

There exists, first, a class of statements dealing with events which, to the best of present knowledge, appear objectively true, and, second, a class dealing with such various public beliefs as have acquired among the multitude the same force as members of the first class. The duty of an official dealing with the public, therefore, is usually to adjust matters in such a way that events objectively within the scope of the first class are made to appear events within the scope of the second. As the multitude immovably believes that it is primarily fixed upon truth—perhaps the most usual of the second class of statements—its belief may not be denied—nor, as a rule, can this mythical belief serve as a basis for action in the objective world.

The *Public Notes* of Isidor Norin
(Minister for the Dichtung, c. 2300 A. D.)

CAPITAL COMPLEX:

CAPITAL CITY:

1500 H., 27 MAY 2113

"If we're ever going to establish a self-sustaining colony we have to support it now; that ship has to go out."

Freeman looked at the round, red, decisive face of Liam Harcourt and sighed. A meeting of the Council, even an informal one, was far from the best place to give Harcourt a lesson in the elementary rules of dealing with human beings—if, after all, there were any such rules. But the Minister for Public Order had to be sat on—an imperative at least as insistent as Harcourt's own *that ship has to go out*, and as important. More: he had to be made to understand. The damned fool had, as of May 2113, the ear of the emperor, and a good deal of influence with Dace and the rest of the Interplanetary Flight people as well; and neither Walther IV, nor the respected Dr. Dace, was the sort of paragon, it appeared, of whom Dall Freeman dreamed: a man immune to irrelevant personal influence. Rule one, perhaps: there are no paragons.

However: "I see," he said, as mildly as possible. No minister present showed the least surprise at the tone. It had been a long time, Freeman supposed, since he had trained himself into Old-Mildness-Whenever-Possible, and though recognizable outbreaks of the old Unreconstructed Bastard occurred, he took as a minor triumph, all in all, that the new character had become accepted as—quite normal. Quite predictable. "The ship has to go out," he went on in the same tone. "We all see that much, Liam. But it cannot go out this week. And there seems no way whatever of arguing with that limitation."

Harcourt made a sound two-thirds of the way from a cough toward a dog's wet bark. "I've heard quite a lot of argument with it," he said, and sent a fast, heavy look around the Council table.

Prater Shaw blinked behind his enormous imitation-ancients' spectacles, and leaned forward as if he were eager for his cue. "Oh, *scientists*," he said, with immense high-tenor scorn. Behind the facade of Old Mildness-Whenever-Possible, the Unreconstructed Bastard began to curse rapidly, steadily and explosively. "They're not *practical* men, Lee," Prater went on, as if he were saying something totally new. "Surely you know that. They just don't understand the way most people think, that's all. And we have to take that into account the very first—"

"Most people," Harcourt said—a trombone interrupting an English-horn solo—"don't think. And I won't bother bandying idiocies even with a Minister for . . . what's the new title? . . . Travel and Communications."

Freeman forced himself to interrupt the Unreconstructed Bastard's picturesque, if silent, soliloquy. "We don't really need to fight about this, you know, between ourselves." The four other ministers present helped out with a background mutter of agreement; and Prater, of course, with several more blinks, chimed in.

"Oh, I had no *intention*—"

"Yes," Harcourt said dully, "we know that. You seldom have." And, while Prater was apparently

sorting that one out for possible insults, the big red-faced man went on. "I don't give twenty credits for the opinions of most people. In a matter like this, they have no competence at all. The decision has to be left to technical men—to experts, if you like the word."

Freeman sighed again. "Would you want to tell that to 'most people'?" he asked.

"The public," Harcourt spat, "has no competence in the matter!"

"Very well," Freeman said, a little weariness showing through; he had been fighting a single battle, on the same terms, for a week and a half, and was inclined to think boredom the chief terror of war.

"Explain it all to them—tell them they are not competent."

"They wouldn't agree! They wouldn't *understand*—"

"Exactly," Freeman said, still in his softest tones. "And they wouldn't even agree to the parts they did understand; they'd like none of it." Perhaps a small victory in the continuing war occurred; only Prater—thinly eager—and Harcourt—turning from red to purple-decisive—showed any interest at all. Neutrality was an advantage to anyone who knew how to use it, as it nearly always was. "The only difficulty," Freeman went quietly on, "is that, unless someone re-invents the ancient fuel and firing methods in a great hurry, we will have to go on with our own techniques. Which involve a single, inalterable exhaust speed, and—therefore—a single, inalterable track for the *Roubins* to follow. The experts, Liam, have been through all of this for us, in testimony and otherwise, and their figures are scarcely questionable now. It's simple enough: exactly one point eight years, plus a few-odd days and hours, elapse between one trip and the next. Given only one ship speed and only one Earth-Mars track, we can send one ship every—well, call it every twenty-one months. If we pass this one, we wait for twenty-one months, and so does Thoth. And Thoth isn't even *that* self-sustaining, not yet."

