

Flash Crowd

Larry Niven

1

FROM EDGE to edge and for all of its length, from Central Los Angeles through Beverly Hills and West Los Angeles and Santa Monica to the sea, Wilshire Boulevard was a walkway.

Once there had been white lines on concrete, and raised curbs to stop the people from interfering with the cars. Now the lines were gone, and much of the concrete was covered with soil and grass. There were even a few trees. Concrete strips had been left for bicycles, and wider places for helicopters carrying cargo too big for the displacement booths.

Wilshire was wide for a walkway. People seemed to hug the edges, even those on bikes and motor skates. A boulevard built for cars was too big for mere people.

Outlines of the street still showed through. Ridges in the grass marked where curbs had been, with breaks where there had been driveways. Some stretches in Westwood had a concrete center divider. The freeway ramps were unchanged and unused. Someday the city would do something about them.

Jerrybeny Jansen lived in what had been a seaside motel halfway between Bakersfield and San Francisco. On long-ago summer nights the Shady Rest had been packed with transients at ten dollars a head. Now it made a dandy apartment house, with swimming pool and everything, including a displacement booth outside the manager's office.

There was a girl in the booth when Jerrybeny left his apartment. He glimpsed long, wavy brown hair and the shape of her back in the instant before she disappeared. Janice Wolfe. Too bad she hadn't waited. . . but she hadn't even seen him.

Nobody was ever around the booths long enough to say hello to. You could meet someone by hovering outside the booths, but what would they think?

Meeting people was for the clubs.

A displacement booth was a glass cylinder with a rounded top. The machinery that made the magic was invisible, buried beneath the booth. Coin slots and a telephone dial were set into the glass at sternum level.

Jenybeny inserted his C .B . A. credit card below the coin slots. He dialed by punching numbered buttons. Withdrawing the credit card closed a circuit. An eye blink later he was in an office in the Central Broadcasting Association building in downtown Los Angeles.

The office was big and empty. Only once in an aeon was all that empty space ever used, though several score of newstapers saw it for a few seconds each day. One wall was lined with displacement booths. A curved desk down at the end was occupied by Jenybeny's boss.

George Bailey was fat from too much sitting and darkly tanned by the Nevada sun. He commuted to work every morning via the long-distance booths at Los Angeles International. Today he waved at Jeriybeny without speaking. Routine, then. Jerryberry chose one of several cameras and slung the padded strap over his shoulder. He studied several lists of numbers posted over the table before picking one.

He turned and moved to avoid three more newstapers stepping out of booths. They nodded; he nodded; they passed. As he reached for a booth door, a woman flicked in in front of him. Rush hour. He smiled at her and stepped over to the next booth, consulted the list, dialed, and was gone.

He had not spoken to anyone that morning.

The east end of Wilshire Boulevard was a most ordinary T-intersection between high, blocky buildings. Jenybeny looked around even as he was dialing. Nothing newsworthy? No. He was two blocks away and dialing.

He punched the numbered buttons with a ballpoint pen when he remembered. Nonetheless, his index finger was calloused.

The streets of the inner city were empty, this early. In a minute or so Jerryberry was in sight of the freeway. He stepped out of the booth to watch trucks and bulldozers covering this part of the Pasadena-Harbor Freeway with topsoil. Old machines find new use—but others were covering the event. He moved on.

The booths were all identical. He might have been in a full-vision theater, watching scenes flick around him. He was used to the way things jerked about. He flicked west on Wilshire, waiting for something to happen.

It was a cheap, effective way to gather news. At a chocolate dollar per jump per man, C. B. A. could afford to support a score of wandering newstapers in addition to the regular staff. They earned low salaries, plus a bonus for each news item, plus a higher bonus per item used. The turnover was high. It had been higher before C.B.A. learned not to jumble the numbers at random. An orderly progression down a single street was easier on the mind and nerves.

Jerryberry Jansen knew every foot of Wilshire. At twenty-eight he was old enough to remember cars and trucks and traffic lights. When the city changed, it was the streets that had changed most.

He watched Wilshire change as he dialed.

At the old hat-shaped Brown Derby they were converting the parking lot into a miniature golf course. About time they did something with all that wasted space. He queried Bailey, but Bailey wasn't interested.

The Miracle Mile was a landscaped section. Suddenly there were people:

throng of shoppers, so thick that many preferred to walk a block instead of waiting for a booth. They seemed stratified, with the older people hugging the curbs and the teens taking the middle of the street. Jerryberry had noticed it before. As a child he'd been trained to cross only in the crosswalks, with the light. Sometimes his training came back, and he found himself looking both ways before he could step out from the curb.

He moved on, west, following the list of numbers that was his beat.

The mall had been a walkway when displacement booths were no more than a theorem in quantum mechanics. Dips in the walk showed where streets had crossed, but the Santa Monica Mall had always been a sanctuary for pedestrians and windowshoppers. Here were several blocks of shops and restaurants and theaters, low buildings that did not block the sky.

Displacement booths were thick here. People swarmed constantly around and in and out of them. Some travelers carried fold-up bicycles. Many wore change purses. Fromnoon onward there was always the tension of too many people trying to use the same space for the same purpose.

The argument started outside Penney's Department Store. At the time one could see only that the police officer was being firm and the woman— middle-aged, big, and brawny—was screaming at the top of her lungs. A crowd grew, not because anyone gave a damn but because the two were blocking the walkway. People had to stream around them.

Some of them stopped to see what was happening. Many later remembered hearing the policeman repeating, "Madam, I place you under arrest on suspicion of shoplifting. Anything you say—" in a voice that simply did not carry. If the officer had used his shockstick then, nothing more would have happened. Maybe. Then again, he might have been mobbed. Already the crowd blocked the entire mall, and too many of them were shouting—genial or sarcastic suggestions, random insults, and a thousand variations of "Get out of my way!" and "I can't, you idiot!"— for any to be heard at all.

At 12:55 Jerryberry Jansen flicked in and looked quickly about him while his hands were reinserting his credit card. His eyes registered the ancient shops at the end of the mall and lingered a moment on the entrance to Romanoff's. Anyone newsworthy? Sometimes they came, the big names, for the cuisine or the publicity. No?—passed on, jumped to the crowd in front of Penney's two blocks down.

There were booths nearer, but he didn't know the numbers offhand. Jerryberry picked up his card and stepped out of the booth. He signaled the studio but didn't bother to report. Circumstantial details he could give later. But he turned on his camera, and the event was now. . . real.

He jogged the two blocks. Whatever was happening might end without him.

A young, bemused face turned at Jenyberry's hail. "Excuse me, sir. Can you tell me how this started?"

"Nope. Sony. I just got here," said the young man, and he strolled off. He would be edited from the tape. But other heads were turning, noticing the arrival of— A lean young man with an open, curious, friendly face, topped by

red-blond hair curly as cotton. A tiny mike at his lips, a small plug in one ear, a coin purse at his belt. In his hands, a heavy gyro stabilized teevee camera equipped with a directional mike.

A newstaper. One pair of eyes turned for an instant too long. The woman swung her purse. The policeman's arm came up too late to block the purse, which bounced solidly off his head. Something heavy in that purse.

The policeman dropped.

Things happened very fast.

Jerryberry talked rapidly to himself while he panned the camera. Occasional questions in his earpiece did not interrupt the flow of his report, though they guided it. The gyro stabilized camera felt like a living thing in his hands. It followed the woman with the heavy purse as she pushed her way through the crowd, shot Jerrybeny a venomous look, and ran for a displacement booth. It watched someone break a jeweler's window, snatch up a handful of random jewelry, and run. The directional mike picked up the scream of an alarm.

The police officer was still down.

Jerryberry went to help him. It occurred to him that of those present, the policeman was most likely to know what had been going on. The voice in his earpiece told him that others were on their way, even as his eye found them leaving the booths: faces he knew on men carrying cameras like his own. He knelt beside the policeman.

"Officer, can you tell me what happened?"

The uniformed man looked up with hurt, bewildered eyes. He said something that the directional mike picked up, but Jenybeny's ears lost it in the crowd noise. He heard it later on the news. "Where's my hat?"

Jerrybeny repeated, "What happened here?" while a dozen C.B.A. men around him were interviewing the crowd, and police were pouring out of the displacement booths. The flow of blue uniforms looked like far more than they were. They had to use their shock-sticks to get through the crowd.

Some of the spectators-shoppers-strollers had decided to leave. A wise decision, but impractical. The nearest booths could not be used at all. They held passengers cased in glass, each trying to get his door open against the press of the mob. Every few seconds one would give up and flick out, and another trapped passenger would be pushing at the door.

For blocks around, there was no way to get into a displacement booth. As fast as anyone left a booth, someone else would flick in. Most were nondescript citizens who came to gape. A few carried big cardboard rectangles carelessly printed in fluorescent colors, often with the paint still wet. A different few, nondescript otherwise, had rocks in their pockets.

For Jerryberry, kneeling above the felled policeman and trying to get audible sense out of him, it all seemed to explode. He looked up, and it was a riot.

“It’s a riot,” he said, awed. The directional mike picked it up.

The crowd surged, and he was moving. He looked back, trying to see if the policeman had gained his feet. If he hadn’t, he could be hurt. . . but the crowd surged away. In this mob there was no conservation of matter; there were sources and sinks in it, and today all the sinks were sources. The flow had to go somewhere.

A young woman pushed herself close to Jerryberry. Her eyes were wide; her hair was wild. A kind of rage, a kind of joy, made her face a battlefield. “Legalize direct-current stimulus!” she screamed at him. She lunged and caught the snout of Jerryberry’s camera and mike and pulled it around to face her. “Legalize wireheading!”

Jerryberry wrenched the camera free. He turned it toward the big display window in Penney’s. The glass was gone. Men crawled in the display window, looting. Jerryberry held the camera high, taking pictures of them over the bobbing heads. He had the scene for a moment—and then three signs shot up in front of the camera. One said “TANSTAAFL.” and one bore a mushroom cloud and the words ‘POWER CORRUPTS!’ and Jerryberry never read the third because the crowd surged again and he had to scramble to keep his feet. There were men and women and children being trampled here. He could be one of them.

How had it happened? He’d seen it all, but he didn’t understand.

He tried to keep the camera over his head. He got a big brawny hairy type carrying a stack of teevees under his arm, half a dozen twenty-inch sets almost an inch thick. The thief saw the camera facing him and the solemn face beneath, and he roared and lunged toward Jerryberry.

Jerryberry abruptly realized that there were people here who would not want to be photographed. The big man had dropped his teevees and was plowing toward him with murder on his face. Jerryberry had to drop his camera to get away. When he looked back, the big man was smashing the camera against a lamp post.

Idiot. The scene was on tape now, in the C.B.A. buildings in Los Angeles and in Denver.

The riot splashed outward. Jerryberry perforce went with it. He concentrated on keeping his feet.

2

The explosive growth of the mall riot has taken enforcement agencies by surprise. Police have managed to hold the perimeter and are letting people through the lines, but necessarily in small numbers.

The screen showed people being filtered through a police blockade, one at a time. They looked tired,

stunned. One had two pockets full of stolen wristwatches. He did not protest when they confiscated the watches and led him away. A blank-eyed girl maintained a death grip on a rough wooden stick glued to a cardboard rectangle. The cardboard was crumpled and torn, the Day-Glo colors smeared.

Meanwhile all displacement booths in the area have been shut down from outside. The enclosed area includes fourteen city blocks. Viewers are warned away from the following areas. . . . These scenes were taken by C.B.A. helicopter.

Most of the street lights were out. Those left cast monstrous shadows through the mall. Orange flames flickered in the windows of a furniture store. Diminutive figures, angered by spotlights in the helicopter, pointed and shouted silently into the camera viewpoint. The deep, earnest voice went on: We are getting no transmissions from inside the affected area. A dozen C.B.A. newsmen and an undisclosed number of police in the area have not been heard from....

