To Pay the Piper

THE MAN in the white jacket stopped at the door marked Re-Education ProjectCol. H. H. Mudgett, Commanding Officer and waited while the scanner looked him over. He had been through that door a thousand times, but the scanner made as elaborate a job of it as if it had never seen him before.

It always did, for there was always in fact a chance that it had never seen him before, whatever the fallible human beings to whom it reported might think. It went over him from gray, crew-cut poll to reagent-proof shoes, checking his small wiry body and lean profile against its stored silhouettes, tasting and smelling him as dubiously as if he were an orange held in storage two days too long.

"Name?" it said at last.

"Carson, Samuel, 32-454-0698."

"Business?"

"Medical director, Re-Ed One."

While Carson waited, a distant, heavy concussion came rolling down upon him through the mile of solid granite above his head. At the same moment, the letters on the doorand everything else inside his cone of visionblurred distressingly, and a stab of pure pain went lancing through his head. It was the supersonic component of the explosion, and it was harm-lessexcept that it always both hurt and scared him.

The light on the door-scanner, which had been glowing yellow up to now, flicked back to red again and the machine began the whole routine all over; the sound bomb had reset it. Carson patiently endured its inspection, gave his name, serial number, and mission once more, and this time got the green. He went in, unfolding as he walked the flimsy square of cheap paper he had been carrying all along.

Mudgett looked up from his desk and said at once: "What now?"

The physician tossed the square of paper down under Mudgett's eyes. "Summary of the press reaction to Hamelin's speech last night," he said. "The total effect is going against us, Colonel. Unless we can change Hamelin's mind, this outcry to re-educate civilians ahead of soldiers is going to lose the war for us. The urge to live on the surface again has been mounting for ten years; now it's got a target to focus on. Us."

Mudgett chewed on a pencil while he read the summary; a blocky, bulky man, as short as Carson and with hair as gray and close-cropped. A year ago, Carson would have told him that nobody in Re-Ed could afford to put stray objects in his mouth even once, let alone as a habit; now Carson just waited. There wasn't a manor a woman or a childof America's surviving thirty-five million "sane" people who didn't have some such tic. Not now, not after twenty-five years of underground life.

"He knows it's impossible, doesn't he?" Mudgett demanded abruptly.

"Of course he doesn't," Carson said impatiently. "He doesnt know any more about the real nature of the project than the people do. He thinks the 'educating' we do is in some sort of survival technique. . . . That's what the papers think, too, as you can plainly see by the way they loaded that editorial."

"Urn. If we'd taken direct control of the papers in the

first place . . ."
Carson said nothing. Military control of every facet of civilian life was a fact, and Mudgett knew it. He also knew that an appearance of freedom to think is a necessity for the human mindand that the appearance could not be maintained without a few shreds of the actuality.
"Suppose we do this," Mudgett said at last. "Hamelin's position in the State Department makes it impossible for us to muzzle him. But it ought to be possible to explain to him that no unprotected human being can live on the surface, no matter how many Merit Badges he had for woodcraft and first aid. Maybe we could even take him on a little trip topside; I'll wager he's never seen it."
"And what if he dies up there?" Carson said stonily. "We lose three-fifths of every topside party as it isand Hamelin's an inexperienced"
"Might be the best thing, mightn't it?"
"No," Carson said. "It would look like we'd planned it that way. The papers would have the populace boiling by the next morning."
Mudgett groaned and nibbled another double row of indentations around the barrel of the pencil. "There must be something," he said.
"There is."
"Well?"
"Bring the man here and show him just what we are doing. Re-educate him, if necessary. Once we told the newspapers that he'd taken the course. . . well, who knows, they just might resent it. Abusing his clearance privileges and so on."
"We'd be violating our basic policy," Mudgett said slowly. " 'Give the Earth back to the men who fight for it.' Still, the idea has some merits. . . ."
"Hamelin is out in the antechamber right now," Carson said. "Shall I bring him in?"
The radioactivity never did rise much beyond a mildly hazardous level, and that was only transient, during the second week of the warthe week called the Death of Cities. The small shards of sanity retained by the high commands on both sides dictated avoiding weapons with a built-in backfire; no cobalt bombs were dropped, no territories permanently poisoned. Generals still remembered that unoccupied territory, no matter how devastated, is still unconquered territory.
But no such considerations stood in the way of biological warfare. It was controllable: you never released against the enemy any disease you didn't yourself know how to control. There would be some slips, of course, but the margin for error ...
There were some slips. But for the most part, biological warfare worked fine. The great fevers washed like tides around and around the globe, one after another. In such cities as had escaped the bombings, the rumble of truck convoys carrying the puffed heaped corpses to the mass graves became the only sound except for sporadic small-arms fire; and then that too ceased, and the trucks stood rusting in rows.
Nor were human beings the sole victims. Cattle fevers were sent out. Wheat rusts, rice molds, corn blights, hog choleras, poultry enteritises, fountained into the indifferent air from the hidden laboratories, or were loosed far aloft, in the jetstream, by rocketing fleets. Gelatin capsules pullulating with gill-rots fell like hail into the great fishing grounds of Newfoundland, Oregon, Japan, Sweden, Portugal. Hundreds of