"We know all this," Harcourt said. "Why don't you—"

But boredom was a weapon for both sides. "Liam," Freeman said, "after ten days of talk I have no idea at all what anyone knows. I respond to what you say; but I've got to lay a ground of some sort here."

"Now—"

"Please," Freeman said, even more gently. "Thoth isn't self-sustaining. That's why the *Roubins* is needed. Thoth won't wait twenty-one months; they'll start right back here long before then, probably via the Moon—ours, or one of theirs."

"Exactly," Harcourt said, as if he'd won something. *A prize for bullheaded idiocy, perhaps,* Freeman thought. *A steel carving of an animal head with an open cavity where the brain might have been expected. Suitable for ashtray, paperweight, or missile.* "Exactly. That's why we have to ignore this—silly outcry. It will wear itself out, Dall; you'll see. As soon as the *Roubins* reaches Thoth safely, it will die down completely."

"Eighty days from lift-off," Freeman said.

Sam Murin spoke up weightily, around his great black pipe. "It seems a long time."

"Seems, Sam? It is a long time," Freeman said. "As Minister for Information, you know the effect of eighty days of uproar better than anyone else."

"Except the emperor," Sam put in.

Freeman shrugged. "If you like," he said. "At any rate, this is supposed to be a popular government—an elective government. Responsive to the wishes of the people." He let the words hang in the dead air for a second. "The government would fall."

Harcourt muttered something inaudible. He seemed to be practicing looking noble. "If it has to be—" he began.

Freeman caught the shadow of an immense distaste on Sam Murin's square face, and broke in. "Very well. If we're to be sacrificial, let's consider the result. The government falls." He looked round at the others: neutrality in most faces, stubbornness in Harcourt's, while Sam Murin went carefully blank and Prater Shaw seemed to be trying for *dutiful*. "But what government succeeds us?" he went on. "A government pledged to 'cut all this space-adventuring to the bone'—you've heard the speeches. Dismantle Thoth. Continue Moonbase by yearly shuttle and no more. Drop all probes, all attempts at

colonization or exploration. Yank the human race right back to Earth. If you want to step out in favor of *that*—"

"Moonbase," Sam Murin said. "Dall, why not get the rocket to Moonbase and start it to Thoth from there? It'd get rid of the numbers problem, wouldn't it?"

"It would, Sam," Freeman said, "except for another numbers problem. It would be approximately three times as expensive—and despite what the Dichtung says every time a new budget item for Rocket and Interplanetary Flight Group comes along, there just isn't that, kind of available credit for the asking."

Murin nodded very slowly. "Nor likely to be," he said. "According to research and interview groups, and spot eavesdrop checks, the public has had about as much spending for 'cold, empty, airless, useless space'—I quote a recent speech by one of our Opposition friends—as they're going to stand. Nevertheless, contingency funds—"

"Are useful for many things, Sam," Freeman said. "But not for anything this big. Contingency funding is like petty cash; immensely useful, but you can't draw on it indefinitely, or to any large extent."

Prater looked up suddenly—struck, obviously, by what Prater considered an idea. "But the Opposition . . . I mean, if they did get in, if we went ahead and the government did fall on this issue—if they got in, I mean—well, they wouldn't stay in office forever, you know."

"They wouldn't have to, to do the damage we're talking about." There were times, Freeman reflected, when he seemed to be teaching a primary school. Remotely, he imagined that everyone, probably, felt the same now and again. Still . . . "Give them two years—and I think they'd have two years without much trouble—and we'd have to start over again from scratch. No probe program, no proto-colony, nothing in this area at all would last two years without real support. And—we'd have to start over again with the people, too, Prater." He looked over at Murin. An authentically calm man, Freeman thought, and wondered whether or not he envied the quality.

"Two years is a long time," Murin agreed, on cue. "People forget. They have to be educated, or reminded . . . well, find your own word for it . . . all over again. They have to be re-convinced. And God, if any, has no more idea than I do whether, after two years, re-convincing would be in the least possible. It isn't the sort of question you can expect Information to answer—we deal only in very immediate futures."

"Well, then—" Harcourt began heavily.

"Well, then, we have to send the *Roubins*," Freeman cut in. "Except that we can't—which is where this talk began."