Many of the rioters are armed. A C.B.A. helicopter was shot down early today but was able to crash-land beyond the perimeter. Close shot of a helicopter smashed against a brick wall. Two men being carried out on stretchers, in obvious haste. The source of weapons is not known. Police conjecture that they may have been looted from Kerr's Sport Shop, which has a branch in the mall.

How did it all start?

The square brown face looking out of the tridee screen was known throughout the English-speaking world. When news was good, that wide mouth would smile enormously, the filter cigarette in the middle of it smoldering delicately between white front teeth. It was not smiling now. That expression was more earnest; it was shaken.

Jenyberry Jansen looked back with no expression at all.

He had thrown away his camera and seen it destroyed. He had dropped his coin purse and ear mike into a trash can. Not being a newsman was a good idea during the mall riot. Now, an hour after the police had let him through, he was still wandering aimlessly. He had no goal. Almost, he had thrown away his identity.

He stood in front of an appliance-store window, watching teevee. The deep, precise voice of Wash Evans was audible through the glass—barely.

How did it all start?

Evans vanished, and Jenybeny watched scenes taken by his own cam-

era. A milling crowd, mostly trying to get past a disturbance. . . a blueuniformed man, a brawny woman with a heavy purse... . The officer was trying to arrest a suspected shoplifter, who has not been ident~fied, when this man appeared on the scene.

Picture of Jertyberry Jansen, camera held high,~ caught in the view of another C.B.A. camera.

Barry Jerome Jansen, a roving newstaper. It was he who reported the disturbance (The woman swung her purse. The policeman went down, his arms half-raised as if to hide his head.) and reported it as a riot, to this man. Bailey, at his desk in the C.B.A. building. Jenybeny twitched. Sooner or later he would have to report to Bailey. And explain where his camera had gone.

He'd picked up some good footage, and it was being used. A string of bonuses waiting for him. . . unless Bailey docked him for the cost of the camera.

George Lincoln Bailey sent in a crew to cover the disturbance. He also put the report on teevee, practically live, editing it as it came. At this point anyone with a teevee, anywhere in the United States, could see the violence being filmed by a dozen veteran C.B .A. newstapers.

The square dark face returned. And then it all blew up. The population of the mall expanded catastrophically, and they all started breaking things. Why? Wash Evans flashed a white grin with a cigarette in it. Well, it seems that there are people who like riots.

Jerryberry cocked his head. He had never heard it put quite like that.

Now, that seems silly. Who would want to be caught in a riot? Wash Evans had long, expressive fingers with pink nails. He began ticking off items on his fingers. First, more police, to stop what's being reported as a riot. Second, more newstapers. Third, anyone who wants publicity. On the screen behind Wash Evans signs shot out of a sea of moving heads. A girl's face swelled enormously, so close she seemed all mouth, and shrieked, "Legalize wireheading!"

Anyone with a cause. Anyone who wants the ear of the public. There are newsmen here, man! And cameras! And publicity!

Behind Evans the scene jumped. That was Angela Monk coming out of a displacement booth! Angela Monk, the semi-porno movie actress, very beautiful in a dress of loose-mesh net made from white braided yarn, very self-possessed in the split second before she saw what she'd flicked into. She tried to dodge back inside and to hell with the free coverage. A yell went up; hands pulled the door open before she could dial again; other hands pulled her out.

Then there are people who have never seen a riot in person. A lot of them came. What they think about it now is something else again.

Now, all of these might not be a big fat percentage of the public. How many people would be dumb enough to come watch a riot? But that little percentage, they all came at once, from all over the United States and some

other places, too. And the more there were, the bigger the crowd got, the louder it got—the better it looked to the looters. Evans folded down his remaining finger. And the looters came from everywhere, too. These days you can get from anywhere to anywhere in three flicks.

Scenes shifted in Evans's background. Store windows being smashed, a subdued wail of sirens. A C.B.A. helicopter thrashing bout in midair. An ape of a man carrying stolen tridees under one ann. Evans looked soberly out at his audience. So there you have it. An unidentified shoplifting suspect, a roving newsman who reported a minor disturbance as a riot— "Good God!" Jerrybeny Jansen was jolted completely awake.

"They're blaming me!"

"They're blaming me, too," said George Bailey. He ran his hands through his hair, glossy shoulder-length white hair that grew in a fringe around a dome of suntanned scalp. "You're second in the

chain. I'm tired. If only they could find the woman who hit the cop!"

"They haven't?"

"Not a sign of her. Jansen, you look like hell."

"I should have changed suits. This one's been through a riot." Jerryberry's laugh sounded forced, and was. "I'm glad you waited. It must be way past your quitting time."

"Oh, no. We've been in conference all night. We only broke up about twenty minutes ago. Damn Wash Evans anyway! Have you heard—"

"I heard some of it."

"A couple of the directors want to fire him. Not unlike the ancient technique of using gasoline to put out a fire. There were some even wilder suggestions... . Have you seen a doctor?"

"I'm not hurt. Just bruised. . . and tired, and hungry, come to think of it. I lost my camera."

"You're lucky you got out alive."

"I know."

George Bailey seemed to brace himself. "I hate to be the one to tell you. We're going to have to let you go, Jansen."

"What? You mean fire me?"

"Yah. Public pressure. I won't make it pretty for you. Wash Evans's instant documentary has sort of torn things open. It seems you caused the mall riot. It would be nice if we could say we fired you for it."

"But—but I didn't!"

"Yes, you did. Think about it." Bailey wasn't looking at him. "So did I. C.B. A. may have to fire me too."

"Now—" Jerrybeny stopped and started over—"now wait a minute. If you're saying what I think you're saying. . . . but what about freedom of the press?"

"We talked about that, too."

"I didn't exaggerate what was happening. I reported a—a disturbance. When it turned into a riot, I called it a riot. Did I lie about anything? Anything?"

"Oh, in a way," Bailey said in a tired voice. "You've got your choice about where to point that camera. You pointed it where there was fighting, didn't you? And I picked out the most exciting scenes. When we both finished, it looked like a small riot. Fighting everywhere! Then everyone who wanted to be in the middle of a small riot came flicking in, just like Evans said, and in thirty seconds we had a large riot."

"You know what somebody suggested? A time limit on news. A law against reporting anything until



twenty-four hours after it happens. Can you imagine anything sillier? For ten thousand years the human race has been working to send news farther and faster, and now. . . . Oh, hell, Jansen, I don't know about freedom of the press. But the riot's still going on, and everyone's blaming you. You're fired."

"Thanks." Jenybeny surged out of his chair on what felt like the last of his strength. Bailey moved just as fast, but by the time he got around the desk, Jeriberry was inside a booth, dialing.

He stepped out into a warm black night. He felt sick and miserable and very tired. It was two in the morning. His paper suit was torn and crumpled and clammy.

George Bailey stepped out of the booth behind him.

"Thought so. Now, Jansen, let's talk sense."

"How did you know I'd be here?"

"I had to guess you'd come straight home. Jansen, you won't suffer for this. You may make money on it. C .B . A. wants an exclusive interview on the riot, your viewpoint. Thirty-five hundred bucks."

"Screw that."

"In addition, there's two weeks' severance pay and a stack of bonuses. We used a lot of your tape. And when this blows over, I'm sure we'll want you back."

"Blows over, huh?"

"Oh, it will. News gets stale awfully fast these days. I know. Jansen, why don't you want thirty-five hundred bucks?"

"You'd play me up as the man who started the mall riot. Make me more valuable. . . . Wait a minute. Who have you got in mind for the interview?"

"Who else?"

"Wash Evans!"

"He's fair. You'd get your say." Bailey considered him. "Let me know if you change your mind. You'd have a chance to defend yourself, and you'd get paid besides."

"No chance."

"All right." Bailey went.

3

For Eric Jansen and his family, displacement booths came as a disaster.

At first he didn't see it that way. He was twenty-eight (and Barry Jerome Jansen was three) when JumpShift, Inc., demonstrated the augmented tunnel diode effect on a lead brick. He watched it on

television. He found the prospects exciting.

Eric Jansen had never worked for a salary. He wrote. Poetry and articles and a few short stories, highly polished, admired by a small circle of readers, sold at infrequent intervals to low-paying markets that he regarded as prestigious. His money came from inherited stocks. If he had invested in JumpShift then—but millions could tell that sad story. It was too risky then.

He was thirty-one when commercial displacement booths began to be sold for cargo transport. He was not caught napping. Many did not believe that the magic could work until suddenly the phenomenon was changing their world. But Eric Jansen looked into the phenomenon very carefully.

He found that there was an inherent limitation on the augmented tunnel diode effect. Teleportation over a difference in altitude made for drastic temperature changes: a drop of seven degrees Fahrenheit for every mile upward, and vice versa, due to conservation of energy. Conservation of momentum, plus the rotation of the Earth, put a distance limit on lateral travel. A passenger flicking east would find himself kicked upward by the difference between his velocity and the Earth's. Flicking west, he would be slapped down. North and south, he would be kicked sideways.

Cargo and passenger displacement booths were springing up in every city in America, but Eric Jansen knew that they would always be restricted to short distances. Even a ten-mile jump would be bumpy. A passenger flicking halfway around the equator would have to land running—at half a mile per second.

JumpShift stock was sky-high. Eric Jansen decided it must be overpriced.

He considered carefully, then made his move.

He sold all of his General Telephone stock. If anyone wanted to talk to someone, he would just go, wouldn't he? A displacement booth took no longer than a phone call.

He tried to sell his General Motors, wisely, but everyone else wisely made the same decision, and the price fell like a dead bird. At least he got something back on the stock he owned in motorcycle and motorscooter companies. Later he regretted that. It developed that people rode motorcycles and scooters for fun. Now, with the streets virtually empty, they were buying more than ever.

Still, he had fluid cash—and the opportunity to make a killing.

Airline stock had dropped with other forms of transportation. Before the general public could realize its mistake, Eric Jansen invested every dime in airlines and aircraft companies. The first displacement booths in any city were links to the airport. That lousy half-hour drive from the center of town,

the heavy taxi fare in, were gone forever. And the booths couldn't compete with the airlines themselves!

Of course you still had to check in early—and the planes took off only at specified times. .

What it amounted to was that plane travel was made easier, but shortdistance travel via displacement booth was infinitely easier (infinitely—try dividing any ten-minute drive by zero). And planes still crashed. Cassettes had copped the entertainment market, so that television was mostly news these days; you didn't have to go anywhere to find out what was happening. Just turn on the TV.

A plane flight wasn't worth the hassle.

As for the telephone stock, people still made long-distance calls. They tended to phone first before they went visiting. They would give out a phone-booth number, whereas they would not give out a displacementbooth number.

The airlines survived, somehow, but they paid rock-bottom dividends. Barry Jerome Jansen grew up poor in the midst of a boom period. His father hated the displacement booths but used them, because there was nothing else.

Jerryberry accepted that irrational hatred as part of his father's personality. He did not share it. He hardly noticed the displacement booths. They were part of the background. The displacement booths were the most important part of a newstaper's life, and still he hardly noticed their existence.

Until the day they turned on him.

4

In the morning there were messages stored in his phone. He heard them out over breakfast.

Half a dozen news services and tapezines wanted exclusives on the riot. One call was from Bailey at C.B.A. The price had gone up to four thousand. The others did not mention price, but one was from Playboy.

That gave him furiously to think. Playboy paid high, and they liked unpopular causes.

