# Analogue Men

(*Hell's Pavement*)

Damon Knight

1955

*OCR from !foi-proofpacks Knight, Damon - Analogue Men.tif. Spell-checked.*

# Chapter 1. The Analogues

The creature was like an eye, a globular eye that could see in all directions, encysted in the gray, cloudy mind that called itself Alfie Strunk. In that dimness thoughts squirmed, like dark fish darting; and the eye followed them without pity.

It knew Alfie, knew the evil in Alfie; the tangled skein of impotence and hatred and desire; the equation: Love equals death. The roots of that evil were beyond its reach; it was only an eye. But now it was changing. Deep in its own center, little electric tingles came and went. Energy found a new gradient, and flowed.

A thought shone in the gray cloud that was Alfie—only half-formed, but unmistakable. And a channel opened. In-stantly, the eye thrust a filament of itself into that passage.

Now it was free. Now it could act.

The man on the couch stirred and moaned. The doctor, who had been whispering into his ear, drew back and watched his face. At the other end of the couch, the technician glanced alertly at the patient, then turned again to his meters.

The patient's head was covered to the ears by an ovoid shell of metal. A broad strap of webbing, buckled under his jaw, held it securely. The heads of screw-clamps protruded in three circles around the shell's girth, and a thick bundle of insulated wires led from it to the control board at the foot of the couch.

The man's gross body was restrained by a rubber sheet, the back of his head resting in the trough of a rubber block.

"No!" he shouted suddenly. He mumbled, his loose features contorting. Then, "I wasn't gonna—No! Don't—" He mut-tered again, trying to move his body; the tendons in his neck were sharply outlined. "Please," he said. Tears glittered in his eyes.

The doctor leaned forward and whispered. "You're going away from there. You're going away. It's five minutes later."

The patient relaxed and seemed to be asleep. A teardrop spilled over and ran slowly down his cheek.

The doctor stood up and nodded to the technician, who slowly moved his rheostat to zero before he cut the switches. "A good run," the doctor mouthed silently. The technician nodded and grinned. He scribbled on a pad, "Test him this aft.?" The doctor wrote, "Yes. Can't tell till then, but think we got him solid."

Alfie Strunk sat in the hard chair and chewed rhythmically, staring at nothing. His brother had told him to wait here, while he went down the hall to see the doctor. It seemed to Alfie that he had been gone a long time.

Silence flowed around him. The room was almost bare—the chair he sat in, the naked walls and floor, a couple of little tables with books on them. There were two doors; one, open, led into the long bare hall outside. There were other doors in the hall, but they were all closed and their bumpy-glass windows were dark. At the end of the hall was a door, and that was closed, too. Alfie had heard his brother close

it behind him, with a solid snick, when he left. He felt very safe and alone.

He heard something, a faint echo of movement, and turned his head swiftly. The noise came from beyond the second door in the room, the one that was just slightly ajar. He heard it again.

He stood up cautiously, not making a sound. He tiptoed to the door, looked through the crack. At first he saw nothing; then the footsteps came again and he saw a flash of color: a blue print skirt, a white sweater, a glimpse of coppery hair.

Alfie widened the crack, very carefully. His heart was pound-ing and his breath was coming faster. Now he could see the far end of the room. A couch, and the girl sitting on it, opening a book. She was about eleven, slender and dainty. A reading lamp by the couch gave the only light. She was alone.

Alfie's blunt fingers went into his trousers pocket and clutched futilely. They had taken his knife away.

Then he glanced at the little table beside the door, and his breath caught. There it was, his own switchblade knife, lying beside the books. His brother must have left it there and forgotten to tell him.

He reached for it—

"ALFIE!"

He whirled, cringing. His mother stood there, towering twice his height, with wrath in her staring gray eyes; every line of her so sharp and real that he couldn't doubt her, though he had seen her buried fifteen years ago.

She had a willow switch in her hand.

"No!" gasped Alfie, retreating to the wall. "Don't—I wasn't gonna do nothing."

She raised the switch. "You're no good, no good, no good," she spat. "You've got the devil in you, and it's just got to be whipped out."

"Don't, please—" said Alfie. Tears leaked out of his eyes. "Get away from that girl," she said, advancing. "Get clean away and don't ever come back. Go on—"

Alfie turned and ran, sobbing in his throat.

In the next room, the girl went on reading until a voice said, "Okay, Rita. That's all."

She looked up. "Is that all? Well, I didn't do much."

"You did enough," said the voice. "We'll explain to you what it's all about some day. Come on, let's go."

She smiled, stood up—and vanished as she moved out of range of the mirrors in the room below.

The two rooms where Alfie had been tested were empty. Alfie's mother was already gone—gone with Alfie, inside his mind where he could never escape her again, as long as he lived.

Martyn's long, cool fingers gently pressed the highball glass. The glass accepted the pressure, a very little; the liquid rose almost imperceptibly inside it. This glass would not break, he knew; it had no sharp edges and if thrown it would not hurt anybody much.

The music of the five-piece combo down at the end of the room was the same—muted, gentle, accommodating. And the alcohol content of the whisky in his drink was twenty-four point five per cent.

But men still got drunk, and men still reached for a weapon to kill.

And, incredibly, there were worse things that could happen. The cure was sometimes worse than the disease. We're witch doctors, he thought. We don't realize it yet, most of us, but that's what we are. The doctor who only heals is a servant; the doctor who controls life and death is a tyrant.

The dark little man across the table had to be made to understand that. Martyn thought he could do it. The man had power—the power of millions of readers, of friends in high places—but he was a genuine, not a professional, lover of democracy.

Now the little man raised his glass, tilted it in a quick, automatic gesture. Martyn saw his throat pulse, like the knott-ing of a fist. He set the glass down, and the soft rosy light from the bar made dragon's eyes of his spectacles.

"Well, Dr. Martyn?" His voice was sharp and rapid, but amiable. This man lived with tension; he was acclimated to it, like a swimmer in swift waters.

Martyn gestured with his glass, a slow, controlled move-ment. "I want you to see something before we talk. I had two reasons for asking you here. One is that it's an out-of-the-way place, and, as you'll understand, I have to be careful. If Dr. Kusko should learn I'm talking to you, and why—" Martyn moistened his lips. "I'm not ashamed to say I'm afraid of that man. He's a paranoid—capable of anything. But more about that later.

"The other reason has to do with a man who comes here every night. His name is Ernest Fox; he's a machinist, when he works. Over there at the bar. The big man in the checked jacket. See him?"

The other flicked a glance that way; he did not turn his head. "Yeah. The one with the snootful?"

"Yes. You're right, he's very drunk. I don't think it'll take much longer."

"How come they serve him?"

"You'll see in a minute," Martyn said.

Ernest Fox was swaying slightly on the bar stool. His choleric face was flushed, and his nostrils widened visibly with each breath he took. His eyes were narrowed, staring at the man to his left—a wizened little fellow in a big fedora.

Suddenly he straightened and slammed his glass down on the bar. Liquid spread over the surface with a glittering flood. The wizened man looked up at him nervously.

Fox drew his fist back.

Martyn's guest had half-turned in his seat. He was watch-ing, relaxed and interested.

The big man's face turned abruptly, as if someone had spoken to him. He stared at an invisible something a yard away, and his raised arm slowly dropped. He appeared to be listening. Gradually his face lost its anger and became sullen. He muttered something, looking down at his hands. Then he turned to the wizened man and spoke, apparently in apology; the little man waved his hand as if to say, Forget it, and turned back to his drink.

The big man slumped again on the bar stool, shaking his head and muttering. Then he scooped up his change from the bar, got up and walked out. Someone else took his place almost immediately.

“That happens every night, like clockwork,” said Martyn. “That’s why they serve him. He never does any harm, and he never will. He’s a good customer.”

The dark little man was facing him alertly once more. “And?”

“A year and a half ago,” Martyn said, “no place in the Loop would let him in the door, and he had a police record as long as your arm. He liked to get drunk, and when he got drunk he liked to start fights. Compulsive. No cure for it, even if there were facilities for such cases. He’s still incurable. He’s just the same as he was—just as manic, just as hostile. But—he doesn’t cause any trouble now:”

“All right, doctor, I check to you. Why not?”

“He’s got an analogue,” said Martyn. “In the classical sense, he is even less sane than he was before. He has auditory, visual and tactile hallucinations—a complete integrated set. That’s enough to get you entry to most institutions, crowded as they are. But, you see, these hallucinations are pro-societal. They were put there, deliberately. He’s an acceptable member of society, because he has them.”

The dark man looked half irritated, half interested. He said, “He see things. What does he see, exactly, and what does it say to him?”

“Nobody knows that except himself. A policeman, maybe, or his mother as she looked when he was a child. Someone whom he fears, and whose authority he acknowledges. The subconscious has its own mechanism for creating these false images; all we do is stimulate it—it does the rest. Usually, we think, it just warns him, and in most cases that’s enough. A word from the right person at the right moment is enough to prevent ninety-nine out of a hundred crimes. But in extreme cases, the analogue can actually oppose the patient physically—as far as he’s concerned, that is. The hallucination is complete, as I told you.”

“Sounds like a good notion.”

“A very good notion—rightly handled. In ten years it will cut down the number of persons institutionalized for insanity to the point where we can actually hope to make some pro-gress, both in study and treatment, with those that are left.”

“Sort of a personal guardian angel, tailored to fit,” said the dark man.

“That’s exactly it. The analogue always fits the patient because it is the patient—a part of his own mind, working against his conscious purposes whenever they cross the pro-hibition we lay down. Even an exceptionally intelligent man can’t defeat his analogue, because the analogue is just as in-telligent. Even knowing you’ve had the treatment doesn’t help, although ordinarily the patient doesn’t know. The analogue, to the patient, is absolutely indistinguishable from a real person—but it doesn’t have any of a real person’s weaknesses.”

The other grinned. “Could I get one to keep me from draw-ing to inside straights?”

Martyn did not smile. “That isn’t quite as funny as it sounds. There’s a very real possibility that you could, about ten years from now ... if Kusko has his way—and that’s exactly what I want you to help prevent.”

The tall, black-haired young man got out of the pickup and strolled jauntily into the hotel lobby. He

wasn't thinking about what he was going to do; his mind was cheerfully occupied with the decoration of the enormous loft he had just rented on the lower East Side. It might be better, he thought, to put both couches along one wall, and arrange the bar opposite. Or put the Capehart there, with an easy chair on either side?

The small lobby was empty except for the clerk behind his minuscule counter and the elevator operator lounging beside the cage. The young man walked confidently forward.

"Yes, sir?" said the clerk.

"Listen," said the young man, "there's a man leaning out of a window upstairs, shouting for help. He looks sick."

"What? Show me."

The clerk and the elevator operator followed him out to the sidewalk. The young man pointed to two open windows. "It was one of those, the ones in the middle on the top floor."

"Thanks, mister."

The young man said, "Sure," and watched the two hurry into the elevator. When the doors closed behind them, he strolled in again and watched the indicator rise. Then, for the first time, he looked down at the blue carpet. It was almost new, not fastened down, and just the right size. He bent and picked up the end of it.

"Drop it," said a voice.

The young man looked up in surprise. It was the man, the same man that had stopped him yesterday in the furniture store. Was he being followed?

He dropped the carpet. "I thought I saw a coin under there."

"I know what you thought," the man said. "Beat it."

The young man walked out to his pickup and drove away.

He felt chilly inside. Suppose this happened every time he wanted to take something—?

The dark man looked shrewdly at Martyn. "All right doctor. Spill the rest of it. This Dr. Kusko you keep talking about—he's the head of the Institute, right? The guy who developed this process in the first place?"

"That's true," said Martyn, heavily.

"And you say he's a paranoid. Doesn't that mean he's crazy? Are you asking me to believe a crazy man could invent a thing like this?"

Martyn winced. "No, he isn't crazy. He's legally as sane as you or I, and even medically we would only call him dis-turbed. What we mean when we speak of a paranoid is simply that—well, here is a man who, if he did become insane, would be a paranoiac. He belongs to that type. Meanwhile, he has unreal attitudes about his own greatness and about the hostility of other people. He's a dangerous man. He believes that he is the one man who is right—standing on a pinnacle of right-ness—and he'll do anything, anything, to stay there."

“For instance?” the dark man said.

“The Institute,” Martyn told him, “has already arranged for a staff of lobbyists to start working for the first phase of its program when the world legislature returns to session this fall. Here’s what they want for a beginning:

“One, analogue treatment for all persons convicted of crime ‘while temporarily insane,’ as a substitute for either institu-tionalization or punishment. They will argue that society’s real purpose is to prevent the repetition of the crime, not to punish.”

“They’ll be right,” said the dark man.

“Of course. Second, they want government support for a vast and rapid expansion of analogue services. The goal is to restore useful citizens to society, and to ease pressure on institutions, both corrective and punitive.”

“Why not?”

“No reason why not—if it would stop there. But it won’t.” Martyn took a deep breath and clasped his long fingers to-gether on the table. It was very clear to him, but he realized that it was a difficult thing for a layman to see—or even for a technically competent man in his own field. And yet it was inevitable, it was going to happen, unless he stopped it.

“It’s just our bad luck,” he said, “that this development came at this particular time in history. It was only thirty years ago, shortly after the war, that the problem of our wasted human resources really became so acute that it couldn’t be evaded any longer. Since then we’ve seen a great deal of pro-gress, and public sentiment is fully behind it. New building codes for big cities. New speed laws. Reduced alcoholic content in wine and liquor. Things like that. The analogue treatment is riding the wave.

“It’s estimated that the wave will reach its maximum about ten years from now. And that’s when the Institute will be ready to put through the second phase of its program. Here it is:

“One, analogue treatment against crimes of violence to be compulsory for all citizens above the age of seven.”

The dark man stared at him. “Blue balls of fire. Will it work, on that scale?”

“Yes. It will completely eliminate any possibility of a future war, and it will halve our police problem.”

The dark man whistled. “Then what?”

“Two,” said Martyn, “analogue treatment against pecula-tion, bribery, collusion and all the other forms of corruption to be compulsory for all candidates for public office. And that will make the democratic system foolproof, for all time.”

The dark man laid his pencil down. “Dr. Martyn, you’re confusing me. I’m a libertarian, but there’s got to be some method of preventing this race from killing itself off. If this treatment will do what you say it will do, I don’t care if it does violate civil rights. I want to go on living, and I want my grandchildren—I have two, by the way—to go on living. Unless there’s a catch you haven’t told me about this thing, I’m for it.”

Martyn said earnestly, “This treatment is a crutch. It is not a therapy, it does not cure the patient of anything. In fact, as I told you before, it makes him less nearly sane, not more. The causes of his irrational or antisocial behavior are still there, they’re only repressed—temporarily. They can’t ever come out in the same way, that’s true; we’ve built a wall across that particular channel. But they will express

themselves in some other way, sooner or later. When a dammed-up flood breaks through in a new place, what do you do?"

"Build another levee."

"Exactly," said Martyn. "And after that? Another, and another, and another—"

Nicholas Dauth, cold sober, stared broodingly at the boulder that stood on trestles between the house and the orchard. It was a piece of New England granite, marked here and there with chalk lines.

It had stood there for eight months, and he had not touched a chisel to it.

The sun was warm on his back. The air was still; only the occasional hint of a breeze ruffled the treetops. Behind him he could hear the clatter of dishes in the kitchen, and beyond that the clear sounds of his wife's voice.

Once there had been a shape buried in the stone. Every stone had its latent form, and when you carved it, you felt as if you were only helping it to be born.

Dauth could remember the shape he had seen buried in this one: a woman and child—the woman kneeling, half bent over the child in her lap. The balancing of masses had given it grace and authority, and the free space had lent it movement.

He could remember it; but he couldn't see it any more.

There was a quick, short spasm in his right arm and side, painful while it lasted. It was like the sketch of an action: turning, walking to where there was whisky—meeting the guard who wouldn't let him drink it, turning away again. All that had squeezed itself now into a spasm, a kind of tic. He didn't drink now, didn't try to drink. He dreamed about it, yes, thought of it, felt the burning ache in his throat and guts. But he didn't try. There simply wasn't any use.

He looked back at the unborn stone, and now, for an in-stant, he could not even remember what its shape was to have been. The tic came once more. Dauth had a feeling of pressure building intolerably inside him, of something restrained that demanded exit.

He stared at the stone, and saw it drift away slowly into grayness; then nothing.

He turned stiffly toward the house. "Martha!" he called. The clatter of dishware answered him.

He stumbled forward, holding his arms out. "Martha!" he shouted. "*I'm blind!*"

"Correct me if I'm wrong," said the dark man. "It seems to me that you'd only run into that kind of trouble with the actual mental cases, the people who really have strong com-pulsions. And, according to you, those are the only ones who should get the treatment. Now, the average man doesn't have any compulsion to kill, or steal, or what have you. He may be tempted, once in his life. If somebody stops him, that one time, will it do him any harm?"

"For a minute or two, he will have been insane," said Martyn. "But I agree with you—if that were the end of it, there'd be no great harm. At the Institute, the majority believe with Kusko that that will be the end of it. They're tragically wrong. Because there's one provision that the Institute hasn't included in its

program, but that would be the first thought of any lawmaker in the world. *Treatment against any attempt to overthrow the government.*"

The dark man sat silent.

"And from there," said Martyn, "it's only one short step to a tyranny that will last till the end of time." For an instant his own words were so real to him that he believed it would happen in spite of anything he could do: he saw the ghostly figure or Kusko—big, red-haired, grinning, spraddle-legged over the whole earth.

The other nodded. "You're right," he said. "You are so right. What do you want me to do?"

"Raise funds," said Martyn, feeling the beginning of a vast relief. "At present the Institute has barely enough to operate on a minimum scale, and expand very slowly, opening one new center a year. Offer us a charitable contribution—tax-deductible, remember—of two million, and we'll grab it. The catch is this: the donors, in return for such a large contribu-tion, ask the privilege of appointing three members of the Institute's board of directors. There will be no objection to that, so long as my connection with the donation isn't known, because three members will not give the donors control. But they will give me a majority on this one issue—the second phase of the Institute's program.

"This thing is like an epidemic. Give it a few years, and nothing can stop it. But act now, and we can scotch it while it's still small enough to handle."

"Good enough. I won't promise to hand you two million tomorrow, but I know a few people who might reach into their pockets if I told them the score. I'll do what I can. Hell, I'll get you the money if I have to steal it. You can count on me."

Smiling, Martyn caught the waiter as he went by. "No, this is mine," he said, forestalling the dark man's gesture. "I wonder if you realize what a weight you've taken off my shoulders?"

He paid, and they strolled out into the warm summer night. "Incidentally," Martyn said, "there's an answer to a point you brought up in passing—the weakness of the treatment in the genuinely compulsive cases, where it's most needed. There are means of getting around that, though not of making the treatment into a therapy. It's a crutch, and that's all it will ever be. But for one example, we've recently worked out a technique in which the analogue appears, not as a guardian, but as the object of the attack—when there is an attack. In that way, the patient relieves himself instead of being fur-ther repressed, but he still doesn't harm anybody—just a phantom."

"It's going to be a great thing for humanity," said the dark man seriously, "instead of the terrible thing it might have been except for you, Dr. Martyn. Good night!"

"Good night," said Martyn gratefully. He watched the other disappear into the crowd, then walked toward the El. It was a wonderful night, and he was in no hurry.

A big, red-haired guy came in just as the waiter was straight-ening the table. The waiter stiffened his spine automatically: the big guy looked like Somebody.

"Which table was he sitting at—the tall man with the glasses who just went out?" The red-haired guy showed him a folded bill, and the waiter took it smoothly.

"This one right here," he said. "You a friend of his?"

“No. Just checking up.”

“Well,” said the waiter cheerfully, “they ought to keep him at home. See here?” He pointed to the two untouched drinks that stood at one side of the table, opposite where the tall man had been sitting. “Sits here for over half an hour—buys four drinks, leaves two of them setting there. And talks, like there was somebody with him. You know him? Is he crazy or what?”

“Not crazy,” said Dr. Kusko gently. “Some would call him ‘disturbed,’ but he’s harmless—now.”

# Chapter 2. Horn Of Plenty

## 1990

The pressroom on the eightieth floor of the World Legis-lature Building was a bedlam, but it quieted the minute the big red-haired man walked in.

“You know what we want, Doctor,” somebody called. “Let’s have it.”

“Print this,” said Dr. Kusko, enunciating clearly. “The pas-sage by the World Legislature today, of the bill creating a universal analogue treatment program, not only gives me and my associates a very deep gratification, but should be a cause for rejoicing on the part of every citizen of this globe. This date marks the beginning of the world’s maturity. We have put an end to war, to crimes of violence, to conspiracy against the peace, to corruption in public office, to all the myriad insanities that have oppressed and divided us since the beginning of history. From now on, we go forward.”

Pencils scribbled busily for another second or two. “What are you going to do next, Doctor?” asked a reporter.

Kusko grinned. “Off the record—” A groan went up; the big man’s grin widened. “Off the record, I’ve spent the last twenty years, figuratively speaking, in building a bug-trap. Now that it’s built, I’m going to sleep for thirty-six hours, spend the next twelve getting reacquainted with my wife—and after that, praise God, I believe I can begin to get some real work done.”

“Some of us thought,” said a woman, “that Mr. Chou of the Civil Rights Commission might block the passage of the bill at his session and perhaps defeat it altogether. Have you any comment on that?”

“How could he?” Kusko asked. “Chou had the analogue treatment himself six years ago. He was developing a suicidal mania—off the record.”

After an uncertain pause, the woman said, “Dr. Kusko, forgive me if I’m misinterpreting you—do you mean that when you treated Mr. Chou for that condition, that you also deliber-ately made it impossible for him to interfere with the passage of this bill?”

“That’s what I mean,” said Kusko. “Just as all of you in this room have had the treatment to keep you from revealing anything your informant asks you to keep quiet—otherwise you wouldn’t be getting this story. The only difference is, Chou didn’t know what was being done to him. Neither did the fifty-odd world senators who came to us for one reason or another. And everything I have just said, by the way, is—very definitely—off the record.”

Most of the reporters laughed. They liked Kusko; you couldn’t help it.

“The end justifies the means, is that it, Doctor?” said a little man in the front row, who had not laughed.

“In this case,” said Kusko seriously, “it does.”

## 1993

“Gentlemen,” said the bulky, well-groomed man at the head of the table, “now that the mutual introductions are over, you undoubtedly realize that we have here a rather unique assemblage. Here in this room are representatives of some of the major interests in every field of production in North America, from food to steel. Together, the companies we represent can clothe Mr. Average North American Con-sumer, feed him, amuse him, keep him healthy, house him, and sell him everything he needs or wants. And we are all interested in that same consumer, yet we are not in competi-tion with one another. For that reason, I believe that everyone will be intensely interested in the proposition I have to lay before you here today.”

He glanced down the double line of faces, then consulted his notes. “As a matter of fact,” he said, “there is one amend-ment I should make to the statement I have just made. There is, in this room, no representative of the advertising industry. The reason for that will become apparent in a moment.

‘My corporation, gentlemen, spends seven million credits each year on advertising and promotion. I believe that figure is not greatly out of line with the average figure of our respective corporations. Now let me ask you this. How would you, as representatives of your corporations, like to increase the sales of your products and services, while at the same time reducing your advertising and promotion budgets to exactly zero?”

At his signal, two young men came forward, one on either side of the table, and began to pass out large rectangles of plastic. Mounted on each was a glossy sheet of paper bearing a three-color sketch of a young man and woman standing under a golden cornucopia from which a shower of jewelry, miniature automobiles, hams, food cartons and fur coats was descending into their outstretched arms. The bannerline was:

FREE! FOR A WHOLE YEAR!!

“That,” said the bulky man after a few moments, “is what I might refer to as the advertisement to end all advertisements. As you will note, the text here has been drawn up to represent sample brand names and lines of products from each of the corporations and associations represented at this table. You will note that some corporations have one brand name or line of products mentioned, while others have two or more.

“That has been done, in every case, to represent five percent of each corporation’s gross yearly sales. And also you will note that the total of the free goods and services amounts, pricewise, to the same percentage—five percent of the different items that the North American Consumer wants and needs. In other words, each corporation will take a one-hundred--percent loss for one year on five percent of its products, in order to induce the consumer to buy all the products of that corporation, exclusive of all other competitors. I have here—” the young men stepped forward again and distributed piles of documents—“a table of estimated profit and loss resulting from this offer, based on an enrollment of ten million heads of families the first year. I believe that in every case the capital reserves of each corporation represented here will be ample to cover that first year deficit.”

For the first time, one of the other men at the table spoke up. “I believe,” said a thin-faced oldster, “that this would be characterized as an association in restraint of trade, Mr. Dine.”

“Our legal department has covered this question very thoroughly, Mr. Hoyle, and they assure me that the offer is perfectly legal. Our respective corporations will be associ-ated only for the purpose of this offer. There will be no con-solidation of capital, no interlocking directorates—nothing whatever of that sort, at this time. There is no compulsion to accept the offer on the part of any person whatsoever. All we are

doing is selling large quantities of merchandise at the same time and offering a premium—there will be a contract for the consumer to sign, over and above the analogue treat-ment. However, the contract is renewable at the end of five years. The treatment is permanent."

The assembled gentlemen smiled the kind of smiles acquired at poker tables and board meetings.

"A more important question might be," said a red-faced man with a clipped white mustache, "can you get the analogue facilities? I thought that was all owned by the government."

"No, Colonel," said the chairman, "I believe you will find that the Kusko Psychiatric Institute is a private, non-profit institution, licensed and subsidized by the government. The use of the analogue facilities is controlled by statute, but it is an interesting fact that according to the law, anyone can get analogue treatment, for a fee, to prevent him from doing anything he does not wish to, except of course for legally compulsory acts. Gentlemen—"

He spread his hands. "I have too much respect for your acumen to belabor the obvious to you. Let me be brutally frank: There it is. If we don't take it first, somebody else will."

# Chapter 3. The Customer Is Always Wrong

## 2134

The robing room of the Junior Assistant Salesman, Third Level, Block Nine, Glenbrook Store, is the kind of place that is remembered in neophytes' nightmares. The shower stalls are along one side; the opposite wall is lined with identical open closets; in between are cold metal benches. The over-head glow-lamps are dim; they have not been dusted for years. The air has an ineradicable smell of liniment and sweaty feet.

Thirty young men, most of them Consumers by birth and not far removed from it by training, can seem like a hundred in such a coop. Some behind the shower curtains, some fully dressed and others shapeless in their robing sacks, they were all talking, all shouting, all laughing at once, as gregarious and as deafening as a cageful of monkeys.

At the showers, half a dozen of the oldest were tormenting the newest and youngest in a traditional manner. The new-comer, a stunted pale-faced adolescent named Wilkins, was invisible but not inaudible inside one of the shower stalls; they had let him get inside and then had begun twitching the curtain open at intervals. Wilkins was afraid to take off his robing sack, and increasingly of being late to his post; he was beginning to howl.

Tall, bony Arthur Bass, JAS 2/C, listened with half an ear while he worked on one garment after another under his sack. His predominant sentiment toward Wilkins was one of gratitude; he felt there was good reason to hope that Eldridge, Yankowich and the rest would be so taken up with the sport that they wouldn't remember him at all.

Eldridge and Yankowich were the ringleaders of the Junior Assistant Salesmen, Third Level, Block Nine—old veterans, thirty at least, with nothing to look forward to in the Store but superannuation to vergers' or quarter-masters' posts. Bass, in between neophytes, was their favorite butt. Whether it was his long, cranelike face and body that offended them—Eldridge and Yankowich were identically stocky, short and hairy-limbed—or whether it was his solemnity, his careful speech, or simply his prospects for promotion, they had never accepted him, never ceased to torment him.

Bass took it with equanimity. For years it had been no more than a minor annoyance, one of the many discomforts to be suf-fered for their doubtless beneficial effect on the long road up to the dizzy heights of

Senior Salesmanship. But lately Yankowich had seen him walking home from the Bakery with Gloria.

Decently dressed, Arthur pulled the sack off over his head, rolled it up neatly and thrust it into its slot in his closet. He took down his stole, adjusted it over his shoulders. He glanced at his watch. He was early, as usual, but there was still only a few minutes to wait until the bell.

He listened carefully. The unfortunate Wilkins' howls had ceased; probably he had fainted. It was poor material they were sending up nowadays.

Sure enough, here came Yankowich shouldering across the room, his meaty face split in an idiot grin. Heads turned to follow him; bodies crowded for placement in the half-ring that was forming around Arthur.

"Lovey-dovey," said Yankowich in his bull-roar. He leered. "Are you speaking to me, Mr. Yankowich?"

"Yes I am speaking to you, lovey-dovey," said Yankowich in a cracking falsetto. The Junior Assistant Salesmen laughed heartily. Yankowich leaned tenderly closer, pursed his lips and made smacking sounds. The laughter surged again, with a note of hysteria in it. Yankowich, Eldridge and a few more of the older JAS's were married; the rest, like Bass, were not, and like him, they had never kissed a woman.

"And that ain't all," said Yankowich with a sidewise leer. He blinked, changed expression, and said to no one in parti-cular, in an aggrieved whine, "I didn't say what—I just said that wasn't all!"

He glanced around the semicircle, then clasped his hands in front of him, bugged his eyes and sucked his cheeks in. The Junior Assistant Salesmen clutched their sides.

Arthur felt himself turning hot and cold by turns. It was absurd to let an ape like Yankowich bother him, but he couldn't help it. The very crudity of the imitation made it harder to bear: was that really what he looked like to other people?

Yankowich, his voice burbling grotesquely through his pursed lips, was saying, "Wull y' murry me, Gluria? Wull y', wull yu'?"

The name gave Arthur an unexpected pang. "Gloria!" the young men shouted. "Gloria! Glo-oria!" Infinite knew how Yankowich had found that out—he must have gone sneaking around the Bakery in his off hours ....

Yankowich was crooning, "What's wrong, lovey-dovey? You aren't scared to get married, are you? What for? Come on, tell us, what for?"

Some perversity in Arthur's mind suddenly brought up the picture of Yankowich's squat wife. He had seen her for a moment last year in a Founder's Day Parade with Yankowich—hairy-faced, dull-eyed, a more disgusting animal than the Yankowich itself.

"*Seventy-three-oh-eight-eight*," Arthur's mind was murmur-ing to itself.

That was all he had to say; it was the one perfect answer: 73088 was the number of the Store's overdresses for excessively long-armed women.

His jaw and tongue formed the sibilant, then went slack. "Well, lovey-dovey?"

Arthur's mouth was dry. "Marriage is a holy state," he said thinly.

A disgusted sigh went up around the semicircle. In the JAS robing room, L 3, B 9, piety was the worst possible form.

The duty bell rang. Crowding out into the corridor with the rest, Arthur found himself thinking. "Seventy-three-oh--eight-eight, ape-face ... seventy-three-oh-eight-eight! It was as if there were an imp in his mind, an imp of mischief. Arthur knew it well; when he least expected or wanted it, it would appear and whisper astonishing things in his mind—things that Arthur found hard to believe when he looked at his own solemn face in a mirror. If he could have brought himself to utter even a fraction of them, a hundredth as much as Yanko-wich got away with, it would have made all the difference in the robing room ..

But what was he to do? Disrespect to a superior was a sin. The way of virtue was the way of success. Who wills to do right is doubly blessed.

And Arthur, more than any man in L 3, in B 9 or in the whole of Glenbrook, knew the depths of hellfire that yawned under his feet.

Inside the multiple carapace formed by his two thin under-shirts, the overshirt, the vest, the surcoat and the weighted stole, Arthur itched intolerably.

Sweat trickled down his ribs across the exact focus of the itch, not relieving it but coaxing it to still greater virulence. Arthur clenched his teeth and stared stoically out across the massed hats of the Sunday crowd. Under the cod-like eye of Senior Salesman Leggett, he dared not scratch, wriggle or even change his expression.

Leggett was finishing off another customer. Arthur entered the amount of the last purchase on his machine, totaled it, and tore off the itemized tab, together with the customer's credit card. The customer, a jaundiced, shriveled little woman, thrust out a liver-spotted hand for them, but Leggett's voice stopped her.

