

Mask of Peace

By Edwin James

A dream would be betrayed, but Carla knew that this was better than permitting the dream to fulfill itself into nightmare reality!

"Peace seemed an impossible unreality in the turbulent ninth century of the post-Imperial era; the galaxy was broken into a hundred warring segments under greedy, ambitious tyrants, until the revitalized League of Peace, under the magnetic leadership of Eldred Carla, promised to bring the three major rulers into an agreement to maintain present boundaries and prevent further warfare by force of arms..." Milton George, Galactic History, v. 6, p. 297.

WITH ONE last fiery sigh, the space ship settled to the surface of the small space port. The port was not particularly busy at that time of evening, but the ship was only a two-seater, dark and insignificant; nobody paid much attention to it, or to the pilot who made his way into the port waiting room. He was clad in a long dark cape and a dark hat which shadowed his face. The pilot paid his bill in advance and started toward the door into the street.

"Mr. Carla!"

The pilot's step hesitated, and his lean dark face slowly turned to fix the doorman on the gaze of two intense black eyes.

"We hadn't heard you were on Flora, sir. I mean, I didn't know that you..."

"No?" The pilot's face was non-committal.

"Peace go with you, Mr. Carla," the doorman said fervently, making a

●
There's a difference between "peace" and "peace at any price"; graves are "peaceful", too!
●

small gesture with his fingers. "We all know what you're trying to do; we're all praying for you."

Carla repeated the gesture, and a slow smile exposed two even rows of white teeth. "Peace go with you, friend. What is your name?"

A fleeting expression across the doorman's face was hidden by the shadows. "Davis, sir. Robert Davis."

"You haven't been attending the meetings regularly, have you, Davis?"

"No, sir," the doorman said hastily. "My wife has been ill. There has been no one to stay with her. Otherwise..."

"Peace, Davis; such things cannot be helped. But the League needs faithful members. See that you return to full participation as soon as possible. Meanwhile, remember that my visit here is secret; I rely upon your secrecy."

"You can, Mr. Carla."

"Peace go with you, Davis." Carla turned and strode away down the dark, silent street.

Flora, Carla mused, the minor planet of an insignificant sun, few exports, little natural wealth, small tactical position lying near the outskirts of the galaxy.

"Flower planet," he chuckled, eyeing the dingy shabbiness of the warehouse district, for Carla prided him-



Carla sensed, rather than saw, the knife behind him...

self on his knowledge of etymology and tried to keep abreast of the latest cultural discoveries or deductions from the tumbled ruins of the mother planet.

No temptation to conquest here, he thought, but a place where history might be shaped—secretly. The thought was amusing. Little, independent Flora, the birthplace of history! The thought that he might assist at the birth was even more amusing. Poor Flora was pregnant and didn't suspect anything. Or, on the other hand, maybe it was a false alarm; there had been several such lately.

A familiar prickling of the scalp warned him. A quick, twisting turn saved him from serious injury as a knife blade whispered through the cloth of his cape, part of his upper arm, and out through the cape again. That arm, wounded though it was, made a smooth, swift motion to his hip as a brawny, cloth-covered arm came around his throat. His arm con-

tinued its arc, and Carla heard a pained grunt as his own knife blade plunged into a soft belly.

● **THE ARM RELAXED AND** Carla's leg followed the twisting of his body to land in the groin of the knife wielder who had struck the first blow. The man doubled up and slowly knelt down on the pavement, groaning. Now Carla's left hand was filled and as a third assailant closed in, a low cough came from the pellet gun in his hand. A scuffling sound came from farther down the street. Carla turned to see one of the crew running, bent over, both hands clutched to his belly. He chanced a shot, but the range was too great and the pellet made a small flare against the side of a building and fell smoking to the walk.

Carla turned to survey the field. The one who had taken the pellet was dying, his limbs jerking in agony. The first was slowly, painfully trying to

crawl away. Carla caught him up by the collar, thrusting him against the smoky side of a warehouse. "Who sent you?"

