of hit was possible.

You could argue, no doubt, that some Venusians were *not* assassins, but such differences made no difference, so long as those Venuspeople who *were* informed by hostility had the means to maintain this continuous fire.

Danton looked out through the transparent plastic of the tear-drop that was his personal ship, a low-priced "baby-hopper" that carried him high above woodlands, and wondered, *Will it be today?*

And all over Earth, people glanced up at the sky and asked the same question. *It* was the next bomb, the bomb that would land on *you*. What mattered the intervals between bombs—whether the spacing was hours, days, or months? What mattered whether the bombs came singly, or in clusters? They would continue to come; that was all.

Would the next one be it?

A voice from the ship's radio intoned, "*...nor shall compacts entered into without notification and approval be honored; nor shall any agreements entered into by governments in any other fashion than publically, be held binding on the governments, whether or not approved by the Council.*"

"Article 2, Section A, Paragraph 2 of the Peace Orders, Security Broadcast, May 4, 1961," Danton murmured beneath his breath. He knew this passage by heart, as did virtually everyone else on Earth. It was intoned, rather than asserted, before each meeting of the Security Council—reminding the world that part of the dream of a great statesman of the 20th Century had come true. Decisions among and between nations had, in truth, become open covenants, openly arrived at; every official meeting of the Security Council was broadcast and televised.

He wondered what might be the occasion for today's meeting; none had been scheduled. Danton's ruminations

ceased as his personal wrist-communicator stuttered a familiar rhythm. His brown eyes squinted, Tudor-like features becoming rigid with tension, as the fingers of his right hand moved toward his wrist to squeeze the cut-off.

THE FINGERS hesitated. He was Paul Danton, but more than Danton; he was a member of the Pro-Earth Party, the underground movement which conspired against Earth's ruling government—the Security Council—and propagandized peace-overtures to Venus, among other surface-aims, awaiting a day that never seemed to come. He was Dendrite B, of the Inguinal Plexus, anonymous otherwise, as were his colleagues in this monolith.

To the layman, the scientific-sounding terminology in the Pro-Earth Party lent support to the party's contentions of being truly scientific in its approach to socio-economic problems—and anything else under the sun that it might find of use for its purposes. Thus, the various party locals were known as Plexi, and named after the various plexi in the human body. Within the plexus, the unit was the Vagus—a three-man cell, whose leader was termed the Cyton; nine of such cells made up the plexus, and dendrites were lettered from A to Z. The local chief, referred to as the Ganglion, had no letter.

Thus, in the Inguinal Plexus, Dendrite A was the Cyton; Dendrite B, Paul Danton; and Dendrite C, another rank-and-file member, whose name Danton didn't know. Dendrite E, of course, was Cyton of another Vagus, and so on—although cytons were never referred to by their dendrite-letters unless they were on trial. Party members who had sufficient sense of humor to be amused at the neurological analogies rarely survived long enough to enjoy the joke, Danton had noticed. The idealism which had led him into the party had become tempered with caution early enough to insure his

survival through ten purge-hidden years.

One learned hesitation, but one did not waver too long. The call-signal Danton had just heard was right. If Golgi was taking such a risk as to order that dendrites be summoned on personal wave-bands, then there must be an extraordinarily-compelling reason. Danton said warily, "Dendrite B, Inguinal."

Golgi was the central committee of the Pro-Earth Party, responsible only to the party chief himself, that elusive person known as The Cortex. Theoretically, the Cortex could be deposed, for sufficient cause, and he was only the spokesman for the committee—but in practice, his rule was absolute.

The reply Danton heard was instantaneous, though faint. "Main stem." That was the headquarters of the central committee. "The conference on Duplication has been cancelled; if you're near a local, you'd better land there."

Danton looked at his wrist, sifting the meagre facts; let's see... yes, there was a local of the Pro-Earth Party not too far off his present line of flight—he couldn't recall which Plexus, though. Security hadn't uncovered this one, yet—at last reports. He wondered if Main Stem were tracking his flight.

"What's up?" he asked, a little of the tension easing out of his voice.

"Another heller of a V-Bomb just arrived... landed in a rural area; but if they have any more like it in the same batch, serious damage is bound to come." Involuntarily, Danton looked up through the plastic of his ship at the cloudless, non-committal sky. That glance upward, helpless and defiant at the same time, was virtually a universal tic, a signal-reaction to the word, "*they*", when intoned as it was now.

"Security has called an emergency session," the speaker continued.

"I know," Danton replied; "I was just listening to the ritual; cut-off,

please, so I can hear what's going on." He squeezed his own cut-off, and altered his course; the little ship swung south obediently, as the suave tones of Joachim Burgd's well-known (and, to Pro-Earth Party members, well-hated) voice filled the cabin. Danton had seen the Representative from Antarctica many times on video; he could picture the man, now—even before he turned on the tiny screen in his hopper: sleek, giving an impression of tallness, even though his height was barely medium; immaculately attired; a feline figure, with eyes that underlined the suggestion.

2

BURGD WAS saying, "Surely, we should be accustomed to this by now. This is not the first bomb; it is not the one hundred and first. It is, roughly, the twelve-hundredth. Might I suggest that the hour is somewhat late for—if my colleagues will forgive me the word—hysteria?"

He stood confidently beside his desk, cat-like, his eyes powerful, and giving an impression that he had learned how to purr. Behind him in the screen, Danton could see Marcia Nels, the Albertan chairwoman of the Council; she appeared less cool, for all her decided poise. Danton knew her for an expert politician, yet he could tell from her eyes—small as her figure was on his screen—and from her hands, that she felt the latest blow from Venus. She felt it as much as if it *were* the first, he thought; the victims were real to her.

Her voice was calm enough as she replied, "There are such things as emergencies in the healthiest constitutions, Mr. Burgd. The body-politic has reached a threshold. The people have borne this continual bombardment from the skies too long."

"Suppose we let Mr.—ah—Wilkins finish," interrupted the Appalachian representative, a man named Heath.

He spoke into the sender on his own desk. "Just how much damage was there, sir?"

A faint crackle from the radio—the attache seemed to be reporting from another station—then Danton heard Wilkins' voice come through. "Very little, fortunately. Durham is not much of a town, and the projectile landed in the outskirts. But—I never saw a chemical explosive go off so sharply; it seemed to turn to gas in every particle, all at once—the wave-front of the explosion was way up in the supersonic frequencies. It behaved like a relative of trinitrogen iodide—went off with a *crack*, instead of a *boom*."

"Tell us about the damage, please," Heath put in dryly; "we aren't scientists."

"Well... it busted a lot of eardrums, and fired the tobacco-crop in the vicinity—don't ask me how! And there were some extraordinary emotional affects among the townspeople. About \$45,000 worth of buildings powdered. . . . Deaths haven't been counted, since they're still going on; but there seem to be between six and seven hundred, so far."

"Immunes?" Burgd asked. There was a brief hesitation at the other end. Most of the speculation about human mutations, that might result from the radiations emanating from fission-bomb explosions in the Twentieth Century, remained nothing but speculation. But one viable mutation *had* emerged. These people weren't monsters, or freaks, in any visible aspect; but they all had one characteristic in common, Danton remembered: immunity to one or more of the afflictions which plagued "normal" people.

"One was killed," came the answer. "There are only a few Immunes here; the rest are unharmed, as usual." The undertones in Wilkins' voice bespoke the resentment most "normal" people held toward the mutants. "*An Immune*

is a human being; he's a man, all right," Wilkins' undertone said, "*but he's somehow 'different'; I can't predict his motives and actions by 'normal' standards*."

"Thank you," Marcia Nels replied. "Does the Council wish further information?"

TAMARA, the Representative for Ukraina, stood up. "That sounds simple. I suggest that Mr. Wilkins complete this report in the usual way; Mr. Heath can cull it for us later."

The faint wash of sound that was Wilkins' carrier-beam stopped. Tamara continued, "I think that the danger is real enough, to be sure. The Venusians have a radiation-screen around the entire planet which won't pass atomic weapons. So far, they haven't been able to shoot fission or fusion bombs at us, any more than we've been able to fire atomic weapons at them. But... if their molecular science keeps advancing at the pace it has, this may not make any difference, shortly."

She spoke in Russian, as was her usual practice, but Burgd understood, and plunged ahead without waiting for translation. "Just what do you propose? I am as reluctant as any other member that the people should be asked to suffer this century-long fusillade passively. But I see no present alternative that we could accept; the situation has grown much worse, but it has not changed, essentially. The *soi-disant* 'Earth Government-in-Exile' is still as impervious to our major weapons as it ever was—and there is no military sense in returning their chemical-projectile attacks. It might relieve some pent-up feelings on Earth, but it would mean nothing; we might as well send the people out to blow peas at penguins, from baby-hoppers half a mile up. A few birds might be hit, and the peas might sting them a little, but they'd peck still harder after that."

Marcia Nels recognized Carillo, the



Tidal waves washed over New York after the ice-cap was bombed; all the coastal cities were engulfed.

Representative for Brazil, who spun out an elaborate, intricately-balanced discourse in Portuguese, replete with gestures, which the translator reduced to, "My government agrees with Mr. Burgd upon quite different premises. We all hold membership in this Council in order to prevent war; too carry war to others is specifically forbidden under our charter."

Heath had been attending to his corn cob, apparently paying no attention, but he twirled a match in his fingers, putting out the flame before it had touched the tobacco in the bowl. The answer he shot back at the bird-like Brazilian was pungent; it went over into Portuguese rather oddly.

"Luncheon-meat!" the translator barked for him. "Is Venus an aggressor

within the definition of the Peace Orders, or isn't she? Are we in doubt as to which planet houses the legal government of Earth? Has the title of the Venusian rulers, the self-proclaimed Earth-Government-in-Exile, any validity for anyone except themselves and Venuspeople? Security had no scruples about flooding out the old multi-national states back in 1961, when it bombed the ice-cap. Our ancestors carried war to the whole damned Earth, and did it with nothing more than fifty antiquated fission-bombs.

"What about that, Mr. Burgd?" Heath added, shooting a glance at the Antarctic. "If the first Council hadn't found a method where there seemed to be none, your present east-teemed territory would still be under

quite a few tons of ice. And I doubt that Mr. Carillo would be here, either, if the first Council hadn't taken the action it did; the additional sixty feet of depth that the Amazon river took unto itself after the bombing may not have made Brazil a major power in one blow, but it sure did help."

Burgd was purring almost audibly now, Danton thought. "But... *what do you propose?* We grant you your point: Antarctica, Brazil, Appalachia—*none* of us, as a matter of fact—would be here now had the Peace Squadron not bombed the ice-cap. We would have no nations to represent. What were then known as Russia and America had fission and fusion bombs; Argentina, as it was called before it disappeared beneath the ocean, was supposed to have a fusion bomb. Very well; we agree—there would have been no survivors, so far as nations go.

"Since that time, as we all know, there has been no aggression on this planet; the Peace Orders left no room for it. But... need I remind you, my dear sir, that the Peace-Orders seem to be unenforceable on Venus? You cannot get a fission-powered ship, or any other kind of atomic projectile, or atomic Dust-cloud, through the Thomas Screen. The surface of Venus, itself, is always invisible to us; we have no idea where to shoot a torpedo, or any other kind of demolition missile. An entire planet could not be blanketed with gas, nor could we use biological weapons in an extra-Terrestrial ecology.

"Do you imagine that you can stop the bombardment by liquidating the Pro-Earth Party? The Americans thought along such lines, as I recall; that didn't prevent war. Or should we ask for volunteers to parachute thousands of miles through that screen? If there *is* anything that will work—"

3

THE BROADCAST of the Security Council's meeting covered not

only the planet Earth. There was a tiny vortex in the Terrestrial ionosphere, fixed there magnetically by the last of the ships that had carried the original members of the Earth Government-in-Exile to Venus—a pinhole through the Heaviside Layer, which otherwise confined radio-waves within Earth's atmosphere. Forty-five million miles away, deep within the planet Venus itself, men who proclaimed themselves the current Earth-Government-in-Exile listened.

But there was another relic of that period—an artificial satellite rotating in a fixed orbit between Earth and Moon, a left-over from those belated war-preparations. It was now an anchorage for single spaceships known as the Moon Ferry, whose vast, absorbent bulk shuttled between the satellite and Luna itself.

The ferry was in the way, and the Security Broadcast, except for an occasional half-audible word, was blanked out—so far as the Venus audience was concerned—in the middle of Burgd's sentence.

It was a quiet room within Venus, where Geoffrey Thomas sat in the Director's chair and chuckled at his colleagues, the top officers of the Earth-Government-in-Exile. Thomas, who should have been dead these sixty years, at least—the fabulous electronics genius who created the screen that covered a planet—chuckled again as his eyes traveled around the room, from one man to another. First, "Nerveless" Lathrop, standing with his feet apart to accommodate a considerable girth, his Colonel's uniform immaculate, looking something like a medieval British king; Enfield, sad-eyed, lanky, a Mazarin brooding in the place of Richelieu and conscious of his shortcomings; Mann, a sharp-visaged Cassius, burning with the naked desire for power; Taverner, a young Stalin, bland and deceptively innocent-looking.

Thomas looked at this second generation of conspirators, measured them against the men with whom he had made his flight, and laughed. That laugh made his five hundred and twenty pounds of flesh do obscene things; even Lathrop's sensual mouth twitched. Other eyes looked rapidly away from the swaying, pendulous fat that hid the arms of the chief's chair—except for Taverner. He watched as unconcerned as a cow chewing grass.

"Next time we're cut off," Enfield observed gloomily, "there'll be no avoiding the conclusion that they've discovered our 'aerial'." The others stiffened uneasily—again with the exception of Taverner, who smothered a yawn.

Thomas watched Enfield's perpetually-sad expression droop still farther. As he'd remarked once, no predicament was ever as bad as it seemed, with Enfield; it was far worse. The attitude was a natural one for a moderate liberal to develop, when he was trying to operate in a society based on violence. Still, the man's predecessor...well, that was part of Enfield's burden.

His eyes shifted to Lathrop, as the Colonel snorted, "Impossible."

"We'll have to fire off a deputation, asking them kindly to start sending in radar," Thomas suggested, gurgling. "I'm sure they wouldn't want to miss a bigger Hooper."

LATHROP insisted again that it wasn't possible. "The hole those broadcasts come through couldn't be found in a million years without knowing its exact coordinates beforehand. These interruptions are regular; sooner or later, we'll get the periodicity tied to some known event, and we'll be able to predict them. But we'll find that Security has nothing to do with them."

"Well, the end-result is the same," Enfield replied. He looked at Tavern-

er. "What do you think—or *do* you think?"

The weariness in the question took any sting out of it. Taverner's expression didn't change. He shrugged slightly: "This situation does not require my thinking; I realized long enough ago that thinking about it would not change anything, nor lead to any action that could accomplish anything. You think the way a chicken pecks, my friend; I only think when it is necessary."

Thomas' smile grew as Lathrop said, "Ah...a man of action. What are you doing, then, if you're not thinking?"

"Waiting. Enfield pecks with thinking, and you peck with play-acting. I wait. When it is time I shall do what is necessary."

Lathrop didn't seem perturbed at the insult, Thomas noticed. He nodded briefly, and looked at Enfield. Thomas' smile burst out into another chuckle—one he knew would set up sympathetic vibrations in the three that teetered on the verge of hysteria. Taverner didn't seem to notice.

"Stop the horseplay!" Mann grated. He led the extreme militarists, the Warhawk Party, and his words were as sharp as the hunger that exuded from his soul. "We've got them mad now. A few more torpedoes, and they'll be all set to do something stupid. We'll have a good hot party waiting for them when they arrive."

Enfield wanted to know how. He drew circles in the thin, crystalline dust on a table, and explored the situation which would confront Venus when Terrestrial expeditions arrived in force. The diagnosis was reassuringly dismal, Thomas thought.

"Atomics or no atomics," Enfield concluded, "if they become angry enough to make a large-scale raid, they'll swamp us. They have the men, and they have the chemists. And we haven't enough radioactives to make

more than a few fission-bombs of our own, at the very best."

He drew a deep breath, which promised an epilogue twice the length of the speech he'd just delivered, but a pithy expletive from Lathrop interrupted him. Enfield shut up, looking like a disapproving school-teacher. The Colonel balled his fist against his belt, and thrust his feet still farther apart, looking impressively theatrical.

"You civilians are worse than children. Don't you ever *look* at the planet you live in? No matter how powerful Earth's technology may be, or may become, it means nothing against us. We're perfectly dispersed, completely featureless, a colony of moles spread out under the surface of a good-sized world. We have nothing they could hit—even with atomics—that would cripple anything more than a very small area. We have no more central organization than an earthworm; they can destroy a few segments, that's all."

He tapped his fingers against his belt, smiled unpleasantly, and looked around at the rest of them—except for Thomas. "It would take very nearly their entire population to make a conquest here that would have any chance sticking, gentlemen. Our position is nearly impregnable; why should we jeopardize it by making a bigger gesture than we need, or can afford? With proper preparation, we can own the Earth."

"You should know, Colonel," remarked Thomas, looking at Lathrop with an infuriating smirk. "Why don't you and Mann get together? It's obvious that a Warhawk need good military advice."

Lathrop met the Director's eyes steadily. "Because," he said coldly, "I am not a Warhawk, as you well know."

Thomas was silent, but beneath the layer of tissue, his smirk subsided momentarily. He made a signal, and Taverner stepped to one side as two

male nurses, who had been standing in attendance behind the Director, came forward and began to ease him to his feet.

"You're a mugwump, like our friend Enfield, Colonel—despite your belligerent uniforms and poses," Thomas panted. "Your motto is, *Sit Tight*; his is *Lie Still*—not so great a difference."

"And what is Taverner? What's the difference between him and us?"

Thomas' eyes shot sidewise to the bland young man. "Taverner? . . . Oh, he's a real Boy Scout; his motto is *Be Prepared*. You can look up the rest for yourself, Colonel."

He smirked at their expressions, knowing that they all wondered how Thomas was able to walk at all, even with help. They'd seen earlier pictures of him, and knew that he'd been a big man in the first place—well over six feet tall, and equipped with a large frame, to boot. He could almost see them calculating—*How old would he be now? At least one hundred and forty.*

"Ah, yes, Colonel—once I was trim like you; now my legs stick out from each other like the rays of a starfish."

Lathrop paled. "You've given us thumbnail sketches of each other—tell us now just what you are, besides an immortal anachronism?"

There was no answer as the nurses helped the Director of the Exiles' government sidewise through the door, and a faint, blubbing laugh echoed back, along with the flopping sound of footsteps. Thomas pictured Lathrop running a finger along his waistline (there was a rumor that he had ordered corsets) and Mann standing beside the dead radio, clenching and unclenching his fists. There was silence in the room momentarily; any sound, even a whisper, would be picked up by one or more of the concealed microphones Thomas had spotted about, and relayed to the communicator he carried inside an artificial molar.

He heard Lathrop murmur, "A scout is helpful," as Mann whispered, "Stinking usurpers! *Come and get us!*"

Thomas smiled. The original Exiles had hated Earth, but none as viciously as this second generation, this new crop of power-seekers he called his Cabal. But then, Mann and the others had the advantage of thorough ignorance concerning Earth. . . No; that was wrong, partly—only Mann really hated. . .

4

ON EARTH itself, there was no interruption in the broadcast or televising of Security proceedings. Paul Danton, eyes on the screen as if he could read the thoughts behind the tiny figures there if he looked closely enough, wondered what hidden project lay behind Joachim Burgd's phrase, "Do you think we can stop the bombardment by liquidating the Pro-Earth Party?" Was this remark merely a jibe, something intended to goad the Party into ill-considered action? If so, Burgd was being naive; the Party knew that Security was in no position to deliver on such an offer. Still. . . the threat was there; it had been hanging over their heads when first Danton joined. It provided the rationale for frequent shifts in the party-line, the purges that invariably followed, the incessant spying, the totalitarian discipline.

Yet, Security's agents had done little more than carry on a campaign of incessant harrying; Danton wondered if the punches were being pulled—if some of the heroic escapes of some party-members hadn't been arranged that way.

Did the Pro-Earth Party play an unwitting part in Burgd's devious plans? Was it a convenience he preferred to keep handy?

Danton's attention returned to the television screen as Burgd's voice said, "Or should we ask for volunteers to

parachute thousands of miles through that screen? If there *is* anything that will work—" he coughed slightly, and Danton found himself bending forward.

"—in a military sense, I mean—we should know about it; then there would be some sense in debating how to use it.

"But research has produced nothing; the situation stands exactly as it stood a hundred years ago—the day our predecessors saw the rebel ships enter Venus' atmosphere, and, soon afterward, saw a single flash of lightning shroud the planet in their wake. You will remember that atomic physicists of that day declared the Thomas Screen to be mathematically impossible. I am not a mathematician, so I bow to their judgement, but must murmur under my breath that the Screen exists; without it, the rebels would never have risked a flight to Venus."

Burgd paused momentarily, and Carillo sprang into the breach. "Madame Nels—must we waste time on grammar-school lessons?"

"I move that Mr. Burgd proceed," the Siberian representative said. "This is a public meeting; we are on the air, and it is essential that all sides be heard. After all, many grammar-school children will be listening; we must not assume that every member of the general public knows as much about history as we do, even though we assume them capable of understanding it, once the facts are clearly put."

"Thank you," the Antarctic replied, somewhat too politely, Danton thought. "That was partly what I had in mind; it does not hurt to be reminded of what we know, at relevant points. . . . I wish only to point out, again, that—perhaps due to a failure to instruct atomic projectiles that the Thomas Screen is an impossibility—the Screen *did* operate exactly as Geoffrey asserted it would. It has been as

inconvenient to them, in a way, as it has been protective; every projectile that the Exiles have fired at us has been chemically-powered and chemically-armed. Hatred as violent as theirs—hatred sufficient to produce this generation-spanning bombardment—would not draw the line at atomic missiles unless there were a reason.”

“Perhaps they do not have atomic weapons,” Carillo suggested.

“This is possible, I grant you,” Burgd replied. “However, there is better reason to assume that they do. Nor, let me remind you, have we been satisfied with paper-logic and academic debate. Fifty years ago, atomic projectiles *were* fired at Venus; they all blew up just short of the Screen. The experiment is still being tried, but the results are the same. Conclusion: the Screen will not pass radioactive, from either side.”

“Still,” added the Brazilian.

“Still,” agreed Burgd. “So far as cracking the Thomas Screen goes, Earth’s best brains and equipment have made not one step farther than was made during the period of the revolt and flight of the rebels. As the public has been informed, the latest report from the Screen Team—a group of geniuses, if men ever deserved that overworked title—confesses failure to agree on the most elementary of initial tests. Even a full century’s advance in mathematical theory fails to provide any clue as to the nature of the Thomas Screen; without such knowledge, testing-instruments cannot be designed.”

HEATH AGREED. “Report’s a sadsack. The Thomas Screen is physically out of this world—and out of theirs, too, I guess. But when it comes to reminding us of what we know, I can deal you one, Mr. Burgd. Remember reports of what were apparently Venusian attempts to get atomics of some kind by their own

screen? Blew up—just like our own bombs.

“But it seems to me, Mr. Burgd,” Heath went on, “that the Representative from Brazil is right in toning this down. We’ll accept the likelihood that the Screen may not be cracked, atomically, for another century to come. Maybe it can’t be cracked at all—one of those irreversible things—though they said it couldn’t be made, in the first place. That isn’t the point at all, however. What we’ve got to find now is a way to deal with Venus *without* using atomic weapons.”

He lit his eternal pipe, and twirled the match reflectively. “It’s the report of the Psychology Team which counts, now. They’ve traced a rising insanity-curve directly to this bombardment. No doubt about it, either. Despite all that our educators can do—all that the press can do—our people grow up in a world that’s got a mass phobia. Isn’t a single human being on this Earth who can make a move that hasn’t been influenced by fear—fear of that no-longer-proverbial bolt from the blue.

“You don’t need much imagination to know that *up there somewhere* is a world that hates you and everyone else on this planet, and is out to kill as many Earthpeople as possible. You can see that nothing has been done about it—nothing effective, anyhow; and it doesn’t look to the average man as if anything *can* be done. You feel like a rat in a maze.”

The Appalachian’s rough voice and manner of speaking could not compare with Burgd’s brilliance and polish, Danton thought, as Heath took the corncob out of his mouth. Nevertheless, the man had his listeners’ full attention. His pipe had gone out again, but no one—not even Burgd—interrupted him while he filled and relit it. The camera momentarily spotted Heath twirling his matchstick in the preternatural silence of the Council



"Wait a moment," said Danton. "That first one — it seems to have a collar with a metal device on it. I don't remember owning anything like that."

chamber, then shifted to his face as he continued.

"We've done the best we could; the situation's just unbearable. Long as it stays like this, we're right smack against the edge of mental bust, over the whole planet. We can maybe postpone it, hold it back day to day and week to week, but we're still right where we were. The hospitals are jammed full; the weakest ones keep going down, one by one—minds snapping like lights going out in a power-shortage. Any kind of intelligent work, just government, good artistic creation—hell and damnation, you might as well say any kind of sane living at all—gets more fiendishly difficult every day. Pretty soon, it'll be impossible.

"So I'm saying that, Screen or no Screen, we've got to act. Not tomorrow; not when the Screen Team finds something, but *now!*"

5

THE INTERFERENCE of the Moon Ferry had passed now, and Heath's words were heard on Venus—but not by the Exiles; they were heard in a small Nissan hut on the hot, arid surface of the planet. In that murky atmosphere, no eyes could see the hut from more than a foot away—if as much as that. It was hidden from the Venusian populace, far below and from the watchful eyes of the Exile government as effectively as from Terrestrial eyes. No telescope on Earth could find an object a thousand times the size of this hut on Venus' face, nor could any visual-magnification instrument help on Venus.

"*At last!*"

Each man within the hut was anonymous in the oxygen mask that all must wear, and heard the shouts of the others over the earphones of his communication-unit. There was no demonstration but, as Heath's concluding remarks came over the radio, excitement was a tangible thing in the room, passing from man to man

around the table where they huddled. Only one of the nameless figures seemed unmoved; the tall, lean figure at the head of the table, known to the others simply as the gloomy Man.

"They won't come," he said simply. His shoulders lifted and sagged again. "They won't come; they haven't before, and won't now. Security has been using parliamentary maneuvers as a substitute for action for a hundred years—as you'll discover if you read over the transcriptions of their broadcasts from the time the Earth Party started. They won't change now, no matter what anyone may say in any particular speech."

He stared around at his still-exultant colleagues, all of them featureless as himself, distinguishable only by their size, characteristic postures and gestures, and the inflections in their speech as it came over the headphones. "You don't agree, eh?"

"This sounds like something more than mere talk," the stocky one half-way down the table objected. "It's a perfect time for them now, if they're ready." He motioned downward, in the general direction of the main body of Venusian civilization. Only the observatories and the "underground" were on the surface. "The Exiles are at each other's throats, just about literally as things stand. Enfield has been losing ground, as we know, and he's just about burned out; there's no one among the Moderates to step into his shoes. I doubt that Enfield, even as he was, could keep the Moderate Party from collapse much longer, in any event. Lathrop is the strongest single personality in the Cabal, but the Conservatives have been losing popularity for quite awhile; Mann and his program have caught the popular fancy. Warhawk Party membership has doubled in the past two months—the people want decisive action, and Mann's the only one talking along those lines. He's succeeded in

having the bombardment stepped up, you know, and that looks good to the average citizen—it looks as if something is being done. As for Taverner. . .” The stocky man let his voice drop.

“Lathrop hasn’t the numbers to win out,” the figure at the radio agreed. “But Mann hasn’t the brains to seize control, even though now is the time he might do it and make it stick. Enfield exists only by tolerance—Lathrop and Mann each find him a convenient buffer against the other, and he *does* represent a sizeable block of the populace still. As for Taverner—well, what is he? A glorified office-boy. He hasn’t any party behind him at all, doesn’t represent anything except himself, and that’s saying very little. Thomas has some use for him, so he’s there; the others have to accept him.”

“Thomas sprawls on top of them all, and don’t you forget it,” the stocky one said. “He uses each against the other, and that is where Taverner fits in—as Thomas’ instrument. None of them are making coalitions and temporary pacts when it comes to their main object—to kill Thomas and become immortal in his place. . . . Don’t tell me that Taverner doesn’t dream of it, too; my guess is that he has an inside track. . . .”

THE GLOOMY man wheezed and looked around the table again, as if trying to find direction where there was none. “Immortality?” he asked. “Sure, that’s what everyone on Venus dreams of.” His inflections left no doubt that he included all present in his statement. “Oh, it hasn’t been proved that Thomas is immortal—but he obviously has some secret way of extending his life-expectancy, and that’s a good enough start. . . . Maybe he *is* immortal; at any rate, the secret goes along with the Director’s position, so the rest of the Cabal has its eyes on the chief’s chair for more than the usual reason. It’s a palace-

struggle, first of all, my friend,” he added, nodding in the direction of the stocky man. “Popular backing has a part in it, but is really secondary—the man who wins will have a party; you may be sure of that.”

The stocky one shrugged. “Well. . . there’s plutonium under the crust of Venus, all the same. If Earth made a landing, we wouldn’t have to go through with the coup we planned. The Exiles would be fighting each other so busily that they wouldn’t care *what* happened on the surface of this planet.”

“That’s right,” agreed the mask at the radio; “we’ve made the progress we have during the past year pretty largely because the Cabal’s been fully occupied jockeying for power, and hasn’t paid any attention to us. Ever since Thomas simply announced that Taverner was now a member of the Cabal, and the others all thought they could make private capital out of accepting him. . . .”

“Let me get this straight,” the gloomy man put in. “We’ve already gone over the background today, before the broadcast started.” He paused significantly, and remembered past years when he, too, had been enthusiastic. The thought softened the statement he’d been about to make to, “What you have been saying, so far as I can reduce it, is this: Earth *is* going to raid Venus this time, because—as we all agree—this is a good time for it.”

There was a long, uncomfortable silence. At last a small figure, whom they knew as the Old One said bitterly, “The last twist of the knife. From that, we’d have to assume that Security, back on Earth, knows all about the conflicts and general situation here. They couldn’t unless they *were* here, had spies. . . . It might be possible,” he started up, hopefully.

The gloomy man shook his head. “No spies have ever contacted us; you know that. We would be their

natural allies; the chances against it—”

“Aren’t too great!” burst out the stocky one. “Didn’t you hear Burgd’s reference to the ‘Pro-Earth Party’? How does he know that there *is* such a party? How can he know of our existence, unless Security has spies here—”

“No,” the gloomy man stated flatly. “There may be such a party, but it isn’t us. Never have we called ourselves the ‘Pro-Earth Party’; it would have been suicide for our founders to have used the term, and not much better than that for us. We’ve been hounded enough as it is—need I remind you?”

“Why do we call ourselves the ‘Earth Party’? We want to remind our youngsters of what the Exiles—the original refugees from Earth—lost when they made their asinine exodus to this miserable planet.” He chuckled dryly. “When I was a recruit, I tried to agitate for a change in our name—let’s call ourselves the ‘Back-to-Earth’ party, I proposed. Well, it fits our aims, but it’s just too clumsy; I was told that that change had been proposed and voted down on the same grounds many times before.”

“Just the same,” said the stocky man, “the name Burgd mentioned may have gotten mixed around in transit.”

“Possible—but not likely,” asserted the gloomy man. “Burgd is as devious as they come; you know that. He makes a point of saying something a little different than what he means, and isn’t above talking in circles if he’s strongly against any action.” The Earth Party leader tapped on the table, underlining each word. “Burgd opposes action against Venus, and he was piling up double and triple entendres with every sentence. ‘Do you propose to liquidate the Pro-Earth Party?’ wouldn’t have made any sense at all if it referred to us.

“No, gentlemen. . . *he meant the Exiles!*”

“What involved nonsense!” sputtered the stocky one. “I don’t remember that speech word for word, but I’ll bet you don’t, either. You’ve misquoted it, or given it another context—which is just as bad—and you’ll see for yourself when we play it back. I agree that there was probably some irony involved, but it could only have been opposite to the interpretation you just offered. He was most likely implying that *the Cabal would liquidate us, first of all*, if Venus were attacked; that’s logical enough. He may be counting on us for later—”

“Why don’t we stop shouting at each other and turn the radio back on?” the newest member wanted to know. “That meeting must still be in progress. We might easily find out what the Antarctic *did* mean, if we paid attention.”

There was another pregnant silence; then the gloomy man said, “The radio isn’t off; it just isn’t receiving. We can’t tap the system the Cabal uses, and our own depends upon about thirty different conditions. When any one of these don’t obtain, we don’t hear a broadcast.”

“Thirty? How do we ever get anything at all?”

The gloomy man shrugged. “Mostly, we don’t. We have a transmitter hidden in the Outstation, but it hasn’t been serviced for years—our man up there was purged, and we’ve never been able to get another agent aloft.” He stopped, and looked around the table. “Has anyone anything practical to suggest?”

The session of the Earth Party broke up in unhappy silence.

6

IN THE VIDEO-SCREEN of Paul Danton’s baby-hopper, Burgd looked tall as he stood up, even in that five-inch frame the plane boasted.

"If I ask, 'What do you propose?' once more, I may irritate someone," he said. "But in all this talk of technical problems, we have forgotten that warfare, too, is a technique. It has no better place for the inspired amateur than has mathematics or psychology—in short, none—as a man named Hitler learned in the 1940's.

"Of course, we have to act upon the premise that the Thomas Screen is uncrackable. All during this century, we have had a Military Team which begins with that same premise. Will Mr. Heath now please look at *their* report?" His eyebrows lifted in accent as he paused. "Or, to save time, I will summarise it:

"The Military Team does not know the topography of the planet it has been asked to consider as a battleground; it cannot even make what is known as an educated guess, because the entire surface of Venus is invisible, swathed in dust-clouds miles deep. What must we bomb first of all? We do not know. Is a landing in force necessary? If so, where? We do not know. Just how many Venuspeople are there? How well armed are they? How will they operate against us in that eternal, poisonous dust-storm, with which they must be so familiar by now? The Military Team does not know; it has no idea whatsoever. We do not know.

"No one on Earth knows."

On the screen, there was a brief stir of tiny figures. A messenger made his way down the broad aisle toward Marcia Nels' seat on the high rostrum. She bent her bright head, its plaits gleaming, and the messenger spoke to her. Danton heard a vague muttering in the background. Then the messenger turned and went out.

Burgd was still standing, his dramatic pause spoiled, but his stance somehow conveying a tense, almost-eager expectancy. Marcia Nels said, "We have here a report on the progress of

our counter-espionage project. The first phase will be closed within the hour."

Tamara was on her feet at once. "I move we adjourn," she said clearly, "in favor of the Retaliation Committee."

"Second," said Schwartzkopf, the European representative.

"Is there any discussion?" The chairwoman's query was answered with dead silence. Danton watched, amazed. After the complete standstill to which Burgd had argued them—

But the votes piled up, one by one. There was not a single "Nay". Danton listened, in growing consternation as the "Ayes" mounted, and gasped when, as the chairwoman called upon the representative from Antarctica, Joachim Burgd voted "Yes".

It was as good as a declaration of war...

...and Burgd had voted, "Yes!"



The Invisible Curtain

THE CALL-INSIGNIA of the video-network appeared on Danton's screen, and a voice said, "This concludes the Security Council session; we now return you to Hollywood Bay, and the interrupted performance of Kurt List's opera—"

Danton switched off the set with a brittle gesture and sat back in the bucket-seat of the hopper. There was nothing for him to do now but to await the "destination" buzz from the synchro; but there was much to think about.

The crucial Duplication conference of the Pro-Earth Party cancelled!

The minute I hit ground, he thought grimly, I'll file a protest.

Lord knows how long we've fought to have peace-overtures made. We get within smelling-distance of a weapon to back our demands, and—just as Security moves toward open war with Venus—the Party throws the weapon away!

But his first thoughts were hardly complete before second thoughts arose and pushed them into the background, and Danton knew that he would make no such protest at the moment. True, the Party offered all members the instrument of protest over any decision from Golgi, but...

Let's see, murmured Danton's second thoughts, *who was the last Dendrite who protested openly? "Was" is the correct tense.*

No—this situation might indicate a sudden shift in the party line, and he knew the correct course to take—the course most likely to insure his survival. *Attend the meeting, this mentor urged, and give another demonstration of your total devotion and thorough understanding of the dendrite's duty. You approve; voice your approval.*

He let himself—nay, forced himself—to remember the case of Dendrite J of...he couldn't remember the plexus...who had filed a formal protest not two months before. A serious-minded, intellectually-inclined man, often under suspicion but accepted so long as he used his gifts the right way. Was he still alive now? Had he fallen sick, or met with an accident, as was the fate of most dendrites who were read out of the party? It didn't matter; Dendrite J died the night he was turned out, died there before his fellow dendrites, repenting his errors, bewailing his crimes, calling upon all who witnessed to behold the inevitable end of wrong thinking and to take warning—beware of deviation! He had thanked them for permitting him to speak, to acknowledge his unforgivable acts...pleaded for physical

execution...full justice to a saboteur and a traitor...

Danton shuddered, not so much at the thought of Dendrite J's crimes, or even his specific punishment, as at the thought of existence outside the Pro-Earth Party. Dendrite J had served the Party in his humiliation; there had been others who had simply deserted. How did they exist now? How could they exist, day to day, cut off from the surety, the security, the comradeship, the inner light of the Party?

Voice your approval, the inner voice said to Danton, and keep alert. Listen carefully for any sign of deviation or dissent from the others. There are enemies within the organism, some of whom may expose themselves at this time. Attack any symptoms you see, but in a fraternal manner, at first; simply expose errors, for a slight corruption, immediately cured, strengthens all. But note who displays weakness, prepare for later denunciation; overlook nothing; forget nothing...