"There is still time to alter your purchase, madam. This sweater—" he pointed to the image on the screen behind him—"is acceptable enough, I grant you, but this one-(thirty-seven-oh-nine-five, Bass, quickly)—is guaranteed to wear out in half the time."

Arthur relaxed, sweating harder. He had felt an almost overpowering impulse to punch the code for Athletic Suppor-ter, Tan, Large, just to see what would happen; but he had managed all the same to finish punching the proper number just as Leggett ended his sentence.

The customer stared timidly at the flimsy, bright pink gar-ment that was now displayed on the screen, and said something totally inaudible.

"You'll take it, then," said Leggett. "I thought so. You're a Store-fearing woman. *You* don't want your neighbors to call you a money-saver. Bass, if you please—"

"No," the customer said in a louder voice. She had winced at the phrase "money-saver," as Leggett meant her to, and there was a thin flush of shame on her old cheeks, but her eyes were stubborn. "I *can't* , Salesman. I jist can't. 'V got m' worsh-ing-machine payments to make and m' houserent's due, and m' husband's been crippled up with's back all this month. And I can't."

Leggett achieved a noteworthy sneer simply by exposing an eighth of an inch more of his rabbity incisors. "I understand perfectly, madam. There is no need to explain to me." His cold eye raked her and passed

on. “Next!”

Crushed, the little woman turned away without seeing the tab and credit card that Arthur held out to her, and he had to lean down from his platform and press them into her hand. In the process, as stole and surcoat swung away from his body, he plunged his free hand under them and raked his nails across his short ribs, once, twice, before he straightened again.

The relief was exquisite.

The next customer was a stout man in a plain unquilted sur-coat and breeks, with not more than a half-dozen bangles at his wrist. Beside him, as he climbed to the dais below Leggett, was a moon-faced boy of about eleven, dressed in blouse and knee-breeks so much too small for him that he could barely move.

“Onward, Salesman,” the fat man wheezed. “‘S m’ boy Tom, come to get ‘s first suit of man’s clothes.”

“Onward. High time, too, I should say,” Leggett rejoined frostily. “How old is the boy?”

“Jist ten, Salesman. Big for’s age.”

“How long since his birthday?”

“‘S jist ten, Salesman, hardly past it.”

“*How long?*”

The fat man blinked. “Jist a few weeks, Salesman. ’S first chance ‘v had to bring him in, Salesman, I swear to y’.”

Leggett made a sound of disgust and glanced at Arthur: “Seventeen-eight-oh-one,” he said.

Arthur, who knew his superior, had punched the number almost before Leggett spoke. The item which now appeared on the screen was the most expensive boys’ intermediate suit the Store carried; the fabric showed wear readily, the dye was light in color and not fast, and the stitching was treated to disintegrate after four months, rendering the garments completely useless.

Leggett stared at the man, silently daring him to object.

The customer read the price and licked his lips. “Yes, Sales-man,” he said miserably. “That’ll do main well.”

Bass entered the item.

“Ninety-one-two-seven-three,” said Leggett. That was over-shirts, of the same quality, in lots of five.

The next item was undershirts, in lots of ten. Then under-pants; then socks; then neckscarves; then shoes.

“Step down, Tom,” said the fat man at last, wearily. “On-ward, Salesman.”

“A moment,” said Leggett. He leaned forward in his pulpit and peered with sudden interest at the fat man’s magenta overshirt.

“Your shirt, man, is fading,” he said. “You had better have a dozen new ones. (Fifty-three-one-oh-nine, Bass.)”

"'Scuse me, Salesman. That'll better wait till next time, 'V bought so much for the boy, 'v nut left to buy for m'self." Leggett raised one gray eyebrow. "You surprise me," he said. "Bass, what is the man's credit balance?"

Arthur tapped keys. "One hundred ninety point fifty-three, Salesman Leggett."

Leggett stared down his nose," 'Nothing left,' I believe you said."

"Two hundred's legal," the fat man said, his jowls quivering, "and's not even the end of the month yet. I know m' rights—y' can't intimidate me—I need that money for spenses. C'mon, Tom."

A murmur of outrage arose from the crowd. Peering down slantwise without moving his head, Arthur watched the fat man and his son descending into a barrage of angry stares.

And quite right, too, Arthur reminded himself dutifully. The very fatness of the two was offensive—the greasy swollen jowls, the necks folding over the collars, the barrel thighs. How could anyone get himself into that condition on an orthodox diet? Who did they think they were—Stockholders, or Execu-tives?

Leggett was silent, hands folded across his red-and-silver stole, staring down at the two through half-closed eyes. Here and there in the first ranks of the crowd, Arthur saw a man or a woman surge abruptly forward with red face and uplifted fist, and as suddenly fall back, listening to angelic voices audi-ble to him alone. If this were the bad old days, he thought with interest, there would be a riot.

The fat man turned at the foot of the dais. "I know m' rights," he said angrily, and held up a balloon-fingered hand. "Give me m' card."

Arthur stood motionless, waiting.

Leggett said expressionlessly, "You may know your rights, man, but you have not yet learnt your duties. I therefore offer you a choice. Will you appear in Sumptuary Court with your boy and his birth certificate—and explain why you did not equip him with intermediate clothing until he had all but burst out of his last primaries—or will you make this additional purchase for the benefit of your soul? (Eleven-five-two-six, Bass.)"

The item that appeared on the screen was a complete cos-tume in black pliovel from turkey-feathered hat to buckled sandals—gala clothing designed to be worn once, on an impor-tant occasion, and fall apart after. The price was Cr. 190.50.

Someone shouted, "Good for old Leggett!" A whisper of laughter swelled to a roar.

Leggett did not even smile. He stared down with the faintest expression of boredom and disdain as the fat man, legs planted, bracing himself against the laughter that swept round his ears, raised his fists to the level of his scarlet jowls and then dashed them down again.

His expression did not change until the fat man, two tears of rage squeezed out of his eyes, opened a shapeless mouth and bellowed: "Die of a disease, y' rotted vice-eaten mud-lick'n dogson!"

The laughter stopped. There was a scraping of shoes as the crowd moved radially away.

Into the silence that followed Leggett's voice dropped and burst:

"*A demon!*"

His hand slapped the lectern control panel, and a fiendish clangor broke out, drowning the crowd's noise

as it surged away in panic. Arthur saw the fat man, fists still clenched at his sides, crouching a little, face all awry and as pale as a flour sack. He saw the moon-faced boy, mouth open to howl.

Then the crowd split as three horrid black-masked men came bounding across, gas-tubes in their fists, lightnings at their heels.

Arthur turned his head aside automatically. The last glimpse he had was one of the fat man between two uniformed backs, pale face upturned in a desperate question, as they bore him away.

After a few moments came the rustle of turning bodies and the gathering murmur; the Guardsmen and their prisoners were gone. When Arthur turned to face the room again, he saw that the pulpit above him was vacant. Leggett had retired to make his report to the Guard.

The crowd was clotting at a few points where, apparently, people had fainted or been knocked down. A white-robed medic came in, made a circuit of the room and left. A few minutes later he was back with two assistants and an emer-gency cart, around which the crowd eddied briefly until the bodies were loaded aboard and carried out. The murmur of talk had increased to a loud, steady drone.

Someone at the back of the room began to sing a hymn. Others took it up, and it contended for a while with the crowd-noise but finally sank, defeated. More people were entering constantly from both doorways. The sluggish flow past the platform gradually stopped; there was no longer any room to move.

Arthur stood rigid, suppressing a torrent of excitement. This was the first time he had ever seen a man possessed, though cases were reported almost daily on the news channels. To him, as to the customers, hearing that man curse a Salesman—and knowing that if his analogue-angel had not been driven out, he could no more have uttered a word of that anathema than he could have committed murder—was like a sudden glimpse into the Pit.

The difference was that Arthur's viewpoint was somewhat nearer. The customers had been taken to the Confirmation Chambers in Store at the age of seven and again at ten. So had Arthur. The customers had been treated by the sacred machines. So had Arthur. The customers had each one ac-quired an angel to shepherd him through life.

Arthur hadn't.

It was the central fact of his life, something he could never talk about to anybody, but never dared forget for a moment. Somehow, somehow, the machines that worked on everybody else had not worked on him. But did they work on everybody else? Were there others like him? Others, perhaps near him now, pretending like him that they had angels to guide them?

So far his freedom had cost him more than it was worth; it was an awkward treasure that he must hoard up until some day ... some day, when he had raised himself to Executive's rank, or even to that of a minor Stockholder—it wasn't possible

But meanwhile there was one thing he passionately desired to know:

Was the fat Consumer a man like himself, and had he simply given himself away in a fit of anger?

Or were there really demons?

The door behind the pulpit opened and Leggett stepped through. Silence rippled back from the platform to the far-thest corners of the room.

Here, Arthur knew, was a ready-made opportunity for an impromptu sermon. The customers expected it; at least half of them were here for no other reason.

He felt a glow of pure admiration, then, as Leggett merely stared down at the front row of the crowd and said dryly, "Next!"

It was more effective than an hour's oratory. The incident had told its own story, pointed its own moral; there was no more to be said.

The code numbers Arthur punched were all in the first-quality group now; not a garment among them that would not disintegrate after the fifth wearing. Again and again, he had to announce that a bemused customer's credit card was sub-zeroed. By midafternoon he realized that Leggett was piling up a sales total unprecedented in the history of the clothing department.

At three o'clock, the hall still more than three-quarters filled,

Leggett stopped in the middle of a sale and said crisply, "Bass."

"Yes, Salesman Leggett."

To Arthur's astonishment, Leggett turned his back, opened the door behind the pulpit and stepped through. Arthur followed.

Leggett was waiting in the corridor a pace beyond the door-way. Arthur shut the door.

"Bass," said the Salesman coldly, "you are ordered to report to the chambers of Personnel Manager Wooten, in Block Eighteen, Level Five, at exactly three-twenty. It is now three o'clock. Before you go, since I shall probably not have a fur-ther opportunity, I wish to inform you that your demeanor and deportment today have been unspeakable. Five times, in the past hour alone, I have had to wait for you to punch a code number. You have slumped. You have shuffled your feet. You have *scratched* yourself when you supposed that I could not see you."

"Salesman, I'm sorry," said Arthur, recovering nimbly from his dismay. "The truth is—"

"I do not wish to hear your excuses, Bass," said Leggett. "Attend me. If you still retain any ambition to become a Sales-man—an office for which you are grossly unfitted—let me advise you to remember this: a Salesman is the direct repre-sentative of his Store's President, who in turn represents his District Executive, and so by an unbroken chain of authority to the Chairman himself. He is and must be the living symbol of rectitude, an example for others to follow to the limit of their abilities. *Not* a callow, fidgeting jackanapes." He turned abruptly. "Onward, Bass."

"Onward," said Arthur, and stared at a rapidly diminishing strip of Leggett's back through the closing door.

Whistling thoughtfully under his breath, he walked down the corridor to the robing room. It was empty, the long ranks of open closets dismally gaping. He removed his stole and cap, folded them and put them away. He put on his surcoat, hat, pouch-belt, wrist bangles and rings. Then, restraining an im-pulse to tie knots in Yankowich's clothing, he left the room and walked down the long echoing corridor to the stair.

Two levels below, he crossed a ramp into the Block Nine concourse and boarded the northbound slideway. It was not crowded; few people came to Store at this hour, for fear of using up their time

before they ever got to a Salesman. And then there was Sunday dinner to be gotten over with in time to come back for evening services .... He caught himself. That was a little too much like Arthur Bass the Consumer talking. And no matter what happened, no matter what the risk, he wouldn't go back to that.

He hadn't had time to think about it; the knowledge was simply there, as if he'd known all along he was going to be dis-missed from the Store. Whistling inaudibly but cheerfully, he got off the slideway and mounted the nearest upstair.

"Bass."

The dun-robed secretary, with hair and face both so pale that they looked like one pasty mass, opened her mouth for the single syllable and shut it again like a trap. Her myopic eyes looked not at him, nor even through him, but beyond, at something indescribable in a nameless direction.

Twice, in the half hour Arthur had been waiting, she had stood up, walked directly to the window that opened on an airshaft, lifted her hand to open it, and then frozen there, listening, before she turned and walked mechanically back.

A suicidal type, evidently; in the bad old days she would have jumped out.

The inner office was paneled in white oak and ebony. Facing Arthur as he entered, behind the desk, were three tall casement windows through which he could see the sunlit Glenbrook hills; the hangings on either side were of green-flushed silver damask. On the walls, in ebony frames, were hung a few of the usual mottoes:

THE CUSTOMER IS ALWAYS WRONG

PARSIMONY IS THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL

A MORTIFIED CUSTOMER IS OUR BEST ADVERTISEMENT

WEAR IT OUT; TRADE IT IN; USE IT UP; BUY AGAIN

Behind the desk were two men. One, with a round, pink face that would have been cherubic except for the hardness of the slitted eyes, wore the white-bordered black robes of Manager s rank. That would be Wooten; but he was standing at the desk, leaning the heels of his hands upon it. The lean, white-haired old man who sat beside him, fingering a sheaf of file folders, wore the ruffles and scarlet lace of an Arch-deputy.

"This is Bass, Your Excellency," said the man in black. "Bass, I am Manager Wooten. This is Archdeputy Laudermilk, who will interview you."

"Onward, Your Excellency, Your Worship," Arthur said.

"Onward," Laudermilk answered in a surprisingly melodious voice. "Sit down, Bass. Now, let's see ...." He lifted a page of the dossier before him, glanced at the one under it, and went back to the first page. "You're twenty-one," he said. "Eyes brown, hair black, complexion fair, build slender, no scars or distinguishing marks. Yes. Both parents Consumers; mother dead. Nothing extraordinary in your pedigree; well, that's as often good as bad. Three surviving brothers, two sisters. That's quite good. Well. Now, Bass, tell me something about yourself. Not this sort of statistics—" he closed the folder and leaned his forearms on it—"but just anything at all that occurs to you. What you like; what you don't like. What you think about things." He stared across the desk with an expression of extra-ordinary interest.

Arthur cleared his throat. Come, he told himself, this doesn't have the feel of a dismissal; but what on Earth—? "I like most things, Your Excellency. I like my work. That is, I liked—"

Laudermilk nodded, smiling and squinting with sympathy. "What else? What do you do when you're not in Store?"

"I have classes, four hours a day, at the University—"

"Yes, that's right, I have that here. What do you study there?"

"It's the usual course, Your Excellency—I haven't got a dispensation. Mercantile history, logic, rhetoric, philosophy, sacred economics and Consumer psychology."

"Which study do you like best?"

What was he getting at? "Well, they're all interesting, Your Excellency, but I guess I like economics and psychology a little better than the others."

Laudermilk nodded. "A leaning toward the scientific," he said. "Yes. Your Dean tells me that you have distinguished yourself in those two studies, although you have fallen some-what behind in rhetoric and philosophy. That's quite under-standable. Yes, Bass, I have a feeling that you weren't meant for a Salesman." He pursed his lips, tapping a long, exquisitely manicured middle finger against the desk-top.

Arthur swallowed hard.

"Now, tell me something, Bass," said Laudermilk, animated again. "Suppose you had an opportunity to study other things—things that aren't in the ordinary curriculum—would you like that? Do you think you'd be interested enough—could you make a vocation of it?"

Arthur forgot to breathe for a moment. To study the Mys-teries—if, incredibly, that was what Laudermilk meant—to become a lay Doctor of Science or even a Store Deacon, for a start—he'd give half a leg for that.

"Physics," said Laudermilk. "Electronic engineering. That sort of thing, was what I had in mind. Take all the time you want to answer.'

Arthur said, "I'd like that better than anything in the world, Your Excellency."

"Good. Good. I believe you would. Well, now I'd better explain what this is all about. Every year at this time, Bass, the various institutions of restricted learning have to recruit a whole new class of scholars. That's why I'm here. We usually do most of our looking among the newer candidates for Sales-manship and other Mercantile ranks, because the type of young person we need generally does go into the Store on his own initiative. Now, the quota I happen to be filling is that of the College of Sacred Sciences of Three Mercantile University in Pasadena. It's a four-year course, leading to a degree of S. S. D., and, very often, an immediate Junior Assistant Deacon-ship. Now, let me warn you before I arouse your enthusiasm too much—it's a long, hard course. It has other disadvantages, too; you'll be confined to the campus for the entire four years, and if you marry, your wife will have to undergo the same con-finement. Neither of you will see anybody not connected with the College until you graduate—if you do, of course. Not everyone succeeds. And afterwards, naturally, you'll find your-self rather cut off from the sort of people you used to know, even your own family. I must warn you, it isn't a thing to go into lightly."

"I understand, Your Excellency."

"Good. Very good. Now, let's see ...." He flipped the pages of the dossier, one after another, studied

something on the last one, folded them down again. “Tell me, Bass, how do you get along with your angel?”

Arthur felt a wary tension inside him. “I—haven’t seen him for years, Your Excellency.”

“Hm. Yes. Well, that’s nothing to be ashamed of, Bass. You’re what is known as an inherently stable type. It’s rather rare, but it isn’t anything that need interfere with your career. On the contrary, I’ll tell you in confidence, we’re always on the lookout for personalities of your type; they do very well in the restricted sciences.

“Well—” the Archdeputy leaned over, picked up something from the floor beside him and put it carefully on the desk: it was an oblong box-shape, a foot high, draped in a yellow cloth.

“Stand up, Bass ... come a little nearer. That’s it. Now don’t be frightened. Do just as I tell you, and we’ll be all right.’

Without warning, Laudermilk whipped the yellow cloth away.

The box was frontless.

Inside, vivid against the black-enameled metal, stood a red plastic bag, labeled in yellow:

MARMON’S BEST

SEEDLESS HYBRID RAISINS

1 POUND

Cr. /45

But in the upper right-hand corner, instead of the familiar red and white “GP” for “General Products,” was an obscenity: a yellow circle with a spidery black “U/ M” inside it.

“Pick it up!” said the Archdeputy sharply.

Arthur’s head felt suddenly very large and light; his lips and tongue, especially, felt impossibly enlarged, as if they were balloons that somebody had blown up. He let himself sway a little.

“Pick it up!”

Arthur stretched out his hand to the red bag. His fingers were within an inch of the thing; half an inch

Nothing was going to happen; his last thin hope was gone—he *still* had no angel. He was going to have to fake it ... He shouted hoarsely and snatched his hand back.

He was groveling on the floor, hands over his face. “No,” he said. “I never will. I never will again!”

“There, son, there. It’s all right.” Hands were lifting him; he groped behind him for the chair and sat down with his face in his hands.

“Take your time.”

Arthur shuddered, breathed heavily and sat up straight. That had been an upsetting experience; part of him had stayed cold and watchful, but the rest had been almost too ready to see that imagined image—the wrathful angel, with his fire-dripping sword ....

“All right. Now, I’m sorry I had to put you through that, but we have to be sure. I think you’ll do, Bass. Let’s see, where—yes, here’s the list—”

# Chapter 4. If A Sin I Would Commit

It was still early afternoon when he emerged from the colossal northern face of the Glenbrook Store; the lesser buildings that clustered around it, pebbles beside a boulder, were joined by short, violet-tinged shadows, harshly outlined on the clean glitter of vitrin and stone.

He turned up the High Street, past a row of lumpish service shops and offices, past the District Bakery, poisoning the air with sweetness; past the Guard station and the cinema, into the residential area: two—and three-story frame houses, for the most part, gleaming with new paint but sagging out of plumb. Old houses—two hundred years old, many of them. They had a faint smell that no amount of deodorant could suppress—a mustiness, a smell of memories and decay.

The quality of the light changed imperceptibly as he walked; from blue the sky turned golden, outlines softened and blurred, the shadows became mere ruddy smudges. Everything was bright, hazy and depthless, like the golden landscapes in old paintings; the few people in the streets walked haloed in brightness.

Rain began to fall in the sunlight, so thin and gentle that Arthur was scarcely aware of it until the moisture began to drip from his hat-brim.

He opened his pouch abstractedly and took out his rain-coat. The shoulder seam opened as he pulled the folds apart.

He put it on anyhow. *Better to be seen with a cheap coat than a torn one. Better to be seen with a torn coat than none at all ....*

He passed through the ring of new apartment houses that surrounded what was left of the park, and followed one of the paths to the bench where he sometimes met Gloria on her way home from the Bakery. There was no use waiting for her now; she wasn’t on the Sunday crew. She’d be in Store now, or help-ing with Sunday dinner, like everybody else .... He sat down.

He had a lot to think about.

For instance, had that inconspicuous vitrin-fronted box on

Wooten’s desk concealed a camera? He had managed to fool Laudermilk, who looked shrewd behind that façade of bum-bling kindliness, but if a record had been made, could he be sure there wasn’t something in it that would betray him—some shade of expression, some brief hesitation?

And going beyond that, was it reasonable to expect he could pass the further tests he would almost certainly get at the College—the one place in the world where they knew most about angels and the angel reaction?

Arthur wrestled manfully to put himself into a suitably gloomy mood about this prospect, and failed. The risks were only, in exaggerated form, those he had lived with all his life. But the things he stood to gain! Opportunity, advancement, Gloria .

All right, so much for that. But there was one other item: the fat man.

Early in his twenty-one years, Arthur had arrived at an atti-tude of healthy skepticism toward the

Supernatural. According to the Store's dogma, he himself didn't exist. A man might lose his angel, for reasons that had never been clearly explained to Arthur, but nobody ever failed to get one in the first place; the sacred machines always worked; there were no exceptions. And yet here he was.

Finding a falsehood in one part of the system, it was natural—indeed, it was the only thing that could keep him alive and sane—for him to conclude that the rest was no better. But the weight of contrary opinion was intimidating, all the same, and it was impossible not to wonder now and then—particularly when something like this business of the fat man caught him off guard—whether there mightn't be something in it, after all.

Arthur considered that the time had come to give these doubts one last trial. If theology could hold its own, very well; if not, let it stop bothering him.

He considered a moment, then got up briskly and struck off westward, toward the nearest phone and the Underground.

From the next room came the heady smell of boiling cab-bage and the clattering of cookery, punctuated by the voices of Dean Horrock's wife and daughters. The Dean himself was dressed in his best, pinkly clean and reeking of Sunday cologne.

Everyone liked the Dean. It wasn't easy to maintain the appearance his rank demanded on a pedagogue's salary, most members of the University staff were a little shabby, and no one thought the worse of them for it, but the Dean was always immaculate. He had eight children, too; and over twenty grandchildren: a good man. More to the point, he was always at home to any student in difficulties, and he could make the knottiest doctrines clearer than many a Salesman.

Arthur said, "I saw a possessed man in Store today, Dean. He cursed Salesman Leggett. The Guard came and got him."

Horrock nodded. "An upsetting experience," he suggested quietly.

"Yes. Dean—"

Horrock waited patiently.

"Can you tell me why the Infinite lets people be possessed?"

Horrock's face writhed and twisted. A sudden spurt of meaningless syllables came out between his clenched teeth; then it cut off short. His features smoothed out; he stared up-ward past Arthur's shoulder, listening. In a moment the fit was over, and Horrock was blinking calmly at his pipe-stem.

"That's a question," he said slowly, "that has tormented men of compassion for centuries, Arthur. Why does infinite good permit the existence of evil? Mm. I'm not surprised that you feel so strongly about it; at your age, one does ... and even beyond your age, for the matter of that. Some very great and good men have spent their lives in the study of that question, and without reaching any answer that will satisfy everyone. In a sense, it's the core of the religious problem ....

"Let me put it this way. Mm. Can either of us say that if it weren't for the few men and women whom the Infinite allows to be possessed, human vanity and willfulness might not grow so strong that we'd *all* cast out our angels?"

Arthur was silent.

“A little evil preventing a greater,” Horrock said. The tic in his left cheek pulsed slowly, regularly. “Mm. That’s only a sug-gestion, Arthur, a speculation. The only final answer, I’m afraid, is that we can’t know the answer. The ways of the In-finite are not our ways. How can we judge, who are judged?’ His pipe had gone out; he fumbled at it with tremulous fingers.

“Yes, I see that,” said Arthur carefully. “But it isn’t the general problem that bothers me so much as—that man in Store today, for instance. What did he do ... I mean, why *him*?”

‘Well—” Horrock smiled a lopsided smile. “Who can say? A sin of omission here, another here—perhaps, over the course of years, they added up, on the Infinite’s balance sheet, to—’ He shrugged.

That was true enough; the fat man had been a miser—but Arthur had never grudged the Store a credit.

“Dean,” he said. suddenly, “there are people who want to do worse things than that, but their angels stop them. What I mean is, why can’t the angels make people do what they should, not only stop them from doing what they shouldn’t?”‘

Horrock smiled gently. “Well, I can answer that in two ways, Arthur. Taking it on the mundane level, there are certain purely technical difficulties in the way of it. The Mysteries are beyond my sphere, of course, but my understanding is that the sacred machines can only give us a certain limited capacity for perceiving our angels, which would be burned out, so to speak, if our contact with them were too frequent or prolonged. Mm. On the spiritual level—where the true answer is generally to be found—you remember your nursery prayers, Arthur:

*“If a sin I would commit,*

Angels *stand ’twixt me and it.*

*If I would a duty shirk,*

Conscience *guide me to the work.*

“We’re prevented from committing positive sins—first be-cause they tend to be so final—killing a man, for example—and second, paradoxically enough, because they’re relatively unimportant. Mm. If I want to cut someone’s throat every evening—mm, I *do*, by the way—that’s a trivial matter, really, because the impulse has no duration and therefore no effect on my character. But if I want to buy less than I should, that’s a serious thing. It affects no one person a day, but all of us every day: through me, it strikes at the very foundations of society.

“The point is, Arthur, that the Infinite is not profoundly in-terested in our transient passions. Our angels stand ’twixt us and sin, just as a mother might stand between her child and a pot that was about to fall off a shelf. The pot has nothing to do with the child’s development, as long as it doesn’t hit him on the head. Moreover, the child can’t be expected to guard himself against the danger; he’s too young.

“But the child is expected to learn to perform his household duties, and the mother can’t very well stand over him every minute to see that he does them. Mm. Do you see? If the child wants to shirk his duties, conscience must guide him to the work—or he’ll go without his supper. Conscience must guide the adult to his responsibilities, too—or he’ll go without salva-tion. And salvation, unearned, would be tasteless stuff, Arthur.”

“I think I understand now,” said Bass. “Thank you, Dean.”

There you were; that settled it. From his teens upward Arthur had been guilty of several million silent sins, his im-pious and blasphemous thoughts: but long before that he had already been condemned. Until he was seven, of course, he had been a child, and had committed childish errors. Had he been punished for those? It was unreasonable; Arthur had heard stories of saintly children who walked the road of righteousness before they could toddle, and communed with their angels only to receive praise, but he had never met one—they must be extremely rare.

What it boiled down to was that the Infinite, if there was an Infinite, had withdrawn its grace from him simply to make him serve as an example—so that "human vanity and willfulness might not grow so strong ...." He had been chosen at random, as an orchardman might prune one branch from a tree.

The Infinite, Arthur felt, had had its chance. Feeling himself again, he got off the Underground at the Hill Street station and walked to the second house from the corner.

He crossed the yard, skirting the massive old elm, and went to the kitchen window. Inside, Gloria Andresson was stirring something in a bowl, flushed and vigorous, tendrils of golden hair loosed at her temples. On the far side of the room Mrs. Andresson was icing a cake, and the two younger daughters were watching her.

Arthur scratched gently on the windowscreen. Gloria looked up abstractedly, raising a round arm to brush the hair back from her forehead. Then she saw him; her eyes widened. She glanced behind her, put down her mixing spoon and left the room. A moment later she was with him under the elm.

"Don't y' want to come in, Arthur?" she murmured. There was something ambiguous in her expression, but Arthur was too impatient to wonder about it.

"I've been chosen to go to Three Mere," he told her. "I have to leave day after tomorrow."

"Oh," she said slowly. "That's wonderful for y', Arthur, but—How long will y' be gone?"

"We," said Arthur. "We'll be gone. I know I can get per-mission—we'll be married tomorrow, and spend our honey-moon in Three."

"Arthur—"

"That's why I wanted to talk to you first, before I came in, because—"

"Arthur, I've got to tell y' something." Her fists clenched at her sides. "I've been wondering all day how I'd tell y'." He stared at her. "What's wrong?"

"It's—I'm going to be married. He asked Da last night, and Da said yes."

Arthur felt a little dizzy. "Who?" he said:

"Elder Yankowich. He lost his first wife last autumn, and his brother saw me in the Bakery and told him—"

Arthur couldn't speak for a moment. Rage and pain were making such a rumpus inside him that he was blind and deaf. He wanted to strangle Yankowich and his brother, hug Gloria, make a bonfire out of her father ....

"Listen," he said hoarsely. "Do you love me?"

"Arthur, y' mustn't ask me that—"

“Then I won’t let it happen. I’ll do something. I’ll get a ser-vice contract and buy him off.”

“Y’ can’t. He’s senior foreman at the food plant. He wants a new wife, he says, to help him spend his money ....”

Her head was lowered, her eyes half closed; he could see her dark lashes tangled with tears. He moved a step closer, in-voluntarily, and found himself breathing her perfume. He could see a tiny pulse beating in the hollow of her throat. Her breasts swelled against the dark wool, drew back, swelled again.

“It’s no good, Arthur. We’d better say goodbye now.”

She turned her face up and made a sudden convulsive motion toward him; checked it as suddenly, while her eyes turned to look at something invisible over his shoulder. She stood listening—listening, Arthur realized bitterly, to her angel telling her she mustn’t touch him, because they weren’t married.

“Oh, please,” ‘ she said to that invisible shape. “Just this once—”

Arthur choked and stepped forward as if he had been shoved. For an instant his arms were around her; he bumped her nose with his, and their teeth grated jarringly. Then his arms were empty.

She was standing a yard away from him, jaw hanging open, eyes staring through a curtain of disordered hair. He took a step after her. “Gloria—”

“*Get away from me*,” she said breathlessly. She gulped, filled her lungs, and let out a healthy scream. Then she turned and ran.

Arthur listened to the slam of the back door, the commo-tion inside, and Gloria’s voice overriding it, loud, excited and dramatic.

She was telling them all about it.

Ten minutes later, running along a back street, startled faces popping out of doors on either side, he heard the sirens climb-ing the hill behind him.

He lay under a bush in a dusty back yard, fighting to get his breath.

The sirens had stopped. For a while he heard the distant shrieks of children—children under seven, they must be, still in a state of nature: fierce little animals, with nothing to restrain them but their own accidental hurts, and the bogies that whis-pered to them from hypnagogic pillows at night.

Arthur could remember that time, a little: the wild freedom, the passions that burned through him; the bright colors, the indescribable bigness and closeness of everything; the earth turning, close and hot under his running feet.

From somewhere down the street came the faint crack of a slamming door; from somewhere else, the rattle of feet on a porch stair.

That would be the Guardsmen. They had fanned out behind him like children playing Carthies and Red until they reached the Wall on either side of him; now they were closing in, searching one house, one yard after another: finger and thumb.

And behind Arthur rose the Wall.

Rattle.

Slam.

(Nearer, now, nearer, like the footsteps of the angel down the long dark hall, his eyes aflame with malice and the chopper in his hand.)

But behind him was the Wall.

On the maps, Glenbrook is an island. To the northeast of it lies Norwalk, minutely detailed, with all its rivers and roads, and to the west, White Plains. They are islands, too.

The whole map of the continent is like that—islands of life in a dead-black sea. Some of them merge to form chains. Others are very large, hundreds of miles across, but even these have cankerous spots of black in them. To north and south, they dwindle away; the map becomes all black.

Around each island is a Wall, and on the far side of that Wall live the Others.

(The Others: the bat-winged, the fire-eyed, who dress in garments of iron that never wear out; and eat their own spawn; and live in caves that they scrape out of rock with the tines of their terrible hands.)