The man shook his head weakly. Carla slapped him across the face, hard. "Who sent you?" he repeated savagely. "Who paid you? Who pointed me out?"

"Nobody," the man got out. "Nobody. I don't know what you're talkin' about."

"You're lying!"

"Naw," the man said hysterically. "We're just a gang; just the three of us. Thought you looked easy. Thought you might have money."

"Know what this is?" Carla showed him the gun.

The man's eyes widened. "Yeah. A pellet gun. Yuh got Jackie with it. Yuh ain't gonna shoot me, Mister! I'm tellin' yuh straight."

"Who sent you?" Carla raised the gun slowly.

"Nobody, I'm tellin' yuh," the man screamed. "Whadda yuh want me to say? I'll say anything yuh want. Gimme the knife if yuh want to, but don't put a pellet in me! The Assassins! That's what. The Assassins sent me."

"You're lying!"

"I told yuh, mister. I'll say anything yuh want; who do yuh want me to say?"

Carla slowly shook his head. He didn't have the time to waste. He reached inside his cape and drew out a small needle. As the man tried to scuttle away, Carla scratched his hand lightly. In a few feet the fellow collapsed. That should keep him quiet for long enough.

Hastily Carla stripped his arm. It was only a flesh wound, but the knife might have been poisoned. He uncorked a small vial and poured a few drops into the wound and a few more onto his tongue. He wrapped up the wound, brushing the tears from his eyes, and resumed his coat and cape. He turned slowly to find two beady eyes gazing at him from the

gnarled, wrinkled face of an old crone.

"He he he," she cackled. "You killed this man and that man," she pointed. "But you missed the fat one; he ran away."

"Who cares?" Carla's voice was low and casual.

"Not me," she giggled. "But the men who clean up the streets won't like it; it's such a bother for them. They're always complaining about it."

"I'm glad you were amused."

"More fun than I've had in ages, sonny," she said. "Very neat, too, I will say, who have seen my share."

"I'm glad," Carla said, as he walked away toward the distant lights of the business section.

"But, mister," the old woman called after him, "you shouldn't have let the fat one get away!"

•THE LIGHTS OF THE business district were blinding after the darkness of the deserted factory and warehouse area; every building was a fountain of vari-colored lights, inviting, soliciting, compelling. Soothing melodies and rhythmic dissonances wavered through the air in ear-tling intensity. Perfume and stench assailed the nostrils. It was that cosmopolitan mingling of the highest and lowest elements of life which was the criterion of the era.

Carla brushed shoulders in the crowded streets with gorgeous dandies with their curled plumes and hair, their glittering clothes and adornments, their mincing steps. Then even more brilliant female counterparts were dressed over-abundantly in places—in others exposed beyond the call of even a lascivious fashion, laughing coyly, talking boldly, glancing wantonly. There tough, battle-hardened, scarred professional soldiers, armed, belligerent, pleasure-seeking, free-handed and suspicious, ready for any encounter, male or female, brushing the expostulating dandies from their paths, taking their not-unwilling feminine companions with a flourish. And beggars, ragged, snarling, whining bundles of superan-

nuated humanity, limping, creeping, crawling. They all gave way for the silent, dark-robed Carla, leaving a swirling, uncertain, quieted whirlpool behind.

The huge, three-dimensional viewer loomed ahead atop a low, dark, flat-topped building. The crystal walls now enclosed a brilliant symphony of swirling light, casting weird colors on the faces and figures of the passing throng, transforming them into unreal shadows of an unwordly reality. The masses passed unmoved, but Carla paused and leaned back against a scarlet wall.

