

THE PERSON FROM PORLOCK

BY RAYMOND F. JONES

Borge, the chief engineer of Intercontinental, glanced down at the blue-backed folder in his hand. Then he looked at the strained face of Reg Stone, his top engineer.

"It's no use," said Borge. "We're canceling the project. Millen's report is negative. He finds the BW effect impossible of practical application. You can read the details, yourself."

"Canceling---!" Reg Stone half rose from his chair. "But chief, you can't do that. Millen's crazy. What can he prove with only a little math and no experimental data? I'm right on the edge of success. If I could just make you see it!"

"I have seen it. I can't see anything that warrants our pouring out another twenty-five thousand bucks after the hundred and fifty your project has already cost the company."

"Twenty, then. Even fifteen might do it. Barge, if you don't let me go on with this you're passing up the biggest development of the century. Some other outfit with more guts and imagination and less respect for high-priced opinion in pretty folders is going to come through with it. Teleportation is in the bag—all we've got to do is lift it out!"

"Majestic and Carruthers Electric have both canceled their projects on it. Professor Merrill Hanford, who assisted Bots-Wellton in the original research, says that the BW effect will never be anything of more than academic interest."

"Hanford!" Reg exploded. "He's jealous because he doesn't have the brains to produce a discovery of that magnitude. Bots-Wellton himself says that ass effect will eventually make it possible to eliminate all other means of freight transport and most passenger stuff except that which is merely for pleasure."

"All of which is very well," said Borge, "except That it doesn't work outside of an insignificant laboratory demonstration."

"Insignificant! The actual transfer of six milligrams of silver over a distance of ten feet is hardly insignificant. As for Millen's math, we haven't got the right tools to handle this."

"I was speaking from an engineering standpoint. Of course, the effect is of interest in a purely-scientific way, but it is of no use to us. Millen's math proves it. Take this copy and see for yourself. I'm sorry, Reg, but that's the final word on it."

Reg Stone rose slowly, his big hands resting against the glass-topped desk. "I see. I'll just have to forget it then, I guess."

"I'm afraid so." Borge rose and extended his hand. "You've been working too hard on this thing. Why don't you take a couple of days off? By then we'll have your next assignment lined up. And no hard feelings over this Bots-Wellton effect business?"

"Oh, no—sure not," Reg said absently.

He strode out of the office and back to the lab where the elaborate equipment of his teleport project was strewn in chaotic piles over benches and lined up in racks and panels.

A hundred thousand dollars worth of beautiful junk, he thought. He slumped in a chair before the vast, complex panels. This cancellation was the fitting climax to the delays, misfortunes, and accidents that had dogged the project since it began.

From the first, everyone except a few members of the Engineering Committee and Reg himself had been against it. Borge considered it a waste of time and money. The other engineers referred to it as Stone's Folly.

And within Reg himself there was that smothering, frustrated, indefinable sensation which he couldn't name.

It was a premonition of failure, and there had been a thousand and one incidents to support it. From the first day, when one of his lab assistants

fell and broke a precious surge amplifier, the project seemed to have been hexed. No clay passed but that materials seemed mysteriously missing or blueprints turned up with the wrong specifications on them. He'd tried six incompetent junior engineers before the last one, a brilliant chap named Spence, who seemed to be the only one of the lot who knew a lighthouse tube from a stub support.

With men and materials continually snafu it was almost as if someone had deliberately sabotaged the whole project.

He caught himself up with a short, bitter laugh. The little men in white coats would be after him if he kept up that line of thought.

He passed a hand over his eyes. How tired he was! He hadn't realized -until now what a tremendous peak of tension he had reached. He felt it in the faint trembling of his fingers. the pressure behind his eyeballs.

His disappointment and anger slowly settled like a vortex about Carl Millen, the consulting physicist who'd reported negatively when Borge insisted to the Engineering Committee that they get outside opinion on the practicability of BW utilization.

The cool, implacable Millen, however. could hardly be the object of anything as personal as anger. Yet, strangely enough, he had been the object of, Reg Stone's friendship ever since the two of them were in engineering school together.

What each of them found in the other would have been hard to put into words, but there was some complementary view of opposite worlds which each seemed able to see through the other's eyes.

As for Millen's report on the BW project-Reg knew it had been utterly impersonal and rendered as Carl Millen saw it, though the two of them had often discussed it in heated argument in the past. But the very impersonality of Millen's point of view made the maintenance of his anger impossible for Reg.

But never in his life had he wanted anything so much as he wanted to be the one to develop the Bots-Wellton effect from a mere laboratory demonstration to a system able to transport millions of tons of freight over thousands of miles without material agent of transfer.

Now he was cut off right at the pockets. He felt at loose ends. It was a panicky feeling. For months on end he had been working at top capacity. He seemed to have suddenly dropped into a vacuum.