Harcourt nodded. Judicious. Thinking it over. "With—it occurs to me—your fond acquaintance Richard Hamsun in command. Dall, it irritates me to have to work for that man's success—"

"It isn't his success, and there's nothing really irritating about him," Freeman said as mildly as he knew how. "He's the best available—and he knows it—which is why he was invited to the Year Day Gala. I took some care to introduce myself to him then, and to make as sure as I could that he remembered me. Admittedly, he has an unfortunate habit of saying what he thinks . . . but he *is* the best available, and the success won't be his, or mine, or yours. The success will belong to the human race. We need to spread out—"

"I remember Hamsun's speech," Harcourt snapped. "It hadn't occurred to me that you'd had one of your staff write it—or written it yourself."

"I didn't." *Quite tiring*, Freeman told himself—*exhausting, in fact. Also, necessary*. "It's just that the proposition is sufficiently obvious to occur to more than one person."

"Perfectly obvious," Harcourt said.

"And every survey—am I right, Sam?—makes it more and more evident we're stalled. The *Roubins* has to leave within a six-hour period. We have that much leeway—but all of it falls on Friday. Friday, June 13th, in the year 2113. Which puts a curse on the ship—for all I know, on Thoth, on Hamsun, and on the entire program; I wouldn't put anything at all past the quasi-rational hysteria a good superstition can work up. The people won't stand for the curse." "Damn it," Harcourt exploded, "it's perfectly ridiculous!"

And Freeman wearily nodded. "I know," he said. He gestured toward the sunken imitation window

of the Council chamber, a ten-foot square purporting to display the world outside the Complex. "I know," he said once more. "And you know. And we all know." He gestured tiredly at the window. "Now, Lee—tell *them*."

**CAPITAL COMPLEX:
IMPERIAL AUDIENCE CHAMBERS.**

1040 H., 29 MAY 2113

"Very well," Sam Murin said, tamping shreds of something or other carefully and precisely down into his big black pipe. *An authentically calm man*. At times, the most irritating type of human being available. "We have secured—at any rate, Dall, you have secured—an audience with the emperor, which will begin in twenty minutes and, for all I know, end in twenty seconds." The pipe was, apparently, sufficiently loaded. Murin touched one of those new things—an Induction Coal—to it and began surrounding himself with smoke. "After all, I am the Minister for Information, Dall. I think the least I deserve is a small bit of information. Such as: What am I doing here? What are you doing here? What in the name of God-if-any is this whole official audience all about?"

And in all those words he had never raised his voice. *It was*, Freeman thought, *an admirable performance, of its kind. And Sam wasn't a bad fellow, take him all in all ...*

"I think we can get Imperial backing for the *Roubins*," Freeman said. "And for a small idea of mine."

Murin made a sound rather like hm-m-m. "I know your small ideas. One of them almost cost Prater Shaw his nomination—not that Prater knows it, and not that it's worth my telling him."

"I hadn't meant to—"

"Doubtless," Murin said comfortably. "And what you *did* mean to do—well, you did. Playing politics, as they say—the only game for adults."

Freeman tried to sound relaxed. "Who was it called it that?"

"Eberhardt," Murin said. "Psych professional, and—at the moment—influential. In fact, psych man in charge of that section for the Interplanetary Flight Center." A cloud of smoke lifted his words to the domed, undecorated ceiling. "Thinks politics is harmless and ignorable—you know the type. But don't sidetrack me."

"I wasn't trying to," Freeman said. "What I want to do is attack the whole stupidity of superstition directly—on 3V, wherever and whenever possible. Ministerial dignity might make a dent here and there; but of course I need Walther's permission. And yours."

"Mine?" Murin managed to look rosy-cheeked, innocent and sly, all at once. For a man of Murin's experience, with Murin's oversized features and flat long face, it was distinctly a feat.

"Yours," Freeman said flatly. "You control 3V—all of it that counts, anyhow. Don't give me the sort of bafflegab you hand the public. If I want to spread a view on 3V, I need you with me."

Murin nodded. "I'm with you," he said.

At the far end of the great plain room, a set of double doors opened, two uniformed men entered and stood at attention, and, as Freeman and Murin watched stiffly, a reasonably tall man, run a bit to fat, with a spiky whitish beard, curled white-yellow hair and the tiny pair of half-eyeglasses that were his public trademark, walked in between the uniforms, glanced round the room, and waved a somewhat languid hand. The doors banged shut; the men in uniform remained inside the audience chamber, one at each door, at full attention, and fully armed.