The symphony of color faded, to be replaced by large block letters:

WAR

Other letters formed below:

THE ARCTUREAN FLEETS HAVE BEEN BEATEN BACK IN THEIR ASSAULT ON THE OUTER FORTRESSES OF SIRIUS IN AN INCONCLUSIVE BATTLE WHICH SAW LITTLE DAMAGE DONE ON EITHER SIDE.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE GALAXY UNEASY PEACE RULES AS A RESULT OF THE STALEMATE WHICH OCCURRED WHEN THE TWO LARGEST FLEETS ANNIHILATED EACH OTHER IN THE MOST INTERESTING SERIES OF MANEUVERS SINCE THE FINAL DEFEAT OF THE BARBARIAN HORDES, LEAVING THE TWO PRINCIPAL RULERS WITHOUT MEANS OF ATTACK. ANALYSTS EXPECT NEIGHBORING SYSTEMS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION WITHIN THE NEXT SEVENTY-TWO HOURS.

The letters faded into two battle scenes in vivid three-dimensional reality, one showing the attack on the fortresses of Sirius, and the other the

maneuvering and complete destruction of two fleets.

Again the letters formed:

PEACE

This was followed by:

RUMORS ARE STILL FLYING WILDLY ABOUT A POSSIBLE MEETING BETWEEN SEVERAL OF THE PRINCIPAL RULERS IN THE GALAXY AND ELDRED CARLA, HEAD OF THE LEAGUE OF PEACE, TO ESTABLISH AN INVINCIBLE ALLIANCE FOR THE PREVENTION OF WAR. REPORTS VARY AS TO THE TIME AND PLACE OF THE MEETING AND EVEN THE NUMBER AND PERSONAGES OF THE HEADS OF STATE. ONE OF THEM CERTAINLY WILL BE THE RULER OF THE SIRIAN EMPIRE, GORDON III. NONE OF THESE RUMORS HAS BEEN VERIFIED, AND THEY MAY BE MERELY A SMOKE SCREEN FOR OTHER ACTIVITIES IN ANY CASE THE ATTITUDE OF THE GALAXY'S CITIZENS, OTHER THAN THE MEMBERS OF THE LEAGUE, CAN BEST BE EXPRESSED, PROBABLY, IN THE WORDS OF THAT ANCIENT MASTER OF SWORD AND PEN, VINCE. CARLA'S WAR—PEACE; WHAT DOES IT MATTER? IN WAR WE ARE KILLED BY OUR ENEMIES, IN PEACE BY OUR FRIENDS."

The crystal cube was filled by the smiling head and face labeled beneath: *Eldred Carla*.

Carla hastily pulled his hat a little lower over his face and turned quickly away. A few blocks down the street his pace slowed. A small bar invited him, and he was soon seated at a table sipping a tall, cool drink.

Perhaps Grayson was right, he thought. But he shook his head slowly. It had all been gone over before, time and time again; this was the only way, the only right way. Everything—the analysts, the historiagraphs, the seers—bore it out. Nothing could be allowed to interfere with the destined path of history. Carla's lips tightened. And yet there were—psychological obstacles.

He shook his head. There were times for mercy and times for ruthlessness; times for indulgence of feelings of humanity and times for unswerving action. Carla knew which time this was, distasteful though the knowledge was at moments.

• **A** CONVERSATION CLOSE behind him caught his attention and a fleeting smile crossed his lips. A tale of conquests, when conquests were easy: of women when morals were loose; of men and worlds when the strong could overcome the weak with little danger and the clever could trick the foolish and trusting without compunction, openly, and be admired for it.

Carla could identify the possessor of the voice without turning. It would be a big fellow, slightly gone to fat, vicious to the weak, cringing to the strong, a hero in the recounting, a coward in action. He would not last long with his big, loose mouth. But the conversation had turned to other things.

"Now peace—that's a thought."

There was a sly voice. "A thought for weaklings; a thought for fools."

That was the braggart.

"You are not subtle, my friend," said the wily one. "You do not see what peace can be in the hands of those who know how to wield it. Peace is often a stronger weapon than war."