He debated handing in his resignation and going to sonic company that would let him develop the project. But who would Majestic and Carruthers, two of the largest outfits, had pulled out. Borge had said. Who else would pick it up? There was one other possibility, he thought breathlessly. Reg Stone could take it over!

Why not? He had a beautifully equipped back yard lab and machine shop. Tens of thousands of dollars worth of equipment from the project would have to be junked by I Intercontinental. Reg felt sure Borge would let him buy it as junk.

Sure, it would be slow without the facilities of the Intercontinental labs, but it would be better than scuttling the entire project.

He suddenly glanced at the clock on the wall. He'd been sitting there without moving for over an hour. It was lunch time. He decided to go downtown where he wouldn't meet anyone he knew, rather than eat in the company cafeteria. He chose the Estate, a sea food restaurant three miles from the plant. As soon as he walked in he knew Why he had chosen the Estate with subconscious deliberation.

He saw Carl Millen across the room. He had meant to see him. Millen always ate at the same place at the same time.

Millen spotted Reg almost simultaneously and beckoned to him.

"Sit down, Reg. You're the last person I expected to see here. What's new at your shop?"

"Not much-except Borge received a report from Carl Millen Associates, Consulting Engineers."

Millen grinned wryly. "Did he blow his top?"

"Why did you turn in a negative report?"

"Didn't you read it? I proved the BW effect is absolutely limited by the free atomic concentration in the dispersion field. That limitation utterly forbids any mass application of the principle."

Reg was silent as the waiter brought the menus.. They each ordered oysters on the half shell.

"I remember," said Reg, When the waiter had gone. "about 1925 a then very prominent aeronautical engineer wrote a learned piece proving absolutely that planes could never reach five hundred miles an hour."

Millen laughed. "Yes, and there's also the gent that proved a steamship could never carry enough fuel to get it across the Atlantic."

He stopped and looked seriously at Reg. "But for every one of those classic boners there are thousands of legitimate negative demonstrations that have saved engineering and industry untold millions. You know that as well as I do. This is one of them."

"I'll admit the first, but not the second," said Reg. "I've not read your report. I probably won't. It's faulty. It's got to be. The BW principle can be utilized somehow and I'm going to prove it."

"Just how do you propose to do that?" Millen asked, smiling gently.

"Something intuitive, no doubt?"

"All right, have your fun, but come around and see me when you want to go on a quick vacation via the Stone Instantaneous Transfer Co."

"Reg, that job I talked about a year ago is still open. I could offer you Assistant Chief of Development. In a year I could let you in on a partnership. It's worth twenty thousand now, thirty later."

"I could work on the BW outside?"

Millen, shook his head. "That's the only string attached. Our men haven't time for anything but customers' projects. Besides, you'd have to get used to. the idea of believing in math, not intuition."

"I don't ..think I'd do you much good."

"You could learn, for that kind of money, couldn't you? What does that cheese factory pay you? About eight or ten?"

"Seven and a half."

"The lousy cheapskates! Three times that ought to be worth shelving your intuition in favor of math."

Reg shook his head. "There isn't that much money in the world. Solving other peoples' riddles for a fee is not my idea of living."

"Sometimes I think you're just a frustrated research physicist. In this business you're in for the money. It's a cinch there's no glory."

The waiter brought their orders, then.

His depression continued with Reg that evening. His three boys sensed it when he turned down a ball game. His wife, Janice, sensed it when he didn't poke his head in the kitchen on the way to his study.

After dinner, and when the boys were in bed, he told her what had happened that day.

"I don't understand why you feel so badly about the cancellation of this particular project," she said when he finished. "Others have been cancelled, too."

'Because it's one of the greatest phenomena ever discovered. It's ripe for engineering application, but no' one else will believe it. It's as if they deliberately try to block 'me in every step. All through the project it's been that way. Now this—chucking—the whole business, when we've gone so far! I can't see through the reasons behind it all. Except that they just don't want it to succeed. I've got that feeling about it, and can't rid myself of it. They want me to fail!" "Who does?"

"Everyone! In the drafting room. The lab technicians. The model shop. It seems as if everybody's concern with the project is simply to throw monkey wrenches in the gears."

"Oh, darling — you're just wrought up over this thing. Let's take a vacation.

Let the boys go to camp this summer and go off by ourselves somewhere. You've got to have a rest."

He knew that. He'd known it for a long time, but teleportation was more important than rest...He could take care of the neuroses at his leisure, later. That's the theory he'd worked on. Now, all he had was a beautiful neurosis. It couldn't be anything else, he told himself, this absolute conviction that he was being sabotaged in his work, that others were banded against him to prevent the full development of the BW principle.

"Perhaps in a few weeks," he said. "There are some more angles about this business that I must follow up. Let's read tonight.

Something fanciful, something beautiful, something faraway--"

"Coleridge," Janice laughed.

They sat by the window overlooking the garden. Their one vice of reading poetry together was some thing of an anachronism in a world threatened with atomic fires, but it was the single escape that Reg would allow himself from his engineering problems.