species of animals were drafted as secondary hosts for human diseases, were injected and released to carry the blessings of the laboratories to their mates and litters. It was discovered that minute amounts of the tetracycline series of antibiotics, which had long been used as feed supplements to bring farm animals to full market weight early, could also be used to raise the most whopping Anopheles and Aedes mosquitoes anybody ever saw, capable of flying long distances against the wind and of carrying a peculiarly interesting new strain of the malarial parasite and the yellow fever virus. . . .
By the time it had ended, everyone who remained alive was a mile under ground.
For good.
"I still fail to understand why," Hamelin said, "if, as you claim, you have methods of re-educating soldiers for surface life, you can't do so for civilians as well. Or instead."
The Under Secretary, a tall, spare man, bald on top, and with a heavily creased forehead, spoke with the odd neutral accentuntinged by regionalismof the trained diplomat, despite the fact that there had been no such thing as a foreign service for nearly half a century.
"We're going to try to explain that to you," Carson said. "But we thought that, first of all, we'd try to explain once more why we think it would be bad policyas well as physically out of the question.
"Sure, everybody wants to go topside as soon as it's possible. Even people who are reconciled to these endless caverns and corridors hope for something better for their childrena glimpse of sunlight, a little rain, the fall of a leaf. That's more important now to all of us than the war, which we don't believe in any longer. That doesn't even make any military sense, since we haven't the numerical strength to occupy the enemy's territory any more, and they haven't the strength to occupy ours. We understand all that. But we also know that the enemy is intent on prosecuting the war to the end. Extermination is what they say they want, on their propaganda broadcasts, and your own Department reports that they seem to mean what they say. So we can't give up fighting them; that would be simple suicide. Are you still with me?"
"Yes, but I don't see"
"Give me a moment more. If we have to continue to fight, we know this much: that the first of the two sides to get men on the surface againso as to be able to attack important targets, not just keep them isolated in seas of plagueswill be the side that will bring this war to an end. They know that, too. We have good reason to believe that they have a re-education project, and that it's about as far advanced as ours is."
"Look at it this way," Colonel Mudgett burst in un-expectedly. "What we have now is a stalemate. A saboteur occasionally locates one of the underground cities and lets the pestilences into it. Sometimes on our side, sometimes on theirs. But that only happens sporadically, and it's just more of this mutual extermination businessto which we're com-mitted, willy-nilly, for as long as they are. If we can get troops onto the surface first, we'll be able to scout out their im-portant installations in short order, and issue them a surrender ultimatum with teeth in it. They'll take it. The only other course is the sort of slow, mutual suicide we've got now."

Hamelin put the tips of his fingers together. "You gentlemen lecture me about policy as if I had never heard the word before. I'm familiar with your arguments for sending soldiers first. You assume that you're familiar with all of mine for starting with civilians, but you're wrong, because some of them haven't been brought up at all outside the Department. I'm going to tell you some of them, and I think they'll merit your close attention."

Carson shrugged. "I'd like nothing better than to be convinced, Mr. Secretary. Go ahead."

"You of all people should know, Dr. Carson, how close our underground society is to a psychotic break. To take a single instance, the number of juvenile gangs roaming these corridors of ours has increased 400 per cent since the rumors about the Re-Education Project began to spread. Or another: the number of individual crimes without motivecrimes committed just to distract the committer from the grinding monotony of the life we all leadhas now passed the total of all other crimes put together.

"And as for actual insanityof our thirty-five million people still unhospitalized, there are four million cases of which -we know, each one of which should be committed right now for early paranoid schizophreniaexcept that were we to commit them, our essential industries would suffer a manpower loss more devastating than anything the enemy has inflicted upon us. Every one of those four million persons is a major hazard to his neighbors and to his job, but how can we do without them? And what can we do about the unrecognized, subclinical cases, which probably total twice as many? How long can we continue operating without a collapse under such conditions?"

