

Vaughan Nathan Roberts, captain of the fast interstellar transport *Orion*, stood in the huge room amidst all the wheeled and antennaed metal shapes, large and small, and thought of his ship orbiting the planet with its drive knocked out. The idea of coming to this place, he told himself stubbornly, was to get repairs. Not to get eaten alive, mobbed, or bundled around by roboïd functionaries, but to get repairs. The question was how?

Roberts was flanked by metal boxes nearly as tall as himself, much wider and thicker, with whip antennas on top, bicycle wheels below, and the words "Law Enforcement" blazoned on them front and back.

Directly in front of Roberts stood a far larger metal box, on low massive wheels, with a variety of antennas sticking up, and mouthpieces, viewscreens, and receptor heads thrust out toward him under the glowing letters: **CRIMINAL COURT**.

From this maze of screens and speakers, a voice was murmuring: ". . . Fingerprints, palm prints, retinal patterns, total body index: not on record. Conclusion unavoidable that this individual is not native to this planet."

"I've been trying to tell you," said Roberts, "we had gravitor trouble. We headed for the nearest repair facility, got here crippled, couldn't raise any response on the communicator, and half-a-dozen of us came down in the ship's tender. The tender cracked up in a forest forty miles from the spaceport. Three of my men were badly hurt. One of us stayed with them, and two of us hiked out for help. When we reached your city, here, we got garbage dumped on us, tin cans and chunks of cement slung at us, a gang of kids went for us, and then your iron gendarmes arrested us for causing a riot."

"Unsuitable attire," snapped a voice from the metal box to Roberts' right.

"We are dressed as spacemen," said Roberts shortly. "Now, I've got three injured men in the tender, and a ship in orbit with the rest of my crew trapped on board. We'll gladly pay for medical help and repairs. *Where are they?*"

A general murmur and clack rose from the big metal box in front of Roberts. On the screens, human faces and metal forms of various sizes and shapes rapidly came and went. From somewhere in the room, Roberts could hear the voice of Hammell, his cargo-control officer, raised in anger.

Then a speaker in front of him was murmuring, "On basis of correlation of statements of both accused, overall probability of guilt is 0.2, necessity of making examples 0.1. Therefore, adjudge innocent, transfer to Immigration."

At once, a loud voice announced, "We find the accused *innocent* of all charges brought against him."

From Roberts' roboïd captors, to either side, came low murmurs of discontent.

A new voice spoke with authority. "The prisoner will be released at once, and escorted to Immigration for disposal."

Roberts blinked. "I don't want to immigrate. I just need repairs for my ship!"

The words **CRIMINAL COURT** faded out and the words **IMMIGRATION HEARING** flickered on.

"Name," said the box.

Roberts said, "I've been *through* all that. What I want . . ."

"Name," said the box sternly.

To Roberts' right, one of the smaller boxes explained. "You *were* at the Criminal Court. Now you are at the Immigration Hearing."

"I don't *want* to immigrate!" said Roberts.

The big metal box said sternly, "This case has been transferred to Immigration for disposal. Relevant information of interest to applicant: 1) No individual not already a citizen will be compelled against his will to become a citizen. 2) Due to food and material shortages, technological breakdowns, and attendant malfunctions, no one not a citizen will be fed, sheltered, clothed, or otherwise allowed to become a charge on the planet, unless otherwise decided by the due and constituted authorities." There was a brief pause. "Name."

Roberts blinked. Apparently he would have to become a citizen in order to exist while arranging for repairs.

"Name," snapped the box.

"Roberts. Vaughan N. Roberts."

"Sex."

"Male."

"Age."

"Thirty-six."

"Height."

"Six feet one-quarter inch."

"Weight."

"One hundred seventy-five pounds. Look . . ."

"Occupation?"

"Spaceship captain. Listen, all I want . . ."

"Inapplicable occupation. Demand for spaceship captains on this planet: Zero. Correction: Occupation: Unskilled. Years of experience?"

Roberts stared. "Experience? As a spaceship captain?"

"As unskilled," snapped the box. "This is your occupation."

Roberts said, "I have no experience as unskilled. I . . ."

"No experience," said the box disapprovingly. "Any physical defects?"

"No. Look, all . . ."

"Convicted of how many crimes the last three years?"

"None. All I . . ."

"Formal education?"

Roberts blew out his breath. "Twelve years of general schooling, six years training in the Space Academy, one year at the Tactical Combat Command Advanced Training Center. *And all I want is to get some repairs done!*"

"Seven years college training. Equivalent fourteen years experience credit. Excellent. Raise your right hand."

Roberts exasperatedly raised his right hand.

"Repeat after me," said the box, and rolled off words in short incomplete groups, so that Roberts had time to repeat the words, but not to understand their full meaning. Then the box said, "You are now a citizen of the planet Boschock III, known as Paradise, and entitled to all the rights and privileges appertaining thereto, and subject to all the laws, regulations, and customs thereof, so help you God, Amen. This hearing is closed."

The words **IMMIGRATION HEARING** faded out.

Before Roberts could say a word, he was rushed up a gravity-lift, down a hall, and shoved into a room where he was weighed, measured, photographed, fingerprinted, palm, toe, and foot-printed, retina-graphed, his mouth pried open and teeth examined, and then he was presented with an identification card, and run down the hall to a window where ration books popped out of slots onto a counter. Next he was hurried out to a store full of huge vending machines, and outfitted with a new set of clothes.

Roberts and Hammell now found themselves outside, holding their own clothing wrapped in big bundles, and each wearing a kind of loose long-sleeved blouse, loose long pantaloons, ill-fitting shoes, and long-billed high-topped floppy cap.

Roberts looked sourly up the street at the milling crowd, then glanced at Hammell. "Do *you* have any ideas?"

"I wouldn't know an idea if one banged into me," growled Hammell. "I'm so mad I can't see straight."

"We need to get in touch with someone in authority—if any human on this planet *has* authority."

"Yes," said Hammell. "But how?"

Roberts said, "If they have any kind of public communications system here, there ought to be a

directory."

While they were trying to think where to look for one, a large mobile metal box stopped in front of them, and abruptly shot its antenna to full height. Metal covers on its sides snapped back and a dazzling yellow light flashed in their faces. A set of long flexible metal arms whipped out, a mesh-covered speaker snapped "Spot check," and with a quick flip of the metal arms, the robot emptied their pockets onto the sidewalk. Next, it rapidly felt them all over, then jerked loose the bundles they were holding, so that they spilled open in the street.

"Nonexplosive. Clothing. But nonstandard. *You have receipts for these?*"

For the moment, Roberts was speechless. He heard Hammell snarl, "They're our own clothes."

"Uncitylike behavior, one count: lying to roboid police officer under direct interrogation during spot check; these are not clothes permissible for a citizen to wear, hence they are not *your* clothes. They can only be *costumes*, and costumes can only be purchased by registered entertainers. You are not dressed as registered entertainers." The yellow light flashed in Roberts' face. "*You. You have receipts for these? Your answer? Do not lie.*"

"We're new citizens," Roberts began, "and—"

"Not asked. Do not evade the question. Do you have receipts for these costumes?"

"Of *course*," said Roberts. "Yes, *certainly*."

"Produce the receipts."

"They're on board the spaceship *Orion*. We wore these clothes on board *Orion*, came down to arrange for repairs, got sent to Immigration, and then bought the clothes we're wearing now. These clothes in the bundles are the clothes we wore when we came down."

"Spaceship visits are rare, improbable. It follows, this explanation is improbable. *Arrest on suspicion of shoplifting*. You will come with me for immediate interrogation while investigation proceeds."

The two men were separated, placed under bright lights for a long series of questions, then put into a cell with two cots, a light bulb, a toilet, a 3-V set that didn't work, and a decorative design on the ceiling that obviously incorporated the pick-up heads for a sight-and-sound recording system.

As the robot-jailer rolled off down the corridor, Roberts and Hammell eyed the ceiling, and lay down on the cots without a word.

Several hours crawled by, then a tall gray-haired man wearing dark-blue blouse and pantaloons, of good material and narrow cut, walked down the corridor, and stopped outside the cell.

"Which of you is Roberts, Vaughan N.?"

"I am."

"You represent yourself as a spaceship captain?"

"I'm captain of T.S.M. *Orion*, Interstellar Rapid Transport Corporation. The ship is now orbiting this planet with a nonfunctional main gravitor. I came down here to arrange for repairs, but our tender went out of control, we cracked up, two of us hiked in to get help, were attacked by a gang, arrested, dragged into court, given to understand we would immigrate or starve to death, then arrested again because we couldn't produce receipts for the clothes we'd worn down, and here we are."

"I see. And this other individual . . . let's see . . . *Hammell?*"

"He's the cargo-control officer assigned to *Orion*."

"As which," said Hammell coldly, "it is my duty to tell you that *Orion* has a spoilable cargo. This planet is supposed to have a Class II commercial repair facility. We've been trying to get in touch with it for days."

"I see. My name is Kelty. I'm assistant-chief of the Law-Enforcement Department, acting under the planetary computer, which technically is chief. I'm afraid I have some bad news for you gentlemen."

"Not surprising," growled Hammell.

Roberts said, "This planet has been nothing but bad news since we got here."

"Then why not go to another planet?"

"Our gravitor burned out. We had to strip the coils of the tender's gravitor, to make emergency repairs. Then, to come down here, we had to scavenge from the main gravitor, to get the tender to

work."

"Where did you land?"

"We didn't land. We crashed about ten miles inside a forest belt, between a couple of wide tracts of cleared land. The spaceport was about forty miles to the east of where we crashed."

"Then," said Kelty, watching Roberts alertly, "you were well inside the killer forest. I'm surprised you got through alive."

"Yes," said Roberts, "we're a little surprised, ourselves. We'd scarcely started to set foot outside the tender when a thing like an oversize gray tiger jumped us. We fought that off with guns from the emergency kit. Our communications officer got in contact with your city here—we hadn't been able to raise it while we were in orbit—and while I was trying to arrange for help, another of these overgrown tigers showed up. Meanwhile, it turned out that I was talking to a mechanical answering device of some kind, so I gave that up. We fought off this second animal, the sun set, and something started taking cracks at the far side of the tender. This thing forced its way into the tender's cargo compartment. We managed to get in touch with someone else on the communicator, but before we could make our position clear, the tender got heaved around, and the communicator was smashed."