Janice began reading softly. Her voice was like music out of a past more gentle and nearer the ultimate Truths than this age.

"In Xanadu did Kubla Khan

A stately pleasure-dome decree : Where Alph, the sacred river, ran

--that deep romantic chasm which slanted

Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover !

A savage place! as holy and enchanted

As e'er beneath a waning moon,

was haunted--"

Reg suddenly stiffened and sat erect, his eyes on the distant golden cavern of the sky..

"That's it," he breathed softly. "That's just how it is--"

Janice looked up from the book, her face puzzled. "What in the world are you talking about?"

"The Person from Porlock. Remember how Coleridge wrote Kubla Khan ?"

"No. Who's the Person from Porlock ?"

"Coleridge wrote this poem just after coming out of a dope dream. He later said that during his sleep he had produced at least two to three hundred lines. While trying to get it on paper he was interrupted by a person from the village of Porlock. When he finally got rid of the visitor, Coleridge could recall no more of his envisioned poem.

"He was furious because this self-important busybody had interrupted his work and he wrote a poem castigating the Person from Porlock and all other stupid, busy people who hamper the really industrious ones."

"And so--?"

"Don't you see? it's these Persons from Porlock who have made it impossible for me to complete my work. Borge, Millen, Dickson, the draftsman who bungled the drawings; Hansen, the model shop mechanic who boggled tolerances so badly that nothing would work. These Persons from Porlock--I wonder how many thousands of years of advancement they have cost the world!"

In the near darkness now, Janice sat staring at Reg's bitter face. Her eyes were wide and filled with genuine fear, fear of this malign obsession that had overtaken him.

"The Persons from Porlock," Reg mused, half aloud. "Wouldn't it be funny if it turned out that they were deliberately and purposely upsetting the works of other men. Suppose it were their whole object in life--"

"Reg!"

He was scarcely able to see Janice in the settling gloom, but he felt her fear. "Don't worry, Janice, I haven't gone off my rocker. I was just thinking--Sure, it's fantastic, but Coleridge was one of the world's geniuses. Perhaps he glimpsed something of a truth that no one else has guessed."

Reg went into Borge's office early the next morning. The chief engineer frowned as he saw Reg Stone. "I thought you were going to take a few days."

"I came in to ask what you are going to do with the equipment that's been

built for my BW project."

"We'll store it with the miscellaneous plumbing for a while, then junk it. Why?"

"How about doing me a big favor--and declaring it junk right away and letting me buy it--as Junk?"

"What do you want the stuff for?"

"I want to continue the BW experiments on my own. You know, just putter around with it in my shop at home."

"Still think it will amount to something, eh?"

"Yes. That's why I'd like to buy the stuff, especially the velocitor chamber. It would take me a couple of years to build one of those on my own."

"I'd like to do it as a favor to you," said Borge;-- "but Bruce, the new manager has just made a ruling that no parts or equipment may be sold to employees. It was all right during the war when the boys were outfitting their WERS stations on company time and equipment. We were on cost plus then, but too many are trying to refurbish their amateur stations now at our expense. So Bruce cut it all out."

"But that doesn't make sense with such specialized stuff as I've had built for the BW. It's no good for anything else."

"Maybe you could talk Bruce out of it. You know him."

Yes, he knew Bruce, Reg thought. A production man who, like many of his kind, considered engineers mere necessary evils. It was utterly useless to ask Bruce to make an exception to one of his own regulations.

Persons from Porlock-

Persons from Porlock-

The words echoed like a tantalizing refrain in his mind as he went downstairs towards his own lab. He knew he should forget that impossible concept, but the words were like a magic chant explaining all his misfortunes.

This huge plant and all the technological advances that had come out of it could not exist without Borge and Bruce, and the others like them. Yet, at the same time, these Persons from Porlock constituted the greatest stumbling block to modern scientific development. Every engineer in the world at some time had been stymied by one, of them--an unimaginative chief, a stupid factory manager, incompetent draftsmen, model shop machinists, secretaries, expeditors, administrators.

As he passed the open door of the company's technical library he spotted Dickson, his head draftsman on the BW project, sitting inside at a table. He went in.

Dickson looked up. "Hello, Reg. I wondered where you were this morning. I just heard about them junking the project. It's a devil of a tough break."

"Are you really sorry, Dickson?" said Reg.

The draftsman looked sharply. "What do you mean? Of course I hate to work on a project and see it canceled, Who wouldn't?"

"You know, looking back, it appears as if we hadn't made each one of about fifty boners, the project would have succeeded. For example, that dimension on the diameter of the focusing cavity in the assembly unit. It's the only one in the assembly that wouldn't be obvious to the model shop, and it's the only one on which you made a mistake in spite of our checking. A seven that looked like a two in your dimensioning. That made the difference between success and failure and lost us nearly four weeks while we looked for the bug in the unit."