"What do you mean?"

"War is a waste, and when the waste is carried on too long the people become restless. Resources are depleted; trade is halted. The little and the big have been fighting off and on for

over a century. Perhaps it is time to consolidate, to protect for the moment, to give the people the illusion of prosperity."

"The people are well off—what have they to complain of? It is we who do the fighting, the professional soldiers."

"But it is the people who pay for your indifferent efforts—after all, what is it to you who wins? You are paid by the day, not the job. First you fight for one side, then the other. And you take good care not to risk your good hides overly."

The man growled.

"Save that for the little ones." The voice was steely.

The big mouthed one subsided.

"And then when, by good fortune, you break through to a planet—then the pillage and the looting, then the burning and killing, then the rape, eh?"

The braggart chuckled. It was an unpleasant sound.

"The people have no reason to love you or your kind—or their rulers, either, if they only knew it.

"Peace—I repeat—there's a thought!"

Carla's brow clouded. There was more than half a truth in what the sly one said.

The big one was speaking again, this time in a confidential whisper. "You think me stupid, perhaps. But there you are mistaken. I imagine I know more of this matter than you suppose." He stopped to let the remark sink in.

"Indeed?" The other's tone was skeptical.

"This peace you were speaking of," the big one hurried on, "what if I should tell you that I am on the inside of that."

"I should tell you that you are a fool."

"Then look! Look!"

"What are you trying to tell me. That you are a member of the League? Ha! The card says so. I knew that, you fool."

●THE UPROAR WAS AT THE door, a door suddenly blocked by uniformed police, guns in their hands. "This place is surrounded," said the leader of the group. "We have reason to believe that there is an enemy of the state in this room. You will file out quietly, one by one, showing your identification."

"The card. Give me the card!" The braggart's voice was harsh and low.

"Card? What card?" The other's voice was surprised.

"The card I gave you. The League card!" The big one was getting hysterical as the search narrowed.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Carla felt something thrust into his hand. He turned slowly around to see the loud mouthed one, much as he expected, surrounded by police.

"He took my card!" He took my card! the fellow screamed.

The other shook his head at the police, spreading his palms in innocent bewilderment.

"Come along," said one of the officers.

"Thanks," said Carla in a low voice as they passed the thin wiry man he identified as the one with the sly voice.

"It's all in the interest of peace," the thin one said, in a voice that could mean anything.

Carla tensed as he neared the inspection line. The officer glanced at the card and back to Carla's face. His eyes narrowed suspiciously. "Is this your card?"

Carla made a gesture with the fingers of his left hand. "Of course not," he said, smiling; "I got it off the big fellow."

The officer laughed and returned the gesture. "Peace be with you, friend."

Outside Carla breathed deeply of the cool night air before he moved down the street toward the slums.

●THIS WAS THE OTHER SIDE the coin, Clara thought. No dandies here; no sparkling towers of

light; no melodies; no mingled odors—only the all-pervading odor of poverty, strong in the nostrils, overpowering in the mind. Everything was dirt and disrepair, shabby ghosts of buildings inhabited by shabby ghosts of humanity. This was the slums.

Carla knew what it was like to wake up hungry in the morning; to go to bed hungry at night; hunger all the day for food to feed the starving body, the starving mind, the starving soul. Carla knew what it was to glimpse the lights from afar; to shiver ecstatically in a dark corner at the sight of comfort, of luxury, of beauty. Carla knew what it was to fight, desperately, ceaselessly, agonizingly, for just one thing—escape, to get out, to leave the dirt and depression and hunger and despair behind. Carla knew what it was. This looked enough like his home to be his own. These streets might have been his tutors. These faces might have been his.