Roberts shook his head. "The next morning, Hammell and I started through the forest, got into some kind of a thicket that folded big clinging leaves around us like wet sheets, and while we were fighting clear of this, a pile of insects came pouring through the trees, tumbling over each other, and spreading out to eat everything in sight. We managed to get out of their way, and saw that when the horde passed, all the insects left behind jumped and flew after it to catch up and pour forward again. They were traveling southeast, which suited us, so we walked along close behind, and believe me, nothing bothered us. When they hit the cleared ground, they changed direction, and we got out of the forest and hiked the rest of the way in the open."

Kelty was listening intently. His look of suspicion had disappeared, and now he smiled. "You used your heads. Such good sense deserves success; but I'm sorry to have to tell you, we have no way to go after those men, and the repair facility you're looking for is no longer here."

Roberts looked at him blankly.

Kelty said, "You've apparently assumed that the population of this planet grew up from a beginning with a few tough settlers to its present size. In that case, if there was cause for a repair facility in the first place, it wouldn't disappear overnight. But it isn't so. The city was designed and built as a man-made paradise, through the beneficence of a tax-free foundation. The foundation was under legislative investigation. To get out from under, an accumulated surplus balance of several trillions had to be unloaded quickly, and it had to be done somehow for the demonstrable benefit of mankind. A planetary-utopia project was dug out of the files, and right here is the final result. This city was built, and staffed by highly-trained technicians, with a computer in overall control, then the foundation opened a campaign on half-a-dozen overpopulated worlds, gathered from their slums millions of 'socially-disadvantaged individuals' and used the last of its excess money shipping them here. *That* is how this planet was settled."

Roberts grappled with the mental picture this created.

Hammell said, "Where did a repair facility *ever* fit in?"

"It looked nice in the plans, and it did a good job when the populace was coming in here. After that, there wasn't much use for it. When a mob looted and burned it, the computer had what still remained reprocessed to fill more urgent needs. There's nothing left now but a plot of ground where the facility used to be."

Hammell shook his head and glanced at Roberts.

Roberts finally said, "There's no way to get the repairs done here?"

"Not without the equipment and the technicians. The equipment was looted. About that time, the technicians saw the way things were sliding, and made recommendations, which the computer, in compliance with its built-in directives, rejected. The technicians got fed up. One fine morning, they pulled out, leaving the computer programmed to neither produce nor maintain air-travel mechanisms. The

technicians went to the far side of the killer forest, and set up independent farming communities over there. This planet being what it is, they're evidently having plenty of trouble, but they prefer it to the city. We can't reach them to bring them back. We have no air transport. And the computer couldn't be programmed to restore the repair facility except by these technicians."

Roberts said, "Could the technicians be persuaded to come back temporarily, just to program the computer?"

Kelty's eyes glinted. "If so, they'll never get away again. They broke their contract. Now the whole roboid police force is on the lookout for them. Naturally, I will obey the orders of the planetary computer, and seize them the instant they show up." Kelty saw Roberts' expression, and smiled. "Don't worry, Roberts. They know this. No, you could never possibly persuade them to come back here. We've tried to hire people to take their place, but without success. Who wants to spend his time struggling with the frustrations of a gigantic slum-city? Everything you do here fails. Put up a light bulb, and someone will smash it. Install a water pipe in the afternoon, and it will be ripped out by next morning. Bare maintenance is all the computer and its mechanisms can manage. For most specialists, the work is solid frustration. My job is a little different. It's quite a challenge to use limited force in such a way that a measure of order is maintained. But I do it, and I aim to continue to do it."

Roberts thought it over. "I can see what you're up against. But unless we can get the computer and the technicians together, how can we get the ship—or even the ship's tender—repaired?"

Kelty shook his head. "In the present setup, it's impossible. The computer can't divert the effort to rebuild the repair facility, because of the widespread disorder and destructiveness of the populace."

"I can't leave my ship in orbit," said Roberts, "and the men trapped on board, helpless."

"But, you see, unless some order can be brought out of this chaos, we have no choice in the matter. And to do that would take a change in the attitude of the populace. There's only one other way."

"What's that?"

Kelty studied him speculatively. "If you and your men, who have considerable technical background, will first consent to devote your time and training exclusively to work for the City, from now on, *then* we might be able to work something out." He straightened up, and then stepped back. "Then, you see, it might be worth the computer's while to rebuild the repair facility."

Roberts stared at him.

Kelty smiled. "Meanwhile, since you're citizens, you have guaranteed rent-free cost-free housing. If you should decide to join us, your work would naturally require that you live in close proximity to the Planetary Control Center. Until you do, it would, of course, be unfair to discriminate against the other citizens by giving you special attention. Since we've found you innocent, you will now be released. You'll be given a routing ticket on the way out, to take you to your quarters. You'll find them airy, with an exceptional view."

Kelty turned, gestured, and a roboid-jailer wheeled with a hiss of tires down the corridor.

Kelty gave them a final smiling glance. "Think over what I've said, Roberts. If you decide to join us, let me know."

That evening found Roberts and Hammell in a five-room apartment on the sixth floor of a ten-story building. The building had emergency staircases littered with cans, broken bottles, garbage, and large rats, which disputed the passage with them on the way up. The gravitor-drop had a chain across the entrance, bearing a dented "NO POWER" sign. There was not a whole piece of glass to be seen in the building. The empty window frames looked out over a park, where dead half-grown trees had four-letter words carved in their bark, and the spindly grass sprouted amidst heaps of rotting garbage.

From down in the streets came a scrape and rumble as battered cleaning-machines picked up trash. From the building above came a chorus of yells:

"Kill the lousy mechs!"

A fusillade of bottles smashed down on the machines' armored tops. Loudspeakers broadcast appeals for law-abiding cooperation, and the air shook with curses flung back in answer.

Roberts and Hammell stared out the window at the buildings and parks, laid out like the alternating

squares of a checkerboard, and stretching off to the horizon. In the distance, lit by the setting sun, the buildings looked almost magical. Nearby, rats scurried amidst the trash in the park. From overhead, a bundle of garbage plummeted past the window, opening up as it fell.

Hammell turned away from the window. "Now what do we do?"

"The first thing is to get out of here. Kelty seems to think a little experience of this will make us eager to join him. I wouldn't want to stay in this place on *any* terms."

"The forest is murderous. The City won't help. That leaves the technicians."

Roberts nodded. "If we can get them to help, maybe we can straighten the mess out yet."

"If they haven't *already* helped, it's too bad for Matthis, Warner, and Cassetti."

Roberts nodded soberly. The three men had been too badly hurt in the crash to carry out. "Well, if we get out of here early in the morning, we should avoid getting waylaid by a gang. I hope we can find where we cached our packs, guns, and canteens. Then we can start back."

"Personally, I'm half-dead from the last hike."

"If we stay here, we could be all-dead before we know it."

Hammell glanced around. "There's truth in that, all right. Well, while it's still light, let's get set. This could be a rough night."

The two men blocked the apartment door with a battered bedstead and a bureau with all the knobs broken off its drawers, then cleaned out a small room and collected in it all the bottles they found in the litter, just in case they should need ammunition. They carried the wreck of a mattress into this one room, stuffed the baseboard's ratholes with smashed glass and the bent lids of tin cans, and jammed another can into the hole where the corner of the closed door was gnawed away.

The night started out like a bad dream. The mattress was lumpy, the room damp, and the garbage smell overpowering. Toward morning, someone began to scream, and someone else began to laugh hysterically. The louder the screams rose, the louder was the laughter.

Roberts came dizzily awake to find the room faintly lit by a reflected glow from below, where powerful street lamps stood protected by big metal shields and heavy wire mesh. From the walls came a twang of metal as the rats wrestled with the tin shoved into their holes. From the door came a scrape that Roberts interpreted as a rat trying to move the can jammed between the door frame and the gnawed corner. Then the scrape came again, louder, and Roberts sat up. He reached out carefully, and closed his hand around the neck of a heavy bottle.

Wide-awake now, he could see that Hammell was out of bed, but he couldn't see where he was. Carefully, Roberts got up.

From the doorway, came a louder, longer scrape.

Slowly, the door swung open.

From the darkness of the next room, a stooped figure eased in, the faint light glinting on the edge of a broken bottle in its hand.

From behind the door came a brief glint of reflected light. There was the rap of glass striking bone. The intruder dropped. There was a crash and the sound of splintering glass.

A long moment passed, and nothing else happened.

Hammell stepped out from behind the door, glanced toward Roberts, and waited a moment. The screams and laughter overhead rose to a peak, then died away.

Hammell said, "How much rest are we going to get in this place?"

"You're right." Roberts felt carefully along the floor. "Here, help me turn the mattress over on top of this broken glass. All we need is a cut foot."

They gathered their bundles of clothing, carefully checked to make sure they had everything, and eased out into the next room. Around them, there was the scurry of feet as rats went across the floor. Then they found the door, eased out into the pitch-black hall, and a low voice spoke, close to Roberts:

"You get their ears?"

Roberts shifted his bottle, landed a solid blow, heard something thump to the floor, and groped forward toward the steps. As he carefully felt his way forward, something ran across his foot. He eased onto the steps, and started down. The slow descent to street level seemed to take all eternity. Then they

reached the lower hall, found the front door, and eased it open.

Outside, the street was brightly lit.

A roboid policeman, whip antenna up, rolled past with a silvery flash from its swiftly-turning wheels.

Roberts waited, then carefully pulled the door wider. The policeman was a dwindling speck in the distance. Roberts and Hammell slipped out, walked quickly down the block, and turned left, toward the west and open fields.

Up under one of the streetlights, a loudspeaker blared:

"Halt, thieves! You are detected on the central board! Mobile police units are already on the way. You cannot escape!"

"Run!" said Roberts.

From overhead, someone shouted happily, "Hunt! A hunt!"