"Reg, I've told you twenty times I'm sorry, but I can't do anything about it now. A hair on my lettering pen made just enough of a boggle of the figure so that those dopes in the model shop misread it. It was a worse two than it was a seven. They should have checked us on it even if we did miss it."

"Yeah, I know. It just seemed funny that it was that particular dimension you were drawing when the hair got on your pen."

The draftsman looked at Reg as if stunned by the unspoken implication. "If you think I did that on purpose--"

"I didn't say that. Sure it was an accident, but why? Was it because you

didn't want the thing to succeed—subconsciously ?"

"Of course not! It was of no material interest to me, except, of course, as I said before I have the same enthusiasm to—See a project on which I work turn out successfully as you do."

"Yeah, I suppose so. Just forget I said anything."

Reg left Dickson and walked back to the hall. Persons from Porlock—were they consciously malicious or were they mere stupid blunderers? More likely the latter, he thought, yet there must be some subconscious desire to cause failure as was the case with the mysterious accident prone so familiar to insurance companies.

The more he considered it, the less fantastic the Person from Porlock concept seemed. It was "entirely possible that the genius of the-poet, Coleridge, had hit upon a class of persons as definite and distinct as accident prone—and a thousand times more deadly.

There could hardly be any other explanation for the stupid blunder of Dickson in drawing the focusing cavity. He had done far more complex drawings on this project, yet that single dimension, of an .extremely critical nature, had been the one to be botched.

And it meant there were others like him in the model shop because any machinist with half an eye for accuracy would have checked that figure before going ahead and. shaping up the part to such critical tolerances.

He turned into the machine shop where Hansen, the machinist who'd done the job on the cavity, was working.

"Pretty nice work." He nodded towards the piece in the lathe.

"Hope the engineer thinks so," Hansen growled. "They give me plus five thousands on this thing and no minus. Next they'll want flea whiskers with zero-zero tolerance."

"You're good. That's why you get the tough ones."

"I wish the guy on the payroll desk would take note."

"But you know, there's something that's bothered me for. several weeks. You remember that cavity you made for me with a one two live interior instead of a one seven five?"

Hansen turned wearily to the engineer. "Reg, I've eaten crow a hundred times over for that. I told you it looked like a two. Maybe I need my eyes examined, but it still looks that way."

"Did you have any reason for Trot wanting the cavity to work?"

"Now, look!" Hansen's anger suffused red through his face. "I'm paid to turn out screwball gadgets in this shop, not worry about whether they work or not."

"Didn't it occur to you to check that boggled figure ?"

"I told you it looked all right !" Hansen turned angrily back to his lathe and resumed work.

Reg watched the mechanic for a moment, then left the shop.

The bunglers seemed to have no personal interest in their botch work, he decided. It must be something entirely subconscious as in the case of accident prone. That didn't make them any less dangerous, however. Without them on his project he would have been able by now to demonstrate the practicability of BW utilization.

But, following, this line of reasoning, why couldn't the teleportation equipment be made to work now ? According to all his theory the equipment he had built should have been capable of acting as a pilot model for a larger unit and it should have been able to transfer hundred pound masses at least a thousand feet. Yet, it had failed completely.

Granting that he himself was not a Person from Porlock—

But could he grant that?

Maybe the greatest blunders were his own. His failure to catch Dickson's mistake early enough, for example!

That was the one premise he could not admit, however. It led to insolvable dilemma, rendered the problem completely indeterminate. He had to assume that he was not one of the bunglers.

In that case, why did the equipment fail to work ?

It meant that some of the blunders introduced by the Persons from Porlock still remained in the equipment. Remove them, and it should work ! He'd have to go over every equation, every design, every specification-point by point--compare them with the actual equipment and dig out the bugs. He went into his own lab. He dismissed the assistants and shut the door. He sat clown with the voluminous papers which he had produced in the ten months of work on the project. It was hopeless to attempt to go over the entire mass of work in short hours or days. That's what should be done, but he could cover the most vulnerable points. These lay in the routine, conventional circuits which he had left to his assistants and in whose design the draftsman and model shop had been trusted with too many details.

The first of these was the amplifier for the BW generator, whose radiation, capable of mass-modulation, carried the broken down components of the materials to be transported. The amplifier held many conventional features, though the wave form handled was radically unconventional.

It contained two stages of Class A amplification which had to be perfectly symmetrical. Reg had never made certain of the correct operation of these two stages by themselves. Spence, his junior engineer, had reported them operating correctly and Reg had taken his word on so simple a circuit.

He had no reason now to believe that anything was wrong. It was just one of those items left to a potential Person from Porlock.

He disconnected the input and output of the amplifier and hooked up a signal generator and a vacuum tube voltmeter. Point by point he checked the circuit. The positive and negative peaks were equal and a scope showed perfect symmetry, but in the second stage they weren't high enough. He wasn't getting the required soup. The output of the tube in use should have been more than sufficient to produce it.