Golgi is right, as it has inevitably been right in the past, for we have mastered the science of history. Golgi is right...even when proved wrong, another thought came; Danton stifled this impulse, but not before the fragment had completed itself:...for reasons newly invented to fit the occasion...

I'm tired, he thought. My resistance ebbs when I'm tired. He sighed and tried to relax, breathing deeply. We are not supermen, his thoughts continued, as if he were preparing a speech. We have no illusions of infallibility, as individuals; we are scientists, and we are not afraid, nor ashamed, to admit mistakes when we discover them. We check and question ourselves constantly; our self-criticism is sharper and more penetrating than any outside criticism possibly could be, for we know the correct methods. But the fundamental fact is



Blond Taverner was a ragged man now . . . "We questioned him," Thomas said, "and he showed a certain reluctance."

that we do not make *basic* errors; so, when we find a miscalculation—a human failing—we know how to correct it simply and straightforwardly.

He wondered momentarily if a protest might not be his duty. For one thing, Golgi had only the vaguest of reasons to imagine that the almost-legendary Duplication machine ever existed; Danton's recently-completed mission had been to make a final search, to settle the question.

If the decision to cancel the Duplication session were only a decision of Golgi, without the initial impetus of the Cortex, then there would be an important difference in this situation. There were times when the loyal dendrite was expected to be critical.

Consider space flight, Danton thought. We were conditioned to it by easy spoonful, so to speak, until the idea became commonplace. All century, we have been swallowing new miracles of science—our capacity may have been strained. To accept the idea of a machine which can make duplicates of living men may be too much to take in one gulp.

THE CONTENTS of his stomach sloshed as the hopper stopped and dropped in a single motion. Danton glowered at the synchro. Thanks to the sudden ringing in his ears, he hadn't heard the "destination" signal; in fact, he remembered now that he had never heard that buzz. More expensive ships had better manners, no doubt.

The building which housed the local dated from the mid-Twentieth-Century "Cold War"; its camouflage had peeled off long ago, but there was little to see except a concrete dome, set low in the Earth. The hopper was admitted through a port, rusted open, which had once been designed to emit guided missiles with unfriendly intentions. Most of the upper levels of the emplacement were weatherbeaten,

choked with the remains of cranes, launching-racks, dollies, and monorail gondolas. The missiles, of course, were gone; Security had salvaged them for their radioactives a century ago. Farther down, there were living-quarters which could still be occupied, in case of witch-hunts—and an arsenal, also empty, which Geiger counters showed to be safe for conferences.

Names in the Pro-Earth Party were only a neurological jungle, but in the murmuring crowd in the conference hall, Dendrite B was astonished to see a number of familiar faces. Many of them, previously, had been visible only on rare occasions, peeping from the topmost foliage of the Party's tree or organization, and the cores of its guiding cells. It looked like a shift in the line, all right; Danton started to prepare a speech.

Some sort of meeting had already started; he sat down quietly on an empty torpedo-rack, and raised an eyebrow at his nearest neighbor. The man held up two fingers, and Danton felt himself blinking. Duplication! Then the conference hadn't been cancelled, after all—merely transferred to this spot. The radioed warning had been a blind; Golgi had been tracing Danton's hopper, and had known he would have to land here.

The adaptable Dendrite B, of the Inguinal Plexus, felt a new surge of confidence in the Party leadership, and his tiredness vanished.

"This will have to be our last chance," the speaker on the flaky cement floor was saying. "Our efforts to force peace by political pressure have a longer history than any man here today. The fathers of the party were master politicians, but they never planned that we should stop with political pressure. They preached force. Force and fraud; myth and violence. We repudiate such instruments in our dealings with each other, but we know that we must be pre-

pared to meet our enemies on their own ground."

Danton's eyes swung over toward the far wall, where photographs of the party's ancestors hung in a long line extending from either side of a huge oil painting of the Cortex. The photographs were often changed, and the replacement of a picture—even a shift in the order of the pictures—was a signal for alert dendrites. Something was due to break, had been due for a long time; within his life as a Party member, Danton had seen certain little minority factions tolerated over a number of years. He had carefully avoided over-complicity with any of them—such had been Dendrite J's undoing—while still according each the politeness that the current line called for. (Failure to do so could also be fatal, were any of them suddenly to come into prominent favor.)

One of them is about to be exalted, he thought; the rest will be purged. He realized that this Duplication session might be a trap, a device to crush the faction in favor of it. It was significant, Danton thought, that he, himself—a dendrite who had taken no stand on the subject other than what the party line indicated—had been chosen for the crucial mission of exploration...

DANTON studied the photographs carefully—ah, there was a clue for all who had the intelligence to see and understand. None of the pictures he had seen at the last conference had been removed—none of the olden "traitors" restored and reinstated as new evidence proved them heroes—but there had been a slight shift in the order. That picture immediately following the last Golgi member on the left—it had been two places farther down last time.

"There is an old saying that it takes two to make an oxymoron," the speaker continued. "Some of us think that

the time for half-measures is over. It's inarguable that our being a vocal political minority has not done much for our cause; now that Security is actually preparing to make war on the Exiles, we are suspected of target-spotting for them. The Inguinal Plexus is still tolerated by the authorities, but it is now under a microscopic radar watch; that is why we are meeting here, instead.

"We are ready, now, for the force and violence we have neglected..."

Danton pondered over the juxtaposed photographs; both were of leaders who favored violent measures, but there was an important ideological difference.... Of course. The difference was the *type* of force used. One was direct, military action; the other proposed a combination of force and fraud, employing a minimum of outward violence.

"...thus it is peculiarly fitting that the plan Golgi has adopted grew out of a myth, and contains sizeable elements of deception. In brief—we need only one vote, here and now, to put the Duplication Plan into effect."

There would be a debate, Danton realized, but the pictures showed that the Cortex had already made his decision in favor of Duplication; the opposition apparently did not realize this—or what it meant.

The speaker's voice, as flatly oratorical as a country preacher's, fell back suddenly into the grim colloquialism of a man who means business. "With two or three different Burgds and Heaths and Nels crisscrossing in Security, issuing contradictory orders, making idiotic public statements—the war will fall flat on its face."

The words were in the characteristic manner of the Cortex himself. Danton glanced around him again. *And that is the last warning to the "opposition"*, he thought.

From the blurred, white faces

across from Danton, a voice rang out in the chilly hall. Danton recognized the speaker as an Adrenal dendrite. "I speak for that minority you mentioned," the voice boomed. "The minority that has advocated force all along, and that you people in Golgi have been stifling in sweetness and light for years..."

Danton prepared his line-of-action again. The party-line change was here, and the purge in the offing. He looked at the speaker and shook his head slightly, feeling a brief surge of pity for the man he recognized as a veteran, one-time hero of the Pro-Earth Party. *They let themselves get carried away by spurious idealism and forget the fundamentals*, he thought. *Haven't they learned from experience that persistent opposition can only lead to treason?*

"...don't link us with the Duplication plan," the speaker continued. "That's a dream. It's a silver-line stain some Security agent ran off on the grey matter at Golgi."

The fool, thought Danton; *he's declared war on the leaders.*

"If you mean to use force, use it. Force against Security means *military* action. Nothing else will rid us of their tyranny; let's kick them out! Earth needs a brain-transplantation, not a conjurer's trick!"

There was murmuring all around, but considerable applause. Danton felt himself tense as he listened to it. Could this be a double-shift? Was the test of Party loyalty more involved than he had thought? There should have been much more of a demonstration against the speaker.

Up on the platform, the efferent from Golgi waited calmly for the applause to die out. "Do you think that the Duplication machine is only a myth, then?"

"Obviously."

The efferents and afferents were messengers to and from Golgi; effer-

ents carried messages *from* the Cortex only, while all messages going back to the Cortex were carried by the afferents. In this instance, the neurological imitation made for solid efficiency and practicality.

"Dendrite B, of the Inguinal Plexus—will you please make your report?"

DANTON ducked his head clear of the rack and stood up. He had already made a report to the efferent, who had given him full instructions for his "spontaneous" remarks here. He was astonished to find that his knees were trembling.

"I've seen the machine," he began. "It's not—"

He broke off, as a confused muttering, compounded mostly of amazement and disbelief, was swollen to a roar by the echoing concrete. When it had almost spent itself, he began again.

"Naturally, I can't produce photographs of it. I can draw you a map of where it can be found. It's in Old York—about the last place I thought of looking—in a sealed tunnel of some sort—a railway tunnel by the looks of it. It's a fair distance under water, but otherwise unguarded. I suppose that Security figured that no guard would protect the secret, once it was out, and the hiding-place is really something to get to. You have to row about a mile from shore, and then locate the right spot among the tops of all those old buildings; this particular one has been sawed off level with the water. There's an airlock to let you in."

"How did you find it, then?" the Adrenal Dendrite asked, sceptically.

"I went through all the records of the Halasz trial, for clues as to where Jonas Pell's shop had been. I thought maybe Security might have decided to leave the machine in the most obvious place. When I found out that it was in Old York, I gave up that lead;

I only came back to it after I'd exhausted all the others."

"And you pretend that it's anything but a mass of rust now?"

Danton's knees stopped shaking. The man was making him lose his temper. He realized now that he had been jittery over the anticipation of playing a leading role in the purge that he was sure loomed ahead of him. It would be the first time. . .

But anger was forcing out all feeling of personal regret over what must be done, and his sense of confidence swelled with it. "Certainly it isn't," he said in a firmer voice. "It's been pickled—'canned', I think is the term they used to use. The machine is in perfect condition.

"Furthermore, it's surprisingly simple in construction, without any moving parts that I could see. A quick raid could seize it easily; there are no alarms in that tunnel, else I'd have been caught. I suppose there's a radar watch over the water there, but I beat that by swimming the last two hundred yards. I see no reason why picked men couldn't do the same, get the machine to the surface, and be delivered by 'copter the moment thy surface—before Security even suspects anything amiss."

There was another murmur, but its tone was different. Behind Danton, a man sitting in the rack (he'd shown signs of disapproval of the opposition's speaker) said, "Good boy—that must have taken guts." Danton realized suddenly what a desperate venture it *had* been, and wondered vaguely if he were going to be terrified so long after the event.

The murmuring continued, with rising excitement. The secret of the Duplication machine had been well-kept. Up to now, Danton thought, the public knows it only as a legend. A man who had been a Security officer was supposed to have been executed for murder because of it. Common information was that the trial seemed

to show conclusively that the officer, Halasz, had been mad; and that the alleged inventor, Jonas Pell, had only been a harmless tinkerer; but there had never been any such machine.

Coming as it did right after the Carbon Bomb Treason scandals, this had proved to be a most fortunate outcome. Public feeling about "scientists" had been ambivalent ever since the fission bomb, and that eternal question, "Why did they do it?", was burgeoning toward a mass hatred for all technicians. The public still tended to react categorically—a scientist was a scientist—and once they had begun to have murderous signal-responses to the term, the trend might have become irreversible. By 1965, general knowledge of the existence of a machine capable of producing duplicate men would have resulted in mass slaughter, right down to the lowest mechanic. However, when the trial brought forth evidence showing the deceased Pell as merely comical—as all scientists not in the "Frankenstein" tradition were popularly supposed to be—the air became clearer; and the execution of Halasz channeled off the worst of the hatred.

The violent dendrite was standing now, displaying a black object about the size of a golf ball. Here and there about the hall, other men—most of them recognizable as members of the same minority—were also rising, holding out similar objects, raising them above their heads. The murmuring died out in brief puzzlement.

"Security," the minority leader was saying, "has a Duplication plan of its own. You need not steal the machine; it has been removed. But we will gladly show you where it is."

He dropped the black golf ball to the floor, and a thin, colorless mist began to rise around his feet. Elsewhere in the hall, there were more popping sounds. Danton saw the mist rising from all sections of the room as he looked about.

"Plague capsules," he called out. "Don't breathe, Dendrites!"

"Too late," the minority leader said. "You can't possibly leave this place without getting at least one lungful. Of course, you might stay here if you wish; frankly, I do not know what is in these capsules, but I understand that it is something special." He smiled suddenly, and winningly. "Those of you *who want antidotes* will please file quietly upstairs. There are planes waiting for you."

He turned, unhurriedly, and walked toward the nearest elevator. The bacterial mist had already reached his shoulders.

2

THE MISTS of Venus' surface, where the Earth Party listened in on such scraps of Security broadcasts as could be picked up, and on the intercom lines of the Venus Government in Exile, were far thicker. Geoffrey Thomas was considering the Underground that existed far above him, at the moment, smiling as he murmured their name, for he was reasonably sure that the Underground's thoughts were only superficially concerned with the Earth. The communicator on his wrist-watch was open as he listened to the Earth Party's session, and the person tuned to him could hear his slightest whisper.

"There's a bigger question here than Earth, and they know it," he said. "And its symbol is a certain chair."

It was the largest chair on Venus; not a throne, because a throne would not be fitting for a president, or a director, but certainly a *very* large chair. "Did I ever tell you," he said to the unseen listener, "that I was thinking of the struggle between lesser men around me when I had this chair built—the battle to occupy it? I built it large not only to fit my own size, but to dwarf anyone who tried to sit comfortably in it after me."

"It's tighter than a steel corset around you now, Thomas," came the reply.

"I can still watch the struggle from it—Warhawk and Conservative circling each other, waiting for the right moment, and this chair of mine looming at the end of their duel."

"I should think the edge of your amusement would have become a little turned, by now."

Thomas chuckled. "I think of the expedients to which pickled old Venus, this corpse-planet, has driven men; I consider the monumentally worthless cause of the Earth Government-in-Exile; I listen to the homesick Earth Party huddled on the surface—and remember that they all had a certain importance at one time. But after a century, there is nothing but hilarity left in them.

"You know, I might have been a master chess-player, and I might have been a master criminal. But my gifts always ran to trickery, and the only canvas large enough for me to paint upon has been history; so my role has been painting vast lies upon this canvas—lies colossal enough to make a difference."

"Then you ought to know, Thomas, that a man who is capable of making such jokes should be capable of becoming their butt."

Thomas heaved a blubbery sigh—the kind he often emitted for the benefit of Lathrop, Mann, Enfield, Taverner, and the score of others who had preceded them. Let his listener think he sighed for his lost youth, for the lean technician who had designed the Thomas screen; she could not see the grin on his face, which grew as he thought of all those bureaucrats, generals, munitions and utilities executives, and other backbone-members of authoritative society—now remembered as the raw material of a great libertarian movement. He, Thomas, knew the truth, the exodus had been a flight of the useless, nothing more.

He smiled more broadly as he recalled how easy it had been to give them the Thomas screen; all the other technicians among them had been industrial hacks, incapable of such a stroke. Much better suited for the raid they'd made on some city—the name escaped him—for women.

And they'd all been so appalled to find that Venus wasn't a tropical, swampy planet. . .

They'd shown cunning of a sort, but not enough to suspect the reason behind Thomas' assistance—a reason which still applied, he thought, but didn't seem so important any more. Normal death had just passed him by for the fourth time, and now high purposes seemed as funny as phony ones. "History makes jokes of both," he said, "with a little judicious help."

"Which you, as an immortal, can give just at the right time," came the voice.

YES, HE thought, Death has evaded me; I wondered if I would be able to die when the fourth metastatic cycle closed. The answer turned out to be *no*.

"Immortality, Luisa," he said to the other party on his unit. "That was the second gift of my Venus adventure; I wish you could have been around to watch the first party chieftains jockeying over it. They started off with a ruling that only the elected Director should have it, and elected me because they didn't trust anyone else—the secret would be passed on only when I was deposed by impeachment (it was if in the actual wording, of course) and then the race started. A noble-sounding rule, don't you think?"

"I'll bet it seemed noble at the time."

And of them all, he thought, only Taverner and Luisa can stand to look at me. Sooner or later, one of the contenders will succeed me and win the great chair—for high reasons, no

doubt. He'll be dwarfed by the chair, for a time—then the secret will be out, and perhaps we'll have a new monster. Until then. . .

Until then, there is Luisa. She was saying, "I have to see you, as soon as possible."

"Come ahead," he replied, and cut off the unit. Thomas wondered if the already-sizeable Lathrop would find the irony of it as telling as he, himself, had. It was too early to be certain, but Lathrop looked like a more than probable winner; if it happened, would the erstwhile Colonel be wise enough to smile when he realized what he'd won?

Thomas blinked, and muttered, "Gods—I must be getting as senile as they think me. It's been less than hours, and I've already started to forget that I ate poison from one of their hands. Can this be another part of the process?"

He chuckled; thus far, his fungoid appearance had been attributed to glandular deficiencies, and—sometimes—to libertinism of some loathsome kind. "They're as incapable of happiness as I am," he murmured; "they suspect foulness at the very mention of pleasure, and when something that looks like a monstrous disease shows up, they're sure of it."

Well, the facts behind Thomas' "disease" couldn't be concealed for many more decades. Even if he wanted to conceal them, he couldn't much longer.

None of those who face me now are weaklings, he thought; they'll face the facts when they find them—as well as their warped reactions can face events outside of themselves. Meanwhile, they'll squabble amongst each other, with high-sounding words, trying not to look at me. . .

. . . Except for Luisa.

He smiled at the thought that she would be here soon, and felt a momentary glow of sympathy for Lathrop, who had discovered her. He'd

spied upon the pair enough to discover that she found a certain continuing contentment with the Colonel, though not quite as Armand Lathrop imagined it. Did she see herself as an Evita Peron? Thomas wondered. In any event, she would not remain merely the Colonel's mistress much longer.

But the main question, Thomas thought, is—precisely *what* is the girl after? She found the way to meeting me on her own, and managed to present me with an enjoyable series of questions from the very start. She has her limitations, of course—but where and what are they? And how long will they remain in her way?

He thought how she had left him, after that first meeting, (with a few necessary keys and instructions) as his office door opened now, with decorous caution. He looked up, his chins passing over each other damply. She was on cue, as always, and he had grown to like her.

Like? Perhaps, he thought, it would be better to say that I share interest with her as one colorful individual with another—much more than the routine interest in a tool which needs attention if it is going to continue to be useful. . . . But woe to the man who looks on his woman and sees nothing more than a tool. . .

SHE CAME in, and Thomas smiled again at her fragile, childlike appearance that cancelled out before the impression could crystallize—erased by something that seemed to emanate from her and alter her appearance into beauty.

Luisa looked at Geoffrey Thomas, without blinking, and said, "Why do you tell me so much, Thomas?"

"Because I am tired of laughing alone. You share my amusement at this struggle for immortality—to a certain extent—and I'm curious to see if you will use what you learn from me as I think you will."

There was a smile on her face now,

a smile that reminded Thomas of the picture of Dorian Gray, as she answered, "And you think that I will make myself a subsidiary prize for the winner, whomever he may be?"

"To ask the question is to answer it, my dear." If she doesn't know the real joke, he thought. . . . but then who but I, myself, could?

She shrugged the conversation off and held up a yellow call-sheet. "I have something peculiar here. Perhaps you ought to look at it."

"Can't bend that far. Read it off to me, Luisa."

A ringlet of her dark hair tumbled forward as she bent her head, and Thomas wondered if she had yearned for years to be in a position where her hair could have such a meticulously-casual appearance. "It's from one of the polar weather stations," she said; "it came in visually, and I just took some shorthand notes. The staff there wants you to know that one of their tornado rockets is out of control. I have the number here if you need it."

Thomas frowned. The tornado rockets had to be sent up constantly, in order to take readings on that hysterical jest known as "weather" on the surface of the planet. Venus' "day" was twenty-three Earth-days long, so that the temperature-range between the day and the night sides was always enormous. Protecting the ventilators and other surface installations was an everlasting problem.

At first, Thomas had been inclined to veto the use of rockets entirely, but it soon became evident that Venusian civilization could not survive without them; after that, it became only a matter of time before the inevitable happened. Well, if it had happened now, then it had been a long time. . . . and perhaps long enough.

"Don't see why I should need the number," he said. "They're forever loading me up with useless information. Is something really wild going on, on the surface? Has their rocket

blown up a surface-eye, or the like?"

The girl shook her head. "No... no storms of any importance. The rocket just ran off, that's all, and made for the sky at top speed. They say it's three hundred thousand miles out now, and Outstation reports that it's still going strong."

So here it is, Thomas thought. Luisa doesn't bring me useless information; I should have known. "It's a number four series rocket, then," he said. "Fission-powered. You're sure about that distance?"

Her grey eyes met his, and the soft, Oriental mouth curved into Luisa's only smile—her only genuine one. It was a rather chilling smile, Thomas thought, and not one she would show a man who might be useful to her.

"I thought you'd be interested," she said. "I made them repeat the mileage. They gave it to me in lunars, first. They want to know if they should send out after it and fetch it back, since that region seems to be safe now; or whether they should just let it go until it explodes, to see how far the screen has expanded."

"Any change in the series four design lately?"

"No; basically, they're just like the isomer plotters. They send them up for tornado flight, I understand."

He looked at her a moment or two. "You've been studying quite a bit recently, eh?"

She shook her head; "I got enough information to be able to make a thorough report."

His tiny eyes sent pinpoint of light at her. "Do you think they'll get their explosion, Luisa?"

The two of them looked at each other with complete understanding. "Not up there," she replied. "How long do you suppose the screen has been down?"

Thomas sniffed. "I couldn't say. Theoretically, it was to have lasted indefinitely—it needed no power-supply once it was established. It cer-

tainly couldn't have expanded, not by an inch. If that rocket got by it, the screen's gone. Entirely gone."

HIS VOICE died. Talking was an effort, and he saw no point in telling any more, now. It *would* have been convenient to have allowed the screen the ability to expand, but that would have made the future too flexible for the kind of manipulation he wanted. What Luisa already knew was important enough.

"So...the crisis arrives, eh, my dear," he said, after a short silence. "You've seen me back the weaker fraction in every little climax during the past few years; you've noticed how I kept an uneasy balance, and you've tried to uncover a long-term reason; now you've guessed that this is the event I have been anticipating."

"And you are prepared for it?" she asked with an artlessness Thomas found admirable.

He wondered if she had uncovered Lathrop's close-held secret of the whereabouts of the Earth Party; wondered if she—or anyone else who had lived under the screen for less than fifty years—could guess how crucial a thing its disappearance could be; wondered if she had told Lathrop some details that Thomas himself would have found important. The colonel was a man, he thought, who might at times be misled best by simple straightforwardness, and Luisa could have passed on numerous crucial details in her innocent-seeming way. He'd given her enough material...

"That would be telling," he replied. "We can't hope to hide this, can we, Luisa?"

She let a mask of sincere concern fall over her face. It was automatic, of course, but Thomas appreciated the gesture, knowing that she knew he saw through it. "No," she said, "it will spread from the switchboards; there's no way to censor them all at once. You'd best release it from here, if

you want any control over who hears it first."

"Clever little piece," he approved. "All right; then shall we play it for drama? Let's tell the Conservatives; they'll produce the most consternation."

She smiled again, the way she smiled only with him, Thomas thought, and mocked at his thought. "You're the boss." The door closed behind her with the same politeness.

Thomas turned on his unit to hear tiny voices vibrating in his skull. Luisa's first:

"Hello, Armand? Hold it a moment. News for you."

"Where are you calling from?" came the Colonel's voice. It was as if tiny figures moved through Thomas' brain, a private stage where he controlled every motion. "I told you never to use this combination except in an emergency—"

"Shut up, Armand. You've never even heard the word 'emergency' until now; take my word for it. Hold it."

"Luisa?" came another, sharper voice. "What's up?"

"Luisa," sputtered Lathrop—"for God's sake; you haven't got Mann on this line—"

There was a tiny click before Luisa answered, and Thomas wondered if she knew that Taverner was now also in her audience; there might be time to be sure.

"Be quiet, both of you, and listen. *The screen's down.*"

Thomas giggled soundlessly.

3

PAUL DANTON stared despondently out at the blue skies over Success Deep, the fair blue skies that would soon be fouled, not by the random bombs he had known, but total destruction. Venus would raid in force, now; he was sure of it. And Earth's only hope for peace, the Pro-Earth party was as good as crushed...

Jets on full, the planes shot over the bay without stopping; it was ten minutes at top speed before they began to circle. Below, a runway had been cleared in the dense upstate forest, and a white building with a green cross on its roof squatted across the concrete. One of the two arms of the runway was empty; on the other, another group of planes were waiting.

"Decontamination," the violent dendrite explained, smiling lazily.

The plane swooped and the runway rose to meet them. A moment later, the flight was over and the white building loomed nearby. Danton started to get up.

"No you don't. Wait."

The door of the building, Danton noticed suddenly, was circular. After a short while, it began to rotate, and then moved toward them, pushed out toward the plane on the end of a long lucite tube. There was a buzz from the plane's control board; the violent dendrite pulled back the port and stepped into the tube, whose entrance had frised out and sealed itself firmly to the hull.

"All right; come on."

Danton and the pilot got out; the tube sealed itself again. Men in rubber suits and lucite helmets trundled the plane to a nearby shed; the next plane blew its jets gently and rolled up.

"What about the hideout?" Danton asked suddenly. "If some of the plague germs—"

"Don't worry. Within ten minutes after we left, that area was completely seared. I'm afraid your friends will have to find a new hideout. Perhaps they can sue."

Danton took a good look at the other, seeing him now as Security Agent, rather than minority-faction leader. He was Danton's height, but seemed shorter, somewhat leathery; he could have passed for a Maine farmer; there was an upper New England twang in his speech. "You're quite a

comic," Danton said. Somehow, now that the man had revealed himself, he didn't feel quite the complete hostility; an enemy, a spy was one thing—but none of this category was quite as loathsome as an heretical dendrite who professed loyalty to the Party.

The agent shrugged and entered the bare chamber first, then began to strip, motioning Danton and the pilot to follow suit; they bundled his and their clothing into a small pressure lock. Danton momentarily felt glad that he never carried his wallet while on Party business—then realized that he'd probably never see it again, anyhow.

More of the captives were filling in now, together with their captors. The tube remained extended; as Danton crossed the threshold, there was a flash of unbearable actinic light, and a sharp report. The whole room glared with germicidal violet radiance; it exploded again and again as the rest of the men filed through.

IN THE NEXT chamber a white-coated technician, and two assistants, took charge, lining the men up. The agent came and stood at the front of the line, but the technician grinned un reassuringly, and slipped the tip of a 10 cc syringe into a rubber-hooded vial.

"Not this time, Captain Small," he said. "Which one is Paul Danton? Orders are to shoot him first."

The agent shrugged and stepped aside. "What was in the capsules?"

"A new mutation. A strep, cytolytic; incubation period about two hours. Chews hell out of the lungs."

Small turned as grey as blotting paper.

"Plenty of time," said the technician. He strapped Danton's upper arm with a rubber tube. "Clench your fist," he said boredly, and slid the needle into the big vein crossing the patient's elbow-joint. Danton could not repress a sigh of relief as he watched the plunger go home.

"Next," called the technie, pitching the needle into a bowl of disinfectant and fitting another one. Danton walked away down the corridor, pressing an alcohol-soaked patch over the puncture. Another large chamber awaited him; it was warm, slightly above body-heat, which was a relief. He'd begun to get goose-pimples. He sat down on one of the long benches with which it was furnished, and looked quizzically at Small as the agent came in, an instant later.

The man looked different, now—nondescript, cheerful, vaguely blond, with a placid, unthoughtful face. He could just as easily be a retail grocer, or some other kind of petty merchant, Danton thought, as a farmer. That was undoubtedly why he made a good agent. Now that the job was done, he seemed friendly enough.

"What now?" Danton asked.

"We sit here until we become unequal again." He smiled faintly at the expression on Danton's face. "Ever since we inhaled that stuff, you and I and all the others have been equals; death has a way of making differences in personal qualities rather unimportant." He tapped his knee thoughtfully. "Then, when we're fit to associate with the living, they'll give us new clothes, and we'll put on our characters with them, and off we go again."

Danton digested this for awhile, and wished that these benches were padded.

"Can I be told anything else now?"

"You may ask; I'll answer what I can."

"Well...you were in the Party for a long time—longer than I was, as a matter of fact. I saw you at the first congress I attended—you were some sort of official, I think."

Small nodded. "Afferent; I took messages back to the Cortex."

"Well," continued Danton, "the only idea I have of your name is what the technie called you; if I'd wanted to find out before then, I wouldn't have the faintest idea of how to go about it."

"And you want to know how I knew your name?" The agent smiled. "Simple; the same way you knew mine; before then, I didn't know. I was shown your picture a while back, and ordered to bring you in after you'd finished snooping around the Duplication machine. As you guessed, when we struck, I and other members of my faction work for the Security Council. . . . That picture, by the way, was a solidograph—a tridi composite—so you must have tripped off a dozen cameras while you were in the old subway station."

So that was the answer! Still—"Then why didn't I trip some alarms, too, and get picked up on the spot?"

Small chuckled. "Brother, you had enough alarms tripped for a fireman's reunion. But if we'd nabbed you then, the Party would have known that we considered you dangerous, and would have deduced that the Duplication machine existed—maybe even in condition to be used against Security. As matters stand now, all that your remaining leadership knows is that we bagged a large number of dendrites in one scoop—including the afferent who would have taken your report on the machine back to the Cortex. We didn't tip our hand by singling anyone out."

"But you did," Danton answered quietly. "You shot your mouth off about it, you know."

"Everybody who heard me is here—and we cut all communication units, and outside wires, before the meeting began. Golgi has no idea *when* the raid took place, or how much of a meeting there was beforehand."

DANTON could think of nothing to say but "Oh". The hard plank was distinctly uncomfortable, and he noticed—with a touch of satisfaction—that Small, too, was shifting his position now and then.

"Still, you went to a lot of trouble to bring us in alive," he said, reflectively. "Yet . . . you admit that you

know no way to figure out our names; even under truth-serum we couldn't give you the names of persons you haven't caught yet."

The agent shrugged. "I said I *didn't* know your name—not that I *couldn't* have found it out. Golgi knows the name of every dendrite; what Golgi knows, I can discover, too."

Danton frowned; this seemed to be a pretty bald attempt at provocation. "I don't believe you," he said quietly.

"You aren't required to. Did you ever stop to think that, despite the illusion of anonymity, the Meninges usually manage to find any dendrite who has been denounced as a deviationist?"

The Meninges were the Pro-Earth Party's secret police, responsible only to the Cortex; Golgi was as vulnerable to them as any Plexus, Vagus, or individual Dendrite.

The others were beginning to come in and seat themselves, regarding Danton and Small with curiosity and hostility respectively. Danton said, "Anyhow—that's beside the point. What *is* going to be done with us?"

"The rest will be given a rather perfunctory examination, then held incommunicado until the Venus crisis is over. They won't be harmed, or mistreated. You're the one that the Council really wants."

"But why? I'm not an important figure."

Small grinned. "I don't know," he said. "After all, I'm only a police officer; Security doesn't explain its every purpose to me. All I know is that they took the trouble to trace you—you can imagine the time it took the sorters, just comparing your pictures with the record cards. So . . . it follows that they must have some further use for you. Evidently, the Duplication machine is involved."

"It ought to give you some satisfaction, my friend, to be considered

more dangerous than all the rest of the Party put together."

One of the other captives, a cyton, broke in from across the benches. "Can you think of any reason for that?" His voice was urgent. "Think, man! You must have some skill, some bit of knowledge, *something* that puts you in this spot. If you can figure out what it is—"

Danton shook his head. "I was the first to find the machine, but we all know about that now." He searched his memory, but nothing in his perfectly-ordinary daily life, or in his career as a rank-and-file Party member, seemed even interesting, let alone dangerous or useful. If only...

One of the attendants stepped into the room with two small piles of clothing. "You and you," he said, his finger stabbing at Danton and Small, "climb into these. The plane's hot and ready to go."

4

ABOUT THE only difference noticeable on the surface of Venus, from session to session of the Earth Party, was that the wind seemed to be worse than last time, or not as bad as last time. Inside the Nissen hut, dust was everywhere, and the oxygen masks on all present preserved their unchangeable expression of things recently dead.

The gloomy man sat at the head of the table, but there was a slight difference in his posture; he wondered if the others were smiling beneath their masks, too. He thought back along the endless succession of years, remembered the voices now gone—particularly the thin voice of his predecessor—and exhaled sharply.

At last, at last something had happened!

•He did not have to be telepathic to know what was running through the minds of his colleagues; now that the

screen was down, and Venus' long protection against avenging expeditions from Earth down with it, the crisis in the Exiles' government was no longer something building up. The crisis was here; they could feel it in this very room; they knew that the members of the Cabal would now be fumbling their way to power, each man for himself, and the Earth Party would be free for action.

The time was now!

Grey light glinted from the gloomy man's eyepieces as he turned to glance at the door, which opened to admit the newest member. The newcomer shut the door of the hut hastily against the formaldehyde-laden blast without, as the dust inside the hut swirled and scattered. A coughing sound came from the radio.

"What's up?" asked the newcomer. "That's not Security you have there—not Earth."

"We know," said the stocky man.

Two more late-arrivals entered, to engage the brief glance of the gloomy man; the masks looked at each other with stoic surmise, as the men sat down at the table to listen. The newest member fidgeted nervously.

Another cough from the radio, then a voice, saying, "Is anybody missing? I haven't heard Enfield yet."

"I'm here," came another voice, petulantly. The quality of the sound indicated that it did not originate from the same source as the questioner's voice; there was more echo behind it. "Why don't we call a roll and get it over with? Everybody knows why this conference is being held."

First Voice: "Stop yapping!"

The gloomy man smiled more broadly. Yes, it was running true to their expectations.

"Oh, let him yap, Colonel," put in a third speaker. "It's his last chance to sound off over *this* circuit—he might as well get it out of his system."

Enfield: "Don't give me that. You don't own the Cabal yet, Mann; and you're not Director yet, either."

The newest member interjected, "I never heard Enfield speak as sharply as that." Others murmured agreement, falling silent as a fourth voice entered with, "No one owns the Cabal yet. That is why we are having this conference."

Lathrop: "Ah yes—conference. Taverner, just what do you imagine you are doing now?"

Taverner: "A scout is courteous, Colonel; I am waiting."

The newest member started halfway out of his seat. "You've got the Cabal—the private circuit?" he asked, swallowing. "How the hell—"

The gloomy man rapped the table with gloved hands. "Time you grew up, and stopped questioning facts, friend."

"But," protested the other, "but they're all in different spots. There's no central board for the GC system; how'd you get the combination and tap all the wires at once? It's incredible!"

The gloomy man remembered his own novitiate in the Earth Party, and sighed; from across the room, the man at the radio said, without turning, "I assure you that it is *very* complicated; let it rest at that, and permit us to listen."

"Why listen?" a strong voice cut in from the doorway. "Don't you know what has happened?"

"We know that the screen is down, and the crisis afoot," answered the stocky man. "But we want to find out what the Cabal plans, and what Thomas is going to do."

"Immediate attack on Earth, of course," replied the man in the doorway. He came in and seated himself. "Thomas must have killed the screen himself, just to start things popping."

The gloomy man said, "If he did, he'll get his wish."

THE RADIO broke in with, "Ready? We've been ready for years. We already have a sizeable fleet of chemically-powered ships, enough to cripple Earth at the very first blow. We had them prepared for a sally through the screen, but now we can use atomics. We don't need many bombs, gentlemen; security is centralized, and we need only a few maneuverable spaceships. The V-bombs and the shells will disorganize resistance even before the big ships arrive."

Taverner: "Mann is right; this is the first and last chance we will have. How long do you think it will take Earth to discover that the screen is down? We must strike *now!*"

Lathrop: "You may be right."

Taverner: "Colonel, I know you're ready. Are you with us? *You* know what will happen when Security finds out we're unprotected, at last."

There was a brief silence; under the oxygen masks, breathing nearly stopped in the underground's headquarters, and the gloomy man's smile was gone.

Lathrop: "All right; you win. I'll back it."

Mann: "That is all gentlemen. Lathrop—if you're backing me, then you're following me—right? Good. You may as well withdraw and prepare, then. I'll take over this end."

Enfield: "Good, hell! Who put you at the head of the Cabal, Mann? Thomas—"

"—is dead!" Mann's voice cut in. "And Taverner is with us, as you heard. Sit down, Enfield, wherever you're standing. This cellular procedure has its disadvantages; if you were present, you'd have been shot off your feet."

He paused, and the gloomy man thought that Mann's voice had the timbre of a hungry man come to table at last, determined to make up for lost time, indigestion or no. It had

lost the razor edge they all knew so well; it was thicker.

"We'll take a vote," Mann added.

The voices stopped abruptly, replaced by a continuous tearing noise, like a buzzsaw chewing its way through a scrapheap.

The latest arrival observed, "It looks as if we have no monopoly on ingenuity. We found a way to tap the complex; the Cabal knows how to jam it. Got any explanation for *that*?"

The gloomy man said, "Shut up," with no special animus. After a lifetime of frustration, it didn't seem any more than natural for momentarily-lifted hopes to be thrown down. Now, all was normal again. "I can guess who is doing the jamming," he continued; "Mann must have been prepared for a long time, although I doubt that he foresaw this particular break. There will be a stampede toward Warhawk policy now.

"The raid on Earth will be voted through as a simple formality; they're jamming to keep details secret from any die-hard Moderates and Conservatives."

The lenses of his mask surveyed the table, which had quietly filled during the debate among the Cabal members. "I hope you all realize that we are in a bad way. We anticipated a crisis, but who could have guessed that Lathrop would swing his party over to Mann?"

"I don't know," spoke up the stocky man. "Something about that exchange between Lathrop and Taverner didn't quite ring true. It's as if they'd agreed on this course beforehand, but decided that it would be better if the Colonel appeared a little hesitant, and Taverner won him over with a special appeal. That speech had all the earmarks of stage-history; we know that Taverner doesn't go in for that type of play."