Roberts and Hammell ran, hampered by the bundles they were carrying. Overhead, fresh loudspeakers blared. There was the sound of banging, shouting, and a concerted rush to the windows. Screams of "Hunt! *There they go!*" rang out. A bottle crashed into the street just behind. The next bottle hit to the right and in front, scattering broken glass over the street. "Thieves! Thieves! *Kill* them. Look out! *Here come the mechs!*" There was a pause, then a loud jeering, and a deafening rattle and smash further back.

Urgently, the loudspeakers boomed, "You must cooperate! Do not obstruct the law-enforcement officers!"

Straight ahead, the brightly-lighted street abruptly came to an end, a garbage-filled park on one side, and a high building on the other side. From this building, streaks of light flashed down, the reflections from hurtling bottles, as Roberts and Hammell sprinted past.

"Look out!" screamed someone overhead. "You're headed Out!"

Roberts and Hammell shot over an embankment in a headlong rush, heard a squeal of rats as they plunged knee-deep in a mass of garbage, then slammed forward on their bundles. As they pulled free, they glanced back, to see the police robots, bottles bursting and splintering in a dazzle of light from their metal tops and sides.

Roberts and Hammell stumbled across the dump, fell forward on soft earth, and looked back to see the robots spreading out along the edge of the embankment. But they didn't go down the steep bank, where they might overturn or mire down in the piles of garbage.

The loudspeakers blared, "You have left the City! Before you is only bare ground and the killer forest!"

The hail of bottles had let up. Voices shouted from the buildings, "You're Out! *You can't live out there!*"

"Come back!" shouted fresh voices.

"Return!" blared the loudspeakers. "Here you have Universal Care. Out there is only the Wild."

Roberts glanced at Hammell. "You hurt?"

"No. By some miracle, I didn't step on any glass."

"Neither did I. Let's get further away from this place."

By daybreak, the voices and lights had long since faded into the distance. In the gray light of dawn, they located the cache, changed to their own clothes, checked their guns, slung their packs, and headed toward the forest. At an irrigation ditch, they stopped to drink, refilled the canteens, and munched emergency-ration bars from their packs. Then they went on. Late that afternoon, the forest came into sight far ahead, barely visible across a flat field with endless rows of small, geometrically-spaced plants.

"Better stop here," said Roberts.

Hammell nodded. "We don't want to hit that forest at night."

Worn out, they lay down in the soft earth, to fall asleep at once, and wake early the next morning,

stiff, chilled, miserable, and dumbfounded that the night had somehow passed already.

Today they had the forest to get through.

By noon, they found themselves looking across a wide dry ditch at the mingled trees and shrubs of the forest. The forest edge ran in an almost mathematically straight line, north and south.

"Now," said Roberts, "we can't just walk into that mess. We've got to find the cleared path we came out on. Is it to the north or south?"

Hammell looked around. "Why didn't we follow our own footprints back?"

Roberts glanced back. In the enormous field, the only irregular feature was their fresh footprints in the soft soil.

Roberts said, "There weren't any footprints near the cache. Whatever cultivates this field must have wiped out the prints." They turned back to the forest.

"Well," said Hammell, "Which way?"

Roberts looked around thoughtfully. "South."

"South it is."

For the next hour-and-a-half, they trudged south, and had just decided to go back north when, in the distance ahead, they saw the open end of the angling track through the forest.

Simultaneously, they saw, far away and straight ahead, a low cloud of dust. Out of this, there speedily resolved a low broad frame, straddling the rows at the edge of the field, with an angled wing thrust out into the wide ditch. The frame was rushing toward them at high speed, suspended above the earth on antigravs, with the low cloud of dust rising behind it.

Hastily they looked around, took half-a-dozen steps toward the center of the field, then saw another dust cloud coming fast behind the first one, and further back, still another cloud of dust.

They whirled, looked back.

Already, the frame loomed larger. It was coming fast.

Roberts plunged toward the broad, dry ditch, rushed across the bottom of it with Hammell close behind, and scrambled up the far bank. A roaring hiss was now audible, and growing louder fast. Breathing hard, Roberts forced himself up the last of the slope into a patch of brush at the forest edge. The brush gave way before them. An instant later, the cultivator roared past.

Wind swept over them, and they looked out through a whirling cloud of dust. "That was close!"

"Sure was. But—"

Suddenly, Roberts grabbed for his sheath knife.

All around them, the brush was unfolding large leathery leaves that swung up to blot out earth and sky. At a touch, the leaves wrapped themselves around Roberts and Hammell, and clung tighter with every movement.

Roberts barely had time to reach his knife. As the leaves wrapped around him, his arms were pinned to his sides down to the elbow. The clinging velvety surface drew snug across his face, tight against his nostrils, and shut out the air. Only from the waist down was he free. He turned, felt a stem draw tight like a stretched cord, reached out with his knife, and cut it. With his free lower left arm, he tore at the big leaf across his face. At once, fresh leaves wrapped snugly around his arm and chest, pinning his arm. He sucked in desperately, bit through the leaf as it pressed into his mouth, then dragged in a breath of air that stopped as abruptly as a slammed door when a new leaf wrapped around his face.

Roberts struggled to concentrate on that sharp knife held in his right hand. He turned slowly, cutting away each stalk as it grew taut. Carefully, he stayed in the same spot, lest he bring himself within reach of fresh leaves. Meanwhile, his need for breath was growing. Already, his chest was straining in a spasmodic effort to draw in air. He cut and turned, cut and turned, then strained desperately to free his left arm. The clinging leaves, slashed loose at the base, reluctantly pulled free, and for an instant, all he could do was drag in great gasps of air.

Hammell, working the same way, managed to free himself a moment later. The two men stood breathing deeply, then cut their way out through the few remaining leaves.

"That's the *eighth* time," said Hammell heavily, "that this planet has almost killed us."

Roberts looked around. "I know. I've had nightmares I liked better than this." Behind them, clouds of dust were blowing into the forest. Atop the bank, the thicket folded its leaves, and the stalks pulled together to give the appearance of a place only sparsely overgrown and easily crossed. As the last big leaves folded out of sight, the rib cage of a large animal came into view, white and smoothly polished, just a few short steps from the edge of the clearing.

Hammell grunted. "There, but for the Grace of—"

"Don't talk too soon. We've still got the forest to get through, and the ship to find."

"That's right."

They found the straight wide path cut by the insects, and holding their guns warily at the ready, they started into the forest. Stretching out in front of them was a patch of devastation that stretched as far as they could see. There was no blade of grass, no tiniest small plant in sight in front of them, but only an occasional tree, stripped leafless and bare. They walked through an eerie silence between clumps of vegetation to right and left, but nothing bothered them. Nothing came near, save a small mouse-like creature that blundered onto the path, looked in both directions, gave a desperate squeak, and vanished back into the undergrowth with desperate kicks of its hind legs.

After a few hours, they found where the horde of insects had first poured into view. In another hour, they found the clearing, and near one side of the clearing, the wrecked tender. The large flattened metal spheroid on its three stubby legs looked like home. They shouted, and a tall lean individual with sandy hair and electric-blue eyes looked out. This was Morrissey, the communications man.

Morrissey beamed and waved as they ran over.

Roberts called, "How are Cassetti and the others?"

"Those technicians we got in touch with the first night dropped down in a grav-skimmer and picked them up. They've got doctors and medicines, and they think every-thing will be all right. But believe me, that bunch was all business. If we hadn't had anything to trade, it would have been no go."

"Could they offer any help getting anybody down from *Orion*?"

Morrissey's smile faded. "They said they didn't have the equipment. They said the City has the equipment, and they'll fight to the death before they go back to the City. What's wrong with the City?"

Roberts and Hammell described their experiences, and Morrissey shook his head in disgust. "Then, the brains to do the repairs are one side of this forest, the equipment is on the other side, and never the twain shall meet?"

"That's it," said Roberts exasperatedly.

"How do we get around that?"

"I don't know."

Morrissey shook his head. "In time, we'll have a ship full of corpses orbiting the planet."

Hammell said, "Even if we somehow fix the tender, and get everybody down here, *then* where are we? We never wanted to get marooned on this planet. The idea of coming here was just to get some repairs done."

Roberts nodded. "Maybe if we could talk to those technicians some more, we could work out something. Have you got the communicator working?"

Morrissey gave an odd laugh. "It's *working*, all right. But it doesn't *communicate*."

Roberts frowned. "What *does* it do?"

"Come on inside," said Morrissey, "maybe you can settle a problem that's been bothering me. The question is, whether or not I've gone nuts."

The communicator's case had been removed, exposing the works, and Morrissey pointed out a timer unit between the set and the power supply.

"I put that timer in there when I started work. I wanted to check the hatches again, and be sure everything was secure before nightfall. I knew if I just started work, I'd forget everything else, so I set the timer to cut off the current and give a long loud ring."

Roberts and Hammell nodded.

Morrissey said, "I got working on this, and saw after a few minutes that it would be no great problem to fix it—just a matter of a few connections that had jarred loose when the set was knocked to the deck. I thought what a sloppy system it was to use these pluggable connections, instead of permanent connections that couldn't come loose. Then I thought that this *was* quick and convenient, though, and handy when you wanted to hook something up temporarily. Then it occurred to me I had plenty of time, and nothing to do, and for the first time in a long time I *could* just fool around if I wanted to. Well, I was visualizing the circuit, and the action of the different parts, and suddenly I wondered what would happen if I fed the current to an interface that's ordinarily left unconnected in this kind of circuit. I made a few adjustments, so I wouldn't wreck anything, and then I tried it. The next thing I knew, the timer went off."

Roberts and Hammell looked blank.

Morrissey paused.

Roberts said "What of it?"

"I'd fallen asleep. I figured I must have been more tired than I'd realized. I checked the ship, and came back, still curious about this circuit. I reset the timer, and switched on the set. The next thing I knew, the timer was going off again, and this time I was picking myself up off the deck. Again I'd fallen asleep. This began to seem peculiar. I checked the ship, came back, cut the current to the interface way down, set the timer for ten minutes and switched on the set. Right away, I wanted to go to sleep. I wanted the worst way to sink deep asleep, sound asleep—and then the timer was going off and I came awake again."