Then he discovered the fault. The bias was wrong and the drive had been cut to preserve symmetry.

Spence had simply assumed the flat tops were due to overloading. Reg sat in silent contemplation of the alleged engineering and poured on self-recrimination for trusting Spence.

This was the reason for the apparent failure of the whole modulator circuit. Because of it, he had assumed his theory of mass modulation was faulty. Spence was obviously one of them, he thought. That meant other untold numbers of bugs throughout the mass of equipment. During the remainder of the morning and in the afternoon he adjusted the amplifiers and got the modulator into operation. He uncovered another serious bug in an out-of-tolerance dropping resistor in the modulator. He contemplated the probability of that one defective resistor among the hundreds of thousands of satisfactory ones the plant used--the probability of its being placed in exactly that critical spot. The figure was too infinitesimal to be mere chance.

By quitting time he had the circuit as far as the mass modulator functioning fairly smoothly. He called Janice and told her he wouldn't be home until late. Then he worked until past midnight to try to get the transmission elements to accept the modulated carrier. The only result was failure and at last he went home in utter exhaustion.

The next morning, refreshed, he was filled with an unnatural ebullience, however. He had the key to the cause of his failures and he felt success was only a matter of time. If he could just get that necessary time-- The broad parking lot was dotted with infrequent cars at the early hour of the morning at which he arrived. Gail, the lab secretary, was already at her desk, however, when he walked in. She called to him, "Mr. Borge wants you to come up, Reg."

"O.K. Thanks."

He turned and went back out the door towards the chief engineer's office. This would be the new project, he thought. He strode in and Borge looked up with a brief nod.

"Sit down, Reg." The lines of Borge's face seemed to have eroded into deeper valleys in the short time since Reg had last seen him.

"I hear some things I don't like," said Borge suddenly. "About you."

"What sort of things? I haven't—"

"Dickson and Hansen have been saying you've accused them of deliberate sabotage on your project. True or not, whatever is implied by these rumors can't go on. It can wreck this shop in a month."

"I didn't accuse them of anything!" Reg flared. "I just asked if they wanted the project to fail. Of course, I didn't expect them to say that they did, but their manner showed me what I wanted to know."

"And what was that?"

Reg hesitated. This development was nothing that he had expected. How would Borge, as one of the Persons from Porlock, react to Reg's knowledge of them? Did Borge even understand his own motives? Whether he did or not, Reg could make no rational answer except the truth.

"I found that they did, subconsciously, want the project to fail. I believe this is the explanation of the numerous blunders without which my project would have been a success."

"You believe, then, that your failure is due to the...ah, persecutions...of these persons, rather than to any inherent impossibility in the project itself or your own inability to bring it off?"

"I haven't a persecution complex, if that's what you're trying to say," Reg said hotly. "Look, Borge, did you ever hear of accident prones, who plague insurance companies?"

"Vaguely. I don't know much about the subject."

"I can prove there is another kind of prone, a blunder prone, whose existence is just as definite as that of the accident prone. I call these blunder prones 'Persons from Porlock' after the one named by the poet, Coleridge, when his great poem, 'Kubla Khan,' was ruined by one of them."

"And just what do these er, Persons from Porlock do?"

"They make mistakes in important work entrusted to them. They interfere with others who are doing intense and concentrated work so that trains of thought are broken and perhaps lost forever, as in the case of Coleridge. And as in my own case. I could tell of at least a hundred times when I have been deliberately interrupted at critical points of my calculations so that work had to be repeated and some points, only faintly conceived, were totally lost."

"Which couldn't have been due to your own nervous strain and overworked condition?"

"No."

"I see. These Persons of Porlock generally persecute the intelligent and superior people of the world, is that it?"

Reg's anger flared. "I'm not a psychoneurotic case and I'm not suffering from a persecution complex!"

Suddenly, cold fear washed over Reg. Borge's pattern of reason was clear, now. He would dismiss the whole matter as a neurotic complex and let Reg out of the lab. He would be blackballed with every other company in which he might have another try at BW work.

"I know you're not," Borge was saying, "but you are tired. For six years you've been turning out miracles. I hate like the devil to see you come up with something like this, Reg. Surely you must realize it's all the result of overwork and fatigue. No one is going around interfering with your work. Your mind refuses to admit defeat so it's automatically throwing it off on someone else. I'm no psychologist, but I'll bet that's close to the right answer. I want you to have Walker at the Clinic examine you. I'm willing to bet he recommends a long rest. Give you six months with pay if necessary. But I can't let you back in the lab unless you do this. A repetition of yesterday's performance and the whole place would be shot up. You've got to get rid of this Person from Porlock business."

The pieces of the whole puzzle locked into place with startling clarity for Reg. He knew that the last uncertainty had been removed. They were not random, subconsciously motivated performers. These Persons from Porlock were

skillfully conscious of what they were doing. Borge could not hide the knowledge that his eyes revealed.