As he came toward the small Imperial seat at the room's center, Walther took a sad look back. "Very disappointing for them, isn't it?" he said. "I mean: one would think they'd be horribly bored, guarding one man month after month, with never the slightest hint of an assassin to guard against—" He reached the chair, slid into it, and waved Freeman and Murin to seats nearby and facing him. "You wouldn't be planning to kill me, now, would you?" he asked. "Or anything exciting like that? I really do feel a certain responsibility for the way I've wasted the time of these poor young men—"

"Damn it," Freeman cut in, "you don't have to stick to the public manner here. You know that."

The emperor blinked. "Minister," he began, very slowly, "there are moments when one nearly

understands the reputation you once had—the reputation one had thought you had long lived down. Such impatience—" He made a vague gesture with one hand.

Freeman took a deep breath. *Old Mildness-Whenever-Possible*. "My most sincere apologies, Sire," he said, most quietly. "I have been so frustrated by recent events that even the basic forms of politeness at times drop from me. I most sincerely beg your pardon."

Murin, at Freeman's right, made a strangled sound and managed to sit still. Walther IV nodded with elegant, precisely calculated graciousness.

"Very well, Minister. I had hoped for an enjoyable chat . . . but, then, of course, one must be businesslike, even when Imperial, mustn't one? And, as you have requested this audience, I shall ask you to state our subject—which, I take it, is somehow connected with your recent . . . ah . . . frustrations?"

Freeman waited for a polite second and nodded. "If Your Imperial Majesty please—" he began.

"No need to overdo the manner," Walther put in quietly.

Freeman shrugged. "I'd like you to hear something," he said. "This is a copy of a tape taken for record at the Space Center. We've been going through a good deal of material, and perhaps this—to provide background and an emotional setting—will be of use."

The emperor appeared to hesitate; then, with a wave of one thin hand, he said: "Oh—very well, Dall. Go ahead."

Freeman reached to the small box on the floor at his left, and touched two buttons. There was a small, continuing hiss. "The first voice belongs to Richard Hamsun," he said, "our selected pilot for the shoot to Thoth. The second belongs to a Dr. Beirin Eberhardt, the acting head of the Psychological Section there. The occasion was one of the scheduled 'unofficial chats' with psychological personnel."

"I see," the emperor said. Nothing could have been more noncommittal than those two sounds.

Suddenly a harsh voice began to speak in the room. "How did it start?"

"This business about thirteen?" Eberhardt's much smoother, older voice asked.

"All this—superstition," Hamsun said. "Suddenly it's all over the place. How did it start out?" There was a brief pause.

"The men at the Center," Freeman put in hastily, "know that curiosity is considered a healthy trait, when allied with safeguarding traits; they occasionally make a point of displaying it."

"Of course," the emperor said, and Freeman snorted to himself: what need was there to explain the obvious to a politician who worked at his job all the time—not part-time, only when chosen for the Council, like semiprofessional Dall Freeman?

"No one," Eberhardt was saying reflectively, "really knows. Though of course Dr. Allerton's work has brought a good deal of it to public attention with—ah—a certain amount of force. His diggings and subsequent research into the days of the ancients . . . well, of course it's been established that the superstition didn't spring out of the Clean Slate War itself—though the myth that followed it, the 'thirteen hydrogen bombs,' gave it . . . ah . . . a new lease on life."

"Myth?"

"The truth is," Eberhardt said in an oracular tone, "that no one has any clear idea how many such . . . ah . . . devices were set off. I doubt whether even Dr. Allerton's researches will tell us that in any certain way. But—the superstition long predates the War, and was quite common among the ancients. They had begun the exploration of interplanetary space, you will recall—and when accidents of a serious nature developed during the Moonflight which one 'country' had numbered thirteen, the significance of the number—to such persons as owned to the old superstition, of course—was naturally much increased."

"I can see that," Hamsun said. He had no chance to say more; Eberhardt was sailing straight on. "One line of research, duplicating the principles involved in the hydrogen-bombing techniques themselves," the psychologist said cheerfully, "and then attempting to fix very precisely the amount of residual radioactivity in ordinarily . . . ah . . . stable materials . . . as well as other techniques . . . all this may eventually provide some trustworthy figure, though I doubt it, for the number of bombs used, their exact power, and so forth. But current belief merely asserts, without feeling the need for any proof whatever, that the number was in fact *thirteen*." "Sure," Hamsun said, a bit distantly. "Heard it all my

life."

"The basic superstition, however, extends into the past beyond any records which the ancients were kind enough to leave in the chaos our ancestors inherited. Quite a lot of material, actually, though with a few odd gaps, and a certain . . . ah . . . reluctance among our immediate ancestors to pursue the records at all. We must understand, you see, that—though the War was much more than a century ago, we call those who suffered it *ancients*: a psychological mechanism to displace them further from us, to put the entire period so far into the past that it need not be the concern of any living person. *Ancients* indeed—when available material coherently displays a *written* history more than five thousand years long! But popular terminology is inescapable."