Hammell stared at the circuit.

Roberts frowned. "What did you do then?"

"I cut the current to the interface to the barest trickle. I reset the timer, snapped on the circuit—and yawned. I didn't exactly feel *tired*, but I wanted to go to sleep. I fought it off till the timer went off, then the feeling that I wanted to go to sleep faded away, and I just sat there in a cold sweat."

"And," said Roberts, "you're wondering whether it really happened or you imagined it?"

Morrissey nodded. "That's it."

"Let's try it."

Morrissey bent eagerly over the timer. There was the snap of a switch.

Roberts yawned.

Hammell put his hand to his head, swayed against the nearest bulkhead, massaged his eyes and forehead.

It came to Roberts that he had walked miles and miles today, and miles and miles yesterday, and no wonder he was tired. He was worn out. What he needed, what he wanted, was a long quiet sleep.

Hammell was already stretching out on the deck.

Morrissey was fighting off a yawn.

Roberts turned toward the tender's control room, and its soft comfortable pilot's chair. But it looked a long way away. He didn't want to go all that distance. He wanted sleep *now*, not after a long hike. He wanted to sleep long and deep, and he took a step toward the control room, and then felt the soft cozy deck drifting up toward him as he slipped off into warm sleep, and swirling darkness and sleep.

Something was shaking him violently.

Roberts dizzily opened his eyes. The swirling scene steadied. There was a big face looking down on him, that resolved into Morrissey's face, the electric-blue eyes worried.

"Sir, I'm sorry. I never realized it would hit you so hard."

Roberts remembered the circuit, and pulled himself to his feet.

"Don't blame yourself. Hammell and I were worn out." Roberts' head was throbbing where he'd banged the deck, but that was a minor matter. "You've got a new discovery here. This could be important."

Hammell was bent over the circuit, his expression awed.

Morrissey said, "If only this had happened some other time, instead of down here, with hardly any

equipment to work with."

Roberts looked down at the circuit. "You were able to vary the *current* to the interface. Are there *other* circuit characteristics you can vary?"

"Sure. Until I had witnesses, I was afraid to try it. But let me just mark this, so I know roughly where I was—" Morrissey bent briefly over a variable condenser, straightened, said, "I'd better set the timer for a shorter interval, just in case." Then he twirled a knob, snapped on the set, and—

Roberts felt jolted. He looked at Morrissey angrily.

Morrissey glanced at Hammell, still bent over the set.

"Give me a little room, will you?" snapped Morrissey.

Hammell straightened up. "I'll give you all the room you want."

Roberts became aware of an intolerable lapse in discipline. He said shortly, "Drop it. Both of you."

"Sir," snarled Hammell, "this juice-jockey is trying to shove me around."

Morrissey's eyes flashed. "'*Juice jockey*'?" He cocked his fist.

Somewhere inside of Roberts, there seemed to be a little figure, jumping up and down, crying, "What's happening?"

Aloud, Roberts said with grating emphasis, "That's *enough!* Morrissey!"

Hammell eyed Morrissey's cocked fist. He clenched his own fists.

Roberts glared at them. He would like to smash them *both* in the teeth.

The timer went off.

Roberts' ill-temper evaporated.

Hammell and Morrissey stared at each other foolishly.

Morrissey lowered his fist.

Hammell suddenly laughed, and said, "What have we got here, anyway?"

Morrissey got out a small notebook, and began writing in it. "That's what *I'd* like to know. Let's try something else."

Excited now, and more than a little scared, they tried setting after setting, with the current low and the timer set for less than a minute.

For less than a minute, Roberts looked at Morrissey and Hammell, and despite a fierce struggle to control himself, he wanted to blow their brains out.

Then the timer went off. Morrissey whistled, and tried another setting.

Roberts realized suddenly that his life had been a failure. He wanted money. With enough money, what couldn't a man do? Stacks of crisp green bills seemed to float tauntingly before him. In his mind's eye, he could see piles of gold and platinum bars and soft leather bags of diamonds. He wanted *money*.

Morrissey changed the setting.

Roberts felt a desire for self-sacrifice. What, he asked himself dizzily, could be nobler. With a hard effort, he fought off the desire to offer himself to science for experimental purposes, then an urge to volunteer himself as a human bomb-carrier. Not out of hatred of the enemy. No, not that. Out of love for mankind. Out of—

Morrissey changed the setting.

Now Roberts felt the urgent desire to do right. What mattered most in life was the knowledge that he was doing right. He stood straighter. He asked himself, *Was* he doing right? Suppose—

Morrissey changed the setting.

In his mind's eye, Roberts saw a lovely woman in a closely clinging dress. He saw her move her long legs as she walked toward him, smiled sweetly, and lifted her arms—

Wham!

Morrissey, Hammell, and Roberts hit the switch at the same time.

Hammell grinned. Morrissey swore. Roberts said, "Well, Morrissey, *now* we know what you've got here."

"That's more than *I* can say. What is it?"

"It's a want-generator, that's what it is. A desire-stimulator. And if we can't get a stranglehold on this

planet with it, and lever the population around so we can get that ship repaired, I'll be surprised."

Morrissey blinked. "*How?*"

"Why, what's the cause of the trouble? The people here are destructive, and they're disinterested in work. They hinder, not help. Right?"

"Right."

"Then all we have to do is get them to *want to create*, rather than destroy, and to *want to work*, right? And *here* we have a *want*-generator, that plays the range of human desires like the keys of a piano. Once we find the right settings, where's the problem?"

You're right," said Morrissey. "Here I've been complaining because we happened to find this when we're stuck in this miserable place. It never occurred to me this might get us *out* of here."

"It shouldn't be any great problem" said Roberts. "Let's keep trying till we get all the settings we need."

In the next few hours, they felt one desire succeed another in seemingly endless variety, and then abruptly Roberts was filled with the undiluted urge to achieve.

"That's it!" he said.

"You've hit it," Hammell agreed. "There's one setting."

Morrissey carefully noted it, and went on, until suddenly they had a sensation they'd had before, of eagerly wanting to do something, *make* something, create—

"That's it!"

Hammell nodded. "That gives us what we want. That is, what *they* should want."

"Now," said Roberts, "we've got to find out the range of this device, whether it can broadcast, or whether the set has to be physically present to work. We may have to make other sets—"

"If so, we're hung up," said Morrissey. "We don't have the spares here to make another of these."

"The technicians may have spares."

"Their having them and our getting them are two different things. I had to trade them two guns from the emergency kit, and a lot of ammunition to get them to look after Cassetti, Matthis, and Warner. They'll want something in return for spares, and they're hard bargainers."

Roberts looked at the set thoughtfully. "You don't suppose there's a 'desire to be cooperative and helpful' there, do you?"

"Hm-m-m," said Morrissey. "Let's see." He reached for the timer, and suddenly Roberts had a distinct urge to take poison.

Hammell swore. "That's not it."

Morrissey tried again.

A peculiar murky indefinable longing none of them had experienced before came across.

Morrissey said, "I hope we can find something better than that." He tried again, and again, until at last Roberts said, "Hold it!"

He had never felt more agreeable and obliging in his life.

Hammell sighed. "Right on the nose."

Morrissey noted the setting, then glanced at his watch. "It's getting pretty late. We'd better check again to be sure everything's tight."

Once they checked the tender, Roberts and Hammell again realized how tired they were. While Morrissey eagerly went back to work, Roberts and Hammell went to sleep.

The next morning saw the start of a bout of painstaking experiment. Where the first work had gone smoothly the next steps were maddening.

"Damn it," said Morrissey, "it's just *impossible* to broadcast this signal, or aim it, or focus it. At this rate, we'll have to take the set into the city, and *hide* it there somewhere."

Roberts had another worry. "If we trade with those technicians, we've somehow got to block out our own reception of that generosity signal. Otherwise, we'll probably end up by giving them the set."

Another week crawled by, and then in desperation, they discovered that a supertranquilizer pill, several tins of which were in the emergency chest, not only stopped them from worrying how long the

delay would last, but also solved the problem. It stopped them from feeling any perceptible want or desire, natural or induced, at all. Once they took the pill, they were as good as vegetables for the next four to six hours.

"O.K.," said Roberts. "Now, how are we going to work this?"

Morrissey said, "We'll take apart the want-generator, and make a communicator, then I'll tell the technicians we've got some extra guns, ammunition, protective suits, and so on, to trade. I'll ask for circuit components, and also some things we don't especially want, so we have a little leeway in trading. Before they get here, we'll make the circuit back into a want generator. When they land, I'll take a pill, and turn the want-generator on them."

"We'll need to be very sure it's on the right setting," said Roberts.

Morrissey nodded. "Don't worry about that. I'd probably turn it on low, and then gradually step up the power, so they don't notice it. Meanwhile, you and Ham will have taken pills."

Hammell objected, "The trouble with that is, we won't be able to react right. We're going to act like zombies."

Morrissey thought it over.

"When I set up the meeting, I can say we've been knocking ourselves out, can't think of any solution, and so on. They'll expect us to look depressed."

Roberts nodded. "That ought to help, anyway."

Hammell said, "What about when they leave?"

"Before that, I'll start to cut down the power. After they leave, I'll step it up again, so they don't come to their senses the minute they get out of the clearing. If we work it right, and try to make reasonably decent trades with them, they may never guess a thing."

Roberts nodded. "Just so *they* don't skin *us*."

It was just a few days later that the technicians came, in two medium-sized skimmers. They were bearded, bristling with guns, and gave the impression of watching in every direction at once.

As soon as the skimmers dropped into the clearing, Roberts and Hammell each dutifully chewed up his pill. They'd scarcely swallowed the last gritty bits when a layer of glass seemed to slide down over the world. They could *see* through the glass, but nothing out there really meant anything, ever had meant anything, or probably ever would mean anything. So there was no point getting excited about nothing.

Tranquilized into two-legged vegetables, Roberts and Hammell trudged outside, while Morrissey bent at the set.

The technicians climbed out of their skimmers.