But what were they doing ?

Six months—it would be too late, then. His sense of blind urgency told him that. Borge was simply showing him that there was no possible way that he could win.

He tried again. "I can't expect you to believe these things. I know it sounds fantastic. Any psychiatrist would no doubt diagnose it as a persecution complex. But I promise that no more incidents like yesterday's will take place. Give me the new assignment, but let me work on the BW just six weeks in my spare time, on my own. I'll guarantee I'll have it working in that time." Borge shook his head. "That's the main trouble with you already—overwork. You've been pushing yourself so hard that your nerves are all shot. Anyone walking by while you are computing is such a disturbance that you think he's deliberately interfering with you. Put yourself in the care of a good doctor and let me know his report.

That's the only condition upon which I can let you stay with the company. I hate to put it that way. I wish you'd try to understand for yourself—but if you won't, that's the way it's got to be."

Reg stood up, his body trembling faintly with the fury of his anger. He leaned forward across the desk: "I know who you are! But I warn you that I won't stop. Somehow I'm going to carry this work through, and all you and your kind can do won't stop me!"

He whirled and strode from the office, conscious of Borge's pitying glance upon his back. Conscious, too, that he was walking out for the last time. The fury and the anger didn't last. When he got outside, he was sick with frustration as he glanced back at the plant. He had acted stupidly through the whole thing, he thought, letting them cut him off from any access to the BW equipment without a struggle.

Yet, how else could he have conducted himself ? The whole thing was so fantastic at first that he couldn't have outlined a rational program to combat it.

Maybe Borge was right in one respect. He was devilishly tired and exhausted from the long war years of uninterrupted work. There'd been that micro-search system on which he'd spent two years at Radiation Lab. One such project as that would have sent the average engineer nuts. As soon as it was in production he'd tackled an equally tough baby in the radar fire-control equipment that had gone into fighter planes four months after he took over the project cold.

Yeah, he was tired.

Janice was surprised to see him, and was shocked by the pain and bewilderment on his face.

Slowly, and carefully, he explained to her what had happened. He told her how Borge had built up a case against him out of the things he'd said to Dickson and Hansen. He told her how they and Spence and the rest had sabotaged his project.

"They've got me licked," he finished, "They've done what they started out to do, knocked out the BW project."

Janice had sat quietly during his recital, only her eyes reflecting the growing terror within her.

"But, darling, why should they want to hinder the project ? What possible reason could there be behind it, even if these mysterious Persons from Porlock actually existed?"

"Who knows? But it doesn't make any difference, I suppose. They're so obvious that I don't see how the world has failed to recognize them. Yet...you don't believe a thing I've said, do you?"

"They can't exist, Reg! Borge is right. You're tired. This notion is only something that your mind has seized upon out of Coleridge's fantasy. It has no basis in reality. Please, for my sake, take a visit to the Clinic and see if they don't advise rest and psychiatric treatment for you."

Like a cold, invisible shell, loneliness seemed to coalesce about him. There was the illusion of being cut off from all sight and sound, and he had the impression that Janice was sitting there with her lips moving, but no sound coming forth:

Illusion, of course, but the loneliness was real. It cut him off from all the world, for where was there one who would understand and believe about the Persons from Porlock? They surrounded him on every side. Wherever he turned, they stood ready to beat down his struggles for the right to work as he wished. Perhaps even Janice.

But that premise had to be denied.

"I'll let them tap my knees and my skull if it will make you happier," he said. "Maybe even beg Borge to take me hack if that's the way you want it. It doesn't matter any more. The BW project is dead. They killed it—but don't ever try to make me believe they don't exist."

"They don't! They don't Reg. You've got to believe that. Quit deluding yourself—"

Quite suddenly, it was beyond his endurance. He strode from the room and out into the brilliance of the day, brilliance that was like a cold, shimmering wall surrounding him, moving as he moved, surrounding but not protecting. Not protecting from the glance of those who passed on the street nor from those who came towards him, nor those who followed after in a steady, converging stream.

He felt their presence—the Persons from Porlock—like tangible, stinging auras on every side. They surrounded him. They were out to get him.

His stride broke into a half run. How long his flight continued he never knew. It was dimming twilight when he sank, half sobbing from exhaustion, onto a park bench miles from home.

He looked about him in the gathering darkness, and somehow it seemed less evil than the light and the thousand faces of the Persons from Porlock who drifted by on every side.

If only he could drag one of them out into the open where all the world could see it and believe—that would be one way of escape from the soundless, invisible prison in which they had encased him. He had to show that they existed so that no one in the world would doubt his word again. But how? What incontrovertible proof of their existence did he, possess? What was there besides his own feelings and beliefs? He shuddered with realization that there was nothing. His knowledge, his evidence of them was of the flimsiest kind. There had to be something tangible.