Three people wanted to murder him. On two of them the teevee was blanked. The third was a graying dowdy woman, all fat and hate and disappointed hopes, who showed him a kitchen knife and started to tell him what she wanted to do with it. Jerrybeny cut her off, shuddering. He wondered if any of them could possibly get hold of his displacement-booth number.

There was a check in the mail. Severance pay and bonuses from C .B .A. So that was that.

He was setting the dishes in the dishwasher when the phone rang. He hesitated, then decided to answer.

It was Janice Wolfe—a pretty oval face, brown eyes, a crown of long, wavy, soft brown hair—and not an anonymous killer. She lost her smile as she saw him. “You look grim. Could you use some cheering up?”

“Yes!” Jerryberry said fervently. “Come on over. Apartment six, booth number—”

“I live here, remember?”

He laughed. He'd forgotten. You got used to people living anywhere and everywhere. George Bailey lived in Nevada; he commuted to work every morning in three flicks, using the long-distance displacement booths at Las Vegas and Los Angeles International Airports.

Those long-distance booths had saved the airlines—after his father had dribbled away most of his stocks to feed his family. They had been operating only two years. And come to think of it— Doorbell.

Over coffee he told Janice about the riot. She listened sympathetically, asking occasional questions to draw him out. At first Jerrybeny tried to talk entertainingly, until he realized, first, that she wasn't indulging in a spectator sport, and second, that she knew all about the riot already.

She knew he'd been fired, too. "That's why I called. They put it on the morning news," she told him.

"It figures."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Get drunk. Alone if I have to. Would you like to spend a lost weekend with me?"

She hesitated. "You'll be bitter."

"Yah, I probably will. Not fit to live with. . . . Hey, Janice. Do you know anything about how the long-distance displacement booths work?"

"No. Should I?"

"The mall riot couldn't have happened without the long-distance booths. That damn Wash Evans might at least have mentioned the fact. . . . except that I only just thought of it myself. Funny. There hasn't ever been a riot that happened that quick."

"I'll come with you," Janice decided.

"What? Good."

"You don't start drinking this early in the morning, do you?"

"I guess not. Are you free today?"

"Every day, during summer. I teach school."

"Oh. So what'll we do? San Diego Zoo?" he suggested at random.

"Sounds like fun."

They made no move to get up. It felt peaceful in Jerrybeny's tiny kitchen nook. There was still coffee.

"You could get a bad opinion of me this way. I feel like tearing things up."

"Go ahead."

mean it:

“Me, too,” she said serenely. “You need to tear things up. Fine, go ahead. After that you can try to put your life back together.”

“Just what kind of school do you teach?”

Janice laughed. “Fifth grade.”

There was quiet.

“You know what the punch line is? Wash Evans wants to interview me! After that speech he made!”

“That sounds like a good idea,” she said surprisingly. “Gives you a chance to give your side of the story. You didn’t really cause the mall riot, did you?”

“No! . . . No. Janice, he’s just too danm good. He’d make mincemeat of me. By the time he got through I’d be The Man Who Caused the Mall Riot in every English-speaking country in the world, and some others, too, because he gets translations—”

“He’s just a commentator.”

Jerrybeny started to laugh.

“He makes it look so easy,” he said. “A hundred million eyes out there, watching him, and he knows it. Have you ever seen him self-conscious? Have you ever heard him at a loss for words? My dad used to say it about writing, but it’s true for Wash Evans. The hardest trick in the world is to make it look easy, so easy that any clod thinks he can do it just as well.

“Hell, I know what caused the mall riot. The news program, yes. He’s right, there. But the long-distance displacement booth did it, too. Control those, and we could stop that kind of riot from ever happening again.

But what could I tell Wash Evans about it? What do I know about displacement booths?”

“Well, what do you know?”

Jerryberry Jansen looked into his coffee cup for a long time. Presently he said, “I know how to find out things. I know how to find out who knows most about what and then go ask. Legwork. They hammered at it in the journalism classes. I know legwork.”

He looked up and met her eyes. Then he lunged across the table to reach the phone.

“Hello? Oh, hi, Jansen. Changed your mind?”

“Yes, but—”

“Good, good! I’ll put you through to—”

“Yes, but!”

“Oh. Okay, go ahead.”

“I want some time to do some research.”

“Now, damn it, Jensen, you know that time is just what we don’t have! Old news is no news. What kind of research?”

“Displacement booths.”

“Why that? Never mind; it’s your business. How much time?”

“How much can you afford?”

“Damn little.”

“Bailey, C.B.A. upped my price to four thousand this morning. How come?”

“You didn’t see it? It’s on every screen in the country. The rioters broke through the police line. They’ve got a good section of Venice now, and there are about twice as many of them, because the police didn’t shut down the displacement booths in the area until about twenty minutes too late. Twenty minutes!” Bailey seemed actually to be grinding his teeth. “We held off reporting the breakthrough until they could do it. We did. A.B . S. reported it live on all stations. That’s where all the new rioters came from.”

“Then. . . it looks like the mall riot is going to last a little longer.”

“That it does. And you want more time. Things are working out, aren’t they?” Then, “Sorry. Those A.B.S. bastards. How much time do you want?”

“As much as I can get. A week.”

“You’ve got to be kidding. You maybe can get twenty-four hours, only I can’t make the decision. Why don’t you talk to Evans himself?”

“Fine. Put him on.”

The teevee went on hold. Pale-blue flow patterns floated upward in what had become a twenty-inch Kallioscope~ Waiting, Jenyberry said, “If this riot gets any bigger, I could be more famous than Hitler.”

Janice set his coffee beside him. She said, “Or Mrs. O’Leary’s cow.”

The screen came on. “Jansen, can you get over here right now? Wash Evans wants to talk to you in person.”

“Okay.” Jerryberiy clicked off. He felt a thrumming inside him. . . as if he felt the motion of the world, and the world were spinning faster and faster. Surely things were happening fast....

Janice said, “No lost weekend.”

“Not yet, love. Have you any idea what you’ve let me in for? I may not sleep for days. I’ll have to

find out what teleportation is, what it does.

where do I start?"

"Wash Evans. You'd better get moving."

"Right." He bolted his coffee in three swift gulps. "Thanks. Thanks for coming over, thanks for jarring me off the dime. We'll see how it works out." He went, pulling on a coat.

Wash Evans was five feet four inches tall. People sometimes forgot that size was invisible in a teevee close-up. In the middle of a televised interview, when the camera was flashing back and forth between two angry faces, then the deep, sure voice and the dark, mobile, expressive face of Wash Evans could be devastatingly convincing.

Wash Evans looked up at Jenybeny Jansen and said, "I've been wondering if I owe you an apology."

"Take your time," said Jenybeny. He finished buttoning his coat.

"I don't. Fact is, I psyched out the mall riot as best I knew how, and I think I did it right. I didn't tell the great unwashed public you caused it all. I just told it like it happened."

"You left some things out."

"All right, now we've got something to talk about. Sit down." They sat. Their faces were level~ now. Jerryberry said, "This present conversation is not for publication and is not to be considered an interview. I have an interview to sell. I don't want to undercut myself."

"I accept your terms on behalf of the network. We'll give you a tape of this conversation."

"I'm making my own." Jerrybeny tapped his inside pocket, which clicked.

Wash Evans grinned. "Of course you are, my child. Now, what did I miss?"

"Displacement booths."

"Well, sure. If the booths had been cut off earlier—"

"If the booths didn't exist."

"You're kidding. No, you're not. Jansen, that's a wishing horse. Displacement booths are here to stay."

"I know. But think about this. Newstapers have been around longer than displacement booths. Roving newstapers, like me—we've been using the booths since they were invented."

"So?"

"Why didn't the mall riot happen earlier?"

“I see what you mean. Hmm. The airport booths?”

“ ‘ ‘ ~i?~ili . ‘ ‘

“Jansen, are you actually going to face the great unwashed teevee public and tell them to give up long-distance displacement booths?”

“No. I. . . don’t know just what I have in mind. That’s why I want some time. I want to know more.”

“Uh-huh,” said Evans, and waited.

Jerrybeny said, “Turn it around. Are you going to try to talk the public into giving up news programs?”

“No. Maybe to put some restrictions on newstaping practices. We’re too fast these days. A machine won’t work without friction. Neither does a civilization. . . . But we’d ruin the networks, wouldn’t we?”

“You’d cut your own throat.”

“Oh, I’d be out.” Evans mashed out a cigarette. “Take away the news broadcasts, and they wouldn’t have anything left to sell but educational teevee. Nothing to sell but toys and breakfast cereal. Jansen, I don’t know.”

“Good,” said Jerryberry.

“You question my dispassionate judgment?” Evans chuckled in his throat. “I’m on both sides. Suppose we do an interview live, at ten tonight. That’ll give you twelve hours—”

“Twelve hours!”

“That’s enough, isn’t it? You want to research teleportation. I want to get this in while people are still interested in the riot. Not just for the ratings ,but because we both have something to say.” Jerryberry tried to interrupt, but Evans overrode him. “We’ll advance you a thousand, and three more if we do the interview. Nothing if we don’t. That’ll get you back on time.”

Jerryberry accepted it. “One thing. Can you make Bailey forget to cancel my C.B.A. card for a while? I may have to do a lot of traveling.”

“I’ll tell him. I don’t know if he’ll do it.”

5

He flicked in at Los Angeles International, off-center in a long curved row of displacement booths:



upright glass cylinders with rounded tops, no different from the booths on any street corner. On the opposite wall, a good distance away, large red letters said “TWA.” He stood a moment, thinking. Then he dialed again.

He was home, at the Shady Rest. He dialed again.

He was near the end of the row—a different row, with no curve to it. And the opposite wall bore the emblem of United.

The terminal was empty except for one man in a blue uniform who was waxing the floor.

Jenyberry stepped out. For upwards of a minute he watched the line of booths. People flicked in at random. Generally they did not even look up. They would dial a long string of digits—sometimes making a mistake, snarling something, and starting over—and be gone. There were so many that the booths themselves seemed to be flickering.

He took several seconds of it on the Minox.

Beneath the United emblem was along, long row of empty counters with scales between them, for luggage. The terminal was spotless—and empty, unused. Haunted by a constant flow of ghosts.

A voice behind him said, “You want something?”

“Is there a manager’s office?”

The uniformed man pointed down an enormous length of corridor. “The maintenance section’s down that way, where the boarding area used to be. I’ll call ahead, let them know you’re coming.”

The corridor was long, unnecessarily long, and it echoed. The walk was eating up valuable time. . . and then an open cart came from the other end and silently pulled up alongside him. A straight-backed old man in a one-button business lounge said, “Hello. Want a ride?”

“Thanks.” Jenybeny climbed aboard. He handed over his C.B.A. credit card. “I’m doing some research for a—a documentary of sorts. What can you tell me about the long-distance booths?”

“Anything you like. I’m Nils Kjerulf. I helped install these booths, and I’ve been working on them ever since.”

“How do they work?”

“Where do I start? Do you know how a normal booth works?”

“Sure. The load isn’t supposed to exist at all between the two endpoints. Like the electron in a tunnel diode.” An answer right out of the science section of any tapezine. Beyond that he could fake it.

This Nils Kjerulf was lean and ancient, with deep smile wrinkles around his eyes and mouth. His hair was thick and white. He said, “They had to give up that theory. When you’re sending a load to Mars, say, you have to assume that something exists in the ten minutes or so it takes the load to make the trip. Conservation of energy.”

“All right. What is it?”

“For ten minutes it’s a kind of superneutrino. That’s what they tell me. I’m not a physicist. I was in business administration in college. A few years ago they gave me a year of retraining so I could handle long-distance displacement machinery. If you’re really interested in theory, you ought to ask someone at Cape Canaveral. Here we are.”

Two escalators, one going up, one motionless. They rode up. Jenybeny asked, “Why didn’t they build closer? Think of all the walking we’d save.”