THE GLOOMY man nodded and shrugged at the same time. This had all the academic interest of a post-mortem, he thought. "However it rings," he said, "it rang wrong for us, and for our estimate of the situation. We expected the two bigwigs to slug it out..."

"I'm not so sure," the stocky man broke in. "Granted that the actual situation is worse than any prediction of it, we can still act. We were on the Moderate side, more or less, because we thought that backing the weaker party would make the division greater. We were wrong; Thomas worked the same system, and now he's a corpse. We don't have to guess that..."

"Are you opposing me or confirming me?" the gloomy man wanted to know. "That's the worst of it; what we all thought would be a Kilkenny catfight has turned out to be a Warhawk testimonial dinner."

"I'm opposing you," returned the other. "You've overlooked Mann's utter confidence, his eagerness. His is a one-track mind, and his single arm is: devastate Earth; raid in force. He has no other program; he's completely unprepared for anything else; and it's a cinch that he hasn't anything like full attention on us.

"So, add it up: with Thomas gone, Enfield is nothing; Mann has Taverner's and Lathrop's support, whatever that means. One of those two is obviously playing the other's game for the moment, but they're both giving Mann a send-off right now. Conclusion: Mann's riding the crest, ready to ride out to Earth, and he's forgotten us completely."

The gloomy man nodded slowly, approvingly, as the others could tell by the little gesture he made with his hand. "That might be." He wouldn't endorse the stocky man too fully now, he thought, but it was good to see this kind of perception. *I'd have figured*

is out myself in another moment, he thought, and wondered if he would have. No, perhaps not; perhaps this was the time to turn his chair over to a younger man. The thought didn't worry him; it came as a relief.

"That might be," he repeated. "Go on." He raised his glove to make a sign that was almost a benediction.

"Our new member," the stocky one continued, with less urgency in his voice, "has been amazed at the way we contact supposedly-closed parts of the GC system. The rest of us take it as a matter of course; our only possible weapon against the Cabal is the GC system, so it follows that we have had to come to know it intimately. Very well, then; my suggestion is that we use the same GC plan that we have been planning all along. If you agree with my analysis of the situation, then it follows that what has happened won't interfere with the plan's effectiveness at all."

"You mean sabotage?" inquired the newest member.

"Precisely." The stocky man looked at the head of the table; then, when the gloomy man nodded, he continued. "Sabotage at local nuclei can be much more serious than sabotage of one big central installation—the repair problem is much greater. If we were to wipe out the surface observatories and weather stations first of all; isolate the Outstation; and then disable the local switchboards which would report the wreckage—just how much of a spacefleet do you think the Cabal could launch? They couldn't see the surface of their own planet, let alone the stars."

THE DUST in the hut whirled as a final latecomer wedged his way through it. Before the door had swung shut, the gloomy man had opened a drawer in the table; he was on his

feet with an astonishingly graceful motion, a heavy machine-pistol bulging in each gloved hand.

"There is one too many here," he said with deadly softness, as if he had been waiting through the years to speak this one line, and had run through every possible inflection of it. "Everyone will line up against the far wall immediately, or I shall spray the entire hut."

The others at the table were raising their hands, as he added, "I have known, friends—all but one of you—that this would have to happen sooner or later, despite the care with which our masks have been tailored."

The newcomer said, gently, "There is no need to go through this; I'm your extra man. Colonel Armand Lathrop, at your service, gentlemen."

The gun-muzzles swung and bored at Lathrop's chest. Had the gloomy man pulled both triggers, the Colonel would have been cut in two before he could fall.

"Before you shoot," Lathrop continued, without any trace of nervousness, "you might ask me why I am here."

"I know that you didn't get your nickname, 'Nerveless' for nothing; but I'd say it was damned foolishness, nonetheless."

"Perhaps," Lathrop agreed. "Still, I think you ought to know that you have no monopoly on ingenuity, as my friend Eddisson reminded you a few moments ago."

"So you have been tapping us," the gloomy man said. "I am not greatly surprised; that is a risk we have always run."

Lathrop straightened out of his slouch against the doorsill, and crossed the floor slowly, approaching the table. If he noticed that he was advancing directly into the line of fire, he gave no sign of it. "I haven't been tapping your speeches or meetings," he said

contemptuously. "I depend upon Ed-
disson for that kind of information.
I've been tapping your brains. Have
you ever heard of the mnemono-
graph?"

The gloomy man was not the only
one to suck in his breath sharply.
"Yes," he said.

"Then you know what I have on
file against you. Not your underground
work, but your total subconscious
guilts. Each and every one of you
has something in his past, and his
memory, that he couldn't endure to
have related to his wife, or relatives,
or friends, or business associates, or
just the general public. Nothing big,
but little, childish things which have
been buried deep and which—they tell
me—form the core of your fears. I'll
admit quite frankly that I am also
vulnerable on this score; I took one
myself and listened in to make sure
that this would be an effective
weapon."

He paused briefly and drummed his
fingers on the table. "I can assure
you, gentlemen, that had I not taken
pains to do this entirely on my own,
it would have been necessary either
to murder everyone else who knew, or
to blow my brains out. . . . In your
case, Ed-Disson planted the graph in
your radio a year ago; your oxygen
masks contain the pickup aërials.

"You may kill me now, if you wish."

THE TWO faced each other for a
moment, then the gloomy man
laid the machine-pistols on the table.
"All right, Colonel; I don't think we
dare disbelieve you. You have us; what
now?"

There were sighs throughout the
room.

"I need your help," Lathrop said,
simply.

"You *what?*"

"May I sit down?" the Colonel
asked. His agent arose and gave him

a chair. Seated, it was impossible to
distinguish Lathrop from the others.
"You all heard me back Mann on the
radio. But I am not a Warhawk, what-
ever I may have agreed to. I knew,
as you did, that the obvious course
was for Mann and me to kill each
other off, once Thomas was dead—
and I had natural, personal objections
to that. I also oppose Mann's prema-
ture raid on Earth—as thoroughly as
I oppose your party's desire to turn
Venus over to Earthmen."

"So?" asked the gloomy man.

"So I backed Mann, of course. He
has sense enough to know that I'm
planning something, but he doesn't
know what it might be. My sudden
switch—you were right about Tavern-
er and me having rehearsed our little
act in advance, by the way—will con-
fuse him long enough to protect my
own existence for the time being.
He'll wait to see just what use he
can make of me and my faction."

"Were we right about anything
else?" inquired the stocky man.

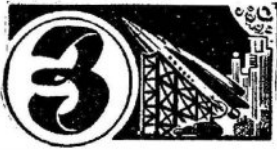
"Yes. . . . you did rather well. You
correctly assumed that an intense, one-
track mind like Mann's wouldn't make
for the thoroughness you'd expect
from the Army—so Mann doesn't
know much about you from his own
sources of information, and I've kept
my own secrets. Frankly, I expected
I'd need you sooner or later."

"For Lord's sake, get to the point!"
burst out the stocky man.

"I'm getting to it," Lathrop replied,
unhurriedly. "And the point is a very
simple one: you cannot make your
revolt without me. Therefore, if you
want the raid on Earth to be stopped,
you'll do it my way."

"You mean," asked the gloomy man
in incredulous tones, "that you intend
to use the GC plan?"

"With your permission, gentlemen,"
Lathrop declared silkily, "that is pre-
cisely what I propose."



Tapestry Of Treasons

THE SKY, this night, was made to order for Mann's all-out raid on Earth, but, despite the ever-present anxiety, few Earthmen scanned it for dreadful portents. In a suburb, a nondescript little man was thinking, *It's all over; the Pro-Earth Party is shot, and we're all in the soup.* Security agents were everywhere; that was certain. True, he hadn't heard of any arrests here in Appalachia City, but that gave him no feeling of relief. *They're just waiting, biding their time for another big haul like the one they pulled at Solar Plexus,* he thought.

Well, he'd show them that the little man could take anything they had to dish out. He stepped out of the bar, and squared his shoulders to the cool air. No more of this skulking around like a hunted dog; he'd act as if he hadn't a worry in the world, that's what he'd do. *Besides, they can skulk better than I can, anyway,* he thought.

Habit made his eyes rove toward the drugstore on the corner, as a heavy-set man emerged and paused at the curb to wait for the traffic-light to change. The heavy one took a package of cigarets out of his pocket, extracted one, and tapped it absently on his thumbnail.

On the other side, the nondescript little man also glanced at the traffic-light, then started diagonally across the street. The other figure struck a match, cupped it, then made a gesture of annoyance as it went out. He started to drop the matchstick, then shoved it into his overcoat pocket.

The ritual was commonplace, but stiffly unconvincing; anyone could see that the man was far from a good actor.

It was the old signal, one long since superseded; therefore, the other was either a party wheelhorse or an agent provocateur, thought the little man. *Should I ignore him or approach him? What have I to lose, if he's a provocateur?*

In the end, he knew that habit would carry him through; the little man sighed, then stooped to adjust a shoelace. Frowning, the heavy-set one bore down upon him. "Have you a match, friend?" he rumbled; "I'm all out."

Without looking up, the nondescript man said, "Me, too; try the bar a block over; gro-op's all out, too."

The heavy-set one murmured his thanks and went on. Five minutes later, after completing several meaningless errands, the little man resigned himself to the indisputable fact that he was going to the rendezvous; he entered the bar, and saw his quarry standing about halfway down.

He toyed with the thought that perhaps he, himself, was the quarry; but, somehow, he couldn't quite believe it. The little man took up his stance next to the other, and ordered a beer.

"Hell of a note," he muttered guardedly, "when you can't get matches in the stores."

The other shrugged, and ran a finger idly around the base of his glass. "You know how it is when the Deliverer's Guild has a grievance."

"What was it this time? I haven't had a chance to listen to the news recently."

"Oh. . . they've had some sort of setback—pretty serious, I'd guess—and they just wanted an issue to tie the membership together again. Some local leader has been making a lot of un-

warranted demands—what was his name, now? Danforth—no, I'm thinking of another guild; it was something like Bolton... not that it matters. He got sat upon, and stiffly, of course; but the Guild saw a chance to use him, get free publicity, and put on an act about how necessary they are to the working man." The heavy-set man snorted into his beer. "Meanwhile, the public doesn't get matches."

It was all very stagey, even a little childish, the nondescript man thought—but you couldn't deny that there was a certain zest to it. *Why, this is like the old times*, he found himself thinking; he straightened up for the first time in days. "Sounds familiar," he replied, "but isn't that a rather dangerous stunt for them to pull in these times?"

The heavy man shrugged. "Oh... they probably have an out already planned. They usually do in the Guilds, you know, and this Paul who handles their publicity is a slick one. I know how these things work, because I was in a Guild myself once, when I was young and didn't know any better. They'll cover themselves; you can be sure of that. My guess is that they'll discover—with just the right amount of surprised shock—that this bird is a traitor to the Guild (after he's served his purpose, you understand). They'll backtrack, chastising him as they go—perhaps kick him out.

"Maybe they wanted to get rid of him in the first place—who knows?"

"Looks rough for him," the little man ventured.

"Deserves it, no doubt." The other set down his glass, and looked at his watch. "Got to be going," he said. "Thanks for the match." He nodded and went out, while the little man ordered another beer.

This was wonderful. He was kicking himself, but he felt wonderful just the same. The party was going to pull through; he knew it, and he was kicking himself for ever doubting it,

even for a moment. History never missed, he told himself; men might lose faith, but History went on, regardless. Here was an issue that would tie them all together—a disciplinary matter which would show their strength, not weakness. He had still another beer, although two was really his limit.

When he walked out of the bar, the little man realized that he was a trifle high—but nobody could say that his shoulders were sagging. And, blazing through his consciousness like a slogan on a banner, was the order: *Get Danton; find Paul Danton; find the traitor!*

2

"THE SMELL of treason," whispered Geoffrey Thomas, "is a sharp, unforgettable odor that cuts through conspiratorial fog, and breathes new life into the almost-dead. It penetrates through our miles of Venusian fog, through the shell of our detestable planet, into every corner of our under-world paradise, awakening every sleeper." Thomas of Venus laughed, "How poetic I'm getting." He shut off the burring voices in his false tooth and squinted benevolently at Luisa.

"You know," he said, as he thought back—with a ghost of delight—over his past few years' effort to penetrate that perfect coldness, "were you other than as you are, this crisis might have come sooner." The thought came to him swiftly that, as long as Luisa remained in control of herself, he hadn't wanted to risk it—in fact, perhaps he hadn't dared. He lingered over the strangeness of this last thought, recalling that he had been reminded of his weakness but shortly before.

Luisa said nothing.

"There is one gratifying thing about being an immortal and a monster," he

grunted comfortably. "It enables me to see you as a person, my dear, instead of as a woman. A young man, even a strong young man—and I mean anyone under sixty—sees you as a young woman. What an error, eh?"

"I couldn't say," she returned sweetly.

Thomas thought, *I owe her something for six hours of scarlet agony which had caused me to miss the Directorate meeting—yet, there's no point in repaying in kind.* Part of it was due to his own lethargy. Not that a good deal of the plot might not have come through, even if he'd paid more attention to it—but it needn't have been so unpleasant. He could have been prepared for the poison.

Well, after all these lifetimes, I still have much to learn.

"Ah no . . . you couldn't say," Thomas replied. "Doubtless Fafnir didn't think of himself as a horror—but you wouldn't know anything about that. . . ." he checked himself. "Or would you?"

Luisa shrugged slightly. "Is it important now?"

"It might be." Without basic information, Thomas realized that there was a likelihood of falling into either one of two extremes, with Luisa: overestimating her, or underestimating her. And he could just as easily do both simultaneously, on different levels.

He sighed again. "You're lush, Luisa; my memory contains no other image so seductive. Lathrop and the others see no farther than that, do they? Much too young to realize that you are the monster, far more than I. Ah . . . babes in the wood—but I don't think you'd know what a wood is, either."

She said nothing.

"You're not even understandable to most mortal men. You can't want power in itself; this is visible. Perhaps you want love—but no more than they

do, I'm sure; and I don't think you would be able to do more with it, if you had it. You do want prestige of a sort, because you won't take anybody but the man who rules Venus."

"And that man will be immortal."

Thomas looked at her, seeing no change in her expression, and smiled. "That's more like it, eh, Luisa? It's the fear of death that drives you, isn't it. So much that all you care about is immortality; you want to know the process, and you mean to get it out of whichever man wins the secret—and you."

It might not be the right answer—or, misleading, might be just part of the answer, but Thomas was sure that he had touched the eternal wound. She said nothing.

Your composure is wasted on me, he thought, wasted now. No matter what part you played tonight, I don't want to shatter your mask at this moment. When that goes, the game is ended.

"Of course," he mused, "I'll have to die first, before the next man can learn the process. Now, Mann has reported me dead; he has had Taverner poison me, very ingeniously—with your assistance, of course!"

Her face held that same combined look of youth and innocence as she answered simply, "Of course."

"That would have made him top man, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," she replied coldly.

"Good girl. You haven't disappointed me yet, although you almost did when you first saw me alive, this evening. Well, then: Mann is on top, and you've rejected Lathrop; he's been out-generated. But, you see, already something has gone wrong with Mann's plot. What if Lathrop were victor, after all?"

Luisa recrossed her legs, a shrug in her voice. "Then I would have been wrong."

Thomas considered the layers of meaning in her remark, deciding it most likely that the girl only looked upon Mann as a temporary victor. "But you'd have taken the Colonel in that case?"

"Naturally," she said. "Thomas, you can't bait me much longer. They'll soon learn that, for some reason, you didn't die tonight; but they'll know you can't survive this turnover, no matter who wins it. Do you think Lathrop would be any more reluctant to dispose of you than Mann was?"

He chuckled. "It isn't a matter of reluctance, and Lathrop knows it. He'd be most likely to pause and think about it, in any event. And I've just shown him a reason for abjuring haste in such matters—he seemed to be impressed. Open that door, Luisa."

"Not interested."

"Open that door."

She remained where she was for a moment more; then, smiling slightly, Luisa arose, walked to the door and tugged at it. It was unexpectedly heavy; it had been soundproofed.

Taverner! The door opened into what had been a closet, the back wall of which was the rock of Venus. He had been crucified against it with railroad spikes.

BLOND Taverner was a ragged man, now. Scores of inch-wide tabs had been cut into his skin, and the tabs drawn out with pliers into six-inch ribbons. His face had been left in recognizable shape, except for the absent eyes, and—to judge by the noise he was making—tongue.

"We questioned him," Thomas said, "and he showed a certain reluctance."

Luisa stood still and looked at him, her hand on the doorhandle. She said, "I'm surprised at you, Thomas. You must be near the end of your rope."

Thomas' vast bulk was rippling. "I have my weaknesses." A mad, gurgling sound came from the closet. "And,

crude as it may be, I consider it sound practice to discourage ineffective attempts at assassination. This was largely impromptu—too bad there wasn't time to have planned it properly."

His voice lowered. "If you ever find yourself in a position like mine, Luisa, guard against giving way to sudden passions. For the first time in my career, I have taken swift revenge. How foolish, when you have decades to do it slowly, and time to stop when and if it becomes pointless."

She closed the door, went back and sat down. "That might scare Lathrop, but I doubt it. If it does scare him—I can always try myself."

"Bless you, my dear. Now, tell me: is it the secret of immortality that you want?"

She stood up, suddenly, and crossed the room to him. "Yes, you maggot. And I'll have it. Tomorrow, or the next day—it doesn't matter. I'll have it from whomever owns Venus."

"Capital," Thomas whispered, "capital. We'll grow as old as we can together."

In the brief silence, he felt a tinge of real anxiety—so strong an emotion, after all the long decades, that it was almost pleasurable. *Is the game not over, after all?* he thought. *Have I overdone the treatment, tipped it into the ridiculous? Or is there no situation basically intolerable to this girl's psyche?*

Luisa screamed.

"That's right," Thomas said, "I'm your man. Poison me. Cut my throat. Stab me. Shoot me. Catch me in a fire—that would be easy, eh? But I'll be here, no matter what you do. I can't even be drowned. I'll grow. . . and grow. . . you see?"

"My body cells adapt. The great gift of immortality is *total cancer*. I can suffer all the agonies of fire, poison, or injury; but I'll reform, and keep right on growing. A fission-bomb might fin-

ish me, but Mann is ready to ship our whole store out for the attack on Earth. And even if he saved one for me, he'd never use it. Even if he wanted to, you wouldn't let him, Luisa; that bomb would destroy the secret, too."

"Why do you think I was worried when I first saw you tonight, you fool?" she snapped.

For a moment he looked at her in astonishment, then an expression of near-ecstasy crossed his face. "So that is it. I felt that something was missing in my analysis of your motives; it didn't seem right, that, with your determination to get the secret, you'd risk my dying and taking it with me.

"You poisoned me, Luisa, because you had to be sure that I *wouldn't* die."

"And now, Thomas, I'll take your word for it that you are immune to poison," she said simply.

"Thank you. It will be something of a relief to eat and drink in peace," he replied. "Do you know where the secret is, Luisa? I'll tell you; I'll tell anybody who really wants to know. It's hidden in the genes of the last really human body-cell I own, the only one—containing that secret—that will remain unchanged when I am bigger than Eluyres Mountain and brainless as an amoeba.

"Would you care to dissect for the secret in that one cell, Luisa? And could you read it when you had it, at last? Come now—*how badly do you want to live forever?*"

The girl stepped backward slowly, the echoes of her scream fading in her face. It was as if each word pounded her back another inch. She sat down as if all her bones were aching.

After awhile, Luisa said, "All—right. You win. What do you want?"

"Ah—that's uncomplicated. For one thing, you are now really working for me. Matters have come to a pass where I can't afford to let you continue as a free agent; besides, I can't

have any more of this assassination business—it's uncomfortable, and it's apt to make me lose time inconveniently. I'd gladly cooperate and go dead for any of you, if it were possible, because I want to die much more than any of you want my death. But since it's impossible, I'm in no mood for further experiments to prove the point.

"Carry on as usual, of course, on the surface—but see to it that I'm informed of any developments." He paused for a moment, then added: "Now, come here; you know how I hate unnecessary movement."

Her eyes were lifeless as Luisa went to him.

THOMAS faced the thing that had been Taverner. "Still alive, eh?" He motioned to the medic beside him. "I want to talk, and I want an audience. You can still listen and you can answer me 'yes', or 'no', or something in between. Is the pain still bad?"

The crucified man bent his head. Thomas nodded, and looked at the medic; the man gave Taverner an injection. "This will deaden it, but leave you conscious; if you cooperate, now, you'll be given a stiffer dose when I'm through and that will end it—otherwise, I think you'll be good for a number of hours to come." He shrugged. "You're a strong youngster, Taverner; you might even last for a couple of days."

Thomas wasn't smiling now, as the medic's needle bit into the tortured man's arm.

"Why did you defy me, Taverner? Didn't you know I'd picked you for the final winner? Lathrop, Mann, Enfield—what are they? Any one of them might seize the chair, but you would know how to hold it. You could wait for them to make moves they couldn't recall, then quietly get control of their organizations, and let them lose by default.

"I would have overlooked your trying to kill me, Taverner; but you lost your head, and wouldn't give me information when I was in pain. That was stupid, and unforgivable."

The other nodded.

"Doesn't hurt so much now, eh?" asked Thomas. "Good enough. Tell me—do you think I've hit upon Luisa's weakness?"

There was a nod, followed by a side-to-side motion.

Thomas smiled wanly. "Yes and no; I'm inclined to agree. But she counted on Lathrop's winning out, didn't she?" Another nod.

"Then what I told her to do about Mann is what she would have done anyway—perhaps not the exact thing, but something like it. Ah, you nod again. And what about you, Taverner—did you want to be immortal?"

A nod, followed by a headshake. Thomas of Venus was silent for a moment, and the smile was gone from his face. "You wanted your mortality extended, but not until you knew how it could be ended...until you could be sure you wouldn't share my fate. . . . Yes, no need to nod your head to that. Is that why you refused to talk—did *she* tell you that if I didn't know what kind of poison I'd been given, it might work, after all?"

Taverner nodded.

A gasping sound came from the great hulk of the Venusian ruler. "How could you know? How could anyone know? Taverner, Taverner, I flew into a passion because I thought you were just a fool—and I, Thomas, have been the fool. Oh, God, my son—if it were possible, I would give you the secret now, and you'd be whole again."

The ragged man shook his head. "You wouldn't take it?" asked Thomas. "Ah, yes, you heard what I told Luisa; I meant you to hear it. Well...most of it was true..."

"I've always looked on you as

a son, Taverner—not only because you remind me of the long past, but . . . well, never matter. . . . Do you see now that Luisa tricked me this time, that she achieved her purpose?"

The other made no movement. "It was a double purpose. She had heard of former attempts to kill me, but she wanted to be sure...that was why she almost broke a little while back when she first saw me and didn't know I was still alive. And the other part of her purpose was to eliminate you.

"I know...you had plans, and you didn't need me as I needed you. In fifty years, Taverner, no man has understood me as you did—almost as if we were of one flesh as well as one mind. And...she saw that—saw the likelihood that if once you failed me in a crisis, I would be in pain; I would strike out at you blindly, but lethally. . . . I'm as mad as any Czar or Caesar, Taverner, but your end is easy compared to mine."

There was silence in the room, and Thomas turned to glance at the white-faced medic. "Don't be afraid," he whispered. "Your memory of these words will be expunged, but you won't be harmed otherwise." Thomas murmured softly, his words unintelligible, staring into the space ahead of him. At length, he sighed.

"So...Mann is as good as finished. But the balance shifts, now, and another ending begins. Lathrop...tell me, Taverner, whom do you pick as winner, now? Mann won't be done until he's dead of course—and he isn't dead yet. Nod your head when I name the one you would pick."

Thomas named the others, waiting after each one. At the last name, a nod came from the crucified man. There was another silence in the room, then something very nearly like a sob came from the monstrosity in the great chair. "You know...Taverner, you know; you deduced it as surely as I did my-

self. Why...why...?" The Director lifted a blubbery hand and let it fall.

3

EARTH HAD no Thomas screen, thought Joachim Burgd, but this mattered little. Earth had its secret invention. The Duplication machine stood before him, a simple apparatus about which the Antarctic knew nothing, and he stood and regarded it, his chin bristly under his fingers.

He hadn't bothered to shave since the crisis had begun, and the feeling was good. The mice were away, so the cat could relax for awhile. Back in Antarctica, natty appearance didn't count for much; but in diplomatic life, men still wanted formality, still kowtowed to protocol. In these private sessions, though, the men took it easy, although the women still kept up appearances, as meticulously as if the public were watching. They'd be here soon, Burgd thought, although Tamara didn't have much of a show against Marcia Nels.

The Duplication machine. What was known about it? Burgd wondered if it had any constructive function. Not that its history wasn't clear enough. No one who had heard the facts would be likely to forget the dramatic murder of Jonas Pell, the inventor, and the still more dramatic confession of Leo Halasz, then chairman of the UN Educational and Scientific Council. At the trial, Halasz had put on a fantastic show, confessing to thirty crimes he could not possibly have committed to every one of which he was guilty, and setting afloat an armada of rumors—conflicting stories as to what the invention would or would not do; how it worked; where he had hidden it, etc.

"Burgd?" came Heath's voice. "Hello. Looking at our little hell-raiser?"

He turned slightly. "Hello, Heath. Is Marcia—ah, here she is now."

The Albertan woman moved gracefully but quickly across the floor, giving the machine but the briefest of glances, and sat down at the big, curving desk.

Heath got out his pipe, "Well, there it is," he said; "right out of a video-serial script. Complete with a sort of dull-brown, sluggish liquid that's complicated as all get-out, but can be easily prepared by any organic chemist who knows what he's doin'. And that, they tell us, will make as many as five copies of a man at a single clip—five copies that'll live, and in every respect will be that man; only needs an operator and a source of power."

"You don't believe it, eh?" asked the Antarctic.

"Oh, once I've had breakfast I'm ready to believe all sorts of impossibilities—when I've seen 'em. Got any idea *how* it works?"

"It looks like a large video pay-booth," said Marcia Nels.

"Yeah, sort of a let-down," Heath agreed. "Important thing is whether it produces, of course. Lord, what a god-send it would have been to the power-hungry in the old days."

Burgd smiled at the thought that they could well afford to be critical of the hungerers after power, since the Security Council had power such as Napoleon never hoped for. "I wonder if there is any use for it that *isn't* military at the bottom."

"Well," said Marcia, "suppose someone were killed accidentally..." and paused as Heath shook his head. "You mean it wouldn't...?"

"Don't know all the ins and outs," the Appalachian declared, "but I got enough information on it to know it wouldn't be any good for that." He fumbled with his matches, and Burgd wondered if the grateful citizenry of Appalachia might possibly vote their representative a pipe-lighter. "It isn't a camera, doesn't make negatives,"

Heath went on. "The best you'd get was six duplicate corpses."

"Then perhaps we could all have duplicates of ourselves put in cold storage, just in case," Marcia put in.

Burgd shook his head. "I can just picture the Earth hollowed out, its entire space filled with duplicates in reserve. No, my dear, I'm afraid this thing before us is good for nothing but making trouble. The late Mr. Halasz was a benefactor of humanity; as I recall, social conscience was little more than a meaningless noise, so far as actual events went, back in the days when Pell built more horribly than he knew." He nodded to Tamara, as the dumpy Ukrainian woman stepped in, carrying a blocky leather case.

"This may well be the biggest thing since the icecap was bombed," Burgd remarked in Russian. "If we can write Venus off, we'll actually have a peaceful planet, for the first time in history."

Tamara shot him a sidewise smile. "You sang a different song in council," she observed.

Burgd nodded, reflectively. "There are times when I think there might be more than we admit in what we let the public hear—policy or no policy. How was it that Carillo put it?—carrying war to others is no part of our function. That was the trouble with the old multi-national thinking, 'Just one more war, and everything will be straightened out.' It's always been, 'Peace tomorrow!' on this planet, and here we are doing it again." He glared at the machine. "We've come to a pretty pass when we're driven to using *that*."

"Ends do not modify means," Tamara said, indifferently. "When attacked, one uses the handiest weapon."

A buzzer sounded from the annunciator to Marcia Nels' left. She snapped the tumbler down.

"Captain Small, Madame Nels,"

came the agent's voice. "Danton's arrived."

"Good work, Captain. Bring him up right away."

The table became quiet, and Burgd wondered if the same thought had struck the others at the same time. Photographs had shown beyond doubt that this Danton was the man they needed—yet, sometimes the living reality was disappointing.

Barring the completely random factors introduced by the way V-bombs picked their targets, Burgd knew that he could predict the future course of the Venusian war with the certainty of an astronomer. But the feelings of the people involved in the critical incidents—now there was material for speculation, if you liked. He thought: *I'd give a pretty to be inside this fellow's mind for the next twenty minutes, say...*

DANTON had never seen any of the Council-members in person before, and he was particularly curious to see if Marcia Nels' world-famous beauty was real, or only a trick of telecasting. When he came in, he surveyed the group at the table intently; but even a casual eye could not have missed the sudden smiles, the relaxing of bodies in chairs.

"Perfect!" exclaimed the Appalachian.

Danton heard the voice, and knew the speaker to be Heath; he heard and did not hear. Marcia Nels met his eyes for an instant, and smiled quizzically. Danton had to fight to keep from catching his breath; it had been no trick of telecasting. He looked away, feeling the part of a fool.

The bitterness washed itself away in mystification. What did he, Danton, have that they could greet with such evident pleasure?

"Please be seated, Mr. Danton," Marcia Nels said. "We'd like to ask you some questions, and proffer you

some explanations I am sure you have been wanting."

"I could use the explanations," he replied, feeling the stiffness in his throat deforming his words. "But I don't know anything you don't know already."

"They aren't that kind of questions. First of all, I'd like you to look at a picture." She nodded to Tamara, who slid the leather case across the polished surface of the table. The chair-woman extracted from it a life-sized solidograph, a three-dimensional photograph of a man's head, encased in a block of transparent plastic. "Do you recognize this man?"

"Of course," Danton replied with a shrug. "It's an excellent likeness." His hand went to his throat. "It—makes me feel decapitated."

The blonde Albertan smiled. "Very good. Now...what about this one?" Another cube came out of the case.

"That's me, too." Danton leaned forward, frowning suddenly, as a thought struck him. "Wait a moment; that first one—it seems to have a collar with a metal device on it. I don't remember owning anything like that."

He looked from one picture to the other, while the Committee on Retaliation watched him intently. At last, he sat back, his eyes travelling to the Duplication machine. "Am I to understand—"

"No," Burgd said. "The machine hasn't been used upon you without your knowledge; we were told that that was technically impossible." He nudged the second tube. "You know how we got this compo of you. The other picture is of another man entirely."

Danton blinked for an instant, then a faint smile arose inside him and spread to his face. "I begin to see," he said ruefully. "I've been wondering all along just what it was I had that might be valuable to you...but I never thought it would turn out to be my

good looks." He felt Marcia Nels' eyes upon him, but avoided looking at her; it seemed that nothing he could say could escape contributing to what he had felt when he first entered the chamber. "May I ask who this double is?"

Heath said, "We don't know his name." A third cube came out of the case, and Danton began to wonder if it were bottomless. Would it continue to produce heads of Danton endlessly? Two thirds of the head in this third picture were as smooth and blank as the head of a dummy. "And this," Heath went on, "is all of him we're sure about. The rest, you see, was built up for us by police physiognomists."

"You might call it," Burgd put in, "a free fantasia on the Bertillion laws."

THE ANTARCTICAN was purring again. "We got the original," he continued, "from a fragment of a Venusian television broadcast last year. Our Screen Team had a small spaceship scouting the planet, trying to place the position of the Thomas Screen and run some tests on it. They failed; but while they were there, they happened to pick up this broadcast and hold it for a minute. This man was speaking at the time." Burgd inclined his head slightly. "I need not point out to you, Mr. Danton, that history often hangs upon such unpredictable happenings."

So I will go down in history as a great coincidence, Danton thought. *...Well, that's better than as a footnote in police reports of the Pro-Earth Party.* He looked at the compo again, as the meaning of Heath's words penetrated, and incredulity blanked out his thoughts. "They got a visicast through that cloud-layer?" Danton asked.

"Ever hear of the Outstation?" Heath asked in reply. Danton shook his head as the Appalachian filled his pipe. "It's a small artificial satellite, like the old American one we have. It's

in an orbit around Venus, just above the cloud-layer, but below the screen. They use it for high-altitude weather-observation, and as a ranging-station for shelling Earth."

"I should think their shelling would be more accurate, then," Danton demurred.

Heath shook his head. "Outstation's too small to handle the necessary equipment. If they built it that large, they'd have had to put it outside Roche's Limit—which would mean putting it outside the screen, where we could blow it up."

"All of which," Burgd put in, "is not germane to your question. The Outstation *does* house a precipitron, so that when the gales are below normal violence it can keep a column of clear air between itself and the surface. The visicasts come up that column."

Danton nodded. "I see. An all-around lucky break."

"No," Marcia Nels corrected him, "not exactly." She sounded a little nettled, Danton thought. "We often have ships tracking the Outstation. The resemblance, of course, is pure luck."

The others nodded, and the Albertan chairwoman went on, "The next item is the current situation on Venus; I think you'll be interested in that. Among other things, it makes the activities of your party seem rather foolish. . . ."

"You're familiar with the history of the rebellion and flight from Earth. Since then, analysis of the personalities of the people involved has shown us a series of incipient conflicts—unknown perhaps even to the participants, but smoldering all the same. What we know of Thomas shows him to have been a domineering person, fully capable of keeping the rebels integrated into a tight group; but, though we don't know his age at the time of the flight, we can be sure that

he has been dead at least thirty years."

"More likely fifty," Heath said.

Danton nodded. "In the meantime," he suggested, "the later generations have come to maturity, and the sins of the fathers are being visited upon the grandchildren."

"A shrewd observation," Burgd commented. "Suppose *you* tell *us* what you think the course of further events would be."

DANTON shrugged. "I'll try to think the way I judge you are thinking," he said slowly. "There is probably a make-peace-with-Earth movement of some kind, possibly outlawed; a middle-of-the-road party, favoring armed independence from Earth, but opposing the random bombardment in favor of some decisive military test; and a majority group who will want to hit Earth as hard and as often as possible, even if there's no military sense in it.

"And it seems sensible to guess that the quarrel between the groups is coming to a head around now—otherwise you wouldn't be so worried about it. The majority group can't help but win out, but the margin may be narrow; that means compromise with the moderates."

The Committee was intently still, but their expressions varied markedly. Danton couldn't decide how to read Tamara's broad face, but decided tentatively that the Ukrainian was faintly suspicious. Heath looked surprised, and frankly approving. Marcia Nels was bending upon him that disquieting, quizzical smile which made it impossible to look at her for more than a few seconds—all the more disquieting, because she seemed to be unaware of it. Only Burgd looked as if he were quite detached from the proceedings, or at the most a bit amused by them. He said, "And the results?"

Danton drummed nervously on the tabletop. "An initial slackening of the

bombardment, and an increased effort to make what few blows are struck more telling than they have been, thus far. Over the long haul—within ten years, say—a plan to arm to the teeth, drop the screen, and attack us. I suppose they won't try to set themselves up as the only legal Earth government, by then; rather, they'll hope to be so powerful that they can compel you to rescind their present criminal status and accept them as a sovereign planet."

"That," said Burgd, "is almost precisely the picture that the Sociology Team has presented to us." His tone was not commendatory; he seemed merely to be stating a fact.

Danton smiled wanly. "All we used was common sense. We didn't have any psychometric data on the original rebels, nor any experts to analyze them if we had. We just figured that most of the present Venusians couldn't help but hate Venus—they aren't adapted to that kind of planet, wouldn't be for generations to come—so must hate Earth for exiling them. It also seemed reasonable that some of them, youngsters who have never seen the Earth, might not know enough about it to feel very strongly on the issue; there are your moderates. And your actively, romantically homesick people make up the minority."

He paused and forced himself to look levelly at Marcia Nels. "And I fail to see why my Party's activities strike you as so blind. They seem to me to be perfectly sensible in the light of your own conclusions. When this crisis is over on Venus, a full-scale war will be in preparation against Earth. We've never claimed that the outraged professional politicians, the brass hats whose profession Security made obsolete, or the rest of that scurvy crew, were the rightful government of Earth; you'll give us that, I hope.

"What we *have* said is that the re-

bellion is a *fait accompli*, and that it's dangerous to treat the descendants of the rebels as refugee criminals resisting extradition. Naturally they hide behind their screen and shoot at you. You track their Outstation; you shoot test Bombs at their screen; generally, you act like an angry cat poised just outside a mousehole. If you'd offered them amnesty and peace, they would have come out; and the trouble would have been over by now. The youngest generation must be very sick of its heritage of hatred. But now you're going to discover that what you've got penned up in that hole is not a mouse, but a snake!"

"You're right all the way, Mr. Danton," Heath growled, striking his pipe against his heel. "Only one hitch; we consider it damn unlikely that they'd accept an amnesty. Look at it **this** way: if they accepted, it would **mean** their recognizing Security as the lawful government here. That they won't do—can't do. Their whole indoctrination runs counter to it.

"And this random shelling isn't the trick of a cornered mouse, not by a damsite. It's the spitting of a weasel that'd like nothing better than for you to try to reach in and pat it. You'd draw back a bloody stump, and make no mistake about it."

"Let's waste no more time on zoology," Marcia Nels put in. "The crux of the whole matter, Mr. Danton, is that we have a much simpler way of settling the affair, without bloodshed, and with the ultimate certainty that Venus' fangs are drawn." Her smile came back suddenly. "Now you have me doing it. But that's the way it is."