But could there be more? ,Insidiously, doubts began to creep into his mind. He remembered the look in Borge's eyes, the pity and the fear in Janice's.

He rose stiffly from the park bench, cold fear driving his limbs to carry him out into the lights. If he were to remain sure of his own sanity, he had to first prove to himself beyond any doubt that the Persons from Porlock existed in actuality, not merely in his own suspicions.

There was one way by which he might be able to do this. That way lay through the report of Carl Millen and the mathematics by which he had "proved" the BW effect impossible of mass exploitation.

The math was deliberately false, Reg knew. If he proved it, confronted Millen with the fact.

He caught a taxi home. Janice met him, dry-eyed and with no questions or demands for explanations. He offered. none, but went to his study and took out Millen's report. He asked Janice to brew up a pot of coffee and he began the slow weaving of a pathway through the tortuous trail of Millen's abstruse mathematical reasoning.

Sleep at last forced abandonment of his work, but he arose after a few hours and turned to the pursuit again. All through the day he kept steadily at it, and in the late afternoon he caught the first threads of what he was searching for. A thread of deliberate falsification, a beckoning towards wide paths of illogic and untruth.

It was so subtle that he passed it, twice before recognizing it. Something of

the intense deliberation chilled him when he realized the depths of the insinuations. It was like the devil's nine truths and a lie that ,he'd heard country preachers talk about when he was a boy.

This work of Carl Millen's was certainly the nine truths---and the one, black, insidious lie.

Now that he recognized it, following its development became easier until he trailed it to the final, colossal untruth that the free atomic concentration in the dispersion field made large scale application impossible.

This was it! Proof!

The triumph of his discovery swept away the exhaustion that had filled him. Let them call it a persecution complex now!

He put the report and his pile of computations in his brief case and told Janice he was going to Millen's.

As he drove with furious skill towards town he wondered what Millen's reaction would be. He could call Reg crazy, deny he was a Person from Porlock--but he could never deny the evidence of his deliberate falsifications.

The secretary told Reg that Millen was busy and would he sit down?

"Tell him it's Reg Stone, and I've found out what he tried to do in the BW report," said Reg. "I, think he'll see me."

The girl glanced disapprovingly at the engineer's disheveled appearance and relayed the information. Then she nodded towards the polished, hardwood door.

"He'll see you."

Reg opened the door sharply. Carl Millen looked up from behind the desk in the center of the room. His face was unsmiling.

Then Reg saw the second person in the room. Spence, his junior engineer on the BW project. The man's unexpected presence gave him a moment's uneasiness, but it would make no difference, Reg thought--since Spence was one of them, too.

"So you think you've found something in my report?" said Millen. "Pull up a chair and show me what you mean."

Reg sat down with slow deliberation. but he left his brief case closed.

"I think you know what I mean," he said. "I don't believe it's necessary to go into the details. You deliberately invented a false line of reasoning to prove the BW effect useless."

"So? And what does that prove?"

His failure to deny the accusation took Reg aback. There was no trace of surprise- or consternation on Millen's face.

"It proves that you are one of them," said Reg. "One with Dickson, Hansen, Borge, and Spence here--one of those who fought to keep me from developing teleportation. I want to know why!"

Millen's face relaxed slowly. "One of your Persons from Porlock ?" Amusement touched his face at the words.

"Yes."

Millen leaned forward, his almost ominous seriousness returning. "You've done a good job, Reg. Better than we hoped for a while. It looked for a time as if you weren't going to get it."

Reg stared at him. The words made no sense, but yet there was an admission here of the unknown that chilled him.

"You admit that you falsified the facts in your report? That you are one of the Persons from Porlock ?"

"Yes!"

The stark admission echoed in the vast silences of the room. Reg looked slowly from one face to the other.

"Who are you? What is your purpose?" lie asked hoarsely.

"I'm just like you," said Millen. "I stumbled into this thing when I first opened my consulting service. Spence is the one that can tell you about it. He's the different one--your real Person from Porlock."

Reg turned to his former junior engineer. Somehow, this was what lie had known since he first entered the room. Spence's face held a look of alien detachment, as if the affairs of common engineers were trivial things."

His eyes finally turned towards Reg's face and they seemed to burn with a

quality of age despite the youth of his face.

"We came here a long time ago," said Spence slowly. "And now we live here and are citizens of Earth just as you are. That is our only excuse for meddling in your affairs. Our interference, however, gives you the same safety it does us."

Reg felt as if he were not hearing Spence, only seeing his lips move. "You came here? You are not of Earth—"

"Originally, no."

And suddenly Reg found Spence's words credible. Somehow, they removed the fantasy from the Person from Porlock concept.

"Why haven't you made yourselves known? What does all of this mean?"