Once Carla had thought he hated them. Once, had he had the power, he would have wiped them away, destroyed their dreary homes and their dreary lives together. Later he had pitied them. Now he knew that here was the hope of the future, the best of the galaxy, in spite of all appearances. From these slums sprang the great men, the fighters, the artists, the idealists, the dreamers, the hopers; elsewhere the galaxy was dead of its own boredom, dead of its own soul-sickness. Here there was no time for boredom, no time to be soul-sick; here there was only the eternal fight.

Carla ached to be among them, doing his work, preparing the fertile ground—the stinking breeding place of everything foul that had only to be tended, cultured, to raise great crops of the brightest blossoms the galaxy had ever seen.

Carla steadied his thoughts, straightened his steps. First there was work to do.

"Any old coins, mister?"

"Any old dirty money you ain't got no use for?"

"Gimme a penny, mister. Gimme a penny."

He was surrounded. A circle of eager, starved bodies enclosed him. A ring of dirty, bright faces stared up at him, mouths ready to shape thanks or curses as the need arose.

Carla threw them a handful of small coins; they scrambled after them, yelling thanks, like monkeys in a zoo after peanuts. The comparison was not too farfetched at that, he thought.

There was something new ahead, something to relieve the monotony of the swarming ruins. It was a sparkling tower, almost blinding in the intensity of its pure whiteness—a temple of the new religion, the religion established less than two centuries ago by the scientific mystic, Sarn Sanderson. Here it was, rising like a phoenix from the ashes of the slums enclosed on all sides by dingy poverty but lifting out of it untouched, un-touchable.

Carla paused by the wide entrance, glancing in at the swirling, scintillating mists, reaching long arms toward the outer air but never extending beyond the walls of the temple. Through the diamond-studded mists Carla could see the magnetic purple effulgence of the Sign of Sarn suggesting but never delineating its outline. And occasionally through the mists could be seen the indistinct white-robed figures of the priests as they went about their duties.

There was promise in it all, a promise its neighbors found easy to believe. It promised satisfaction of innumerable hungers of the body and the spirit, a refuge from the pressing troubles of the world, fulfilment, peace. Here were dreams for the asking, miracles for sale. Carla frowned; his few experiences with the temple had been disquieting. There *had* been dreams and weird happenings that were hard to explain away.

Was the temple the answer? Carla shook his head. It was too easy; one didn't help the galaxy, one deserted it.

One didn't even improve one's own life, one cut it off behind. The answer might be there, but it was too well protected, too inaccessible, and there was no assurance that once the answer was found a man could leave with it—or would want to leave. The answer would have to be found in the realm of the living.

●THE SMOOTH PURR OF A car came from down the street. Carla glanced back. The sleek front was approaching rapidly, scattering the people from the street. They stood, looking after it, shaking their fists in impotent rage. The car was closer; Carla saw the slits in the windows and knew what it was.

With one fluid motion Carla vaulted over a railing into the protection of a series of steps descending below the street level to a basement apartment. Above his head a series of pellets raked the face of the building with a line of fire and crept slowly downward. Carla hugged the protection of the front wall. The fiery pellets crept closer. An agonized scream sounded above, a scream that was suddenly cut off. Then the pellets were bouncing upward off the pavement. The car roared and was gone.

Emerging slowly from his shelter, Carla found an old woman writhing on the pavement in death agony. Her lips were bloody and her limbs jerking spasmodically. She was alone. No one came near her; no one looked at her. The business of living in the slums was resumed. Death was no stranger to these people, even sudden death. What was one old woman, more or less?

Carla turned away. There was nothing he could do.

"Got a few minutes, mister?"

The low dulcet tones came from a flashy, skimpily dressed girl who could not have been sixteen. "I could make it worth your time."

Carla turned away, sickened. He walked on down the street, trying to get away.

"Cheapskate," the girl yelled, and other words that were not so nice, in tones that were now harsh and strident.

Carla bowed his head and strode on. Soon he would be out of the district and nearing his destination. He had a job and he wanted to get it over with. There wasn't much time now.