Roberts and Hammell shambled across the clearing. Morrissey dropped out the hatch, and drifted after them.

The technicians stared at them, looking bemused.

"Poor guys," said one.

"Yeah, you can sure see *they've* been clobbered."

"Remember what it was like for us last winter? It's hit them already." Roberts and Hammell listlessly raised a hand in greeting.

A burly giant with a bristling red beard, said, "Ah, fellows, we're all in the same boat. Do we have to *trade* with these poor guys?"

The rest of the men shifted their guns in embarrassment.

"After all," suggested a small wiry technician with a rifle in his hand, a knife on his belt, and a pistol butt protruding from under his armpit, "we're all human."

"Sure, why be greedy?"

Someone mumbled, with a catch in his voice. "They'll have trouble enough, anyway, no matter what *we* can do for them."

Roberts had the impression of looking out through a glass wall, and sensing invisible forces that beat powerfully on the other side.

A technician with a scar down the side of his face, and a tough, no-nonsense cast of countenance, suddenly shut his eyes. Tears ran streaming down his cheeks.

Roberts' brain sluggishly added up two and two. He reached back and shook Morrissey by the arm. "Turn it down."

Morrissey nodded listlessly, and headed back for the tender.

The technicians were now choking, trembling and struggling to keep control of themselves. Roberts said nothing, because the technicians were clearly too choked up to talk.

Morrissey disappeared into the tender.

The red-bearded giant thrust his right hand out, palm up. He began, "*Anything* we can do—"

Roberts, through the dull placidity imposed by the supertranquilizer, sensed a sudden lessening of force outside the glass wall. Suddenly there was no force there at all.

The red-beard frowned. "Within *reason*, of course—"

Another of the technicians wiped his eyes with his sleeve. "After all, *we* have to live, too, you know."

Roberts glanced around.

Morrissey was just coming out of the tender.

The scarred technician said flatly, "Those that are fit to survive, *survive*." He eyed Roberts and Hammell. "Nature weeds out the incompetent."

By now, every eye amongst the technicians was drying fast.

"These supplies weren't easy to get," growled the red-bearded giant. "*If* you have something to trade, we'll be willing to *consider*—"

Morrissey paused, halfway out from the tender, with a strange expression on his face. Then he turned around, and plodded back again.

The small wiry technician shifted his gun around, and alertly watched Morrissey go back into the tender.

"What's *he* doing?"

Roberts struggled to get some kind of idea through the glass wall.

"He . . . he's got indigestion."

Hammell, with a look of painful effort, said carefully, "Can't keep anything down."

"Could be ten-day fever. Has he got spots on the backs of his hands?"

The air outside the glass wall seemed to suddenly thicken again, then get thicker yet by graduated stages.

Tranquilizer or no tranquilizer, it came through to Roberts that Morrissey was botching the job.

Tears were spurting out of the technicians' eyes. The short, wiry technician rushed forward and emotionally offered Roberts his gun. The giant red-beard, weeping uncontrollably, clasped Hammell like a brother. Before Roberts could figure out what to do, he found himself surrounded by piled-up supplies, with the technicians wringing their hands tearfully; and then, apparently unable to bear their emotion, they all piled into one of the skimmers.

"We'll be back! We'll bring you more axes, and seeds, and everything. Just tell us what you need! We really *want* to help!"

The skimmer shot up over the trees, and vanished.

Morrissey, watching at the personnel hatch, faded back inside. A moment later, the air seemed to thicken like glue. Roberts still felt no emotion, but he found it hard to think or move.

Hammell, carrying a gun in each hand, looked stuporously at Roberts.

"Wait till they get out of range—not that it matters, of course."

"Nothing matters."

"No."

Hammell dully picked up more of the supplies. "Probably we ought to take in everything we can carry."

Roberts took an armful, and followed Hammell. Just as they reached the hatch, the swirling thickness outside the glass wall let up.

Out beyond the clearing, there was an outburst of snarling, thrashing noises.

It occurred to Roberts that if the device affected the local animals, there could have been

half-a-dozen predators out there, taking mercy on their prey.

But that was all meaningless. Roberts climbed in, set own his load beside Hammell's, then stood waiting, sunk in blank tranquility. Finally, they roused themselves long enough to go into the control room and sit down, torpid and stupefied, till the pills wore off. By that time, it was starting to grow dark outside, and Roberts and Hammell were asleep, unaware of the opening and shutting of the hatch, and the sound of a pair of feet traveling back and forth past them.

Early next morning, as the first glow of dawn began to light the portholes of the control room, Roberts came awake.

A blaze of light was pouring through the slightly opened door of the general-purpose room between the control room and the inner air lock to the cargo compartment. It was in that general-purpose room that Morrissey was working on the communicator.

Roberts, feeling almost fresh for a change, sat up, stretched, peered at the lighted doorway, and asked himself what Morrissey was doing.

Roberts got up, opened the door wide, and looked in.

A wooden frame, made apparently of odd scraps from the cargo compartment, met Roberts' gaze. On different levels of the frame sat a variety of electrical circuits, connected by loops of wire. Roberts could recognize three separate circuits that looked like the want-generator.

Morrissey straightened, bemused.

"Those technicians brought along a good selection."

Roberts looked at the frame. "What have we got here?"

"Why, I wondered if it would be possible to make two or three of these sets, and get them to reinforce each other. There were more than enough components out there, so I tried it, using very low power, and trying first one set, then two, then three together."

"What happened?"

"Well, with two, I seemed to get less than twice the effect, and with three, there was no effect at all."

"None at *all*?"

"No, it was the same as turning them all off. It occurred to me they might be interfering with each other. I tried gradually stepping up the power on one of the sets, and turning down the others. Nothing noticeable happened. I had them set to create desire for sleep, and I was sure I'd notice that. But nothing happened. While I was mulling this over, there was a buzz from the communicator. I snapped it on, and the voice of one of the technicians snarled, "What kind of gas did you use on our people?"

"I was stupefied," said Morrissey. "I didn't even realize what he was talking about. 'Why,' I said, 'What do you mean?'"

"'You know damned well what I mean.'"

"'No, I *don't*.'" *Then all of a sudden I did know.* I'd been so stupefied by the tranquilizer that I'd done a clumsy job, and they'd sensed it. But I kept my mouth shut, and he said angrily, "'What did you use?'"

"I said, 'Can we help it if we've had so much trouble they were sorry for us?'"

"'Oh, they were, were they? Suppose *you* tell *me* these troubles, while I'm out of range of your gas or whatever it is. Go on. Let's hear it.'"

"Well," said Morrissey, "that gave me a chill. If I couldn't convince him, there was no telling what might happen. And he didn't sound very easy to convince. I could only see one possible way out. It seemed to me that there *had* to be *some* effect from these three circuits. Certainly, they weren't doing anything here. Could they, then, be producing an effect somewhere else? It was worth a try. I started telling him all the trouble we'd had—and meanwhile I varied the current to the three linked sets, and listened for some response.

"I told him all about how the accident happened, how the gravitic field distorted and held the circuit breaker shut till a section of coil burned out and vaporized, and how the next distortions knocked half the storeroom, and the spare gravitor wire, out through the hull. Then I told him what a desolate part of space it happened in.

"Tough,' he said.

"It was obvious I hadn't got through yet. Next, I told him how we jury-rigged the main gravitor, using wire from the tender's gravitor. I told him about all the trouble we had, from then till we got to this planet. I told him how the gravitor had knocked out the ship's communicator, so we had to use the one in the tender, and we couldn't get any response with that. I told him how we rewound the tender's gravitor, came down, and, at the last minute, it malfunctioned, and we missed the spaceport and smashed down in the forest.

"About this time, he said it was too bad we hadn't just fallen into a sun and got it over with quick. I kept readjusting the circuit. I told how Cassetti risked his life to try and fix the tender's gravitor, and how Matthis and Warner tried to save Cassetti, and all three were all but hashed when we hit. I described the trouble we had when the gray cats tried to get us, and when the bats got in here, and the giant thing with the big head, long snout, and battering-ram tail. He said he was getting bored, and hurry it up. All the time, I kept varying the current. In my mind, I had a picture of the want-generator sweeping the surface of the planet, the field moving from place to place as I readjusted the controls. I had an idea how this might work, but was beginning to wonder if this wasn't just wishful thinking.

"Meanwhile, I was telling how you and Hammell trekked all the way to the City, and there wasn't a repair facility there any more. How you came back and the cultivator almost got you.

"And then," I said, 'they jumped out of the way of the cultivator, and a big patch of smother brush unfolded its leaves—'

"He interrupted. 'Shorten up this tiresome tale, will you? I couldn't care less if they fell into a gangbat nest.'

"Well, I said, giving it up, 'that's about it, anyway. They stumbled out of there, came back to the ship along that path the swarm of bugs had made—"

"Say,' he said, 'that *is* too bad, isn't it? They had to come back on a bug trail, because there was no other way.'

"I couldn't figure out if this was sarcasm," said Morrissey, "or sympathy. I sat there holding my breath. I didn't dare change the setting.

"That *is* something,' he said, a funny catch in his voice. 'All that trouble, and now when they try to come back, they've got to come back *on a bug trail*. No wonder the guys wanted to help! Buddy, we're *all* people. We've got to stick together. Why, I'd give you the shirt right off my back, now I see what you've been through. *I never wanted to help anyone so much in my life*. If I can get away, I'll be out there tomorrow, early. I want to help. I'll—'

"He went on like this so it embarrassed me. I started juggling the current to the different circuits, trying to cut it down gradually all around without changing the relationship too much. I'd figured out that it was the *relative* power to the three circuits that probably changed the focus, while the higher the overall power, the greater the effect."

Roberts said eagerly, "Could you check that, too?"

"When I got it cut down far enough, he stopped babbling, and when I cut it down further yet, he finally just sounded sympathetic. I told him we'd gladly trade for the goods we'd gotten, and I said how grateful we were for their help and sympathy, and we'd cheerfully pay for the help, but he wouldn't even think of it. I was in a sweat by the time I got through talking to him."

"Then," said Roberts, "we can use the thing *from a distance*."