Carson mopped his brow. "I didn't suspect that it had gone that far."

"It has gone that far," Hamelin said icily, "and it is accelerating. Your own project has helped to accelerate it. Colonel Mudgett here mentioned the opening of isolated cities to the pestilences. Shall I tell you how Louisville fell?"

"A spy again, I suppose," Mudgett said.

"No, Colonel. Not a spy. A band ofof vigilantes, of mutineers. I'm familiar with your slogan. The Earth to those who fight for it.' Do you know the counterslogan that's circulating among the people?"

They waited. Hamelin smiled and said: " 'Let's die on the surface.' "

"They overwhelmed the military detachment there, put the city administration to death, and blew open the shaft to the surface. About a thousand people actually made it to the top. Within twenty-four hours the city was deadas the ringleaders had been warned would be the outcome. The warning didn't deter them. Nor did it protect the prudent citizens who had no part in the affair."

Hamelin leaned forward suddenly. "People won't wait to be told when it's their turn to be re-educated. They'll be tired of waiting, tired to the point of insanity of living at the bottom of a hole. They'll just go.

"And that, gentlemen, will leave the world to the enemy . . . or, more likely, the rats. They alone are immune to everything by now."

There was a long silence. At last Carson said mildly: "Why aren't we immune to everything by now?"

"Eh? Whythe new generations. They've never been

exposed."
"We still have a reservoir of older people who lived through the war: people who had one or several of the new diseases that swept the world, some as many as five, and yet recovered. They still have their immunities. We know; we've tested them. We know from sampling that no new disease has been introduced by either side in over ten years now. Against all the known ones, we have immunization techniques, anti-sera, antibiotics, and so on. I suppose you get your shots every six months like all the rest of us; we should all be very hard to infect now, and such infections as do take should run mild courses." Carson held the Under Secretary's eyes grimly. "Now, answer me this question: why is it that, despite all these protections, every single person in an opened city dies?"
"I don't know," Hamelin said, staring at each of them in turn. "By your showing some of them should recover."
"They should," Carson said. "But nobody does. Why? Because the very nature of disease has changed since we all went underground. There are now abroad in the world a number of mutated bacterial strains which can by-pass the immunity mechanisms of the human body altogether. What this means in simple terms is that, should such a germ get into your body, your body wouldn't recognize it as an invader. It would manufacture no antibodies against the germ. Consequently, the germ could multiply without any check, andyou would die. So would we all."
"I see," Hamelin said. He seemed to have recovered his composure extraordinarily rapidly. "I am no scientist, gentlemen, but what you tell me makes our position sound perfectly hopeless. Yet obviously you have some answer."
Carson nodded. "We do. But it's important for you to understand the situation, otherwise the answer will mean nothing to you. So: is it perfectly clear to you now, from what we've said so far, that no amount of re-educating a man's brain, be he soldier or civilian, will allow him to survive on the surface?"
"Quite clear," Hamelin said, apparently ungrudgingly. Carson's hopes rose by a fraction of a millimeter. "But if you don't re-educate his brain, what can you re-educate? His reflexes, perhaps?"
"No," Carson said. "His lymph nodes, and his spleen."
A scornful grin began to appear on Hamelin's thin lips. "You need better public relations counsel than you've been getting," he said. "If what you say is trueas of course I assume it isthen the term 're-educate' is not only inappropriate, it's downright misleading. If you had chosen a less suggestive and more accurate label in the beginning, I wouldn't have been able to cause you half the trouble I have."
"I agree that we were badly advised there," Carson said. "But not entirely for those reasons. Of course the name is misleading; that's both a characteristic and a function of the names of top secret projects. But in this instance the name 'Re-Education,' bad as it now appears, subjected the men who chose it to a fatal temptation. You see, though it is misleading, it is also entirely accurate."
"Word games," Hamelin said.
"Not at all," Mudgett interposed. "We were going to spare you the theoretical reasoning behind our project, Mr. Secretary, but now you'll just have to sit still for it. The fact is

that the body's ability to distinguish between its own cells and those of some foreign tissuea skin graft, say, or a bacterial invasion of the bloodisn't an inherited ability. It's a learned reaction. Furthermore, if you'll think about it a moment, you'll see that it has to be. Body cells die, too, and have to be disposed of; what would happen if removing those dead cells provoked an antibody reaction, as the destruction of foreign cells does? We'd die of anaphylactic shock while we were still infants.