"And my resemblance to this Venusian is involved?" Danton asked, guardedly.

"Yes," she said. "We **are** going to put your Party's Duplication Plan **into** effect. You hoped to use the **ma-**chine to make copies of the Council members, and thus throw Security **into**

confusion, didn't you? As it stood, that plan was unworkable, but we thought the principle behind it was quite sound.

SHE INDICATED the first compo, "This man, whoever he is, is a military leader of some kind—from the brief conversation we overheard, it seems possible that he is *the* military leader. If the crisis on Venus has not happened yet, this will change its complexion entirely. If it has, then we hope to have one of our men in the saddle, in charge of the attack on Earth. One of them is bound to find an opportunity to assassinate this Venusian and assume his role."

"You can see the possibilities," Burgd said.

Danton pursed his lips. "Yes. . . I see them all right. But what if I refuse?"

"There lies the catch," Burgd admitted. "Believe me, Mr. Danton, we are not in the habit of explaining ourselves in such detail to every member of a subversive group whom we capture. We have reason to think that your duplicates may be more amenable than you might be; but if *you* go along with us, we can be sure there will be no residuum of opposition in their minds—no incipient schism in their motives."

"Look," broke in Heath, "why should you refuse? Here's your chance to mix into Venusian affairs directly, instead of talking about them from a distance. We'll drop you and your duplicates by parachute from beyond the screen. You'll have a free hand—we couldn't guide or order you afterwards if we wanted you. About the only thing you *couldn't* do would be the one thing we most fear—give yourselves up and tell the Exiles the whole story; they'd shoot the bunch of you for safety's sake. Anything else than that you might do is bound to change the situation for the better, in some way."

It was confusing to hear oneself be-

ing referred to in the plural. Danton tried to weigh what he had heard, and found it a heavy load. Heath was right, of course—this was a magnificent opportunity for a mere rank-and-file Party member. Like many plain citizens, he supposed, Danton had sometimes thought that he could run either Earth or Venus a lot more sensibly than the people in power were doing it. Now he had the chance. *It's not a very flattering offer*, he thought, *but—it's an offer.*

Tamara spoke briefly, and Burgd grinned. "The Representative for Ukrainia wishes to remind you that Revolutionaries are always expendable. I can't think of anyone else, except possibly Mr. Carillo, who could tell you more about revolutionary movements."

Danton grinned back. "I'm not worried about the Party. It has taken care of itself in worse times than these; it's a democratic centralism. Any member can assume leadership; we're all equal."

The Ukrainian spoke again; Burgd did not translate this time, but her tone was sufficient. Marcia Nels said, rather sharply, "We'll not further matters by baiting him."

"You prefer to dangle the carrot?" Danton asked.

Unaccountably, she flushed. "Perhaps that is accurate enough."

"I appreciate your frankness," Danton exhaled deeply. "Very well, then; I'm your man."

4

THOMAS looked up as Luisa came in, then continued dictating. "They had been secure, and they hated that security. Now that the Thomas screen was down, the Venus leaders felt like men released from prison. None of them, save Thomas, could have any idea what Earth might be like, but they yearned for it all the more that they knew it not; and their

simple, deadly hatred of its people was not confused with knowledge.

"Venus had suffered from the deadliest of all sicknesses: conviction of helplessness. Now, power was in the forging."

Thomas nodded, and the attendant cut off the recorder and went out. "When one gets tired of playing a game, one can always write a book about it and philosophize. You know, the first history to appear always has a particular value far beyond its objective worth . . . Tell me, is Mann happy?"

"Like a child with a yardful of new gadgets. . . . You don't seem amused any more, Thomas."

"I'm not. I'm tired of laughter. You know, it is said that when the news came of the sinking of the white ship—bearing the crown prince—came to the court, the king fell fainting from his chair; and from that day, he never smiled again. . . . I thought it a quaint bit of romanticism once. . . ."

She tossed her head impatiently. "Oh, stop your play-acting. You aren't going to have me executed, and you know it—even if I did connive to ruin Taverner. I didn't have anything to do with his death; that was all your idea."

"Quite right, Luisa. It was all my idea, *mea culpa*. . . . *mea maxima culpa*. A pity I haven't the build for hair-shirts. . . . No, I need you, and you need me even more. Besides, Thomas can learn from experience; after one act of hasty vengeance, he can be patient."

"Stop it!" she snapped. "Get to the point, if there is any."

"There is no hurry, my dear. I see your end as surely as I see my own, and Thomas is satisfied with yours. . . . Oh yes. . . . I called you for something definite, didn't I? Let me have the information on. . . ."

MANN MADE a final effort to hear the flight officer above the

screeching of the loading-trams, and popped his earphones back into place. The officer grinned at him, and he grinned back—a grin so wholesome that it made him feel young again. Never had there been such a gratifying noise as that screeching, nor colors so rawly beautiful as the smoky yellows and reds, the mercury-vapor blues and greens that flickered through the great cavern.

He could feel that the hollow tumult meant the same to the others as it did to him—release of tensions which had been part of their cultural pattern, and that of the generation before them—the fact of action against the Earth.

It's as if, at long last, I've been born, he thought; now I draw my first breath of air.

He watched the new power in the forging, and heard the men who forged it yell over its din, rather than accept the help of earphones. *We are the Power, he thought; our voices conquer it; we shall shout down the Earth!*

"Should be done in half an hour," the officer said. "Marshal Lathrop really had this organized. Have you ridden a rocket before?"

"No, but I'll get used to it." *Marshal Lathrop, eh? Well, let the old boy have his promotion; might be enough to keep him in line. "There she goes!"*

There was a long, steady rumble in the rock, growing louder and rising in pitch at the same time. Then it diminished overhead, an ear-splitting shriek—a V-bomb, rocketing up its shaft toward the sky. . . .

Mann listened with an ecstasy of concentration. When the sound had died, he said, "What word from the geologists?"

"Nothing to worry about. There may be a minor collapse in the hydroponic caves, but it won't be anything to cripple production seriously. The exit-bores are all perfectly sound—they say that vulcanism has been extinct on Venus for so long that all the major

fault-lines stabilized ages before we got here."

Mann nodded and took off the ear-phones once more, his lungs still drinking deep. In a smooth stream, the great torpedoes passed along the tunnel beneath the ledge on which he stood, toward the launching-sites picked out for them; the loading-trams screamed on their rails. Each shell bore the stripe which told what was penned in its warhead—red for high explosive; orange for incendiaries; yellow for gas; green for pestilence. The white stripe of the fission-bomb was absent; there were only a few of these, and they had been saved for the spaceships—to fire them at random would have been wasteful.

The phones buzzed against his skull. Reluctantly he pulled them back into place.

"General Mann? This is the Out-station. Better get to your shell, sir. We're a little late, and we're going to try to fire the vanguard at 2120. Are the V's leaving? We can't see them from here."

"Yes, they're being fired now."

"As soon as they're launched, your chemically-fueled fleet should leave. If you want to wait, you can ride one of the fission-powered jobs still—they won't need to leave for awhile yet. You'll be more comfortable, too..."

"No. I want to be up front. Any word from Marshal Lathrop?"

"No sir. We have a 'gram from Director Thomas, however—"

"Thomas?" Mann shouted.

"Yes, sir. He says the big ships are nearly ready, and that a 'sufficient number' will make the deadline. That's set to bring them in less than a day after you hit Earth's atmosphere."

"We'd better board," the flight officer said.

Mann hesitated for an instant. Thomas! A spasm of anxiety shook him, but he put it aside. The attack was under way; Thomas had escaped, somehow, but he had escaped too late.

Through the rock, the hammer-blows of the torpedoes rang. There were over a thousand of them in flight by the time Mann had swung shut the airlock of his ship behind him. The Venusian dust-clouds whistled and seethed with their passage.

Earth revolved placidly, awaiting their coming.



The Brain-Children

THE TROUBLE Paul Danton thought, was with control; he remembered how they'd stressed that in the Pro-Earth Party from the very beginning, when he first joined the ranks. Control your thoughts; screen out your emotions and be objective. He sat in the dark, violently still, and tugged at the kinks in his thinking, tried to unravel the knots that kept him from orderly thought.

It wasn't objective, he kept telling himself, to dwell in daydreams of far-off Venus, where he'd soon be playing the strangest set of multiple-roles in history; it wasn't objective to keep on remembering blonde Marcia Nels, and the look in her eyes.

All right, he thought, there's an objective fact; she attracts me, and apparently I attract her. He repeated the thought several times, as if it were a slogan or a speech to be memorized. *And I don't like it,* his thoughts, added; *I don't like it and I don't want it. It's unreal and completely romantic.*

He tried to put her away by thinking of former affairs with objective Party members—many of them, looking at it without illusion of glamor, were far more attractive than the

Security Chairwoman. She was far less in control than he, Danton, was, he judged. Most likely, she didn't realize what was going on, as yet; or, at the very best, she was toying with it.

He looked around the room—comfortable enough, though locked and judiciously bare of window and ventilators. He'd been fed from the Council's own kitchens and told to get a few hours' sleep. He glanced at the door, and pictured Marcia Nels standing there, looking at him in that same way as she said, "Nobody knows exactly how great a strain the Duplication-process is, Mr. Danton; there isn't any danger, but you still should not approach it with your nerves on edge."

Danton grinned tightly. Confronting five copies of oneself would be strain enough. He'd managed to get some sleep, finally; he'd bored himself into it with a bound volume of the minutes—there was no clock in the room—and he knew he wouldn't doze off again.

He got up, put on the light, washed, and dressed—feeling a sort of eagerness he hadn't known for years. He felt like a kid on Christmas morning, sure that it was time to get up—but knowing that he mustn't sneak downstairs and peek at the tree. He picked up the UNESCO minutes, put them back into the bookcase, and pulled down a copy of "Finnegans Wake".

Lord, how I hated this in school, he thought. But then, perhaps that was because it was required reading. Besides, this appeared to be the unexpurgated edition.

There was a discreet knock on the door. Danton called out, "I'm awake." The door clicked, and an attendant entered, pushing a tray. Behind him in the corridor, clipping the color-coder which opened the door back into his belt, Danton saw a familiar figure: Captain Small.

"Hi," he said. "Are you going to dog me all the way to the end?"

The agent grinned. "Right to the foot of the scaffold. I'm supposed to know you better than anyone else, you see. Did you find out what you had that was so valuable?"

Danton nodded. "Yes. But if they haven't told you, I don't see why I should."

The agent waved negligently. "My curiosity is purely professional; see you later."

Danton attacked his meal with unexpected relish. He was still at it when the door clicked again.

IT WAS BURGD. "Good evening," said the Antarctic pleasantly, "Sit down—I didn't mean to interrupt your breakfast. You have a while yet; it is just past midnight. This is only a social call."

"I'm gratified," Danton said, "even if puzzled."

"Well, admittedly, we are not old college chums. Still...you are an intelligent man—a man of good will, as they used to say in the 1900's—and you have undertaken a hazardous venture for idealistic reasons." Burgd coughed slightly. "That is something I rather dislike seeing; it leads so inevitably to emotional shocks. If you were a scoundrel, I would not mind, but..."

Danton hid his increasing bewilderment behind the mechanism of cutting up his steak. Was the man going to try to talk him out of his decision to go?

"Speaking for myself alone—not for the Council," Burgd went on, "I do not like the policy to which we are committed; and I like the use of the Duplication machine even less.

"Tell me—do you remember exactly why it was so easy for the Peace Orders to be enforced—even though only about ten Bombs still remained in the hands of the Squadron when they were issued?"

Danton blinked, wondering where this would lead. "Why...yes, I think

20. The earthquakes and storms after the icecap was melted had made resistance nearly impossible. There was something about the Earth's angle of precession changing—"

"You are thinking of Drayson's Law. What was important was that it did *not* change; the momentum of the rest of Earth's mass prevented that. The result was that the energy which had been consumed in swinging that icecap round and round was converted from angular momentum into heat—by the time a quarter of the weight had been bombed off, the rest of the cap melted by itself."

Burgd paused. Both men were seeing the same vision: the raging, continent-wide fog; the splitting and groaning of endless frozen waste; the fifty tiny planes struggling frantically through a hell of lightning and slushy hail.

"But the earthquakes, and so on, only helped," continued Burgd. "The nations had been on the eve of war—another 'last war', of course. That has been every scoundrel's justification for a new war since the beginning of the twentieth century. The idealists haven't been any better, and combinations of the two... Well, to get back to the subject: There was still enough organization to fight off the International Squadron. Ten obsolete Bombs would not have frightened officials who were not likely to be hit by them, in any case."

"What did scare them, then?"

"Chaos: the ancient bugaboo of the bureaucrat. If the established order of things is destroyed, or badly damaged, your official suffers a break in the buck-passing chain. He has no one on whom he can blame his own errors, and no one on whom he can lay the responsibility for acting in a crisis. If the breakdown is grave enough, he may lose his position—he usually holds some kind of office which depends upon highly-centralized governmental machinery.

"The national governments were fighting the chaos that came from the earthquakes; that was the danger they feared. They would rather surrender to one enemy than lose to the other...and, you see, Security represented Order to them. When the Bomb threat came, they were glad to have an excuse to knuckle under—and pass to us the responsibility for re-establishing order."

Danton leaned back, thoughtfully. "Oh—I see. And this is what you are hoping will happen on Venus?"

"Exactly. In the cosmos of the governmental official, the Duplication machine is ten times the terror that any possible war-weapon, in the usual sense, can be. Even the carbon bomb does not frighten most of them—mainly because no one really has the imagination to picture the entire planet going up in a single blast; and the ones who might be worried are satisfied with the explanations of those experts who say it won't happen. I daresay if we were to have another inter-national war of Earth, some dumbhead would use the carbon bomb sooner or later, out of sheer scepticism. But the Duplication machine—that hits hard at the part of the universe that is intimate and real to the bureaucrat. It causes organizational chaos—something far worse than fire and riot."

DANTON looked at the Antarcticant closely, trying to see behind the suave tones; Burgd sounded much the same as he always had, on TV, although his appearance was shabbier. But there was something about the man now, some underlying tone, which Danton had never noticed before—and wondered if he'd ever heard before. He'd always pictured Burgd as the master-player in politics, a professional with the fine instinct and inner enthusiasm of an amateur; tonight, Burgd didn't seem to be playing a game.

"Just why are you bothering to tell me all this?" Danton asked.

Burgd shrugged. "Partly because I like you. I do not know just how far your sympathy with the Exiles may go; but, at least it's plain that you favor the weaker party—it makes no difference whether on sentiment or principle. I know how you feel; I was a perennial lost-causer myself, before I obtained a position on the Council. I want you to understand, as thoroughly as possible, how much you will be hated for your good intentions by the very people whom you support."

"Hardly a new turn in philosophy, Mr. Burgd," Danton said. "Even if we weren't told about it when we first joined the Pro-Earth Party, I doubt if any of us didn't realize it before we'd had more than a few months' experience."

"Crucifying saviours, one way or another, was an old practice, long before Christ's time; and it never falls out of practice." Danton shrugged. "People who don't realize that get bitter; realists expect nothing better for themselves but keep their eyes on the objective."

"Partly true," the Antarctic replied. "The trouble with the saviour is that he wants to save you in his own way, rather than in yours."

"Well," sighed Danton, "I'll be looked upon as the ultimate in military plagues—the latest achievement in biological weapons." He smiled suddenly. "Your affection for me takes a curiously practical turn, Mr. Burgd! What you have done is to warn me, in the strongest possible terms, not to give the show away when I land on Venus."

Burgd rolled a cigar judiciously between his palms and sniffed it. "My reputation for being devious is hardly undeserved," he admitted. "But my stated reason for the warning is quite sincere, also. There is something else you will need to know, too, eventually: How much do you know about the Immunes?"

"Immunes?" Danton couldn't keep

the surprise out of his voice. "Damned if I see the connection, but—well, they're the only major pro-survival mutation that came out of all the radioactivity that was kicking around after the icecap was bombed. They're widely hated, but for no visible reasons. About the only characteristics they all have in common is that they are sterile; they can't catch diseases, and, as a result, they usually live to a great age. Is that right?"

"Quite right, so far," Burgd agreed gravely. "I believe that they are also popularly supposed to be immortal, as well as invulnerable to accident. Neither of these two ideas are right, of course; Immunes can be blown to pieces, and they have to have oxygen—but they can adapt to almost anything else."

"But—"

BURGD HELD up his hand. "You are going to ask me why I bring the subject up. That I cannot tell you now. You will find a use for what you know about Immunes, sooner or later; and had you been ignorant of the facts, I should have had to tell you. That's all. As for the Duplication machine, I do not like using it, just as I said. I'm not afraid of the chaos bugaboo; what I hate is the intricate organizational system which makes the bugaboo possible, and I think that the use of the machine tends to perpetuate that system."

"Hold on," Danton protested; "you've got to have a pretty intricate governmental system to run a high-technology civilization."

Burgd blew a smoke-ring softly. "Ah...but the high-technology civilization! Think a moment, my friend. Do you actually believe that we need to run the Earth at its present peak of technology, if our only concern were to keep the people well-clothed, housed, fed, healthy, and so on? Nonsense! We passed *that* peak around 1910. Medicine, agriculture, education

—none of them require a technology as advanced and as energy-expensive as the one we maintain. Even after adding an increment for basic research, you would still have a peak only about half as high as our actual one. There is just one excuse, and one only, for this practice of keeping the technology cranked up against the ceiling, and forcing it higher every year. You know what it is as well as I do."

"Warfare," said Danton.

"Tsk tsk." Burgd stood up. "What an ugly word. Let us call it... defense."

"Against what? Venus? Now who's being ridiculous?"

"I am," Burgd replied easily, "but only because I speak for a ridiculous civilization. Think it over, Mr. Danton—and a good trip to you."

As the door closed behind the Councilman, Danton sloshed his coffee dregs morosely. It had been a pretty fair Christmas tree, but somehow, the expected electric train had not been under it. Then he remembered his objectivity and control, and decided that it had been an ideal Christmas tree.

He could still hear Burgd's ironic chuckle in the back of his mind when they came for him.

2

THE ROAR of the tubes died abruptly, leaving behind a series of asthmatic coughs from the defective feed-unit. With its oxygen-supply shut off, however, the hot nozzle could do no more than vaporize the dribbling fuel, and the bursts of vapor became steadily weaker and more infrequent. Finally, there was silence.

"Cripes!" Mann said feelingly. "I'd rather have the noise. Why is it so dead?"

The pilot shrugged and ran fingers through his hair. "Nothing to make any noise. On Venus, there was al-

ways a murmur of transmitted sound from somewhere, no matter how distant. Out here—nothing. . . . Do you hear the sea?"

"The sea?" Mann frowned. "By damn, I do hear a sea-sound of some kind. What's that?"

"The passage of the blood in the vessels around your inner ear. On a planet, you may find a place quiet enough to hear that once in your life. We heard it often at the Outstation."

"Well, I don't like it." Mann listened for a moment. "Damnation! Turn on the radio." He fidgeted nervously while the tubes warmed. "Why doesn't it hum?"

"It's DC, of course, from the batteries."

The speaker whispered, very quietly.

"Two of the boys talking somewhere," said the pilot. "They're nearly out of range. I'll see if I can raise someone else." He began to jiggle a key. Raucous blasts of static cut across the distant, lonely voices.

"Who's doing that?" the speaker demanded suddenly.

Mann smiled and picked up the phone. "This is Mann. Who's there?"

"Goode. Stop that dit-da-ditting, will you? Somebody behind me is talking, and my Sparks can't hear if you do that."

"I heard them," Mann said, "but they were pretty dim. Why? Something up?"

"Plenty. Hold it, will you, until they finish? I'll pass it along—that's how it's coming, anyway... passing along the line."

"All right."

Mann wanted to pace up and down the narrow deck, but he'd just banged his forehead a moment or two ago, while attempting it. He kept his belt closed, and contented himself with tapping his foot, and picturing the havoc soon to be visited upon Earth. That was better; he licked his lips, while the pilot chewed a pencil and

checked calculations matter-of-factly. Mann broke off his own speculations to glare at the pilot; damn these cocksure Outstation men who were so used to space that they could pretend it wasn't there!

He'd looked out a few times, at first, to shake his fist at Earth; but the stars in their glory, as the phrase went, made him dizzy, and he hated the emptiness of lights and darkneses—felt a gnawing fear and a doubt that one of these lights could be Earth, could be solid, could be bombed.

Mann thought, *If he loved it, if he got poetic about that hell outside, I'd tell him to shut his damned trap—but I'd respect him. But he ignores it—he's a machine!*

"Mann!"

"Yes!" Mann started to jump to his feet, then thought better of it. "Yes, yes!"

"I'm not sure I have this right," continued the speaker. "There was a break in the chain somewhere, and some of it got lost; the one behind me says he could barely hear the guy behind *him*. Anyhow, it seems to come from Grenfell; he started sending as soon as he hit space. Says there's been some kind of revolt at home."

"Lathrop. . ."

"No, not as far as I can tell. Something calling itself the Earth Party, it sounds like. Anyhow, most of the observatories have been sabotaged, and both the polar weather-stations are out. Grenfell says that his ship was fired blind; Outstation corrected his course for him, but he doesn't know whether he has enough fuel to pass the no-gravity line. Wait a minute. . . something else coming through."

MANN STARED numbly through the plate at the remote star of Earth, forgetting his revulsion for the scene. Earth. Earth party. Sabotage. Then this meant long-laid plans, completely hidden from the cabal. And someone. . .

The speaker whispered softly: "...ship off. . . on full. . . give them about. . . no. . . we've tried, but. . . four days. . . tell Mann when. . ."

"Hello, Mann?" came the stronger voice. "Goode again. Grenfell's lost—write him off. They didn't fire any after him. Outstation got to them somehow, and told them to stop until they could take over the plotting. That leaves five ships on the way, counting us."

"Five!" exploded Mann. "There should be sixteen!"

"That's the gap in the line. We can't raise Kolar. Meteor, or backblast, or something like that, I suppose. . . we'll never know just what."

"Maybe his radio is just out of kilter."

"Possible, but there's no sense counting on it. Anyhow, we've a couple thousand V's in flight ahead of us, and 150 men ought to be able to do some damage on Lon Garland."

"Didn't any of the atomics take off?"

"Not a one. Why, I don't know—they had plenty of power to compensate for errors."

"I'll call you later." Mann put the mike down heavily on the board. The pilot looked at him fatalistically. "Tough, chief," he said. "Too bad we can't turn back. After those torps hit, they'll be ready to hang us the moment we put our feet on Earth."

Mann nodded glumly. "I hope at least a few of them strike the Council buildings. We've got enough bombs between us to clear our landing-areas."

He steeled himself to look out once more at the glittering planet, hating it, and remembering how his hatred had grown from the time he had begun to hate living on Venus. He remembered his father's fanatical hatred of Earth, and his own initial rebellion against the propaganda the elder Mann tried to inculcate. Then, the little incident that had suddenly knocked it all into place, and made him one with his fa-

ther in vowing vengeance...strange; he couldn't remember what had happened, now. A crucial thing; it must have been crucial to turn his every dream thereafter into a Roman triumph.

Mann shook his head and his mind turned to the torpedo swarm again; he pictured toppling buildings and a hundred different kinds of death.

They can't deprive me of that, he thought.

He felt tired, suddenly, for something else was coming back to him... something of the reasons behind his former rebellion against this destiny.

Suddenly, he had to turn and look out on the stars, and they didn't horrify him as before. *Why, he thought, this is like almost any war in Earth history. When it ends, no one will win.*

The revolt back home, on Venus—that must have been designed to stop the attack for good. But it had come too late—the V's, and five of the chemical ships were en route.

"The fleet was launched, but late—too late..."

"Yeah," agreed the pilot, "that's how it goes if your luck's turned. And nobody wins this war, but we know some who'll lose."

Luck? thought Mann. No, not luck. Earth Party. Earth Party. Who stood to gain by this revolt? Who knew, and had kept the secret for his own purposes? That was the only possible answer.

Who *could* gain? They had all lost: Earth, himself, Lathrop, Enfield, the Earth Party itself—

Mann's thought-chain broke off and he sat there, stunned.

He had found a winner.
Luisa.

3

ALL FOUR members of Earth's Security Executive Committee were present, and Paul Danton flicked his glance from one face to

another, getting the feeling that none of them seemed to look forward to this session any more than he did. Marcia Nels was pale and expressionless, her eyes showing that she had slept little; Joachim Burgd gave him a serious nod of greeting, but the Antarctic's face was preoccupied, and his eyes rested mostly on the machine. Only the Appalachian, Heath, seemed undisturbed—he was talking in his usual bluff manner—mostly with Tamara, who nodded occasionally, but maintained a steady, intense stare at Danton. He felt disquieted under her eyes.

A technician was present, making a last-minute check on the Duplication machine—and Captain Small was here, too; his manner showed that he knew the whole story, now. Danton looked at him, and felt that there was a bit of anger behind his professional mask, but that it struggled with sympathy.

Marcia Nels said, "Mr. Danton, you're still going along with us?" Her voice was strained.

"Yes," he replied simply.

"Thank you," murmured the Albertan. She picked up one of several glittering objects which lay in the center of the table; it was a soft spun-glass cap, with a sort of pigtail of fire wire, tipped with a jack. The other members, and the Security Agent, donned similar helmets, and plugged the jacks into sockets before them.

"This machine is not a camera," the technician explained, at a nod from Marcia Nels. "Basically, it's an encephalograph: it taps certain kappa-wave patterns from the brain of its operator, or operators. Precisely which ones, and where they originate, is a secret that died with Jonas Pell; fortunately, we don't need to know in order to operate or duplicate the machine itself—any more than we have to know the true nature of electricity to make a light-bulb. These patterns seem to be the sums of past memory

and present observation which are pertinent to the person to be duplicated. There must be one operator for each duplicate."

"Are five duplicates the limit for a single operation?" Heath asked.

"There's only five helmets," the technician said; "we don't know how many more could also function simultaneously."

"What about the molecular structure of the body?" Danton asked, feeling pleased that the question had occurred to him. "No operator could carry all that in his mind."

"It isn't necessary. A complete normal structure is built into the machine; the brain, and nerve-webs, are included. The operator's knowledge of the subject simply molds the surface appearance, and induces the various reflex and synapse-patterns which make for personality."

"Well," put in Heath, "if that's the case, then why can't the subject himself make your encephalograph record? Seems to me that he ought to know more about his make-up than anyone outside."

The technician scratched his head. "You sure can ask posers, Mr. Heath. . . . There's no really accurate answer to that in words. Roughly, though, it's for the same reason that you can't call yourself up on the 'visor; the line's busy."

"Now, let me see if I follow you," Burgd spoke up. "The subject furnishes the actual brain-pattern as well as the internal organ pattern. But so far as the outer appearance goes, Mr. Danton, your mental picture of yourself is foreshortened as to height, idealized as to features, and does not include any more than a vague notion that you have a rear view as well as a front one. We want what you really look like—not what you would like to be, or imagine that you are." He glanced at the technician. "Is that right."

"Good enough."

"Let's get on with it," Marcla Nels said. "If you're ready, Mr. Danton, will you please enter the chamber?"

DANTON NODDED, as his hands went to his clothing. His eyes fell upon the formal dress that Burgd sported—the Antarctic had shaved since their last meeting, as if this were to be a public appearance—and grinned as he stripped, then turned resolutely toward the machine. A moment later, the five were on the other side of him, and an insulated door had closed. He stood tensely, somewhat disappointed that there was nothing to be seen inside the chamber.

The walls throbbed a deep pulse of tone: *Thrummm!*

He felt no sensation whatsoever, and wondered why it was necessary to be inside the machine at all.

Thrummm! It seemed almost as if his duplicates would be appearing out of the empty air. Of course, this wasn't the case; the machine didn't create mater out of energy; all the chemicals which make up the human body were stored in the works.

Thrummm! That was three. Evidently more information than he imagined must have been lost during the machine's long hibernation. He *must* be contributing something to the process, however obscure. Oh yes—his own brain-patterns; of course, no one else could do that.

Thrummm! Danton waited. Captain Small was in on this, too; he wondered why, wondered what connection the agent had with the Executive Committee. "I'm supposed to know you better than anyone else, you see." But what did that have to do with it?

Thrummm! That did it; Danton swallowed hard, feeling a momentary surge of panic. There were now five people out there who thought exactly as he did, would know exactly what

he was thinking at any given second—and worse, *had all his memories*. He braced himself to remember that his guilts were also theirs, and theirs his.

He stood there, determined not to walk out on a dressing scene, and waited until the technician opened the door. "It's all right," the technie said nervously. "You can come out, now; they're waiting for you."

He stepped out of the chamber and walked slowly around to face the others, feeling silence in the air. When he saw their stunned faces, he thought: *They're taking it far worse than I am.*

Then, an instant later, his aplomb vanished.

Of the five newcomers in the room, *not one was a real duplicate of Danton!*

"What the hell!" Heath exploded at the technician. "You must have done something wrong!"

"There's nothing to do but close the master-switch and trip and re-set the toggles," the man pointed out with some asperity. "It's not my fault if you can't remember what a man looks like for thirty seconds."

"Get out of here!" the Appalachian growled, jerking out his pipe. No one else said anything, as he started to stuff it. Burgd was mopping his brow, visibly straining for his usual control; he looked like a cat who had just missed falling into a bathtub, and had escaped with only a few stray splashes.

Heath lit his pipe and looked around. "Well," he said, "somebody's memory was all right. Maybe we're only supposed to get one duplicate out of each batch of five." His eyes were on one of the new men, a fellow who looked to Danton like a possible younger brother; the other members were too busy staring at the group to follow the line of Heath's glance.

DANTON and his avatars looked each other over.

There were two who might be described as excellent resemblances at a party, but neither could really pass as Danton; nor did they greatly resemble each other. The next one in line was the most amazing; in him, Danton's build and features had become a strange blend of 'visor-star handsomeness, and the kind of ugliness that a woman would call "cute". He was by far the keenest-looking of the lot, and contrasted sharply with the man next to him—a meek, nondescript fellow who looked as if he had been pressed from worn stampers. The rather callow object of Heath's scrutiny completed the list.

"Can we agree that any more than one of these men looks like the Venusian?" Tamara asked. "That seems to be the crucial problem."

Burgd pointed. "That one looks more like the Venusian than Danton does himself."

Marcia Nels regarded the youngish duplicate Burgd indicated with a rather motherly smile. "Perhaps you're right. We'd better run them all through the stereoplast comparator just as we did Mr. Danton. I doubt that we are in proper emotional condition to judge very accurately at the moment. What do you think, Mr. Heath?"

"I'd ask Danton what *he* thinks."

"As far as I can see—" began six men in chorus.

"Stop!" Marcia Nels cried. "Captain Small, call that technician back. Thank you." They all waited in silence, and the six Dantons observed each other with mutual disapproval until Small and the other returned. "Doctor," the Albertan asked, "which of these men would you say was the one you saw go into the machine?"

"That one," replied the technie, decisively. The original Danton breathed a sigh of relief, noticing that the five duplicates were seriously startled. That had been the worst moment of

his life. They all knew, now, what the original subject contributed: continuity of impression.

"Now then," continued the blonde, nodding at the original Danton, "what were you going to say?"

"That as far as I can see, you have two passable resemblances to the Venusian here." He pointed out the two dissimilar men who seemed to look most like himself. "And of the two, the one Mr. Burgd pointed out seems to be the better. The others might manage in a bad light, or if the people to be deceived have only seen this Venusian for brief periods, over the visor. That allows for a fair amount of usefulness, I would guess. But they certainly wouldn't fool any personal acquaintance for a second."

He looked at the agent, who nodded. "Mr. Danton speaks as an experienced conspirator, Madame Nels; I have to agree with what he says."

The annunciator buzzed sharply four times, then twice again. Heath took the pipe out of his mouth and knocked it on the table. "Isn't that the emergency buzz?" he asked sharply. "As if we hadn't enough hell already—"

Marcia Nels touched a button on the table. "Executive Committee," she said.

"Madame Nels?" the speaker responded, the voice sharp with alarm.

"Yes. What now?"

"Mass bombardment going on, on the day side."

"What!" Heath roared. "Day side! Of Earth?"

"Yes, Mr. Heath. A regular meteor-storm of V's—with everything in them from plague charges to supersonic HE."

"From sunward?"

"Yes, sir. Struck an hour ago; the reports are just beginning to take enough shape to put them together and find out what's happened. The bombardment is just churning hell out

of the Atlantic at the moment, but it's still coming. If it keeps up, the American continents will be catching it by sunrise. We've put every armed ship that we can muster into the air, but we can't possibly intercept more than a fraction of those missiles. And there may be more coming. Orders?"

Marcia Nels abruptly covered her face with her hands. Burgd snapped, "Don't waste ships trying to intercept the V's—it can't be done. Save the ships to fight off manned craft; there are probably fighting-ships and troop-carriers to come. Go on out along the radiant line and get *them*—pick off any torpedoes you pass, of course."

"Yes, sir."

The intercom cut out. Burgd turned to the Dantons, and lifted an eyebrow. "Tell me, gentlemen, aren't you just as glad that your party is *not* in power at this moment?"

4

THE CORRIDOR, bored smooth as a gun-barrel through the rock, showed its long neglect plainly. No seal, it seemed, could keep the dust of Venus out. It crept into everything; sifting through the ventilators; swiftly clogging any screen meshed fine enough to block it; whirling in gusts whenever a surface-port was opened; brought in on clothes of Outstation and Weather shifts, and creeping through fissures and past the rims of ports. Even at this depth, it lay along the curving floor nearly three inches deep, and scuffed chokingly under the feet of Geoffrey Thomas and his nurses.

No one but Thomas had been this deep into the planet since the corridor had been cut; he himself had not been down here in twenty years. Another man, perhaps, might have visited it yearly; but Thomas, knowing what he knew, could wait.

He knew his man. "Matters go as it has been agreed they shall go," he

dictated to his false tooth. "When some accident diverts their course, events indicate this plainly enough, and there is time to make adjustments."

The two nurses, young men, strong and hard of muscle, made no reply. Their faces wore the look of the hypnotised, their expressions soft, helpless, and blind as snails; they seemed weaklings behind the purpose which informed his own flabby, almost-unmanageable bulk, Thomas thought. "I had you hypnotised for your own protection," he said. "Oh, your loyalty is unquestioned, but you can still be tortured; as it is, you will remember nothing, and no one will subject you to purposeless pain."

He closed his eyes, as if to shut out a vision. "I don't want to hurt anyone again," he whispered. "You will probably have to die, of course; that psychiatrist has been fool enough to be attracted by Luisa. She wants to know what is in this vault, you see; I do not think she believed my story that the secret of immortality is forged in the one unchanged cell in my body. . . . Well, that psychiatrist will be in for a shock, I'm afraid. You see, his predecessor, who worked with you first, was entirely reliable, and he planted certain triggers. . . . You will die without knowing the event or feeling it; but only if someone tries to question you."

Thomas sighed gustily. "Shouldn't try to talk while I'm walking; bad for my heart." For a moment, he paused, as if expecting to chuckle. He sighed again. "Olcott—open the door."

THE MAN'S fingers moved over the combination; his face remained blank, his eyes distant.

This is the first time you have done this, Olcott, and you do not know what you do; even under hypnosis, you would not know this combination. You are performing a reflex action, which you would do, asleep or awake,

at my command—and at mine only. And when you die, Olcott, even I will not be able to enter the chamber—but by that time, I shan't need it any more."

The tumblers ticked softly, and the two men tugged at the door. Without hypnosis, Thomas knew that they never could have moved it against the air-pressure. "Your strength," he said, "is as the strength of three—but not, I fear because your hearts are pure; it is tripled when your last reserves are open to command."

After a moment, they succeeded in drawing it back a fraction of an inch. With a screaming hiss, the air rushed through the crack, and the door fell open in a blinding swirl of dust.

Thomas stepped inside, and turned on a tiny hooded lamp at the desk within. "Shut the door and wait outside," he told them; "you will open again when I knock."

But the knock itself, Thomas remembered, would be useless, even from him, without the preceding sentence in his own voice.

In a moment, he had forgotten them.

"And here," Thomas said, "in the body of this desk is concealed the source of the voices I can summon through my false eyetooth, while the other tooth records. . . . Why I am saying this now; isn't it already in the records? . . . Ah yes, I was leading up to something: Venusian civilization has many myths, and one of them is that the communications-system is decentralized, and is nearly a hopeless problem to the trapper.

"Poor Lathrop has never suspected that, although there is no central switchboard for the system, every switchboard is connected in some way to the master-receiver at this desk; and any one of them can be reached through it. I can raise a party on the other side of the planet, easily; for anyone else, a large-scale cooperation

of operators, and a tedious amount of relaying is the only possible way."

Thomas set up the controls, and waited. After a while, the false eye-tooth hummed, and, in the Director's skull, a man's voice—very distant—said: "Here, Geoffrey. How are things?"

"My time is near, friend. But everything is completed."

Another wait; then the voice said: "A few unexpected factors at this end, but nothing major. . . Must it run the full course with you, Thomas?"

"I no longer care; I have held it off by pretending this was a game I played; and now it has come to the point where I forget I am pretending. . . . When the time comes, you will find all the records; I carry a micro-recorder with me always. . . and speak monologues into it like a cardboard Hamlet." There was something that almost resembled a gurgle from the massive figure. "This is the punishment for my crimes; when the story is known, Thomas will be pitied. . . . Goodby, friend; I shall not talk to you again. Speech will go next. . . ."

There was a pause, then: "Goodby. Thank you for your assistance."

A faint chuckle did come from the Director, as he replied, "I enjoyed it," and broke the connection.

For awhile, he sat very still, looking down at the desk-top, proposing questions to himself in the dim, hooded light. It would be a very suitable, dramatic gesture now, to call the two hypnotics standing dumbly outside—call them in, point to the desk, and say, "Destroy that."