"The only trouble is, we don't know what it's aimed at. We only know the right setting to hit the *technicians*. And once they should move, we'd lose them."

"Never mind that. They left one of their skimmers for us. Hammell and I can go up in it—one of us can keep a lookout for flying pests, and the other can guide it. It has its own communicator. We can go to different places, and you can try different settings. When we feel the effect, we'll say a few words to let you know where we are. When we have enough of the settings plotted on a rough map, we should start to understand how to set the device to aim it anywhere."

Morrissey beamed. "And *then* we can go to work on the city."

They spent the next few days making a map, and plotting the settings that induced wants when they hovered close to any given territory. The city, they charted at night, moving low over the darkened buildings, lit from below by the heavily shielded streetlights. Meanwhile, Morrissey developed a method for focusing the device more accurately, so as to concentrate the effect or spread it over a wide region. Then they decided that they were ready to go to work in earnest.

"You can see," said Roberts, studying the completed chart, "that we can hit any or all of the city with one exception. The computer itself is apparently unreachable."

"Stands to reason," said Hammell. "Desires are *emotional*. The closest thing that computer has to an emotion is its set of built-in directives."

"So," said Roberts, "we have to work through the *people*, not the computer. Now, the technicians left the City for exactly the same reasons that the computer has been driven to supplying only bare necessities. The people are destructive, and uncooperative. What we have to do is to correct that, right?"

"Right," said Hammell.

Morrissey took out a sheet of paper with a list of settings. He read: "Desire for achievement, desire to excel, desire to cooperate, desire to make friends, desire to learn, desire to work hard, desire to help others. Once we get started, that computer will have the easiest time it's had since it was made."

"Then," said Roberts, "it ought to be possible for the technicians to go back. And once we get the technicians back there, and the populace cooperating, *then* there should be no trouble getting the tools made to repair the ship."

"Q.E.D.," said Hammell cheerfully.

"When shall we start?" said Morrissey.

Roberts said briskly. "Right now. Why not set the want-generator on 'desire for achievement,' and give the whole city a good jolt for the rest of the day?"

Hammell nodded. "They certainly could use it."

"O.K.," said Morrissey. He set up "desire for achievement" on the generator, and snapped it on. "No use making a simple thing complicated. After we let them want to achieve for a while, then we'll hit them with 'desire to work hard,' and then 'desire to learn.' We'll have them snapped into line in short order."

Hammell grinned. "Do you suppose we'll notice much difference if we take the skimmer up late this afternoon, and look them over through the glasses?"

Morrissey nodded. "Should."

"I don't see why not," said Roberts. "They'll doubtless be out cleaning those streets. We might even see them carrying off parts of the dumps to get that out of town."

Morrissey said, "We might be able to see without even going up in the skimmer. Some of the components the technicians left look to me like they'll work the 3-V on the comset here. All I have to do is put them in, set up for one-way viewing so we don't get snooped by mistake, and—*Voila!*—we can pick up the City's own 3-V news broadcast."

Roberts nodded. "O.K. Set it up."

"Good as done," Morrissey said.

Roberts and Hammell spent the rest of the morning hunting from the skimmer, and came back with an animal like an antelope, and two smaller animals, like large wood-chucks. The afternoon, they spent strengthening the cargo section, and refitting its hatch. By now, the big cats had learned to be wary of the tender, and the rest of the daytime carnivores were in awe of the strange three-legged beast. But the nighttime animals appeared to be in awe of nothing.

While Roberts and Hammell worked on the tender, Morrissey, in the general-purpose room, could be heard whistling cheerfully.

"O.K.," said Roberts, when they had the big cargo hatch tight, and the sun was dropping toward the horizon, "want to take a look at the city?"

"Sure."

Roberts called cheerfully to Morrissey. "Want to come along? We're going to take a look from the skimmer."

"Go ahead. I've almost got the screen done."

Roberts and Hammell got their guns, climbed into the skimmer, and watched the clearing drop away below. The ground flashed past, forest giving way suddenly to neat rows of crops. Far off to the south, a dust cloud crawled across the ground, and they realized it was the cultivator coming north again.

"Good to be up here," said Hammell.

Roberts glanced around, to see no flying predators nearby. "It sure is." He pointed up, toward *Orion*, orbiting unseen far overhead. "And let's hope we're up there again pretty soon."

Just then, far ahead, the City rose up over the horizon, and seemed to flow swiftly toward them.

Eagerly, Roberts raised the high-powered glasses.

The City sprang closer, clouds of smoke pouring up near its center. Frowning, Roberts adjusted the magnification.

The scene visibly enlarged, and grew clearer as they rushed toward it.

In the streets, rioting mobs battled lines of roboid police.

Hammell said eagerly, "Have they accomplished much? Does the City look improved?"

Roberts swallowed.

Hammell said, "Let's see."

Speechless, Roberts handed over the glasses.

Hammell stared through them at the city. His mouth opened and shut.

Roberts swung the skimmer further north, toward the center of the upheaval.

Hammell handed back the glasses.

A second and closer look corrected Roberts' impressions. It wasn't a riot. It was a war. The police robots were being overturned, and smashed with sledge-hammers and lengths of pipe. The humans were steadily forcing their way into the center of the city.

If the roboid police were destroyed, there would be nothing to protect the computer. If the computer were destroyed, the ship would *never* be repaired.

"Hang on," said Roberts. He whipped the skimmer around and streaked for the forest.

Hammell said, "Did Morrissey set it up wrong?"

"I don't know. But God help us if that mob wrecks the computer."

The sun was sinking toward the horizon. To their left, a flying cloud of roughly hand-sized gangbats appeared, and turned with a flash of white teeth to intercept the skimmer. The skimmer pulled ahead, streaked along over the wide cleared lane through the forest, then Roberts located the clearing and dropped down beside the tender's cargo hatch. A few moments later, they were inside, pulled the skimmer in and locked the hatch.

In the personnel section of the tender, the communicator was turned up high.

". . . Now being driven back along the main avenues leading from Planetary Control. Again we urge all citizens to remain indoors and avoid joining in this disturbance. Unnecessary loss of life can be avoided only if all law-abiding citizens remain in their assigned quarters . . . "

Roberts and Hammell climbed the ladder to the air lock, stepped in, pushed open the inner door, and found Morrissey in a glare of light, staring at something out of view from the door. Roberts stepped forward. By the communicator screen, a pair of whirling hypnotic spirals seemed to briefly catch his gaze, drawing one eye slightly to the right and the other to the left, till a scrambled chaos of light and shadow on the screen suddenly took on depth and sprang out into the room, and now Roberts was looking at a fleeing mob, their discarded weapons rolled over by police robots sweeping in rigid lines down the long straight avenues from the center of the city.

Morrissey said shakily, "That was *close*. If I'd been an hour later getting that 3-V fixed, I wouldn't have known what was going on till too late."

"What happened?" said Roberts. "They acted like they were set up to 'want to revolt.'"

"I checked that," said Morrissey. "What I had set up was 'desire for achievement,' all right. What we

overlooked was, what *kind* of achievement? Suppose they think the greatest achievement would be to *overthrow the computer and the robots?*"

Hammell turned to Roberts, "Remember what they yelled when they threw the bottles at the maintenance robots? '*Kill the mechs!*'"

"Ye gods." Roberts glanced at Morrissey. "What did you do to stop them?"

"Set the want-generator for 'desire to give up,' and beamed it at them, full power. Naturally, the computer and the roboid police weren't affected, so in almost no time, they had things under control. I've been cutting down the power since then."

Hammell swore. "There goes *that* setting. We won't get much help from 'desire for achievement.'"

Roberts was frowning. "It's worse than that. It means we don't know how they'll react to *any* desire."

Morrissey nodded. "Look at this." He hit the "Replay" button, and a recorded view appeared, showing an apartment house door coming slowly open. A crafty individual with a knife eased out, carrying a cord, on which was strung about a dozen odd objects. As he peered around, something flicked into his neck from the side, he clawed at his throat, staggered to the sidewalk, and a moment later a second figure greedily took possession of the string, bent over the fallen figure to take it by one ear, pulled out a knife, briefly tested its edge with a thumb—"

Morrissey hit the "Replay" button.

Black smoke poured out of a building. A set of scurrying figures ran past carrying a torch, sprinted down the block, hurled the torch through a window, threw half-a-dozen bottles in after it, and dove into the gutter. A yellow flash and flame roared out the window, to climb high up the side of the building.

"Accomplishment," said Morrissey dryly. "Collect ears, burn buildings, smash the town to bits."

Roberts snapped the switch, to see what was happening now.

At once, a mob appeared, racing in full flight down a street where no roboid police were anywhere in sight. Screams of terror mingled with the blare of loudspeakers:

"Be calm! *You are in no danger!* No punishment is intended for those who took part in this disturbance!"

Someone screamed. "They're after us!"

The loudspeaker boomed. "Be calm!"

Someone screamed.

"HERE THEY COME!"

Roberts glanced at Morrissey. "Better turn that thing down."

"I've *already* got it turned down almost all the way."

On the screen, the mob was running so fast that anyone who hesitated was immediately trampled underfoot.

"The trouble," said Morrissey, "is that once they get going, they go faster and faster all by themselves. They build up a kind of inertia all on their own."

The communicator was saying, "This view is typical of the streets in a twenty-mile ring around the Planetary Control Center. All citizens are urged to remain indoors. Repeat, all citizens are urged—"

Roberts said, "We've got to stop it."

"What would you suggest?" asked Morrissey.

"How about 'desire to fight'? That ought to nullify the panic."

Hammell nodded. "They can't be scared and mad at the same time."

Morrissey didn't say anything, but glanced at a list of settings tacked on the want-generator frame, then bent over it carefully. He straightened and glanced at the screen.

The screaming mob rounded a corner and there was another terrified mob coming from the other direction. They fled headlong straight into each other, hit like two avalanches in collision, and were strewn all over street and sidewalks by the impact. They then suddenly looked furious, and sprang to their feet.

"*Quick!*" shouted Roberts. "Shut it off!"

"Done," said Morrissey.