"For that reason, the body has to learn how to scavenge selectively. In human beings, that lesson isn't learned completely until about a month after birth. During the intervening time, the newborn infant is protected by antibodies that it gets from the colestrum, the 'first milk' it gets from the breast during the three or four days immediately after birth. It can't generate its own; it isn't allowed to, so to speak, until it's learned the trick of cleaning up body residues without triggering the antibody mechanisms. Any dead cells marked 'personal' have to be dealt with some other way."

"That seems clear enough," Hamelin said. "But I don't see its relevance."

"Well, we're in a position now where that differentiation between the self and everything outside the body doesn't do us any good any more. These mutated bacteria have been 'selfed' by the mutation. In other words, some of their protein molecules, probably desoxyribonucleic acid molecules, carry configurations or 'recognition units' identical with those of our body cells, so that the body can't tell one from another."

"But what has all this to do with re-education?"

"Just this," Carson said. "What we do here is to impose upon the cells of the bodyall of thema new set of recognition units for the guidance of the lymph nodes and the spleen, which are the organs that produce antibodies. The new units are highly complex, and the chances of their being duplicated by bacterial evolution, even under forced draft, are too small to worry about. That's what Re-Education is. In a few moments, if you like, we'll show you just how it's done."

Hamelin ground out his fifth cigarette in Mudgett's ash tray and placed the tips of his fingers together thoughtfully. Carson wondered just how much of the concept of recognition-marking the Under Secretary had absorbed. It had to be admitted that he was astonishingly quick to take hold of abstract ideas, but the self-marker theory of immunity was like everything else in immunologyalmost impossible to explain to laymen, no matter how intelligent.

"This process," Hamelin said besitantly, "it takes a long time?"

"About six hours per subject, and we can handle only one man at a time. That means that we can count on putting no more than seven thousand troops into the field by the turn of the century. Every one will have to be a highly trained specialist, if we're to bring the war to a quick conclusion."

"Which means no civilians," Hamelin said. "I see. I'm not entirely convinced, butby all means let's see how it's done."

Once inside, the Under Secretary tried his best to look everywhere at once. The room cut into the rock was roughly two hundred feet high. Most of it was occupied by the bulk of the Re-Education Monitor, a mechanism as tall as a fifteen-story building, aad about a city block square. Guards watched

it on all sides, and the face of the machine swarmed with technicians.
"Incredible," Hamelin murmured. "That enormous object can process only one man at a time?"
'That's right," Mudgett said. "Luckily it doesn't have to treat all the body cells directly. It works through the blood, re-selfing the cells by means of small changes in the serum chemistry."
"What kind of changes?"
"Well," Carson said, choosing each word carefully, "that's more or less a graveyard secret, Mr. Secretary. We can tell you this much: the machine uses a vast array of crystalline, complex sugars which behave rather like the blood-group-and-type proteins. They're fed into the serum in minute amounts, under feedback control of second-by-second analysis of the blood. The computations involved in deciding upon the amount and the precise nature of each introduced chemical are highly complex. Hence the size of the machine. It is, in its major effect, an artificial kidney."
"I've seen artificial kidneys in the hospitals," Hamelin said, frowning. "They're rather compact affairs."
"Because all they do is remove waste products from the patient's blood, and restore the fluid and electrolyte balance. Those are very minor renal functions in the higher mammals. The organ's main duty is chemical control of immunity. If Bumet and Fenner had known that back in 1949, when the selfing theory was being formulated, we'd have had Re-Education long before now."
"Most of the machine's size is due to the computation sec-tion," Mudgett emphasized. "In the body, the brain stem does those computations, as part of maintaining homeostasis. But we can't reach the brain stem from outside; it's not under conscious control. Once the body is re-selfed, it will retram the thalamus where we can't." Suddenly, two swinging doors at the base of the machine were pushed apart and a mobile operating table came through, guided by two attendants. There was a form on it, covered to the chin with a sheet. The face above this sheet was immobile and almost as white.
Hamelin watched the table go out of the huge cavern with visibly mixed emotions. He said: "This processit's painful?"
"No, not exactly," Carson said. The motive behind the question interested him hugely, but he didn't dare show it. "But any fooling around with the immunity mechanisms can give rise to symptomsfever, general malaise, and so on. We try to protect our subjects by giving them a light shock anesthesia first."
"Shock?" Hamelin repeated. "You mean electroshock? I don't see how"
"Call it stress anesthesia instead. We give the man a steroid drug that counterfeits the anesthesia the body itself produces in moments of great stresson the battlefield, say, or just after a serious injury. It's fast, and free of aftereffects. There's no secret about that, by the way; the drug involved is 21-hydroxypregnane-3,20-dione sodium succinate, and it dates all the way back to 1955."
"Oh," the Under Secretary said. The ringing sound of the chemical name had had, as Carson had hoped, a ritually soothing effect.
"Gentlemen," Hamelin said hesitantly. "Gentlemen, I have aa rather unusual request. And, I am afraid, a rather sel-