"No," he murmured, "not yet." He knew that his active part in it was over, but Thomas found he still wanted to watch the drama work itself out—and this connection gave him one of his best vantage-points.

"Besides," he murmured, "this might also warn me of approaching death, and give me a chance to outwit

my last and greatest antagonist: myself. . . . What an illusion. . . . You two, outside, will die without knowing; I shall live forever without knowing. Which of us should salute the other?"

He sighed and gave the signal. "It would never do to go back to Luisa disfigured by the loss of a tooth," he said, as he waited for the nurses to pad in and ease him out of the chair. Thomas turned out the light, and pushed the bulkhead to; a second later, there was a muffled throb of pumps drawing air out of the chamber.

"And now," he said, "at long last, the stage is set. The rest will be up to History."



Venus In Love

IT WAS STILL dark when the Security limousine, carrying the six Dantons and Captain Small, plus one guard, emerged into the city; but it was a darkness which held neither sleep nor peace for Earth. The mechanisms which normally guarded Security's confidential business seemed to have broken down under this weight of the topmost secret of all, Paul Danton thought.

He, and his avatars, saw that the streets were filled with huge mobs, boiling to and fro, jamming toward open country, or trying to make their way into already-packed underground shelters. He looked up at the windows of the taller buildings, saw them white with distorted faces staring East—watching crazily for the terrible dawn.

Dawn would bring the city into the rain of bombs. Venus, the unknown,

implacable enemy of a century, had emerged from her shield.

He thought, *We could have prevented this*, and found himself wondering if the Pro-Earth Party's program, in effect, would have really made any difference.

The driver cut in his siren, but it was only a thin whisper in the din. Waves of people broke around the sides of the car, casting exhausted bodies against it, throwing themselves down in its path; men fought to climb to the roof, hammered at the steel-hard, plastic windows, shouted and pleaded and swore, their voices absurdly thin and distant. The driver, granite-faced, looked at the agent sitting beside him.

"No," said Small, "not yet; make the best headway you can."

Only one of the six Dantons seemed to be paying any heed to the infernal scene outside: the mildest, most undistinguished of them all occasionally shot it a frightened glance. The others talked in soft, tense voices.

Danton looked around, trying to remember what he'd imagined his feelings would be, as compared to the actuality. There was no point of resemblance; his five "duplicates" were little more than a large assortment of resemblances.

"Well," he said, "you all know everything that I do, but I think you see it differently and feel it differently. You're not Danton-2, Danton-3, and so on."

"No," spoke up one of the closer resemblances, "you can call me Danton-Burgd. I feel some sort of kinship with Burgd—almost as strong as I share with you, Paul—and it pulls at me, although I don't like it. I feel as if I can understand Burgd, but I don't particularly like him; and I definitely don't like the tie-in."

Small whistled shortly. "So that's it," he mused. "That's what each of us who wore helmets did to you. We

made duplicates of Mr. Danton, all right, but what came out was *our own ideas* of what the subject was like, superimposed upon his shape, and features, and personality."

Danton-Burgd nodded. "We all have the same minds, the same content in our brains, as Paul said—there's only one *Paul* Danton; I feel like a Danton all right, but that name doesn't fit me—and the induced differences are so strong in the surface that we can't depend upon our all having reached the same conclusion. We cannot expect to understand each other, and the similarities will only add to the confusion."

"You even talk like Burgd," Danton-Small said wryly; "let Paul speak first."

"Well...those induced differences are the starting-point," Danton began. "The Ukrainian woman apparently viewed my agreeing to Security's plan as that of an obedient, even subservient citizen. Also...er...I don't think her eyesight is too good."

"I'd say that your being a member of the Pro-Earth Party contributed as much to her view of your personality as anything else," put in Captain Small. "Tamara considers rank-and-file members of revolutionary parties as rather meek sheep."

"Very likely," Danton sighed. "The end-result is that our brother here"—he glanced at Danton-Tamara—"is, to put it kindly, a rather ineffectual personality—although basically capable of every physical and mental effort I am myself."

DANTON-TAMARA coughed apologetically. "If you please," he said, "I see no need to go into personality-analysis. I am ready to serve the Party as I have always done; and no matter how you may sneer at it, my part contributes."

"No offense meant, brother," Danton replied, hastily. "After all, a slur

at you is a slur at me." He paused, appalled, at the thought of how he must appear to the Ukrainian—how he must appear? No, how he *did* appear; here was the living proof.

"And I," said Danton-Small, "am how you look to the cops."

"You're no stereotyped revolutionist, though," said Small. "I studied Paul as carefully as I could, and with an open mind; it was my job to find out as much as I could about what he was really like." He looked at Paul Danton. "Funny, how I missed a few obvious little details; that technician wasn't far wrong when he said we couldn't remember what a guy looked like for five seconds."

"You didn't do so badly," Danton-Small spoke up. "I feel as if I *could* play the role of Paul here, and get away with it."

"He has the mind of a plotter," Danton-Burgh said. "I'd guess that Captain Small over-estimated your conspiratorial abilities."

Danton turned to Danton-Burgh. "I can see myself better than I ever did before, because of you five. Your mind, now, is much more straightforward than mine; I was that way in the little time Burgh actually saw me and spoke with me. And since he had a bit of success in manipulating me to his wishes, that characteristic is more confirmed in you than in myself; you will always be more susceptible to subtlety than I am."

He looked at Danton-Heath for a while, silently. "There's something about you—you aren't actually smaller than I am, but you seem that way. I think that physical size must be important to Heath, and that he sees people who are smaller than he is, as smaller than they really are. He must view the Pro-Earth Party as a more-or-less inconsequential nuisance most of the time."

"But," Danton-Heath interposed, "I have a flare for analysis. Heath

thought your summation of the situation was quite expert; and he's so much of an individualist himself he wouldn't consider that you might just be spouting the party-line. He saw Danton as the originator of the analysis you made, and put you down as a pretty shrewd article, even if unimportant."

The handsomest of the sextet spoke now for the first time; a strange quality in his voice. "And I, brothers, am the idea of a woman in love."

Paul Danton, and all the others, were silent. The thought had been with him, but now that it had been spoken, given weight and substance, it seemed hard to believe. Formerly, it had been a shapeless thing, an inspiration which beckoned, and led his mind into channels where he could find tangible clues. He knew this was behind his ability to analyse the other duplicates in terms of the five people connected with the duplication-process itself.

But the thought of what Danton-Nels' appearance might mean had kept itself submerged.

Now he could no longer pigeonhole it. Paul Danton rubbed his forehead, remembering the cool, fair beauty of Marcia Nels, surrounded since her youth by men of powerful character and subtle mind—men who ran the Earth.

"We're pieces in a chess game," Danton-Nels said. "We're not just pawns, perhaps, but we're many squares away from being a king."

Paul Danton started, as the other echoed his own thoughts. Then—there could be a kind of mental kinship, at times. Yes, of course. They were all fragments of Paul Danton; from time to time, his thoughts and feelings would impinge on their basic characteristics—and at such times, understanding was possible.

He found himself thinking of the confidential accounts about Marcia

Nels' intimacy with Burgd, and with other past officials.

DANTON-NELS continued: "The differences are very important." He turned to Danton-Heath. "I suppose that you have been thinking of induced incompetences."

"Yes," Danton-Heath agreed. "There are two of us who ought not to go to Venus. Danton-Burgd, here, is one of them; he was robbed of the conspirator's temperament, and couldn't lie with a straight face. At least, under anything more than cursory questioning, he'd give the show away."

"You're right on that," Danton-Burgd said.

Tamara's duplicate said, "I presume that I am the other." He smiled, wanly. "Yes... I suppose I'm a good soldier Schweik. Don't think for a moment that I want to go; I just agreed because I saw no other acceptable choice. But—you know—I think that if I went, I'd be able to get along. Not that I'd help the cause much, so far as anything heroic goes, but—well, you know there *are* times when someone like me is just the person who is needed; nothing more nor less."

"You see?" Danton-Small said. "He's not very bright—he thinks he is Paul Danton."

"Don't let me spoil your fun, gents," cut in the guard brusquely, "but you're *all* going, no matter how you figure it."

Captain Small chuckled heartily. "Let 'em talk, Lieutenant. It'll be an education for you, if you listen. You've got the reverse side of every person on the Executive Committee here."

"Fascinated by your own product, huh?" the guard growled, but the tone of his voice belied his words; he stopped interrupting.

The sextet shrugged collectively;

then looked at each other and smiled. Danton-Tamara said, "We're like a six-voice composition; every once in a while, we'll all play the same note together."

"But one of us," Danton-Small said reflectively, "will *have* to stay behind."

"One of us?" asked Danton-Heath. "Two, at least."

"I mean one of those who are qualified to go. Naturally, the two misfits should stay. But Marcia Nels will expect one other person to remain."

"Why?" asked Danton-Nels.

"Because she loves you."

Danton-Nels shook his head. "Not me; she loves Paul. I'm just her idea of Paul."

"Which is why you have to stay," Danton-Small said.

"I'm damned if I will!" Danton-Nels shouted. Then, in a calmer voice: "I know that you're the plotter amongst us, but you have to remember that I can't help being what I am. Out of all of you, I'm the only one committed to any sacrifice for Venus' sake. Nels imagined me that way, and she made me so that I can't operate any other way." Abruptly, his voice broke, so markedly that the others in the car felt a sense of shame.

For a moment, there was silence, broken only by the wash of sounds from outside.

"Of course," whispered Danton-Heath. "Of course! You're her idea of a lover, combined with her notions of a super-romantic revolutionary. Accented on the romantic—you're a Rudolf Rassyndale of Ruritania, if I ever heard of one. You love her, but all the love is concentrated upon the ideal of sacrifice for her sake." He stopped and looked out the window at the maddened crowd. After a few moments, he added: "Nobody ever had to be a colder Adonis."

"Sir..." said the driver.

Captain Small looked out, too. The

car had stopped. In the square ahead of them, the crowd massed blackly, clawing. There were no individuals visible—only the mass, dark and homogenous. In the east was a faint glow, and all faces were turned toward it, three-quarters to the car; the swaying mass was stippled with cheeks.

"Can't you get through?" Small asked.

The driver revved the siren. Against the dawn sky, a sudden hair-thin line of fire raced downward. The crowd screamed.

"Not a chance."

Small clenched his teeth. "All right, then; go ahead."

THE CAR inched forward, and the margin of the mob sagged away from it, but would not clear. The car nudged it, ground forward again, and was stopped. Its driver looked at Captain Small again.

"I said, go ahead."

A wash of white flame eddied out from the car's perimeter. Even through the thick plastic, screams were audible. The bodies fell, their legs cut away and dissolved in the scything Bethé fender. The car began to move again.

"That's exactly the point," Danton-Heath said, calmly. "You're Paul Danton as he would be if he loved her," he told Danton-Nels. "You've got to go back to her. She doesn't expect it; otherwise, you'd do it without being told. But if you *don't* go, she'll probably spoil the whole action against Venus."

Paul Danton, himself, sat up astonishedly. "Why?" he asked.

"Because she has already realized why all the Dantons are different," Danton-Small said. "Nels is nobody's fool, for all her beauty, and she knows now that Danton-Nels is her envisioned lover, and must come back to her. If he doesn't, she will decide that her explanation of why we are all

different is wrong, and act accordingly. That will mess us up."

Paul Danton found his brain whirling, lost in the complexity of it. He felt curiously humble. This duplicate, who differed from him only because a Security agent had thought him more devious than he really was, reasoned in a way that was utterly alien to him.

"Look at it this way," Danton-Heath said. "I follow the logic, and it's plain enough. If Marcia Nels has the right answer—as we believe she has—she'll let the masquerade go through. If she has any reason to suspect she has a wrong answer, she'll probably do something that will bollix things up."

Well, thought Danton, *they understand each other, all right; I wish I could see what they're driving at.*

"That's just what he said," Danton-Nels protested. "It doesn't make any sense the second time. I don't see why she should expect me to come back now. She might hope I'll come back to her some day—as I hope I can—but if I didn't go at all, I should think she'd be disillusioned."

Danton-Small shook his head. "Only on the surface, and not for very long."

"She knows that you are Paul Danton as she wanted him to be," added Danton-Heath. "She won't realize that when she created you, she wasn't thinking in terms of duplication; she will have forgotten that the induced differences ever puzzled her. No. She expects you back; you'll have to go."

Danton-Nels turned his face away, his jaw-muscles becoming tighter and tighter. "I can't," he muttered thickly.

As if distant, a heavy concussion reached them; the car nearly turned over. "Close," said Captain Small. "Better make your minds up now."

"Now, wait a minute, chief..." the driver started.

"Shut up," said Small. "I'm in command here."

Paul Danton began to feel better.

"There's no reason why Danton-Nels has to go back," he said. He turned to the handsome duplicate. "You are obviously the most competent one to deal with the Venusian crisis, anyhow; you outclass me by miles—you were made that way.

"Danton-Small has to go, too. So does Danton-Burgd, who looks more like the Venusian than I do—though he'll need help. Danton-Heath and Danton-Tamara should stay behind. And that leaves me—to go back to Marcia Nels."

"I'll kill you if you do," Danton-Nels said evenly.

"I'll kill *you* if he doesn't," Danton-Small replied abruptly. He turned to his original. "You're right; I overlooked the crucial factor. Danton-Nels must go to Venus; but you're obviously the one to return to Marcia Nels. That's one of the troubles of having an extra-devilish mind; obvious things sometimes slip right by you."

"What..." started Danton.

His question was drowned out by an explosion, and he felt the floorboard rising to meet him.

The car overturned, and burst.

2

PAUL DANTON came to with the sound of the Security agent's voice in his ears. He struck out, struggling. Somebody should survive the raid, get the Party started again...

"Don't be a sap. I'm on your side. Get up; I've slugged the driver."

Danton propped his elbows behind him. A ruined building loomed overhead, and the whole world seemed to be in flames.

"It's not far to the spacesport now," continued Small. "I've commandeered a truck, and put Nels' and my own duplicates in it. I'll have to take them along in a moment. How do you feel?"

Danton shook his head and staggered to his feet. "All...right, evidently."

"No...sense of something missing...? None? I wondered. You see Danton-Heath was killed. Somebody shot him as we climbed out of the wreck...why, I can't imagine.

"Danton-Burgd was swept away in the crowd, and Tamara's duplicate is missing, too. I guess he took the chance to run away, and I can't say I blame him. That leaves only the three of us."

Danton paused a moment. No...he didn't feel anything physical, but there was a certain sense of loss. In the little time he'd known the man, he'd had the feeling that somewhere a door had been closed, some possibility locked off from him. He looked at Captain Small, and asked dazedly, "Three?"

"Burgd ordered me to Venus with the rest of you; I'm still going. You've got to go back to Marcia Nels."

"But—but she'll know..."

"No, she won't. It came to me, just like it did to my protegee; you'll see why, later.... Now, git, before some plague-torpedoes arrive, and we're all quarantined. Your going back to Nels wasn't in the plan, but I'm convinced it's right, all the same. If Burgd wants to argue with me, he'll have to do it on Venus.... All right, what are you waiting for—beat it!"

Danton nodded, weaving, and ran blindly for the nearby ruin. Things blew up around him. At the edge of his reeling universe, a heavy truck roared away...

In the hallway of the shuddering building, there was enough darkness to make him feel less exposed. He stopped to collect his senses. Captain Small, Small's duplicate, and Danton-Nels were off for Venus. And he, the original and only authentic Paul Danton, must be on his way to Marcia Nels—to live with Earth's most powerful woman, and one of its most beautiful...

Not to Venus, where he had lived in his heart for all these years.

Something from Venus thudded and shook plaster down upon him. Against the far wall, a plastic mirror remained defiantly whole, a shining geometrical figure. From its center, another duplicate Danton—more faithful to the original, an image guaranteed to do only what Paul Danton himself decided to do—stared out at him through the agitated dust. He walked over to it and gazed bitterly at the mindless image.

"Hello, stranger," he said.

He stared further, trying to see something of the handsome Danton-Nels in this figure, but it was no use. He was himself, not Marcia Nels' image of him.

It came to him suddenly, as he remembered Danton-Tamara, and the revelation that his missing brother was what Paul Danton looked like to the Ukrainian delegate. Then—Danton-Nels was what Paul Danton looked like to the Albertan chairwoman. No...she'd never know the difference!

History, he knew, had no further use for the original Paul Danton. He was being retired, to live happily ever after with the fairy princess. From here on out, only bad copies of himself could act for him; the original had been awarded a happy ending, far in advance of the end of the play.

The meaningless image in the mirror looked back at Paul Danton through the thinning dust-cloud.

History could do this to him: it was implacable. But it could not make him like it.



The Invaders

WHEN SHE arrived at his apartment and let herself in, Luisa found Marshal Lath-

rop smoking a pipe, his hands on the controls of the 'phone. He looked up as she entered, and settled back into the chair.

"And that," he said quietly, "settles friend Mann. What schemes for finishing me off are turning in that snake-pit you call your mind?"

She looked at him silently for a moment, realizing that this was not the time for innocence or seduction. "Even a snake needs a mate, Armand," she replied. "I had my choice, and don't imagine for a moment that it was otherwise. I wanted you."

For an instant, she felt his eyes upon her; then his head went back and his laughter filled the room. She knew she had won. There was a hearty infectiousness about Lathrop's laugh that made it compelling, but Luisa caught the theatrical undertones of it; it meant nothing. She could use it against others as long as she needed him, and against himself when she didn't.

"Did you tell that to Mann, too?" he demanded.

Luisa knew what he wanted, now. She came easily up to the side of the chair and perched on his arm. "Something like that," she said quietly. "But even if I said it to every male on Venus, it would still be true when I said it to you—no matter how false it was for them. Just because a woman uses love as a weapon sometimes doesn't mean she cannot be straight with a particular man."

She tilted her face toward him. "Don't pretend you've never done the same thing, Armand—that you haven't played with women you didn't love, just because it was convenient for the moment, either for duty, or pleasure, or both."

"I haven't endangered their lives," he said. "There's a slight difference." He got up, and faced her, one hand balled into a fist and thrust against his hip, his legs apart. "Maybe you can get a broken heart—but no one dies of that, despite what the poets

may say. When you mix love with politics and murder, that's something else. I don't find it amusing to be played with in *that* game.

"Mann was after my hide, and I was after his. And the way you were playing it, one of us might well have been killed off sheerly because of your interference on the other's side."

Luisa slid off the chair. "One of you *was* killed—for just that reason," she said. "Or just as good as killed, because there's little likelihood of Mann's ever coming back. I knew what I was doing."

His eyes narrowed. "Well... it came out all right. But that was in spite of you, my dear. I got out from under on my own."

Luisa shrugged. "Of course. I wouldn't be interested in a man who couldn't. That's why I told both you and Mann what was up at the same time; you'd still have been waiting around, if I hadn't."

She could see that this tack was effective. She hesitated, as if reluctant to continue, then said, "I'll... admit it, Armand. I wasn't sure about you; I wasn't sure that you were the strongest, and I had to be certain. I *wanted* you to be the strongest, but I'm not a foolish young thing; if you had gone under, it would have hurt me, but that thought didn't stop me.

"Now I *know*; now I can give in to my feelings."

His hand touched the medals on his jacket, caressed the purple Order of Earth that Thomas had pinned on him, and Lathrop smiled. "All right, Luisa. You can make the game more exciting. And don't think for a moment that I trust you." He reached for her, and she submitted to him an instant, hesitated just long enough, then responded. She knew that Thomas was listening, and wished the Director laughed his obscene laugh these days; she wanted to laugh with him.

"Armand," she whispered. "I'm still

a woman; I... can't stop being a woman... no matter how hard I try."

He laughed again, and his arms tightened about her. Luisa closed her eyes, and pictured the expression on Thomas' face.

"Armand... don't fail me..."

2

THE THREE of them—Captain Small, Danton-Small, and Danton-Nels—stood in a huddled group, staring at the lava-like ground around them. Venus! Dust swirled about them, and poured by the wind—a wind blowing steadily in one direction with near-storm velocity. Here, on a planet 30,000,000 miles closer to the sun than the world of their birth, they would never see the sun—only a dim, suffused glow, so deeply red after its long struggle through the dust-blanket that it seemed almost purple.

The grotesquely-enormous head of the Security pilot bulged through the racing clouds, dwarfing the lithe, black-clad body beneath to ridiculous proportions. The egg-like dome which was screwed into the shoulder-socket of his air-suit was an oxygen helmet, but the three invaders had only masks.

As the pilot spoke, the diaphragm in his suit fluttered his words queerly into chains of uninterrupted sibilants. "I've been ordered to leave you side-arms, though you may not need them," he said. "You'll find them in your packs, dismantled."

The three masked heads nodded mechanically.

"You'll find a settlement where there's breathable air after a while," the pilot continued. "When you do, don't forget to jettison the masks you're wearing. They have no identifying marks on them, but they're bound to be different from the model in use here." The huge head turned from side to side, curiously. "So... this is the mystery planet! I don't envy you your job."

He raised a gloved hand. "Good luck," said the hiss and whisper.

The pilot swung and dissolved instantly into the cochineal fog. A moment later, a spot of seething yellow roared into sight and glided away; the sound faded gradually as the yellow pool mounted in the sky like some elfin light, a will-o'-the-wisp, a meaningless spot of color in the eternal monochrome. Then it was gone.

The two Dantons, absorbed in conflicting emotions, did not move; Captain Small dropped matter-of-factly to his knees on the fused, glassy ground, and began to unpack the tiny bundle of supplies. The first thing he did was to assemble the guns, two of which he passed to his companions, silently. The motion of accepting the weapons seemed to awaken the pair.

"Nice party you crashed, Small," Danton-Nels said. "Do you think somebody really lives here?"

"It's a stinking stone golf-ball," the Security agent agreed, cheerfully. He set the telescoping corner-posts of the portable cabin they'd brought along into position, and pulled them out to full length. "What's the program?"

Danton-Small helped him stretch glass-thread "canvas" over the posts. "We couldn't move a step in this soup without losing our way. If we tried to explore without a center-point, we'd probably meet each other half a dozen times. The idea, as I see it, is to use the compasses, and each of us to set out in a different direction from here until somebody hits a settlement."

"Too bad we haven't any radar equipment," Small mused.

"We don't know whether any part of Venusian civilization sticks up above the ground," Danton-Nels pointed out. "Who has the compasses?"

"Here." Small handed one to him, then a second to his protege. "One for each of us.

"Umm," continued Small, "the planet has its own magnetic field; that means we won't have to bother ener-

gizing the tent-poles." He looked about in bafflement. The mists assumed a hundred elusive, mocking shapes; but he knew them to be illusions, produced by a retina which seized eagerly upon any suggestion of form in the unnatural purple blackness.

He entered the cabin, carrying his pack with him, and the others followed, stowing away the remaining equipment. The air inside the flimsy structure was quieter and clearer—but little tendrils of dust streamed in from under the walls, and at the roofjoint. The single window sewn into the fabric was like a featureless disc of stained glass.

Danton-Nels looked at the dreadful uniformity, and muttered, "Is this the raw material of a world, or the corpse of it?"

"Doesn't make much difference to us, one way or the other," answered the Security agent. "All set?" He zipped the flap open again. "Let's go. . . . Don't either of you go South—that patch where the ship parked will be radioactive for a week. I'll go North, I guess."

Danton-Nels looked at the other two, and knew that they were all thinking the same thing, assessing their chances of meeting again. There were no words for this parting that wouldn't have sounded frivolous and stupid. They put the feeling into a brief gesture—half salute and half farewell—and walked away from one another.

IT WAS VERY soon afterwards that Danton-Nels was alone in the wasteland. There was absolutely no way to measure time or distance. The cabin vanished like a projection upon the flat backdrop of the dust; and after that, the universe was all the same. Except for the movements of his legs, he knew he would have been unable to tell whether he was moving at all.

The obsidian ground, scoured to a mirror-finish by eternally-racing for-

maldehyde particles, moved past beneath him, as directionless as a treadmill. He found he had to look at the ground quite often; if he merely looked ahead, his eyes began to stare, and he got the feeling that he was going blind. When he swung his glance to the compass, he found his eyes were entirely unfocussed; it was an effort to reorient them. After that, Danton-Nels looked at the clouds just as little as possible.

Something caught him, just below the knee, and he fell heavily. For a moment, he sat, regaining his wind and rubbing his bruised shin; then, suddenly, he caught the impact of what had happened.

He had tripped over something!

Then...there was something on this planet that stuck up above the ground. He got to his feet and limped back.

It was a stone object, rather like an ancient tombstone, clearly artificial in shape, despite its weathered edges. It was firmly fixed in the ground, and Danton-Nels found that it bore a deeply-cut legend in English characters: *B.M. 420*.

The first settlers here certainly must have gone about their business methodically—a bench-mark, under these conditions, could only mean that the area had been surveyed under infrared light. Somewhere in the vicinity, there ought to be some kind of installation, or at least an abandoned surveyor's cabin which might contain some useful information. He struck out again.

On his third try away from the bench-mark, a structure loomed suddenly out of the mists.

3

THE VANGUARD of the mob swept up the Avenue of Flags and seethed irresistibly toward the opposite side of the great square; behind and overhead, the black, clumsy

bulk of a Venusian ship lumbered, appliqueing a train of scarlet sunbursts into the fabric of the city. The dark wave of humanity broke at the last minute at the reviewing stand and poured around it.

Loudspeakers boomed: "*The tube doors are open—please...everyone get underground as rapidly as possible—There are no safe shelters on this side—the tube stations will admit you one at a time—there are plenty of trains leaving the city—*"

It was like preaching to a whirlwind. The Venusian ship moved a bit faster, but the bombs stopped falling. Seconds later, the reason announced itself with a high, infuriate scream. It looked like a pitifully unequal contest: the attacking Security cruiser was plummeting like Thor's own lightning, the crude invader teetering on its jets and groaning for a little extra speed.

Then the Earth-ship came raining down the sky in flaming fragments.

A tree to the north of the square was struck, and burned like a giant's torch. The crowd stopped, piled up, began to charge the other way.

The loudspeaker was still going: "*Please don't rush the gates—you'll be admitted one at a time, as fast as possible—*"

The Venusian ship was mounting the sky now at a fairly good pace. Black dots grew on the horizon: a squadron. Belatedly, the tower atop Security Building came to life, and something which only a dozen people on Earth knew was not a searchlight stabbed upward.

"*If you mob the platform, you'll slow your own escape—*" One of the gates gave, with a sharp report; then another. Across the square, the tree was a single crackling pillar; a man crawled away slowly from the heat, dragging a broken leg, and the crowd-noises began to diminish as the mass went underground. After a moment, the man saw the single

figure on the reviewing-stand shrug and climb down. The figure hesitated, looked about as if seeking a hiding place—then strode defiantly across the exposed square to the injured man.

"Serves you right, you damn fool," he said. "Sling an arm over my shoulder. Here. You can hold up the game leg, can't you?"

"Thanks," said the hurt one. "Couldn't help it. My car—oof—got blown over. Mob just took me along like a cork. Fell here and got trampled."

"Okay. Take it easy. I've got an apartment near here."

"The bombs—"

"We'll take our chances. Safer than the tubes right now, I'll bet. Incidentally, my name's Kien Ouen-Ti of Han."

The injured man smiled sadly. "I'm Paul Danton-Burgd."

There was no response on the other face, save for the lifting of one nearly-invisible eyebrow. "Any relation?"

Danton-Burgd looked at the destruction around him, and said, "Sort of unprodigal son."

They made it to the building without incident, and found that the elevator would not respond to its button. "Looks as if just about all the power must be going into that beam sweeping around the sky," said Danton-Burgd. "I wonder what is in that broom."

"Not knowing makes it seem more powerful," whispered Ouen-Ti.

THE APARTMENT was only three flights-up; but the journey took twenty minutes. Danton-Burgd saw that it was small, but comfortable; in-different sunlight gave it a cheerfulness which he found particularly ghastly now.

"Married?" he asked the other.

"She probably rushed out onto the street at the first alarm," said Ouen-Ti, walking steadily into the kitchen. "You know how women are." The

pat phrase, the non-committal tone, the stagily-impassive Oriental countenance said, almost in italics, *please don't make me think about it.*

Danton-Burgd swallowed and changed the subject hastily. "How are your plague precautions?"

"The usual—U-V lamps and what have you. I think Security must have smelled this coming. I've had warden on my neck for the last month. Of course, if Venus has evolved any virus biologicals. . . Do you feel up to food? I've a radar cooker."

"I'm not very hungry," Danton-Burg said. "Couldn't we set this leg first?"

"Sorry. I'm a little rattled. No fun, standing on the bullseye of the biggest target in the city, and trying to tell others where to hide."

He yanked down a window-curtain and began to tear it into strips. Danton-Burgd watched him narrowly for a moment, then said: "I think you are in worse shape than I am. If you've had to follow the warden's rules, you must have a DP kit here, with splints in it."

The Han sagged down into the nearest chair and began to cry convulsively, and without tears. Danton-Burgd turned his face away, but he could not shield his imagination—at this moment, he sat in a million homes everywhere on Earth; and everywhere men wept and made useless motions, utterly undone by the cumulative terror of the century. . .

After a while, Ouen-Ti stood up and got out the DP kit, as if nothing had happened since he had spoken last. Together they straightened out Danton-Burgd's twisted limb, and began to bind it. The Han asked: "What did you do before today's smashup?"

"Nothing much," Danton-Burgd answered wryly. "I was supposed to have some hand in forestalling this raid, but it didn't work out that way."

"You're a Security man, too, then."
"Well, I was." Danton-Burgd eased

the bad leg out in front of him. "I was something of a Venus man to boot—had a finger in the Pro-Earth Party. I guess I was to have been a professional villain on both sides. This accident was a good thing for me, because I haven't the talents for either job."

The Han sat down again and snuffled nonchalantly, as if he were only suffering from a slight cold. "I like to meet a man with ideas of his own. What do you plan to do? If you've been on both sides of this mess, you ought to be pretty well equipped to take a part in it—talents or not."

Danton-Burgd wiggled his toes experimentally, and turned the question over in his head. Joachim Burgd had not given him much with which to work; he didn't know whether he was really a person, let alone a proper citizen. Certainly, he wasn't a proper Paul Danton. The only things which distinguished him from the original Danton seemed to be his deficiencies—he was, he decided, in essence only a bad imitation of a far-from-extraordinary original.

But, at least, if he were not a Danton, he must be someone else. *Then perhaps I'm a person in my own right*, he thought; *I might actually have some ideas of my own.*

"I'll take part in it," he said to Ouen-Ti at last. "It can't be a political part, because I haven't the talents, as I said. But what I want to know is what it all means—where it's going. I'm not satisfied with the explanations I got before I was anybody; they're too partial, they don't connect with each other, they're strictly mixed pickles. There's been a major factor hidden all along in this Venus affair, and I think it did a hell of a lot more to me than just break my leg. I want to know what it is. I mean to find out."

He looked somberly at his puzzled host. "Wheels within wheels' is the only visible answer, and I think it would have satisfied my prototype—

that's the Danton side of the family. But like the elephant's child, I seem to have a certain 'satiabile curiosity', inherited from Mr. Burgd. I don't give a damn about the whirring of all the little wheels. What I want to know is—which is the drive-wheel? The rest don't count."

"And when you find it?" murmured Ouen-Ti.

"*Break it*," Danton-Burgd said. The words were drowned in a heavy explosion, which shook the whole room. He did not repeat them.

4

JOACHIM BURGD looked up from the reports he was studying as a squad of soldiers brought a man into the room—one of the Venusian leaders, the message had said. Their uniforms were smeared and torn, and one of sported a beautiful black eye. The lean Venusian himself was in no better shape, but he carried himself with iron erectness, his mouth a bitter, bloodless line, mathematically straight across his face, jaw-muscles clenched. The men brought him to a chair before the big table, just in front of Marcia Nels, but he had to be forced to sit down.

"What happened?" the Albertan woman asked.

"We were mobbed, ma'am," said one of the soldiers. "Most of this fellow's crew were knocked out when his ship hit, and by the time we got to it, there were a couple of hundred civilians systematically stringing them up. We cut down the ones that weren't dead yet, and took the survivors out of the ship; then the mob turned on us. We were hard put to it, getting the ten yards from the wreck to our half-track."

"Any civilians killed?" asked Burgd.

"One, sir—the guy who seemed to have drummed up the lynchings. He was pretty persistent."

Burgd nodded, feeling a momentary

touch of sympathy for the lynchers, for all his detestation of their acts. "He won't be missed," the Antarctic said quietly. "Good work, Lieutenant. . . . Now, then, my Venusian friend, what's your name?"

The invader glared, but remained silent.

"Come now," Burgd urged, "you can give us your name and rank without betraying your government; that's traditional. . . . No? . . . Lieutenant, what can you tell us?"

"His men say his name's Mann, sir, and his insignia say he's a general—if their system is the same as ours."

Burgd's eyebrows went up. "Well, well—the head Warhawk. Welcome, General Mann. I believe your friend, Armand Lathrop, is going to be surprised—at least by the promotion you've given yourself."

A spasm shook the muscles of the invader's face, but it was Marcia Nels who looked at Burgd with slow surprise. "Joachim, what's this? You know of this man? How—"

He showed her a wry smile. "You'll see in a moment, Marcia. In the meantime," he said to the prisoner, "I must caution you not to be stubborn, General Mann. You've already seen a demonstration of the popular state of mind. We before you are more responsible persons, but we also have tempers to lose."

His voice lowered in volume, but there was greater intensity. "This bloody and wholly criminal air-raid of yours has done nothing to sweeten us. If you're uncooperative, we may retaliate."

"Go ahead and shoot," Mann said stiffly.

"Shoot? Oh, no—that would be too easy, General. Instead, I think we will just put you back out on the street, and forget we ever saw you. You'd like that."

"To be butchered by civilians—"

"—who, only a little while ago, were being butchered by you. Yes, that

is the idea, General." Burgd sat back smiling easily. "I think you had better tell us what we want to know—beginning with the exact size of the force used in this raid, and what else we may expect to be on the way."

"Go to hell," Mann said.

Heath said shortly, "Maybe. But you'll get there first."

Burgd sighed. "I want to show you," he said, "how unprofitable this theatricalism is, General, to say nothing of how out-of-date. Lieutenant, you'll find a Venusian officer waiting in the library, under guard. Have him brought in here, please."

THE WHOLE Council was looking at Burgd, now. Heath opened his mouth, then closed it again without saying anything. Of them all, only Marcia Nels seemed to have any glimmering of what was coming—

But even she was stunned when the library door slid back, and Danton-Tamara was escorted into the room, wearing the uniform of a Venusian colonel.

"I believe you two gentlemen know each other," Burgd purred. "But in case you don't, I want to introduce Colonel Armand—er, 'Nerveless'—Lathrop, who got to Earth exactly one hour and twenty-three minutes before you did, and sold you out—lock, stock, and barrel!"

Danton-Tamara blinked at Mann and the others. It was obvious to the Council-members that he had only a faint notion of what was going on, but his somewhat-dazed expression contributed to the masquerade. He was the image of a beaten man.

The moment held, and Burgd felt his heart racing. Everything depended on Mann's not noticing important details under strain. More than an instant's close scrutiny would surely be fatal.

Mann was standing there motionless, then Burgd saw the Venusian's eyes widen as his face cracked open.

"You filth!" Mann shouted. "You crawling traitor! I let you take the position of Field Marshal, but that wasn't enough for you! It wasn't enough for you to cut off my forces as soon as I was in the air. You had to come here and see the big fiasco personally. Lathrop, if I live to tell it, your name is going to be a stench in the nostrils of every Venusian from now to eternity!" He paused, heaving.

"Bravo!" Burgd interjected. "So nothing more is coming; that is all we wanted to know. . . Mr. Danton, I can see no reason why you should remain here to be called names; thank you for your service."

Danton-Tamara shrugged and went out, unaccompanied by his "guards". Mann stood frozen, his face still set incongruously in the expression of righteous fury which had gone with his previous speech.

Then he screamed like a woman, and launched himself at Burgd. Six soldiers brought him down as his hands, contorted into tetanic claws, came within inches of Burgd's throat.

The would-be conqueror of Earth was dragged off, babbling childishly. Burgd realized, as they heard the tailings of Mann's voice, that he hadn't moved an inch. He forced a nonchalant smile, and sat down, grateful for the table that concealed the tremor in his legs.

"Whew," Heath said. "A nasty customer."

"And as neat a piece of counterprovocation as I've ever seen," Tamara added. "Mr. Burgd, I understood that all the duplicates had been sent to Venus. How was this one held back?"

"He wasn't," Burgd said. "There was an accident on the way to the spaceports; one of the duplicates was killed, and two others turned up missing. This one was found just a little while ago; we're still looking for the other. Frankly, I had no expectation

of being able to use this trick, but I had the duplicate put into uniform on the off-chance that the opportunity would arise. It did."

"Congratulations," Heath said. He lit his pipe. "Well, if that's all, I'll be going. We still have to clean up the mess General Mann's accomplices made."

The Council broke up quickly; finally, Burgd was alone with Marcia Nels.

He looked at her and said, "I know what you want to ask me."

"I want to ask you nothing," she replied. "I want to congratulate you, too—for a masterful piece of obfuscation. You explained your sudden intimacy with Venusian affairs by intimating that you got it from a Venusian; and when the Venusian turned out to be a fake, the information seemed actually to have come from General Mann. As always, your timing was perfect."

"Not perfect enough," he said. "It was supposed to fool you, too; but I saw when you looked at me that it hadn't. . . Well, are you going to question me, Marcia?"

She shook her head. "No," she said levelly. "I trust you, Joachim. If you have access to information about Venus which is denied the rest of us, I believe it is for the ultimate good of Earth; I've never seen you behave any other way."