In a short pause, Hamsun muttered: "I imagine so." No one else spoke.

"And in any case," Eberhardt went on, having apparently taken on new breath, "the horror of the number thirteen can be traced back as far as written records go; doubtless it was common in the Stone Age. There are numerous theories regarding its origin, none being finally convincing. Where it began, and why, we simply do not know."

Another pause. The hiss of the tape filled the big chamber. "But ... well, did they take it so damned seriously, back then? You'd think—"

"Some, doubtless, did," Eberhardt said, "and some did not. The proportion seems to have favored . . . ah . . . sanity more than it now does; we have records, at least, of a flight numbered fourteen."

"Sanity?" Hamsun asked, sounding shocked. "The . . . ancients?"

"Precisely," Eberhardt said calmly. "You make a common error, Richard: you assume that society—that even one man—is all-of-a-piece, so to speak. The ancients were suicidally mad: the Clean Slate War is sufficient proof of that. They were also, as regards . . . ah . . . serious superstition, more sane than we. I believe that their various 'countries' were pervaded by a—miasma, so to speak—of generalized superstition, cropping up here and there in specific forms. But, certainly so far as *thirteen* is concerned, we are less sane; we allow the superstition, which has no rational base and for which no rational base is ever offered, to influence rational acts."

"Like this shoot," Hamsun said.

"Exactly," Eberhardt said at once. "One of the . . . ah . . . ancients said that 'progress is not total,' which is entirely correct. All of a society does not progress at the same speed or in the same way, even assuming that we can define what we mean by progress. And another ancient wrote, within a very few years of the War, that his particular 'country'—one of the more highly advanced—owned more television sets than it did flush toilets. The shoot numbered thirteen was watched, via flat 3V in color and quite satisfactory detail, by human beings many of whom sat in houses 'protected' against witches and curses by 'hex signs' and the like.

And we . . . we are attempting the colonization of Mars, and we may be hurtfully, even fatally delayed by a superstition absolutely sense-free and older than recorded history."

"You really think they can stop us?" Hamsun said after a second or so. The three listening men sighed and stretched somewhat, out of weariness; the psychologist's tendency to lecture was hard on everyone. Dall Freeman felt, briefly, a bit sorry for Hamsun.

"I have no idea," the professional voice said calmly.

"Then maybe—"

"But I have learned," the voice went on, with no change in tone whatever, "never to underestimate human stupidity."

Freeman moved forward and cut off the recording. The silence that came down on the room seemed exceptionally empty, exceptionally sad. "It goes on for some time," Freeman said as briskly as he knew how, trying to dispel the general wash of emotion. "But you've heard the essentials."

"Very well," Walther IV said rather slowly. Murin, hands behind his back, kept silence, watching and

waiting; Sam was a good man, all in all. Not a subtle man but a good one. "What is it you want of me?"

Freeman shrugged. "It ought to be obvious, Sire."

Walther's grin was as sharp and distant, as cold and plain, as ever Walther had been. An unusual man to be elected emperor, Freeman thought briefly; one would expect a friendlier type, more accessible, more obviously "understanding." But then—

The phrase *father image* occurred to him and he dismissed it with impatience: Whatever the truth was it went deeper than that. Another ancient saying, from God knew who or where: *The most thorough lie that can be told is: It was as simple as that.* Probably quite true, which was why politicians were in the lying business...

"I'm afraid," Walther said coolly, "you'll have to tell me, Minister. I'm not in the mood for riddles this afternoon."

Which bothered Murin, a good man but not a subtle one. Freeman knew that the luxury of responding to personal insult had to be jettisoned in the first month of elective-political life, if there were to be a second month. Walther had got rid of it long ago. "Very well: I want Imperial backing for a series of appearances on 3V. Appearances by me—"

"Obviously," Walther said dryly.

"—Talking about this superstition and trying to combat it with the facts."

Walther's grin returned. "The facts, Minister?"

Sam said: "Dall—"

"The facts," Freeman said. Walther appeared to assess the idea for a minute.

"You'll lose," he said then. "The *Roubins* won't take off. Why, Dall— you know as well as I do that the public isn't influenced by facts." *A very odd person for an elective emperor. One would think . . . well,* Freeman told himself, *never mind.* "Nevertheless," he said.

Walther turned away, washing his hands of the matter. "Minister, I want the *Roubins* in flight as much as you do, and you know that."

"Then—"

"But this—giving facts to the public . . . this has no chance of success. And you must know that, as well."

"I've made my request," Freeman said.