A few more blocks and he would be entering the residential district of the very rich, the rulers, the tyrants. In one of the palaces a meeting would be taking place amid luxury and comfort. He had an appointment there soon.

"Hey, mister! What's your hurry?"

The girls were leaning out of windows above him.

"Best girls in town."

"Very clean."

These were older; somehow it didn't bother him so much. He knew them, what they were, how they lived, what brought them here.

"Not tonight," he called.

"You don't know what you're missing; come back this way," they called after him.

No, not tonight, he thought. *Not tonight.* Tonight there was work to do.

● **PALACES LOOMED AHEAD,** dark, empty mausoleums of wealth, blotting out the blue-blackness of the night sky. This was not the season on Flora. The local rulers were enjoying the infinite delights of the pleasure planets. The palaces were deserted—no, not entirely deserted. Somewhere in these somber tombs of the people's wealth, the people's hopes and dreams, men were meeting in secret and sober deliberation to determine the future of the galaxy. And in his hands, Carla thought with a shiver, rested the responsibility for the success or failure of those conferences. It was almost too much.

Carla steadied himself. The slums were only a few blocks behind but, in reality, almost a score of years. He had come a long way. There was no turning back.

Was this the place? Carla checked

his bearings; this huge pile might be a little bigger, but it seemed as dark and deserted as the rest. Its long wide steps rose to a magnificent, wide, many-columned entrance. Carla checked again. This was the place.

He circled the palace, slipping from shadow to shadow, his eyes searching every possible hiding place. Nowhere was there any sign of guards. Carla hadn't expected any—guards attracted attention—but there must be nothing left to chance, no unnecessary risks taken. This had to succeed. There would be no second chance.

At the front Carla inspected every crevice for mechanical warning devices. None. Carla glanced at his watch; it was almost time. Caution had had its moment. Now was the time for action.

Quickly Carla mounted the steps. Stopping close to the pillars, he withdrew two small objects from his cape and his hands began to move rapidly. He stepped back, sighting, made a few adjustments, and marked a mental spot on the steps. Carla faded into the shadows of the columns.

Minutes passed slowly. Suddenly the massive doors sighed into a narrow opening; a man slipped between them and walked to the top of the steps, looking down on the dark street below. He breathed deeply. A shaft of moonlight from the smaller of Flora's two moons lighted up his face for a brief moment as he threw back his head.

"Eldred!"

The man turned, his eyes piercing the shadows. Carla walked slowly forward.

"John!" the man exclaimed.

Carla stared into the face which was so much like his own, yet subtly different. Not quite so hard, perhaps, yet lit from within by a stubborn flame that shone from the other's eyes—a flame which was hard to decipher at first, but after so many years John Carla thought he knew what it was.

"Well, Brother John—so we meet again." Eldred had recovered from his shock of recognition, apparently.

"Again," agreed John, "after so many years."

"Years which have not been wasted, eh, John?" chuckled Eldred.

"No—not wasted."

"We've come a long way since we parted in the slums," Eldred said, echoing a thought John had had only a few minutes before, "I am head of the League of Peace and you..." John was silent. "Well, it's obvious that you, too, have done well for yourself."

John nodded his head in silent agreement.

"But why have you turned up again after so many years?" asked Eldred. "It can't be just fraternal feeling." He laughed. "There was never much of that."

"No—it wasn't just that," said John. "How does it feel to have so much power in your hands—to shape the destiny of the galaxy?"

Eldred laughed easily. "You've been listening to too many rumors."

"Perhaps you're right—but I don't think so; that, primarily, is why I'm here."

"I heard you were on Flora, of course," Eldred shifted rapidly.

"I know. I met your welcoming party."

● **E**LDRED CHUCKLED. "Clumsy fools. Too bad you gave yourself away at the port. You see, I know Davis. And I never forget."

"I thought it was something like that."

"That street fight was good work. You shouldn't have let the fat one get away, though. I wasn't certain at first, but when he described the fight I knew it couldn't be anyone but you." Eldred chuckled again. "I have too many scars from our childhood scraps, even though I was the older."