An oak tree grew in the yard. Arthur reached for a limb and hauled himself up, grunting. As he mounted, he saw a Guardsman appear briefly in the yard two houses down. He saw something else, too: he saw the nubbly, weathered top of the Wall, and beyond it, the Outside.

There was a thing like the upper story of a house, and then a counterfeit treetop, and then another pseudo-house, and another. It struck him that the illusion was holding up remark-ably well; he had always imagined that if you got this near, you'd be able to see through it.

He climbed higher. By stretching a little, he could reach a limb that grew out over the Wall.

Rattle.

Slam.

He swung himself out, hand over hand, feeling the limb dip under his weight, until his dangling feet touched the top of the Wall. Below him on the far side, the house and the yard looked disconcertingly substantial. If he couldn't believe what he saw, then there might be no ground there at all; he might be star-ing down into a bottomless chasm without knowing it.

It was a fair risk. He jumped.

From the tower rooms of the Intersocial Chambers, rising like a skewer from the fat segmented dumpling of the Ana-logue Works in Darien, the careworn diplomat at the close of his day can enjoy a pleasant view of Lake Candlewood to northward, or of the Sound, Long Island and a ribbon of the Atlantic to the south. His Honor Gordon S. Higsbee, Resident Commissioner from Gepro, was doing neither; he was staring down across the Umerc-Gepro border—from this height, it seemed to lie just below the fat skirts of the building—at the tiny rooftops of Glenbrook.

"Wish you were there, eh?" said Morris at his elbow.

The little Umerc commissioner—and head of the secret police, now that he was at home in United Merchandise terri-tory—was soft on his feet as a cat. Catlike, too, was his painted smile. In the uneasy truce of the Intersocial Commission, where representatives of the rival societies tolerated each other be-cause they had to, there was never any doubt that every mem-ber detested every other. Morris was no exception, but he was smoother than most.

"Not at all," Higsbee protested, smiling. "Well—perhaps a little, now and then. But I remind myself, dear Commissioner, that Umerc is justly famous for its hospitality, that your own company makes up for much, and in short, that I am very lucky to be here, and not in some other places that you and I could name."

Morris bowed, with a flash of surprisingly good teeth in his acne-scarred face, and glanced sidelong at the room behind them. The inspection belt had stopped; the finished analogue machines, with their approved censor capsules sealed and tamper-proof inside them, had vanished into the conveyor. Higsbee's junior, gathering up his records, was on his way out to change into Umerc dress and spend the evening asking foolish questions of a random gathering of nonentities in bars and fun halls; Morris's junior, doggedly following, was on his way to direct a crew with listening bugs whose records, in the morn-ing, Morris would have to ponder, even though they had al-ways been useless and probably always would be.

Last to go was Junoesque Madam Euphemia O'Ryan of Conind, her cowed little assistant swimming in her wake like a dolphin after a whale. Her penetrating voice dwindled slowly.

Morris sighed. "Tell me," he said, as he and Higsbee turned toward the door, moving in step but with a formal two-foot space between them, "in confidence, Commissioner utterly un-der the rose—isn't that woman awful?"

Higsbee said nothing, but contorted his lean face into an expression of anguish.

"Twenty-nine capsules," said Morris meditatively, "each with the same subcritical deviation, not in the antiviolence area, not even anywhere near it—and twenty-nine times seven minutes of discussion. We could have pressed a capsule of it and rested our throats; but then we'd have had to listen to two O'Ryans, pardon me for mentioning it, the thought is unbearable."

They paused at the door. The upstair was to the right, the down to the left. "Three and a half hours overtime," said Morris. "She's spoiled my evening, and I suppose yours too."

"No, I've coptered over three nights this week', I planned to spend this evening quietly with my secretary, anyhow. Could I induce you to join us, Commissioner, since you have no plans of your own?"

Bowing, they boarded the stair together and ascended, two bars of color against the pale vault—Higsbee austere in violet-gray, Morris burning bright in a motley of crimson and green—as stiffly as two marionettes going to heaven.

Sipping brandy from a U/M glass, filled from a U/M de-canter delivered spotless to his hands by the autochef, Morris said earnestly, "But tell me—we so seldom have the benefit of a truly discriminating and disinterested opinion—what do you think of the novel in Umerc? For example, our Harlan Darro's new book—I see you have it there. How does it strike you, Miss Silver?"

The Honorable Anne Silver sat beside Higsbee across a wide table from Morris, at a distance sufficient to spare them the odor of his brandy, and Morris the smell of their GP coffee. Primly erect in a bouffant daydress of satin and spring steel, she unbent far enough to pick up the novel and turn its brightly-colored

pages.

She blinked mildly at a panel depicting a Roundhead being skewered gorily through the throat by a Cavalier. (One balloon read, "TAKE THAT, TRAITOROUS SCUM!" and the other, "*AAAARGH!*")

"Why, I found it interesting, Commissioner," she said. "Very interesting—so real. But I do really prefer a good story of romance."

Morris nodded judicially. "And you, Commissioner?"

"A very well conceived work. Quite impressive. Those battle scenes—I vow, I couldn't put it down."

"I'm delighted to hear it. But truthfully, didn't you find it just the least shade extreme? The violence—in such excruciating detail, and such—what do I want to say?—such gusto."

"Oh, that seems harmless enough," said Higsbee easily. "We mustn't expect too much of the human beast, Commis-sioner. We all seem to want this sort of vicarious release in one form or another, and doubtless it's good for us in moderation."

"I couldn't agree with you more. In moderation, but of course—but then if it goes beyond that, if it seems to generate a vicious interest in violence, a more than normal desire for it—"

"Oh, in that case, you're right to be concerned. If I thought for an instant that anyone were actually advocating the re-turn of violence—But there, it's a fantastic idea, isn't it?"

Morris agreed, and gracefully changed the subject to deep-sea farming. A few moments later Miss Silver turned momen-tarily pale and put her hand to her forehead.

Both men uttered expressions of polite concern; Miss Silver protested that it was nothing.

"But really," said Morris, "it is appallingly late, what must you think of me? Till tomorrow then, Commissioner—and very soon, I hope, dear lady—"

As soon as he was gone Miss Silver stood up, unzipped her dress at the back, loosened and withdrew her corset through this opening, and scratching her ribs vigorously. Higsbee frowned; she made a face at him. Then, sighing happily, she took a handful of dull-gray ovoids out of her reticle and dumped them on the floor.

They scattered, darting on tiny wheels, climbing with spidery legs all over the walls, the furniture, the ceiling. Each of them, as it homed on a listening bug, clung to it and began to recite a conversation in the authentic voices of Higsbee and Miss Silver—one, however, which Morris's men had heard up-wards of a hundred times already.

"I'm glad you gave me the sign," said Miss Silver, pouring brandy. "Did you know I wanted a drink?"

"No," said Higsbee abstractedly, fiddling with the link-metal band of his wristwatch. He put the dial to his ear. Miss Silver sat down with her brandy, her wide eyes alert and interested.

"All right," said Higsbee to the watch. "We'll do what we can." He manipulated the band again. "Laudermilk," he said to Miss Silver, whose eyebrows went up slightly.

"Get this description," said Higsbee to the watch. Male, 21, six one, 150, medium ecto-meso. Black straight hair, Gepro J. A. Salesman cut, brown eyes, fair complexion Forehead high, brows medium, eyes prominent, aquiline nose, mouth narrow and firm, oval jaw, cheeks hollow. He's somewhere in

West Darien, call me if you spot him, out."

"An Immune?" Miss Silver asked.

Higsbee¸ nodded. "Laudermilk flushed him this afternoon. His act was so good that Laudermilk thought he was Agent A type and let him go, but apparently not; he got into some trouble with his girl—tried to kiss her—then disappeared when she called the Guard. He hasn't been found. Laudermilk thinks he's jumped the Wall into Darien."

"How long have we got?"

"An hour, perhaps, before the word goes up through chan-nels on that side and down on this."

"Bad luck."

"Perhaps. If he's had sense enough to disguise himself and mingle, we've got a chance. If he's hiding, or just wandering around the suburbs in his Gepro clothing—" Higsbee shrugged.

Gradually the Wall curved away to his left and the character of the street changed. The ancient clapboard houses gave way to larger, newer ones, and then to huge masonry structures, so new that they might have been Store-built. Arthur could not imagine what they were for; their windowless facades made him uneasy, and he turned northward at the next corner, hoping to get out of their district.

But the buildings grew taller, and the silence deepened, re-jecting the flat echoes of his footsteps. He found himself stop-ping often to listen.

He wondered who was taking his place now on the plat-form below Leggett's pulpit. He thought with an unexpected pang of Sunday night in Glenbrook: the music, the scents, the rolling echo of the Salesman's voice down the long hall and the sea-surge of the murmured response; the many-hued robes, the sweating faces upturned to hear ...

It struck him suddenly, with a queer shock, that Glenbrook itself would be drowned in this same silence tonight—Sunday night, with everyone in Store but children, the sick and the in-firm.

He turned the idea over carefully, looking for traps. There didn't seem to be any. The pavement rang solid under his feet; dressed stone was cold and slippery to his hand; grass and earth scents were in the air; moths clustered around the street lamps. Except for some of the newer buildings, this city might have been an extension of Glenbrook. The slum district along the Wall, especially—the same weathered clapboards, the same porches, roofs, chimneys—the hedges, even, continuing the same parallels ... as if those houses had been built, the hedges grown, before there ever was a Wall between them.

As if the Others were men.

Arthur breathed deeply, feeling the blood running crisp and warm under his skin. Standing, not erect like a tower or a tree but balanced at the nexus between a thousand falls, he sensed the pressure inside his body that balanced the thrust of air around him; he saw the opposed contrapuntal masses of the buildings, invocation and response, pinching a thin waist of sky and street between them.

Smiling, he began to run, lightly and surely, and the earth rolled massively, smoothly under him as he ran.

The sky glow in the west had faded to a mere rind, but a lopsided rind: it bulged and brightened toward what ought to be the north. Arthur stopped and listened between breaths; faintly from the same direction

came a formless whisper of sound, swelling and fading.

He followed it, and after a long time the glow spread over half the sky, the sound grew to a muted roar; but their source was still hidden behind the diagonals as he turned north and then west, north and west again.

Another building, another door: and this one opened. A green and gold stick man came faintly glittering out of the entranceway shadow: then another, and another—bone-thin shapes, glowing with spectral greens and blues and reds in the twilight.

They stopped. They saw him. They turned with a dreadful blossoming of gashed bone-white faces. They screamed, and scattered. Staccato of footsteps across the street, a dwindling howl: they were gone.

Arthur stood, frozen in wonder. Had it happened?

Were those the Others—*running*?

After a moment he started forward again. In the nightmare silence his footsteps echoed like the tick of an old clock. He moved faster, breaking the rhythm. Faster.

He turned three corners. Just before the fourth, he stopped, aware of footfalls that were not his own. A rust and orange puppet stilted into view, turning, crossing the street directly away from him.

Arthur stared at the apparition's back listening to his heart's sudden hammering. Then his limbs came unlocked. His lungs swallowed a great breath and let it out in a wordless roar—and he was running, so fast that the thing's sick face had barely time to turn.

He saw the smears of color around the eyes, the bloated dark lips, the pale pencil of nose. The head bobbed back, mouth splitting to a wedge, and then he was upon it, grappling with a jumping-jack. An elbow hit him in the mouth; dazzled by pain, he returned the blow.

The thing staggered and fell. The body writhed like a cater-pillar's, curled into a ball and lay still.

Arthur felt gingerly of his lip. He approached the thing cautiously, nudged it with his foot. It rolled over passively, jaw clenched, eyes shut.

It was a man. He was thin, and his odd, tight garments made him seem thinner, but he was no taller than Arthur. The garish coloring of his face was apparently not natural; it looked like paint. Scrub that off, Arthur thought, and it might be any-body's face.

He nudged the man again. The face contorted suddenly and a hoarse voice came out of it. He leaned over. "What?"

"Oh Life, I can't stand it—don't let the crotty thing touch me!"

He leaned closer. "Who are you?"

"Don't let it, oh Life, don't—"

"Answer me," said Arthur. "Who are you?"

There was a long pause. "Ed Strowski."

"What are you afraid of?"

The creature's eyes blinked open incredulously, then squeezed shut again. "You're a demon," he said faintly.

He twitched and yammered when Arthur touched him again; froth bubbled at the corners of his lips, and when Arthur tried to get an arm under his shoulders, he stiffened and struck out wildly.

Kneeling, Arthur made a fist and hit him on the jaw as hard as he could.

In the darkness of the nearest entranceway, gritting his teeth, Arthur dragged off the rust and orange clothing and exchanged it for his own. In his victim's kit he found paints and a mirror, a jar of cream, a package of tissues. He painted his own face into a staring death-mask, then wiped the other's clean.

"Now *you're* the demon," he said.

# Chapter 5. Live!

The street and all the streets around it were one shouting, blaz-ing, screaming bedlam of noise and light and music. There were open arcades along the building fronts at the second and third levels, and vitrin-walled bridges between them, and every-where you looked it was the same, a swirling drunken river of bodies, black and orange, lavender and apple green, scarlet and white, grotesque red mouths and blind eyes.

It was a little like the disorganized, miles-long rout that fol-lowed a Founders' Day procession in Glenbrook—every able-bodied Consumer in the district, shouting drunk on sacramental wines, sermons, singing, dancing, mock fights and exhortation.

It was like that, compressed and magnified and turned inside out. The music was like no Store music he had ever heard; it was raucous and gut-thumping; it yelled and sneered and snickered. There was not a commercial motto in sight; he looked in vain for "Save Not, Want Not" or "A Credit Spent Is a Credit Earned"; but towering fifty feet over his head was a gigantic array of neon that spelled:

LIVE

Trapped in the center of the flow, Arthur let himself be car-ried along, jostled behind and squeezed tight in front, half deafened, wholly dazzled, his nostrils stuffed with a wild con-flict of smells.

A soft bulk urged itself against him. It was a stout woman, wedging herself into the crowd with both arms raised, a clus-ter of metal hoops in one hand, a bottle in the other. Her body moved across his with a ponderous cushiony insistence; she was wearing a tight purple bodice slashed to the waistline, and Arthur fond himself staring down past her tight blue curls into the chasm between her lolloping breasts.

Feeling suffocated, he worked his way across the street. A cross-current took him, and then he was adrift in one of the open halls that lined the street, the mob noise muted behind him, smaller sounds closing in: shuffle of feet, coughs, grunts, the echoes of individual voices.

Something touched his arm. Arthur flinched and turned; at first he thought he must have been mistaken, then he looked down and saw a leathery little man with a fantastic green beard. The creature was roaring something at him in the Others' barbarous dialect.

After a moment Arthur was able to make it out. "Said, are you sig?"

'No. I'm all right, thanks." He started away.

The little man cocked his green beard up and his floppy hat down. "Don' *soun'* awide. Sure you nod

sig?"

"Sure."

Arthur took another step, but the little man twinkle-toed around him, put one hand on his hip and beckoned with the other.

Arthur bent down unwillingly into an invisible cloud of sickly-sweet fumes, something like liniment and something like well-rotted orange peel. "Den," roared the little man confidentially, 'WY you dock lige dad?"

It struck Arthur belatedly that his own speech must sound as outlandish to these people as theirs did to him. He straight-ened up, thinking furiously.

He pointed to his mouth. "Dung dye," he said.

The little man looked satisfied; he nodded energetically several times. "Me doo," he said, and backed away. "Well—live!"

"I will," said Arthur.

The little man gaped, then exposed a fierce set of brown teeth and bellowed with laughter. He went away, slapping his thighs.

Shaken, Arthur retreated into the room and moved slowly down the aisle, listening for stray words. The people were ranked three deep along each wall and around a thick central pillar, for what reason he couldn't see. Hard crot . blood me, seven, be big ... two, two!

Nobody talked like the little man, and now that he thought of it, neither had the man he'd traded clothes with. Now he'd have to start over—that peculiar a sound, almost like an e; vowels emphasized in some places and slurred in others; crot; blood me; and what were you supposed to answer when some-body said "Live"?

Someone shouted in his ear, "You got chains for a duckle?" Arthur jumped again. It was a plump girl in scarlet, holding out something glittery and flat.

"No!" he said.

She said, "Oh, slock," gave him a big smile and walked away. Arthur stared fascinated at the twitching short skirt and the fleshy shudder of thighs as each foot came down. He was aware that she was stopping another man with the same ques-tion, and then another—*oh, to have chains for a duckle!*-—and finally, with a look of restrained frenzy, joining the end of a long line in the corner.

People at the head of the line came away with handfuls of the flat things—little oblongs of plastic or metal, they seemed to be—and either left the room or pressed themselves into the crowds that lined the walls. One of them was a slender woman in dark metallic blue picked out in diamonds of white. The white, he discovered when she hurried past him, was her skin.

Arthur watched, clenching his fists at his sides.

The woman in blue was half hidden, now, by a heavyset man in rust and green who had moved up behind her. To their right, somebody moved out of the crowd and the rank dipped in toward the wall. Sweating, Arthur went over and filled the place. He looked straight ahead, over a yellow shoulder and a white one, intensely aware of the woman to his left. Would she realize he was following her? Would she resent it?

Someone shuffled up behind him, penning him in. Arthur reminded himself that he didn't even know what all these people were lining up to do. But he had to begin somewhere. The sense of danger that was making his heart race was partly unreal, he knew; it was simply that having been forced to sup-press and conceal his own lewd desires for so long, he couldn't entirely break the habit; here, where the exposure of women's bodies was clearly no sin, he still felt that automatic wincing of guilt and alarm ..

He glanced to his right. Everyone around him seemed to have a handful of the colored plastic oblongs. Some were waiting patiently, some tipsily lurching. One, a red-haired woman two rows away, was moving rather oddly, left, right, left, right, in a regular slow rhythm. She was deliberately rubbing her breasts against the next man's back.

Arthur plunged his hand into his belt pouch and fumbled the contents over: boxes of powder and paint, the little tube of lip paste—and an unfamiliar, bulky shape.

He drew it out and stared hard at it. It was a thick pliovel folder that opened to show seven thin sheaves of plastic strips, protruding through slots in such a way that they could be slid out, one at a time, by the thumb. There were two golden ones in the first compartment; those would be duckles. The others were silvery, red, blue, dove gray, yellow and white.

He pulled out a palmful of them at random and put the folder back in his pouch.—But, he told himself, part of the danger was, must be, as real as it had been in Glenbrook. Until he could find out how these people were expected to act, he risked betraying himself every minute. Any one single risk, deliberately taken for that object, would be better than the cer-tain disaster of doing nothing. And as for method—purely aside from the fact that it was what every cell in his body urgently wanted—the quickest and best way would be to find himself a woman.

The line moved forward; an old woman, with dismal yellow curls askew over one eye, came pushing her way past him to-ward the aisle. Now, beyond the green-haired man directly in front of him, there was only a woman, who was beginning to do something to a metal framework that gleamed vaguely on the wall. To his left, the blue woman stayed at the edge of his vision, never far enough ahead that he could see her clearly, never far enough back that he could forget she was there.

The green-haired man stepped to one side, craning over the woman's shoulder. Her dress covered only the lower half of her back; the rest was plump, moist, red-freckled flesh that writhed doughily when she moved her arms.

The line moved again. Arthur felt the plump woman brush past him, and looked up. The green-haired man was working at something that clicked softly, and paused, and clicked again. Looking over his shoulder, Arthur saw that the thing he had taken for a framework was a bright-rimmed box of metal fixed to the wall. At the top, stamped of the same metal, was a cut-out figure 4. There was a transparency high on the machine's face, on which a number of four digits appeared, and below that were four horizontal slots, one rimmed with gold, one with silver, one with red, one with blue.

The man put one of the plastic strips, a red one, into the red-bordered slot. It disappeared. the machine clicked, and the number in the transparency changed, digit by digit, from "2134" to "3412."

"Crot," said the man, and put another slip of red plastic into the slot. This time the number changed to "1432."

It made no sense to Arthur. The machine looked like a crude, uselessly oversimplified version of an Assistant Salesman's cal-culator, but the operations it was performing baffled him. No digits higher than 4 appeared; otherwise there was no pattern to the thing at all, except that no digit was ever repeated.

“Crot.” *Click*. “Blood me, three!” *Click*. “Two. Crot.” *Click* ....

Twice the machine clicked out of rhythm, and the man cried, “Ahoh!” but each time, when Arthur looked, he was pushing still another red strip into the machine: *Click*. “Four-a-four, up! Crot.”

And then the man was moving past him. Arthur was at the head of the line—and to his left at the next machine was the woman in blue.

Arthur stared blindly at the machine, aware for the first time how hard this was going to be. What could he say to her? He took a slip of plastic and fumbled it into a slot. Concealed rollers whipped it out of his fingers; the machine clicked and abruptly spat the strip back at him.

He crouched swiftly and picked the thing up: it was a white one. The wrong color?

The man behind him said something in a loud, impatient voice. Arthur pulled a red strip hurriedly out of the bunch, and fed it into the red-bordered slot. The machine accepted it. He gave it another.

He could pretend to pick up one of the strips, and say, “Did you drop this?” But suppose someone saw him do it? Or sup-pose these people kept lost property, instead of returning it?

He could hear her, almost at his elbow, sighing and murmuring as her machine clicked. The only thing to do was to look at her, catch her eye and say “Crot,” or anything at all.

He rehearsed it in his mind; he told himself, I’ll put two more slips in and then do it.

4312. *Click*. 4213. *Click*.

He forced his head to turn. She was staring intently at the machine. He looked away; his heart was pounding against his ribs. It was absurd, it was maddening, but he simply couldn’t do it.

He caught himself about to give the machine a blue strip; the red ones were gone. He put it into the blue-rimmed slot, and that was all right. When the blue ones were used up, he started on the silver; and then they were gone. There was nothing left but the grays, yellows and whites, and one golden one.

As he was putting the golden one in, he sensed a movement to his left: the woman in blue was leaving. He hesitated, then turned away.

The next man grabbed his arm. “Crot, man, don’t you want it?”

He looked. The transparency showed “3332.” As he watched uncomprehendingly, the last digit changed to another 3 and the machine went *clickluck bump*.

At the bottom of the machine, in a recessed hopper, lay four thick sheaves of the plastic oblongs: gold, silver, red, blue. Arthur shuffled them together into an awkward double handful.

“Quad on a duckle “ said the man. His eyes were wide and glittering.

Arthur worked his way back to the aisle. The woman in blue was nowhere in sight. Irritably, he turned the plastic slips over in his fingers. There was something printed on each one, in faint green letters: on the gold ones, “Ten Dollars,” and “June 12, 140”—that was last Monday. The silver ones said “Five Dollars,” the red ones “One Dollar,” and the blue ones “Fifty Cents,” all with the same dates. Duckles; dollars; cents; what was it all about?

A voice said, “Thick, man! You got change for a duckle *now*, gotten you?”

It was the girl in red. “How big did you make?” she asked, coming a little closer.

“Quad on a duckle,” Arthur said thickly.

She whistled. “Five-one-two—are you lucky! But how you ever going flat out before the horn?”

“I don’t know,” said Arthur honestly.

She moved nearer still. Arthur was paralyzed; he couldn’t look away. “Want somebody to help you spend it?” she asked.

Arthur croaked, “All right,” and then stared at her, so aston-ished that he blurted before he could stop himself, “Spend it! You mean this is *money*?”

She laughed until tears brimmed in her eyes. “Are you a skitch!” She put her plump arm through his and drew him to-ward the street. “Are we going have *gasms!*”

In the Gepro Suite, high in the Intersocial Tower, Miss Anne Silver poured another glass of brandy and pushed it across to Higsbee. “What did you make of Morris’s comments about the book?” she asked, spurning it with a finger.

“Needling me about the fact that we don’t give the Con-sumers anything but textbooks and sermons to read in Gepro, and consequently even the upper classes have no literature at all, unless you count Elsie Winthrop Grimes.”

Miss Silver snorted. “Not what I mean.”

“I know. Just a fishing expedition, Anne, I *think*. I gave him enough of a hint in both directions to make his scales balance, but I’m afraid we didn’t get anything from him, either. Call it a draw.”

“We know he’s picked up the same rumors we have.”

“Which we knew already, and he knows that we know. If there’s anything behind this, if one of the mid-continental societies really is using illicit analogues to train an army for aggression—and I must say I’m beginning to believe it—then they’ve been exceedingly clever. The minute the word leaked, instead of trying to cover, they set the same tip going about everybody else. Now we’re all running in circles—or, at any rate, two out of three of us are.

“As to Morris this evening—either Umerc isn’t guilty and thinks Gepro is—or that’s what they’d like us to think; take your choice. The book gambit was just a little crude for Morris, meaning any one of half a dozen things—see propositions one and two, above.”

“Opinion?”

“Reserving it.”

“There are days when I loathe you,” said Miss Silver. Higs-bee looked smug.

“Gordon, what do you think of Morris?”

“Exceptionally able man, for a Normal. Why?”

“Just wondering if he is a Normal. Doesn’t it seem to you, Gordon, that there might be an earmark or

two of the Immune there? That look in his eye, sometimes—”

Higsbee grinned satanically. “Interested?”

“I burn with a pure passion for him, except that he smells of chypre and looks like a lipsticked lizard. Seriously.”

“Seriously, then, the chances are very small that Morris is anything but what he seems. Don’t allow yourself to believe that in addition to our obvious and very real advantages we have a monopoly on ability, Anne; if you do, you’ll not only find yourself seeing an unabsorbed Immune in every opponent who doesn’t trip over his own feet, but you’ll underestimate, and that’s fatal.

“Secondly: Granting the possibility that Morris is an Im-mune who’s grown to adulthood and reached high executive position without being discovered by our organization—if true, it doesn’t matter. By now, if he is an Immune, he still isn’t one of us and *never can be*: he’s an Immune for Umerc.”

“Mm. That isn’t precisely what was worrying me, but let it pass. Have we got anything to read besides this bucket of blood?”

Higsbee got up silently and came back with a tattered volume, brittle acorn-brown pages in a binding of threadbare cloth. Miss Silver took it carefully and settled down to read, working hard at it, brows knitted, lips moving occasionally.

Higsbee lit a cigarette with ceremony and leaned back star-ing gravely at the ceiling.

“Trouble.”

“Mm?” said Higsbee.

“The poetry again. What’s a Bechstein?”

“Context, please.”

“‘*Like the old Bechstein, auctioned off for nothing*.’”

“Let’s see .... Oh, I remember this. I don’t know, Anne, I took it to be an early brand of orthotyper. A keyboard instru-ment of some kind, anyhow—”

“All right, but if it’s an orthotyper why does it take more than one man to carry it away? And why are they wearing aprons?”

“It’s a poetic image—”

“I know that, but what is it an image of? And then this jibber-jabber at the end, *Yes, sir, she’s my baby, yes sir, she’s my baby, yes sir, till the crack of doom*. Does it *mean* anything?”

“Some of it seems to, and some doesn’t. Judging by the samples we have, there was a staggering amount of poetry written in pre-eupsychic times, not all of it as lucid as this by any means. If you want my opinion, some of it is sheer manic nonsense, some merely happens to be full of obsolete terms and usages, and some parts, that seem to us to make the least sense, are actually the richest in meaning.”

Miss Silver looked skeptical.

“All right. True or false: The object of writing is to convey meaning with maximum clarity and precision.”

"True, of course."

"Wrong. There's a missing factor—brevity. In the kind of prose you're used to, clarity and precision come first. But in poetry the order is *brevity*, precision, clarity. A poem is com-pacted meaning; ordinary declarative syntax uses up too much room, so they had to create a fantastically complex structure of allusion, symbolism, metaphor and we don't know what all else. In other words, in order to pry out all the meaning of that thing of Huxley's we not only need to do research into the design and merchandising of orthotypers in 70 B.A., the archi-tecture of the first-century home, the exact relationship of—"

He stopped in mid-phrase, fingered the band of his watch and put the dial to his ear.

Miss Silver stood up quietly and looked a question at Higs-bee. He nodded.

Under the vents and control panel of the autochef was a large cold-storage compartment. Miss Silver opened it, slid the bin out on its runners and began to remove cylinders of coffee concentrate, flat vegepacks, nubbly cartons of fruit-juice cap-sules, all branded with a big red and white "GP."

"All right," said Higsbee, "stay with him. Ten minutes."

He turned and watched Miss Silver for a moment. Kneeling on the carpet, she opened a mirrored case, loosened the hard double bun of her hair and set to work swiftly pinning and lacquering it into an extravagant mound of curls.

"You think you can read my mind, don't you?" he said.

"You can't go. Lewis would bungle it. Costa's pinned down and you may need him later for a diversion." Her fingers kept moving, without seeming to hurry. She brushed powder onto her dark hair, turning it into a gleaming gold-and-cream confection; gilded her brows and lashes, then inserted her face carefully into the shaped hollow of a thick mask. It came out another face, smooth and bright as metal: eyes brilliant under blue-green shadows, mouth like a bloody blade.

Miss Silver was wearing, among other things, two chemises, four gorgets and seven crinolines—Executive class Gepro costume, so designed that it could hardly be put on in less than twenty minutes, or removed in less than ten. Miss Silver snapped open a tiny folding wrist-knife with a hooked blade, inserted it at the throat of her overdress, and ripped.

Higsbee watched thoughtfully as she stepped out of her chrysalis and let it fall. "You're a handsome creature, Anne. When are you going to give up and marry somebody?"

Miss Silver stripped off all her jewelry in three motions and dropped it with a jangle. "Never." She reached for her stockings.

"That's what I'm afraid of," Higsbee said.

She glanced at him, startled, "You're serious." She turned to the bin again, took out a flat plastic package and shook it open.

"Perfectly. You don't like the idea much, do you?"

"Can you think of any reason why I should?"

"Oh, yes. Children."

"Proxy birth," she said.

“Proxies have been abandoned. You ought to know why, Anne.”

She had finished clothing herself with the contents of the package—sandals, cache-sexe, twelve-inch skirt of violet and gold, fitted black singlet cut alarmingly low, belt and sporran.

She thrust her fingertips into another matrix, withdrew them capped with polished violet claws. “Tell me something, Gor-don. And don’t say you don’t know, because I think you do. Who was my mother? Not the one who hummed Consumer jingles at me until I was fifteen, and not the one who died when I was born—my real mother.”

“Her name was Lois Trocchi.”

“Was. She’s dead—and that’s why you’d tell me?”

Higsbee did not seem to have heard.

“All right, that was an unnecessary question. She didn’t want me before I was born, she didn’t care when I disap-peared into that sinkhole for fifteen years, and she still didn’t want me when I was found again.”

Higsbee said nothing.

“And my father? He’s still alive, I suppose—how far would I have to look to find him?”

Higsbee met her level stare with a contemplative expres-sion, entirely unembarrassed. “Anne,” he said gently, “do you think we look at all alike?”

“Yes. Inside.”

Higsbee blinked slowly, as if he had just remembered some-thing trivial. He adjusted his wristwatch and put it to his ear.

After a moment he said, “Where is he now? ... Yes, stay with him, out.”

He looked at Miss Silver. “You’ll find him near the corner of Ross and Kusko. Rust and orange. Lewis also says the Guard is out in force—regulars and plainclothes.”

“They’ve heard from Glenbrook so soon?”

“I don’t think so. Not that bad, but almost—Lewis says there are rumors that a demon has been seen in Darien.”

At the door, she hesitated, took an ornate ring out of the sporran and glanced inquiringly at Higsbee. It was a typical piece of Umerc junk jewelry, except for the deadly little fang concealed inside it.

Higsbee nodded gravely. “You’ll have to decide. You were fifteen when we identified you; this boy is twenty-one. If he’s stable and not too far gone, save him if you can. If not—kill him.”

# Chapter 6. Shooting Gallery

Her name was Florence, and he found that he could say almost anything to her, because she thought he was a funny man.

They were in a tiny railed space with two chairs that un-folded when you put money in the slot, drinking something called “rum collins” and eating meat rolls that Arthur had bought from a machine across the arcade. Everything came out of machines; the whole area was like a gigantic roofless Store, but without a

Salesman anywhere.