On the screen, the mingled remnants of the two mobs waded into each other savagely.

"For—" Roberts looked on, speechless.

"It's *started*," said Morrissey, "so it *goes on by itself*. Each one of them saw someone else glaring at him. That was on account of our want-generator here. We turned that off. But already, they were swinging at each other. And the punches connected. Well, what would *you* do? Now they've got *real* reasons to be mad. You want me to set it up for 'desire to flee' again?"

"No. This is just one scene. For all we know, on other streets they're still fighting and running at the same time. Set it up for 'desire to sleep.' I don't see what harm *that* can do."

On the screen, the combatants gradually seemed to run down. They looked around, yawning.

"Quick!" said Roberts. "Shut it off!"

"Off," said Morrissey. "I'm getting quick at turning this thing off."

Hammell said, "Why not leave it on. Get them quieted down, and—*Oh*."

Fire was crawling forward up the block, and now burst out the windows fronting on the nearest street.

"I was afraid," said Roberts, "they'd get caught in the fire."

"This disgraceful riot," the communicator was saying, "has caused damage that may not be repaired for years. Your city administration, human and roboid, will attempt to rectify the situation as rapidly as possible. But any improvement will be contingent upon your cooperation. This upheaval has cast doubt upon many fundamental beliefs firmly held in the past, and in future it may be necessary for your administration to use stronger methods to maintain law and order. It is fervently hoped, however, that—"

"Shut it off," groaned Roberts.

Morrissey reached over and snapped the switch.

"Great space," said Hammell. "*All* we did was beam 'desire for achievement' at them for a few hours. How did all this mess come about?"

"Obviously," said Morrissey, "their idea of achievement just wasn't what we had in mind."

"Sure, but that isn't what I mean. Look, it was only a *little time*. A few hours, that's all. How did a full-fledged revolution get going *in that length of time*?"

Roberts shook his head. "What's the big problem in getting anything changed? Creating *desire* for the change. To get a reform pushed through, for instance, there has to be a lot of argument just to get people headed in the same direction. With *this* device, we may get through that stage in a few minutes."

"Only," said Morrissey, "we don't know what will happen till we've done it."

"The trouble," said Hammell, "is that they just aren't *educated*. If they were educated, they'd want exactly the same things *we* want. Let's set up 'desire to study.' We've got that, haven't we? *Sure* we have. I remember."

Dubiously, Morrissey said, "I don't know. It seems to me—"

"Yes, we *have*, I remember when we hit it. All at once, I got an urge to study circuits, memorize formulas—"

"Yes," said Morrissey, "I *know* we've got 'desire to study' on the list. *Sure* we can hit them with that. But then what? I've had enough of being sorcerer's apprentice for a while."

"What harm could it possibly do?"

"I don't know. But that doesn't prove it *won't* do harm."

"The trouble," said Roberts, "is that we just aren't used to this thing yet. We need more practice. This is like stepping out into space for the first time, when you've grown up on a planet. The thing is strange. But that doesn't mean you won't master it, with practice."

Morrissey looked slightly encouraged. "It *is* true that this is the first time we've used it."

"Sure," said Hammell. "We were bound to have trouble."

"But," said Roberts, "already we're getting used to it. We know, for instance, that the effect builds up a lot faster than we thought. And we also know that, once started, there's a sort of inertia—the thing tends to keep going by itself."

"Well," said Morrissey, "when you put it that way—maybe things aren't as bad as they looked. But I think we'd better lay off for a while, anyhow. I'm about done in."

Roberts nodded. "They're about done in in that city, too."

"But *tomorrow*," said Hammell, "we can start educating them."

Early the next morning, they tuned in the city. The scene on the 3-V looked exactly like what it was—the morning after a small war. Roboid fire-fighting equipment battled fires in buildings and smoldering dumps, while first-aid crews shunted riot victims into big many-wheeled ambulances that rolled away with a dozen patients at a time. Whole buildings, and long stretches of street and park, were like mountains of white foam, but more fires still burned, and the prostrate forms in the streets plainly numbered in the hundreds, if not thousands.

"*Whew,*" said Morrissey, glancing from the 3-V to the want-generator. I don't know. I'm almost afraid to touch this thing."

"Don't worry about that," said Hammell, "a little education will straighten everything out."

"How do we know they can get anything to study? Does the place have a library?"

"It's bound to," said Hammell. "Come on. Let's get on with it."

With visible reluctance, Morrissey turned to the want-generator. Then he shrugged, glanced at the list of settings, and got to work.

Hammell glanced at Roberts. "I wish they'd had something like this when *I* was in school."

Roberts nodded absently. He was starting to have doubts about this approach. "How long is this going to take? Education is great, but it's kind of a long-range proposition. We want to get off this planet some time in the foreseeable future."

"Well," said Hammell, "we worked up a small war in less than a day."

Morrissey straightened. "There we are. Now, what do we do? Shall we all watch it at once, or should we set up a system of watches?"

Hammell shrugged. "Why not let it work for an hour or so? 'A watched pot never boils.'"

"No," said Morrissey. "It doesn't boil *over*, either."

Roberts said, "I don't see how it could do any *quick* damage. Suppose Hammell and I work for a while on the game we caught yesterday? If you want, you can keep watch on the 3-V."

Morrissey nodded. "What happened yesterday makes me uneasy."

"Nothing bad," said Hammell positively, "can possibly come out of education."

Morrissey visibly readied a sharp reply.

Roberts poured oil on the waters. "Probably nothing will happen, but there's no harm being on the safe side. Let's go see if anything got in last night."

Hammell nodded, and went along with Roberts into the cargo compartment.

"Well," he said, "we should have fresh meat pretty soon. Nothing got in here last night."

They examined the game they'd caught the previous day, bled, gutted, and then hung up till they had time to skin it. Then they got out their knives.

An hour later, their knives were blunted, and their hands sore.

Hammell growled, "It couldn't be harder if it were frozen."

The stiff skin, held to the meat by tough membranes, gave way an inch at a time.

"*Whew,*" said Roberts. "No wonder those technicians seemed so ugly. Probably everything they've got only came after a struggle."

Hammell nodded. "Or maybe they got that way from *eating the meat.*"

"That's a thought." Roberts eyed the animal with calculating gaze. "We've got to figure it out somehow. Those emergency rations were meant for a whole crew, but they won't last forever."

"Yeah. Well, if we keep at it—"

From the other end of the tender came Morrissey's voice.

"Ah, for the love of . . . Well, GREAT HOLY LEAPING . . . "

Without a word, Roberts and Hammell jumped up, and headed at a run for Morrissey and the 3-V set.

"Just listen to this," said Morrissey.

". . . will be done," the communicator was saying, "in order to supply suitable study materials. We repeat, however, that books, films, spools, and exhibits on such subjects as shoplifting, explosives,

safe-cracking, mental-suggestion, seduction, death rays, hypnotism, aphrodisiacs, sabotage, secret jujitsu blows, and undetectable murder methods are forbidden under a law which has just been enacted. However, if anyone wishes to learn about anything else, the necessary materials will be provided, following due and careful consideration of the request."

Hammell sagged against the bulkhead.

Roberts shook his head. "*Another* zero."

Morrissey had an odd smile on his face. "What next?"

"First," said Roberts, "we don't get discouraged. We've got to keep trying—"

"Sure," said Morrissey. "If once you don't succeed, try, try again. If twice you don't succeed, try, try again. If three times you don't succeed—"

Roberts said, "What do you say I take the next turn at this?"

"Anything so I don't have to watch any more of it. What are you going to try?"

Hammell said uneasily, "I know the last one didn't turn out, but I've got another idea."

Morrissey smiled. "Sure."

Hammell thrust out his chin.

Roberts said, "Try it. If we're going to get out of here, we've got to get *some* kind of improvement started. Just watch it."

"I'll watch it," said Hammell grimly. "You go ahead."

Morrissey said, "It's all yours. I'm going on vacation, starting now."

"Bring your knife with you," said Roberts. "I hope it's sharp."

Roberts and Morrissey had been wrestling with the local variety of antelope for the better part of two hours, when a stream of incredible profanity burst out on them from the other section of the ship. They sprinted for the air lock.

". . . Miserable, brainless, incorrigible *cretins*," Hammell was snarling. He glanced around at Roberts. "*Look at this*. I set up 'desire to work.'"

Standing out from the screen, in realistic three-dimensional solidity, was a small crowd with hammers, pipes, and crowbars. As they moved back, it was possible to see that they were crowded around a half-disassembled police robot. Proudly, they took out gears, shafts, and small electric motors, and divided them up amongst themselves.

". . . sort of activity," the communicator was saying, "will not be tolerated, nor will further removal of paving blocks, doors and window frames, or lengths of gas or water line. Your law-enforcement agency orders you to cease and desist from further demolition, remodeling, and private unauthorized construction. Strict penalties will be imposed . . . "

"That does it," said Hammell.

"Well," said Roberts, "we've only started—"

"O.K., *you* try it." Hammell went out the air lock. Morrissey lost no time following him.

Roberts found himself alone, eyeing first the want-generator, and then the sight of a weird structure, built of torn-up paving blocks, that was rising in the middle of a street, blocking the two center lanes.

"*Whew*," said Roberts. He went out into the control room, sat down in the control seat, tilted it back, and just let his mind drift. A few ideas came into his field of consciousness. How about 'desire to do right'? But that depended on what anyone thought was right. How about 'desire for progress'? Roberts didn't think he and Morrissey and Hammell had hit on that setting yet, but even if they did, what would that produce? Whose *idea* of progress? How about 'desire for religion'? His mind presented him with a picture of devotees hurling babies into the flaming idol.

Roberts groaned, lost the thread of his thoughts, fell into a kind of stupefied daze, and emerged thinking, "Obviously, one man can't figure this out. It will take *everyone* to do it."

He woke up abruptly to ask himself what this meant.

Then suddenly he sat up. He swung his legs over the edge of the tilted control seat, and balanced there, hanging tight to the idea.

Everyone has got to do it.

Do what?

Figure it out.

How can that be?

Everyone will have to want to think.