"I did not come," said Spence, "but my ancestors did. They had no intention of visiting Earth. An accident destroyed their vessel and made landing here necessary. The members of the expedition were scientists and technicians, but their skill was not the kind to rebuild the ship that had brought them across space, nor were the proper materials then available on Earth."

"They became reconciled to their er, and knowing that the chance of communication with the home planet, and knowing that the chance of being found was infinitely remote. They were skilled in the biologic sciences and managed in a generation or two to modify their physical form sufficiently to mingle undetected with Earthmen, though they kept their own group affiliation.

"From the first, they adopted a policy of noninterference, but they found living standards hardly suitable and built secret colonies where their own life and science could develop apart from that of Earthmen.

"It was one of these colonies which the drugged mind of your poet, Coleridge, was able to see in his unconsciousness, and which he began to describe in `Kubla

My people had detected the presence of his perceptions and one of them was sent immediately to interrupt the work of recollection because they didn't want their colony revealed with such accurate description as Coleridge could make. The Person from Porlock was this disturbing emissary."

Spence smiled for the first time, briefly. "So you see, your designation of all of us as Persons from Porlock was not far from the truth."

"But why have you interfered with me? Why don't you make yourselves known and offer your advanced science to the world?"

"Surely you are sufficiently familiar with the reaction of your own people to the new and the unknown to make that last question unnecessary. We aren't concerned with advancing your science...It is progressing rapidly enough—too rapidly for your social relationships, which would benefit by some of the energy you expend on mechanical inquiries.

"In our own science we have great fields of knowledge which do not exist in yours. One is a highly specialized field of what we term prognostication logics. Your symbolic logic sciences are a brief step in that direction—very brief. We're enabled to predict the cumulative effect of events and discoveries in your culture. We take a hand in those which indicate a potential destructive to the race. We interfere to the point of preventing their development."

Reg stared at Spence. "How could my teleportation development imperil the race? Surely that was no excuse for your interference!"

"It was. It isn't obvious to you yet because you haven't come to the discovery that teleportation can be quite readily accomplished from the transmitting end without the use of terminal equipment. Further along, you would have found no receivers necessary. Everything could be done from the transmission end."

"That would have made it a thousand times more valuable!"

"Yes? Suppose the cargo to be transported was the most destructive atomic bomb your science is capable of building."

The impact of that concept burst upon Reg. "I see," he said at last, quietly. "Why did you let us produce the bomb at all?"

"We were rather divided on that question. Our computations show a high probability that you will be able to survive it, but only if a number of

auxiliary implements are withheld, teleportation among others. There were some of us who were in favor of preventing the bomb's construction even with the assurance our computations give but their influence was less than that of us who know what benefits atomic energy, can bring if properly utilized. As a group, we decided to let the bomb be produced."

"But the BW effect can never be utilized?"

"Not for some centuries."

Spence seemed to have said all that he was going to say, but Millen moved neasily.

"I can never tell you how glad I am that you uncovered my math," he said. "You know the alternative if you hadn't?"

"Alternative-?" Reg looked across the desk. Then lie remembered, that night, sitting in the park, seeing the shadows against the distant lights, the ghastly pursuit of imagined terrors.

"The alternative was-insanity?" Millen nodded.

"Why? Couldn't it have been done some other way?"

"Millen avoided the question. "You will never attempt to develop the BW effect now, will you?"

"No. Of course not."

"It wouldn't have been that way if Spence or some other had come to you and warned you that it wasn't to be done. You'd have laughed at him as a crackpot. Now there's no doubt in your mind."

Reg nodded slowly and cold sickness lodged in his vitals at the thought of what he had so narrowly escaped. "Yes, I see. And now I suppose I shall go back and eat crow for Borge. That is, if you will put in a good word for me with your man." He smiled wryly. towards Spence.

"We have a bigger job far you," said Millen. "I still want you here."

"Doing nail puzzles and answering riddles for customers too stingy to run their own development labs? Not me!"

"Not that, exactly. We need you to take over my job. I've got something else lined up to take care of."

"What are you talking about? Take over as head of Carl Millen & Associates ? That would be worse than the puzzles-desk arthritis."

"No. Who's the best man in the world today on interference with the utilization of the BW effect?"

"I don't understand you."

"You're that man. We need somebody to take charge of the whole project of BW interference. Spence has another assignment for me, but Bots-Wellton himself still needs to be worked on. Carruthers and Majestic haven't stopped their projects yet. That was only a blind to fool your company. They've got to be stopped yet. A couple of universities are working on it. It's a big job, and you're the best equipped man in the world to handle it-under Spence's direction, of course. You see, his people won't do the detail work after some of us once become trained in it. It's up to us to fry our own fish. Will you take it?"

Reg stood up and went to the window, looking down upon the street crawling with ever hopeful life. He turned back to Spence and Millen.

"How could I do anything else in the face of the drastic indoctrination and persuasion course you've given me. Sure I'll take it !"

Then he laughed softly. "Reg Stone: Person from -Porlock!"