“You never heard a 707 taking off?”

“Sound is only part of it. If a plane ever crashed here, nobody would want it hitting all the main buildings at once.”

The escalator led to two semicircular chambers. One was empty but for a maze of chairs and couches and low partitions, all done in old chrome and fading orange. In the other the couches had been ripped out and replaced with instrument consoles. Jerrybeny counted half a dozen men supervising the displays.

A dim snoring sound began somewhere, like an electric razor going in the next-door apartment. Jerrybeny turned his head, seeking. It was outside. Outside, behind a wall of windows, a tiny single-engine plane taxied down a runway.

“Yes, we still function as an airport,” said Nils Kjerulf. “Skydiving, sport flying, gliding. I fly some myself. The jumbo-jet pilots used to hate us; we use up just as much landing time as a 747. Now we’ve got the runways to ourselves.”

“I gather you were a manager somewhere.”

“Right here. Iran this terminal before anyone had heard of teleportation. I watched it ruin us. Thirty years, Mr. Jansen.”

“With no offense intended whatever, why did they train a professional administrator in quantum displacement physics? Why not the other way around?”

“There weren’t any experts where the long-distance booths were concerned, Mr. Jansen. They’re new.”

“What have you learned in two years? Do you still get many breakdowns?”

“We still do. Every two weeks or so, something goes out of synch. Then we go out of service for however long it takes to find it and fix it—usually about an hour.”

“And what happens to the passenger?”

Kjerulf looked surprised. “Nothing. He stays where he started—or rather, that giant neutrino we were talking about is reflected back to the transmitter if the receiver can’t pick it up. The worst thing that can happen is that the link to the velocity damper could be lost, in which case—but we’ve developed safeguards against that.

“No, the passengers just stop coming in, and we go out of service, and the other companies take the overflow. There isn’t any real competition between the companies anymore. What’s the point? T.W.A. and United and Eastern and the rest used to advertise that they had better meals in flight, more comfortable seats, prettier hostesses. . . like that. How long do you spend in a displacement booth? So when we converted over, we set the dialing system up so you just dial Los Angeles International or whatever, and the companies get customers at random. Everyone saves a fortune in advertising.”

“An antitrust suit—”

“Would have us dead to rights. Nobody’s done it, because there’s no point. It works, the way we run it. Each company has its own velocity shift damper. We couldn’t all get knocked out at once. In an emergency I think any of the companies could handle all of the long-distance traffic.”

“Mr. Kjerulf, what is a velocity shift damper?”

Kjerulf looked startled. Jenybeny said, “I took journalism.”

“A.h. ~

“It’s not just curiosity. My dad lost a fortune on airline stock—”

“So did I,” said Kjerulf, half-smiling with old pain.

“Oh?”

“Sometimes I feel I’ve sold out. The booths couldn’t possibly compete with the airlines, could they? They wouldn’t send far enough. Yet they ruined us.”

“My dad figured the same way.”

“And now the booths do send that far, and I’m working for them, or they’re working for me. There wasn’t all that much reason to build the long-distance systems at airports. Lots of room here, of course, and an organization already set up. . . but they really did it to save the airline companies.”

“A little late.”

“Perhaps. Some day they’ll turn us into a public utility.” Kjerulf looked about the room, then called to a man seated near the flat wall of the semicircle. “Dan!”

“Yo!” the man boomed without looking up.

“Can you spare me twenty minutes for a public-relations job?”

The man stood up, then climbed up on his chair. He looked slowly about the room. Jerrybeny guessed that he could see every instrument board from where he was standing. He called, “Sure. No sweat.”

They took the cart back to the terminal. They entered a booth. Jerrybeny inserted his C. B. A. credit

card, then waited while Kjerulf dialed.

They were in a concrete building. Beyond large square windows a sunlit sea of blue water heaved and splashed, almost at floor level. Men looked around curiously, recognized Nils Kjerulf, and turned back to their work.

“Lake Michigan. And out there—” Kjerulf pointed. Jerrybeny saw a tremendous white mass, a flattened dome, very regular. A great softly rounded island. “—is the United Air Lines velocity damper. All of the dampers look about like that, but they float in different lakes or oceans. Aeroflot uses the Caspian Sea. The T.W.A. damper is in the Gulf of Mexico.”

“Just what is it?”

“Essentially it’s a hell of a lot of soft iron surrounded by a hell of a lot more foam plastic, enough to float it, plus a displacement-booth receiver feeding into the iron. Look, see it surge?”

The island rose several feet, slowly, then fell back as slowly. Ripples moved outward and became waves as they reached the station.

“That must have been a big load. Now, here’s how it works. You know that the rotation of the Earth puts a limit on how far you can send a load. If you were to shift from here to Rio de Janeiro, say, you’d flick in moving up and sideways—mainly up, because Rio and L.A. are almost the same distance from the equator.

“But with the long-distance booths, the receiver picks up the kinetic energy and shunts it to the United Air Lines velocity damper. That big mass of iron surges up or down or sideways until the water stops it—or someone flicks in from Rio and the damping body stops cold.”

Jerryberry thought about it. “What about conservation of rotation? It sounds like you’re slowing down the Earth.”

“We are. There’s nothing sacred about conservation of rotation, except that the energy has to go somewhere. There are pumps to send water through the damper bodies if they get too hot.”

Jerryberry pulled out the Minox. “Mind if I take some pictures?”

“No, go ahead.”

The Minox was a movie camera, but it would not have the resolution of a press camera. No matter. If he had the time he could comeback. . . not that he thought he would. He took shots of the men at work in the station, of Nils Kjerulf with his back to the windows. He shot almost a minute of the great white island itself. He was hoping it would surge; and presently it did, sinking sideways, surging up again. Waves beat at the station. A jet of white steam sprayed from the top of the great white mass.

“Good,” he said briskly to himself. He folded the spidery tripod legs and dropped the camera in his pocket. He turned to Kjerulf, who had been watching the proceedings with some amusement. “Mr. Kjerulf, can you tell me anything about traffic control? Is there any?”

“How do you mean? Customs?”

“Not exactly. . . but tell me about customs.”

“The customs terminal in Los Angeles is at T.W.A. You haven’t been out of the country recently? No? Well, any big-city airport has a customs terminal. In a small country there’s likely to be just one. If you dial a number outside the country, any country, you wind up in somebody’s customs terminal. The booths there don’t have dials, you see. You have to cross the customs line to dial out.”

“Clever. Are there any restrictions on traffic within the United States?”

“No, you just drop your chocolate dollars in and dial. Unless it’s a police matter. If the police know that someone’s trying to leave the city they may set up a watch in the terminals. We can put a delay on the terminals to give a detective time to look at a passenger’s face and see if he’s who they want.”

“But nothing to stop passengers from coming in.”

“No, except that it’s possible to Kjerulf trailed off oddly, then finished, “...turn off any booth by remote control, from the nearest JumpShift maintenance system. What are you thinkingof, the mall riot?”

“~‘ali . ‘ ~

There was no more to say. He left Nils Kjerulf in the United terminal in Los Angeles. He dialed for customs.

For several minutes Jenyberry watched them flicking in. There were two types:

The tourists came in couples, sometimes with a child or two. They flicked in looking interested and harried and a little frightened. Their clothing was outlandish and extraordinary. Before they left the booths, they would look about them mistrustfully. Sometimes they formed larger groups.

The businessmen traveled alone. They wore conservative or old-fashioned clothing and carried one suitcase: large or small, but one. They were older than the tourists. They moved with authority, walking straight out of the booths the moment they appeared.

At the barner: four men in identical dark suits with shield-shaped shoulder patches. Jenybeny was on the wrong side of the barrier to command their attention. He was thinking of dialing himself to Mexico and back when one of them noticed him and pegged him as a newstaper.

His name was Gregory Scheffer. Small and round and middle-aged, he perched on the wooden barner and clasped one knee in both hands. “Sure, I can talk awhile. This isn’t one of the busy days. The only time these booths really get a workout is Christmas and New Year and Bastille Day and like that. Look around you,” he said, waving a pudgy hand expansively.

“About four times as many incoming as there was six months ago. I used to want to search every bag that came through, just to be doing something. If we keep getting more and more of them this way, we’ll need twice as many customs people next year.”

“Why do you suppose—”

“Did you know that the long-distance booths have been operating for two solid years? It’s only in the last six months or so that we’ve started to get so many passengers. They had to get used to traveling

again. Look around you; look at all this space. It used to be full before JumpShift came along. People have got out of the habit of traveling, that's all there is to it. For twenty solid years. They have to get back into it."

"Guess so." Jenybeny tried to remember why he was here. "Mr. Scheffer—"

"Greg."

"Jenyberry. Customs' main job is to stop smuggling, isn't it?"

"Well. . . it used to be. Now we only slow it down, and not very damn much. Nobody in his right mind would smuggle anything through customs. There are safer ways."

"Oh?"

"Diamonds, for instance. Diamonds are practically indestructible. You could rig a cargo booth in Kansas to receive from. . . oh, there's a point in the South Pacific to match anyplace in the United States: same longitude, opposite latitude. You don't need a velocity damper if you put the boat in the right place. Diamonds? You could ship in Swiss watches that way. Though that's pretty finicky. You'd want to pad them."

"Good grief. You could smuggle anything you pleased, anywhere."

"Just about. You don't need the ocean trick. Say you rig a booth a mile south of the Canadian border, and another booth a mile north. That's not much of a jump. You can flick further than that just in L.A. I think we're obsolete," said Scheffer. "I think smuggling laws are obsolete. You won't publish this?"

"I won't use your name."

"I guess that's okay."

"Can you get me over to the incoming booths? I want to take some pictures."

"What for?"

"I'm not sure yet."

"Let's see some ID." Gregory Scheffer didn't trust evasive answers. The incoming booths were in his jurisdiction. He studied the C.B .A. card for a few seconds and suddenly said, "Jansen! Mall riot!"

"Right!"

"What was it like?"

Jenybeny invested half a minute teffing him. "So now I'm trying to find out how it got started. If there were some way to stop all of those people from pouring in like that—"

"You won't find it here. Look, a dozen passengers and we're almost busy. A thousand people suddenly pour through those booths, and what would we do? Hide under something, that's what we'd do."

“I still want to see the incoming booths.”

Scheffer thought it over, shrugged, and let him through. He stood at Jerryberry’s shoulder while Jenyberiy used his eye and his camera.

The booth was just like a street-corner booth, except for the blank metal face where a dial would be. “I don’t know what’s underneath,” Scheffer told him. “For all of me, it’s just like any other booth. How much work would it be to leave off the dial?”

Which made sense. But it was no help at all.

6

They tape the Tonight Show at two in the afternoon.

Twenty minutes into it, the first guest is lolling at his ease, just rapping, talking off the top of his head, ignoring the probable hundred million eyes behind the cameras. This is a valuable knack, and rare. Tonight’s first guest is a series hero in a science-fiction tapezine.

He is saying, “Have you ever seen a red tide? It’s thick down at Hermosa Beach. I was there this weekend. In the daytime it’s just dirty water, muddy-looking, and it smells. But at night...”

This enthusiasm that can reach through a teevee screen to touch fifty million minds, this enthusiasm is in no way artificial. He means it. He only expresses it better than most men. He leans forward in his chair; his eyes blaze; there is harsh tension in his voice. “The breakers glow like churning blue fire! Those plankton are fluorescent. And they’re all through the wet sand. Walk across it, it flashes blue light under your feet! Kick it, scuff your feet through it, it lights up. Throw a handful of sand, it flashes where it hits! This light isn’t just on the surface. Stamp your foot, you can see the structure of the sand by the way it flares. You’ve got to see it to believe it,” he says.