He could hardly chew for the wonder of it. Money in bits and pieces instead of totals in a credit book: money floating as free as the air. It wasn't even identified with serial num-bers! How could anyone tell where it had been, who had spent it, and how much, and for what? But that was just it—nobody wanted to know. These people were buying not be-cause it was their duty, but purely because they wanted to.

And the money out of the machine! You put a piece in, and according to some incomprehensible system you might get hundreds of times as much back—money for nothing. There had been over five hundred dollars in that stack, and Florence said she earned only two hundred a week. He could stop when he'd spent a hundred and fifty or so, and still have enough to last him until he could find a way to earn more.

There would always be the money machines, of course, but Arthur thought it would be better to have a position; the machines didn't strike him as dependable.

There must be thousands of things that would be easy and delightful to do in this extraordinary world—but first came tonight.

Tonight: Florence.

She was looking at her watch, cramming the last of the meat roll into her mouth. She said something indistinct. "What?"

She swallowed again. "Hurry up, dickey—only an hour left to midnight."

Arthur took another bite. "What happens at midnight?" He added courageously, "We go home?"

She giggled. "Are you a skitch! What else would we do?" Arthur's heart jumped. "Where do you live?"

She waved a pudgy hand. "Out by the airport. My hus-band don't like it—says the noise keeps him—"

Arthur lost the rest of it; he had swallowed the wrong way. When he could speak he said, "Where—where's your hus-band?"

Florence stood up. Arthur did the same a moment later, willy-nilly, when their seats began to fold and sink back into the pavement. "He went in the jaypee with one of my half-sisters," she told him as they moved out across the arcade. "That's all he thinks about. You never see such a dog for the jaypee."

"Don't you like it?" Arthur asked mechanically.

They were out in the street. "Well, who don't, dickey?" she shouted in his ear, and squeezed his arm harder. "Don't flap, we'll go there later if you want. Anybody likes it, here and there, with a new face—but this dog, he wants to go there every night, with *me*, his *wife!* Wouldn't it scatter you?"

She pulled him off suddenly in a new direction. "There's a shooting gallery! Come on, dickey, let's go in there!"

Angry and bewildered, Arthur allowed himself to be led to a turnstile with a gold-rimmed slot. He put two duckles into it and the turnstile let them through into a wide, shallow room with six doors in the far wall. Between the two center ones was an open panel. Florence took a long tubular object out of it and handed it to Arthur, then took another exactly like it for herself.

Even under the paint, there must have been something in his expression that showed how he felt. Florence looked at him solicitously. "You having gasms, dickey?"

“Lots of gasms.”

“Big.” She patted his arm. “Now don’t forget, I’ll meet you by the out in twenty minutes. Straight?”

“Straight.”

She giggled. “You take that in, I’ll take this one. And watch out!”

The door closed behind her. Arthur stared at it, then at the strange mechanism in his hand. Gasms, jaypee, shooting gallery, husband! All he wanted now was to get away from Florence. It was after eleven; everybody went home at mid-night; and where was he going to go?

He tried the turnstile; it wouldn’t move. All right, then the only thing to do was to get through this place as fast as he could and leave Florence behind.

He pushed open the door she had indicated. He glimpsed a short, narrow hall; then the door swung to behind him and he was in darkness. He stopped and swore nervously. After a mo-ment he began feeling his way along the wall with his free hand.

Another door ended the corridor; it swung open at his touch, but there was nothing beyond it but more blackness. This room was larger. Arthur’s groping hands touched noth-ing on either side, and he no longer heard his own breathing echoing back from the walls. There were other sounds in-stead, so faint that he had to strain his ears to hear them—stealthy, unpleasant sounds.

Somewhere up ahead there was a ghostly gray flicker of light. A moment later he saw another, off to the left. This one, for an instant, had a tiny moving silhouette in it—a human figure, with pearl-bright rinds of light on the head and shoulders, and the lifted hand. Before it vanished, Arthur heard a series of muffled popping sounds that he couldn’t account for. Capsules of something crushed underfoot? Drawn corks?

He moved forward cautiously in the direction of the last light. He had taken two steps when a dingy yellow glare flashed on directly overhead, spilling a ten-foot circle of light around his feet.

Something struck him in the chest with a vicious *splat*. While he stared wildly, he was hit twice more, in the arm and the groin; and as he turned to leap for safety there was a mas-sive splattering sound against the wall behind him, as if whoever was throwing the things had thrown a handful of them.

The light went out.

Crouched in the darkness, Arthur fumbled incredulously at his chest. His fingers came away damp; a cold clinging moistness was oozing down his breastbone—and his right arm, in two places—and his left thigh—

*Blood*?

Across the room another distant light flicked on; there was a distinct *splat* and a shriek.

Arthur crawled numbly across the floor until he reached a wall and got his back against it. Infinite aloft, what kind of a place was this?

The unfamiliar metal shape in his hand reminded him: shooting gallery; shooting—an archaic word, something to do with ...

His fingers were crawling over the metal—straight slender tube, hollow, ringed at the tip with a pad of rubberoid; swell-ing at the base into a fat cylinder, then a curious projecting wedge; and at the obtuse

angle of cylinder and wedge, an upright ring with a curved lever inside it.

Picture in a book—*Pre-Mercantile Civilizations*, the two-week survey course at the beginning of his freshman year. Now he remembered:

A gun.

But didn't people die when they were shooted? Arthur probed again at his wounds; he felt nothing but the wetness, but he didn't know what you were supposed to feel—maybe the missiles were too small to make a perceptible hole. Florence hadn't thought he was going to die; she'd said, "I'll meet you in twenty minutes."

But she'd also said, "Watch out!"

He got to his feet with exaggerated caution and ran his fingers along the wall, looking for the door he'd come in by. He found a vertical hairline crack, not even wide enough to get his nails into; no handle; no latch.

Maybe the missiles only stung you until you'd been hit a certain number of times. In that case, the idea was to hit the others oftener than they hit you.

Arthur restrained a demented impulse to laugh. Far across the room another cone of light flicked on, and another shadowed figure ran while the guns popped around it.

Holding the weapon, he moved forward in the darkness.

He learned to move quickly and quietly, pause for a moment with the gun ready, and move on again. He learned that the way to hold the gun was with his left hand forward on the cylinder, his right just behind it, forefinger on the lever. And he found that the place was not totally dark be-tween the flashes of light; as his eyes adjusted, he began to see dim gray threads of light that outlined the walls and other obstacles. Now and then he could even make out a blur of motion, gray or darker gray, when another hunter passed him.

He was still being hit nearly every time he was caught in a light; but he was beginning to hit the others, too.

From the first chamber he passed through a faintly out-lined doorway into another that was a maze of pillars and waist-high screens; and here he learned about ambushes.

What was the limit? How much more could he take?

In the next chamber he stumbled onto a ramp and fol-lowed it up to a kind of long, narrow balcony. Looking down into the vault some ten feet below, he could see the others clearly when the lights caught them. It was a perfect vantage point—but Arthur hesitated.

There had to be something wrong with it. If you hid behind one of the waist-high barriers, down below, somebody else might be aiming across the top of the next one behind you—or there might be somebody off to the side with a clear view of you both. You never got anything for nothing.

He moved forward, pausing after each slow step to listen. After a while he stopped.

There was somebody ahead of him on the narrow balcony.

He could hear the other's faint, slow breathing; after a moment he could see the formless blur of his body, gray on gray. The man was over against the railing; Arthur couldn't be sure, but he thought the face was turned half away, staring down into the deeper darkness of the hall below.

Pale light stabbed down from the ceiling, out in the center of the room. Arthur saw the blurred glint of a gun tube swing-ing down: *pop splat*, and a stifled gasp from below. The light winked out.

Arthur moved closer still, hardly breathing; he wanted to be sure.

A long time passed. Arthur's legs ached from the strain of holding one position. His heart was thudding louder and louder; the sense of the other's nearness was growing unbearable. But he waited. When the next light flashed out there, with any luck, his target would be outlined against it—Instead, the light exploded straight over his victim's head. She blazed into being, cream-and-gold hair, slim torso in black, violet skirt, long, perfect legs. In one frozen instant he saw her turning. Her face stared blindly past him, and it was beauti-ful even under the mask of paint.

He shot her between the eyes.

His second and third shots went past her as she fell. He saw her gun bounce on the carpet. Then she was lying with her legs twisted awkwardly; and while the light lasted, she didn't move.

Neither did Arthur, for a long moment; he couldn't. In the darkness, incredulously, he forced himself to take the four steps and kneel beside her.

Her face moved under his hand.

Arthur whispered hoarsely, "Are you—"

He heard her voice: "Bumped my head. You hit me big." There was a faint rustle as she sat up.

"Bumped your head," Arthur whispered, hearing his voice catch.

"When I *tripped*. Where's my gun?"

Arthur's mind fumbled the words for what seemed a long time before he could extract any meaning from them. He turned then and reached across the carpet to where the gun should be; his fingers touched a drop of liquid and jerked away from the cool shock. Blood, it had to be blood; what else? But she

"Can't you find it?"

Arthur reached out again and this time touched something worse; a scrap of something clammy and wet that moved obscenely under his hand. Groping again, unwillingly, he found the gun and swung himself back.

"Ow," said the whisper. "Can't you be careful?" The gun was taken from his hand, and he heard a faint susurrus in the darkness, as if the woman were rubbing herself under the black cloth.

"Sorry," he said with a tight throat, louder than he meant to speak. Her nails dug suddenly into his arms.

"Listen," said the whisper, close to his ear.

Arthur heard nothing. After a moment, idiotically, the thing he'd touched on the floor began to worry him. It couldn't be what it had seemed at the first touch, a gory fragment of human skin. A grape skin, then? He didn't think so.

He thought he remembered where the thing had been, but his fingers touched only the smooth, dry carpeting. He trailed them in an arc around him and still found nothing. It was ridiculous; the thing had to be there. Finally he reached out as far as he could, feeling like a fool. He must be fumbling nearly at the base of the wall now; it couldn't have been that far away

But it was.

He explored it with his fingers. It had been a thin spherical capsule, too small for a grape. There was a ragged tear half-way around it now, and it was empty except for a trace of moisture.

He smelled it: an acrid, unidentifiable odor, but one that, now that he thought of it, he'd been smelling faintly for a long time. He dipped his fingers in the slowly drying stain over his heart.

It was the same.

"Somebody there," the woman breathed in his ear. "Clob him!"

He felt her move away, sensed that she was raising her gun. He crouched in the darkness, staring at the dim gray bulk of his hand and the invisible shred of limpness in his fingers.

Her gun popped rapidly. He heard one of the missiles strike, not far away; heard someone's startled gasp and then the pop of another gun. The paralysis left him and he dropped the wet shred, raised his own gun and began firing down the balcony as fast as he could, a bubble of laughter rising in his throat.

Capsules! Thin globes of gel that burst when they hit, releasing the fluid inside ... not blood.

Footsteps padded away. The woman stopped shooting; so did Arthur.

Her hand found his shoulder. "He'll be waiting down at the other rise, to get flat with us," she whispered.

The problem seemed simple to Arthur. "I'll follow—him, and you go down the other way. We'll get him from two sides."

She chuckled and melted away. Arthur waited a moment, breathing deeply, then followed the balcony rail back the way he had come. At the bottom of the ramp he turned and moved cautiously along the wall, moving as fast as he could without noise. He picked up the other's ghostly blur a few yards farther on. When it turned, he froze against the wall. When it moved again, he moved; when it stopped, he stopped.

The man was crouching just short of the spot where the pale guide line of the ramp dipped to the floor. Arthur moved cautiously out a few paces, sank to one knee and began to shoot.

Another gun echoed his. The gray shape spun, wavered, then crouched and fled, with missiles splat-splatting on its back until it was out of range.

"Clobbed him," said the soft whisper.

"Big."

The light caught them a few moments later. Missiles beat at them from three directions; half blinded, Arthur leaped for the vaguely-outlined shelter of a screen. The woman was with him. They fired together at the unseen attackers around them. Arthur thought he could hear a few hits, but they were being outflanked now, and getting much worse than they gave.

"There must be a dozen of them," he whispered.

“Wolf pack.” She paused. “My gun’s empty.”.

“So’s mine,” said Arthur, surprised.

Her fingers closed on his wrist. “Come on, let’s jolt for it!”

They ran. A glowing sign drifted past: OUT. Then the ghostly outlines of the walls began to narrow and in a moment they were running a gauntlet, missiles splattering at them in a steady hail from both sides; it was like being in a shower.

He and the woman wound up in a tiny corridor like the neck of a bottle, clutching each other for balance, choking and gasping. Her voice sounded half amused, half indignant. “Crotty wolves—should’ve saved pellets and clobbed ’em back—forgot. Oh, well—live!”

“Live,” said Arthur, and felt her move away toward the nearest of a row of outlined doorways. He followed hastily. “Uh—” he forced it out—“are you with anybody?”

Her head turned. ‘Well,” her whisper came slowly, “I was, but who knows where the dog is now? You want to be with me, cobby?”

“Yes,” said Arthur. “What’s your name?” He wanted to ask, Are you married? But she couldn’t be; he couldn’t be that unlucky twice in a row.

“Anne. You got a few slats for the dresser?” Her hand came out, the fingertips glittering dimly.

Money, he guessed. Change for a duckle; slats for the dresser. “How much?” he asked.

“Well, a double duck at *least*, cobby,” she whispered re-proachfully. “After all, it’s only about three quarters to the horn.”

Arthur fumbled at the money holder—duckles on top, that was right—and pressed four of the golden strips into her hand.

“Thanks, cob. Later!” The door opened and closed behind her; the glowing outline around it disappeared.

Arthur went to the next door. Behind him, he could hear the *splatasplat* as someone else ran the gauntlet. He opened the door, stepped through into more blackness, and bumped his nose on the second panel as the first swung shut. He pushed, and light dazzled him. He was in a tiny cubicle, facing a mirrored machine on the wall.

In the mirror, a disheveled stranger looked back at him. For an instant, even expecting the painted face, Arthur didn’t recognize himself. The rust and orange he had been wearing was there only in random spots and streaks; the rest was a hideous discolored drip of muddy brown and black!

On his face a few droplets of colorless fluid were trembling. Could that be it? He picked up one of the clear drops on his finger, carefully transferred it to one of the untouched rust areas. The color ran and melted. He stared at it in admiration. What a merchandising idea—if only old Leggett could see it!

He turned his attention to the machine. It was a vending machine, obviously, but more complicated than any he’d seen yet. The first thing would appear to be the pointer at the top, marked “M” and “W.” Men, women? He moved the pointer to M.

Next, in a vertical row, were buttons and slides, each pair with a transparency over it, lighted now with

the legends: “Hat,”

“Tunic,”

“Breeks,” and so on down to “Shoes.” He punched “Tunic” tentatively; nothing happened. He tried the slide; it moved to the right, exposing a series of numbers: *28 30 32 34*.... Sizes, they must be, but a different numbering system from the one he knew. Baffled, he left the slide at “34”; when nothing had happened for another moment, he punched the button again.

On the suddenly opaque mirror flashed the bright image of a garment in black and pearl checks. After a moment it dis-appeared and another took its place—the same cut, but pat-terned in a honeycomb of blood-red and ocher. Arthur waited, but the black-and-white appeared again, in a sleazier-looking version, then the honeycomb—then the black-and-white—

Arthur’s professional admiration grew. You had to buy new clothes to get out of the shooting gallery, but you got hardly any choice; and he felt almost certain that there was something wrong with the patterns as well. Shooting-gallery clothes; you could wear them home, but the next day you’d have to buy still again.

He settled for the best black-and-white tunic and breeks, with a moss-green floppy hat and white pliovel buskins. When he punched the button a third time, the price appeared on the screen, and he put the money into the slot. He missed the size three times on the breeks, and twice on , everything else, so that when he had undressed and put on the new clothes, he had a huge bundle left over. He found a disposal chute beside the machine, and dumped the clothing in.

Then he pushed open the outer door, and found himself back in the bedlam of the street.

For an instant he thought the woman had left without him. Then he saw her, slim in a paneled sheath of blue and gold. She smiled.

When he started toward her, he walked straight into Flor-ence.

“Oy, dickey!” she cried. “I thought you dumped me or got lost. I had to stuff the dresser myself, dickey—look at me, a quint, that’s all I had left! Come on, dickey, let’s go buy me a rag fit to—” She broke off, following Arthur’s gaze as he looked helplessly at Anne.

The tall woman moved slowly up to Arthur’s elbow. She looked at Florence and said nothing.

“Who’s this skimbone, dickey?” Florence demanded.

“Anne,” said Arthur, “Florence. Florence, Anne.”

“You want something?” asked Florence. “Go dump yourself. He’s with me.”

“Was he?”

Florence cast a bitter glance at Arthur and then ignored him. She stepped an inch closer to the other woman. “Jolt,” she said. “Skit off.”

Anne didn’t move. “You want a man?” she asked quietly. “I saw one laying in the donnick down the street. Fish’m out, he’s all yours and half as ugly.”

Florence’s scarlet mouth was a straight, hard line. A vein under her jaw stood out; her eyeballs looked as if they were about to pop. “You sluck!” she said on a rising note. “You think you can lutch in and talk like that to me, the crot you can. Skit off! Skit off, or you’ll be sorry—”

Anne smiled. She put the tip of one violet thumbnail deli-cately between her teeth and flicked it toward Florence.

A slapped-baby flush rolled up under the little woman's paint. Her eyes glittered blindly; her hands came up clawed, and then stopped; she stiffened in the typical stare of the angel-struck, the "angelic rigor."

"All right," she muttered. She re-laxed slowly; then her eyes cleared and her face drew trap-tight again as she looked at Anne.

She lifted her jaw, tendons straining under it, and howled: "CARP!"

The flow of bodies around them eddied and stopped. Faces were turned toward them; other voices were shouting, "Carp! Carp! Carp!"

Anne circled casually around until her back was to Arthur. Over her shoulder, he saw a tall figure in black-and-green striped satin coming through the crowd. "Aright, what's the ruck here?"

"You a carp?" Florence asked suspiciously.

"Plainclothes," the man said impatiently. "Now I asked you, what's the ruck?"

"Her," said Florence, pointing at Anne. "Wants to lift my man off me."

The carp—*A Guardsman*? thought Arthur, melting back into the crowd—glancing perfunctorily at Anne. "Duel?" he asked.

"That's right, a duel," said Florence, with a thin spume at the corners of her mouth. "I'm going to show that skinny sluck—"

"Aright." The carp turned suddenly. "Stand back there, give'm room!"

The crowd rustled back, slowly clearing an oval space around the carp and the two women. Arthur found him-self wedged into the second rank, unable to move. The intent silence was spreading, the crowd growing and thickening into ring after ring of glare-lit faces staring.

The carp opened his belt pouch, put on gloves, drew out a transparent package and broke it open. Inside were four long, tapering strands which he uncoiled carefully, holding them by the thickened butts. He gestured the two women a little farther apart, measuring the distance carefully with his eye until he was satisfied.

They stood facing each other, erect, with their feet a little apart. The carp handed two of the strands to each, butt fore-most; they were dark and stiff, then lighter and springily flexible, then milk-white and limp, and slender as wrapping cord. A clear drop welled from the tip of each, and fell to the pavement.

The carp stepped back. "Aright. Ready—" The women raised their closed hands to shoulder level and stood tensely waiting. "Go!"

The four strands lashed out and tangled in midair, un-wound and fell apart, whipped back and lashed again.

Arthur watched in bewildered fascination. The set, intent expressions of both women bore witness that this was no sham or mock-battle: they wanted to hurt each other. Yet the cords they were flailing seemed ridiculously inadequate as weapons; you could do more damage with a pebble picked up from the street, if you were allowed to hurt another person at all .. , .

He shook his head. They couldn't, their angels would stop them; he'd seen Florence's at work only a moment ago. Then what was it all about? Those frail cords, with the clear liquid oozing from them

Something happened too quickly for him to catch it; he had the impression that one of Anne's cords had swept around while her other one tangled both of Florence's. He looked more closely.

He couldn't be sure, but he thought there was a tiny rent in the orange cloth over Florence's hip.

The thing happened twice more, once to Anne and once more to Florence; and still he wasn't sure. Now they were pausing, both breathing heavily. Florence feinted an underhand blow. Anne did the same; then Florence struck, the cords tangled in midair—but one of Anne's whipped around and trailed across the plump girl's body just below her bosom.

This time there was no mistake. Arthur saw the hairline gleam of flesh under the orange cloth.

He watched in horror to see if the skin darkened or bled, but it didn't. And then he understood. His first thought had been acid, but this was something different; it was like the chemicals in the guns, harmless to flesh—except that instead of changing colors, it dissolved the fabric.

The movements grew faster and still harder to follow. It was a little like mock-fighting; Arthur could see the pattern of feint and sidestep, blow and counterblow, but this was so different that he could never tell why one stroke got through and not another. He sensed that both women were experi-enced and resourceful at this kind of fighting; it was because they were so evenly matched that before every successful blow there was a long, monotonous sequence of lash and tangle, unwind and lash again.

Neither woman was unmarked now. Fabric was falling away in a little tongue from two accidentally-crossing slashes across Anne's right hip. Florence had the long slit across her torso, widening now, and Anne a shorter one diagonally down the belly.

There was another flash of movement, and when it ended he saw that Florence's bodice had been laid open, straight down between breast and shoulder, almost to the end of the horizontal cut. She fell back a step, one hand coming up to touch the place; Arthur thought she looked worried. Then they were at it again more furiously than ever, the cords sing-ing and cracking as they met in midair. Florence moved back, Anne following her in a slow shuffling arc. As Arthur craned for a better view, there was another swift exchange of blows, and Florence stumbled back in an oddly hunched posture, her left hand tightly pressed to her bodice.

She moved back again, beating frantically with one cord against Anne's two, and Arthur saw what had happened. The inverted L of the two cuts had been turned to a square-bottomed U, neatly enclosing her bosom. The oblong of cloth was nearly free, attached only at the lower corners, and Florence was desperately trying to crumple the top of it with-out letting go the cord, so that it would stay up and free her left hand again.

Anne wasn't giving her a chance. Coldly and savagely, she engaged Florence's one cord with one of her own while the other flicked again and again with exquisite precision, cutting a long line across the shorter woman's plump belly, then an-other a few inches lower; then a diagonal that connected the two near one end, so that two strips of fabric curled away from the flesh. Then a short stroke downward from the right end of the exposed strip, and another on the opposite side; and an absurd flap like a shoe tongue curled out, widening the window in which Florence's belly quivered and bounced as she moved.

Then, still lower, a diagonal slash across each thigh: the skirt sagged in two loops. Then, flick-flick, two cuts downward from the belly.

Florence gasped and clutched herself, dropping one cord. She stared up wildly, her face a mask of frustrated rage. Anne calmly sidestepped and flicked her twice across the buttocks, left, right.

Florence dropped the remaining cord and ran. The tightly packed crowd opened barely enough to let her squeeze in, and closed behind instantly, but Arthur could tell the direction she took by the chorus of delighted, derisive hooting that followed her.

The carp picked up the dropped cords, accepted Anne's, and walked away. The crowd began to flow again ..

Anne put her arm through his; she looked calm and cheerful. "Let's go, cob—only half an hour to the horn!"

# Chapter 7. Horn Of Judgment

In a softly lit oval room, little Morris reclined with one hand supporting his head and the other poised on the dials of a portable console; his pocked face was calm and intent.

"KB," said a voice from the speaker. "Subjects on Clinton Upper between Main and Pollack. F checks within margin; M wearing blue and white, fails to check two and three."

"Subjects 22, F and M," said Morris, while the assistant across the room stuck a marker onto the illuminated map. "Follow until notice. Set up blind and report. Out."

The pudgy man in the recliner next to Morris' couch shifted restlessly, tapping a silly ebony-and-jade wand against his thigh. "Morris," he said.

"One moment," said Morris politely, turning a dial.

"KQ, KQ," came from the speaker, and the screen above lit up to show the stereo image of part of an auto-restaurant. "Camera in blind, subjects 7 F and M, here they come."

On the screen, a man in mustard yellow and a woman in scarlet entered and sat at a table. The distant cameraman tracked them and adjusted his lens to a closeup. Morris stared carefully at the faces. "Subjects 7 out," he said, and the assis-tant removed a tab from the map. "Stand by."

Another dial. "KI. Subjects corner of Bryant and Pearl Lower, F checks to limit except for five, M wearing black, otherwise checks to limit."

"Subjects 23, F and M," said Morris. "Follow and report out."

"KB. Subjects 22 heading east on Clinton Upper. Suggest blind in arcade, north side of Clinton just below Pollack."

"Confirmed," said Morris. "Stand by, connecting with camera." He turned a dial, flicked a switch. "Your Excel-lency?" His ugly face turned, all deference, but he didn't rise and his hand stayed languidly under his cheekbone.

The pudgy man said irritably. "You seem relaxed enough, at any rate, Morris."

"The brain works best when the body is at ease, Your Ex-cellency," Morris told him affably. "If you would prefer me to sit up when addressing Your Excellency—?"

"Oh, stay as you are," said the pudgy man. "All I want to know is, how much longer you are prepared to

keep this foolishness up?"

"Only until midnight." Morris touched a dial, took another message and answered it. "After that, of course, other methods will be necessary."

"I suppose you mean the methods I advised. You ought to be using 'em now. What the church good are they if you're going to let the game slip away in the meantime?"

"It's a calculated risk, Your Excellency."

"You've said that before."

"KB," said the speaker. "Camera in blind, subjects 22 F and M, on your screen."

Morris inspected the screen for a moment. "Subjects 22 out. Stand by."

"KR. Subjects 18 entering bar north side of Arlen middle, suggest immediate blind here if possible."

Morris glanced at the map. "Confirmed. Stand by, connect-ing with camera."

He turned to the pudgy man. "Eighteen is our best corres-pondence so far. Both check out perfectly except for the man's clothing; this may be it."

The pudgy man snorted. "There must be a thousand couples in Weekend tonight that answer the same description. The man is probably clear out of the area by now. He and the woman probably aren't even together."

"I think they are," said Morris apologetically. "If I may review what we know, Excellency—One, the man arrives in Darien: two, simultaneously, Commissioner Higsbee's secre-tary develops a headache: three, we find that the eyes cover-ing the exits of his suite have burned out."

"That happens often enough."

Morris nodded. "Quite true, and it also happens in other societies when our own resident commissioners wish to get someone out unseen. Or it may be only a feint. That's what you mean, is it not, Excellency? I heartily agree, of course. But—"

"K.R. Catmera in blind, subject 18—M on your screen now, F just entered the donnick, stand by."

"—any chance is worth taking," Morris continued, "if it can lead us to proof that Gepro is guilty of breach of covenant."

"If you want my opinion, that fellow is just an ordinary case of possession, and it isn't Gepro that's breaking the covenant at all, it's those damned women. Conind: that's where you'll find the trouble cooking; I've said so all along."

Several minutes passed while Morris calmly watched the screen. Then:

"KR. Here she comes."

Morris' pale eyes narrowed slightly. He murmured, "But one proposition hangs on the other, does it not, Excellency? And why should Miss Silver of Commissioner Higsbee's staff trouble herself with an ordinary case of possession?"

The pudgy man blinked irritably. "There you go, *assuming*—"

He stopped when Morris, with a grin of triumph, swung the console around to face him. The woman on the screen, without doubt, was Miss Anne Silver.

"Here we are, cob," said Anne.

Arthur was fingering the rolled-up book he had bought from a machine in a little gallery next to the restaurant. The title had caught his eye as they were passing, with a shock out of all proportion to what it said: "*... With Security and Abundance For All*."

Word for word, it was the same title as that of a book that was on sale in Glenbrook, had been for years; it was required reading in the schools.

He badly wanted to examine the text, to see if he recog-nized any of it, but he hadn't had a chance. It would have to wait until they got through with the jaypee, whatever that was. He glanced up.

Chrome letters over the vestibule spelled: JOY PALACE.

A few steps inside, baffles and soundproofing cut down the blare of noise from the street; a slow, sensuous music took its place. Arthur paused to examine an illuminated stereograph set into the wall, and got another shock that drove the first out of his mind.

"Never been in a jaypee before, have you?" said Anne's voice at his shoulder.

He swallowed hard. "What makes you say that?"

"Oh, I can tell," she said wisely, her head on one side. "You're no Conser, that's to spit. You don't even talk like the Zecks around here. From up north? Albany? Toronto?"

"Toronto," said Arthur.

She nodded. "Lowring. *I* know. I used to be office maid to a Stocker, and the things I peeped!" She bent closer and whis-pered a word into Arthur's ear. "—in *houses*!" she added, with a leer.

"That's right," said Arthur. "Don't tell anybody I said so." What could be wrong with whatever it was in houses?

Her expression seemed to say that he was an imp of a fel-low. "Well, it's all right for you, because Stockers and Zecks don't have to worry, but where would *we* be, cobby—nothing but a bunk on the floor, or else build all the sleeps bigger, and what for? And all that crot—You know I read in the old days they use to bring up *kids* at home, too? Church!"

She turned. "Well, you want to go in?"

Arthur honestly wasn't sure. He smelled danger and pleasure in about equal proportions, and with such intensity that he wasn't able to deal rationally with either.

"Of course if I'm not good enough—" she said, and then changed her tone abruptly, clinging to him in a way that made his head swim: "*Come* on, cobber, you know you don't get enough variety at home, it's prackly like brother'n sister, you bloobies all sticking together—" She drew him toward the doors. "And besides, what else're you *here* for?"

What else, indeed?

He put two silver slips—five dollars each—into the turn-stile.

Inside, the first thing Arthur saw was the fountain. He sup-posed you would have to call it a fountain; it came up out of the deep carpeting like a monster porridge bowl, and spouted a tracery of lighted tubing down which colors rippled like water falling—deep, pure violet, crystal blue, pigeon's-blood.

Elsewhere, particolored light came from the walls at curious angles. A couple stepped noiselessly down from the balcony, haloed in misty red; at the foot of the stairs their faces were golden masks, and a moment later they had faded into green walking shadows.

The music was deeper here, groaning all around them as if they were inside a giant's throat. The air was thick with some heavy, spiced scent.

Arthur's skin burned where the woman's forearm touched his. They walked past the fountain and came to a low railing, with another turnstile in it.

"We pay again?"

"To spit—you want the best, don't you, cobber?"

"To spit." He put two more dollars into the silver-rimmed slot.

"And it's twenty to, and you're nowhere near flat. But I guess you don't care."

Around the corner, under the balcony wall, a long corridor ran away into the rear of the building. They walked down it, Anne glancing at each door they passed; there was one every ten feet, each with a small "FULL" sign at eye level.

The fifth or sixth said "EMPTY." Anne pushed open the door and entered.

Arthur followed her, hardly conscious of what he was doing. The door closed. Anne, at his side, a universe away, was push-ing over a little metal slide with a knob that stuck out of the door, *click*. Then she moved away, and he followed her again.

The only light in the room came from a red transparency in the ceiling. Anne's flesh was sunset-colored, her lips were dried blood. Ceiling, walls, carpeting, all the room glowed with a sullen, dark, secret heat.

Anne sat on the wide couch and put her hand on a wall panel. It lighted up with half a dozen lettered strips; from where he stood, Arthur couldn't read them.

"Anything you got a glim for?" she asked. "Woods, street corner, office?"

"No," he heard himself say. "You choose."

She pressed a button. The walls around them leaped and flickered.

Arthur blinked. It was as if the walls had become trans-parent; ceiling and floor were still there, floating unsupported, but all around was a different and much bigger room. Desks lined the far wall, alternating with oddly designed information cabinets and other business machines; the light from the ceil-ing was a cold blue-white in which the real room seemed to float, an island of red.

When he looked back, Anne was standing beside the couch. She did something to her tight singlet and dropped it on the floor. The skirt followed it. She smiled at him.

It couldn't have been less like the way he had imagined it. She didn't look naked, she looked as if she

had taken off her weird costume to reveal another, even stranger, underneath—a fantastic, swollen fleshbagged costume, a parody of maleness and male humanity—the only kind he knew. Since his dimly remembered childhood, Arthur had never seen a woman who was not clothed from throat to ankle, until today. Simply, he did not know what a woman was supposed to look like.