"Thank you, Marcia."

"But I want you to know," she said, as evenly as before, "that from now on, I am watching you."

5

SECTOR 15 was not one of the largest of Venus' trading-centers, but it was crowded; apparently, even a strictly-technocratic economy could have a war-boom. Danton-Small shouldered his way along hurriedly, but by

the time he caught up with the tall figure in uniform, he was nearly across the cavern. Breathless, he grabbed a sleeve.

"Hey, Nels, slow up. Here I've been waiting for you for three days, and then you show up charging away from me at full-tilt. What took you so long, anyhow? Get in a jam?"

Danton-Nels grinned, and looked around at the shops lining the wall of the cavern. "Yes and no," he said. "There's a bar. Let's duck in and have a drink while I give you a run-down."

"Lord," said Danton-Small, "we thought the surface of this planet was weird! Inside, it's worse. It reminds me of a setting of 'Macbeth' I saw once. Highly-technological cave-men all around us; I expect to see bats swooping down from the roof any moment."

The other squinted up. "If you can see the roof, you've got better eyesight than I have."

Danton-Small grinned. "No, I can't see it, really. But I know it's there, and not too far distant, too. I'll bet this would be a swell place for Spengler's magian culture to develop, given time enough."

"Could be," Danton-Nels agreed, as they stepped inside and headed for a booth at the back of the room. Partway, Danton-Small sat down defiantly, choosing a table in full view of the front window.

"No point in skulking," he murmured. "Whatever gestapo system they have here is pretty inefficient—but even so, it might get going if we look too secretive."

"You have a point there," the other admitted, joining him. "Wonderful how we get along, isn't it? We've all read the same books; seen the same plays; played the same games; loved..." A look of puzzlement crossed his face as his voice dropped.

"Tell me what happened," Danton-Small broke in. "It couldn't have taken

you this long to find out that the rocket launching-tubes were here."

"It didn't. I made my first contact with a sort of Quonset-hut affair, that should have led me here practically by the nose. Did you know that they have a Pro-Earth party here, too?"

"Certainly." Danton-Small dismissed the information with a gesture. "It was the first thing I looked for."

"Ah yes, you have a copper's soul, my brother. You would. Well, this place I ran into was a hangout of theirs, and it seems that they have teamed up with the military party. This bird we're supposed to resemble—Lathrop's his name—wanted the raid on Earth stopped until a hundred percent conquest could be set up. I see you know that, too, Sherlock." He sighed. "Shall I go on, or let you tell me all you deduced while I was scouting around?"

"Marcia Nels must have found our avatar an amusing fellow, too," observed Danton-Small. "Go on; even if I know some of it, you've seen important details I haven't."

Danton-Nels frowned. "I don't think 'amusing' is quite the word. But...there's a sort of whimsy about me...Well, there was a woman there, fiddling with a radio-set; it took her about two seconds to figure out that I was from Earth." He tugged at an earlobe, and added, "Ye Gods, what a welcome. You'd think I was the Second Coming of Stalin. And I couldn't get rid of her!"

"How come?"

"Well, not without shooting her, anyhow. She took me down inside the planet and explained all the ropes to me, helped me to get these clothes, and—well, it wasn't anything you could put your finger on. It was just that she was so damned busy being helpful that it took me three days to get started."

DANTON-SMALL'S expression became more and more abstracted;

he was now looking intently over his companion's shoulder. "Speaking of women," he said, "our waitress seems to be lost in a pink cloud."

As Danton-Nels turned irritably, the girl gave a start, and composed her features. Danton-Small held up two fingers, and she turned hastily to the bar. "And what, may I ask, are you doing in uniform?"

"I was going to ask why you *weren't* in one," Danton-Nels said.

"Because I've more sense. I know that Lathrop's sure to be around here somewhere, and I don't want to run up against somebody who's just left him on the other side of the street. You're a sap to play up the resemblance before it's useful to you. . . . Ah, here are the drinks."

The waitress set the glasses down and stood, looking at the oblivious Danton-Nels. Danton-Small jingled his change. "Here you are, miss."

"Oh. Thank you," she said groping. She did not go until Danton-Nels glared at her.

"What about my spiritual father?" said Danton-Small.

The other shrugged. "I don't know; haven't heard anything about him, or seen him, since we first arrived. I hope he didn't get lost in that purple pea-soup upstairs."

"I doubt it; he's a shrewd apple. He's probably flatfooting around somewhere, doing something complicated that'll bring the roof down while we're still talking." Danton-Small paused and glanced upward. "Must remember to avoid that simile; it isn't funny. . . . The more I see of this setup, the less chance of action I can find."

Danton-Nels looked ingenuous. "Why, what is the difficulty?"

"This whole society is so damned decentralized that you couldn't pull a cornerstone anywhere that would do no more damage than a plumber could fix. It's a saboteur's Hades. Short of

blowing the planet to bits, all at once—hello, what now?"

A rather faded-looking woman, who had been parked on a bar-stool across from them, had dismounted, and was bearing down upon them, a well-worn book clutched in her hand. "Colonel Lathrop!" she trilled, heaving to. "Oh . . . it's Marshal now, isn't it? I do hope you will pardon poor little me, but I just couldn't resist—I didn't know you had a brother—"

"He doesn't," spoke up Danton-Small, amusedly. "I'm just a chance resemblance he picked up at a party."

"I see," the woman said frigidly. It was obvious that Danton-Small had suddenly ceased to exist. "But what I wanted to ask *you* is if you'd *very* much mind giving me your autograph? I always ask government people. I'm perfectly brazen about it, because I think it will be so nice, when the children grow up—not that you'd think I was a mother, would you? I mean nice to have the signatures of *all* the most famous people who conquered Earth for them while they were just babies—"

Danton-Nels began to look harried. The last thing he wanted to do was to sign Lathrop's name before he had even gotten a look at the man's handwriting; but there was no help for it. After the woman had been shooed off, he said: "I hope she never has a chance to show that to someone important."

"Don't worry, she won't. But you'd better get a sample of our friend's signature and practice up on it." Danton-Small's voice changed timbre suddenly. "You'd better practice something else, too; get to a library and play back records of Lathrop's speeches, until you have his voice and inflections pat."

"I will," Danton-Nels agreed. He looked at the other, wondering what had affected the change in Danton-Small. "Well," he said, "at least the resemblance is established."

HE WATCHED the other swizzle his drink, reflectively, eyes on the table in front of them. Finally Danton-Small looked at him, with a curious intentness. "I... don't think it is," he said slowly. There was a look of distaste on his brother's face that Danton-Nels found upsetting.

"I think you ought to know, my friend, that you do not resemble Lathrop very much—to a man."

"Honestly?" Danton-Nels' eyes widened. "But—really—I've checked with the mirror."

"Oh, that's fair enough. But there are glandular matters involved that a mirror can't comment upon. Remember... we are all imitations, however real we may feel to ourselves. In your case, you've been made a very handsome fellow to the ladies; and you were made that way by a woman. The result is that your good looks are only an imitation, too; instead of being a handsome man, you are a summary of the kind of handsomeness a woman actually sees in a man. Some video actors get closely enough to it to be pretty widely despised by their own sex—but you're... It!"

"And," Danton-Nels said worriedly, "you feel it, too?"

Danton-Small looked up again, once, but looked down into his glass.

Danton-Nels waited, and an image leaped into his mind—the image of a girl the original Danton had once known—and lost to someone like this description the other had just given him. Somehow, he knew that Danton-Small was thinking the same thing...

It seemed impossible to him that he, himself, had never seen the girl. He murmured a name softly.

Danton-Small looked up again. "No," he said, "I don't feel it very much; just enough to know that it is there. It doesn't bother me, any more than remembering Carole bothers me... My creator didn't leave me much room for sexual emotions of any

kind; only a mass of memories that get in my way more than anything else.

"But I recognize this characteristic in you, Nels, and I know that Lathrop doesn't have it. Other men will spot the difference."

Danton-Nels sank back in his chair, stunned. "This... this is awful. It blows the whole plan sky-high."

"No," said Danton-Small, "it doesn't. Not necessarily. It only makes the preliminaries difficult." He leaned across the table. "While you were trying to get away from your Earth-Party captor, I was nosing around the edges of the Venusian Directorate, and I found out something important—especially important to you. *The person who really runs it is a woman.* They call her Luisa. Now: listen carefully..."



The Imposters

THE NONDESCRIPT little man found it difficult to see very much on the corner where the drugstore was. Someone was certainly standing there, but the blackout, incomplete though it was, changed the shape of familiar things, masked identities and even sexes, and made of the city a black-and-grey maze.

For an instant, a few scraps of sound came from someone's radio, a voice saying, "... Earth continues to revolve, as is her habit, so the bombardment has moved westward, petering out as it goes... fighting between our Security cruisers and the heavy black rockets of Venus... but the initial terror has worn off..."

The worst had come at last, the little man thought, but it was tangible,

at least. He and other Earthmen knew what to expect, and had some idea of its shape. What had the Cyton said? Oh yes—“Now that the imagined terror has become real, dendrites, adjustment is possible.”

The news, too, was losing definition and shape in the blackout. The little man sighed, and tried to pierce the gloom across the street. It could be the Cyton, or even the man they were seeking. Either would have a good reason to be prowling about, despite the bombs. Or, it might be an Immune—a mutant, who had nothing to fear.

There was a faint spot of red, indicating the other figure's cigaret. The little man lit one up, from the battery-powered heat-lighter citizens were expected to use in the blackout, then made a few gestures with it—meaningless to anyone other than a fellow Pro-Earth Party member. He watched for a countersign across the street; it came, with the additional signal which said, “come over for consultation”, rather than “stay put”.

It wasn't until he was right up against him that the nondescript little man was certain whether his fellow-dendrite was the Cyton, or Dendrite L. . . . Yes, the other was the Cyton, not only the head man, but the tallest man in the Vagus—although the difference between him and Dendrite L was small enough so that the little man had to be pretty close to make sure. He liked to be called over “for consultation” by the Cyton, though.

“Heard any rumors?” his leader asked.

The little man's voice dropped to a conspiratorial whisper. “They say one of the Venusian leaders has been captured.”

“So I've heard. . . . You can talk in normal tones, K; no need for whispering. . . . And I've heard of a secret punitive expedition, too. . . . though no details, of course. But that's all; have you heard anything else?”

Dendrite K fairly beamed with importance. The juiciest rumor of all, and the Cyton hadn't heard it. “They say,” he said, savoring every word, “that a Venusian officer has changed sides; I got this from a Security guard.”

The other whistled. “Very good, Dendrite K. I'll pass that on to the afferent as soon as we report. Golgi wants to know about every rumor, and its source, if possible.”

“Do they know if Paul Danton is an Immune?” asked the little man.

The Cyton shrugged. “He certainly never looked like one. And yet—weil, you heard the afferent as clearly as I did: he was killed this morning, without orders from Golgi. Danton was burned down as he got out of an overturned car, in the company of a Security cop. Yet, four hours later, he was spotted in the company of a Security warden, a man named Ouen-Ti, with nothing worse than a broken leg.”

Dendrite K sniffed contemptuously. That could be taken a lot of ways, he thought, but really Golgi shouldn't have tried to oppose the execution in the first place. And now to expect party discipline to prevent a second try!

So now, things were different: an efferent had told them all how the Actionist faction had sprung a coup, and had taken over party headquarters.

At last, thought Dendrite K, *Golgi is in touch with the rank-and-file.*

A sudden pressure on his arm brought his thoughts back to the present. “Listen,” murmured the Cyton.

Uneven footsteps were coming toward their hiding-place, sure that the gloom covered them so long as they were noiseless. The sounds grew louder: step-click, step-click. A second later, a slim figure limped past, rounded the corner, disappeared again.

The two dendrites stepped out into the street and went around the corner.

DANTON-BURGD realized now that he'd been over-eager; he'd

not allowed the osteoblastine enough time to work on his leg before venturing out, and the injured member was hurting. He limped along slowly.

A blunt-nosed object touched him gently in the kidney, and a voice said: "Have a cigar, friend."

There was a man on either side of him, and both were familiar. Danton-Burgd made a gesture of annoyance. "Put that thing away. You've made a mistake; I'm Dendrite B of the Inguinal."

"You were," came a gentle voice, from the larger of the two. "Neuromas have to be excised."

It took a moment's concentration before he placed the phrase. It had been many years since he'd heard it used in the Party, but the meaning was clear enough. "So I'm considered a traitor," he said evenly.

"You're the only one," the large man said, "who could have made that scene at Solar Plexus possible; and you've been keeping pretty slimy company ever since."

"I don't suppose," Danton-Burgd suggested, "that Golgi has considered that I might have been a prisoner like the rest."

There was a chuckle from the other figure, a little man, Danton-Burgd observed. "Oh, yes, of course," the little one said. "Golgi has considered it, all right. Consideration is their metier; I shouldn't be surprised if they're still considering it a year from now... that is, the Golgi you're thinking of."

"But we have a new Golgi now... our Golgi... and we're not bothering with puzzles. Someone muffed paying you off this morning, and you crept right back into Security's arms again. We *considered* that very carefully, and decided that, this time..."

He broke off abruptly and pointed to a dark entranceway, a seemingly tall, commanding figure in that moment. "In there. And don't overplay the dragging-leg act, for our patience

may run out very suddenly. You're alive now only because we're curious as to how you managed it."

He stepped into the revolving door, and the big man shoved Danton-Burgd into the next section of it, following in third place. On the other side, a burst of brilliance dazzled him, and he smiled wryly. Certainly Joachim Burgd had robbed his brainchild—the original Paul Danton has been enough of a chessmaster to anticipate crossed Polaroids in the glass panels of the door.

THE PLACE, he saw, was quite crowded and confusing—but the atmosphere was not entirely the one of concentrated hostility that Danton-Burgd expected. Several of the men nearby were regarding him with no stronger emotion than that of curiosity.

It was possible, then, that this rump-session was not entirely composed of extremists, in spite of the coup.

"Here's the cancerous little cell that's migrated about in the Party's bloodstream," the little man said. His voice was charged with vicious satisfaction. "He was missed this morning, but this time the probes have got it."

"Better make sure that they haven't got the Party's last braincell instead," the man addressed said, unexpectedly. "You're Dendrite B, I take it. Do you know that you're Inguinal's ranking officer?"

"What? No, of course I didn't know. Who sent these fanatics after me, then?"

"Watch your mouth, you—" began the little man.

"Dendrite K," said the other, with the air of one talking to a child, "put that gun away. He's not armed, and he isn't going to escape from a roomful of people, no matter what he's done." He noticed the Cyton and said, "Incidentally, dendrites, I recommend discretion; the—shall we say palace revolt—was not as permanent as some

hoped. The Cortex has censured the failure of certain officers to clarify the situation, and has suggested that discipline be restored as soon as practicable."

And that, thought Danton-Burgd, meant that the coup was cancelled. He breathed more easily. "Thanks. Then you're not going to put me on trial after all?"

"Not primarily, though our 'fanatics' got that put on the agenda. Quite in order, I'm afraid, so long as the proper officers are in control; the Cortex has indicated that a bit of cleansing may be in order."

Which means, Danton-Burgd thought, that it's anyone's guess as to which faction the Cortex will support, and what the party line actually is, as of now.

"We're here," continued the other, "to try to agree on some course of action. Come on up front."

Someone pounded a gavel, and the room began to quiet. Danton-Burgd sat down on a front bench, feeling conspicuous and muddled.

"There are only two things for us to consider," the chairman announced without any preamble. "First of all, there is the matter of Dendrite B. Someone took matters into their own hands, this morning, and shot him."

The hall murmured. Aha, Danton-Burgd thought; *it's news to some of them.*

"Luckily, they only hit him in the leg. He's here now. Stand up, Dendrite B. How do you plead on this turncoat business?"

"How would you expect me to plead?" Danton-Burgd asked. "I take it I'm prejudged, in any event."

"Opinion is divided. You're ranking leader here, and if there's any certain way of clearing you, we'd appreciate knowing it. It would help us to preserve some semblance of organization."

Danton-Burgd shrugged and decided to stop trying to imagine what his

original would do or say. For a brief time, while the party monolith was shaking, accusation might not necessarily be equivalent to conviction. It might go easier with him, or harder with him, than were this the usual treason trial; but it wouldn't be drawn out, in either event.

IT CAME to him now that no one here suspected anything in the nature of a duplication, and that they would not find anything that he said or did out of character—after all, those dendrites who had been close enough to Paul Danton to have some idea of how he ticked, were no longer around.

"I can make one suggestion," he said quietly, "but it will probably seem rather simple-minded to you. Give me a job to do. I suggest you pick something you don't think can be done, anyhow; then, should I turn informer about it, you won't have betrayed any really pregnant possibility."

He could hear mutterings around him, and the earlier impression that the cards were not entirely stacked against him seemed to be strengthened. "That's direct, all right," the chairman agreed. "Anyone object?"

The little man who had stalked Danton-Burgd stood up, a picture of frustration and resentment. Danton-Burgd looked at him, and thought: *poor devil; your one moment of importance has come and gone.*

"I'll object," Dendrite K stated, trying to regain his dignity. "Unless he volunteers for something really impossible, *and then does it*, he can't be trusted." The nondescript little man sat down, and Danton-Burgd saw a slight smile crossing his face.

Bravo, he thought, *you've made a good point.*

"He's right," another dendrite called out, and the little man's smile grew. "Simple failure will put him right back in his present position—ready to give away something really worth doing."

Danton-Burgd turned around to face the rest of the gathering, and stared levelly at Dendrite K. He realized now that the party was full of such dendrites, little men who wanted to do something constructive—they thought—and be recognized for their worth, however small. Little men who could do great mischief, because they were not allowed to participate in the plans of the mighty.

He knew then what his role would be in the party, should he come out on top in this affair.

"You're quite right," Danton-Burgd said. "That is precisely what I propose."

"Good," someone whispered beside him. The chairman said: "This method saves time and debate. Our suspicious friend here—Dendrite K—might suggest something impossible."

The little man stood up, a rueful smile on his face now. He drank in the importance of the moment, then shook his head. "Afraid I can't—everything that comes to my mind seems as if it will work. Get him to suggest something. It'll give us an idea of what he thinks is worth messing up."

"Dendrite B?" inquired the chairman.

Danton-Burgd nodded. "I'm willing. I make one condition, though. If I pick the job myself, then the Party must give me full cooperation. If I am to be a lone-wolf, then you pick my assignment."

"Vote," said the chairman.

The ballot-box started around, and while it wove its devious course up and down the benches, Danton-Burgd found his mind moving slowly and directly, down a straight line, at the end of which he began to see an Action; more than an Action—a result and a first cause. What had Ouspenski written while drugged? "*Think in other categories.*" Danton-Burgd remembered then that there was still a hidden drive-wheel in the whole massive

machinery of the war with Venus, a wheel still whirling, still impelling the blind, obedient gears on toward some unguessable object.

He knew that this object must not be attained, and that the machine must be stopped before its Juggernaut progress killed too many people. He knew also, with a curious stab of agony, that one action would stop it. And, finally, he realized, unbelievable as it might seem, that in the victim of that unique action, he must have also recognized the drive-wheel; for no other person's death would have the same result.

For that was the approach he took—not "Who is the drive-wheel?" but, "Is there one person, one person only, whose removal will end the war?"

No wonder straight thinking was so rare; it was a knife that cut two ways.

Danton-Burgd heard the chairman's voice, saying, "A sizeable majority, Dendrite B. You pick the task and we'll implement it."

In the tense, frozen silence, the man who had become Dendrite B said clearly, "The assassination of Joachim Burgd."

2

THERE WAS a popular legend on Venus that ball-point pens worked better under water—which probably accounted for the fact that so many Venusians usually seemed to have black smears on their tongues. At least, Captain Small had noted a large number of such persons—and noticed, also, that nearly everyone licked the point of his pen reflectively before writing with it.

Small walked along the north-bound pedestrian ledge, whistling cheerfully, and making notations in a tattered little book as he went. He was being very Venusian, which meant he was getting used to the taste of ink.

The soft glow in the tunnel became

a little brighter, and ahead the floor began to slope gently toward the next cavern-community. A monorail 'bus rumbled abreast of him, slowed, and stopped. Muted voices drifted up. Small pocketed his notebook and pen, and turned into the staircase which led down to the platform.

On the platform he bought a newspaper, and began turning its pages earnestly, frowning. Fragments of conversation from the discharged passengers came to him, but there was nothing that he could piece together. He sensed a general atmosphere of confusion and disquiet; wonder over the Government's silence as to the further course of the raid on Earth; speculation as to how Earth would retaliate; and armchair strategists' arguments as to whether the screen was still down.

Over all, he caught the subtle, indefinable sense of being in a trap. It was like this all over Venus, so far, Small thought—and this pleased him, although it wasn't what he was seeking at the moment.

He spotted a stout man, who looked like a drummer, and edged over toward him, exuding fraternity, but continuing to frown and turn pages. The Venusian stuffed his own paper into his pocket, with a disgusted crackle. "I'll tell you beforehand, buddy," he said; "whatever it is you're lookin' for, it isn't in there."

"I can practically see the censored spots," Small agreed. "Seems like most everything you want to know has to come by mouth, now."

"That's right," the Venusian agreed. "You'd think they'd give us some warning about this epidemic—but no, they're scared to print anything about it."

"Epidemic?"

"Yeah," went on the stout man. "A fellow I know—cousin of a friend of my wife's—says some sort of plague has cut loose in Sector 11. They think maybe some saboteurs—Earthmen

probably—have gotten at the water-supply, or polluted the air-intakes. Doing their best to keep it quiet."

Small pursed his mouth soundlessly. "I was just there... and had to come back again. I was wondering why the fire-doors were closed."

"So they've closèd 'em! Well, that relieves my mind a little—I was afraid they'd just let the damn thing spread through the corridors for fear of tipping people off."

"I've got to get along to my home office," Small declared. "Thanks for the news. By the way, if you ever need any first-grade portrait-photography, you might give me a ring. Here's my card."

"Why, thanks old man, I will," said the Venusian. "Here's mine—best line of canned goods in the whole canned planet, ha ha!"

Small strolled away, drawing out the little notebook again. This was good enough for the present community, he decided. It had been quite a job shorting the fire-doors in Sector 11, but the results has been worth it. Just one 'bus had been turned back on its schedule, before the authorities made repairs and got the fire-doors open again, but the damage to morale was accomplished. In Sector 12, the populace had invented an epidemic to account for the closed doors; he wondered what the story would be in Sector 202.

Well, he might as well go there and find out, doing what he could to spread panic en route, while he got away from the scene. Captain Small chuckled, and boarded an outgoing bus.

3

IN THE NISSEN hut on Venus' surface, the gloomy man expressed the Earth Party's general feeling when he said, "If it weren't for the whip you hold over us, Marshal Lathrop, I'd be putting forth a million objections, and

you know it. We've done our damndest, through the years, to operate the Party in little; to keep our numbers small, and to do actively whatever thing our forces permitted, at a time when it would hurt most. We'd let grandiose plans for the future take care of themselves."

Danton-Small made a gesture of impatience. "The situation is different. I can't seem to make you realize that I am now the effective head of the Cabal, and that fact in itself multiplies your effective forces a hundredfold. I don't need you any more—my position is consolidated, and you could go right back to being actively ineffective if I'd let you."

"So," the other remarked, "you're staying with us out of love now, Marshal?"

"Do you take me for a fool? I'm staying with you because I want you left intact against eventualities. If Luisa should go over to Enfield—and she might—or possibly to Thomas again—and she might—or in any other way try to pull a *coup d'état*, she knows that I would hand the government over to you lock, stock, and barrel. I have my insurance against you, you know; you are my insurance against her, but you have to be better handled to be an effective threat to her."

"That's why I don't want you organizing any fool protest meetings, or anything else that might mean putting half of you in jail suddenly. And don't think I wouldn't put you in jail if you force me—if you break the laws openly. Not that I give a hang about your being in jail personally, but that would be one damn fine place for you to be should I suddenly need your full strength, I don't think."

The other nodded. "You win, Marshal. And I'll give you this much: you've never tried to softsoap us. You've played it smart all the way—not just halfway, as we expected you

would. That'll pay off if we ever do come to power."

"It had better," Danton-Small agreed. "I still have those memory-capsules, you know."

"All right," said the gloomy man. "We'll call the demonstration off. Just so you understand that we're not doing it because we agree with you. What next?"

Danton-Small drew a deep breath. He'd had one stroke of sheer luck: someone had mentioned the business of just what it was Lathrop held over the heads of the Earth Party. He'd have never guessed, otherwise.

But the rest, he knew, was due to Captain Small's having conceived of Paul Danton as an arch-conspirator, and giving his brainchild a huge dose of that inclination. Knowing that this was the way he'd been cut out to behave didn't impair his enjoyment at all, Danton-Small thought. Just wearing the heavy oxygen mask was a satisfaction to him. He hesitated a moment, savoring the situation, then plunged in with the gusto of a man who is having a hell of a good time.

"Listen carefully," he said, "and make sure you get this straight, because it isn't simple and it has to go off without a hitch. First of all, I want a man placed in every community, and I want your communication-tappers integrated into some kind of central switchboard—don't care how you jury-rig it so long as it's done and it works—so that I can get in touch with any of them, at any time, from some easily-accessible place."

"Mother of Malenkov, Marshal! Have you the faintest idea of what you are asking?"

"In an ancient phrase," replied Danton-Small contentedly, "you ain't heard nothing yet."

4

CAPTAIN SMALL wound up his sales-talk with, "They're very

good plates, you see. All the unflattering wave bands are cut out—only sensitive to the nice hand-painted looking wave-lengths. You should have 'em in about two weeks."

A pained look came across the other man's face. The customer had been nodding happily for the last few minutes. "Why so slow?" he asked. "I need them right away."

Small gestured apologetically. "You know how it is—war and all that. We get a lot of raw material from a plant in Sector 4, and things are in a mess over there, right now—some sort of engineering-project going on, government priorities taking everything, just about."

"Oh? Hadn't heard about this. What is it, anyhow?"

Small shrugged. "I don't know—war-work, I guess. At least, nobody seems to know what it's all about. They're running huge girders to the roof, on heavy hydraulic bases, and Sector 6, right underneath them; is shoving up *its* roof to support them."

The customer looked uneasily toward the ceiling of the little studio Small had rented. "You know," he said reflectively, "I often wondered. These caverns were cut and reinforced a long time ago. Isn't there something about metal fatiguing with age?"

"I wouldn't know," Small replied, sighing. "I'm just a salesman. Well, see you again."

5

ARMAND LATHROP prided himself on being a realist. It was one thing, he knew, to obtain supreme power—and another, and considerably larger task to hold onto it until it could be consolidated. There would come a time when Luisa's dangerousness could not longer be balanced by the pleasure of possessing her and fencing with her. She would work with him against Thomas for awhile, providing it looked

as if they could get rid of Thomas between them.

Then? Then, if there were any other one person who seemed stronger—well, Lathrop thought, he could set that aside for the nonce by lopping off the tallest cornstalks; and the first to go would be Enfield. Mann had been a fool to underestimate Enfield; he, Lathrop, would not. The very fact that Enfield existed at all made him a dangerous possibility.

It was best that Enfield be eliminated *before* the Thomas affair was finished, so that Luisa would have no other choice. He smiled grimly at the thought that the action he planned to take was such as to endear him to Luisa.

It would be simple, and fairly direct, Enfield would be spotted as the traitor behind the failure of attack upon Earth. The Earth Party would be his executioner, and necessary evidence would be planted in the right spots, for discovery when Enfield's decease was investigated.

After that? A new twist on tyranny, which he was sure had never been tried before. Lathrop smiled broadly now, as he buttoned up his tunic. He had a ready-made underground in the palm of his hand. What better means for quietly dealing with his own enemies, and making the dirty work appear to be the doings an official enemy of the government? The perfect secret police.

Lathrop rang the call-button for his orderly, as he put on his hat; the Earth Party must be contacted at once. He waited for a moment, then frowned as the expected footsteps failed to appear just outside his office. He strode rapidly to the door, opened it, and called, "Drayle!"

A short, stocky man in civilian clothes popped his head out of an adjoining door. "Did you call, sir?"

"Of course I called," snapped Lathrop. His eyes narrowed in unbelief. "What are you doing out of uniform?"

The orderly met his gaze with a look of hurt bewilderment. "Why—why, I was just about to take off, sir." His hand went to his breast pocket. "Did I misunderstand. . . ?"

Lathrop's anger vanished at the other's demeanor. "You were given leave, Drayle?" he asked quietly, damning Luisa in his thoughts.

The orderly drew a paper out of his pocket. Lathrop stretched out a hand, took it, and glanced at it quickly—to discover, in his own handwriting: "*The bearer, Quentin Drayle, is hereby relieved from all duty, with full pay and privileges of a junior officer, until further notice. (signed) A. Lathrop.*"

"You gave me this yourself, sir, just after the accident," said Drayle. Lathrop looked at the paper again. It was his own handwriting—or a close enough copy to pass any but the most thorough micro-inspection.

"Tell me about this accident, Drayle," he said.

The man was thoroughly flustered now, but, with gentle patience, Lathrop managed to obtain from him an account of Drayle's being hailed by the Marshal early that morning, and ordered to get the official car, and take him to the Cabal at once. En route, they had been hit by a cab, and Lathrop had been knocked unconscious. Drayle had brought the Marshal back to his own quarters; he had revived there, stating at the time that he was all right, and would proceed to his destination by 'bus a little later. The Marshal had asked the orderly if he, Drayle, wanted anything—to be reminded that the orderly's leave was overdue; Drayle had asked if he could be spared for the weekend. The Marshal had given him indefinite leave, making out the paper at the time.

Lathrop shook his head slightly, knowing that he had been at work all day. He had returned to his quarters, on foot, just half an hour ago.

Something was up; that was certain

—but the meaning and extent was obscure. It was better that Drayle suspect nothing now. He returned the paper to the orderly.

"May I send for your surgeon, sir?" asked the man, anxiously.

Lathrop nodded. "Please do. I am sorry about this; your leave will go on as I told you before. Dismiss." He made a casual gesture with his hand, and watched the orderly run toward the communication-booth.

Luisa? Very likely—it could well be that she was up to something. Then another thought struck Lathrop, and sent him striding rapidly out into the street, where he hailed a cab and climbed in. . .

An imposter! This time, then, it might not be Luisa alone—but Luisa and Thomas.

6

ON THE BUS, Captain Small made himself grey and insignificant, and scribbled busily in his book, blackening his tongue at a curious rate, and wearing the expression of a man whose relationship with addition is one of armed truce. In the seat before him, two much more outstanding citizens were talking worriedly, in rasping whispers. Just before the 'bus arrived, one of them said the phrase, "Cave-In" loud enough for several people besides Small to hear it. Small drew a line beneath his column of figures and sat back; he would by-pass this community. The two gentlemen, talking of their own accord, would do much better than the Earthman could.

This completed the column of figures, so far as he was concerned. For some time, while the two duplicates were working their several ways toward disparate objectives, Captain Small had quite legitimately led the life of a Venusian businessman, and had done nothing at all—because he was not quite sure of his grounds. As a Security agent, he had been used to

working as a counter-espionage officer. It took him a little time to assimilate an opposite position, because counter-spying is based on having everything to begin with, and using it properly. He knew he could not learn enough about the Venusian government to operate in his usual way.

But the duplicates could be assisted very easily. While they were developing whatever true individuality might be possible to them, he—Small—could foster public unrest. The very thing which had made the Captain's work difficult on Earth, would make the duplicates' operations easy, here on Venus.

And on Venus, creating such unrest was simple.

It was no problem to imagine the touchstone of fear which must be common to an underground civilization.

Suffocation!

By whatever agency: fire, disease, structural collapse—there would be always that basic claustrophobia. The people of invincible Venus suffered from shortness of breath.

Thus Small had put on his drummer's clothes, and gone out to place his thumbs gently on the Venusian wind-pipe; and when he heard the phrase, "Cave-in", he knew he had done what he could.



Cave-In

DANTON-NELS looked at the slow smile on Luisa's face and chuckled inside. There was one advantage of being a woman's man in a uniquely-accurate sense: he found himself to be gifted with a rather

one-sided understanding of a woman's moods. But there was something masculine about Luisa which both blocked and titivated his intuition, and he knew he could not trust it with her.

He would have to regard her more as a man, so long as their bodies were separate—except upon occasions when she relapsed into the female, and where he found he understood her thoroughly.

"Success has made you handsomer, Armand," she was saying. "I'm really amazed. I expected you to turn into a stuffed shirt when you took over; and for awhile you seemed to be doing just that. But then you changed, and now you're... well, mellowing a little. You still have your periods of looking noble, but they aren't the same as before. You aren't letting yourself be taken in by your own propaganda."

She stepped closer to him, and wound her arms around his neck casually. "I never dreamed that you could be such a delightful scoundrel, darling. That plan of yours for handling the underground just took my breath away."

A flash of intuition struck Danton-Nels—a certainty that, for the first time since he had known this woman, she was expressing her true feelings.

"But please don't look noble too often around me, my sweet; it makes me want to kick you. Save it for the people."

"I can't help the way I look," Danton-Nels replied. "And I'm not looking noble right now, either. This expression is just my pained look. I feel that I should know the answer—that in fact, I *do* know it—but I can't seem to get at it." He knew that there was a hidden aspect of the relation between Lathrop and Luisa, one still obscure to him; he could sense it in the way she looked at him.

There it was again—something that flitted across her face like a shadow. The thought grew in him that time was

running out, that unless he fitted the pieces together soon—and did whatever she expected of Lathrop, in addition to these unexpected things that now elicited frank admiration—he would have lost.

"Exactly", she said with satisfaction. "Before you got into the saddle, you had too much determination to worry over whether things were going your way. You went out and made them go your way. Now—you worry."

So that was it. The thing about Lathrop which had made this woman choose him was the one trait which Danton-Nels, of all the duplicates, lacked. Well . . . D a n t o n - T a m a r a wouldn't have been any good, either.

But none of the various elements he had, Danton-Nels saw now, could quite replace this basic quality. Lathrop bulled ahead, regardless of obstacles; now he moved slowly, now quickly, but he never asked the cost. Danton-Nels realized what it was Luisa expected of him, and knew that he could not possibly win. His only chance was to keep her amused and try to simulate what he lacked, for a time. Time. Time. Spar for time, that was it, until he had discovered precisely what he could do, and strike one telling blow, quickly.

Luisa sees Lathrop as a super tank, he thought; Marcia saw Paul Danton as a rapier. Can they be reconciled?

It wasn't just strength; Danton-Nels had that, and knew it. It was the particular *type* of strength Luisa demanded of her man.

Then, another thing came to him; yes, there was one way in which he might dazzle her as a rapier—one thing which Luisa would never be able to understand in another person, particularly in a man: the feminine.

He smiled slowly and said, "So I'm going soft, eh?"

She shook her head, but he wouldn't let her speak. He threw back his hair, nostrils flaring. "What do *you* know of my problems? What do *you* know of

the technique of consolidating power? . . . Oh, you can plot and conspire well enough. . . all the inner-chamber work which doesn't require anything more than slipperiness and sex. But what does that mean when power is sitting in your hand, and you are the 'have' instead of the 'have-not'?"

HE SAW by the look on her face that this had taken her aback, and he shifted quickly from one shade of relevance to another, making a coruscation of meaningless brilliance, his voice increasing in intensity as he berated her. Finally, she silenced him by pressing her lips against his.

He pushed her away firmly. "You think a kiss will solve everything, don't you? Mama make it well, eh?" He thrust his fist into his side, the way Lathrop did in his public speeches and laughed; called her some choice, epithets, and laughed harder. Then, before she could answer, he seized her shoulders and thrust his lips against hers with all the brute force he could muster.

When he released her, Luisa was trembling. "Armand," she stammered, "I'm not complaining; I'm enjoying it. But it's hardly an opportune change. Do you know what the people are calling you?"

He dropped the role abruptly, and nodded. "I've heard the talk, although at second-hand. They say I've sold out to Earth, for the promise of a viceroy's post. I half-expected this—it was impossible to hide the fact that I stopped the attack—and no promise of future resumption when we're better prepared is going to placate a war-lust that's been growing this long."

He picked up his gloves, drew them on, and smiled at her: "You can earn your keep, wench, by thinking up some subtle repressive measures. . . . Not that I couldn't," he half-stifled a yawn, "but I have other matters to attend to. Now. . . come here and tell me how

much you'll miss me until I get back."

"Armand—wait!" Luisa walked across the chamber to the visor. "Hear it first-hand, for a change," she said. "Your spy-system is getting lax."

The screen lit, and a roar swept through the room. Lathrop's taxi had gotten as far as 3d Street, at a fair pace, but a mob had slowed it to a crawl there. Danton-Nels could see him standing in the back seat, a gun in each fist, a picture of uniformed fury. His mouth was distorted, moving angrily, but nothing could be heard of his voice.

"Who's that?" Danton-Nels snapped. He strode over to the set, drew off a glove, and valved the taxi up until it filled the whole screen. The set's selectors automatically muted the surrounding sounds, as their sources moved beyond the boundaries of the image; in a moment, Lathrop's great, taurine voice was bawling directly into Danton-Nels' face, against a surf-like background.

"Get out of the way, you fools! You're just making things worse!"

A woman's head popped up, Picasso-like, from the corner of the frame of the screen. "*Imposter!*"

"Get out of the way!" Lathrop's voice roared. "I don't want to have to shoot, but..."

With a quick jerk, Danton-Nels cut the scene off, and dialed for Military Center. The call, of course, would have to be routed a good distance along Venus' central-less network, a web spun by a spider who had flunked his Euclid; there would be a delay. Whether it would be enough to Lathrop through the mob to Thomas' offices was another matter.