The room seemed to hold its breath. After a long time—perhaps fifteen seconds—Walther's dry, distant voice said, almost casually: "Granted."

"I thank you, Sire."

"But I shall not speak—"

"Of course not," Freeman said, shocked. Did the man want to ruin everything? "I'd never considered it."

Walther turned away from them, nodded slowly. "I have learned, Minister, that you almost always know what you're doing. I very much hope that this time you are right. And if there were any other way—"

"If there were any other way," Freeman said flatly, "I wouldn't have made my request."

**CENTRAL BUILDING,
PUBLIC VIEW SERVICES:
STUDIO 3:**

JUNE 1, 2113-1930 H.

"And here, brought to you by *Public View*, the first with the best, to be interviewed by our panel of accredited newsmen, is the Minister for the Dichtung himself, whom you're all anxious to see and hear, so I won't stand in his way any longer: Minister Dall Freeman."

"Thank you, Sidney. Before we begin the interview this evening, I'd like to make a brief statement, if you don't mind."

"Not at all, Minister, not at all; anything you desire, of course. Ladies, gentlemen: The minister is about to make a statement. Minister Freeman?"

"Thank you. It has been brought to my attention that many of you watching—and many who are not now watching; there are doubtless better things to do on a Sunday evening—are opposed to allowing the interplanetary ship *Roubins* to take off on June 13th of this year—a Friday, as you know—because you feel that no good can come of so great an event occurring on Friday the thirteenth. Well, ladies and gentlemen—and I mean to include those of all colors, our white brethren as well as the rest—I hope you won't be seriously influenced by what is nothing more than a bit of ancient superstition. There is no magic in the number thirteen, no magic in the day Friday, no magic in their combination. I'm sure you are sensible enough to realize that. The *Roubins* is needed; it cannot take off on any other practicable date. I hope you won't allow this scrap of discredited superstition to influence you against the takeoff; and I'm sure that, on reflection, you will be the sensible people I have always known you to be."

"Thank you, Minister. And now, if perhaps there is a response . . . yes, Mr. Delvora?"

"I'd like to ask the minister . . ."

COLORADO SPRINGS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE:

1600 H. (2000 CAP. COMP.),

3 JUNE 2113

"I've seen that idiot on five programs in four days," Parran Allerton said as he punched off the portable 3V. "And I hope I never see him again."

His sister Marian, keeping him company in the main tent of the expedition, sighed. It was going to begin all over again. "Why, Parr? It seems to me—"

"It seems to you he makes sense," Allerton snapped. "Of course it does. But to the great public . . . he's doing harm, not good. *They* don't want sense. They want . . . oh, God, I don't know what. Cossetting. Reassurance. Simplicity." He turned to face his sister, his thin frame blazing with anger. "You, now: you're a logical creature."

"I am?" Marian asked gently.

"And those others—the people—now who was it said *Your people, sir, are a great beast*—"

"Hamilton," Marian said. "Alexander. An ancient."

"—Those others don't want logic and won't listen to it. They're crazed with their damned superstition, and it will rule them. It can't be stopped . . . and Freeman, the idiot, is trying to stop it with logic. Like stopping a flood with—I don't know what—a sheet of paper."

Marian sighed again. "But what else can he do? What else is there to be done?"

"Damn it," Allerton said, "he's the politician. He's the one who manages people. He's the one who *ought* to know what to do; what else is a politician good for?"

"Perhaps—"

"No perhaps about it," Allerton said. "The man's an idiot; I've known it for years, ever since I met him when we got those silly medals for our second dig; and I'm having it confirmed for me every time I turn on the 3V."

"Then don't turn it on." Marian thought of herself as a practical woman, a breed which had great value around a dig, where emotional upsets, or sudden accesses of happiness and knowledge, were commonly messy matters.

"But I won't let him bar me from—"

"From what?" Marian said. "A heart attack? Please, Parr, listen to me. You've no business getting so upset about—"

Whereupon the wireless, picture-less 'phone rang in the tent.

Parran Allerton was greatly surprised to find that Minister Dall Freeman wanted to speak with him.

And, after half an hour of talk, chatting between Freeman—that idiot—and his sister Marian, and Marian's explanations, followed by further talk with the minister, Allerton was even more surprised to discover that he had—as he expressed it to Marian immediately afterward—joined the ranks of idiocy. "And the ranks of hypocrisy as well, I suppose," he said. "But, tell me, Marian: what else could I have done?"

"Nothing," Marian said with perfect assurance. "You did the right thing—the only thing. You were exactly, entirely, thoroughly correct, and you deserve congratulations for it."

"Marian—"

"But I'm afraid all you're going to get right now is a report of the findings in square six. Disappointing."