They will run the tape starting at eight thirty tonight.

7

Standard booths: how standardized?

Who makes them besides JumpSh~ft? Monopoly? How extensive?

Skip spaceflight?

Space exploration depended utterly on teleportation. But the subject was likely to be very technical and not very useful. He could gain time by skipping it entirely. Jenyberiy considered, then turned the question mark into an exclamation point.

His twelve hours had become nine.

Of the half-dozen key clubs to which he belonged, the Cave des Roys was the quietest. A place of stone and wood, a good place to sit and think. The wall behind the bar was several hundred wine bottles in a cement matrix. Jerryberry looked into the strange lights in the glass, sipped occasionally at a silver fizz, and jotted down whatever occurred to him.

Sociology. What has teleportation done to society?

Cars.

Oil companies. Oil stocks. See back issues Wall Street Journal.

Wattsriot?Chicago riot? He crossed that last one out. TheChicago riot had been political, hadn't it? Then he couldn't remember any other riots. They were too far in the past. He wrote:

Riot control. Police procedure.

Crime? The crime rate should have soared after displacement booths provided the instant getaway. Had it?

Sooner or later he was going to have to drop in at police headquarters. He'd hate that, but he might learn something. Likewise the library, for several hours of dull research. Then?

He certainly wasn't going to persuade everybody to give up displacement booths:

He wrote: OBJECTIVE: Demonstrate that displacement booths imply instant riot. It's a social problem. Solve it on that basis. For the sake of honesty he added, Get 'em off my back. CROWDS. In minutes the mall had become a milling mass of men. But he'd seen crowds form almost as fast. It might happen regularly in certain places. After a moment's thought he wrote. Tahiti .Jerusalem .Mecca .Easter Island .Stonehenge .Olduvai Gorge .

He stood up. Start with the phone calls.

"Doctor Robin Whyte," Jerryberry said to the phone screen. "Please."

The receptionist at Seven Sixes was no sex symbol. She was old enough to be Jenybeny's aunt, and handsome rather than beautiful. She heard him out with a noncommittal dignity that, he sensed, could turn glacial in an instant.



“Barry Jerome Jansen,” he said carefully.

He waited on hold, watching dark-red patterns flow upward in the phone screen.

Key clubs were neither new nor rare. Some were small and local; others were chains, existing in a dozen or a hundred locations. Everyone belonged to a club; most people belonged to several.

But Seven Sixes was something else. Its telephone number was known

universally. Its membership, large in absolute terms, was small for an organization so worldwide. It included presidents, kings, winners of various brands of Nobel prize. Its location was—unknown. Somewhere in Earth’s temperate zones. Jerryberry had never heard of its displacementbooth number being leaked to anyone.

It took a special kind of gall for one of Jerrybeny’s social standing to dial 666-6666. He had learned that gall in journalism class. Go to the source— no matter how highly placed; be polite, be prepared to wait, but keep trying, and never, never worry about wasting the great man’s time.

Funny: They still called it journalism, though newspapers had died. And the Constitution that had protected newspapers still protected “the press.” For a while. But laws could change.

The screen cleared.

Robin Whyte the physicist had been a mature man of formidable reputation back when JumpShift first demonstrated teleportation. Today, twentyfive years later, he was the last living member of the team that had formed JumpShift. His scalp was pink and bare. His face was round and soft, almost without wrinkles, but slack, as if the muscles were tired. He looked like somebody’s favorite grandfather.

He looked Jerryberry Jansen up and down very thoroughly. He said, “I wanted to see what you looked like.” He reached for the cutoff switch.

“I didn’t do it,” Jerrybeny said quickly.

Whyte stopped with his finger on the cutoff. “No?”

“I am not responsible for the mall riot. I hope to prove it.”

The old man thought it over. “And you propose to involve me? How?”

Jerryberry took a chance. “I think I can demonstrate that displacement booths and the mall riot are intimately connected. My problem is that I don’t know enough about displacement-booth technology.”

“And you want my help?”

“You invented the displacement booths practically single-handed,” Jerryberry said straight-faced. “Instant riots, instant getaways, instant smuggling. Are you going to just walk away from the problem?”

Robin Whyte laughed in a high-pitched voice, his head thrown way back, his teeth white and perfect

and clearly false. Jenybeny waited, wondering if it would work.

“All right,” Whyte said. “Come on over. Wait a minute, what am I thinking? You can’t come to Seven Sixes. I’ll meet you somewhere. L’Orangerie, New York City . At the bar.”

The screen cleared before Jerrybeny could answer. That was quick, he thought. And, Move, idiot. Get there before he changes his mind.

In New York it was just approaching cocktail hour. L’Orangerie was polished wood and dim lighting and chafing dishes of Swedish meatballs on toothpicks. Jenybeny captured a few to go with his drink. He had not had lunch yet.

Robin Whyte wore a long-sleeved gray one-piece with a collar that draped into a short cape, and the cape was all the shifting rainbow colors of an oil film. The height of fashion, except that it should have been skin-tight. It was loose all over, bagging where Whyte bagged, and it looked very comfortable. Whyte sipped at a glass of milk.

“One by one I give up my sins,” he said. “Drinking was the last, and I haven’t really turned loose of it yet. But almost. That’s why your reverse salesmanship hooked me in. I’ll talk to anyone. What do I call you?”

“Barry Jerome Jansen.”

“Let me put it this way. I’m Robbie. What do I call you?”

“Oh. Jerryberry.”

Whyte laughed. “I can’t call anyone Jerrybeny. Make it Barry.”

“God bless you, sir.”

“What do you want to know?”

“How big is JumpShift?”

“Ooohhh, pretty big. What’s your standard of measurement?”

Jenybeny, who had wondered if he was being laughed at, stopped wondering. “How many kinds of booth do you make?”

“Hard to say. Three, for general use. Maybe a dozen more for the space industry. Those are still experimental. We lose money on the space industry. We’d make it back if we could start producing drop-ships in quantity. We’ve got a ship on the drawing boards that would transmit itself to any drop-ship receiver.”

Jerryberry prompted him. “And three for general use, you said.”

“Yes. We’ve made over three hundred million passenger booths in the past twenty years. Then there’s a general-use cargo booth. The third model is a tremendous portable booth for shipping really

big, fragile cargoes. Like a prefab house or a rocket booster or a live sperm whale. You can set the thing in place almost anywhere, using three strap-on helicopter setups. I didn't believe it when I saw it." Whyte sipped at his milk. "You've got to remember that I'm not in the business anymore. I'm still chairman of the board, but a bunch of younger people give most of the orders, and I hardly ever get into the factories."

"Does JumpShift have a monopoly on displacement booths?"

He saw the Newstaper! reaction, a tightening at Whyte's eyes and lips. "Wrong word," Jenybeny said quickly. "Sony. What I meant was, who makes displacement booths? I'm sure you make most of the passenger booths in the United States."

"All of them. It's not a question of monopoly. Anyone could make his own booths. Any community could. But it would be hideously expensive. The cost doesn't drop until you're making millions of them. So suppose. . . Chile, for instance. Chile has less than a million passenger booths, all JumpShift model. Suppose they had gone ahead and made their own. They'd have only their own network, unless they built a direct copy of some other model. All the booths in a network have to have the same volume."

"Naturally."

"In practice there are about ten networks worldwide. The U.S.S.R. network is the biggest by far. I think the smallest is Brazil —"

"What happens to the air in a receiver?"

Whyte burst out laughing. "I knew that was coming! It never fails." He sobered. "We tried a lot of things. It turns out the only practical solution is to send the air in the receiver back to the transmitter, which means that every transmitter has to be a receiver, too."

"Then you could get a free ride if you knew who was about to flick in from where, when."

"Of course you could, but would you want to bet on it?"

"I might, if I had something to smuggle past customs."

"How do you mean?"

"I'm just playing with ideas. The incoming booths at customs are incoming because there's no way to dial out—"

"I remember. Type I's with the dials removed."

"Okay. Say you wanted to smuggle something into the country. You flick to customs in Argentina. Then a friend flicks from California to Argentina, into your booth. You wind up in his booth, in California, and not behind the customs barrier."

"Brilliant," said Whyte. "Unfortunately there's a fail-safe to stop anyone from flicking into an occupied booth."

' '1)arriri. ' ~

“Sony,” Whyte said, grinning. “What do you care? There are easier ways to smuggle. Too many. I’m not really sorry. I’m a laissez-faire man myself.”

“I wondered if you could do something with dials to stop another mall riot.”

Whyte thought about it. “Not by taking the dials off. If you wanted to stop a riot, you’d have to stop people from coming in. Counters on the booths, maybe.”

‘ Pvlni.ri. ~

“What was it like, Barry?”

“Crowded. Like a dam broke. The law did shut the booths down from outside, but not fast enough. Maybe that’s the answer. Cut out the booths at the first sign of trouble.”

“We’d get a lot of people mad at us.”

“You would, wouldn’t you?”

“Like the power brownouts in the seventies and eighties. Or like obscene telephone calls. You couldn’t do anything about them, except get more and more uptight. . . readier to smash things. . . . That’s why riots happen, Barry. People who are a little bit angry all the time.”

“Oh?”

“All the riots I remember.” Whyte smiled. “There haven’t been any for a long time. Give JumpShift some credit for that. We stopped some of the things that kept everyone a little bit angry all the time. Smog. Traffic jams. Slow mail. Slum landlords; you don’t have to live near your job or your

welfare office or whatever. Job hunting. Crowding. Have you ever been in a traffic jam?”

“Maybe when! was a little boy.”

“Friend of mine was a college professor for a while. His problem was he lived in the wrong place. Five days a week he would spend an hour driving to work—you don’t believe me?—and an hour and a quarter driving home, because traffic was heavier then. Eventually he gave it up to be a writer.”

“Gawd, I should hope so!”

“It wasn’t even that rare,” Whyte said seriously. “It was rough if you owned a car, and rougher if you didn’t. JumpShift didn’t cause riots; we cured them.”

And he seemed to wait for Jeriyberry’s agreement.

Silence stretched long enough to become embarrassing. . . yet the only thing Jenybeny might have said to break it was “But what about the mall riot?” He held his peace.

“Drain that thing,” Whyte said abruptly. “I’ll show you.”

“Show me?”

“Finish that drink. We’re going places.” Whyte drank half a glass of milk in three gulps, his Adam’s apple bobbing. He lowered the glass. “Well?”

“Ready.”

On Madison Avenue the sunset shadows ran almost horizontally along the glass faces of buildings. Robin Whyte stepped out of L’Orangerie and turned right. Four feet away, a displacement booth.

In the booth he blocked the hand Jenybeny would have used to insert his C.B.A. card. “My treat. This was my idea. . . . Anyway, some of these numbers are secret.” He inserted his own card and dialed three numbers.

Twice they saw rows of long-distance booths. Then it was bright sunlight and sea breeze. Far out beyond a sandy beach and white waves, a great cylinder with a rounded top rose high out of the water. Orange letters on the curved metal flank read: “JUMPSHWF FRESHWATER TRANSPORT.”

“I could take you out in a boat,” said Whyte. “But it would be a waste of time. You wouldn’t see much. Nothing but vacuum inside. You know how it works?”

“Sure.”

“Teleportation was like laser technology. One big breakthrough and then a thousand ways to follow up on it. We spent twelve solid years building continuous teleport pumps for various municipalities to ship fresh water in various directions. When all the time the real problem was getting the fresh water, not moving it.

“Do you know how we developed this gimmick? My secretary dreamed it up one night at an office party. She was about half smashed, but she wrote it down, and the next morning we all took turns trying to read her handwriting. . . . Well, never mind. It’s a simple idea. You build a tank more

put the teleport pump in the top. You teleport the air out. When the air goes, the seawater boils. From then on you’re teleporting cold water-vapor. It condenses wherever you ship it, and you get fresh water. Want to take pictures?”