Danton-Nels spun on Luisa. "*Who's that?*"

"How should I know?" she countered. "He's what you see—someone the Earth Party has denounced as an imposter."

"Why hasn't he been picked up?"

"I've no authority to order it, and Thomas didn't know which of you was which. I would have told him that *you* were the imposter, except that you're so satisfactory, I'd just as soon you weren't." Her voice softened, then. "I've never known a man like you, Armand."

DANTON-NELS looked properly baffled. "Let that go," he said. "Damned if I know how the Earth Party tells one from the other, anyhow—they've been obeying me well enough, but..."

The visor buzzed. A thoroughly-frightened major stared guiltily at Danton-Nels. "Yessir?"

"Can you get a 'copter in the air in sector 74? Is the cavern big enough?"

"Yessir, but..."

"There's a man being mobbed near 3d Street there. Send a squad around to break up the jam, and pick the man up—bring him to me in the plane."

The major looked as if he were about to burst into tears. "Begging your pardon, Marshal, but..."

"Well, go on," Danton-Nels said, impatiently; "you've nothing to be afraid of."

"There's a word going around that you're an imposter," the officer explained, all in a rush. "I thought it was *you* being mobbed—that is—I can't send a squad because they're in the mob. Most of the public-safety officers have gone over, with the Army, to the Earth Party, and they're passing out weapons to the people. Most of the surplus arms-caches that were supposed to go along with General Mann's raid have been broken into..."

"All right, never mind the squad," Danton-Nels interrupted. "Get that plane ready, and send it over to Director Thomas' field."

Luisa took a quick step forward, and grasped his arm. "Armand, you're not..."

He turned off the set, and brushed her away. "Going over there? Of course. Don't you realize, my dear, that a man who's a dead ringer for me can be nothing but an Earth spy?" Danton-Nels smiled grimly at the expression on her face. "No dissident group on Venus has the organization to comb the planet for doubles. That man is a sledgehammer directed at our whole governmental organization. Be thankful for the Earth Party, since none of my pinhead officials had the nerve to denounce him."

He started for the ramp, knowing that the last scene was about to start. And now, he knew exactly what the real Lathrop would have said and done; it fitted, and he chose to follow. Danton-Nels stopped at the ramp, and added: "Better not plan anything ambitious on this, my sweet. I can almost see the wheels in your pretty head spinning—but think this over: I know exactly what has happened, and I'm a little astonished to find that I know more about it than you do."

He went out.

2

LUISA STOOD in the room, alone with her fury, the fact of Danton-Nels' rightness lashing her. It was one thing to find a man who didn't kowtow to her the way the rest did, but it was something else to find him ahead of her on a crucial thing like this.

The doubles were here; that was all she new. How many of them there were; how many of them were perfect enough to fool even her; what their seemingly-senseless movements meant—no Venusian knew any of this. She had thought that the sudden knowledge would throw Lathrop off his trolley, throw him back into a position of dependence upon her.

For a moment, she felt a pang of regret. Why couldn't he have been a little less self-sufficient?

The moment passed, and she knew

what to do in the lack of any other source of information. Thomas would know; Thomas always knew.

Which meant...

Thomas had other sources of information.

And there was only one other source: the Earth.

Luisa snatched up an abbreviated jacket and flung it on. On her way, out, the framed photo of Lathrop caught her eye; for a moment, she stopped before it, hands clenched before her. Then one arm lashed forward, and the picture slammed face-down on the desk. The old-Earth glass cracked sharply, and Luisa stormed out of the room, all pose of grace forgotten. Her heels cracked like pistolshots in the spiral staircase which led down toward the Dome.

It was "the" Dome; there were others on Venus, but this one was the giant of them all. On another planet, so prodigious a cavern would have been filled nearly to the top with ancient oil, and the rest of the way with gas under pressure. On Venus, it was only a cavern, for Venus' only life was Earthly. An atmosphere containing formaldehyde does not nurture children of its own.

The staircase entered the Dome through a tap in its roof, and wound like a thin spring down a quarter-mile height at its perimeter. On the floor, humpbacked machines crawled, ranking like an army of snails. Above them, on a tiny platform clinging precariously to the stone, something almost man-like sat: Thomas.

LUISA'S heels clacked along the catwalk which led from the stairway's first landing to that platform. For a while, Thomas did not appear to notice her, and she fumed in silence. She saw that he was nearly surrounded by a set of portable visors, and had a map spread clumsily across his blubbery thighs.

"No sign of anything yet," one of the visors was reporting as she came within earshot. "I think it's a false alarm."

"Cover it, anyhow. We won't be around to say, 'It never happened before', if it does happen." Without looking up, and in the same tone of voice, he continued, "Hello Luisa. Have you heard this damn cave-in rumor?"

"Yes, I've heard it," she grated. "I've sense enough not to credit it."

"So have I, so have I. But if we don't prepare for it all the same, we'll have the populace on our necks; they're terrified. And they know that Venus' major fault-line reaches up to the floor of the Dome, so I've got the duralith squad here in mass. The first little tremor that shows its head will get a squirt of cement that could prop the whole planet up, right in its volcanic little puss."

She waited to hear a chuckle, but none came. "Strange, isn't it?" he went on. "That private chamber of mine—the one you've been so curious about—is just about down there where the major vulcanism should occur, if this planet ever had any. I'll admit that it's hot down there, but..."

Luisa found her voice at last. "Shut up, Thomas. I'm about fed up with your schoolboy ironisms. Cave-ins! The planet's rocking on its real political foundations, and here you sit in the puddle of your own fat, playing with duralith mixtures! I'd ask you if you realized that there seem to be half a hundred duplicate Lathrops upstairs—if I didn't know they were all Earthmen, and that *you* brought them here."

He looked at her mildly, but there was something about it that sent a chill through her. "I did nothing of the kind. And as far as any real rocking goes, do you think I really care?"

"You have the brass to deny it?" she choked.

"Certainly. For all I know, Lath-

rop's done it himself. There are old legends of some sort of duplication process—or machine. He may have decided to multiply himself and consolidate a lot of positions at once." She felt his eyes upon her again, in that same manner, bland and somehow dead. "You're just finding out that you underestimated the man, Luisa."

She stared at him, speechless.

"Thomas is not omniscient," the other droned, dictating once more to his secret history. "He never was, but he chose to play the part when others seemed to expect it of him. He amused himself with justice, taking time to arrange for punishments that did not fit the crime, but the criminal. Luisa's had been arranged; she had already started to die."

Luisa concealed showing an instant's feeling of horror just a second too soon. "Thomas!" she whispered.

The Director seemed to awaken. "You'll have to admit to yourself that you have been outgeneraled, at last, my dear—and that wound is fatal. You wanted immortality too much. It never pays to want anything; the universe ploughs on, regardless, and it is much worse for it to remember you than to forget you."

She said, dully, "You've out-doubled-crossed me, Thomas. I kept some faith with myself, at least."

"Another mistake... and false, to boot. Your faith was based on nothing, for you are nothing. You have lost your control, Luisa, and there are only blunders and miscalculations ahead for you. Thomas has no idea which one will be your last, but it will be fairly soon.

"Lathrop kept the same faith you did... now look." The Director did not seem to move, but the screen facing Luisa lit up, and the scene far above at 3d Street faced her again.

"Watch it carefully, Luisa. It's a lesson in desire—one you might have

grasped had I chosen to show you earlier."

"That's a lie, Thomas. You..."

"My whole life has been built on lies, Luisa, and one of the best has been my legend of immortality. You will never find the secret, because there never was one; I may even die before you do." Thomas heaved himself up and grasped the railing; standing at last, he summoned the two attendants. When they came, the Director began to waddle away from the platform.

Luisa watched him, suddenly feeling almost as heavy as this thing that had once been a man. Thomas paused on the catwalk and said, "Have you found out yet what I do in the vault? No? Well, I shan't tell you, but I'll give you a hint, my dear. It's something I could do just as easily anywhere else. ...If you have the courage, come down and see it, when the Lathrop drama has played itself out. I'll leave the way open for you."

She felt frozen as she crouched, hands behind her on the railing, her exquisite body bent to watch the screen.

3

IN A SMALL, carefully-selected whispering-gallery at the base of the Dome, Captain Small sat calmly on a metal drum, swinging his feet, and following the progress of the seconds on his wristwatch. At zero, that drum would have to roll.

4

IN A QUONSET hut on the surface of Venus, Danton-Small demoted his other self to the rank of Colonel, and began to explain something complicated to an invisible auditor.

5

IN THE OFFICE recently quitted by Luisa, Enfield heard himself

appointed Director of Venus by someone he had hated for twenty years; someone he thought was Marshal Lathrop.

6

FAR OUT beyond the catwalk, the figures of Thomas and the two nurses toiled down the spiral staircase toward the vault beneath the Dome.

7

AT 3D STREET, the helicopter settled gently down beside Lathrop's taxi, and the crowd milled around it. The driver saw an opening, and tried to inch the car toward it; the mob blocked him again. Lathrop raised his guns.

8

CAPTAIN SMALL lowered his arm, and got up off the drum, which began to roll noisily down the ramp leading from the gallery; the heavy-gauge ball-bearings inside it did their best to roll along with it, and ominous rumblings sounded all around the caverns.

At the same instant, Enfield started down the top of the spiral staircase; and Thomas and his attendants reached its bottom and disappeared into the depths.

Danton-Small finished his explanation, and said, "Now!"

Danton-Nels fell headfirst from the helicopter's port, never feeling the bullets that riddled him, and the crowd buried Lathrop in a tidal-wave of fury.

9

AND IN THE Dome, the "cave-in" began. For a few second, Luisa did not hear it; she watched Danton-Nels die, and knew then that she had

almost loved him. The lynching of Lathrop touched her not at all. Now she knew part, at least, of the deceit that had been played, for the Lathrop who swung gently from a girder—light glinting on his medals, for all the filth and blood of his tattered uniform—was the man she had helped to power. She would never know who this stranger had been.

Then came an undeniable sound, a distant rumble that became a roar, then a roll of thunder. The steel deck of the platform sang with it.

All the screens came alight at once. Luisa looked desperately into the desperate faces staring at her, and grabbed futilely at the map. It showed spots along the floor of the Dome where action was needed at once, but she found that she could not read them.

The noise grew, and the platform seemed about to shake loose from the wall. She knew she must do something now—no matter how meaningless. Again she was deadly cold, poised.

And in that moment, she smiled her sweetest smile.

"There's an opening at the foot of the stairs," she called out, above the din, her voice clear and without a touch of hysteria. "Who's in that area?"

One of the men on the screen shouted back, "That's my sector—number 6835-F."

"Fill it!"

"The stairwell?"

"Yes."

Down on the floor, the snails converged upon the spot. From their snouts, streams of impregnable durability vomited after Thomas.

Almost at once, the noise seemed to lessen. The faces in the screens harkened tautly, then—one by one—relaxed. The snails backed away from the filled shaft; one of them crunched obliviously over a metal drum, which had rolled out from a side-gallery, and ball-like objects scattered like so

many marbles along the floor of the Dome. The echoes died.

Thomas had not found death—but he had his eternal tomb.

Luisa listened to the terrible silence; then the feet of Enfield's escort rang tocsins into it along the catwalk. She prepared herself, with a last defiant glance in Thomas' direction. In a moment, she would say, "Thank God you've come!" and make it convincing.

She saw Enfield, and saw that there was no look of triumph on his face, no lifting of the sad veil that covered him. Luisa knew then part of what Thomas had meant. Here was a man without desire, the one man among them who never lusted for power. He would accept power, take it as just another burden to be borne, as well as he could bear it. It would bring him nothing but duty and responsibility, with perhaps an occasional moment of near-satisfaction at a job well done; but no joy.

She started toward him, but Enfield was not looking at her. The voice of Danton-Small, saying, "You're the last, and the viceroy of Venus in Earth's eyes", still rang in his ears. He stopped then, and seemed to see who was in front of him for the first time.

She started to speak, but Enfield lifted his finger and pointed, turning his eyes slightly to the guard beside him.

"Kill that woman!"



Drive-Wheel

JOACHIM BURGD was not a man given to flinching, even from his own thoughts. He looked at

the dead guard, then at Danton-Burgd, and said levelly, "I expected you."

Danton-Burgd shrugged. "I suppose you did. You seem to be one up on all of us, up to now."

The Antarctic smiled. "No; I should say that we are even. I did not prepare for you. You are quite at liberty to kill me, here and now—and what is more, you will get away with it. I have left instructions to let you pass under any conditions." His expression changed slightly. "I am sorry, though, that you had to kill my sergeant. He had no guilt but ignorance."

Danton-Burgd felt the blood rising in his face. For a moment, he debated burning down the Antarctic on the spot; only the urgency of his need to know stopped him. "Sorry!" he said thickly. "Sorry for one death—you who have engineered so many?"

"Yes," replied Burgd, inclining his head. "I have engineered many, and I am sorry for those deaths, and for this one. I shall be sorry, too, if I die, and especially at your hands. In some strange sense, you are a son of mine. But it was necessary, Paul Danton-Burgd; believe me; every move. It was monstrous, criminal, and any other epithet you wish to use—but it had to be done. Now that it is done, my own end is of little matter, except to me; and if this is my time, I am ready."

"You're tricking me again," the duplicate accused. "You can't talk me out of it. Your hands are bloody—as bloody as those of any tyrant you and the others were supposed to make obsolete for all time. *You made the War*—and the last shred of reason for it was gone before you came to power."

There was a short silence. Burgd did not even bother to nod.

"Won't you tell me why?" Danton-Burgd felt that his voice was close to breaking, as he continued, "I can't

promise to let you live—that's out of the question. But won't you explain, anyhow? *Was* there any reason? Or—are you—"

"Mad?" the Antarctic finished, softly. "I think not. . . . Do you remember talking to me, the night before the Duplication process?"

"Yes," Danton-Burgd replied, then paused. "I—no, it wasn't—"

"Yes, it was you," Burgd said quietly. "I told you then that I thought Security obsolete. I am an anarchist, as any man who hopes for peace must be.

"We had supposed that peace had come when the Peace Orders were issued; but it had not. There was only the illusion of peace, a dangerous, unstable thing, Paul. Remember. . . . Security had cowed the world into submission; and as long as Security maintained its military apparatus, the nations would remain cowed, and war would be unknown. But after a few centuries of such peace, would Security loosen its grip, relinquish its power?"

"It hasn't," Danton-Burgd admitted.

"This is a special case, but the answer is still no. Security could not relax its control, in any event. It was absolute, subject to no check and no recall; the Pro-Earth Party was right, from the first, when it predicted that the world Security Council would become a tyranny—as any such unlimited power-group must—based on the fear of war. There would always be the shadow, if not the threat—the fear that the moment Security allowed its governmental apparatus to dwindle, some nationalist movement would create a new conflict.

"That was the choice: a form of world authoritarianism, or world wars, one after another, so long as further ones were possible. The peoples of the world chose to support this dictatorship—benevolent, but nonetheless

a tyranny which controlled the life of every citizen, at all times."

THE ANTARCTICAN paused, and Danton-Burgd saw a change in the other's features as he stood, seemingly in reminiscence; Burgd's face took on a curious serenity. "So," he said, "we made our pact, Thomas and I—"

"Thomas! Thomas of Venus?"

"The same," Burgd asserted. "We were men of similar misfortune. Thomas had been working on some sort of anti-atomic screen. He did not find it; he never found it; but he did find something worse: a peculiar form of cancer which would make a man immortal if he cared to pay the price. . . . I, in my turn, was a son of one of the men who Bombed the ice-cap."

"You're an Immune?"

Burgd stretched and nodded. "Yes; long-lived, though not immortal like Thomas; but, like all Immunes, with my own particular penalties to pay. . . . I estimate that Thomas must now be a mountain of a man—too large even to move under his own power, or nearly so. I have not asked him, and he has not told me that; but he has told me that his time approaches. Thomas' body, or what it has become, will live forever—but his sentience will not; he said he was beginning to have difficulty speaking, the last time we talked, and that speech would be the first to go.

"As for me—well, you know the cross mutants bear, even when they do not look like mutants. I am, among other things, sterile. . . ."

Burgd cocked his head, purred a little the way he did on the televised Security sessions, but Danton-Burgd could feel something different about it.

"We made a pact, as I said," the Antarctic continued. "Thomas would join the professional patriots and dis-

possessed bureaucrats who wanted to escape to Venus, and give them his Greek gift of the Thomas screen."

Danton-Burgd's eyes narrowed. "Just a moment," he said tightly. "You told me just now that he didn't find it."

"Correct, and I repeat: he did not. Everything that has been fired at Venus has been pre-set to detonate at the proper distance. Thomas arranged similar demonstrations of his own on Venus. *There never was any screen around Venus!*" He paused reflectively. "You can see why the Screen Team has had such a rough time of it."

Danton-Burgd shook his head. "You made the war," he repeated doggedly. "What do the circumstances matter? You and Thomas made the world pay for your immortality. . . . I know the penalties Immunes pay. One of them is the way they must die, if they die at all—and you've earned that death!"

He looked for some trace of fear on the other's face, but Joachim Burgd's expression did not change. "Of course," he whispered; "I took pains to make sure that you knew. . . . I do not care about this now, because my task is finished. The war is over, and it has been carried on in the only way such a war could be carried on, without reducing mankind to savagery. *Without atomics.*"

BURGD LAUGHED softly at the stunned expression on the duplicate's face. "It looks as if you are beginning to see. Now. . . what have we accomplished, Thomas and I?

"First: we have channeled off all residual nationalisms into hatred of Venus.

"Second: we have allowed a generation to grow up on Earth without a knowledge of national hatreds.

"Third: we have created a planet-wide government, which is already

completely decentralized, except for its military objectives—and these have nothing to do with Earth at all.

"Fourth: we have ended these military aims with a minimum of bloodshed; without conquest on either side, and its attendant sufferings and disillusion, and breeding-grounds for new wars—without anything really happening at all!"

Danton-Burgd found himself listening, spellbound. But some shred of memory was pulling at him—something Burgd had told Paul Danton. . . . Ah, yes—that was it. He looked at the Antarcticans sadly, and said, "And this was the last war, Mr. Burgd? But you told my original that the 'this is the last war' line has been used again, and again, and again—every time some scoundrel or idealist or combination of both wanted to justify the one they were about to start."

Burgd nodded. "I make no such claim," he said softly. "Do you remember your history, Paul? War after war, and each one sowing the seeds of the larger one to come; so long as a defeated nation was permitted to exist at all, national pride demanded that the injury be avenged; that the territories and economic losses be restored, and so on.

"If I believed that this were indeed the last war—even though I may hope it was—and acted on that belief, then I would be mad. What Thomas and I did was to *break the chain-reaction of war*.

"The people of this planet, for centuries, have wanted peace; today, the people of Earth and Venus want only peace. But this is the difference that we have made: there's no dead hand of past wars dragging the people away from peace—no ground on which a warlord can stand and create a new conflict for the salving of national pride. . . . I do not suppose that you have any idea of what the name 'Enfield' means—but a man by that

name is now Director of Venus. Enfield has been fighting for peace with Earth for twenty years—and your brothers helped him to get into the driver's seat there.

"Earth has a new colony—though not in the old-fashioned, imperial sense—a colony on a planet she would never have reached had she been torn by international wars. This conflict Thomas and I created is over, without atomics ever having been used. . . . And Security's rule—as anything like an absolute power—is through; it will become only a token organization, now that the problem which we created for it is solved."

Burgd stood up, tall before his brainchild.

"We did it, Thomas and I. We waged peace on the world—on two worlds. Thomas told me long ago that he had condemned himself to the cancer of immortality for the game's sake. I played my part for pride, and I have reason for pride.

"We lived to kill fear itself, and did it."

His hand grasped his shirt and ripped it away. "You know how to kill an Immune, Paul Danton-Burgd," the Antarcticans said. "I ask one favor: use your hands. Put down that gun—it's obsolete."

Danton-Burgd wiped his forehead with his free hand. . . . then tossed the gun at Burgd's feet. He remained motionless for a little while, then shook his head.

"No," he said. "No. The little wheels run by faith—that much I knew a long time ago, or my original did. But I see now that the big wheel ran by the grace of God, just as the song says. . . . I'm going, Mr. Burgd."

HE STARTED to turn, but paused at the other's voice. "Wait! You—you are going back to the Pro-Earth Party? They'll kill you, Paul,"

Danton-Burgd nodded, his throat dry. "I know," he whispered. "They'll kill me." He thought a moment. "Not on the spot, but I'll be disgraced and expelled; then, not too long after, I'll have a fatal accident. . . . But it doesn't matter, now. I'm a superfluous man, anyhow. . . . What would you have me do? I can't kill you now; and I can't hope to stay alive any other way."

There was a broad smile on the Antarctic's face. "Paul, Paul, where is the little wheel's faith? Don't you know that I have aces up my sleeve?" He took Danton-Burgd by the shoulder. "You are my son. I know your mind well, because I made it. Earth needs you; Security can use you; and I . . . I want you, Paul. I won't let you sacrifice yourself."

"But . . ."

"No buts. We still have the Duplication machine; that is my ace. We shall use it to make a duplicate of a duplicate, with Tamara as the operator. I know very well what Tamara thinks of revolutionaries who fail in their assigned tasks. . . . the new duplicate will share her view of his status. He will go willingly back to the Pro-Earth Party to be judged and degraded and finally executed—before he is anything more than a robot we made—before he can become a person. . . . Does that suit you?"

Danton-Burgd could not speak.

"Very well," Burgd said. "That will leave us together, to face the new era, the Age of Peace. We haven't made peace once and for all; we've just made it possible. It must be defended as vigorously as any conquest won in war—but the longer it's maintained, the greater the inertia on our side, rather than against us." He nodded. "I make only one condition."

"If there is *really* something I can do," Danton-Burgd said, "I'll do anything."

"Will you change your name to

Burgd?" the Antarctic asked softly.

The duplicate man took a slow, deep breath, as he felt pride flowing in an increasing torrent through his veins, like a spring freshet. He was not merely a duplicate now; cell by cell, he was becoming a human being.

He swallowed and looked up. The Antarctic stood waiting, his head slightly tilted, his face in repose, eyes glowing with the immense humanity which he had concealed so long, so craftily, and to such enormous purpose.

"Yes," the younger man said. "Yes. . . . Dad."

EPILOGUE

Excerpt from a letter to Burgd:

" . . . No, no, my dear, I will hear no more protestations from you; I am going to retire and you are going to take my place. Don't pretend that you won't enjoy it. Marcia Nels is going to be nothing more than Mrs. Paul Danton, from here on out; we are both content to have it so. . . .

"Your new son seems to have handled the Johannesburg affair with extraordinary finesse; I am so glad for you, Joachim! Also, I have heard today from Danton-Small, who continues to be most reassuring (and I have told him to communicate with you in the future!) He believes that he can keep the Earth Party quite happy with Enfield; he has delegated them as a sort of secret police, and given them absurdly-complicated things to do. As for the good Captain himself, Agent Small has disappeared, though I believe his brainchild knows where to find him. Evidently Captain Small has settled down into Venusian life. My advice would be to let him do so, for he wasn't political by nature, but only a man willing to do well what was assigned him. He has earned his rest.

"The Pro-Earth Party, here, continues to keep a sharp eye on Securi-

ty's deliberations—I tell you this for your guidance, Joachim—and they'll watch you, too. They still fear for Venus, and any move Security may make toward recentralizing will be regarded as a war-move by their leadership. You may depend upon them to act in a way that will help you, if there is any resurgence of authoritarianism in the future. (They won't tolerate any tyranny except their own, Paul adds.) I agree that our dummy government is not likely to do anything so foolish with such vigilantes on its neck, so you may congratulate yourself on a total victory over me; I would never have believed it possible, without your graphic demonstration.

"You know, there was talk about

building a statue to me—Marcia Nels, heroine of the Venusian war? The project has died of its own weight, to my complete satisfaction. Who is to say where the real heroism lies? I would put it in you, but you refuse it most resolutely.

"Was there any real hero, Joachim? I have examined all the evidence, but I must confess I can find none—or else too many.

"Godspeed, my dear.

—Marcia"

Postcard from Burgd to Marcia Nels Danton:

"There is, indeed, one real hero. His name is Man."

★

• THE RECKONING

A Report on Your Votes and Comments

We're a little crowded for space, so "The Reckoning" had to be shifted, this time; next issue, you'll find it back in its accustomed place, we trust. I'd originally thought that the coupon could be omitted, this time, due to the fact that the novel takes up most of the issue, and there are only three other stories, all short.

However, a couple of readers dropped in while this issue was being closed, and both urged me to run the coupon, anyway. After all, they said, some readers might want to rate "No Greater Glory" in first place.

Ray Banks seems to have done very well with his first appearance; only one voter held his nose. Ray Gallun drew a bit of dislike, but not as many red marks as 1st place votes. However, the former — added to the fact that no one detested the other stories — put his novelet farther down than it might have been otherwise.

Here's how they came out.

- | | |
|---|------|
| 1. "If The Court Pleases" (Loomis) | 2.00 |
| 2. Never Trust An Intellectual (Banks) | 3.00 |
| 3. Something For The Birds (Dryfoos) | 3.61 |
| 4. Double Identity (Gallun) | 3.69 |
| 5. Timber (West & Barr) <i>tied with</i>
Go Fast On Interplane (Halleck) | 4.46 |

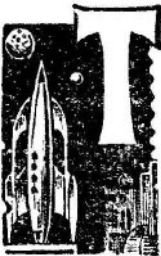
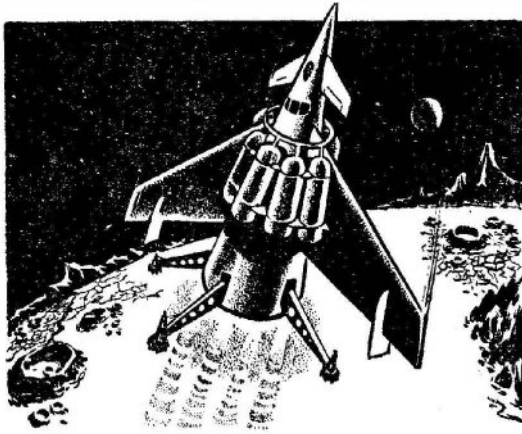
Letter-writers who found favor this time were: (1) Rory Faulkner (2) Bob Silverberg (3) Cal Beck.

He dreamed of being the first man to land on the lunar sphere, and, in a sense, his dreams came true . . .

THE LAST MAN IN THE MOON

by Charles Dye

(illustrated by Milton Luros)



THIS STORY is about a person who, all his life, wanted to mean something to somebody else, and never did. But he *was* the last man in the moon. Which at least makes the tale a "tragedy with a happy ending."

Humphrey Clews, to make an understatement, was startling to look upon. He was born to a couple of peckerwood dirt farmers down in Hicksville, Georgia. His mother was a high-grade moron and his father an illiterate drunkard. From birth he was

a basket case, without arms or legs. He looked like Tweedle-dum and Tweedle-dee. His mother, whose favorite movie star was Humphrey Bogart, gave him that unfortunate first name. Soon everybody in the neighborhood was calling him Humpty Dumpty. Even his father, who ranted and raved, "The likes o' him is a gob o' spit in the eye o' The Almighty", also called him by that nickname.

There were the usual things of an unhappy childhood; very little love; his father slapping him when he cried, or taking away any stray pets which showed affection for the child. At the age of four, his well-meaning but

addled mother took to placing him out in front of the shanty on a scraggly patch of grass while she went about her chores out back. Soon all the Hicksville urchins were rushing out to stare and jeer at Humpty Dumpty. They would roll him all over the front yard like a gigantic Easter Egg until his mother, hearing the racket, would come running with a pitchfork to his rescue.

And so it went. It's a wonder all this didn't turn Humphrey into a psychopathic monster.

When he was twelve, his father sold him to a traveling carnival, claiming that Humphrey was a mid-gut. Thus he became a major attraction among the carnival's freak menagerie of bearded ladies, the hermaphrodite, the rubber man, and others.

Three years later, a psychologist on vacation, doing a paper on the intelligence-quotient of circus and carnival freaks, got around to catching the particular show Humphrey was traveling with.

He learned that Humpty Dumpty—as he was billed and costumed after—had learned to read, and that was about all. Nevertheless, with Humpty's and the manager's consent, Dr. Fox had the boy carried over to his auto-trailer for testing. For those who couldn't write, the questions, micro-filmed, were shot onto a large screen and the answers marked down orally. The testing took three hours, with the Doctor more or less automatically punching the proper keys of a small manual IBM cardex to correspond with Humphrey's answer-numbers.

The boy was then carried away and Dr. Fox spent the rest of the afternoon and evening processing all the cards for that day through an automatic grader. He wearily added up the scores, as usual seeing nothing outstanding, until he came to card 14. Half-rising from his chair, he almost

dropped. Humpty Dumpty had a higher IQ than his testor! Assuring himself there had been no mistake, Dr. Fox slowly relaxed and stared for a long time off into nothing.

That night, after the side shows closed, the psychologist had a long talk with Humpty, and ended up by giving him a Rorschach test. Just as Fox suspected, the boy was practically devoid of all emotional feeling—or rather in conscious expression of emotion; everything was pent up tighter than a drum. The old business of no love or kindness. Fox stopped his musings and looked up at Humpty. With proper conditioning and tutoring, he felt that Humpty would someday be famous; it would be a wonderful opportunity to mold the psychological makeup of a potential genius.

"How would you like to come and live with me, Humphrey?"

Humphrey's expressionless blue button eyes stared right through him. "Will ya gimme all the books I wanna read?"

That was answer enough for Dr. Fox.

NEXT CAME the complex rigamarole of adopting the boy. This took the rest of the summer; but by fall, Humphrey Clews—complete with tutor, and a companion to act as his hands—was installed in the doctor's mansion. Fox realized the child's need for companionship his own age, but was afraid to invite any of the neighborhood children; they might aberrate Humphrey still further. He already was about as withdrawn as you could get and still operate efficiently on a conscious level.

Finally he hit upon his 13 year old niece, a bright child and about as un-neurotic as they come. It would be an added expense—she and her mother—but Fox felt it was worth it. Immediately upon their arrival, he indoctrinated Ginger regarding Humphrey

and his condition, and added that she must try and make him laugh; Fox was quite certain the boy had never laughed. Before introducing the two, however, he allowed Ginger, unseen, to get used to Humphrey's appearance. Despite being a basket case, Fox decided, the boy wouldn't be too bad-looking once the glandular shots got under way for excessive obesity. The child had rather regular features, and now that his hair was no longer combed like Humpty Dumpty's, his face had taken on the appearance of an average adolescent.

The introduction went just as he suspected it would. Ginger's greeting was ignored; Humphrey only stared at her blankly, as if he were staring at just another carnival rubber-necker. The situation continued for several days as Ginger, with her own tutor, sat at the opposite end of the room from him. Then Fox noticed Humphrey more and more looking up from his studies and over to Ginger. She was already a beauty, Fox thought, with her light brown hair and dimpled cheeks. Wait 'til she was in full bloom.

One day the ice was broken.

Ginger brought over to his table a glass enclosed cross-section of a living ant colony. "These are my ants. Want to watch them?"

He didn't say anything, but she could tell by the way he craned his neck forward and stared, that he did. She went away and left him with them until supper-time. On her way in to wash, she asked him what he thought of them."

"They're wonderful." This was the first time he had ever spoken to her, although she had heard his warm southern accent before. "Thanks, Ginger. Wish I had something to show you."

"You can show me where I'm going wrong in my geometry paper-cut-out problems after supper, if you like."

Months later, another incident occurred. But this one could have ended in disaster.

Humphrey, who had a silent agreement with Ginger that she must never help him physically, had been wheeled out on his dolly into the enclosed back garden and left. Ginger joined him shortly, and they played a game of looking up into the blue spring skies and seeing who could identify the largest number of birds flying over the garden. Humphrey was ahead when suddenly he craned his neck too far and lost his balance. He toppled head-on to the cement path border; blood gushed from his head and cheek.

Ginger had caught the whole thing out of the corner of her eye. She saw that, by some miracle, he was still conscious. She went all sick inside and thought that she was going to cry at the pain and shock he must be in. Instead, she forced herself to stare back up at the sky until the gardener—who had also seen it—could get over and put Humphrey back on his dolly.

Then she heard someone laughing. She looked down to see Humphrey smiling at her. Actually smiling. For the first time! "It—doesn't hurt, Ginger."

She suddenly realized that he knew she had seen him fall; that she had kept their agreement; and that he trusted her and would be her close friend for life.

TEN YEARS later, a medium-sized man, wearing neatly-pressed tweeds, stood smoking a pipe and gazing out over fog shrouded San Francisco Bay. The man was Humphrey "Humpty Dumpty" Clews, one of the most brilliant electronic and mechanical engineers in the world. With the help of many willing hands—scientific and otherwise—he had gotten through the California Institute of Technology in record time.

Tired of being known as the "master-mind on the dolly" (he was no longer "Humpty Dumpty;" glandular shots had brought his weight down to what it would have been for a normal man) he had enlisted the best engineering brains in the country—who said it couldn't be done—to design and construct, under his supervision, a harness of electrically-operated arms and legs. Almost imperceptible muscular twitchings triggered off the sensitive solenoids activating his arms and fingers. Similar twitchings in his abdomen, and where his thighs ought to have been, controlled his legs and feet. It took him a year of coordinational training before he could walk in a normal fashion. To use his hands and fingers, it took even longer. Then with his new hands, he set about constructing a really fool-proof, plastic-covered set of limbs which blended almost perfectly with the rest of his skin coloring.

And more than for himself he had done it all for her. For Ginger. He could never have done it if it had not been for her existence.

So here he was; all alone on the eve of the new year, 1964, the Year of the Rocket. The first Moon rocket, the rocket he'd helped to design, the rocket *he* was going to fly to the Moon. But this he had done more for himself.

He'd always wanted the Moon. All his life, out of all the loneliness and unhappiness of childhood, he'd gazed up at the moon and felt a strange kind of peace. At that time, he hadn't known it was scientifically possible to go there. But the moment he found out his whole life had been directed toward that single aim.

Ginger. He guessed he'd loved her ever since the day he'd fallen off his dolly and she had kept her agreement. But was he really capable of love? Or was he just in love with the idea of being in love? Sometimes he didn't

know. Dr. Fox still wasn't satisfied with his Rorschach, his emotional responses... a certain potential un-stableness.

Anyway, half-jokingly half-seriously, he had asked Ginger, "Why don't you someday marry me? Her reply had been, "We'll see."

That had been two years ago. In three hours, he would be meeting the boat bringing back the geological expedition which she had headed into Upper Mongolia. He hoped he'd have her answer then. And in spite of being a pessimist, he was inclined to think it would be favorable.

HE LEFT the Nob Hill cocktail lounge and started walking slowly through the pearl-gray cottony vapors. The moaning of the foghorns, and occasional *swish* of a passing car, seemed the only sounds in the universe. He timed his walk just right; he arrived at pier 69 as the small freighter *Seven Seas* was entering the slip.

Twenty minutes later they spotted each other and she, with a squeal of recognition, was in his arms, giving him a large kiss on the cheek. They said the usual things one says on such occasions, then jumped into a cab and up to her old recently vacated apartment overlooking the Golden Gate. He had seen to it that it was stocked with food and drink.

"Coffee or brandy?" she said.

"Both," he said. She seemed to sense that this was a solemn moment for him, that he had something big on his mind.

For an hour or more she talked about the Mongolian Expedition, their adventures, and the tremendousness of the expedition's many finds.

He suddenly realized she didn't know about the rocket. "I'm going to the Moon in two days."

She dropped her empty cup. "What?"

"The Project was top secret up until a couple of months ago."

Then she was asking him all about the rocket.

"It's a three-step chemical-powered affair, lox and hydrogen—pretty primitive fuel—but it'll get me there and just back. The first step will be dropped almost immediately after blast-off, the second as soon as I break into free-fall. All they are glorified fuel tanks. The real brains of the ship, including me, will be in the third step."

For a moment she looked puzzled. "But how will you ever land back on Earth again?"

"The third step has glider-wings, elevators, and jettisonable lox and hydro tanks. I'll hit Earth's atmosphere and glide in low enough to catapult the cabin enclosed ejection seat out and pull the three ribbon chutes."

For a long time she stared at him with half parted mouth and glowing eyes. "Oh, hell, I'm proud of you!" was all she said.

They linked arms and looked into each others faces. Finally she said, "What have they christened this sky-rocket?"

"*The Moondream.*"

She suddenly reached up and touched her lips to his cheek.

"Ginger. I have a complete day and night free before I have to report out at White Sands. . . . I would like to ask you to marry me—oh, I've thought about it a long time, ever since we were kids, when I think I fell in love with you—"

Her eyes softened into infinite compassion and understanding. Tears welled up in her beautiful eyes. She laid a hand on his arm and very carefully composing herself, said in a soft voice, "I'm sorry, Humphrey, I—I . . . can't. . . . I just couldn't—I, I, mean. . . ."

He went dead inside. *Oh, yes. I understand. You couldn't bear the thought of going to bed with a human robot, a collection of nuts, bolts, screws, wires, tubes, solenoids, solder,*

steel rods, harnesses. And you still remember what Humpty Dumpty looked like the day he had his great fall and cracked his crown!

"No! It's not what you're thinking!" Her hand tightened on his arm. "You . . . see . . . I—want children. . . ."

Funny. He hadn't thought of that. Yes, he was sterile. No wonder he'd never considered the thought of children in others.

He kissed her before leaving. They still would always be friends.