She moved near, her body shaking and swaying in a way that should have been comic—that he wanted to find comic (*sights glimpsed around illfittin' windowshades: snickers and gurgles of laughter*) and couldn't.

He couldn't.

He might have known; his muscles had locked, before, when he had only tried to speak to a strange woman. And now look at him: swollen tight with emotion that wasn't even identifiable as fear or desire any more, it was too intense for that—the pure colorless raw stuff of emotion, as deadly and explosive as nitroglycerine. He couldn't go forward, and it was self-betrayal and suicide to go back.

The woman lifted one round arm; he saw the tremulous rise of her breast, and, incongruously, the glint of a ring on one finger.

He struck her hand aside. He saw it happen as if from an observer's distance, saw her eyes widen, and only then was aware that the swollen mass of frustration inside of him had tipped over into fury. He hit her again and again, roaring, a tight band of pressure around his temples, following her as she fell, hitting again.

His fists met air. She was sprawled half-twisted on the car-pet, not moving. He kicked her. It was no good. He wanted to break something, shatter it, spread it in shards, kill it. He looked wildly around the bare room floating in the phantom office, then took two strides to the couch, seized the strip of fabric that ran across it from one roller to the other. The cloth ripped under his hands. He yanked it out in coils, tearing, fling-ing it aside; he filled the air with scraps. There was no more cloth. He lifted the couch by one corner, levered it over with a thud. He picked it up again, beat it against the floor until the joints sprang and wood splintered, and a leg came off in his hand. Then, still raging, he hurled himself out of the room.

In the corridor, two men and a woman turned like dancers at the first sight of him and ran, shrieking in high breathless voices. Weeping, Arthur pelted after them. A door opened; he saw a head and struck at it automatically as he passed. He was in the foyer, with people scattering like ducks around the foun-tain. He charged through them, striking to right and left; hurdled the turnstile. A man barred his way, half turned, fumb-ling at his pouch. Arthur struck him down and was out in the street, in the cool air, sobering slowly, in the thick of the crowd.

Two levels down and a block over, he saw a dressing machine and stopped to change his clothing. He didn't hurry. He knew he was in more danger now than ever before, but it didn't seem to matter. He felt pleasantly tired, relaxed, and utterly at peace. So that was what it was like—to let yourself go, let the pent-up fury of years stream out of you like water! To strike and kick and shout and leap and strike again, forget-ting the fear that people would know you had no angel! Who wouldn't risk annihilation for that purging delight if he could?

When he came out again, something odd was happening. Traffic in the streets had dwindled, although the crowds every-where were thicker than ever, the roar louder. Wherever he looked, he saw grim, taut faces. He passed a perspiring man in green and rust who was tossing plastic balls into a hopper, buying more and tossing them, without waiting to see what slots they fell into. Beyond him was a girl who was

doing the same thing, as if her life hung on it. In the next bay people were streaming onto a whirling disk, riding once around and getting off, shouting, glitter-eyed. But they weren't drunk; it was something else.

He was lurking near the end of one of the arcades, trying to decide which direction would lead him soonest out of the pleasure area, when a horrendous noise swelled up over the crowd sounds, the music, the clatter of machines, drowning them all. It was nothing he had ever heard before, a sustained raucous note like the blast of an impossibly magnified trumpet.

When it died away, leaving an ache of silence, another sound rose slowly in its place: a dreadful chorus from a thousand throats, a long wailing *Ohhhhh* of sorrow and regret. And that was all.

The music was dead. All the machines were silent and dark. The people shuffled out into the street with a little murmur of talk beginning again; it grew until there were shouts and even an occasional burst of laughter, lonely as dog-cries in the night.

Arthur went with the crowd, marveling. Here and there over the bobbing heads a curious cluster of small black objects rose, fluttered and fell. One of them dipped past Arthur's face, clung for an instant to the next man's shoulder before it disappeared. He had seen it clearly: except for its color, it might have been a piece of money.

He reached into his pouch, pulled out a handful of plastic slips and examined them.

They were jet black except one, and as he watched, that one faded from ruby to an ashen violet-gray, to garnet, to deep purple, to black. The lettering was still visible in blurred gray lines: "ONE DOLLAR, July 12, 140."

He looked at his watch. It was one minute after midnight.

The crowd's slow movement grew slower still. Heads were bobbing all along the packed street; a low mutter rose. Arthur felt a twinge of alarm, but he was thinking with incredulous horror about the people he had thought so fortunate—credit-zeroed at the end of every week; trapped more thoroughly by pleasure than anyone in Glenbrook by duty.

He felt for the book he had stuffed into his belt. He opened it awkwardly slantwise in the tiny space between his body and the next man's. A familiar drawing leaped to his eye: a smiling Consumer, surrounded by his family, with the vague protective shape of an angel swimming overhead. And down at the bottom of the page, the questions and answers:

WHY AM I LUCKY TO BE A CONSUMER?

Because all my needs are given, and all have to do is work and enjoy myself.

WHY CAN'T EVERYBODY BE A CONSUMER?

Life has different jobs for each of us to do. For the Consumer, to work and be happy; for the Stock-holder and the Executive, to worry and plan. "Life must love the Consumers, for It makes so many of them."

Arthur rolled the thing up again. The costumes in the drawings had been changed, and a few words in the text—"Life" instead of "the Infinite," for example—; otherwise it was the same book.

He was still thinking about that some minutes later, turning it over with a slow incredulous wonder at the unending bigness of it, when he realized that the crowd was slowing down. The pressure of bodies increased; the crowd rolled forward a step, paused, surged again and stopped altogether. The hum of voices rose uneasily.

"Attention," blared an enormous voice. Arthur looked up; he saw heads turning all around him. "Among you is a man who by accident has exceeded his capacity for alk. This man is temporarily beyond the control of his angel and is not re-sponsible for his actions. I repeat, his condition is temporary. This man is not possessed, but he is dangerous to himself and others."

The voices rose again, on a note that sent an irritable prickle along Arthur's nerves. The loudspeaker bellowed: "Check points have been set up at every out from Weekend. You will pass through these lonely. This delay is for your own safety. Live!"

After a moment the crowd began to move again, first in lurches, then at a steady crawl. Wide patches of confetti-strewn pavement appeared behind as the mass bunched at the corner. The movement turned inchwise, joining another slow stream that came down the cross-avenue, and Arthur saw with a shock that the sea of hats seemed to end only three inter-sections away.

There was no time to reason out his chances. He turned to the nearest citizen, a dropsical dull-eyed man with pendulous nose and lips. "They're not telling the truth," he shouted over the crowd-roar. "They don't want to start a panic. There's a demon in Weekend!"

The man stared at him, grinning foolishly. Arthur could barely make out the words: "Y'drunk, cob. Forget it."

He tried a woman, and then an acne-scarred boy, with no more result. The crowd moved on. Arthur turned to the loose-lipped man again, seized him by the arm. "Y'drunk," said the man, and gurgled a parody of laughter.

"Listen," said Arthur. "U/M products are no good. The Stockers all have bad breath. The Zecks eat dirt. The Sales-men—"

The man had staggered back, his eyes goggling in sudden sobriety. Halfway through Arthur's third sentence, he violent-ly wrenched himself free and disappeared into the crowd, bellowing.

Arthur forced his way a few steps to the right, seized a nervous-looking woman and repeated his blasphemy. Her shrieks were gratifyingly loud as she scrambled away. By the time Arthur found his fourth customer, the word had spread; he could hear it echoing shrilly from every side: "A demon!" The crowd was beginning to surge massively, this way and that.

Despairing of making himself heard any longer, Arthur re-sorted to pinching everyone within reach, The crowd's forward motion accelerated to a fast walk, to a run, to a stampede.

He saw the wreckage of a flimsy barricade, flanked by shout-ing, impotent Guardsmen, as the flood swept past the inter-section.

But half a mile farther on, the first dozen or so of the scat-tered crowd began to stream past him, running the other way as if salvation depended on it. Dropping out, Arthur saw why.

At the crest of the hill was a barricade—a real one, this time, with swinging searchlights, massed cars and copters, and an army of men with bulky weapons.

# Chapter 8. Out Of The Fire

Arthur stood with one shoulder against the tough clapboards of a house and stared down the long slope at the lights of the city. Behind him, in the darkness, the rising wind howled through the dry hedge and under the eaves of the deserted house. The air was turning cool.

He had paralleled the barricade for eight blocks, almost to the Wall. The carps were there, too—one man to every other yard, with a searchlight trained on the Wall itself.

From where he stood he could see a part of that chain of light, dainty with distance. First came the street lights of the residential area, dipping in precise converging lines to the sprawling glitter of the place called Weekend.

Beyond, clear and perfect, other rows of street lights marched up the gentle counter-slope. Then came the Guards' blinking search-beams, outlining the long broken curve of the Wall; and beyond that Arthur could see a wan glow rising from the other side.

The glow was Glenbrook—a mile and a universe away.

He turned and looked up the slope. Lights were there, too, a long straight line of them, nearer than it had been half an hour ago.

The Guard was moving slowly westward across this penin-sula of the city, winnowing one street at a time, moving the barricade down and starting over. They were being very slow and careful. He had perhaps an hour and a half or two hours before they drove him down into Weekend again.

He was done for. He had no crowd to panic now; he had heard the loudspeaker ordering everyone back into Weekend. Sooner or later, no matter what he did, they would trap him, tangle him and take him to Disposal.

He could accept that. He felt curiously indifferent about it; it was just a thing you had to go through, like a visit to the dentist. But there was one part of it he couldn't swallow, and that was the idea that he had to stand and wait for them to do it—that he couldn't at least deliver some sort of colossal kick to their shins before they carted him away.

He didn't know whom he meant by "they." That simply made it worse. Somewhere up at the top there must have been once, there must still be; people who had laid out this world like a display block, facing all the mannikins in one room away from all the mannikins in another, adjusting their half-blinkered spectacles, crooking their knees.

How could he hurt them?

It was easy to see where they were most vulnerable, or thought they were. There was the symbol, down below—the Wall. But that was no good, the Wall itself really wasn't necessary except to shut out unwelcome sights and sounds; it was the angels that kept people from crossing over.

Now there was a poser. If that was true—and it was—then why a masonry Wall, instead of duraplast paneling?

Well, fire was always a problem, especially along the Wall, where the houses were so old. There was no hidden signific-ance in it, he supposed; it was just that they didn't want to take the chance of a bad slum fire burning through the barrier.

The wind was still rising. It pressed solid and cool against his back, ruffled his hair, flipped the edge of his tunic.

If a man, Arthur asked himself slowly, stood facing that Wall, with an angel's fiery sword before him and a burning city behind—which way would he jump?

Fumbling in the cool darkness of the fuel 'station, he found what he needed—an empty five-gallon can. He took it outside and filled it at the spigot. The wind was still growing, roaring down to meet him as he climbed the hill again. A ruder gust came as he reached the crest, nearly knocking him off his feet; his hat lifted from his head and went bounding away into darkness.

To the east, the lights of the advancing barricade had vanished; the Guardsmen were out of sight in the hollow between the two hills. Arthur turned up the nearest walk, half-skipping with the weight of the can. He mounted the porch, opened the door of a stranger's house and went in.

He felt his way around the crouching bulks of tables, the spidery traps of tubular-metal chairs; passed through a door-way and went straight to the wardrobe closet, crammed with tunics, skirts, trousers, so tightly pressed that they were like one solid mass. He tugged out an armload of them, carried them back into the living-room, heaped them against an inner wall. He doused them sparingly with gasoline from the can.

Before he left, he raised a window in the front room and another in the kitchen, and propped open the door between.

At the next house but one he did the same, and so on down the deserted street, working his way southward, until his gaso-line was gone. Flushed and panting, he dropped the empty can onto the piled clothing, followed it with a lighted match.

With the flame murmuring behind him, he hurried out, up the street, into the next house with an open window. Another match; another blue puff of fire.

When he came out of the eighth house, he saw a ruddy glow rising over the rooftops, down the way he had come.

He ran faster. Time was against him, but he had to finish the row

Three-quarters of the way back to his starting point, he realized that he had just used the last match. He groped wildly in the flickering darkness of the kitchen for another box, gave it up—plucked a blazing, gasoline-soaked garment out of the fire and ran with it down to the next house.

It worked, but it delayed him. When he came out of the last doorway, he heard a siren wailing somewhere off to the west. Also, a copter was parked in the middle of the street. Two red-masked men were climbing out of it, running toward him.

Arthur whirled back, past the flames that were billowing up the wall, through the glare-shot kitchen. Footsteps pounded after him.

He burst through the outside door, crossed the yard in four strides, and heard the door slam again as he leaped the hedge into the yard behind.

He swerved to the right, then left into the trough of deep shadow between houses. The street was too wide, they would catch him before he was halfway across

He swung himself up onto the front porch, opened and closed the door soundlessly after him. His heart was pounding almost as if it still mattered what he did; his hand found the banister and he mounted the black stair, stealthily, a whisper in darkness. At the top he paused, listened, heard nothing but his own furious heartbeat.

Light flared in the room below an instant after he stepped away from the landing.

They knew he was in the house. They must have circled it, one on either side ....

Footsteps thudded faintly in the rooms below.

Arthur took off his shoes. Carrying them, he moved cautiously into the front bedroom and closed the door. He put the shoes under the narrow double-decked bed. One of the windows was stuck, and he dared not force it. He pushed care-fully at the other, working it up a fraction of an inch at a time. Finally the space was tall enough to let him out.

He looked down at the empty yard, then sat on the window-sill and swung his legs over.

Below him the door slammed and a red-uniformed man stepped out onto the walk. He glanced up, nodded, and said into the instrument in his hand, “He’s here. Second floor front.”

Arthur, with his legs half drawn inside the window again, heard brisk footsteps climbing the stair.

“Just sit there,” the man outside said pleasantly.

Arthur glanced up. The roof was just above him, an iron-gray blur against the sky. He squirmed around and stood up precariously, fingers gripping the underside of the raised window.

He shifted one hand to the top of the sash, leaned back-ward and reached up with his free hand. His fingers closed over the rough, dry edges of the shingles. He gripped them convulsively, brought up his other hand to catch the roof, and swung out into space.

“Hurry it,” said the man below, urgently. Inside, the bed-room door was flung open with a crash.

With a lurch that nearly tore loose his grip on the roof-edge, Arthur got one stockinged foot over the top, then his knee.

“Crot,” said the man below. There was a *ping*, and some-thing shattered against the wall under Arthur’s head. White vapor swirled around his face for an instant, blinding him; then the wind whirled it away. Suddenly dizzy, with a gigantic effort he hoisted himself up and over.

He was lying on the shallow slope of the roof; it was roll-ing vertiginously under him, and he felt as if he were going to be sick.

A voice drifted up: “Too much wind, Harry. Better go up after’m.”

A hand appeared on the roof-edge, then another. Arthur flung himself at them dizzily, pried the fingers up.

“Look out below,” said a resigned voice. Arthur heard a thud.

He stood up carefully, hair flying in the wind, knees bent to keep his balance on the slope. Across the ridge, the sky was one enormous gold-and-pink glare.

In the other direction was the roof of the adjoining house. The gap between the two looked to be no more than four feet.

“Bass,” called a voice. One of the Guardsmen had backed into view down the lawn. “Come down, cob. We won’t hurt you.”

Arthur moved down to the edge of the roof. Another gas capsule burst at his feet, but the vapor whipped away instantly. He gathered himself and leaped, clutching frantically as he landed to keep from sliding. He scrambled up, with his palms full of splinters, and climbed to the ridge.

One Guardsman, limping, was heading around the corner of the first house; the other was still on the front lawn. Arthur turned, straddling the centerline, and moved back until he was out of sight from either direction before he clambered down the opposite slope.

One of the Guardsmen was standing between the houses, looking up at him. “Be reasonable,” he said.

Arthur leaped to the next roof. It was harder to avoid slid-ing off this time, and harder to get up, but he managed it. He was tired, and his mind was sluggish, but he knew they would never catch him. He would keep on walking across these roofs forever, if necessary, and by that time the whole city would have burned down. Then they would have to go away and leave him alone.

Here he was at the ridge again.

Orange sparks drifted all around him, stinging his cheeks and hands. A voice was calling over the roar of the flames:

“Bass! Can you hear me? Listen—we’ll mark the price down for you! You come down now, and we leave your family alone! Understand?”

His family ... Arthur’s mind snapped into clarity for a moment. What could they know about his family? For that matter, how could they know his name? Bemused, he turned and walked a few steps toward the front.

This was only a game, he reminded himself. Fire or Dis-posal, it didn’t make any difference. But if these were Glen-brook Guardsmen, what were they doing here, wearing red instead of black? And if they weren’t

Too late, he heard the roaring swell up behind him and felt the wind suddenly beating straight down on his body. Off balance, flailing his arms, he turned to see a metal-and-vitrin monster looming over him.

He had just time to glimpse the head framed in the open doorway, the white hair whipping wildly, orange-tinted in the glare. The face, contorted in a fearful scowl, was that of His Excellency, the Archdeputy Laudermilk.

“*Hang on!*” shouted the old man.

Then something struck him solidly in the chest; he clutched wildly as he toppled, and found himself gripping a line that hung from the copter, just under the doorway; then he was dangling while the roof moved out from under him and the street gently rose.

When his feet touched, the Guardsmen were there to seize his arms and hustle him into the copter. Arthur made no resistance. The wide, crumpled adhesive band that was clinging to his tunic was detached from the line, and the line reeled in. Someone closed the door and pushed him into a seat, and the copter rose again.

“Now,” said Laudermilk severely, “do you see how much trouble you’ve caused?”

Arthur stared down through the copter’s transparent wall. They were cruising high over the pleasure district; he could see the fire from one end to the other. It stretched in a blazing arc halfway down the slope, the flames shooting forward at an acute angle, twice the height of the buildings, sparks fountain-ing upward as if from a battery of titanic Roman candles. But it had not reached the Wall at either end.

At the west end, the nearer one, Arthur could see that the streets were clogged by streams of buses and people moving out of the danger area. Here and there, clumps of tiny green fire engines were playing threads of water against the buildings in the fire’s path.

He could not see much of what was going on in the center, there was too much smoke. But he saw the white clouds that came billowing up out of the sepia: first one, then two to-gether, then a whole row. Buildings were being destroyed to clear a firebreak.

That in itself, it occurred to Arthur, must mean that most of the crowds had been evacuated already.

“Not trouble enough,” he said. “The people in Glenbrook will see the red light and the smoke, and hear the explosions, and tell each other the Others are having a party.”

“Yes,” Laudermilk agreed, “and the Darien people will think the demons in Glenbrook caused the fire. They’ll be right, in a way. What else did you expect?”

Arthur looked at him curiously. The broad young man be-side the pilot was leaning over the back of the seat, holding a fat blued-steel tube in a suggestive manner, but Laudermilk didn’t act like a man who has just captured a dangerous enemy. He reminded Arthur of one of the Store hens his family had kept when he was a child—upset, querulous, feathers ruffled.

He *liked* Laudermilk—which was absurd.

“You don’t have to tell me,” said the old man, “But I really would like to know why you set that fire. It may be important.”

Arthur said slowly, “I hoped it would spread all the way to the Wall on both sides. If it had, people would have climbed over. The Guards wouldn’t have been able to stop them.”

Laudermilk nodded. “And?”

“And,” said Arthur patiently, “they would have seen for themselves that everything you tell them about the other side is a lie.”

“Yes, I see. It wouldn’t have worked, I’m afraid, but it must have seemed reasonable. Now, tell me—”

“Why do you say it wouldn’t have worked?”

“Well, don’t you suppose,” Laudermilk said, “that there have been catastrophes in the world before this? Not only local fires, but real disasters, that dislocated millions of people at a time. The great Missouri flood, for example, in 52. The G. P.’s and the U/ M’s were mingled then, so thoroughly that it took five months to get them all sorted out again. Or the power plant explosion in the Urals in 77. The Obprodniki and the Luchu-velniki both exiled a great many of their own people then—there was a great stench about it in the World Court afterwards—but it really wasn’t at all necessary.”

Arthur stared at him. “Why not?”

“Because people looked at each other, and saw what they expected to see. And the stories grew in the telling. Along the Missouri, for example, they don’t say that the Others have bat wings and fingers like pitchforks, or anything so tame and ordinary as that ... they say that the Others are fifty feet tall, with heads that are all bones and teeth, and that worms crawl in and out of their eyes.”

Arthur shuddered.

“We’d better move along now, Davy,” Laudermilk said to the pilot. “We’re very late.”

“Right.”

Arthur felt the copter dip and shudder as the vanes were re-tracted; then the jets fired, the back-rest shoved hard against him, and the landscape below began to unreel majestically, carrying the fire, and Darien, and all the scurrying little people in it out of sight.

“Now think carefully, Arthur—was that your only reason?”

“No,” said Arthur indifferently. “Where are you taking me?”

“That can wait a little. What other reason was there?”

“Don’t you know? I wanted to get out. If you hadn’t caught me, I would have gone down ahead of the fire, and maybe I would have got through.”

“Yes,” said Laudermilk approvingly. “Good. As it turns out, Arthur, that one did work; we never could have found you if it hadn’t been for the fire. As it was, you gave me the worst half-hour I’ve had in thirty years. You can congratulate your-self on being as valuable to us as you are. I mean by that, of course, your genes. Yes. A very valuable strain. We thought it was lost. To answer your question, Arthur, we’re going to Pasadena.”

Arthur had lost his bearings completely. “Why?” he said.

“To enroll you in the College. Not as Arthur Bass, naturally—you’ve spoilt that name, I’m afraid. How would you like to be called Barbour? That’s an old and honorable name. Arthur Barbour. Yes. Rather too euphonious, if anything, but if you don’t mind—”

“Wait,” said Arthur furiously. “I don’t understand.”

“Arthur,” said the old man gently, “the people at the Col-lege are all like us—all ‘possessed.’ Faculty and students. There isn’t an angel-ridden person among them.”

Arthur fought back a burst of incredulous laughter. “You mean, if I’d stayed in Glenbrook—and not got into any trouble—”

“Yes. Of course I wish now that I hadn’t let you leave, but there didn’t seem to be any necessity to hold you at the time. You can add that to our debt to you, if you like. We owe you a great deal already; if it hadn’t been for us, you never would have been born.”

Arthur gaped at him.

“It’s true. I can’t actually prove it—the records were lost fifteen years ago—but I haven’t much doubt that you’re our own flesh. You see, thirty years ago we were a very small group, poorly organized and nowhere nearly as well dug in as we are now. We wanted very badly to increase our numbers—and to

do that rapidly, we took a rather desperate chance. Dear me, this is going to be hard to explain. I don't suppose you have any idea how children are made, Arthur? Well, over-simplifying a good deal, a seed from the father and a seed from the mother come together in the mother's body, and from that a child grows and eventually is born .... Well, using an an-cient technique, we took those combined seeds from ourselves and planted them in other women, without their knowing it—quite a number of us happened to be medics on the staffs of Consumer hospitals. It was a mistake, on several counts; for one, too many of the proxy mothers died in childbirth; for another—well, it's a rare Immune who can live the first fifteen or twenty years of his life as a Consumer, or an Executive or Stockholder for that matter, without being so badly warped that he's no good to us or himself. On the whole, we're not proud of the experiment. But we're doing what we can—gather-ing in those who are still what we like to call sane. That's a word you'll learn; the Mercantile jargon for it is 'inherently stable.'

"You see, those who pass the test I gave you are sent on to the College, where they're given more thorough analogue tests, and if they pass those, somehow or other they always fail their academic examinations, and we send them home. Those who fail that box test are the ones we're really after. We put them under immediate confinement, so they can't betray themselves, ship them off to the College—and they stay."

"I'm trying to take this in," said Arthur after a moment. "You control the College of Sacred Sciences—that must mean the Deacons are all your people—"

"Not all," the Archdeputy said. "Only a little more than thirty percent, and it's taken us a long time to get that far. In another fifty years we'll have complete control of the analogue machines—that's their proper name, by the way—and some-thing like a twentieth of the Executive group will be our people, and perhaps ten or fifteen percent of the duard—like the two gentlemen who helped me coax you down off that roof."

"Fifty *years*," said Arthur.

"Well, time passes; you'll be surprised." He yawned. "I'm going to catch a few winks of sleep now, I believe; it's been a busy day."

# Chapter 9. Into The Frying Pan

Stiff from the long trip, Arthur followed Laudermilk through an archway in a moss-grown wall. They had stopped off only twice, once in the Plains to refuel, and once somewhere in the mountains, just before dawn, to exchange Arthur's Darien clothing for JAS streetwear. The overshirt fitted badly, and the shoes pinched.

Laudermilk afoot was hard to get used to; seeing him seated, Arthur hadn't realized how small and fragile he was. But there was nothing feeble about the way he moved; he trotted ahead, as bright and impudent as a sparrow, setting a pace that strained Arthur's long legs.

Inside the gatehouse lounged a red-haired young man in a cowled mustard-yellow robe, folding a sheet of plastic into a complicated mathematical shape. He straightened up and beamed when he saw Laudermilk.

"Arthur, this is—Marks, isn't it?"

"Wesley Marks, sir."

"That's right. Arthur is a recruit, Wesley. Will you take him down to Ad and get him started?"

“Right. Have a good trip, sir?”

“Fair. Just fair.” The old man shook hands with Arthur, then boarded a scooter and jounced off down the street, his robes flapping behind him.

Arthur followed the redhead the opposite way, looking around with interest. There were five low stone buildings, very ancient-looking, a low frame structure, a small Store—hardly more than a chapel—and that was all, except for a few acres of grass and trees. The high wall shut out everything outside; even the buildings of the Liberal Arts College, which Lauder-milk had pointed out to him a few hundred yards away, were invisible.

They passed a middle-aged man in scarlet robes, walking with chin on chest, hands clasped behind him. Two girls went by, decorously sidesaddle on scooters. A young man in black came out of the frame building as they approached, glanced at them incuriously, then sat down on the lawn and chewed a grass stem.

“How many—”

“No talking on street,” said Marks in a harsh undertone.

The last stone building had “ADMINISTRATION” carved in weathered relief over the lintel. Arthur following his guide up the broad steps, into a cool echoing lobby. The place was empty except for two men and a girl behind a desk. The huge old-fashioned electrical clock on the wall clicked harshly as they entered.

“Recruit,” said Marks to the other three. He strolled over and leaned on the desk, and all four of them stared at Arthur with sleepy indifference.

In the silence, Arthur became aware of the clock’s low in-sistent hum.

The girl picked a card out of a box and put it into the ortho-typer in front of her. “Name?”

“Arthur Ba—Arthur Barbour.”

“Sure?” the girl asked with a faint smile.

“Sure.”

The typer whispered. “Age? Former residence? Education? Former occupation?”

He answered all the questions. The girl whipped the card out of the machine, separated it, and gave half to Arthur; it was a standard Gepro credit card. The redhead took his arm and steered him toward one of the side corridors.

Halfway down it, Arthur stopped.

“What’s the matter?”

“She made a mistake. This says ‘Sebastian Ridler.’”

“That’s your name,” the redhead told him. “Come on.”

Arthur followed him again, down a ramp into a gray bare room divided by a long counter. Behind the counter was still another sleepy-looking young man in yellow, and behind him were long aisles of shelving. An enamel sign over his head was stamped: “GENERAL PRODUCTS STORE OF

PASA-DENA, BRANCH LICENSE 9." A clock, exactly like the one in the lobby, clicked as the minute hand jumped.

Arthur put his card on the counter. The clerk inspected him, then wandered back into one of the aisles and came back with a bundle of clothing. "This is all you need now. Anything else you want, go to Store." He slipped Arthur's card into the machine at the end of the counter, tapped the keys expertly, and handed the card back.

Arthur turned.

"Wait a minute."

The clerk had produced what looked like an ink pad and an oversized sigil stamp. He beckoned. "Lean over here."

"What for?"

"Do what he tells you," Marks said.

The clerk inked the stamp and pressed the disk-shaped face of it successively against his cheeks and forehead. "Don't touch it till it dries. Hold out your hands." He inked the stamp again, pressed it against the back of each hand in turn. The "ink" was perfectly colorless; it might have been water.

Arthur looked from one to the other. They were watching him with mild amusement. "All right, now where?" he said. "Don't you want to know what that was all about?"

"Would you tell me if I asked?"

"No." The redhead grinned. "But you'd better find out." Arthur turned toward the door, and stopped. Something was different about the room. What was it? A sound

He glanced suddenly at the clock.

"That's right," said Marks approvingly.

Laudermilk's blonde secretary greeted him cheerfully as he scurried into the outer office. "Hello, Francis. Good trip?"

"Terrible," said Laudermilk, smiling at her. "Too much ex-citement—I'm still quivering like a hawser. This afternoon, Betty, I don't want to see anyone with a crisis—send me peace-ful visitors only. I am going to sit back—"

The secretary pulled a long face.

"Oh, dear," said Laudermilk. "Something waiting for me? What is it?"

"The envoy from Fabital—in your office. He got in half an hour ago. His name is Ezius Migliozzius."

"Yes, yes; I remember." Laudermilk sighed. "Well, *he* hasn't got a crisis, I suppose."

"He might be one, though."

"Ah." The old man stared at her thoughtfully. "You don't care for him?"

“Not very much. It’s just a ‘hunch, though.”

“All right. Thank you, Betty ...” He reached for the door. “Francis.”

Laudermilk turned with a vaguely pained expression. “Have you been taking your pills?”

“Yes, yes,” Laudermilk said impatiently ... “well, actually, no.” He got a pillbox out of his kit, thumbed out two capsules, a red one and a green one, and swallowed them dry, with a horrible grimace.

The girl grinned at him. With a fierce frown, which changed instantly to an expression of bland politeness as he passed through the doorway, Laudermilk swept into his inner office and bore down upon the slender, dark gentleman who was sitting by the window, smoking a cigarette in a long red holder.

“Domine Migliozzie, salve, salve. Maereo quod to salutare non hic eras, sed, verum—”[1]

“Ah, please, Archiprocurator,” said Migliozzius, taking his hand. “I adjure you that it was my honor for you to wait. I expected with the most greatest pleasure. I pray, do not molest yourself.”

Migliozzius smiled, his clipped black mustache expanding like cat’s whiskers, his startling gray eyes almost disappearing. At Laudermilk’s gesture he bowed and sat down again, hitch-ing up his toga behind him and daintily pulling at his trousers to save the crease.

They exchanged a few more politenesses, each in the other’s language; then Migliozzius, seeing Laudermilk baffled at a particularly mangled phrase, gave up, and they spoke New Latin.

“Ever since my people had the happiness to meet yours, Your Worship, it has been our dearest wish that one of us should visit you and learn at your feet. It was most difficult, even with your help from this side, and although we managed to make sure that one of us would be sent, we could not choose which. I must therefore apologize for my poor English, Your Worship; as you know, the study of foreign tongues is not encouraged in Fabital. Your command of Latin, however, is quite perfect. May I ask how—? Perhaps you have formerly served on an intersocial commission in Italia?”

“No, I have never had that pleasure,” said Laudermilk, look-ing embarrassed. “You see, quite frankly, I find I can’t sleep very much—I have to occupy my time somehow—and, to tell the truth, we happened to own several books in Latin for which no translations could be found. Aquinas’ Summa Theologica, for one. We hate to let any knowledge go to waste.”

“Ah,” said Migliozzius, nodding. “Admirable, admirable. And what did you think of the Summa?”

“Oh, a masterwork, undoubtedly. Most illuminating—don’t you agree?”

“Alas, I have never read it. I believe copies exist, but I haven’t your American thoroughness. These old discussions of God and godlets are so dusty now; we have quite enough in our daily lives.”

“Just so,” said Laudermilk agreeably. “But your time is precious, and here I am chattering away. Now, I thought I might just give you a brief sketch of how the College operates, and then after lunch, if you are not too tired after your trip, we can begin to show you around and explain as we go.”

“This is most kind, Your Worship—”

Laudermilk protested, “Esteemed sir, among ourselves these titles don’t exist. We must be friends, and you must call me Francis.”