‘T’sTo.

“Then let’s look at the results,” Whyte said, and dialed.

Now it was even brighter. The booth was backed up against a long wooden building. Far away was a white glare of salt flats, backed by blue ghosts of mountains. Jenybeny blinked and squinted. Whyte opened the door.

Jerryberry said, “Whooff!”

“Death Valley. Hot, isn’t it?”

“Words fail me at a time like this, but I suggest you look up the dictionary definition of blastfurnace.”

Jerrybeny felt perspiration start as a rippling itch all over him. “I’m going to pretend I’m in a sauna. Why doesn’t anyone ever put displacement booths inside?”

“They did for a while. There were too many burglaries. Let’s go around back.”

They walked around the dry wooden building...

and into an oasis. Jenybeny was jarred. On one side of the building, the austere beauty of a barren desert. On the other was a manicured forest:

rows and rows of trees.

“We can grow damn near anything out here. We started with date palms, went to orange and grapefruit trees, pineapples, a lot of rice paddies, mangoes—anything that grows in tropic climates will grow here, as long as you give it enough water.”

Jerrybeny had already noticed the water tower. It looked just like the transmitter. He said, “And the right soil.”

“Well, yes. Soil isn’t that good in Death Valley. We have to haul in too much fertilizer.” Rivulets of perspiration ran down Whyte’s cheeks. His soft face looked almost stern. “But the principle holds. With teleportation, men can live practically anywhere. We gave people room. A man can work in Manhattan or Central Los Angeles or Central Anywhere and live in— in—”

“Nevada.”

“Or Hawaii! Or the Grand Canyon! Crowding caused riots. We’ve eliminated crowding—for a while, anyway. At the rate we’re going we’ll still wind up shoulder to shoulder, but not until you and I are both dead.”

Jenybeny considered keeping his mouth shut but decided he didn’t have the willpower. “What about pollution?”

“What?”

“Death Valley used to have an ecology as unique as its climate. What’s your unlimited water doing to that?”

“Ruining it, I guess.”

“Hawaii, you said. Grand Canyon. There are laws against putting up

apartment buildings in national monuments, thank God. Hawaii probably has the population density of New York by now. Your displacement booths can put men anywhere, right? Even places they don’t belong.”

“Well, maybe they can,” Whyte said slowly. “Pollution. Hmm. What do you know about Death Valley?”

“It’s hot.” Jerrybeny was wet through.

“Death Valley used to be an inland sea. A salt sea. Then the climate changed, and all the water went away. What did that do to the ecology?”

Jerryberry scratched his head. “A sea?”

“Yes, a sea! And drying it up ruined one ecology and started another, just like we’re doing. But never mind that. I want to show you some things. Pollution, huh?” Whyte’s grip on Jenybeny’s arm was stronger than it had any right to be.

Whyte was angry. In the booth he froze, with his brow furrowed and his forefinger extended. Trying to remember a number. Then he dialed in trembling haste.

He dialed two sequences. Jenyberry saw the interior of an airline terminal, then—dark.

“Oh, damn. I forgot it would be night here.”

“Where are we?”

“Sahara Desert. Rudolph Hill Reclamation Project. No, don’t go out there; there’s nothing to see at night. Do you know anything about the project?”

“You’re trying to grow a forest in the middle of the Sahara : trees, leaf-eating molds, animals, the whole ecology.” Jerryberry tried to see out through the glass. Nothing. “How’s it working?”

“Well enough. If we can keep it going another thirty years, this part of the Sahara should stay a forest. Do you think we’re wiping out another ecology?”

“Well, it’s probably worth it here.”

“The Sahara used to be a lush, greenland. It was men who turned it into a desert, over thousands of years, mainly through overgrazing. We’re trying to put it back.”

“Okay,” said Jenybeny. He heard Whyte dialing. Through the glass he could now see stars and a horizon etched with treetop shadows.

He squinted against airport-terminal lights. He asked, “How did we get through customs?”

“Oh, the Hill project is officially United States territory.” Whyte swung the local directory out from the wall and leafed through it before dialing a second time. “Some day you’ll make any journey by dialing two numbers,” he was saying. “Why should you have to dial your local airport first? Just dial a long-distance booth near your destination. Of course the change-over will cost us considerable. Here we are.”

Bright sunlight, sandy beach, blue sea stretching to infinity. The booth was backed up against a seaside hotel. Jerrybeny followed Whyte, whose careful, determined stride took him straight toward the water.

They stopped at the edge. Tiny waves brushed just to the tips of their shoes.

“Carpintena. They advertise this beach as the safest beach in the world. It’s also the dullest, of course. No waves. Remember anything about Carpinteria, Barry?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Oil-slick disaster. A tanker broke up out there, opposite Santa Barbara , which is up the coast a little. All of these beaches were black with oil. I was one of the volunteers working here to save the birds, to get the oil off their feathers. They died anyway. Almost fifty years ago, Barry.”

Part of a history lesson floated to the top of his mind. “I thought that happened in England .”

“There were several oil-slick disasters. Almost I might say, there were many. These days we ship oil by displacement booths, and we don’t use anything like as much oil.”

“No cars.”

“No oil wells, practically.”

They shifted.

From an underwater dome they gazed out at an artificial reef made from old car bodies. The shapes seemed to blend, their outlines obscured by mud and time and swarming fish. Bent and twisted metal bodies had long since rusted away, but their outlines remained, held by shellfish living and dead. Ghosts of cars, the dashboards and upholstery showing through. An occasional fiber-glass wreck showed as if it had been placed yesterday.

The reef went on and on, disappearing into gray distance.

All those cars.

“People used to joke about the East River catching fire and burning to the ground. It was that dirty,” said Whyte. “Now look at it.”

Things floated by: wide patches of scum, with plastic and metal objects embedded in them. Jenybeny said, “It’s pretty grubby.”

“Maybe, but it’s not an open sewer. Teleportation made it easier to get rid of garbage.”

“I guess my trouble is I never saw anything as dirty as you claim it was. Oil slicks. Lake Michigan. The Mississippi.” Maybe you’re exaggerating. “Just what has teleportation done for garbage collection?”

“There are records. Pictures.”

“But even with your wonderful bottomless garbage cans, it must be easier just to dump it in the river.”

“Ahh, I guess so.”

“And you still have to put the gupp somewhere after you collect it.”



Whyte was looking at him oddly. “Very shrewd, Barry. Let me show you the next step.”

\* \* \*

Whyte kept his hand covered as he dialed. “Secret,” he said. “JumpShift experimental laboratory. We don’t need a lot of room, because experiments with teleportation aren’t particularly dangerous. ...“

but there was room, lots of it. The building was a huge inflated Quonset hut. Through the transparent panels Jerrybeny could see other buildings, set wide apart on bare dirt. The sun was 45 degrees up. If he had known which way was north, he could have guessed longitude and latitude.

A very tall, very black woman in a lab smock greeted Whyte with glad cries. Whyte introduced her as “Gemini Jones, Phud.”

“Gem, where do you handle disposal of radioactive waste?”

“Building Four.” The physicist’s hair exploded around her head like a black dandelion, adding unnecessary inches to her height. She looked down at Jerryberry with genial curiosity. “Newstaper?”

“Don’t ever try to fool anyone. The eyes give you away.”

They took the booth to Building Four. Presently they were looking down through several densities of leaded glass into a cylindrical metal chamber.

“We get a package every twenty minutes or so,” said Gem Jones. “There’s a transmitter linked to this receiver in every major power plant in the United States. We keep the receiver on all the time. If a package gets reflected back, we have to find out what’s wrong, and that can get hairy, because it’s usually wrong at the drop-ship.”

Jerryberry said, “Drop-ship?”

Gemini Jones showed surprise at his ignorance. Whyte said, “Backup a bit, Barry. What’s the most dangerous garbage ever?”

“Give me a hint.”

“Radioactive wastes from nuclear power plants. Most dangerous per pound, anyway. They send those wastes here, and we send them to a drop-ship. You’ve got to know what a drop-ship is.”

“Of course I—”

“A drop-ship is a moving teleport receiver with one end open. Generally it’s attached to a space probe. The payload flicks in with a velocity different from that of the drop-ship. Of course it’s supposed to come tearing out the open end, which means somebody has to keep it turned right. And of course the drop-ship only operates in vacuum.”

“Package,” Gem Jones said softly. Something had appeared in the metal chamber below. It was gone before Jerrybeny could quite see what it was.

“Just where is your drop-ship?”

“Circling Venus,” said Whyte. “Originally it was part of the second Venus expedition. You can send anything through a drop-ship: fuel, oxygen, food, water, even small vehicles. There are drop-ships circling every planet in the solar system, except Neptune.

“When the Venus expedition came home, they left the drop-ship in orbit. We thought at first that we might send another expedition through it,

but—face it, Venus just isn’t worth it. We’re using the planet as a garbage dump, which is about all it’s good for.

“Now, there’s no theoretical reason we can’t send unlimited garbage through the Venus drop-ship, as long as we keep the drop-ship oriented right. Many transmitters, one receiver. The payload doesn’t stay in the receiver more than a fraction of a second. If it did get overloaded, why, some of the garbage would be reflected back to the transmitter, and we’d send it again. No problem.”

“What about cost?”

“Stupendous. Horrible. Too high for any kind of garbage less dangerous than this radioactive stuff. But maybe we can bring it down someday.” Whyte stopped; he looked puzzled. “Mind if I sit down?”

There were fold-up chairs around a card table with empty pop bulbs on it. Whyte sat down rather disturbingly hard, even with Gem Jones trying to support his weight. She asked, “Can I get Doctor Janesko?”

“No, Gem, just tired. Is there a pop machine?”

Jenyberry found the pop machine. He paid a chocolate dollar for a clear plastic bulb of cola. He turned and almost bumped into Gemini Jones.

She spoke low, but there was harsh intensity in her voice. “You’re running him ragged. Will you lay off of him?”

“He’s been running me!” Jenybeny whispered.

“I believe it. Well, don’t let him run you so fast. Remember, he’s an old man.”

Whyte pulled the cola bulb open and drank. “Better.” He sighed. . . and was back in high gear. “Now, you see? We’re cleaning up the world. We aren’t polluters.”

“Right.”

“Thank you.”

“I never should have raised the subject. What have you got for the mall riot?”

Whyte looked confused.

“The mall riot is still going on, and they’re still blaming me.”

“And you still blame JumpShift.”

“It’s a matter of access,” Jerryberry said patiently. “Even if only

ten men in a million, say, would loot a store, given the opportunity, that’s still about four thousand people in the United States. And all four thousand can get to the Santa Monica Mall in the time it takes to dial twenty-one digits.”

When Whyte spoke again, he sounded bitter. “What are we supposed to do, stop inventing things?”

“No, of course not.” Jenybeny pulled open another bulb of cola.

“What, then?”

“I don’t know. Just. . . keep working things out.” He drank. “There’s always another problem behind the one you just solved. Does that mean you should stop solving problems?”

“Well, let’s solve this one.”

They sat sipping cola. It was good to sit down. The old man’s running me ragged, thought Jerrybeny.

“Crowds,” he said.

“Right.”

“You can make one receiver for many transmitters. In fact. . . every booth in a city receives from any other booth. Can you make a booth that transmits only?”

Whyte looked up. “Sure. Give it an unlisted number. Potentially it would still be a receiver, of course.”

“Because you have to flick the air back to the transmitter.”

“How’s this sound? You can put an E on the booth number. The only dials with E’s in them are at police stations and fire stations. E for Emergency.”

“All right. Now, you put a lot of these escape booths wherever a crowd might gather—”

“That could be anywhere. You said so yourself.”