HE SAT FOR a long time out in the dust and sun of the New Mexican desert. Behind him towered the Project control blockhouse. In front of him towered *The Moondream*, reflecting the light like a thousand shimmering mirrors. He let sand slowly trickle through his fingers over and over again. What did he mean to anyone, he wondered? Why couldn't people love him the way he loved some of them—one of them? Why couldn't she have loved him the way he loved her? Now he was all alone. He couldn't go on loving her forever, and there was no one else to love. Maybe that meant he wasn't really in love. Maybe old Dr. Fox was right. He'd been through too much to ever be able to sacrifice everything for love—including loving someone forever.

He still had the Moon.

Suddenly a call came out over one of the loud speakers for him. He glanced at his wrist. Thirteen hours to blast-off. What were they bothering? In Control, a WAC told him the top brass had called a special meeting and he was to be there.

They were all waiting for him; the colonel, the major, the captain, the scientists—and Rod Cameron, the stand-in pilot in case anything should happen to Humphrey at the last moment.

The meeting was short, bitter, and to the point.

The colonel said, "Brace yourself, Clews. After careful consideration and

much last minute comparing of opinion, we've reached the unanimous decision that young Cameron here had better go in your place—"

Humphrey stood expressionless, feeling like a statue about to topple.

The colonel rushed on. "Don't you see, man, we simply can't risk ten million dollars work of spaceship. . . . If one of one of your legs or arms, or all of them, should have a power failure. . . ."

Humphrey's voice sounded cold and far away. "They wouldn't; natural limbs would break or pull off before mine ever had any kind of failure."

He could tell by their faces that it was no go.

Nevertheless he went ahead. "The whole control system in that ship, every relay circuit, I designed and adjusted to my own coordinational reflex reaction patterns. Nobody knows it or could manipulate it the way my mechanical limbs can."

"Lt. Cameron, here, has been practicing day and night in every spare moment for the past several months. Last night we stop-watched him on the training mock-up. His timing is just a split second under yours."

Humphrey didn't like the smirk on Cameron's face. "But I designed those control circuits. I know the tubes and wires in my arms and legs. If anything went wrong, it would be only a matter of seconds to locate and fix the trouble."

As an afterthought, he added, "Lt. Cameron has been—so—busy lately, I hardly think he's had time to get degrees in mechanical and electronic engineering."

It was positively no use. Cameron had been working on them too many months.

He took a deep breath. "If that's how it has to be, then that's how it has to be. Later in the day I'll check out and give the controls one final

tune-up. . . . My congratulations to Lt. Cameron."

Cameron smirked even more and gave an exaggerated nod.

LATER IN the day was two hours before blast-off. He climbed up the short first step fin ladder and crawled through the tiny open port. Then he commenced the long climb up the hull ladders of all 3 steps.

He didn't test the controls; he knew they were perfect. He just sat there and waited. To bad, he thought, that blast-off had to wait for the proper astronomical position of the Moon.

Fifteen minutes before blast-off, he heard Cameron climbing up through the 3 steps.

Then Lt. Cameron was sticking his head into the control nest. With all his might in that cramped space, Humphrey drew back his foot and smashed Cameron in the jaw. Before he could fall back through the steps, Humphrey caught him and somehow got him down to the now-closed port of the 3rd step. He unscrewed the port and dumped Cameron, feet first down to the sand, then hurriedly screwed back the port.

Back in the nest it was 7 minutes to blast-off.

It looked like he'd make it, go to the Moon after all.

He didn't bother clicking on the radio. He could imagine what they were shouting. Instead, he started mixing valves and turning on fuel pumps and generators. All was in readiness.

One minute to go.

He fired the igniter.

A dull boom, then rising faster and faster on fiery stilts of thunder. . . . He sank beneath the surface of a black sea of liquid warmth.

SILENCE!

A long shudder traveled through his being, erasing the tensions which had built up within him during the

nerve-jangling job of bringing the third step down on its landing legs. He finished shutting off the mixture valves and fuel pumps, then leaned back and gazed up at the star-dripping Lunar blackness. He'd made it. And it was worth almost everything he'd endured during life.

Finally he got up and climbed down through the bowls of the third step. On the way he struggled into a spacesuit, then went out the airlock and down onto the great cracked bone-colored plain of *Mare Nubium*. He was about to take his first Lunar step when he froze.

Coming toward him were three spacesuited figures. They looked like men!

As they approached him and he them, he saw that they *were* men. That meant some other country had beat him here first. He felt bitter disappointment.

They were in front of him now with smiles on their faces; he could not recognize their nationality. One held out a small box and gestured to him that he should take it. Two leads from it were attached to his helmet phone jacks.

"Greetings Last Man in the Moon. Earth is a psychopathic ward and we are its keepers." There was a pause. "Please come with us; everything will be explained."

At first Humphrey felt alarm. Had a group of madmen beaten everyone else to the Moon? But something told him this was not so.

He meekly followed them through an airlock and into a huge illuminated Luna cave. Eight giant pancake-shaped vehicles hovered inches above the floor. Anti gravity! He would believe anything they told him now.

They went into a small alcove and sat down. After the others had removed their helmets, he did likewise.

He looked at the men, all hawk-faced with piercing black eyes. He

gulped once, then said, "Why do you call me the Last Man in the Moon? Aren't there going to be anymore?"

ONE OF THE men, apparently the spokesman, smiled. "Because we are, or were, the First Men in the Moon—the first men from Earth. Earth is oldest of all Galactic bipedal worlds.

"We left Earth a million years ago and spread out through the Galaxy. You and the others are the Last Men; after the coming of the next glacial period all life on Earth will be destroyed and the planet forever uninhabitable. But we cannot let you start getting off now; you might infect other Galactic worlds. That is why we must keep you Last Men down in your psychopathic ward until the Galactic Psychologists—who are on their way down from the stars now—can cure you. The sick cannot cure the sick."

Humphrey could only stare, open-mouthed.

"The Galactic cure won't take as long as you may think. There will be more Last Men in the Moon by 1995. Then in 2200 a gradual exodus from Earth will begin which will last 2,000 years."

The information was coming a little too fast for Humphrey's complete comprehension. "What are you going to do about me?"

"We are going to send you back to the ward, back to Earth."

"But I will talk."

"What good would it do. They will only think you are crazy."

They seemed to be winning hands down. "What's to prevent other ships like this one from coming here before 1995? What's to prevent *me* from coming again?"

"When the Galactic Psychologists arrive, a force-field will be thrown around Earth through the ionosphere.

That will be in five years side-real time. If anyone comes in the meantime, including you again, they will simply be sent back."

He felt numb, as if he were in some sort of strange dream. "What's holding up the Psychologists?"

"Due to some momentous things beyond your comprehension, or our ability to express in your language, the Galactic Psychologists have been a hundred years late in getting here."

Suddenly Humphrey didn't want to go back to the psychopathic ward. "Can't I stay here with you?" Then he told them the circumstances under which he was here with the ship.

The hawk eyes were expressionless. "If one individual gains his desired ends in an aberrated manner, this is no reason for the second individual to

regain his rightful ends by also using similar aberrated means."

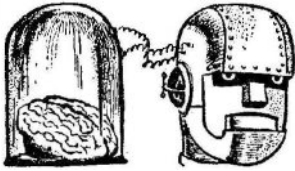
So he was just as aberrated as the rest back on Earth. He didn't mean any more to these people than that. But he knew in essence what they said was truth. And already he was beginning to have twinges of guilt over what he had done. Go back and face the music, that's all.

There was an exchange of some sort of farewells and he wearily went back and climbed into *The Moondream*. Which was no longer a dream.

An odd sense of accomplishment and peace settled over him.

For he was the *first* Last Man in the Moon!

Then the dull boom of the rockets echoed up through *The Moondream*.



Dynamic Science Fiction: fan magazine reviews, personals, cartoons, and discussions on such irrelevant matters as scientology, others forms of psychotherapy (valid or not), handwriting analyses, and tape-recording club business.

Now for a run-down on the authors, this time.

JAMES BLISH is one of the many "name writers" who came up from the ranks of fans and letter-authors in the readers' departments. He's a *New Yorker*, and his name has appeared on numerous stories in nearly all the magazines, as well as in a number of anthologies. MICHAEL SHERMAN first appeared in the September 1951 issue of *Future*, with a short-short story entitled, "The Troubadour"; his

The Lobby

(continued from page 8)

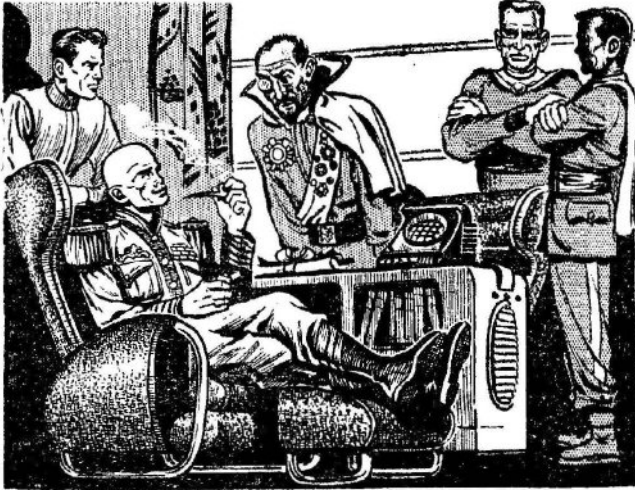
novelet, "A Matter of Faith", was well-received by the readers of *Space Science Fiction*, in last September's issue.

CHARLES DYE's first novel, "Prisoner in the Skull", seems to be doing quite well, according to latest reports, and he's on the last laps of a second. Between times, he's appearing in many of the better markets, and has written a number of memorable cover stories.

GENE L. HENDERSON broke in with several lovely burlesques of overhacked science-fiction plots, around the end of 1951. *Future* presented "A Secondary First" in its November issue of that year, which was among his first appearances, if not the very first.

[Turn To Page 118]

These were the damndest wars; they kept on breaking out, but were uncommonly mild once they started. Hardly anyone was hurt, and peace followed in due course. Then someone began to look for a pattern . . .



THE WINNING LOSERS

by Gene L. Henderson

(illustrated by Milton Luros)

AN AIDE entered the Council hall and snapped to attention before Admiral Bryson, commander of all Earth forces on the Planet Trone. "Sir," he reported, "The Ambassador from Murro requests an audience with you."

The Admiral glanced over at a civilian sitting beside his desk and remarked, "Well, Mr. McLain, your timetable appears to be running right." Bruce merely smiled and nodded.

The officer turned back to his aide and waved a hand casually

"Very well," he said, "Show him in."

The Ambassador and his staff, all formally attired, marched in and stood at stiff attention, just inside the door. The aide called out,

"The Ambassador of Murro, planet Trone, and his aides."

Admiral Bryson came to his feet and smilingly observed, "Well, Sir Joss, this is an unexpected pleasure."

"I hope sir, that it will continue to be so, once you have learned the purpose of my visit." His leather-brown

skin was practically the only difference between his people and those from conquering Earth. "I trust that you have not found the new peace treaty between Earth and your nation unsatisfactory already?"

"We are perfectly satisfied with it; it makes legal our actions today."

"And they are...?"

"A declaration of war between my government and the invaders from Earth." He produced a be-ribboned scroll and extended it towards the Earthman. One of his aides delivered it to Admiral Bryson.

The Admiral merely raised his eyebrows at the conclusion of the declaration and laid the scroll on his desk without glancing at it. "This is a surprise, Sir Joss, especially since our occupation forces have just recently left your country. May I ask the reason?"

"You are invaders from another planet, having no legal right to remain on ours. We intend to fight." His staff nodded vigorous approval as their superior's voice rang out strongly.

The Admiral bit at his underlip briefly and glanced at Bruce, who stared fixedly at a spot between his feet, strongly holding back a smile that threatened to break forth.

Sighing, the Admiral assumed a posture of dejection and said, "Would it be satisfactory to you if our forces evacuated from your planet?"

Instantly the room became so quiet that Bruce could hear the quickened breathing of the natives. The Ambassador's face was a picture of confused amazement, chagrin and apprehension. "But...but...you would have no place to go," he burst out. "Besides Earth, this is the only habitable planet for peoples such as ours."

"True."

"And Earth cannot even support all of the people that still remain on her, let alone the tens of thousands here."

Sadly, the Earthman agreed. "Regrettable, but true."

"Then you cannot leave." The last almost imploring, yet interlined with triumph.

The Admiral turned his back and walked slowly to the window, looking out on the luxurious foliage outside. He sighed heavily once more and Bruce felt a corner of his mouth twitch uncontrollably. It had gone undetected, fortunately, since all eyes were glued to the Admiral.

The latter turned back to the natives and said, "Gentlemen, you are correct. It is impossible for us to leave. Therefore, I now offer unconditional surrender of all Earth forces on the planet of Trone."

The Ambassador sagged noticeably. "But you cannot," he cried out; "we will fight you."

"You will find no opposition; I will instruct my men to dispose of their arms immediately."

The group eyed the scroll still lying on the Admiral's desk. "Well," began the Ambassador hesitatingly, "perhaps we were hasty. You have not read the declaration...we would like to withdraw it."

"Not a chance," declared the Admiral firmly. "Your nation has declared war on us and we surrender."

WORD OF the capitulation hit the supply-fleet flashing from Earth and spread as much consternation as would the report of a vagrant space-warp, dead ahead.

On one, the President of the United Nations paying his first visit to the strife-torn and conquered planet of Trone, stared unbelievably at the space-gram.

"But...but...but this is impossible, gentlemen," he stuttered to high ranking military and civilian officials, also along for a first-hand inspection. "There are more soldiers and equipment now on the planet than at any time since our first invasion, yet Admiral Bryson has surrendered unconditionally without a fight. It's unbe-

lievable."

"Perhaps he's the victim of some new nerve weapon," suggested one of the staff.

"Or nothing more than a traitor," offered another darkly.

BRUCE WINCED as the jeep hit a rut at the edge of the spaceport and silently wondered why science had never found a more efficient form of transportation. Yet, outside of a change in the power plant, it was still basically the same type used in the now almost ancient World War II.

"This is the strangest damned War I've ever fought in," complained the soldier driving the bouncing vehicle. "Hardly anyone gets hurt, but we spend all of our time trying to round up an enemy; then all of a sudden they surrender. It goes on all of the time, first with one country, then the other."

"You mean you'd like to get shot at?" asked his passenger, laughing.

The driver looked around in disgust with an expression that plainly relegated Bruce to his civilian status. "Naw," he drawled. "But we ain't accomplishing nothin' either." He made a wide-sweeping run on a new concrete and steel structure arising out of the mud and jungle-growth and almost stood the Jeep on its hood making a stop.

"This is the Military Governor's headquarters," the soldier announced.

Bruce stepped out and jumped to one side as the soldier promptly gunned the engine and spun his wheels in leaving, throwing mud in every direction. He glanced at the workers clearing out jungle and saw, to his surprise, that they all wore Prisoner of War clothing. Yet there appeared to be no Earth guards watching them. It really must be a strange war, he thought, as he entered the building.

His first conversation with the commander of Earth forces, Admiral Bryson, dispelled none of the observation.

"It has me licked," admitted the Admiral, lines of fatigue lining his ruddy face. "I'm used to either dishing out a lot of punishment or absorbing it. It's...it's not war; I don't know what it is."

Bruce smiled easily and said, "That's exactly why I'm here, sir, as my credentials have outlined. It appears as if there must be some underlying cause or plan for these repeated wars with the planet's countries. All of them have been defeated at least twice."

"There's no plan for anything on Trone," bitterly observed the Admiral. "A little more of this and I'll be psycho."

"That could be an enemy plan, too," pointed out Bruce.

"What good would that be? There's any number of other Admirals and Generals lying around that would jump at the opportunity to take over. No...you may be sharp at alien psychology, but I think you've bitten off more than you can chew this time."

"Well, you could be right," laughed Bruce, "but if you have no objections, I'd like to look around. I promise not to get in your way. I'll make a report as soon as I find out something."

"No, no, go right ahead," assented the Admiral. "Anything I can do to help you, just ask." He turned to some reports just brought in, and Bruce made his exit unobtrusively.

STUDIED casual interrogation of various staff-members brought out seemingly irrelevant facts that began to take on a significance to Bruce.

He made a point to go to the nearby construction town, although several of the officers warned him of the danger in so doing.

"Nothing to worry about from the natives," one told him. "Our own men

and construction workers get to feeling high and things, er—happen.”

“I can take care of myself,” promised Bruce. “Besides, it’s the only way I can find out what I’m after.”

“What a way to earn a living,” commented the other, shaking his head. “Oh well, it’s your funeral.”

The statement almost took on a literal meaning during the first hour, in a little saloon that strongly resembled those on ancient films of the old West he’d seen back on Earth. Here, to his further surprise, he found several more Prisoners of War carousing with as much abandon—and, seemingly with as much money—as their Earth friends. In contrast, other civilian natives were doling out money piece by piece, obviously not so well flushed.

“Hey there,” a voice called out over the uproar, and Bruce looked around to see his driver of the afternoon waving from the other side of the room. Bruce motioned him to come over, figuring it worth the price of a few drinks to get some first-hand information from the enlisted view point. At that instant, a fight exploded and Bruce tried to back out of the way of flying fists and feet—not to mention the articles of furniture the bartender had not securely fastened down. A bottle scraped the side of his head with stunning force and he collapsed to the floor. One of the natives, face aflame with drunken joy, lunged at him with a knife; Bruce barely managed to roll weakly, the knife thudding into the floor beside his face. The native withdrew it with a gleeful shout but, at that instant, a figure loomed up behind and brought a shattered chair-leg down on his head. Bruce sat up groggily and saw that it was his Army friend. At the same time, the fight ended almost as quickly as it had started.

The driver introduced himself as Ed as they ordered up. No one mentioned the recent fight so Bruce asked,

“Does this happen all of the time?”

“Just enough to relieve the mo-

notony,” replied Ed. “Not many people get hurt, although it looked like the native might do you in.” Bruce looked around nervously, to see that the native had also recovered and seemingly forgotten all about the recent encounter.

“Why aren’t there any guards for the POW’s?” Bruce asked.

“They never had it so good,” observed Ed. “They’d be fools to run away. I found some of their iron rations once, what an awful mess it was.”

“Do we ever capture much of their equipment or supplies?”

“Ha, that’s rich,” snorted Ed. “About the only equipment they have is what *they* capture, although those repeller-beams are all right. They live off the country—which means poor living if they go to war just before a harvest.”

“How often have they done that?”

“Say, come to think of it, never.” He frowned groggily into his drink and Bruce slid off the seat beside him and carefully made his way outside.

AS SOON AS he had returned to Headquarters, Bruce went to the almost-deserted records office and asked for the complete history of the Earth force’s activities since arriving. Also, a list of trading goods brought in to be distributed over the entire planet in return for a few manufactured goods and supplies. The junior officer in charge even consented to sending to the base library for one of the few history books covering the planet before the arrival of Earth forces.

Bruce spent most of the night poring over the history book, then dived into the trade and military reports. He forgot most of his sleepiness and compared the histories with increasing interest. Finally he scribbled down copious notes and returned the reports to the junior officer.

“Find much?” asked the bored youngster, yawning.

"More than I'd anticipated," assented Bruce with such elation that the other opened his eyes wide with amazement.

"Glad someone did," he replied. "Everyone on the Staff has to read them when he reports in...driest bit of stuff I ever hit."

In spite of only a couple of hours sleep, Bruce was awake early the next morning and impatiently waiting in the Headquarters building for the Admiral to arrive.

Admiral Bryson looked mildly surprised to find Bruce beside his door and commented, "Good thing the rest of my staff aren't up as early as you or it might shake me out a lot earlier. What's on your mind?"

"A lot, Admiral. I think I've found the cause for all of your trouble."

"Already?" asked the Admiral skeptically. "We've had a lot of men working on it for months, and they didn't get anywhere."

"Perhaps because they were looking in the wrong direction," commented Bruce. He held out the sheets of facts and figures he'd compiled. "Look, I can prove it...as well as predict the probable start of the next war, and the nation that will make it."

"Hmm," commented the Admiral with quickened interest. "I'll warn you now, though, that I'm not going to accept any hair-brained scheme for ending our troubles all at one jump." He read through the scribbled reports, a frown growing darker on his face.

"What's so significant about this order of books from Earth?" he asked.

"A lot, sir, if you'll note the titles. They're books on Earth history."

"That's a logical curiosity. We're interested in their history, too."

"True, up to a certain point. These were distributed to all the nations on this planet, however, and were sold almost the same day. There appears to have been definite information they were after. They'd have to find out

everything they could before launching any attack."

"All right, then what about this item?" continued the Admiral, punching a finger at the papers before him. "A chronological list of the supplies stocked for occupation forces and expended for needed relief of POW's and the civilian populace." He looked up belligerently, "I can go you even one better and give you the figures, from memory, of the total expended in each country."

BRUCE SMILED. "That wasn't the point, Admiral. You'll note comparing that list to the report on outbreaks, that there's a direct relation. As the supplies left by our occupation forces grew lower, the outbreaks became more violent, finally resulting in war in each instance."

"Hmm-m-m, that's correct. Hadn't noticed it before."

"On the final sheet, you'll see that I listed the supplies left for the governing of Murro until the withdrawal of occupation forces. Also, the trouble we've been having with them; I predict a declaration of war in two weeks at the longest."

"Two weeks!" exploded the Admiral. "But man, don't you realize it's only been five months ago that they were whipped to a frazzle?"

"True, but harvest's over now."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Simply that I'll stake my reputation on the fact that the natives of the planet have come to the conclusion by a study of Earth's history, that her defeated enemies invariably had a higher standard of living *after* being conquered than they had under their own rule. Just as the nations the United States conquered, before the United Nations ended our wars."

Admiral Bryson stared at him for a moment, then asked, "You mean that they're declaring war on us just to live better? It's preposterous!"

"All right. Do your men have to guard prisoners of war?"

"No."

"And have any of your men ever been killed by any of the aliens, even when they were helpless?"

"No-o-o."

"And what are the relations between Earth people and the natives when they're not at war?"

"Damned friendly." He stared at Bruce in silence a moment, then said slowly. "You know, I'm almost convinced that you've got something. But, assuming that you were right, what could we do about it?"

"Easy," said Bruce with a grin. "You'll note the date I estimated their next declaration of war, taking into consideration the date the supplies in

Murro will have been used up, and when your men would be withdrawn. Now then, there's one thing that could happen that would throw a monkey wrench into their plans."

"And that would be . . . ?"

"A native victory."

"What!" roared the Admiral, springing to his feet and bending over his desk to pound a fist on it. "Are you suggesting that we *let* them win? The whole idea's crazy, I'll not listen even a minute to it." Bruce shrugged and waited expectantly.

"Wait," breathed the Admiral. "If you were right, then what would they do with not only themselves to take care of, but us in addition?"



The Lobby

(continued from page 112)

W. MALCOLM WHITE doesn't seem to show too much reverence for science-fiction, from the stories we've seen by him—but then, reverence can be overdone. As it stands, his approach to the field has its place, and I like it in the kind of doses he gives.

The letter department hasn't been discontinued, and you'll see your golden words on the June issue next time. That issue went on sale just within a matter of hours after copy for this issue had to be sent off to the printer, so we did not have any returns from you on hand at the time. And our last issue covered your comments on the March *Dynamic* rather thoroughly, I thought.

A couple of weeks ago, I had the pleasure of attending the Fan Vets' Convention, which was very well attended, and where a large and rather good selection of originals and original manuscripts were put up for auction. The Fan Vets use the returns from

their annual auction for postage on the magazines they send to science-fictionists in Korea, and/or any other part of the world where there aren't newsstands to serve fans in uniforms. Again, let's remember that your old copies of science-fiction and fantasy magazines should not be thrown out, if you are not a collector; send them to the Fan-Vets, c/o James V. Taurasi, 137-07 32d Avenue, Flushing, New York.

And if you have some loose stamps lying around, send some of those, too; the lads always need postage to send the magazines out—demand for old issues is usually far in excess of their postage-supply for mailing.

And finally, better watch for our forthcoming issue; we're starting that James Gunn essay you all approved our using, "The Plot-Forms of Science-Fiction". It's a continuation of "The Philosophy of Science-Fiction" as you know.

NO GREATER GLORY

A Dynamic
Vignette

by W. Malcolm White

THE SOLEMN, handsome heads of the leaders of the greatest nation in the great world that majestically circles the star-sun of 61 Cygni nodded in unison. "Certainly there is no honor high enough to bestow upon our great visitor.

"For our benefactor, nothing is too much. We have given him all, we must do even more."

Again the august heads nodded, and their eyes strayed across the great golden parapet to the fields below—where their visitor wandered slowly by himself, enjoying the perfumes of the afternoon air and the glories of the two brilliant suns of their far-off system.

"He has rescued our world from isolation. He has brought us into contact with the peoples of other planets of the universe. He has brought us an invitation from the magnificent culture of his native Earth to sit with them in the halls of Cosmical Harmony."

A tear of gratitude found its way to many an eye of that high conclave. Many a listener felt stirred to the core, even as he had many times before by the revelations their visitor from the heavens had given them.

"He has come from the skies in his marvelous vessel of metal and glass. He has shown us the fires that may travel us through the skies; he has given us the keys to the heavens."

Eyes strayed to the distant white marble building far off on the verdant plain. In that building, the man from Earth—the wonder-giver—had opened freely and graciously the wonders of Terrestrial science to the peoples of

Osiris, world of a far-off sun.

"We have heaped upon him all the honors our world is capable of. Though our science was great, and our philosophy high, he gave us knowledge of which we had not dreamed and thoughts beyond our deepest meditation."

Again the little audience of most esteemed men of this populous world was moved to agree wholeheartedly. "But we must go further. There is that one honor we have failed to bestow upon him. That we must remedy, or we shall remain disgraced before future generations of our civilized people."

Slowly, heads nodded. Solemnly, with a touch of overwhelming reverence. "We must take him to our very own; we must join him with our people, so that none in ages to come may say that he is without him."

Again the conclave nodded.

"We are agreed upon this final honor, then. I regret that we can do no more. But our world and culture alas, has its limits. And this then is the noblest gift we can make to him. Go then," the speaker motioned to two of the noblest and greatest. "Go then and escort him hither."

So they did and they conveyed the visitor from Earth to the conclave; and there, with the finest ceremony of which they were capable—and with genuine feeling and sincere emotion—they joined him to the body of the people of Osiris for all time.

And after they had finished eating him, the whole nation joined in prayer and thankfulness.



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by MILTON LESSER

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INSIDE SCIENCE FICTION

by ROBERT A. MADLE

THE NATIONAL FANTASY FAN FEDERATION

IN THE LAST issue of *Dynamic* we discussed science-fiction fandom in general, giving a brief historical background of the field, and mentioned the most significant events which resulted in the strong and unified fandom of today. “But,” some readers might comment, “we know there is such a thing as science-fiction fandom, fan magazines, and World Science-Fiction Conventions. Our problem is breaking down the barrier which appears to separate fandom from the general readers. How can we become part of the fan world?”

There is a very simple answer to this question: “The National Fantasy Fan Federation.”

The NFFF (as the organization is most commonly known) was the logical result of the demise of Gernsback’s “Science Fiction League,” which, after *Wonder Stories* became *Thrilling Wonder* in August, 1936—gradually dissipated. Several other attempts were made to unify fandom with national organizations: two of the largest—and, perhaps, most successful in an abortive fashion—were “New Fandom,” whose chief claim to fame was the sponsoring of the first World Convention in New York City in 1939, and “The Science Fictioneers,” an organization modeled after the “Science Fiction League” and sponsored by Frederik Pohl’s *Super Science Stories*. The first organization was formed in 1938, and the second appeared in 1940, and by the outbreak of World War II, both were all but defunct.

It was just about this time that super-active fan Damon Knight—now top-flight author Damon Knight—penned an article in a fanzine which suggested that fandom must unite in order to progress. This article led to the formation of the NFFF, primarily through the efforts of one Louis Russel Chauvenet.

The NFFF had rough sledding the first couple years of its existence; but by 1944, despite the fact that most fans were working for Uncle Sam, it had become a powerful influence in fandom. A new group of young, enthusiastic readers took over the reins of the organization from the service-bound fans, and held the club intact until their return. After the termination of the war, these two groups com-

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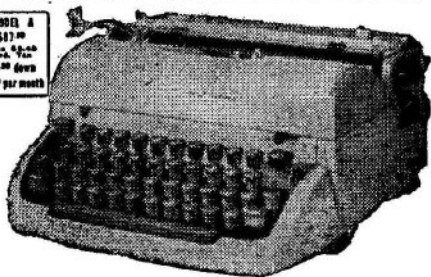
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DYNAMIC Science Fiction

bined to form a unified group which has become the largest non-professionally sponsored fan group of all. There are now over four hundred members residing in all sections of the world. While the NFFF is a fan organization and is run for and by fans, it is interesting to indicate that many well-known writers and editors are members. To mention a few: Forrest J. Ackerman, Ray Bradbury, E. Everett Evans, Virgil Finlay, H. L. Gold, David H. Keller, Clifford D. Simak, E. E. Smith, and Basil Wells.

The NFFF publishes a bi-monthly magazine which is chock-full of interesting articles apropos the science fiction world. Other publications, such as Ray Higgs' *Postwar* (which is composed entirely of letters from members), and *The Checklist of Proazines*, are also distributed to members. The latter publication lists by date every science fiction and fantasy magazine ever published and is of invaluable aid to the collector.

All readers of *Dynamic Science Fiction* are cordially invited to join the NFFF and get into fandom the easy way! Your membership costs just one dollar and this one dollar entitles you to all publications and benefits of the organization. You will receive letters from at least a half-dozen NFFF members—the "Welcomee." In no time at all you will be one of the gang. Send your dollar to: Janie Lamb, Secretary NFFF, Route 1, Heiskell, Tennessee.

SCIENCE FICTION SPOTLIGHT

News and Views: Albert Hernhuter, whose "Dynamic First," "World of Ice," was featured in the March *Dynamic Science Fiction*, was feted by fifty fans and authors at the 5th Annual end-of-February Fanquet honoring the fan in the "Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society" newly most successful as an s-f author during the preceding year. Forry Ackerman was toastmaster, calling for a few words from such celebrities present as A. E. Van Vogt, James Schmitz, Frank Quattrocchi, Ross Rocklynne E. Everett Evans, Mel Hunter, T. D. Hamm, Mel Sturgis, Joe Slotkin, Len Moffatt, and E. Mayne Hull... Joel Nydahl, author of "Lesson for Today," in the *May Imagination* is only fourteen years old. However, Nydahl is not the youngest writer to make the grade: that distinction is held by Kenneth Sterling whose "Brain Eaters of Pluto" was published in the March, 1934 issue of *Wonder Stories* when he was but thi teen!... Armand E. Waldo, whose name may be found on the editorial board of *Holiday*, is old-time fan Bud Waldo. We wonder

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DYNAMIC Science Fiction

how much he had to do with the publishing of Arthur C. Clarke's "A Journey to Mars" in the March number.... *Weird Tales* writer and "Philadelphia Science Fiction Society" member David L. Eynon is Assistant Editor of *The Atlantic Magazine*, company publication of The Atlantic Refining Company.... PSFS member Russell Swanson recently had a professionally-sponsored exhibition of his science-fiction paintings, which resulted in a feature writeup in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

How many of you have noticed the number of stories being featured by the various editors in their own magazines? Within the past few months there have been stories by H. L. Gold in *Galaxy*, Tony Boucher in *F&SF*, Ray Palmer in *Other Worlds*, and del Rey in his magazines. At one time it was not considered ethical for an editor to use his own material* but, apparently, those days are gone forever.... Another unusual simultaneous duplication of titles occurred when James E. Gunn (better known under his pseudonym of Edwin James) and John Christopher (who is British fan C. S. Youd) appeared with "Breaking Point" in the *March Space Science Fiction* and *April Avon Science Fiction & Fantasy Reader*. And, while on this subject, Forry Ackerman has uncovered a simultaneous duplication which preceded "The Green Thumb," mentioned last issue. "Cold War" was published in the October, 1949 *Thrilling Wonder* and *astounding SF* by Henry Kuttner and Kris Neville, respectively. Old time fan Harry Warner, Jr. appeared with a third "Cold War" in the *March Future*.

The Scientifilms: "Think!" the s-f radio drama project of the ABC network's Los Angeles workshop, linked with the "Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society" in mid-March for a brilliant evening of awards to individuals who have made significant contributions to the development of the science fiction film. Starting with Fritz Lang, historically famous for his "Metropolis" and "Girl in the Moon," handsome framed parchments designed by Mel Hunter were presented on the stage by Forrest J. Ackerman, emcee of the evening, to such notables as Frank Capra, Merian C. Cooper, George Pal, Chesley Bonestell, Curt Siodmak, and—as the author of the world's first three-dimensional scientifilm—Ray Bradbury, who was Guest of Honor. The final version of Bradbury's "Mars is Heaven!" was platter-previewed, as well as his "Whole Town's Sleeping." S. J. Byrne of "Science-Fantasy Writers of America" also officiated before a jam-packed audience.... "The Academy of Science Fiction Filmmakers" is a possibility for the near future. Participants include movie producer Carl Hittleman,



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DYNAMIC Science Fiction

screenplay analyst Bill James, and writers Gordon Dewey, S. J. Byrne, Weaver Wright, Fredric Brown, and others. Under consideration for early production is, among other stories, "Time Wants A Skeleton," by Ross Rocklynne.

The 11th World Science Fiction Convention: Issue #2 of the Progress Report is now out and features an article on Guest of Honor Willy Ley along with other pertinent information concerning the Convention. . . . Poul Anderson has suggested that the Program Committee communicate with Gordon Dickson who, in addition to being a good guitar player, has some original science fiction ballads which should be well received. No sooner suggested than done! . . . Jack Williamson says, "I hope to be there." We're hoping so too. . . . Sam Sackett, Editor of *Fantastic Worlds*, graciously offered the Convention Committee free advertising in his magazine, which shall, of course, be accepted. . . . Memberships are now over the 500 mark. If you haven't already done so, send your dollar right now to: 11th World S-F Convention, Box 2019, Middle City Station, Philadelphia 3, Pa.

TWENTY YEARS AGO IN SCIENCE FICTION

Last issue we discussed briefly the effect of the great depression on the science fiction field in 1933. As mentioned, *Astounding Stories* was discontinued with the March, 1933 issue; *Wonder Stories Quarterly*, only a ghost of its former self, failed to appear after the Winter, 1938 issue; and *Amazing Stories Quarterly* was appearing semi-annually, and was headed for certain oblivion. Readers were fearfully wondering if magazine science-fiction would survive this era of economic calamity. Their fears were intensified when *Wonder Stories* combined its July and August issues, using the obviously weak excuse that "...our readers tend to spend the summer months out-of-doors and hence do much less reading than during other seasons."

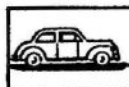
"Castaways on Deimos," by J. Harvey Haggard, a well-written little yarn which portrayed the conflict among a group of space-wrecked people, was featured on the cover. This was a good Paul spaceship cover—quite symbolic of the old master. George A. Dye made his first (and only) appearance with a fair novelette which combined the discovery of a sunken city and a mysterious spaceship that had crashed therein. Laurence Manning presented the fifth, and final, of his "The Man Who Awoke" series, "The Elixir." (Norman Winters awakes in the year 25,000—and is confronted with Immortal

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Man—and Man's search for the answer to life and the universe. This was one of the most "socially-significant" series ever to appear.) Festus Pragnell was represented with a "before-the-Asteroids" story, "The Isotope Men," which we recall as being average. Richard F. Seagrave, another one-shot author, presented "The Cosmic Horror," a short story concerning a meteorite and the beings of pure electricity it contained. And, of course, the second installment of Eugene Thebault's mediocre "mad-scientist" novel, "The Radio Terror," appeared. Forrest J. Ackerman had his usual commentary in "The Reader Speaks." All interior illustrations were by Paul.

The July, 1933 issue of *Amazing Stories* (96 large size pages, as also comprised *Wonder Stories*) featured the last of A. Sigmund's impressionistic covers and, interestingly enough, it is more appealing today than it was then. David H. Kelley led off the issue with his compellingly human, "Unto Us A Child Is Born," a story which preceded the so-called "modern" science fiction by two decades. "Hibernation," by Abner J. Gelula, was a fair story of suspended animation and the battle between the Technocrats and the Democrats in the year 2103. (This was just one of the many stories dealing with the subject of Technocracy—for Technocracy was a timely subject indeed in the depression-ridden days of 1933.) John Russell Fearn brought his serial, "The Intelligence Gigantic," to a prosaic conclusion: Man, of course, triumphs over his malignant creation. Earl Vincent and Raymond Z. Gallun rounded out the issue with "Cavern of Thunders" and "The Flight of the RX-1" respectively. Neither were of any consequence. Morey was the sole interior illustrator.

Amazing Stories, emulating *Wonder*, combined its August and September issues—but offered no "out-of-doors" reason for doing so. Morey returned as cover-artist, with a fair effort illustrating Henry J. Kostkos' initial science fiction story, "The Meteor Men of Plaa." The story was on a par with the cover. In fact, there wasn't a good story in this issue. All stories were complete, and among the authors represented were Walter Kately, Festus Pragnell, and Allen Glasser (who, it may be recalled, was editor of the first fan magazine, *The Time Traveler*.) "Discussions" featured Richard Tooker, Allen Glasser, and John B. Michel (who announced the formation of "The Cosmo Science Club" which eventually grew into the "International Scientific Association," the first really important independent fan club). Morey penned all the illos. A depressing issue, if there ever was one. It appeared that science-fiction had just about hit rock-bottom. Little did anyone realize at this time that in just two

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* Just how this tradition started is somewhat vague. Back in the days when

** Richard Searight had at least one appearance in *Weird Tales*, later. RWL

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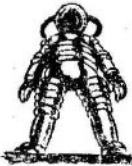
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