fish one." A brief, nervous laugh. "Selfish in both senses, if you will pardon me the pun. You need feel no hesitation in refusing me, but"
Abruptly he appeared to find it impossible to go on. Carson mentally crossed his fingers and plunged in.
"You would like to undergo the process yourself?" he said.
"Well, yes. Yes, that's exactly it. Does that seem inconsistent? I should know, should I not, what it is that I'm advocating for my following? Know it intimately, from personal experience, not just theory? Of course I realize that it would conflict with your policy, but I assure you I wouldn't turn it to any political advantagenone whatsoever. And perhaps it wouldn't be too great a lapse of policy to process just one civilian among your seven thousand soldiers."
Subverted, by God! Carson looked at Mudgett with a firmly straight face. It wouldn't do accept too quickly.
But Hamelin was rushing on, almost chattering now. "I can understand your hesitation. You must feel that I'm trying to gain some advantage, or even to get to the surface ahead of my fellow men. If it will set your minds at rest, I would be glad to enlist in your advance army.'Before five years are up, I could surely learn some technical skill which would make me useful to the expedition. If you would prepare papers to that effect, I'd be happy to sign them."
"That's hardly necessary," Mudgett said. "After you're Re-Educated, we can simply announce the fact, and say that you've agreed to join the advance party when the time comes."
"Ah," Hamelin said. "I see the difficulty. No, that would make my position quite impossible. If there is no other way . . ."
"Excuse us a moment," Carson said. Hamelin bowed, and the doctor pulled Mudgett off out of earshot.
"Don't overplay it," he murmured. "You're tipping our hand with that talk about a press release. Colonel. He's offering us a bribebut he's plenty smart enough to see that the price you're suggesting is that of his whole political career; he won't pay that much."
"What then?" Mudgett whispered hoarsely.
"Get somebody to prepare the kind of informal contract he suggested. Offer to put it under security seal so we won't be able to show it to the press at all. He'll know well enough that such a seal can be broken if our policy ever comes before a presidential reviewand that will restrain him from forcing such a review. Let's not demand too much. Once he's been Re-Educated, he'll have to live the rest of the five years with the knowledge that he can live topside any time he wants to try itand he hasn't had the discipline our men have had. It's my bet that he'll goof off before the five years are upand good riddance."
They went back to Hamelin, who was watching the machine and humming in a painfully abstracted manner.
"I've convinced the Colonel," Carson said, "that your services in the army might well be very valuable when the time comes, Mr. Secretary. If you'll sign up, we'll put the papers under security seal for your own protection, and then I think we can fit you into our treatment program today."
"I'm grateful to you. Dr. Carson," Hamelin said. "Very grateful indeed."
Five minutes after his injection, Hamelin was as peaceful as a flounder and was rolled through the swinging doors. An
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hour? discussion of the probable outcome, carried on in the privacy of Mudgett's office, bore very little additional fruit, however.

"It's our only course," Carson said. "It's what we hoped to gain from his visit, duly modified by circumstances. It all comes down to this: Hamelin's compromised himself, and he knows it."

"But," Mudgett said, "suppose he was right? What about all that talk of his about mass insanity?"

"I'm sure it's true," Carson said, his voice trembling slightly despite his best efforts at control. "It's going to be rougher than ever down here for the next five years, Colonel. Our only consolation is that the enemy must have exactly the same problem; and if we can beat them to the surface"

"Hsst!" Mudgett said. Carson had already broken off his sentence. He wondered why the scanner gave a man such a hard time outside that door, and then admitted him without any warning to the people on the other side. Couldn't the damned thing be trained to knock?

The newcomer was a page from the haemotology section.

"Here's the preliminary rundown on your 'student X,' Dr. Carson," he said.

The page saluted Mudgett and went out. Carson began to read. After a moment, he also began to sweat.