“Yali.

“We’d have to double the number of booths in the country. . . or cut the number of incoming booths in half. You’d have to walk twice as far to get where you’re going from any given booth. Would it be worth it?”

“I don’t think this is the last riot,” said Jenyberry. “It’s growing. Like tourism. Your short-hop booths cut tourism way dQwn. The long-distance booths are bringing it back, but slowly. Would you believe a permanent floating riot? A mob that travels from crowd to crowd, carrying coin purses, looting where they can.”

“I hate that idea.”

Jerrybeny put his hand on the old man’s shoulder. “Don’t worry about it. You’re a hero. You made a miracle. What people do with it isn’t your fault. Maybe you even saved the world. The pollution was getting very rough before JumpShift came along.”

“By God, it was.”

“I’ve got to be going. There are things I want to see before I run out of time.”

8

Tahiti. Jerusalem. Mecca. Easter Island. Stonehenge. The famous places of the world. Places a man might dial almost on impulse. Names that came unbidden to the mind.

Mecca. Vast numbers of Muslims (a number he could look up later) bowed toward Mecca five times a day. The Koran called for every Muslim

to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime. The city’s only industry was the making of religious articles. And you could get there just by dialing....

Jerusalem. Sacred to three major religions. Jews still toasted each other at Passover: “Next year in Jerusalem.” Still a forming ground of history after thousands of years. And you could get there just by dialing....

Stonehenge. An ancient mystery. What race erected those stones, and when and why? These would never be known with certainty. From the avenue at the northeast entrance a path forked and ran up a hill between burial mounds. . . and there was a long-distance displacement booth on the hill.

It would be eleven at night in Stonehenge. One in the morning in Mecca and Jerusalem. No action there. Jenybeny crossed them out.

Eiffel Tower, the pyramids, the Sphinx, the Vatican. . . dammit, the most memorable places on Earth were all in the same general area. What could he see at midnight?

Well— Tahiti. Say “tropical paradise,” and every stranger in earshot will

murmur, “Tahiti.” Once Hawaii had had the same reputation, but Hawaii was too close to civilization. Hawaii had been civilized. Tahiti, isolated in the southern hemisphere, might have escaped that fate.

Everything lurched as he finished dialing. Jenybeny stumbled against the booth wall. Briefly he was terrified. But he’d be dead if the velocity transfer had failed. It must be a little out of synch.

He knew too much, that was all.

There were six booths of different makes this side of customs. The single official had a hopeless look. He waved through a constant stream of passengers without seeming to see them.

Jenybeny moved with the stream.

They were mostly men. Many had cameras; few had luggage. English, American, French, German, some Spanish and U.S.S.R. Most were dressed lightly—and poorly, in cheap clothes ready to come apart. They swarmed toward the outgoing booths, the rectangular Common Market booths with one glass side. Jerrybeny saw unease and dismay on many faces. Perhaps it was the new, clean, modern building that bothered them. This was an island paradise? Air conditioning. Fluorescent lighting.

Jenybeny stood in line for the phone. Then he found that it wouldn't take his coin or his credit card. On his way to the change counter he thought to examine the displacement booths. They took only French money. He bought a heavy double handful of coins, then got back in line for the phone.

They have to get used to traveling again. Right on.

The computerized directory spoke English. He used it to get a string of booth numbers in downtown Papeete.

\* \* \*

He was a roving newstaper again. Dial, watch the scene flick over, look around while inserting a coin and dialing. The coin slot was in the wrong place, and the coins felt wrong—too big, too thin—and the dial was a disk with holes in it. A little practice had him in the routine.

There was beach front lined with partly built hotels in crazily original shapes. Of all the crowds he saw in Papeete, the thickest were on the beaches and in the water. Later he could not remember the color of the sand; he hadn't seen enough of it.

Downtown he found huge blocks of buildings faced in glass, some completed, some half built. He found old slums and old mansions. But wherever the streets ran, past mansions or slums or new skyscrapers, he found tents and leantos and board shacks hastily nailed together. They filled the streets, leaving small clear areas around displacement booths and public rest rooms and far more basic portable toilets. An open-air market ran for several blocks and was closed at both ends by crowds of tents. The only way in or out was by booth.

They're ahead of us, thought Jerrybeny. When you've got booths, who needs streets? He was not amused. He was appalled.

There were beggars. At first he was moving too fast; he didn't realize what they were doing. But wherever he flicked in, one or two habitants immediately came toward his booth. He stopped under a vertical glass cliff of a building, where the tents of the squatters ran just to the bouommost of a flight of stone steps, and waited.

Beggars. Some were natives, men and women and children, uniform in their dark-bronze color and in their dress and their speech and the way they moved. They were a thin minority. Most were men and white and foreign. They came with their hands out, mournful or smiling; they spoke rapidly in what they guessed to be his language, and were right about half the time.

He tried several other numbers. They were everywhere.

Tahiti was a white man's daydream.

Suddenly he'd had enough. On his list of jotted numbers was one that would take him out of the city. Jerrybeny dialed it.

Air puffed out of the booth when he opened the door. Jenybeny opened his jaws wide to pop his ears.

The view! He was near the peak of a granite mountain. Other mountains marched away before him, and the valleys between were green and lush. Greens and yellows and white clouds, the blue-gray of distant peaks, and beyond everything else, the sea.

It was a bus terminal. An ancient Greyhound was just pulling out. The driver stopped alongside him and shouted something amiable in French. Jenybeny smiled and shook his head violently. The driver shrugged and pulled away.

This could not have been the original terminal. Before displacement booths it could have been reached only after hours of driving. In moving the

terminal up here, the touring company had saved the best for first and last.

The bus had looked full. Business was good.

Jenybeny stood for a long time, drinking in the view. This was the beauty that had made Tahiti famous. It was good to know that Tahiti's population explosion had left something intact.

In good time he remembered that he was running on a time limit. He walked around to the ticket window.

The young man in the booth laid a paperback book face down. He smiled agreeably. "Yes?"

"Do you speak English?"

"Certainly." He wore a kind of uniform, but his features and color were those of a Tahitian. His English was good, the accent not quite French. "Would you like to buy a tour ticket?"

"No, thanks. I'd like to talk, if you have a minute."

"What would you like to talk about?"

"Tahiti. I'm a newspaper."

The man's smile drooped a bit. "And you wish to give us free publicity?"

"Something like that."

The smile was gone. “You may return to your country and tell them that Tahiti is full.”

“I noticed that. I have just come from Papeete.”

“I have the honor to own a house in Papeete, a good property. We, my family and myself, we have been forced to move out! There was no—no paysage—” he was too angry to talk as fast as he wanted—”no passage from the house to anyplace. We were surrounded by the tents of the—” He used a word Jenybeny did not recognize. “We could not buy an instantmotion booth for the house. I had not the money. We could not have moved the booth to the house because the—”that word again—”blocked the streets. The police can do nothing. Nothing.”

“Why not?”

“There are too many. We are not monsters; we cannot simply shoot them. It would be the only way to stop them. They come without money or clothing or a place to stay. And they are not the worst. You will tell them this when you return?”

“I’m recording,” said Jerryberry.

“Tell them that the worst are those with much money, those who build hotels. They would turn our island into an enormous hotel! See!” He pointed where Jenybeny could not have seen himself, down the slope of the mountain. “The Playboy Club builds a new hotel below us.”

Jenybeny looked down to temporary buildings and a great steel box with helicopter rotors on it. He filmed it on the Minox, then filmed a panoramic sweep of the mountains beyond, and finished with the scowling man in the ticket booth.

“Squatters,” the ticket-taker said suddenly. “The word I wanted. The squatters are in my house now, lam sure of it, in my house since we moved out. Tell them we want no more squatters.”

“I’ll tell them,” said Jerryberry.

Before he left, he took one more long look about him. Green valleys, gray-blue mountains, distant line of sea.. . but his eyes kept dropping to the endless stream of supplies that poured from the Playboy Club’s Type ifi cargo booth.

Easter Island. Tremendous, long-faced, solemn stone statues with topknots of red volcanic tuff. Cartoons of the statues were even more common than pictures (“Shut up until those archaeologists leave,” one statue whispers to another), and even pictures can only hint at their massive solemnity. But you could get there just by dialing.

Except that the directory wouldn’t give him a booth number for Easter Island.

Surely there must be booth travel to Easter Island. Mustn’t there? But how eager would the Peruvian government be to see a miJlion tourists on Easter Island?

The other side of the coin. Displacement booths made any place infinitely accessible, but only if you

moved a booth in. Jerryberry was grinning with delight as he dialed Los Angeles International. There was a defense.

9

At the police station on Purdue Avenue he couldn't get anyone to talk to him.

The patience of a newstaper was unique in a world of instant transportation. He kept at it. Eventually a desk man stopped long enough to tell him, "Look, we don't have time. Everybody's out cleaning up the mall riot."

"Cleaning up? Is it over?"

"Just about. We had to move in old riot vehicles from Chicago. I guess we'll have to start building them again. But it's over."

"Good!"

"Too right. I don't mean to say we got them all. Some looters managed to jury-rig a cargo booth in the basement of Penney's. They moved their loot out that way and then got out that way themselves. We're going to hate it the next time they show up. They've got guns now."

"A permanent floating riot?"

"Something like that. Look, I don't have time to talk." And he was back on the phone.

The next man Jerryheny stopped recognized him at once. "You're the man who started it all! Will you get out of my way?"

Jenybeny left.

\* \* \*

Sunset on a summer evening. It was cocktail hour again. . . three and a half hours later.

Jenybeny felt unaccountably dizzy outside the police station. He rested against the wall. Too much change. Over and over again he had changed place and time and climate. From evening in New York to a humid seacoast to the dry furnace of Death Valley to night in the Sahara. It was hard to remember where he was. He had lost direction.

When he felt better, he shifted to the Cave des Roys.



For each human being there is an optimum ratio between change and stasis. Too little change, he grows bored. Too little stability, he panics and loses his ability to adapt. One who marries six times in ten years will not change jobs. One who moves often to serve his company will maintain a stable marriage. A woman chained to one home and family may redecorate frantically or take a lover or go to many costume parties.

Displacement booths make novelty easy. Stability comes hard. For many the clubs were an element of stability. Many key clubs were chains; a man could leave his home in Wyoming and find his club again in Denver. Members tended to resemble one another. A man changing roles would change clubs.

Clubs were places to meet people, as buses and airports and even neighborhoods no longer were. Some clubs were good for pickups (“This card gets me laid”), others for heavy conversation. At the Beach Club you could always find a paddle-tennis game.

The Cave was for quiet and stability. A quick drink and the cool darkness of the Cave’s bar were just what Jerrybeny needed. He looked into the lights in the wall of bottles and tried to remember a name. When it came, he jotted it down, then finished his drink at leisure.

Harry McCord had been police chief in Los Angeles for twelve years and had been on the force for far longer. He had retired only last year. The computer-directory took some time to find him. He was living in Oregon.

He was living in a small house in the middle of a pine forest. From McCord’s porch Jerrybeny could see the dirt road that joined him to civilization. It seemed to be fading away in weeds. But the displacement booth was new.

They drank beer on the porch. “Crime is a pretty general subject,” said Harry McCord.

“Crime and displacement booths,” said Jerrybeny. “I want to know how your job was affected by the instant getaway.”

‘ ‘ lâ~LI1 .

Jenyberry waited.

“Pretty drastically, I guess. The booths came in. . . when? Nineteen ninety? But they came slowly. We had a chance to get used to them. Let’s see; there were people who put displacement booths in their living rooms, and when they got robbed, they blamed us McCord talked haltingly

at first, then gaining speed. He had always been something of a public figure. He talked well.