“With the extremest pleasure,” said Migliozzius. He hesi-tated slightly. “Of course—and you must call me

Ezius."

Laudermilk had turned aside to pour out two ceremonious glasses of chianti. "Bene tibi! " He drank a sip, ably concealing his shudder, and setting the glass down, said, "I understand, Ezius, that your people have no colleges for their young—other, that is, than the regular institutions of Fabital and Merxuni."

"We are so backward," said Migliozzius with a flash of teeth. "We have always felt that it would be too dangerous. We educate our children ourselves, each in his own home—that's why we are so very interested—"

"But you're perfectly right," exclaimed Laudermilk cour-teously. "In a Fabital home, of course, of course—We would do the same more frequently if we could, but you understand that in most of the North American societies such privacy in the home is not possible; in some cases I think you would say the home hardly exists."

"Still, we know that you have conquered great difficulties, Francis. To congregate like this, under the noses of the Ordi-naries—in daily danger of being discovered and over-whelmed!"

Laudermilk snapped his fingers. "That reminds me; I must have you—ah—branded before we leave."

"Branded?" Migliozzius' jaw dropped.

"Yes, that's one of our precautions. No, I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll take you around without the brand, first, and show you what an outsider would see—for example, a University official, or an investigator from the Department of Sacred Sciences—if he arrived here without warning."

Migliozzius shrugged helplessly.

Arthur stared at the clock. It was humming with a low, steady note. The minute hand crawled smoothly past one division and started toward the next.

"It clicked before," he said.

"And?"

"Wait a minute," said Arthur, trying to think. It had hap-pened once before, he realized. In the lobby—it had clicked when they first entered, and then he had heard it humming. But what did that have to do with the substance they had put on his face and hands?

"Why wouldn't I let you talk on the street?" Marks suggested.

A short-tempered reply occurred to Arthur. Then, belatedly, he remembered what Laudermilk had told him last night about the College. "Oh," he said.

"M-hm?"

"There are people here who aren't going to stay—they're not Immunes."

"Right," said the clerk. "And?"

Arthur looked at the backs of his hands. Where the ink was drying, there was nothing at all, not even a trace of film. He sniffed at it. Nothing.

But somebody had to be able to tell it was there—And then it was so simple. Sacred light: the Store used it for certain effects. Arthur had been detailed more than once to watch through tinted goggles while the customers played Hide-the--Credit, at holiday services. The ordinary lights would be turned out, but Arthur could see the Credit (a white plastic C) being passed from hand to hand. Afterward he would guide the other JAS who went to point out the customer who had it. It was simple when you knew, but it always had a good effect on the Consumers.

"Well?" said the clerk's voice.

Arthur came to with a start; he had been happily wondering about the strength of the light source, and the density of the tint in the goggles, that would be needed to make the ink show up plainly to the watcher, but be invisible to others.

"The only thing I can't figure out," he said, looking around, "is where you hide the projector, or the lookout man."

Marks' eyes flickered. "You know enough," he said, and took Arthur's arm. "Come on."

Arthur followed him thoughtfully. After a moment he said, "Suppose I figured out why the name on my card isn't the one I gave?"

"You could tell me about it."

"Barbour is a code word. It means I can't use my own name, so I get one off the top of a list you have ready."

The redhead grunted.

"Is that right?"

"Partly. *What's your name*?"

"Uh, Sebastian Ridler."

"Mm." They walked to the desk; the same three people were still there.

The girl leaned forward and spoke earnestly to Arthur, gesturing with a pen. "Now you understand, don't you. No talking at all on the street; talking indoors only when you hear that clock hum. If you hear it tick, or see the hand jump—what do you do?"

"I don't talk," said Arthur.

"All right. Now if anyone talks to you when you're not sup-posed to talk, no matter who it is, you make this sign to show your lips are zipped." She drew two fingers across her mouth. "If anybody asks you anything about yourself except your name—where you came from, parents' names, anything like that—you reply, 'Nowhere,' or 'No one,' or 'Nothing.' Under-stand? All this is in the rules for freshmen—you'll be allowed to study them later. You'll find it'll pay you to learn the rules and obey them. We use the demerit system here; freshmen work off their demerits at the rate of one hour each in personal service to upperclassmen." She nodded to Marks. "Take him over to B dorm, will you, Wes?"

The street was suddenly full of young people; they all seemed to be coming from one direction.

"Refectory," said Marks. "You can probably get something, if you're hungry?"

"No, thanks."

Marks nodded indifferently and led him off into the crowd. Arthur watched all the faces, looking for something, he didn't know quite what. The faces left him no wiser than he had been before. Looking at three or four of them at a time, he half-saw the elusive thing he was after; but as soon as he stared at it directly, it was gone.

They moved in a steady murmur of talk. Trying to sort them out, Arthur found that students in gray gowns were making most of the noise; those in mustard yellow spoke less, those in black hardly at all; those in brown robes, like the one he'd been given, were silent. Evidently it was only the freshmen who weren't allowed to talk on street.

The gray ones must be sophomores, making the most of a new privilege; that would make the yellows juniors, and the blacks seniors.

Marks turned off at the nearest entrance of the long frame building. Inside, two sweating freshmen were carrying a table down a corridor choked with bedding, piled valises, empty cartons and other freshmen. Somewhere out of sight two male voices bellowed an incomprehensible question and answer.

The doorways, all open, were marked with numbered cards. As they passed, Arthur caught fragmentary glimpses of un-made beds, brown backs, squares of windowpane. The same old-fashioned clock was everywhere. Arthur wondered how you could be expected to hear it in this uproar—and then realized suddenly that he could; faint as it was, the click was needle-sharp.

They turned a corner and passed a closed door over which a sign read: WOMEN'S. At the end of the hallway, where it turned again, a yellow-robed young man was sitting crowded against the wall behind a tiny desk, with a ledger open before him.

"Room for one more?" Marks asked him.

He grunted and stared at Arthur. "Name?" He pOised a _pencil over the ledger.

Arthur opened his mouth, heard a tiny click barely in time, and shut it again. He drew two fingers across his lips as he had been taught.

The junior smiled and looked at Marks.

"Sebastian Ridler. Twenty-one. Oshkosh."

The junior wrote it down. "Demerits?"

"Eight," said Marks. Arthur's jaw fell open. "Two each for talking twice on street," Marks continued, "three for addressing an upperclassman without being addressed, and one—" he looked at Arthur—"for that 'uh' when I asked you your name." He grinned, not unpleasantly, and walked away.

The man behind the desk looked at a chart, wrote some-thing on it, then took a booklet from the top of a stack and handed it to Arthur. "Room twelve. That way."

Arthur found the room and went in. There were two study tables, a bookrack, two beds, one unmade, and a quantity of luggage. He sat down grimly on the unmade bed and opened his booklet. There were twelve closely-printed pages of *Rules For Freshmen*, each with its penalty. "Freshmen will attend all scheduled classes and activities. Freshmen will be on time for all classes and activities .... When addressed by a faculty member or upperclassman, the freshman will begin his reply with the word 'Sir' or 'Ma'am.'" There was one Marks could have wigged him for, he realized. He tried to remember how many times he had spoken to an upperclassman between here and the gate, but lost count—probably at least twenty. A little of his rancor toward the junior began to fade.

He was plowing through the list for a second time when someone came into the room. He looked up.

"I guess we're roommates," said a pink-faced youngster. "My line's Flynn, what's yours?"

The clock over the door was humming. "Ridler," said Ar-thur, taking the other's hand. "How does it go?"

"Just horrible," said Flynn, and fell onto the other bed. "I've been running all forenoon. I think they've forgotten about me, now, though. Where you from?"

"Nowhere."

"Oh, fish, I forgot." Flynn groaned half-heartedly. "Those rules are pretty scatty, a'n't they? I think that's why I got so much trouble—I could remember them, but they don't seem to make any *sense*." He groaned twice more, trying out different pitches and volumes. "Well, they don't say you can't *tell* people things, isn't that right? I'm from Deer Park, up in northern Seven. My father's an Executive. Class Two. He runs the power station up there, you know, on Lake Kusko. He's awfully in-telligent, but I'm not. My mother and sister aren't either, but I'm the worst one. How many demerits you got?"

"Eight."

Flynn whistled. "Eight! I got twenty-three, not counting what I worked off last night and this morning." He sighed. "I wish to church I was back in Seven."

"You're sorry you came?"

"Oh, fish, yes. I never wanted to; I knew it was no good. I'm so dim, they had to keep me home ever since I was seven. See, I talk a lot, and when I get excited, I forget to watch what I'm doing. I didn't mind though. I'd quicker be in Deer Park than anywhere." He rolled over on one elbow. "We got five hundred acres, mostly woodland, with a wall around it. My mother's a Williams—she got it from her family. Well, there just isn't any-place like it. There's bass and trout in the lake, and rabbits, and woodchucks and squirrels—and deer, but we don't hunt them; they're tame."

Arthur was startled. "You hunt?"

"Well, church! Don't you? What did you say your line was?"

"Ridler. I'm—I was a Consumer before I went into the Store."

"Oh. That accounts for it, I guess. I never met any Con-sumers before. We don't even keep any servants up at Deer Park—on account of me. Just the family, and my tutor, and a bunch of Immune kids that come up every summer." He shook his head. "Wish to church I was back there. I told my father it was no good, but he's funny. He keeps saying I can do it too if I just put my mind to it. My uncle Sig tried to argue with him, too, but he just got mad."

He groaned again and sat up. "I'm sore all over. I never did any furniture moving before."

"Is that what you do, to work off the demerits?"

"You do anything they say. Mostly furniture, though. All the juniors moving into the seniors' caves, and that uses up a lot of demerits."

"Who keeps track?"

"You do. But if you tell a lie—landslides!" He looked de-spondent. "Man came up to me this forenoon

and said, ‘How many demerits, freshman?’ I had sixteen, but I thought I’d taper off, so I said two. I guess he didn’t believe me. He mar-ched me over to the proctor, and boom! Ten more demerits.”

Arthur watched him, between laughter and pity. “Well if you flunk, they’ll send you back home. That’s what you want, isn’t it?”

“Uh-uh.” Flynn shook his head. “My father said not. He said it was sink or swim. I expect they’ll make a janitor out of me, or something—” He glanced in Arthur’s direction and looked momentarily startled. “Fish, I forgot to tell you—you better make up your bed. That’s one of the rules—”

Arthur jumped. From the book he held a line leaped to his eyes: “Freshmen’s bunks will be neatly made up between 700 and lights out.”

“Well, where do you go to get the bedding?”

Before Flynn could reply, somebody in yellow passed the doorway, backtracked and entered. Flynn made a strangled sound and tried to hide, then thought better of it and stood up, awkwardly erect.

Arthur got to his feet. (“Freshmen will stand respectfully in the presence of faculty members or upperclassmen until per-mitted to sit.”)

“How many demerits, freshmen?”

“Sir, twenty-three.”

“Sir, eight.”

The junior nodded to Arthur. “Nine. Unmade bunk. All right, both of you come along.”

# Chapter 10. Click

The young man on the podium wore a black robe with a thread of scarlet around the cowl. He waited calmly until the last cough and shuffle of feet had died away, and the only sound was the steady hum of the clock behind him.

‘Welcome to the College of Sacred Sciences of Three Mer-cantile University,” he said, and paused.

Arthur leaned forward intently, and almost forgot to listen to the next words. Now he could see the thing that had been eluding him all day: it was plain in the man’s bearing as he stood there, head back, easily erect. He stood—there was no other way of putting it—as if there were no weight on his shoulders.

“I’m going to explain to you how the College operates, and what will be expected of you during your stay here. The first and most important thing is this: The College, as a General Products institution, has traditions, conventions and courses of study—all of which are followed. You are actually going to learn everything you are supposed to learn as candidates for the degree of Bachelor of Sacred Sciences: but you’ll learn it in about one twentieth the time it is supposed to take. During the rest of your time, in class and out, you’ll be studying a lot of other things, none of which is on the Gepro curriculum.

“Therefore: In every aboveground class you will be as-signed what we call a click routine. I will now assign the click routine for this class. Open the books you were given to page two.” He waited until the rustle was over. “During the remain-der of this class you will keep those books open on your desks and turn one page every two minutes. If at any time you hear a click from up there, you will immediately begin reading aloud from the top of the right-hand page to which you are turned. Now: Assume that four minutes have passed.”

The clock's hum stopped. Arthur hastily thumbed over two pages, and hesitantly began to read aloud: "What is the nature of the substances used in the Sacred Machines? They are of nature, for they come from the earth." A ragged chorus swelled up, no two voices together; some of the students near Arthur seemed to be reading something else entirely. "What is the nature of the parts used in the Sacred Machines? They are of man, for man fashioned them." The chorus was a trifle less ragged; the competing voices seemed to have dropped out.

"What is the nature of the Sacred Machines? They are of the Infinite, for neither nature nor man produced them, but they were revealed to Kusko in a dream."

The clock was humming again. Arthur stopped reading; a few voices continued for a moment, then trailed away in confusion.

"All right," said the lecturer. "Turn back to page two. Now assume that two minutes have passed."

*Click*. "What is the nature of nature? The nature of nature is neither good nor evil. What is the nature of man? The nature of man is evil. What is the nature of the Infinite? The nature of the Infinite is good." This time it was better. When the clock hummed again, all the voices stopped.

"All right. That was the only drill in click routine you are going to have. Remember—one page every two minutes, start-ing now. And remember this: from now on, whenever the clock clicks, it will *not* be a drill, it will mean that a Normal is about to enter the room." He looked them over sardonically. "When that happens, get it right."

Almost without a pause, he settled himself behind the lectern and began again, "Some of you will find this hard to believe. But nothing you have been or will be asked to do here is with-out purpose. The College has been organized with these ends in mind: to train you in the skills you need to survive; to train you to be useful to yourselves and your group; and to teach you to think. We expect you to memorize the Gepro texts and forget them except when they're needed; nothing else is taught here by that method. You have already been tested, very thoroughly ..."

That was certainly true, Arthur reflected. After lunch, sore-armed from furniture moving and from half a dozen injections, he and Flynn, along with about fifteen other freshmen, had found themselves being herded down a corridor into a sudden pitch darkness. He had shuffled forward slowly with the group until a hand seized his elbow and a low voice said, "Step down" and down he had gone, twenty steps in darkness, three in light, into the windowless rooms where the tests were given: printed questionnaires, one after another, each one harder than the last. Pictures to look at and make up stories about; machines, like simplified versions of the Sacred Machines—a cap that fitted over your head, and dials that jumped and quivered. Quiet, seemingly aimless talks with men whose eyes never left your face.

That was all clear, except for the machines and the pictures, and he thought he could guess at the purpose of those. But now he was beginning to wonder about something that had hap-pened earlier.

Arthur, and Flynn, and a handful of others had been led into a robing room and handed small penciled scraps of paper. "All the stuff in these closets," the junior explained, "has to be moved. Do it according to the numbers. For instance, if it says '23-51,' you take all the stuff out of number 23 closet and put it in number 51. Move the name cards, too. And I want to see it done when I get back."

Arthur's paper had five rows of figures on it, with three pairs of digits to each—fifteen operations. But the same numbers kept recurring; there were, he discovered, only five closets in-volved. Here at the top, for instance, he was supposed to move the contents of number 60 into number 15, and 15 into 28. And then on the next line, there was 44 going into 15, turning out what he had just put in. For once Flynn was right; this didn't make sense.

He glanced up. Some of the freshmen were doggedly empty-ing out closets and carrying armloads of clothing across the room; others were still studying the lists

He tapped his nails thoughtfully on the desk top, half aware of the lecturer's voice. It had been a test, of course; but who had passed it? Those who followed orders exactly, even though it meant three times as much work as was needed? Or had Flynn passed?

Flynn had come by with a name card in his hand. "Just move the cards," he had whispered to Arthur. "A fellow showed me—it's all exactly the same stuff, in every one of those closets. How can they tell the difference?"

—Or those like himself, who had traced the movement of each number through the list, and made the transfer in five operations instead of fifteen?

Somehow it had never occurred to him before that the Col-lege might not accept him. They might make "a janitor or something" out of him, like Flynn ... I'll die first! Arthur thought; and wondered why the meaningless old catchphrase sent a sudden chill up his spine.

A rustle of plastic warned him, and he thumbed over two pages. A moment later, he was aware that the clock's hum had stopped. Tingling, he read from the page under his hand, join-ing the chorus that swelled up around him.

Between sections, happening to glance up, he saw a marvel: The lecturer was standing exactly as before, but the whole look of him had changed. His shoulders, perhaps, were not quite so straight; there might have been the smallest hint of an acid smile at the corners of his mouth. It was no single thing that you could point to or measure; but you would know the man anywhere for an angel-ridden petty tyrant.

The class droned away at its lesson. After about a minute Arthur heard the door open, and, peering cautiously down into the aisle, saw two men enter. One of them was Laudermilk. The other, tall and dark, was wrapped to the chin in a traveling cloak. They watched for a moment in silence, then turned away, and the door closed behind them.

Ten minutes later, without warning, they were back again. The clock hummed; the lecturer took no notice of them. They stood there, watching and listening, until he said, "Class dis-missed," and the students began to move down toward the floor of the theater. Then, just before Arthur lost sight of them, the stranger said something in a: high-pitched voice. It sounded like, "Meerrum est!"

Now, what was the meaning of that?

Arthur finished the day bursting with matters he wanted to discuss with Flynn. If not the ideal source of information, the Sevener was at least the handiest one; he had lived all his life among Immunes, soaking up knowledge as casually as a sponge.

But when he returned to room 12, Flynn was not there. Neither was any of his luggage. There was nothing in the room to show that he had ever existed.

Late that night, propped up in bed with three pillows behind his narrow old back, Francis Laudermilk laid an ancient printed book aside with care and picked up another, almost equally fragile, the cover thumbed glossy and the pages dull. He opened it and read the last minuscule entry, written in a cipher which had grown as legible to him as clear English. He took a pen from the bedstand and began to write, rapidly

and firmly.

10413. G forwarded to me some odd pages rescued from the ruins of a public library in Regina. I always like to read these, even though they sometimes frustrate me almost intolerably; so much of the world's literature is lost to us that every scrap becomes precious. These are paper pages, burnt at the edges, dating, G thinks, from about 1940 old-style; but I think, for internal evidence, the first publication must have been much earlier. The headings on one side read, "The Revolutionist's Handbook," and on the other, "Man and Superman"; G can-not find either title in any bibliography we possess. The con-tents are short sayings or aphorisms, grouped under titles such as "Democracy,"

"Imperialism,"

"Education." They will con-found R and 0, who think we are the first sane political thinkers in the world. Some are incomprehensible and others seem to be rather shallow plays on words, but a few are gems. As this, from "Democracy"; "Government presents only one problem: the discovery of a trustworthy anthropometric" method." And these, from "Education": "The best brought-up children are those who have seen their parents as they are. Hypocrisy is not the parent's first duty." And: "The vilest abortionist is he who attempts to mold a child's character." What a delightful discovery! If we only knew the author's name!

10414. The conviction that we are all put here to work out a series of complex ethical problems, the rules of which are never stated. An inner thing, stronger now than ever; I am less and less able to believe that it has anything to do with childhood conditioning. I find the same note everywhere; it's the one essential; you can feel it under the most diverse and hardened patinas of dogma and disbelief. Man, the problem-solving animal: but at bottom all the problems are moral.

10415. A fine lot this year. One gave me the third worst scare of my life: B, a proxy child—the last of them I hope, but a promising specimen. It really seems to me that the race is al-ready showing unmistakable improvement; if I am right, we must make preparations for an unusually large senior class four years from now. An exhausting session about this with M in the afternoon. I do hate lying; it brings out all the worst in me. Reasonably sure he swallowed my tale about the secret island where we send our failures; I would have told him suspended animation, as more romantic and harder to refute, but then the Italian Immunes would have wanted the process. The island was better. Almost anything would have done, if I read M correctly; the Ital Ims must be the worst kind of patriots and absolute-worshipers; if they survive, they will be-gin assassinating their own people after they've taken power, too late, with senseless brutality, and for the wrong reasons. Note: Latin classes for promising students of Mediterranean descent *immediately*. What a sickness there has been in the world, and how hard it is to weed it out! Inverts, perverts, fog-heads: the universe is what I say it is if you look at it sideways. Kill the infidel, the capitalist, the Jew, the communist, the Negro, the fascist, the white man, the royalist, the goy; but never kill the moron or the maniac until he has had a chance to breed. I remember another maxim from my Publilius Syrus. "The end justifies the means." Not if the end is foolish or irra-tional, or the means grossly inappropriate, and until now they always have been. I should have liked to tell him the truth. I would have said, Can any society be sane and wise if its citi-zens are neither? If we spend less ingenuity on breeding men than on breeding garden vegetables, do we deserve anything but what we have always got?

# Chapter 11. Revolted To See You

On Mondays Arthur's schedule ran:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 900 | Sacred Physics I | Physics I (UG) |
| 1000 | Mercantile Philosophy I | Mnemonics (UG) |
| 1100 | Gym | Gym |
| 1300 | Mercantile History I | Modern History I |
| 1400 | Sacred Mathematics I | Algebra I |
| 1500 | Consumer Psychology I | Psychology I |

The right-hand side of the schedule was nowhere written down but had to be remembered; the left-hand side existed only on paper, but he was expected to memorize its lessons out-side class and recite them on demand. (Thank the Infinite for Mnemonics!)

Physics and Mnemonics were underground: the College, Arthur now realized, had at least twice as large an enrollment as the charter called for, and nearly all the important events in College life went on down in those concealed, soundproof chambers. Courses that required unorthodox equipment were (UG); so were all classes which the restricted Gepro curricu-lum for females made it awkward to hold aboveground. So were Nudity (Wednesday), Sacrilege I (Thursday), and Sexual Hygiene (Friday).

Hundreds of students slept down there, too, in underground dormitories and "caves." The buried portion of the College had its own generating plant, its own air system, its own store-rooms, exercise rooms, common rooms, offices. There were always enough people aboveground to fill the classrooms and counterfeit the normal routine of an orthodox Gepro school; but the real College was down below.

After dinner on his fourth Monday, Arthur hurried across the court to the dormitory, through the hidden entrance and down the stair. His time was now theoretically his own until lights-out and the earphones that droned information into him while he slept. In practice, he had discovered, he had to keep running.

Everything was different belowstairs. The foolishly humiliat-ing rules for freshmen were relaxed; a senior was just another student and you could call him by his first name if you hap-pened to know it; even to the faculty you were expected to be polite but not obsequious. Everything was different, except the demerit system.

Every demerit you earned on the surface had to be paid off, now that the juniors had had their furniture moved three times over, in labor down below. There were demerits for untidy rooms, demerits for untidy thinking. Time spent scrubbing floors or oiling machinery was time you couldn't spend boning for the next day's classes, and if you were badly prepared—more demerits.

Freshmen who got thoroughly trapped in this vicious cycle, Arthur noticed, had a way of dropping out of sight. He didn't allow himself to think about it much, but when he did, it scared him. So he ran.

At the library entrance he passed Rod Kimbrough talking to a pretty sophomore. Kimbrough had replaced the vanished Flynn as his roommate; like Flynn, he came from an Execu-tive-class Immune family. The resemblance stopped there. Flynn, if he had lasted that long, would undoubtedly have found himself at the bottom of the class. Kimbrough was near the top, several ranks above Arthur.

He glanced up and waved casually. "See you at the club?"

Arthur nodded and kept going, checking off his current assignments in his mind. Bio tomorrow

morning—thixotropy. Physics lab—stress photography. History, ancient literature, psych—a chapter each. Two hours' duty swabbing corridors tonight, or whatever else the duty monitor had in ambush for him. Crash Day drill, likely as not. And the club.

The social clubs were entirely voluntary, and in fact had stiff entrance requirements: but one hour of faultless activity in them would remit you three hours of demerit time. Six of them were open to freshmen—Gepro, Umerc, Conind, Xl, X2 and X3. Kimbrough was a member of all six, and hadn't done an hour's duty since his first week in College.

Arthur was doing well in the Gepro Club, a little less well in Umerc, and passably in Conind, but it wasn't enough; with the demerits for blunders in Club, he was hardly more than breaking even. He had applied for X1 and passed the exam; his initiation was tonight.

He ducked into the cubbyhole he occupied this month with Kimbrough, showered and put on a clean jumper, brushed his hair, and with a glance at the clock, was off again.

X1 met in a suite of rooms at the end of L corridor. Arthur found a closet marked with his name in the ante-room and changed into tight blue knickers, a close-fitting tunic with floppy sleeves, and a torn, dirty rag that covered both and hung down to his ankles. A watch, wallet and other articles went into his pockets. He ran off the instruction booklet in his head to make sure it was all there, hunched his shoulders, and opened the door.

The club mistress, a square-built girl in an orange wig, came forward to meet him. "Revolted to see you," she said, and spat at his feet. Arthur breathed a little easier; that meant this was a social evening, and the ceremonies would be simple. He re-membered to spit back, and the mistress led him toward the center of the wide room, holding her nose.

The other members retched courteously as they passed. "This is Picknose," said the mistress, giving him the name which would be his for the remainder of the meeting. "He is of no worth, and may die at any moment; please do not trouble yourselves about him. Picknose, I counsel you to avoid Sir Filth—" a big, serious sophomore whom Arthur had seen around the campus—"Lady Slime—" a tall brunette—"Sir Frogstool—Sir Pustule—Lady Rot—Parson Running-sore—Squire Stench—Miss Cesspool and her mother, Dame Rumpsmear—"

Arthur acknowledged all the introductions by coughing or hawking, as the case required, and got safely seated beside two orange-wigged sophomore girls called Dame Gallstones and Lady Moldy. Kimbrough was on the other side of the room, talking earnestly to the same girl Arthur had seen him with earlier.

"Your health is failing, I trust?" inquired Dame Gallstones.

"I may not last the evening," Arthur told her, improvising. "I would not have presumed to come, but—"

"Healthy young pig!" said Gallstones indignantly, and slapped him with an orange disc that clung to his rags. That meant one demerit. "Begin again!"

He had been boasting, Arthur realized too late; that kind of thing was politeness only if you said it about somebody else. "Uh, my health is of an insipid sameness." He thought he saw Lady Moldy reaching for another orange patch, and hastily added, "It's disgusting of you to ask."

Lady Moldy relaxed. "And your family—if any of them are left standing?"

Could you boast about your family? The relevant section of the manual stubbornly refused to come clear. "My uncle has the pip and my sister's teeth are falling out—otherwise we are all well."

*Slap*. Another patch. Two demerits—and his handicap for the hour was five. "I mean to say, we are all in average health."

After that it went a little better. "What do you do, Pick-nose?"

The booklet was plain on that point. "I play tennis, and ride, and, uh, go to dances."

They made clucking sounds. "But don't you ever get time for amusement?"

"Oh, yes. Ten hours a day, I clean sewers."

"How *nice!*"

He got through the interrogation without another demerit, and was free to listen while Dame Gallstones, Lady Moldy, Sir Squathard and Squire Stench struck up a three-quarters in-comprehensible conversation, full of places and things that weren't in the booklet. They included him politely, every now and then, but as a rule all he had to do was say, "Yes, indeed," or cough, or retch.

Then the mistress and her helpers came around with revile-ments—little crisp cakes, dyed black so as to look burnt, and glasses of some sweet beverage, that tasted perfectly good if you could ignore the fact that it was greenish-black and scummed on top. Arthur ate and drank with the rest, groaning and spitting; then the plates were broken, the members moved from one divan to another, and conversation began again.

Kimbrough appeared from somewhere and sat down beside him.

"What time is it, Picknose?"

Arthur was wondering himself; he glanced automatically toward the wall clock, but it was draped; you could hear its steady hum but not see it. Remembering, he pulled out his watch. "Seventeen twenty."

He put the watch away, then caught his breath as he remem-bered—not quickly enough: "... Any personal possession displayed must be destroyed or defaced." The mistress and her deputies were everywhere; one of them leaned over and slapped a patch on him.

Furious, Arthur pulled the watch out again, dropped it and stamped on it, muttering, "Lousy watch! wormy watch! creti-nous watch! germy watch!" until the thin shell bent, the crystal popped out, the hands flew off and the works were mashed into a metal pancake. Kimbrough was moving away again. Arthur sent a brooding look after him, but Kimbrough only grinned behind his hand.

It wasn't his evening. Later, while Parson Runningsore was chanting ("For all our curses, All-Lowest, we thank Thee; lift not Thy maleficent rump from us; let Thy blackness enfold our steps ...."), he happened to glance up and see Kimbrough and his girl stealing away, unobserved by the mistress, into one of the private rooms. Jealousy tangled his tongue and be retched when everyone else was spitting. Spat! Another demerit.

He left the chamber with four orange patches on his rags. Four demerits out of five: that meant he had spent an hour to get thirty-six minutes' remission of duty.

It could have been worse. But why did Kimbrough always have to do better?

"My dear Francis!" said Migliozzius effusively, taking both his hands. "I am delighted to see you back.

Was your trip hard? You look tired, let us sit down."

"No, no," Laudermilk said, "you're very good. I'm not in the least tired. It distressed me to leave you, Ezius, but you understand, it was necessary."

"Of course, of course! I understand perfectly, you are too kind, you must not apologize. Your young man, Mr. Hovey, has been most obliging, most helpful, in your absence."

Laudermilk frowned. "Hovey? My dear Ezius, hasn't Dean Flint been showing you around?"

"Ah, no. He explained to me, he is unusually pressed during this month. But Mr. Hovey is a very nice young man."

"*Ita*, I know him, but after all he's not even a member of the faculty, only a student. Really, Ezius, I'm annoyed. I distinctly told Flint to take care of you while I was gone."

Migliozzius looked contrite. "Please, Francis, in these internal matters you must of course do as you think good, but it is far-thest from my wish that Dean Flint should have trouble on my account."

"Of course, Ezius. We'll say no more about it. But at any rate, I'm sure it was very patient of you to put up with Mr. Hovey—there must have been many questions that he couldn't answer to your satisfaction?"

"Yes," said Migliozzius intensely, forgetting Mr. Hovey at once. "One thing puzzles me most extremely, Francis. Here have I been studying your College for nearly a month, and still I have not discovered what you teach!"

"What we teach?" said Laudermilk, wrinkling his forehead. "Your philosophy—what you believe!"

Laudermilk tut-tutted. "Really, Ezius, you ask me not to take this seriously, but it gets worse and worse. Didn't young Hovey show you around to the philosophy seminars?"

Migliozzius involuntarily made a face. "The seminars and discussion groups, yes—those little men and their cups of tea, all saying different things—some of them most vile; I cannot understand why you permit—" He hauled himself up short. "But pardon me, perhaps I have not understood—Do you mean that these are *all?"*

Laudermilk nodded.

"But surely," said Migliozzius, "forgive me, there must be some central point of view, some official—"

"Oh, no," Laudermilk said quickly. "I see now what you are getting at, Ezius. No, I'm afraid you'll think us very primitive, but there are so many theories, so many ways of looking at ethics, the human condition—we have never felt able to say that one is right, all the others wrong. Perhaps none of those we know is right. Unless we can be sure, we feel it would be a very grave error—"

"Very good, very prudent," Migliozzius muttered. "But still, to countenance that Professor Bamburger with his—"

"In confidence," said Laudermilk honestly, "I agree with you. But you see our problem. When the one true system comes along, presumably it will drive out all error: until then, we can only give everything a fair trial .... Which reminds me; I don't wish to pry, Ezius, but perhaps you Italian Im-munes have some beliefs which are not as yet taught here—?"

"Ah, yes," said Migliozzius with a half-doubtful look. "I have not mentioned this heretofore—not out of

reluctance, I assure you, but thinking, perhaps, you would not like—"

"I understand. We all have to be careful at times. But I wonder, Ezius, if you would feel able to conduct a little semi-nar—or a series of informal gatherings?"

"You would permit?"

"My dear Ezius, we should be honored. Who knows, this flay be the true system for which we've been waiting!"

Migliozzius' expression grew intense and confidential. "It is," he said.