Without *wanting* to, they won't do it, and every other desire will lead to a mess.

Roberts got up, frowning, and walked out to look at the list tacked by the want-generator. Halfway down was the notation: "Desire to meditate, consider, think things through."

From the other part of the ship, he could hear heavy breathing as Hammell and Morrissey wrestled with the tough hide.

Roberts looked at the notation again, then studied the linked want-generators. Carefully, he disconnected one from the others, adjusted it to the proper setting, and turned it on, using low power.

At once, he had a strong insistent desire to think things over. What did life mean? Did what he was doing make sense? How—

Roberts carefully cut the power further.

"Hey," came Morrissey's voice. "What are we using *knives* for?"

"Agh!" said Hammell. "How could we be so stupid? What we need for this beast are hatchets. Wait a minute."

There were rapid footsteps, then a moment later, there was a *whack* and a grunt. "Ah, that's better. *Now* we've got a chance."

Roberts connected the want-generator back into the larger circuit, and considered it carefully.

What *was* the chief difference between men, anyway, except that some men thought more and deeper than others, and put the thoughts into action?

Carefully, Roberts adjusted the want-generator.

One hand on the switch, he asked himself, "Is 'desire to think' the cure-all? Anyway, it's one of the ingredients, and probably the one that's missing. They've got plenty of experience. But is it all such one-sided experience that they'll end up with the *wrong conclusions*? Then what?"

Exasperated, Roberts paused to set the power lower yet, and threw the switch.

Then he went out into the air lock, and called Morrissey.

Morrissey came over, entered the hatch, and followed Roberts through the air lock, to hastily glance at the 3-V. Nothing was visible save a few people wandering around with looks of vague disquiet, as if they had just remembered that they wanted to do something, but what was it?

Morrissey looked at the want-generator to see if it was on, blinked in surprise, and studied the setting.

"'Desire to meditate, consider, think things through.' Why didn't I think of that?"

Roberts shook his head. "It won't work. Count on it. It looked great a minute ago. But it's not enough."

"At least, they aren't tearing the place to pieces."

"No, but we've got to work in some other wants and desires, or they aren't going to accomplish anything, either. Let's let 'desire to think' run for a while, then very carefully we can switch to another signal, maybe 'desire to improve,' and see what happens. If some kind of mess starts up, we can go back to 'desire to think' again."

Morrissey began to look excited. "That might work, at that."

"O.K., let's give them a vacation for a few hours, then start hitting them with 'desire for sleep.' They'll be in better shape to think straight tomorrow if they get plenty of sleep tonight."

"Good idea. Swell, we'll do that."

That night, the roboid police patrolled in vain. Not one crime was committed, anywhere in the city. All the humans were asleep.

The next morning, around 6:15, the people of the city began to wake up. Everything went along normally until around 9:00 a.m., when an insistent urge to think things over began to seize hold of them.

The roboid police were now unemployed till noon, when the inhabitants stopped frowning in thought long enough to eat. Activity picked up to normal until 1:00 in the afternoon, when gradually everyone began feeling a progressively stronger urge to think things over. This went on until 5:00 p.m., when the populace gradually began to lose interest, stretched, and felt a desire for physical exercise. The roboid police, who had wheeled vainly up and down the long empty streets all afternoon, now suddenly got their whole day's workout in twenty minutes. The populace chose to take their exercise by bombarding the police with bottles, trash, and broken-up chunks of paving. When the furious twenty minutes came to an end, at precisely 5:20, the populace started to lose interest, and drifted back into the buildings, where they thought things over until around six-thirty. Then they began to want something to eat and things came back to comparative normal until around 9:00 p.m. when everyone began to yawn. By 9:30 the human part of the city was asleep.

All that night, the roboid police had nothing to do but travel up and down the empty streets.

"Now," said Hammell, "this is more like it."

Morrissey beamed. "We're starting to get the hang of this thing."

Roberts, conscious of having originated the idea, modestly said nothing.

The next day went along the same way, until 6:00 p.m., when Roberts shut down operations till 9:00.

"It's working," said Hammell. "You can see an improvement in their appearance."

"That sleep helps," said Morrissey.

"Not only that, they *look* thoughtful."

"What we're doing ought to really uplift this place," Morrissey agreed.

Roberts basked, and remained silent.

<Break>

There was a jarring buzz from the communicator.

Morrissey sat up. "Who might *that* be?"

"Probably the technicians," said Hammell.

"Leave the visual transmission off," said Roberts, sitting up. Morrissey nodded. "How about visual *reception*?"

"O.K. by me."

Morrissey snapped on the communicator.

The three-dimensional image of Kelty, assistant-chief of the City's law-enforcement department sprang into view. Kelty looked exhausted.

"O.K., you win, Roberts."

Roberts looked blank.

"*Roberts*," said Kelty. "Do you hear me?"

"I hear you."

"I'm throwing in the sponge. You'll have your repairs as soon as we can get the shop set up."

"You said that couldn't be done."

"The events of the last few days have given the computer some new data to work on. That uprising came within a hairbreadth of success. The computer now knows it can be destroyed. One of the computer's built-in directives is that it safeguard itself, so long as the resulting actions aren't inimical to the long-term welfare of the populace. That directive is now brought into operation."

"I see. But why call me?"

"I've been thinking things over for the last couple of days. Believe me, I haven't thought as much in most years as I've thought in the last couple days. The thing is perfectly obvious. First, there's the worst upheaval we've ever had on this planet. Following this, we have the most fantastic set of exasperating petty-sabotage operations, in turn followed by utter silence. Then, there is one concentrated burst of violence, followed again by silence. We have this two days in a row."

On the 3-V, Kelty shook his head. "By no stretch of the imagination could a thing like this come about by *accident*. This is a demonstration of control that stuns the mind. Control by whom? The most searching investigation, using surveillance devices all over the City, reveals not the slightest evidence of how it's done. So we're blocked there. But who *could* provide the leadership for a thing like this? Only

the technicians, or complete outsiders. I happen to know that the technicians are in no position to do it. With them, in that wilderness, it's touch-and-go.

"Now then," said Kelty, "where does this leave us? We have the following events: You and your cargo-control officer present yourselves to the City government, requesting repairs. You are refused. A couple weeks go by, and someone masterminds an attack that all but destroys the entity that refused you help. Following this, there is a demonstration that someone is exercising nearly absolute control over the populace. All I can say is, I'm sorry I was so slow to catch on. I've put the problem to the computer in the light of these facts, and it is prepared to rebuild the Class II repair facility at once, especially if you'll hold down the destructiveness of the populace until the work is done."

Roberts waited until he was reasonably sure he had control of his voice. "Kelty, you understand that I don't admit interfering in the internal affairs of this planet?"

Kelty nodded glumly.

"However," said Roberts, "from what you've told me, and from what we've seen watching the 3-V, it does seem that this destructiveness you speak of ought to die down for long enough to get the repair facility completed."

Kelty sighed in relief. "Consider it done. Listen, Roberts—"

"Yes?"

"I don't know who you *really* are, or what are your intentions. With such power as you've demonstrated, obviously you're far more than the captain of a cargo ship. I don't ask you to admit that. All I say is this: If you decide to fit this planet into your plans, just *tell me what you want done*. Is that all right, Roberts?"

"I hear you," said Roberts, fighting to keep his voice even.

"That's all I ask," said Kelty. "I'm sorry it took me so long to catch on."

The three-dimensional image faded out.

Roberts turned off the communicator.

Morrissey said, in a surprised voice, "That's it. That's what we've been trying for."

Hammell said hesitantly, "You know, he's right. With this device, we could exercise enormous power." He paused. "But, of course, we wouldn't want to."

"Of course not," said Roberts, scowling.

"It would be selfish," said Morrissey.

They dropped the subject, but it hung in the air afterward.

The days till now, having been filled with trouble and danger, had crept past a minute at a time. The following days, filled with success, went by in a flash. Suddenly the repair facility was done, the special tools made, the repairs finished, and the three injured men were on their way back to the tender. Roberts, Hammell, and Morrissey disassembled the want-generator, and stood watching the city on the 3-V.

"Well," said Hammell, "believe me, we *earned* those repairs."

On the screen, the people had changed in a way that was hard to pin down, but that came across as a marked increase in self-respect and self-reliance.

Morrissey said exasperatedly, "The planet's still a mess, though. Look there."

A group of youths stalked past, four abreast, wearing armbands marked with triple thunderbolts. They were neat, trim, and confident, the rest of the citizens hastened to get off the sidewalk as they approached.

A roboid policeman cruised by, plainly uncertain just what to do about this phenomenon.

"*Somewhere*," said Morrissey, "there must be someone in that city who did a lot of thinking—about just how much power he could get, with the right organization."

Hammell nodded. "Kelty's going to have a great time when that outfit gets going."

Roberts was frowning at the screen. He could sense what was coming. Morrissey and Hammell both had a feeling of dissatisfaction. The job wasn't done yet.

Hammell said, "We've all got accumulated leave coming. I was wondering—"

Morrissey was frowning at the screen. "That's a thought. We ought to be able to *finish* this."

Hammell and Morrissey glanced questioningly at Roberts. Something told Roberts that they were not asking his opinion as to *whether* they should come back. They were asking if *he* wanted to come back with them.

Kelty's last comment occurred to Roberts. Kelty thought some gigantic cosmic plan was afoot. But Roberts and the others had merely been driven here by bad luck, and the want-generator was just a device they found handy to help them get away.

Roberts paused, as his memory played back this last thought, and then his perspective shifted.

The steam engine was once just a device that people found handy to pump water out of mines.

The airplane had been only a device that could hold a man off the ground for fifty-nine seconds, and in the process carry him not quite three hundred yards.

The spaceship was once just a device that could lift an experimental animal into orbit for a few days.

It was merely that kind of device that the three of them had stumbled on.

Why get excited about a thing like that?

Roberts was dizzy with a sudden vision that flashed into his mind, and as suddenly was gone.

Morrissey and Hammell were still looking at him questioningly.

Roberts waited a moment, to be sure his voice could be natural.

Then he cleared his throat.

"O.K.," he said.