Burglary: The honors were even there. If the house or apartment had an alarm, the police could be on the scene almost instantly. If the burglar moved fast enough to get away, he certainly wouldn’t have time to rob his target.

There were sophisticated alarms now that would lock the displacementbooth door from the inside.

Often that held the burglar up just long enough for the police to shift in. At opposite extremes of professionalism, there were men who could get through an alarm system without setting it off—in which case there wasn't a hope in hell of catching them after they'd left—and men who had been caught robbing apartment houses because they'd forgotten to take corns for the booth in the lobby.

“Then there was Lon Willis. His MO was to prop the booth door open before he went to work on the house. If he set the alarm off, he'd run next door and use that booth. Worked pretty well—it slowed us up just enough that we never did catch him. But one night he set off an alarm, and when he ran next door, the next-door neighbor blew a small but adequate hole in him.”

Murder: The alibi was an extinct species. A man attending a party in Hawaii could shoot a man in Paris in the time it would take him to use the bathroom. “Like George Clayton Larkin did. Except that he used his credit card, and we got him,” said McCord, “and we got Lucille Downey because she ran out of coins and had to ask at the magazine stand for change. With blood all over her sleeves!”

Pickpockets: “Do you have a lock pocket?”

“Sure,” said Jerryberry. It was an inside pocket lined with tough plastic. The zipper lock took two hands to open. “They're tough to get into, but not impossible.”

“What's in it? Credit cards?”

“Right.”

“And you can cancel them in three minutes. Picking pockets isn't profitable any more. If it was, they would have mobbed the mall riot.”

Smuggling: Nobody even tried to stop it.

Drugs: “There's no way to keep them from getting in. Anyone who wants drugs can get them. We make arrests where we can, and so what? Me, I'm betting on Darwin.”

“How do you mean?”

“The next generation won't use drugs because they'll be descended from people who had better sense. I'd legalize wireheading if it were up to me. With a wire in your pleasure center, you're getting what all the drugs are supposed to give you, and no dope peddler can hold out on you.”

Riots: The mall riot was the first successful riot in twenty years. “The police can get to a riot before it's a riot,” said McCord. “We call them flash crowds, and we watch for them. We've been doing it ever since... well, ever since it became possible.” He hesitated and evidently decided to

go on. “See, the coin booths usually went into the shopping centers first and then the residential areas. It wasn't till JumpShift put them in the slum areas that we stopped having riots.”

“Makes sense.”

McCord laughed. “Even that's a half-truth. When the booths went into the slums, we pretty near stopped having slums. Everyone moved out. They'd commute.”

“Why do you think the police didn't stop the mall riot?”

“That’s a funny one, isn’t it? I was there this afternoon. Did you get a chance to look at the cargo booth in Penney’s basement?”

“It’s a professional job. Whoever rigged it knew exactly what he was doing. No slips. He probably had a model to practice on. We traced it to a cargo receiver in downtown L.A., but we don’t know where it was sending to, because someone stayed behind and wrecked it and then shifted out. Real professional. Some gang has decided to make a profession of riots.”

“You think this is their first job?”

“I’d guess. They must have seen the mall-type riots coming. Which is pretty shrewd, because a flash crowd couldn’t have formed that fast before long-distance displacement booths. It’s a new crime. Makes me almost sorry I retired.”

“How would you redesign the booths to make life easier for the police?”

But McCord wouldn’t touch the subject. He didn’t know anything about displacement-booth design.

Seven o’clock. The interview with Evans was at ten.

Jerrybeny shifted back to the Cave. He was beginning to get nervous. The Cave, and a good dinner, should help ease his stage fright.

He turned down a couple of invitations to join small groups. With the interview hanging over his head, he’d be poor company. He sat alone and continued to jot during dinner.

Escape booths. Send anywhere, receive only from police and fire departments.

Police can shut down all booths in an area. Except escape booths? No, that would let the looters escape, too. But there might be no way to stop that. At least it would get the innocent bystanders out of a riot area.

Hah! Escape booths send only to police station!!!

He crossed that out and wrote, All booths send only to police station!!! He crossed that out, too, to write an expanded version:

1. Riot signal from police station.
2. All booths in area stop receiving.
3. All booths in area send only to police station.

He went back to eating. Moments later he stopped with his fork half raised, put it down, and wrote:

4. A million rioters stomp police station to rubble, from inside.

And it had seemed like such a good idea.

\* \* \*

He was dawdling over coffee when the rest of it dropped into place. He went to a phone.

The secretary at Seven Sixes promised to have Dr. Whyte call as soon as he checked in. Jenybeny put a time-limit on it, which seemed to please her.

McCord wasn't home.

Jernybeny went back to his coffee. He was feeling twitchy now. He had to know if this was possible. Otherwise he would be talking through his hat—in front of a big audience.

Twenty minutes later, as he was about to get up and call again, the headwaiter came to tell him that Dr. Robin Whyte was on the phone.

"It's a design problem," said Jerryberry. "Let me tell you how I'd like it to work, and then you can tell me if it's possible, okay?"

"Go ahead."

"First step is the police get word of a flash crowd, a mall riot-type crowd. They throw emergency switches at headquarters. Each switch affects the displacement booths in a small area."

"That's the way it works now."

"Now those switches turn off the booths. I'd like them to do something more complex. Set them so they can only receive from police and fire departments and can only transmit to a police station."

"We can do that." Whyte half-closed his eyes to think. "Good. Then the police could release the innocent bystanders, send the injured to a hospital, hold the obvious looters, get everybody's names. . . right. Brilliant. You'd put the receiver at the top of a greased slide and a big cell at the bottom."

"Maybe. At least the receiver would be behind bars."

"You could issue override cards to the police and other authorities to let them shift in through a blockade."

"Good."

Whyte stopped suddenly and frowned. "There's a hole in it. A really big crowd would either wreck the station or smother, depending on how strong the cell was. Did you think of that?"

"I'd like to use more than one police station."

“How many? There’s a distance him Bany, what are you thinking?”

“As it stands now, a long-distance passenger has to dial three numbers to get anywhere. You said you could cut that to two. Can you cut it to one?”

“I don’t know.”

“It’s poetic justice,” said Jerryberry. “Our whole problem is that rioters can converge on one point from all over the United States. If we could use police stations all over the United States, we wouldn’t have a problem. As soon as a cell was full here, we’d switch to police stations in San Diego or Oregon!”

Whyte was laughing. “If you could see your face! Barry, you’re a dreamer.”

“You can’t do it.”

“No, of course we can’t do it. Wait a minute.” Whyte pursed his lips.

“There’s a way. We could do it if there was a long-distance receiver at the police station. Hook the network to a velocity damper! I told you, there’s no reason you shouldn’t be able to dial to a long-distance receiver from any booth.”

“It would work, then!”

“You’d have to talk the public into paying for it. Design wouldn’t be much of a problem.. We could cover the country with an emergency network in a couple of years.”

“Can I quote you?”

“Of course. We sell displacement booths. That’s our business.”

10

Talk shows are one of the few remaining pure entertainment features on teevee. With cassettes the viewer buys a package; with a talk show he never knows just what he’s getting. It is a different product. It is cheap to produce. It can compete.

The Tonight Show shows at 8:30 P.M., prime time.

Around nine they start flicking in, pouring out of the coin booths that line the street above the last row of houses. They mill about, searching out the narrow walks that lead down to the strand. They pour over the low stone wall that guards the sand from the houses. They pause, awed.

Breakers roll in from the black sea, flashing electric-blue.

Within minutes Hennosa Beach is aswarm with people: men, women, children, in couples and family groups. They hold hands and look out to sea. They stamp the packed wet sand, dancing like savages, and whoop with delight to see blue light flash beneath their feet. High up on the dry sand are piles of discarded clothing. Swimmers are thick in the water, splashing blue fire at each other.

Many were drunk or high on this or that when the Tonight Show led them here. Those who came were happy to start with. They came to do a happy thing. Some carry six-packs or pouches of pot.

The line of them stretches around the curve of the shore to the north, beyond Hermosa Pier to the south, bunching around the pier. More are shifting in all the time, trickling down to join the others.

Jenybeny Jansen flicked in almost an hour early for the interview.

The station was an ant's nest, a swarm of furious disorganization. Jerryberry was looking for Wash Evans when Wash Evans came running past him from behind, glanced back, and came to a jarring halt.

“Lo,” said Jerryberry. “Is there anything we need to go over before we go on?”

Evans seemed at a loss. “Yah,” he said, and caught his breath a little. “You’re not news anymore, Jansen. We may not even be doing the interview.”

Jenybeny said a dirty word. “I heard they’d cleared up the riot—”

“More than that. They caught the lady shoplifter.”

“Good!”

“If you say so. One out of a thousand people that recognized your pictures of her turned out to be right. Woman name of Inna Hennessey, lives in Jersey City but commutes all over the country. She says she’s never hit the same store twice. She’s a kick, Jansen. A newspaper’s dream. No offense intended, but I wish they’d let her out of jail tonight. I’d interview her.”

“So I didn’t cause the mall riot anymore, now you’ve got Irma Hennessey. Well, good. I didn’t like being a celebrity. Anything else?”

He was thinking, All that jumping around, all the things I learned today, all wasted. Unless I can get a tapezine lecture out of it.

Evans said, “Yah, there’s a new mall riot going on at Hermosa Beach.”

“What the hell?”

“Craziest damn thing.” Wash Evans lit a cigarette and talked around it. “You know Gordon Lundt, the ‘zine star? He was on the Tonight Show, and he happened to mention the red tide down at Hermosa Beach. He said it was pretty. The next thing anyone knows, every man, woman, and child in the country has decided he wants to see the red tide at Hermosa Beach.”

“How bad is it?”

“Well, nobody’s been hurt, last I heard. And they aren’t breaking things. It’s not that kind of crowd, and there’s nothing to steal but sand, anyway. It’s a happy riot, Jansen. There’s just a bunch of a lot of people.”

“Another flash crowd. It figures,” said Jerrybeny. “You can get a flash crowd anywhere there are displacement booths.”

“Can you?”

“They’ve been around a long time. It’s just that they happen faster with the long-distance booths. Some places are permanent floating flash crowds. Like Tahiti... . what’s wrong?”

Wash Evans had a funny look. “It just hit me that we don’t really have anything to replace you with. You’ve been doing your homework, have you?”

“All day.” Jerrybeny dug out the Minox. “I’ve been everywhere I could think of. Some of this goes with taped interviews.” He produced the tape recorder. “Of course there isn’t much time to sort it out—”

“No. (jimme.” Evans took the camera and the recorder. “We can follow up on these later. Maybe they’ll make a special. Right now the news is at Hermosa Beach. And you sound like you know how it happened and what to do about it. Do you still want to do that interview?”

“I—sure.”

“Go get a C.B.A. camera from George Bailey. Let’s see, it’s—nine fifteen, dammit. Spend half an hour, see as much as you can, then get back

here. Find out what you can about the—flash crowd at Hermosa Beach. That’s what we’ll be talking about.”

George Bailey looked up as Jerrybeny arrived. He pointed emphatically at the single camera remaining on the table, finger-combed the hair back out of his eyes, and went back to monitoring half a dozen teevee screens.

The camera came satisfyingly to life in Jerrybeny’s hands. He picked up a list of Hermosa Beach numbers and turned to the displacement booths. Too much coffee sloshed in his belly. He stopped suddenly, thinking:

One big riot-control center would do it. You wouldn’t need a police network.—just one long-distance receiver to serve the whole country, and a building the size of Yankee Stadium, big enough to handle any riot. A federal police force on permanent guard. Rioting was an interstate crime now anyway. You could build such a center faster and cheaper than any network.

Not now. Back to work. He stepped into a booth, dialed, and was gone.