10441. An experiment I haven't the courage to perform. Officiating at the Midsummer Sales or some event of equal gravity, I should like to stand on the platform in full view of the customers and stick out my tongue at the Trademark. Am half convinced that no one would dare believe his eyes, and that if anyone did, the rest would take him for a demon, not me. This curious easy talent of man's for deluding himself (and the long unnatural strain of learning to see what one looks at). I don't suppose you could slice it out of the brain without cutting the creative imagination away too. The unseen, un-heard, unfelt and altogether preposterous more fiercely fought for, every time, than the visible, audible, tangible, sensible. One is constantly tempted to give the young ones something to Believe In; almost anything would do. But that gift is always wrapped with a chain.

10442. Still absolutely no confirmation of the illicit analogue rumors. They are oddly persistent. It is perhaps too easy to dismiss them as wish-fantasies; but I ask myself how the information could have leaked in the first instance if they are true. Must remember to suggest we trace back, as far as prac-ticable, movements and occupations of all cases of "posses-sion" in the upper classes during the last year.

10443. I have put off writing this. The disappearance of AS is explained. We were apprehensive that she had been taken by the Umerc Guard at the time of my visit to Darien; but her body was found, early yesterday morning, in a wrecked copter in the Waltham Preserve north of Bethlehem. Apparently she was attempting to reach Greenfield. It was of course impossible for us to claim the body. H deeply distressed, appears too calm; I am concerned about him.

10444. M spent three hours explaining the Ital Ims' world-view to me tonight. My problem now is to get him to talk about anything else. His suspicions are I think now wholly dis-armed; a society that has no dogma of its own, and cheerfully lets him push his, can't possibly be dangerous. Unfortunate about Italy: they had the same opportunity as we, but this prophet of theirs, Fabrizius, turned up at exactly the wrong moment and now they are all Naturists. These turning points are rare and delicate. It's no wonder that there had never been a rational society in the world before, the wonder will be if we bring it off. Ital Im philosophy quite typical and I think very dangerous. Christianity: All men are equal because God cre-ated them all. Communism: All men are equal because all have an equal share in the work of the world. Naturism: All men are equal because they are all specimens of the same func-tional organism. A spiral nearer the truth, always with the near eye shut. Such an easy thing to begin, so grindingly hard to stop. In the country of the purblind, the two-eyed man must squint .... M starts his indoctrination meetings tomorrow; no doubt he feels that in the time he has left he can make at least one or two converts. Unhappily, he is probably right.

Kimbrough stood before the mirror, patting depilatory cream onto the blue stubble of his cheeks; at 18,

he had to depilate morning and evening. With a book open on his lap, Arthur sat watching him in a mood that sometimes came over him, a sort of vague puzzlement. He envied and admired Kimbrough; it was impossible not to want to like him as well, but somehow he never could.

"Date tonight?" he asked.

Kimbrough turned, wiping a tissue along his underjaw. The white coverall he wore was an issue jumper, but where Arthur's hung wrinkled and sagging like the utilitarian garment it was, Kimbrough's looked like a tailored uniform. "No, not tonight." He grinned. "How about you? Or have you passed your finals with Mother Jones yet?"

Arthur twitched with a half-angry annoyance. "Mother" Jones was a handsome woman in her forties, one of several staff members—of both sexes—who conducted an informal course popularly known as "Mattress I." Arthur had fallen briefly in love with her and had been quietly, efficiently and painlessly cured; his respect for her had only increased when he realized that the same thing undoubtedly happened to at least half her students. "I told you about Sally—" he began.

"Oh, sure, the little blonde freshman, I forgot."

"—But she's got ten hours to work off this week. I'm not going anywhere."

Kimbrough sat down and lighted a cigarette. "No duty, yourself? That's right, you're doing better in the clubs these days. Why not come along with me, then?"

"Where to?"

"Migli. Visiting prof—open house every night down in G."

"Tea and philosophy?"

Kimbrough frowned slightly and nodded.

"No, thanks," said Arthur.

Kimbrough looked irritated. "Without even asking what it's about? That attitude won't get you far, Ridler."

"I've already tried two of those things. Vogt and Darbedat. I don't even like tea."

"Don't be flippant; you don't know what you're talking about. You didn't like Vogt or Darbedat. All right, why not?"

"Mainly because they're both so sure of themselves. And all the regulars at those meetings are the same. Ask a question, or even quote one of them to the other one, and they look at you with a pitying smile and talk gibberish. But they can't both be right."

Kimbrough sighed. "Well, your instincts are good, anyway, even if you've got all the wrong reasons. Now listen. Have you ever given any thought to what's going to happen to you when you graduate from here?"

"Some," said Arthur. "I can't see us all being turned into Deacons and D. S.'s; they don't need that many."

Kimbrough snorted. "You'll be lucky to make deacon, the way you're going. What else would you want to be?"

"Something useful. As far as I can make out, the deacons are just going to sit around on their prats until we take over—"

"Which could be a generation from now, or two. All right—you aren't hopeless. You want to be an Agent."

"What's—"

"I'm *telling* you. There are two kinds of Immunes. One kind sits around waiting. The other kind does all the work and takes all the risks—and has all the fun. Those are the Agents. There happens to be three of them in my family at the moment, so I know what I'm talking about. It's the only thing to be: but you have to work for it, Ridler. What do you think the social clubs are for?"

"To train us to work in Conind and Umerc, I'd suppose. But what about the experimentals?"

"Check. And what about Migli tonight? Tell me this, Ridler, who runs the Immunes? Who's going to run the continent if the changeover does happen in our lifetimes? The Agents. Now you can figure this out for yourself. Somewhere among all these different cultural and political systems there's the one we're actually going to adopt—the best one, the right one. So: who do they want for the inner circle when the time comes to administer that program? People who choose it voluntarily, Ridler, *and* show their ability in it—speak up, get themselves noticed."

"You think Migli is the one?" Arthur asked after a moment. Kimbrough's lips dragged hard on the cigarette. He flipped it away. "I don't think. I know," he said.

10462. P brought me this shortly after I returned to the Col-lege this morning; it is by FJ, a senior in his pout phil semi-nar: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: That every human is unique. That each has needs that can be better satis-fied, or only satisfied, under a government of law, and others which cannot be satisfied under a government of law without destroying it; and that such government exists to promote the satisfaction of the first and restrain the satisfaction of the second. That in forming themselves into societies governed by law, humans inhibit the operation of natural selection and must therefore practice artificial selection or degenerate and perish. That the existence of supernatural entities, absolute moral principles and 'natural' rights is unproven; and that a government which cannot stand without them will not stand." This is almost too good; I accused P of indoctrinating his students; he took me half seriously and denied it with vigor. The rest of J's argument is somewhat muddy, but for succinct-ness I think this opening statement of his could hardly be im-proved upon. P delighted; made sure I had noticed the echo of the American Declaration, which J must have unearthed from the archives on his own initiative. We have pledged ourselves not to object if our heirs come rationally to conclusions which differ from ours; all the same, each time a student like J reaches this stage, it is as if the world had passed another crisis.

10463. By a process of elimination we now think it im-probable that an illicit analogue program of the necessary scale can have been mounted anywhere in Gepro territory. That leaves only some five million square miles to be investigated—Conind, Umerc, Canalim, Reinosud—and, of course, our continuing enigma, the Blank. It's in the highest degree un-fortunate that we should have to spend so much effort on what is almost certainly a wild-goose chase, but if this danger actually exists, we alone have any chance of preventing it.

10464. Daydreaming again this afternoon, an indulgence I allow myself too often. I was in one of their cities this time, quite a startling place, not like anything I'd seen before at all—a hundred fifty, two hundred years ahead, I suppose; myself safely buried and forgotten, all the nasty intermediate years done with. Enjoying myself tremendously until it struck me what the difference was—all the beauty was

functional, hy-gienic, orthopsychiatric; not a particle of expressive, com-municative beauty, and I had a sudden conviction that my great-great-&c. grandchildren didn't even know the word. That spoiled it. It's a thing I don't like to think of very often; I haven't the emotional equipment any more to adjust to it, but of course it's inevitable. If we succeed, we shall have destroyed art along with the anxiety joke: art is a product of culture, and culture is the enemy of civilization. The cultured man sees what he has been taught to see, or, within limits, what he chooses to see; the civilized man sees what he looks at.

10465. Dozed just now and fell to dreaming of the Blank. Unpleasant. The place has an obsessive quality, not rational—whatever it is in that little pocket west of the Cascades has never done us any harm, except to make sure (how?) that no one who enters it or even flies over it ever comes out again—but being completely unknown, it equates with all the fear-symbols of the Unknown. Stern eyes: lightnings.

10466. M's time is up tomorrow; he returns reluctantly to Fabital, leaving behind one pseudoconvert, who will carry on the discussion group since it has proved so effective—and five real ones. I get an occasional flash of the most appalling anguish of sorrow and guilt when I think of them; no help for it; the only anodyne for that is to cease to be human.

Aching and aglow from his judo class, Arthur was jogging happily along toward home and bed. The instructor had kept him overtime; hardly anyone else was abroad in the under-ground corridors. Every other glow-lamp was out; the world was dim and sleepy and peaceful.

He came to an intersection, and realized that he was passing for the hundredth time one of the few corridors he had never used. Whether it was because of accumulated curiosity or his transient feeling of virtue, Arthur paused and looked specula-tively down it. The underground part of the College was not built upon any regular plan; corridors branched and curved unexpectedly, and some of them, Arthur knew, ran around the periphery for hundreds of yards without a branch or intersection.

If he took this one, it would almost certainly lead him home as quickly as the direct route. If not—well, he could use the exercise. Arthur had been gaining weight rapidly during the last couple of months, and his athletic coaches were beginning to be pointedly dissatisfied with the way he distributed it.

... Besides which, it would be one small variant in his routine, to polish off rather a nice day. Arthur turned at the corner and trotted off in the new direction.

The corridor ahead of him grew darker swiftly as it curved: every third glow-lamp was lit, then every fourth. For a moment Arthur was afraid he had misjudged the time and was going to be caught by lights-out; but when he glanced back he could tell by the brighter light that the corridor was getting darker in space, not in time.

Novi/ four lamps were dark to one glowing. That was unusual: out of pattern. Arthur slowed down to a walking pace, thinking it over, just as a brighter patch came into view ahead. In it, for an instant, he saw two figures.

Tiny and bright, they paused close together and then passed out of sight, presumably through a doorway in the inner wall. One of them had been Kimbrough. The other was wearing senior's black.

Arthur slowed down still more and finally stopped altogether. He leaned against the wall, frowning. Could he have been mis-taken? He reviewed the image: his memory of it was clear, sharp, and definite. It was Kimbrough. But what in sanity's name would Kimbrough be doing out of quarters so close to lights-out?

That hadn't been a cross-corridor he and the other man had disappeared into—he could see that much

from here. It was a doorway, the only one in that whole stretch of wall. It was closed now, uninformative ... but wherever Kimbrough and the other man had been going, it couldn't have led them back to quarters.

Arthur's mind was ticking over possibilities, none of them very pleasant. The longer he stood here, the more risk he ran, himself, of being wigged for absence at lights-out. On the other hand, if he happened to be passing when Kimbrough and the other man came out, there might be still other con-sequences ... and the fact that Arthur couldn't imagine what they might be was enough in itself to give him pause.

What exactly was so uneasy-making about the situation? Kimbrough, Arthur knew without having thought much about it, had been going regularly to the tea-and-philosophy sessions at Migli's. Lately he had stopped talking about them, though

And that must have been what had made him feel uneasy about Kimbrough, long before tonight, without quite realizing it. There was the heart of the problem. Why had Kimbrough stopped talking about Naturism? Because he had lost interest, himself? Cancel—it was clear from Kimbrough's manner that he was more deeply involved, not less. Because he had given up hope of converting Arthur? Cancel—Kimbrough was not the type to give up trying to convince anybody about anything; moreover, Arthur's vulnerability as his roommate made him the perfect guinea pig for new approaches.

Because he was doing something that had to be kept secret from Arthur—from the whole rank and file of the College? A conspiracy within a conspiracy?

Arthur flattened himself against the dark wall. Up ahead, the door was opening.

One man came out. It wasn't Kimbrough. He paused a moment as the door closed behind him, glanced in both direc-tions, and then set off rapidly away from Arthur; but not before Arthur had seen the bright wetness, reddish against the black of his sleeve.

# Chapter 12. A Primer Of Motives

The room in which Anne Silver lay had been built as a closet, and looked it. The walls were plain, color-impregnated metal. There was no bed, nor any other furniture; she slept on the floor, when she was able to sleep. There was almost room enough for her to stretch out; not quite. For exercise, she could take three steps down the room, one across, three back.

Certain improvements had been made in the room before she was moved into it. These were: a lock on the door; a cesscan in the corner; a brilliant blue-white light in the ceiling; and a sliding drawer by means of which food and water could be passed into the room.

For clothing she had a man's ragged undershirt, gray and stiffening with grime. She had kept her hair combed with her fingers, but it was tousled and felt greasy to the touch. Her scalp itched. She could not bear to look at herself in the mirror. She was dirty, with a kind of ground-in, hardened dirt that she had never seen nor imagined.

The next worst thing was the loneliness. It would have been a relief to be able to talk to herself, but she took it for granted that the room was bugged for sound. She could not be sure there were no concealed vision cells in the room, for that matter. Knowing how much a trained operative could pick up, simply by watching the play of expressions on an un-guarded face, she denied herself even the luxury of thinking about what was going to happen to her next.

Sprawled, waking or half asleep under the bitter blue-white light that never went out, she tried to let her mind sink down into the slow oceanic swell of not-thinking. When that failed, she brought up old

neglected scenes from her childhood, pick-ing over every bead in a long-lost necklace, tracing every line in a forgotten face.

It had taken her a long time to learn this detachment, this floating, mind-almost-free-of-body existence. At first she had twitched and paced, and explored all the fittings of the room with her fingernails. She had done mathematical problems in her head, mentally recited all the Consumer texts, bits of instruction manuals, fragments of pre-analogue poetry she knew.

For weeks, even after she found out who her true captor was, she had hoped for rescue ... until he had casually men-tioned he had arranged for a girl wearing her clothes to die in a copter crash a hundred miles away.

If the Immunes thought she was dead, that ended the matter. She had no real existence anywhere else; "Anne Silver" was only a set of fictitious records in Gepro Archives. The little Consumer girl who had grown up in one of the Gepro en-claves of Manhattan Island had been dead and forgotten for a long time now.

It was curious, she was discovering, how little of yourself was real and permanent. Clothes could be taken away, nail polish would wear off; fatigue and discomfort would show you quickly enough that your body was only a loathsome encumbrance; memories of other people and places you would never see again soon faded. What was left? An "I," formless and without boundaries, caught between nowhere and no-where.

Click.

Her whole body tensed. She sat up, facing the door, realizing that in spite of everything she was reacting just as she was meant to—looking forward to these rare interviews, as if to holiday treats—because anything, *anything* was better than a world in which nothing happened.

The lock rattled faintly. The door slid back. There, at a cautious distance, holding a tangler gun ready, stood pocked, smiling little Morris.

It always took a few minutes for her eyes to adjust. She found the usual chair by touch; it was lost in the swimming green darkness. Across the room, Morris's head was nothing but any eyeless golden blur, afloat in that sea. Nearer, high on either side, was a metallic glimmer that she knew was the support for a tangler gun. Her chair was bolted to the floor, and she knew from experience that once she had sat down, the guns would fire automatically if she tried to get up again before Morris gave her leave.

She had felt little surprise when she discovered that the Guards who captured her in the jaypee that night—how long ago?—that the Guards had turned her over to Morris, and that Morris was keeping her as his own private prisoner—an impossible thing, if Morris had been a Normal ...

There had always been something about Morris ... she had told Higsbee so. But it had been a shock when she found out what he wanted.

*"... if he is an Immune, he still isn't one of us and never can be: he's an Immune for Umerc."* Higsbee had been right; but it was worse than that.

Morris was an Immune for himself.

She relaxed. She was more confined here than in the blue-white glare of her room, but she felt no impulse to struggle. The cushioned comfort of the chair—the warmth—the dark-ness lulled her.

“Today,” said Morris, “I thought we might begin by dis-cussing the nature of reality.”

His head was coming more plainly into view, glowing theatrically golden in the dimness. She could see the outlines of his shoulders, and the massive chair he sat in. The walls were still the darkest, deepest green of all greens, and the floor was an abyss.

Morris continued, “For instance—are you convinced that you yourself are real?”

She stirred: the question came across that green-ink ocean as if spoken by a voice in a nightmare.

“Define ‘myself’,” she said faintly.

Morris chuckled. She could see the rest of him, now, like a ghostly gold-wire abstraction—lying at ease in the chair, one hand—in which there was probably still a gun—draped absently across his thigh. “This is not a trick question—use any definition you like, or none. Do you believe you are real? Do you exist?”

She said distrustfully, “Yes.”

“How do you know?”

“I experience it,” she said. “If I didn’t exist, there wouldn’t be any ‘I’ to wonder whether I do or not.”

“Ably put,” said Morris, biting the words. He leaned for-ward, and his face fell into crescents of green shadow. “Now tell me—what about other people, who don’t happen to be here at the moment? Higsbee, for instance. Is he real?”

She stiffened a little. “As real as you are.”

“Good—but you see me, and hear my voice, and that’s why you can say I am real; isn’t that true? You don’t see Higsbee or hear him. What makes you say he exists?”

“I remember him.”

“And you say he exists.”

“Yes.”

“But what if I tell you he is dead?”

Anne’s fingers curled and relaxed. “Is he?”

“I’ll let you wonder, unless you are very reasonable—but it doesn’t matter, you see. You were sure he existed, and then,’ for a moment, you realized that perhaps he did not .... Now go a step further. When you saw Higsbee and heard him—if you did—was he real then?”

“Yes.”

“So confident! But when you were very small, did you never see and hear a demon incarnate, on All Sales Night? Didn’t it seem real to you? And yet didn’t you later learn that it was only plastic and papier mache, with a voice-tape inside it? And what about all the millions who see ’angels’ whenever they try to do something wrong? They see and hear the angels: those are your reasons, too. They say the angels are real; you say Higsbee is real. But you would tell me that they are wrong, and you are right.”

Anne was silent.

Morris nodded. “I know; you don’t want to admit you have no angel. It doesn’t matter; let me ask you to pretend you don’t believe in angels—still, you believe in Higsbee. Isn’t that so?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Why?”

She thought about it. “I know. I can tell.”

“Can you? Then—is this real?” His arm whipped up, and a ball of flame arced sizzling across the room at her face.

She gasped and ducked.

The flame-ball was gone without a whisper; she had felt no heat, no passage in the air. Glancing to one side of the room and then to the other, she saw the gleam of light dying in two dark lenses: soligraph projectors.

“That wouldn’t fool me twice,” she said.

“Once is enough,” said Morris tensely. “You’ve just seen that you can change your mind about what things are real. You knew it already, but you had conveniently forgotten: you had to be shown. Now tell me: *isn’t it possible, don’t you know in your heart it’s possible, that Gordon Higsbee is a phantom, an illusion—like the whole world, except yourself?”*

Herself, floating alone in the bitter blue-white light or the warm green darkness ... “It’s possible,” she said.

“Then will you die for him?”

She relaxed, deliberately. “I don’t know what you mean.”

“I’ll tell you.” And she knew what was coming; she had heard it so often, it was as if the channel for every word had been physically carved out in her brain: “You’re a member of a conspiracy—a secret organization of people without angels. I was sure of it when you met that boy who crossed the Wall. Higsbee is probably also a member, and perhaps some others of your staff—but that isn’t enough. You know hundreds of members. And you will tell me their names.”

She stirred. “If there were such an organization,” she said carefully, “it seems to me you’d want to join it, not destroy it.”

“Tell me why.”

“Safety in numbers.”

He snorted. “Danger in numbers! Every time you add a member, you increase the probability that one of them will be caught and betray you all; eventually the probability becomes a certainty. Try again.”

“Companionship. Mutual accomplishment.”

“Leaving the first aside, if you mean that a committee can accomplish more than one capable man, I suggest you haven’t seen many committees.”

Weariness—or was it some drugged vapor in the air?—made her head swim. “Morris,” she said after a moment.

“Yes, Miss Silver.”

“What do you want? I don’t understand you—so cold. What do you want?”

“And yet I understand you so well,” said Morris softly. “You don’t want much from life—only to exercise your talents to their fullest, and to take some enjoyment from a world that has treated you badly. I want nothing more.”

Silence fell again. “What’s your talent?” she asked.

“I rule,” said Morris, quietly.

After a moment his voice burst out again: “You don’t know what it’s like, to be the only competent man in a world of morons, and to have to hold yourself in—hold yourself in—I must tell you, Miss Silver, that I was born to a third-rank Executive’s wife who had spent the night in a joy palace. My father was probably a Consumer. I was classified as Executive C. After fifteen years of effort I have risen two grades above that level, and I find myself at the top of my career, taking orders, nominally, from a stock-holder’s younger son who can’t be trusted to trim his own toenails. Only a miracle could raise me any higher.” He took a deep breath. “You are my miracle, Miss Silver.”

He rose and came toward her, two slow steps. “With this I can go over his head, straight to the Chairman himself. Do you understand? I can frighten them as they have never been frightened in their silly lives. I can take anything I want, and I can keep it. Do you understand now? I shall be the man who administers the tests that decide who is a demon. Do you imagine that anyone who offends me, or stands in my way, will pass those tests? Do you understand now?”

“Yes,” she breathed.

He came two steps nearer. “You’re real,” he said. “You have your life, and nothing else—the rest is flickers and darkness. Give me the names. I’ll reward you—and protect you.”

She gazed up at him as he stood poised, head thrust forward like a museum model of a small, deadly dinosaur. “How do I know that?” she asked. “Am I real to you?”

Nearer. “So real,” he said with a lover’s softness. “I have watched you and wanted you, Miss Silver. Think now. Tell me the names, and I will make you queen of the world.”

Nearer. She could see into the green pools of shadow under his brows, and his eyes were hiding there, cool and watchful.

He had played her like a fish, week after week; he had seen her struggles growing weaker until now she lay afloat, waiting for his net.

“If I could believe you—” she said faintly.

He took another step. He must have turned off the auto-matic gun circuit, she judged, or he would never have come this close; a stray cord might catch him. Would he come closer still? Probably not. His eyes were narrowing; Morris was nobody’s fool.

Her vision wavered a little; the light was so tricky ... And this was the last chance; if it didn’t work, back to the blue-white room. She tensed the muscles of her thighs slowly, without a movement to warn him. Now! She hurled herself upward.

—Not quickly enough. Morris’s gun fired with a *cha!* of compressed air, and the long sticky loops of the

tangler cords whipped out in festoons, hardening in air, curling around her body from breast to thighs.

Off balance, she tottered, fell to her knees; only a violent contortion saved her from sprawling.

Morris's lips were pressed thin as he stared down at her. After a moment he glanced at the gun in his hand, then drop-ped it with a grunt of disgust. The slack strands between her body and the gun clung instantly to the carpet, anchoring her still more firmly.

Still badly balanced, Anne struggled not to fall. The loose tangler strands lay coiled directly in front of her. The adhesive of which they were made clung fiendishly to any warm sur-face; it could be cut, but there was simply no point in trying to pull it away until it crystallized and dropped off by itself. It was possible to get into intolerable positions while wrapped in tangler cords. It had been known to happen.

Morris moved stiff-legged back to his chair and opened a compartment in it. He came back with a pair of heavy shears and a roll of thin paper. He tossed the end of the paper at Anne, then began walking around and around her, unreeling the paper as he went, wrapping it around her, covering up the sticky cord. When he had made her into a shapeless cocoon of paper, he paused and examined her critically. He thrust out a sandaled foot and delicately probed at the paper, pressing it closer, making sure that the sticky cord was nowhere exposed.

Then he balanced himself carefully, drew his foot back again, and kicked her in the belly.

Anne half doubled over, choking and sweating. Bound like a kneeling mummy, her back still held in the arch it had taken when she leaped, she teetered on her knees. The slack of the tangler cords lay uncovered where her face and hair would touch it if she fell. She fought with every muscle to draw herself back, and won.

Morris watched her in silence for a moment. She could not see his expression; he was only a wavering blur, like a figure seen at night through a rainy windowpane.

She waited. Probably he would kick her again; if he did, she was done; it was impossible, she couldn't do that again. But instead, after a moment, he knelt beside her and set to work with the heavy, blunt-jawed shears, cutting the cords that held her to the floor.

A whisk of cold air from a pressure flask chilled the blades of the shears; Morris clipped through one strand, chilled the blades again, and went on to the next.

She tried to say, "Morris—"

Her vision was clearing; she saw him flick a glance at her, but he said nothing. He cut another strand.

She tried again. Her voice came out a hoarse, breathless whisper.

"Later," said Morris soberly. "I want you out of here. Then we can discuss it, Miss Silver. Perhaps I'll tangle your hair to the wall, and then your knees to your elbows. Then we can talk very well, while you hang by your hair. Or perhaps I will fasten you down to the floor, with your eyelids stuck open, so that you can watch the light all the time. Then we can talk very well, while you watch the light."

"Please," she said in her choked voice. *"I'll tell you the names—"*

Morris stared at her narrowly. "Yes? Tell, then."

"James P. Han—" Her voice cracked; nothing but a breathy sound came out.

Morris leaned closer. “Hannigan? Han what?”

She tried once more: “Hanrihan.”

“Hannigan?” Morris glanced at the shears in his hand, saw they had warmed and clung to the cords, and dropped them irritably. He hesitated, uncertain, but she was bound, defenseless, helpless, weaponless. He moved closer still, tilting his head to hear.

But she had one weapon that Morris, a civilized man, had never thought of. Her head lashed out like a snake’s, and her teeth clenched in his throat.

She lay beside the body for a long time, feeling too stupefied to move. Eventually she roused herself, fumbled for the pres-sure flask and shears, and began the long, exasperating labor of cutting herself free.

When she had finished, her body was still plastered all over with paper-covered tangler cord; there was nothing she could do about that; at least she could walk and move her arms.

She searched Morris’s body for keys and weapons, found nothing, useful, but suddenly noticed that he had been wearing fitted plugs in his nostrils. She knew what that meant—narcotic gas, as she had half-suspected before. That accounted for her light-headedness, and that curious dreamy feeling of detach-ment; by now her blood stream must be full of it.

She sat down again, staring at Morris’s upturned face. He had had it all timed and calculated—the gas, the persuasion. And, truly, it would have been easy and pleasant to give in to him. But, of course, she never would have done it.

Morris’s jaw was agape, showing his fine white teeth. His eyes were staring at her in astonishment; he seemed to be asking silently, *Why?*

Lone-wolf logic, pack logic ... “You wouldn’t understand,” she told him.

In the arm of the chair, after much fumbling, she found the button that shut off the flow of gas, and then the one that started the blowers to flush it out of the room. Gradually she began to feel more normal. The effect of the gas wore away; time began to mean something.

Time! It might be dangerous to lose a minute.

The first thing was to find out where she was. She had been brought here unconscious; “here” might be some up-district retreat of Morris’s, or

She slid the door open a crack. Beyond was what looked like the central room of an ordinary Executive-class private suite.

She listened, heard nothing, and ventured across; the room was dark and untidy, windowless. She went to what she judged was the outer door of the suite, listened fruitlessly, and padded across to one of the smaller rooms. It had a window. She dialed it to “clear” and looked down along the anonymous face of a moderately tall building to a huddle of hangars and warehouses, and then a blank vista of cultivated fields, fading into the twilight. It looked utterly unfamiliar, and told her nothing.

She crossed to the other side of the suite. If this were a tower room

Jackpot! The opposite room did have a window, and when she dialed it, she looked out on a scene that

she recognized instantly. She was in the local Airtourist Hostel, and that was Darien Airport spread out below her, with a jetliner just coming in from the south. Beyond, lights burning golden in the violet haze, was Darien itself; she could see the tower of the Intersocial Chambers, where Gordon Higsbee was—or had been ....

She went swiftly back into the room where Morris lay, and wasted a few minutes searching for the communicator she had been wearing when she'd been captured. No such luck; probably it had been planted on the body of the girl in the wreck, along with the rest of her equipment.

She found clothes in the closet: sandals, tight trousers that she was able to get into by splitting the seams, a traveling cloak, a floppy hat. Morris's kit, with his cosmetics in it, was lying on a chair. She washed her face in a laver, painted and powdered herself, tucked the grimy, blood-stiffened mass of her hair up out of sight under the hat. With the traveling cloak draping her from shoulders to knees, it ought to do. It would have to.

The door opened on an empty corridor. She took the down-stair to the lobby and walked casually toward the door, head down, fumbling in Morris's kit as she went.

Bad luck: a young Guardsman was just outside the door when she came out. He stepped back automatically, then looked startled. His nostrils wrinkled; he sniffed, and stared.

She was past him, moving a little more rapidly. What must she smell like to him? She'd forgotten it entirely; she had grown used to it—if only she'd thought of perfume before she left!

"One moment, sir!" His footsteps came after her.

Anne kept going, faster now. The broad promenade along the front of the airport building was almost deserted; there was no cover, no bolt-hole.

"You in the black cloak! Stop!"

At the curb a few yards away stood a scarlet two-seater "egg"—an ovoid metal shell balanced big-end-up on a single fat wheel. It was a guard machine, fast and maneuverable—the gyro-balanced shell hung steady while the core was free to revolve full circle. The door was open, the steps out. Anne sprinted for it, unfastening her cloak and letting it flop behind her. There was another shout.

The cloak was violently plucked out of her hands just as she reached the egg. Anne had expected it; the Guards were taught to fire tanglers at the legs of running people. She took the steps at one bound, slammed into the driver's seat, hit the door stud with the heel of one hand and grabbed the steering bar with the other.

She heard the Guardsman's whistle shrilling as she whirled the core around, centered the bar and shoved it hard forward. The egg leaped into motion with bone-crushing suddenness and roared down the nearest avenue between two buildings toward the highway.

Down at the end of the tunnel, two little red figures were moving frantically. One of them raised his arm; threads arced across the opening; as she bore down on them, she could see him turn, tangler gun in hand, and slap it against the wall on his side—making a barrier across the narrow way.

She hesitated a fraction of a second, trying to decide if her momentum would take her through—but tangler stuff was strong! She whipped the bar around.

With a whine of tortured rubber, the egg grabbed for traction, skidded, bounced, shuddered violently, and darted off down the way it had come. She emerged onto the field again in time to see the original

Guardsman, weaponless—his gun still tangled to the cloak—running out to bar her way. She headed straight for him, watched him jump clear—and saw the stout gates closing across the two other exits to the main road.

The only other way out was across into plowed fields ... and there was a light Guard copter slanting down

The jetliner was still standing near the end of the south runway, open and empty, tubes hot. Anne got there just as half a dozen light Guard machines, eggs and prowlers, boiled out of the underground parking area and started toward her.

The airport's public-address horns were blatting thunderous warnings as she fed power to the jets, turned to head up the north runway, and took off.

The trouble with a jet was that there were so few places you could set it down. Anne did her best; the liner had inter-social markings, and she took it west as soon as she could into Conind territory, then north into Canalim. It wasn't good enough. The first interceptor appeared from the northeast as she was angling westward across the Lakes. She turned, but could not lose him. Forty minutes later, as she was flying south-westward across the central districts, the second interceptor appeared from the direction of Nashville. She was forced to turn again, and both pursuers gained.

It happened again as she was approaching the desert. This time her pursuer came from the south; she had to turn north westward. All three planes gained on her, following doggedly, steadily. The indicator in her reserve fuel gauge was bouncing on the lower pin.

Another plane appeared on her left, riding lights winking balefully; then another on her right. She jockeyed for the best course between them as she nosed the plane down, hoping still for a landing in some mountain field.

Then, as a new map segment clicked into view on the instru-ment board, she realized what was being done to her.

The map indicator was crawling slowly toward a sprawling white area west of the Cascades—pure white, on her Inter-social map. It was the Blank, the place from which no traveler returned; the enigma, more mysterious than the mountains of the moon: the dumping ground for all the "demons" and misfits of every North American society.