"You never were much good at man-to-man fighting."

"You escaped the police very easily. I had to get rid of the loudmouthed fellow. He was getting altogether too careless."

"I thought you had lost your touch in choosing men," John said; "he wasn't at all your type."

"Such men have their uses. His usefulness, alas, is at an end. The men in the car thought they had got you; I'll have to reprimand them."

"I'm surprised you took such pains to remove me. I didn't know you considered me so dangerous."

"I never take chances, John, when I can help it. You know that. But tell me, now that you are here. Why did you come?"

"This isn't the time for peace, Eldred."

"You do know about it then."

"The rulers, of course, are only too happy about your efforts. A few more years and they might face a galactic revolt."

"Peace is what the people want," Eldred said simply. "Peace is what they will have."

"But what kind of peace? That is the question."

"My kind of peace, of course," Eldred chuckled. "And they will love me for it."

"Exactly. I wasn't too concerned about the rulers; they are old-fashioned in their methods and thoughts. They will be removed or replaced soon in any case. But you!—that was another matter."

"Was it?"

"I know you too well, Eldred. Peace-maker isn't a big enough role for your ambition. You would be a king-maker—or even the builder of an empire."

"You overestimate my abilities," Eldred said slowly.

"But not your ambitions. No, Eldred—you were the sticking point. I'm giving you one last chance: Drop the peace efforts! Break up the conference! You can do it; you're the only one keeping this motley group together."

"You think I would do that?" Eldred said bitterly. "Now that I have victory in my grasp, do you think I would let you talk me out of it?"

"I didn't really think you would, but I wanted you to have the chance."

"I have my chance." Eldred had regained his composure. "Nothing can stop me." His hands were concealed beneath his long coat.

"Nothing?" John asked slowly.

"Nothing," Eldred answered, bringing into view a pellet gun in each hand. "Not even you."

John raised his hands slowly to shoulder level.

"I knew why you were here all the time," Eldred said. "I knew when you joined the Assassins and where. So they have condemned me. Ha! It will take more than the Assassins to stop me. Soon I will have the power and the information to wipe them out entirely."

"Eldred!" John made one step forward.

Eldred backed up. "Don't move any closer! I wouldn't like to end this before I'm finished; I want to enjoy this moment. I've waited for it long enough. My organization is even more extensive than even you suspect, John. The few years of peace will be enough to see me strong enough to take over—everywhere. Then you will see things hum."

"Eldred!" John moved forward another step, Eldred backing with him.

"I warned you, John," he said, raising his guns.

John raised his hands a little higher.

"This is it," Eldred said. "This is the end of our long trip, John." A smile lit his face. "After this, nothing..."

John raised his hands to their limit. There was a cough from a pellet gun. One of the two figures crumpled to the pavement, writhing in spasms of agony.

"I would have liked it to be quicker and easier," John said to himself,

glancing at the pillars where a pellet gun and electric eye clung in a pneumatic grip.

John looked down at his brother. "So long, Eldred," he said softly. "This is the end of our long trip."

He turned and strode quickly down the steps. At the top of the street, a policeman stopped him. John tilted his hat back.

"Oh, Mr. Carla," the policeman apologized. "I didn't recognize you."

John strode on, unhindered.

"Peace," he said softly. "Someday. A real peace."

•

"...But an assassin's hand struck down Carla at the moment success and peace seemed assured. Investigation of the killing only served to raise confusion with Carla being reported in several parts of the city at the same time and even having been seen leaving the place where his body lay crumpled in death. The assassin was never caught, and the reason for the insane killing never determined. So ended the galaxy's chance for peace for the time, although..." Milton George, Galactic History, v. 6, p. 298

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top-notch story
by Edwin James

**THE SUN CAME
UP LAST NIGHT**

*leading off the
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