"There's always tomorrow," Allerton said automatically, and then, blinking: "Do you know, Marian, I begin to believe there is? I begin to believe there really always is?"

**CENTRAL BUILDINGS,
VARIOUS SERVICES:
JUNE 3-JUNE 5, 2113**

"And I'm sure that you fine people out there won't be influenced by a silly notion of the ancients, and will ignore their idea that numbers have a power of their own. We all know now that numbers won't influence the *Roubins* . . ."

"The upcoming flight of the *Roubins* has aroused a great deal of controversy, Minister Freeman. Would you care to make a comment on that?"

"Why, yes, I would, Charles. It would appear that the people are trying to get the entire matter straight in their own minds, and come to the realization that numbers have no influence over the flight of this ship. And I'm sure that, in the end, they will see that the only sensible attitude—the only logical attitude . . ."

"Friday the thirteenth is just another day, ladies and gentlemen. It means nothing to me, nothing to you—and nothing to the *Roubins*. I'm sure you all know that. And if you do, then the *Roubins* can take off, can supply our people, stranded and awaiting this needed ship, this desperately needed ship . . ."

"...Five minutes, Minister."

"Thank you. Sam, what in God's name are you doing down here?"

"I came to see you. To try to talk some sense into you. Dall, do you know how much harm you're doing?"

"Harm?"

"Damn it, don't you read the sampling sheets? The *Roubins* takeoff gets less popular by the day. Every time you mention numbers, or superstition, you give the nonsense free publicity: people talk it over among themselves. And . . . well, you know. 'There just might be something in it.' Dall, every speech you make strengthens the whole idea that numbers run the world. That this silly superstition runs the world."

"Exactly. But why is this harmful?"

"... If you want the *Roubins* to take off—"

"Sam, I've always thought of you as a good man."

"Thanks."

"An intelligent man, a good minister. But not a subtle man. Not, really, a politician. A politician has only one job."

"To work *against* the things the Comity needs? Dall—"

"I'm not working against what the Comity needs, Sam. Time enough; you'll see where all this is going very shortly now, so I'll give you a preview."

"Don't do me any favors."

"It's the same favor I did the emperor—yesterday. He had to be ready, you see."

"Ready?"

"All right, Sam. Now listen . . ."

"*First News* is happy to present, in its regular weekly interview series, the renowned archaeologist, Dr. Parran Allerton. Some recent discoveries made by him are spreading in influence throughout the

Comity. Dr. Allerton is here to explain their significance, and to tell the story of their finding . . ."

"Minister Freeman?"

". . . Thank you. Now, I want begin by saying once again that numerology has no influence on the real world, the world of events. It's all just a silly superstition. I'm sure none of you fine people out there really believes that numbers influence our world, or influence the takeoff of that vitally necessary ship the *Roubins* . . ."

GREAT HALL:

CAPITAL CITY:

2100 H., JULY 17, 2113

Hamsun, after several hours of trying, had finally managed to corner Minister Freeman in a comparatively quiet section of the Great Hall. Around them, the Space Gala was picking up speed and volume. If it hadn't been for Freeman, Hamsun told himself, he'd never have come to the damned thing. But what he knew was that Freeman had almost killed off the shoot. What he'd heard—the sort of chatter nobody pays any real attention to—was that Freeman had made the shoot possible.

Well, the gala was, more or less, in Hamsun's honor; and no matter what he knew, he couldn't quite keep the chatter out of his head. He needed explanations . . .

"There are all sorts of rumors," he was saying. "People are convinced you made the shoot possible, I mean. I . . . well, you know."

Freeman smiled. The way a politician smiles, Hamsun thought; there's never any way to find out what he *really* thinks. "There are always rumors," he said. His eyes flicked from one person to another as he spoke: studying people, Hamsun realized.

Studying—the materials of his profession; and why wasn't that as respectable as . . . say . . . studying equations?

"But—Look, you made those speeches," Hamsun said. "One right after another. All about how sensible people were, how they'd never let superstition hold them back—"

"That's right," Freeman said. A girl went past them, laughing much too loudly.

"And those speeches damn near sank the entire shoot," Hamsun said. "Every time you told people they were too smart to believe in superstition—Look, we have a psychologist on the base and he explained it this way—you reminded them of the superstition. You forced them to think about it. And—when it comes to superstition—people *don't* think."

"By definition," Freeman put in.

Hamsun blinked. "By . . . I suppose so." He took a breath. "So you kept stimulating the whole thing, making people think about that Friday-the-thirteenth business, making them even more positive they weren't going to let the *Roubins* take off."

Freeman nodded. "Something like that," he said. "Yes."