"Colonel, look at this. I was wrong after all. Disastrously wrong. I haven't seen a blood-type distribution pattern like Hamelin's since I was a medical student, and even back then it was only a demonstration, not a real live patient. Look at it from the genetic point of viewthe migration factors."

He passed the protocol across the desk. Mudgett was not by background a scientist, but he was an enormously able administrator, of the breed that makes it its business to know the technicalities on which any project ultimately rests. He was not much more than halfway through the tally before his eyebrows were gaining altitude like shock waves.

"Carson, we can't let that man into the machine! He's"

"He's already in it, Colonel, you know that. And if we interrupt the process before it runs to term, we'll kill him."

"Let's kill him, then," Mudgett said harshly. "Say he died while being processed. Do the country a favor."

"That would produce a bell of a stink. Besides, we have no proof."

Mudgett flourished the protocol excitedly.

"That's not proof to anyone but a haemotologist."

"But Carson, the man's a saboteur!" Mudgett shouted.

"Nobody but an Asiatic could have a typing pattern like-this I And he's no melting-pot product, eitherhe's a classical mixture, very probably a Georgian. And every move he's made since we first heard of him has been aimed directly at usaimed directly at tricking us into getting him into the machine!"

"I think so too," Carson said grimly. "I just hope the enemy hasn't many more agents as brilliant."

"One's enough," Mudgett said. "He's sure to be loaded to the last cc of his blood with catalyst poisons. Once the machine starts processing his serum, we're done forit'll take us years to reprogram the computer, if it can be done at all. It's got to be stopped!"

"Stopped?" Carson said, astonished. "But it's already stopped. That's not what worries me. The machine stopped it

fifty minutes ago."
"It can't have! How could it? It has no relevant data!"
"Sure it has." Carson leaned forward, took the cruelly chewed pencil away from Mudgett, and made a neat check beside one of the entries on the protocol. Mudgett stared at the checked item.
"Platelets Rh VI?" he mumbled. "But what's that got to do with . . . Oh. Oh, I see. That platelet type doesn't exist at all in our population now, does it? Never seen it before myself, at least."
"No," Carson said, grinning wolfishly. "It never was common in the West, and the pogrom of 1981 wiped it out. That's something the enemy couldn't know. But the machine knows it. As soon as it gives him the standard anti-IV desensitization shot, his platelets will begin to dissolveand he'll be rejected for incipient thrombocytopenia." He laughed.
"For his own protection! But"
"But he's getting nitrous oxide in the machine, and he'll be held six hours under anesthesia anyhowalso for his own protection," Mudgett broke in. He was grinning back at Carson like an idiot. "When he comes out from under, he'll assume that he's been re-educated, and he'll beat it back to the enemy to report that he's poisoned our machine, so that they can be sure they'll beat us to the surface. And he'll go the fastest way: overland."
"He will," Carson agreed. "Of course he'll go overland, and of course he'll die. But where does that leave us? We won't be able to conceal that he was treated here, if there's any sort of inquiry at all. And his death will make everything we do here look like a fraud. Instead of paying our Pied Piperand great jumping Jehoshaphat, look at his name! They were rubbing our noses in it all the time! Nevertheless, we didn't pay the piper; we killed him. And 'platelets Rh VI' won't be an adequate excuse for the press, or for Hamelin's following."
"It doesn't worry me," Mudgett rumbled. "Who'll know? He won't die in our labs. He'll leave here hale and hearty. He won't die until he makes a break for the surface. After that we can compose a fine obituary for the press. Heroic government official, on the highest policy levelcouldn't wait to lead his followers to the surfacedied of being too much in a hurryRe-Ed Project sorrowfully reminds everyone that no technique is foolproof . . ."
Mudgett paused long enough to light a cigarette, which was a most singular action for a man who never smoked. "As a matter of fact, Carson," he said, "it's a natural."
Carson considered it. It seemed to hold up. And "Hamelin" would have a death certificate as complex as he deserved not officially, of course, but in the minds of everyone who knew the facts. His death, when it came, would be due directly to the thrombocytopenia which had caused the Re-Ed machine to reject himand thrombocytopenia is a disease of infants. Unless ye become as little children . . .
That was a fitting reason for rejection from the new kingdom of Earth: anemia of the newborn.
His pent breath went out of him in a long sigh. He hadn't been aware that he'd been holding it. "It's true," he said softly. "That's the time to pay the piper."
"When?" Mudget said.
"When?" Carson said, surprised. "Why, before he takes the children away."