"So," Hamsun said, "you almost did kill the shoot. What I thought. What everybody thinks. Only there was some crackpot talk that you . . . well, that you made the shoot possible."

"I did," Freeman said.

Hamsun opened his mouth and shut it again.

"First of all, you see, I made those speeches," Freeman said. "No, wait a minute, I did one more thing—I bribed an archaeologist."

"*You—what?* What does that have to do with . . ."

"I made those speeches," Freeman said into the silence; around them the gala went loudly on, but even Freeman noticed that with no more than the corner of his eye. "I made everyone conscious of the power of 'numbers. The superstition. Numerology. Thirteen." He gestured. "People who didn't care, people who were unsure . . . I got them all thinking about numerology."

"And believing in it, damn it!" Hamsun broke in.

"Exactly," Freeman said. "Otherwise my bribe wouldn't have done any good, you see."

"But—"

"Thirteen," Freeman went on, sententiously, "is an unlucky number. Correct?"

"Well, sure," Hamsun said. "But when it came out that—"

"That—the sixth month, the thirteenth day, the year 2113—all that isn't nearly so unlucky. Attend: 6 and 13 and 21—from 2113—and then an extra 5—for Friday, normally considered the fifth day of the week—add up to 45. And 45 is the luckiest possible number. It was the number of a great and famous weapon used by legendary heroes among the ancients. It was the year—1945—in which one of their major wars ended. Look it up."

"Sure, I know that," Hamsun said. "The ancients thought 45 was the luckiest number there was."

Freeman smiled, very briefly. "But let me go on," he said. "It's also 9 times 5—9 for the planets, and 5 for the planets known in deep-ancient times, before the telescope. It's also 21—the age of maturity for a long period during the history of the most civilized ancients—plus 24, which is twice as lucky as a simple dozen ... a dozen, of course being lucky because it was the number of the apostles. Among other things." He paused to breathe. "Right so far?"

"Well—everybody knows that," Hamsun said. "Sure. I mean—"

"Everybody knows it," Freeman repeated. "Everybody knows it, and it isn't true. Not a word of it. Not one word."

Hamsun nearly dropped his half-full glass. "But—"

"An archaeologist said it was true, over and over," Freeman went on. "And everyone else picked it up, of course. There I was, making speeches about the silliness of numerology and—your psychologist is perfectly correct—thereby making more and more converts to the damned superstition. And there everyone else was—knowing that numerology made the *Roubins* shoot a marvel, a wonder and an absolute delight, because—within days, in fact—'everyone knew it.' And all I did was bribe an archaeologist—with a grant for a future dig, incidentally, out of what we like to call a contingent fund—to 'discover' the entire good-luck superstition dealing with 45."

Silence surrounded the two men again. After a second Hamsun said: "You mean there never was—"

"Never," Freeman said. "It just happened to work that way. Because, of course, we made it just happen. I'm afraid it will have to be a secret between us, son—and because keeping that secret is in both our interests, it will stay a secret—but we've rewritten history."

This time Hamsun did drop the glass. It shattered. Neither man moved. "Well—talk about just sheer luck," Hamsun said after a while. "If it'd been some other number—one you couldn't work with . . ."

"It could have been," Freeman said. "And it wouldn't have mattered: *any* number could have been used. Let's see: 6 for the month, 13 for the day, 13 for the specific year: 31. Add 5 for Friday and get 36—three dozen. Three times as lucky as a dozen. Then add the 21 and get 47—a fine number, has a seven in it, which the ancients really did believe was lucky: we wouldn't have had to invent that part. For that matter, we didn't invent the *lucky dozen* part, either. But, son: *any* number could have been used. We just fiddled round with what we had available."

Hamsun tried to think it over. Obviously, the way to get people to do something was to make sure you persuaded them *not* to do it, and then—"Politics," he said. "It's all politics."

"Exactly," Freeman said, and smiled very briefly indeed. "Politics: which is *my* science, I suppose. The science of people—which is an art."

Hamsun tried it again. When you had all the pieces, it made sense. But without them—

He stared at the face of the . . . the politician. The useless, talky politician. The . . . Good *Lord*. "But how could you figure in advance . . . how could you push the whole thing—"

"The basic rule," Freeman said, "is simple enough." He looked, Hamsun thought, quite satisfied; almost at peace. "I can put it all in one sentence—and all in words of one syllable."

"If you can't lick them, and you can't join them, there is just one thing left to do: lead them."

This was said two hundred years ago by the first great Minister for the Dichtung, Dall Freeman. It remains true; the present writer cannot improve on its wording.

The *Public Notes* of Isidor Norin (Minister for the Dichtung, c. 2300 A. D.)