The indicator crossed the line.

# Chapter 13. Woman's Place

What happened to people who disappeared from the College? Arthur wanted very badly to know. It wasn't a thing any more that he could push down below the surface of his mind; Kimbrough had spoiled that.

If it could happen to Kimbrough, it *could* happen to him. Sitting at the rear of an early-morning classroom, Arthur half-listened to the lecturer while he mentally rearranged his data. There wasn't much of it. The door he had seen close behind Kimbrough had been locked when he got there, and although he'd risked going back twice more just before lights-out, he hadn't found out anything.

What *did* happen to people like Flynn and Kimbrough? Those who must know wouldn't say; those who didn't know had learned not to ask. There was a vague impression current that they were transferred to other Immune schools; Arthur had heard it expressed indirectly, more than once, in bull sessions and

elsewhere.

Transferred to other schools, without notice, without the chance of saying good-by to friends? It was just possible enough to get by, as a thing nobody happened to talk about—unless you had seen a man walking away from that lonely room with blood on his sleeve.

Arthur was concentrating on that lead now, since he had nothing else. His mental image of the man in black was worn from much handling, but with the help of mnemonic techniques he had learned early in the semester, he was able to bring it back ... The man came out of the room, paused with his face in shadow, looked both ways, and struck off rapidly down the corridor. the face simply would not come clear: Arthur had been looking at his sleeve, not his face. The only useful bit of the whole sequence was a single instant just before the man passed out of the light. Reliving it now,

Arthur saw the blockiness of the blond head, and the slope of powerful shoulders.

He thought he would know the man again, if he saw him at the right angle. He had already eliminated all the fair-haired men he knew to be members of Migli's group; now he was stumped. He couldn't very well go peering around behind every blond senior and graduate student in the College. But there had to be a way, because—

"Ridler!"

Arthur came erect with a start. A tall graduate with red piping on his cowl was standing beside the lecturer; he crooked a finger.

"Sir!" Arthur scrambled up and hurried down the aisle. The man's blond brows were knitted with impatience. "You're wanted," he said curtly. "Let's go."

Arthur stood for a terrible moment staring after the blond man as he moved to the door: the wide well-shaped blond head, the sloping shoulders ...

He recovered himself and followed, just in time to avoid making himself conspicuous. With Arthur a pace behind, they headed toward the nearest Underground entrance.

Arthur mapped out a tentative program of judo strategy, and went on to consider ways and means of getting out of the College and into hiding. He thought he was beyond shock; but he discovered otherwise when the blond graduate led him past the entrance, down the street to the administration build-ing, and into the anteroom of a large office.

"Wait here," he said, and disappeared inside.

Arthur looked dazedly at the pleasant-faced young lady who sat behind the orthotyper desk. "Who was that?" he asked.

Her eyebrows lifted. "Mr. Hovey," she said. "The Arch-deputy's proctor."

After what seemed like a long time Hovey came out again and nodded to Arthur as he passed. Arthur, who was remembering another time when he had been ushered in to see Laudermilk, went in with very mixed feelings.

"Sebastian!" said the old man happily, beaming from behind a huge, cluttered desk. "I'm delighted to see you; sit down, sit down. Gracious, you're looking well. Have some of these dates, they're delicious. Now. Tell me all about yourself—are you happy? Are you getting on well?"

“Passably well, sir,” said Arthur.

“Good,” said Laudermilk positively. “I predicted it. I knew you’d do well here. You’ve gained ten pounds, at least.”

“Fifteen,” said Arthur, pleased in spite of himself.

“Amazing. And very fortunate, as it happens.” Laudermilk glanced at the clock. “Well, we have a few minutes. Sebastian, I’m going to tell you why I wanted to see you today. You may know—or, on second thought, you probably don’t—but every so often it’s possible for us to send undergraduates on what I might call field trips, in other societies. Now I want you to think about this—I’ll tell you as much about it as I can—”

He paused a moment. “Put it this way. At a certain place, something may or may not be happening which we feel would be extremely dangerous to us. We have to find out whether it is or not. We’ve been looking a long time for some indication, and now we have one—but just a hint, you understand, not nearly enough to be certain.” He looked apologetic. “I hope you’re following this.”

“Yes, sir,” said Arthur.

“Good. Well, what it all leads to is, we need someone to pose as a member of the group where this thing may or may not be happening. You can see that it’ll be dangerous and quite difficult. Yes? Was there something—?”

“Which society is it, sir?”

“I oughtn’t to tell you even that, perhaps, but I can see that you’d like to know. It’s Conind.”

Arthur said, “But that’s the worst of my s. c. ‘s, sir. I have a C rating in the Conind club.”

“I know. Ordinarily, we would look for someone with more aptitude for Conind, and perhaps for someone more experi-enced. But your club mistress agrees with me that you can learn to do it. And the fact is that we need you for a special reason. With all that weight you’ve put on, you have a close resemblance to the young man you’re to impersonate—closer than anyone else we have available. Now that really is all I can tell you. The man you’re to work with will be here in a few minutes. If you decide to do it, you’ll have two days of in-tensive Conind drill before you leave ... Is anything wrong?”

“No, sir.” There did not seem to be any reasonable doubt, Arthur was thinking, that students who did not suit the requirements of the College were being destroyed—what was the hideous old word? *murdered* —and that Laudermilk knew about it. He didn’t want to believe such a thing; he found himself liking the old man as much as ever. But leaving that aside, looking at him now—snowy-haired, his leathery old face all alert and good-humored as he waited—Arthur asked him-self, *Would he kill me, if he thought it was necessary?* And the answer came clear: *like lightning.*

A sudden feminine voice remarked, “Commissioner Higsbee to see you, sir.”

Laudermilk touched a stud on his desk. “Ask him to come in.” He looked at Arthur, waiting.

Was all this an elaborate device to get him out of the way? Was he being extinguished more subtly than Kimbrough? It seemed entirely possible. But if so, where was the advantage in saying no?

“I’d like to do it, sir,” he said.

“Excellent. I was sure we hadn’t made a mistake—Gordon, how are you? Come in, come in. I want you

to meet a young man you've heard of before—Sebastian Fidler, born Arthur Bass. Commissioner Higsbee has just finished an assignment in Darien where you had all your trouble, Sebastian. How *well* this is all working out!"

Higsbee was an odd fish, Arthur decided two days later. He was cool and precise in his talk; he had a swift, powerful intelligence—it was a pleasure to listen to him, as it was to watch a good heavyweight fighter at work. And then there was an infrequent flash of ironic humor ... but it was all remote, somehow colorless, as if the inner Higsbee were absor-bed in something else—some private grief or obsession.

It made Arthur's skin crawl; but at least, where their job was concerned, there was nothing uncertain or weak about Higsbee. Just now that was all that counted.

That there *was a* job, after all, was clear from the brutal two-day squeeze session he had been through, not to mention the amount of equipment they had given him and trained him to use. The ornate ring on his finger contained a tiny click-signal broadcasting unit, with which he could tick out *code* messages to Higsbee. The hearing aid *in* his right ear was not what it seemed to be, but a voice receiver; there was a tiny vision eye in the cheap-looking brooch which fastened his robe; and the new filling in the back molar con-tained, he had been told, a locator device that would enable Higsbee to follow him wherever he went.

So far, so good. There hadn't been time to let his hair grow out to Conind length, so they had depilated him and fitted on a waved and scented wig, so flexible, and so well glued to his scalp, that he could hardly tell it wasn't his own. He was trimmed, clipped, anointed, and tinted to a virile glow about the jowls, and here he sat in the copter that was taking them north along the coast—a typical Conind male to look at him, delicately draped in white lawn, his eyes modestly cast down—and a Conind male, too, on the surface of his mind, where a series of learned clichés went ticking over as naturally as his pulse.

Just below that level there was Arthur the conspirator; and further under that, making him feel like a three-layered cake, was the real old original Arthur: the young man who had escaped from the JAS robing room, and the Glenbrook Store, and Gloria (faded memory!)—who had got himself into trouble in Darien and had been rescued from a rooftop—and who was wondering now whether he could bear to leave the Immunes, now that he had found them. And where could he go? What would he do?

Dawn was washing up thinly above the mountains to east-ward. "There's Eugene," said Higsbee, pointing to a cluster of lights down in the wide gray valley. "Portland is only another hundred miles; we'll be landing in about twenty minutes."

Arthur nodded. Watching the brightening landscape unroll beneath them, he deliberately pushed back the doubting, fear-ful part of his mind. To keep it there, he reviewed what Higsbee had been telling him since yesterday.

"It was Laudermilk who got us our first lead," Higsbee had said. "It occurred to him that if there was anything to the rumors—and if they were true, the results would be horrendous—then somebody who had an analogue repression against tell-ing must have told anyhow: or rather hinted at it, worse luck.

Well, a thing like that ought to have shown up eventually as what the Normals call 'possession'—somebody taking too much psychic pressure, blowing up, throwing off the analogue influence, usually with a good loud bang. All right. We looked into the reports of all such incidents in the last year, and we found one case that looked promising. A little Coninder named Ericson, secretary to one of the Conind members of an inter-social commission that was meeting in Philadelphia. Ran amok, poured ink over his superior's head, and managed to get away into downtown Philadelphia for two hours

before they caught up with him and hauled him off to Disposal.

"Well, there was a perfect possibility. In those two hours, Ericson might have let something drop that could have traveled for a week, by word of mouth, before some official spy picked it up. It would have been garbled, and all the details, if any, shorn off it; and the result would have been just what we have now—that everybody's heard it, but nobody knows where it came from.

"So we looked into Ericson's antecedents and found that he used to belong to one of the most powerful families in north-west Conind. Better and better. We found out, further, that one branch of his family, in Portland, has been running through quite a surprising number of males lately. Now that's all we know. To find out any more, we've got to get you into the household. So you're going to be Carl Smeltzer, one of the young males that Marcia Hambling—that's the acting mother of the family I told you about—bought when she was in—"

"Bought!" said Arthur involuntarily. "Sorry. I can't get used to that, somehow. That's why I rank so low in the Conind club."

"I know. You were brought up in Gepro, and that's the most intensely patriarchal of the Middle American societies. You can't expect all that to wear off in a few months. But get used to it: *bought.* You're her property, until she decides to sell you, trade you, give you away or have you sent to Disposal. She's the acting head of a powerful branch of a great family, and you're a no-account male from Denver. If she says lick my boots, you lick."

"But do I have to like it?"

"You have to *think it's normal.* Don't forget that for an instant. You have a good general resemblance to Smeltzer, and we've improved it all we can. Marcia Hambling buys a lot of males—and she's near-sighted. We think you'll get by, if you stay in character. Not otherwise."

That was something to think about ... And here came Port-land over the horizon, big and glittery, with a, pale ribbon of water behind it.

The address was on the neat white signpost at the edge of the road, opposite the tube exit: 17 ROSE LANE. Arthur stood agape. It was the first time he had ever seen a Stockholder-class dwelling, in any society—there was no room for them in Glenbrook, surrounded as it was by Umerc territory—and although he knew what to expect, it shocked him.

Slope upon gentle slope of green rose from the road, between ranks of mathematically pruned evergreens, to a long pillared building that was like a slab of sugar laid down at the top of the rise. There were no paths anywhere: guests, Arthur thought, no doubt arrived by copter, and supplies were prob-ably delivered by an underground passage direct to the storage cellars.

He hesitated, and then began to walk up the long approach. He wouldn't begin by asking foolish questions; Higsbee was watching through the eye in his brooch, and if he thought Arthur was doing something wrong, could say so.

But that perfect pathless green was intimidating. Arthur's sense of intrusion grew with every step, until by the time he had reached the broad, ground-level portico, he fully expected to be seized and bowled all the way down to the bottom again.

*"In theory,"* said Higsbee's papery voice in his ear, *"you shouldn't be here at the main entrance."*

Arthur stifled a curse; the big door was opening. *"Try to brazen it out. You won't succeed, but it's better if you try."*

There was a pale-eyed youth in a saffron robe standing in the doorway, looking suspiciously at Arthur. Stiff-legged with embarrassment, Arthur went to him.

"Well?"

"Carl Smeltzer, expected by Madam Marcia Hambling." Arthur stepped in and handed him his traveling cloak. The doorboy glowered. "Bought?"

There being no help for it, Arthur nodded. The doorboy made a sound of contempt and flung the cloak back at him. "That way," he said, gesturing with his thumb, and walked off.

Arthur's ears burned as he went in the indicated direction. In the middle layer of his mind, he knew perfectly well that Higsbee had trapped him into this situation on purpose: be-cause feeling this way was a necessary part of his impersona-tion. But on the top level he was cringing with bottled-up resentment, and he didn't like it.

This was different, somehow, and worse than the everyday humiliation of being a Junior Assistant Salesman in Glenbrook. The Conind club meetings in College had only partly prepared him for it. Here he was property; and the worst of it was that when he tried to follow Higsbee's instructions, and think of this as normal, he partly succeeded ...

The room he entered was a huge egg-shaped chamber, win-dowless and illuminated only by scattered glow-lamps under antique red shades. The walls were heavily draped; the carpet was thick. The almost imperceptible breeze of the air-con-ditioning seemed to have stopped as he crossed the threshold; the air was still, hot, and heavy-scented.

Nobody noticed him at first. The men were dressed like him-self in robes with puffed quarter-sleeves, cinctured across the chest and falling in ample folds to the ankles. The women, of whom there seemed to be dozens, were all wearing scarlet beehive skirts, and nothing above. Arthur stiffened. That meant some kind of ceremony, probably an important one, particular-ly if—yes, there were the older women, the multi-paras, with skirts cut away in front to let their bellies bulge out. Here was a pickle! What if the room were already sealed to non-family males, and the doorboy hadn't told him about it for spite?

Before he could escape, a passing many-mother caught sight of him and stopped sharply. She was about forty, olive-skinned, plump and ungainly; her eyes were brilliant under untidy brows.

"Yes?" she said.

Arthur introduced himself again, uncomfortably aware that people nearby were turning to watch him. "If I've come at an inconvenient time, Madam—"

"It's no business of mine. Marcia isn't here. Ursula!" she bellowed, turning. "Here's another slut of Marcia's—do some-thing about it." And without another glance at Arthur, she walked away. A nearby male, a tall brunet in violet, grinned unpleasantly at him and flexed his muscles, hands on hips.

Another many-mother came bustling over, looking sweaty and harried, wisps of gray hair escaping from her mobcap. "I haven't got time now," she said irritably. "Why did he have to come today, in Goddess' name?" She peered after the other woman. "Gertrude! You'll just have to induct him, if you want him here, or else—"

Gertrude shouted something muffled over her shoulder as she left by another doorway. Ursula's broad

face puffed with anger. “Well, I can’t—” she squalled, and fell into a fit of coughing. Through the noise she was making, and the hum of talk behind her, Arthur caught another voice—young and shrill, pitched up at the cracking edge of hysteria. “Is it a new boy? I want to see him! *Let me see him! Let me see him!*”

A chorus hushed her, and then there was a new voice, as high as the other, but weak and piping: “Bring him here!”

“Go, then,” said Ursula crossly, and gave him a shove. Stumbling wound busy groups of people, Arthur crossed the room and found himself staring at a wheelchair containing a small, dark bundle, from which two yellowish eyes glared back at him.

“Come closer, boy,” the voice piped. Arthur did so, and then hastily got down to a properly respectful position on his knees. The bundle was a woman, dark and shriveled as an armload of dried sticks. She wore a faded, triple-pointed red cap, signify-ing that she was the matriarch of this family: *And no wonder,* Arthur thought. *She must be over a hundred.*

“Get up, get up, I can’t see you,” she said querulously. Arthur scrambled to his. feet. The reason her eyes looked so odd, he realized, was that they were behind huge archaic lenses, framed to perch on her nose. “What’s your line, boy?”

“Smeltzers of Denver, please, madam.”

“Smeltzers. A thin line. Sold you to Marcia, did they? Think you’ll enjoy that?”

“Yes, please, madam.”

She cackled. “Maybe you will. Best thing a man can hope for in life, to serve a good fertile woman. Isn’t that right?”

“Yes, please, madam.”

“*Sure* it is.” She cackled again, gasping. “I know some things you don’t know, boy. I could surprise you, if I felt like it.”

A bony woman bustled up, fussing with the folds of dark stuff that were piled around the old woman’s shoulders. “Care-ful, now; greatmother, you’ll catch cold. You know how delicate—”

“Let me alone!” The old woman picked petulantly at the shawl until she had opened it, showing a chest like leather stretched over a birdcage. “Know how old I am, boy? *I’m a hundred and sixty-seven*.”

Arthur started. This was the year 140 of the present calen-dar. If she was speaking the truth, the woman must have been 27 when the first analogue societies were founded. She wasn’t merely old, she was prehistoric!

“That’s all right,” she said delightedly, watching his face. “I saw how it all began. I know things I won’t tell.”

“Greatmother—”

“I won’t tell, I said!” she snapped. “I’m just telling you, boy, you want to realize how lucky you are. Isn’t that right? Man’s place is in the mill. The hand that tips the ladle rules the world.”

“Greatmother—”

“A girl’s best friend is her father!”

“Greatmother, they’re ready to start,” said the bony woman firmly, and began to wheel the old woman away.

“Birds should sing,” the old woman squalled over her shoulder, “but a man should be still! Man’s work is never done!”

“Greatmother—”

*“They also serve, who only impregnate!”*

After a moment the bony woman reappeared alone, flushed with irritation. “There isn’t time for you now,” she said. “You’ll have to wait outside. Quick!”

Arthur took one last glance before he stepped outside. The knot of people at the far end of the room had divided; the rest of the crowd was moving back, and he could see the alcove with the moon-symbols carved in the lintel. Inside, there was a covered table on which a young girl was stretched out; at this distance, she looked barely nubile. At her feet, an old man was fussing about a smaller table that held a clutter of equipment. He lifted some small thing, and Arthur saw the flash of steel.

Higsbee’s voice said, *“They have a superstition that it’s un-lucky for a strange male to be in the house during a defloration ceremony.”*

Arthur jumped. He turned instinctively toward the exit. But, he reminded himself, the lower orders needed permission to *leave* a house. In the nearest archway, a violet-clad houseboy stood watching him sardonically.

*Advise,* he clicked out on his signal-ring.

*“Better stay where you are,”* said Higsbee’s voice finally. *“They may be furious to find you there or not, depending on various things, such as who sees you first when they come out.”*

*Be specific,* Arthur demanded ..

*“Impossible.”* Higsbee sounded remotely amused. *“They use mescal at these things, in order to see visions of the Good Goddess and so on. It makes them hard to predict, but don’t worry about it. Nothing they can do to you will damage you permanently.”*

Arthur kept his opinions to himself and waited. There was a lot of silence inside the chamber, and then some low chanting that got on his nerves, then silence again.

After about half an hour the door suddenly slammed back into the wall and women began to stream out, flushed and glitter-eyed. Arthur, huddled on his bench in an alcove, tried to make himself inconspicuous.

Gertrude and Ursula wandered by arm in arm with fixed smiles on their faces; Ursula’s hair was more disheveled than ever, and she was humming under her breath. Milling slowly around the hall, the crowd was breaking up into little groups, all quiet and dazed-seeming, but with a fierce, faraway glitter in their eyes. Three old men with cameras scurried past, and about half the crowd gradually oozed out in the direction of the portico. After another quarter of an hour, some of the people wandered back while other groups dispersed. The hall was emptying; the faces Arthur saw looked calmer, sleepy-lidded and dull. He was beginning to think no one was going to notice him at all when a plump brown-haired girl suddenly appeared in front of him, planted her feet and stared.

Arthur arose nervously. It took him an instant to recognize the girl as the one he had seen on the table inside: she couldn't be more than ten or eleven, but she was dressed now in the same kind of ceremonial clothing her elders wore ... and looked better in it, to Arthur's critical eye, than they did. She was feverishly bright still, her eyes puffy, lower lip petulant and cruel. "You're the new boy," she said. "Hm!"

"Yes, madam."

"I *may* take you for my lover. *Or,* I may not." She put one chubby hand on her brow in a careful gesture. "Well, move around a little—let me see what you're *built* like."

Arthur obeyed unwillingly, feeling like a prize calf. The second time around, a stringy many-mother made an irritated gesture at him, and he stopped.

"Come away now, Diane," said the woman. "Look what mama's bought for you." She pulled forward a young-old man with sleek hair, reeking of rosewater. He looked at the girl side-long and grinned.

Diane barely glanced at him. "Go away, I don't want you." She turned. "I want *you!"*

The thin woman said shrilly, "Girl, don't be a fool. I bought this one for you from Floria Goodrich—he's *guaranteed.* Now be sensible. You can't have that one *anyhow—he* belongs to your Aunt Marcia."

She seemed to think that settled the matter, but the girl didn't. "Today I am a woman!" she yelled, making heads turn all along the hall. "I get to choose! It says so in the ceremony book!" She whirled on Arthur. "Lie down, you," she said, and began pulling up her brocaded skirt.

"What's this?" a deep contralto demanded, and the gather-ing crowd parted to let a tall, regal woman pass. The top of Arthur's head was about level with her chin, and although she was wearing ordinary traveling clothes instead of the open-topped ceremonial dress, it was obvious that she was built on a heroic scale. Arthur stared at her in awe: there was something fascinating about the mammoth bosom, the balanced thrust of the belly, the pillow-sized buttocks. When she moved, she quaked.

"I'm glad you're back, Marcia," the thin woman was saying, with mixed relief and irritation, "though why you couldn't be here for your own niece's Initiation—"

"All right, dear," said Madam Marcia, with an edged soft-ness; and to Arthur, "Who are you?"

Arthur identified himself for the third time. The big woman stepped closer—suffocatingly close ("Oof!" said Higsbee's wry voice in his ear)—and peered at him with large, liquid eyes. "Oh, yes," she said. "I remember. I bought you last week and asked them to ship you. Now what's the trouble?"

Diane and her mother began talking at once; Madam Mar-cia listened to them both, unruffled, gazing with icy patience at the wall over their heads.

"... I told her he belonged to you, Marcia, but—"

"... the most important day of a woman's whole *life—"*

Madam Marcia stopped them both with a raised hand. "I understand. I'll settle it," she said, and a deathly hush fell. "We'll let the wench himself decide." She smiled at Arthur. "Which will you choose, boy—Diane or me?"

Arthur knew the right answer, but the words stuck in his throat. *"Marcia!"* said Higsbee's voice sharply.

"I choose you, madam," said Arthur.

Diane burst into furious tears and was led off, stamping her feet. “Show him to my apartments,” said Madam Marcia over her shoulder as she turned away, pulling off her gloves.

*“Sorry to nudge you that way,”* said Higsbee’s cool voice as Arthur followed a houseboy down the hall, *“but I was afraid you’d show indecision. It would have been out of character. Marcia’s a powerful woman—the real Carl Smeltzer jumped at the chance to be sold to her.”*

Arthur ticked back, *Right.*

*“And on top of everything else,”* Higsbee said, *“she has what the Coninders regard as a gorgeous figure.”*

Arthur waited in his cubicle, but nothing happened. He got hungry and fed himself from the autochef. He killed time by talking with Higsbee, who turned infuriatingly laconic. His signaling finger got tired, and he gave up. Hungry again, he fed himself. The big central salon of Madam Marcia’s suite re-mained empty; if there were other males, like himself, waiting each in his cubicle, he heard nothing of them.

Eventually he discovered with astonishment that it was after midnight. He ticked out to Higsbee, *Did you ever go through this?*

*“Many times,”* said Higsbee promptly.

*Good night,* he tapped out viciously.

*“Pleasant dreams,”* said Higsbee.

It occurred to him that it was entirely possible that Madam Marcia wouldn’t visit her apartments for another week. He dozed off.

Someone was shaking him. “Mm?” he said, opening his eyes, half-awake.

A huge gray bulk was leaning over him in the dim light from the doorway. “Get up,” said Madam Marcia.

He scrambled out, his heart pounding. “Put your clothes on,” she told him.

She watched, smoking a thin cigar in a holder, while he got into his robe and brushed his hair. Then she heaved herself up, gracefully enough, from the armchair and walked over to him. “Now. Are you loyal to me? Will you do *anything?”*

“Yes, Madam Marcia.”

“Good. Get your cloak and come along ...”

Arthur followed her out into the dim corridor to an upstair; they rode in silence to the roof. The roof was still and dark under a starless gray sky; it was still hours before dawn. Madame Marcia climbed into a copter. Arthur followed.

Madame Marcia took the controls and they rose clear of the roof, but began to drop again almost immediately. They landed on the dark lawn near a summerhouse that stood glim-mering faintly on the shore of a small lake.

Madame Marcia yawned and stubbed out her cigar. “There are some young men in that building,” she said. “Go and wake them and bring them here.”

Arthur stumbled across the lawn in a state of dumb wonder. He clicked at Higsbee to see if he was awake. *H. H.*

*"Yes?"*

*What do you make of it?* he asked.

*"Wait and see,"* said Higsbee, irascibly, and yawned in his ear.

There were, indeed, four young men asleep in cubicles in the summerhouse. Arthur awakened them all and got them to dress, and the five of them trooped back to the copter and climbed in.

"All here," said Madam Marcia comfortably. She stopped Arthur as he was about to clamber back into the rear seats with the rest. "You: can you fly a copter?"

"Yes, Madam Marcia."

"Fly, then." She moved back, and Arthur got into the pilot's seat, moving it forward until he could reach the controls.

"That is the heading," said Madam Marcia, reaching over his shoulder to point to a glowing line in the illuminated map. "Climb to two thousand; I will tell you when to come down."

A gloomy silence fell in the copter. When they had been in the air nearly twenty-five minutes, flying south-southeast to-ward the foothills of the Cascades, a bell rang on the control board. "Press the stud beside the map," said Madam Marcia.

When Arthur did so, the glowing line snapped around until it was aligned almost directly north and south. He followed the new heading without waiting to be told, and the copter droned south for an hour. When a mountain which the map identified as Diamond Peak showed up ahead, Arthur climbed to ten thousand. Madam Marcia made no comment. A few minutes later, the bell sounded again; the new heading was west by south.

Another forty minutes brought them within approach dis-tance of a small settlement on the east bank of a dry creek. "Land there," said Madam Marcia.

As Arthur took the copter down, Higsbee's voice came sud-denly in his ear: *"What is that, Rosetown?"*

*Right,* Arthur clicked.

*"The supply rail runs through there,"* Higsbee's voice mut-tered. *"Myrtle Creek, Glendale, Grants Pass—Yes, by all that stinks in Conind!"*

Arthur twitched. *What?*

*"I think I know where you're going. The perfect place, I should have thought of it before ... Isn't that a train lamp down there?"*

Madame Marcia leaned forward, peering. "Drop faster," she said.

*"I think that settles* it. *If I'm right; you'll all be in a freight car heading south about ten minutes from now. And, let's see,*

*I imagine the train will stop long enough to let you of some-where inside a tunnel .."*

Arthur ticked out impatiently, *Going where?*

*"To the caves, Sebastian. The old Oregon Caves. Down, down, down!"*

Up beyond the partition, somebody let out a startled yell.

A shudder ran through the little group in which Arthur stood. After a moment the line moved a few steps closer to the bend in the narrow corridor. There was a silence, while they all strained their ears: then the yell again, in a different voice.

They all shuddered. The line moved forward. There were, Arthur guessed, only about four ahead of him now. What was going on up there?

Somewhere in the labyrinth of natural and man-made passages on the way down, moving through light into darkness into light again, they had lost Madam Marcia; but somebody in Stockholder costume had always been on hand to order them onward. Finally they had reached a room crowded with other young men, from which they'd been called four at a time into a room containing a row of perfectly ordinary sacred machines—analogue machines, as he had learned to call them. With a few omissions—costumes, music—it was almost exactly like the Confirmation Chamber he remembered from his boyhood.

*"That's all we need, pretty nearly,"* Higsbee's satisfied voice had said in his ear. *"Don't try to fight the anesthetic. Relax and do as you're told."*

An attendant in white shorts and halter had buckled him in and fitted the helmet on his head; and that was the last he remembered. He felt no different from the treatment, but then you never did, even if you were a Normal. Now here he was, with a gang of others who had been through the analogue room, waiting for—what?

There was a shriek from the next room. A moment later the swinging door opened and an attendant beckoned. The man ahead of Arthur stepped in.

Arthur counted off the seconds. The yell came. The door opened.

Arthur walked into a bare room that had four people in it: a bored gray-haired woman in shorts and singlet, the attendant who had let him in, and two young men with bewildered expres-sions. Arthur recognized them as the two who had been be-fore him in line. It was good, anyway, to see that they were still on their feet.

The gray-haired woman began reeling off a memorized speech that began, "We-must-all-do-as-Goddess-commands-no-matter-what ..." It took him a while to catch her drift; even-tually he realized she was telling him that, along the borders of the civilized world, people had been influenced by the near-ness of demons—not demons themselves, mind you, and not possessed, just influenced, but stubborn nevertheless; and to make them see the Light of Truth again, Goddess had ordained a somewhat unusual procedure.

"To make this possible, Goddess has sent you a new angel—and for the inscrutable glory of Goddess, this angel will let you do things you never could do before." The woman gestured at Arthur, then at the other two in turn. "You and you—drag him across the room. Go ahead."

One of the young men took the other one by the arm and waited for Arthur; both of them grinned weakly. Arthur's mind was working too fast for him to keep up with it: if this meant what he thought it did—why, the possibilities inherent in *releasing* hostility repressions, if that's what they were doing, and

multiplied by the tens of thousands who were processed here, the possibilities were staggering. Dazedly, he walked over and took the man's other arm. His opposite number tugged, while the man in the middle held back. This, Arthur thought, would be where the shout came in. He helped pull the middle man across the room; stopped, looked around as if expecting his angel, and shouted with amazement.

Ten minutes later, having served his turn as puller and pulled for the next two recruits in line, Arthur found himself in a group being marched across the floor of a long, broad cavern toward what looked like rude barracks on the far side.

*"Who's that in the scooter sidecar, coming this way?"* Higs-bee asked suddenly. *"Get me a clear view."*

Arthur contrived to stumble clear of the group as the scooter approached. The passenger, an imposing woman Arthur had never seen before, glanced at him incuriously as she passed. *"Good!"* said Higsbee with enormous satisfaction. *"That nails it down good and proper. All we have to do now is get you out of there."*

*Explain.*

*"I've got this all taped, vision and sound, and the locator record too, but that could be faked. We had to have some-thing to tie this to Conind, and we just got it—that woman was Madame Euphemia O'Ryan, a member of the Intersocial Commission, and there's no faking her."*

*Show tape to Comm?* Arthur asked.

*"Exactly. We need just one more thing, visual evidence to support the locator record ... Where would you put the in-firmary in a layout like this?"*

Caught off guard by the change of subject, Arthur stared around. *Back along corridor,* he tapped out.

*"Good. I think so too—and hope so, because there are* at *least three emergency exits back there. Get sick."*

That was easy, anyhow. Arthur stopped, clutched his middle, and sagged over slowly. He lay on the floor, groaning and writhing *ad lib.,* until two male attendants showed up with a stretcher and carted him back.

The infirmary turned out to be full; through the open door-way, Arthur could see a couple of young men on cots, looking very green—casualties of the re-conditioning process, no doubt. The stretcher bearers set him down and went away.

Arthur got up as a new herd of recruits came along. He said to one of them in an authoritative voice, "Lie down there," and as the bewildered young man obeyed, Arthur trotted down the hall to the door with the red light over it.

Twenty minutes of hard climbing brought him to the surface, in the middle of a clump of scrub pine. Higsbee's copter was circling overhead.

"Where are we going?" Arthur asked, as Higsbee headed the copter northeastward. They had started out to the south—back to the College, Arthur had naturally supposed.

Higsbee did not reply immediately. He was studying the scope of a high-powered radar unit, not standard in small craft. "There's an object," he said finally, "making large silly circles over us at about fifteen thousand. I just want to see what it'll do if we move over a little ...."

Fifty miles farther along, the object was still there. It was a jet, evidently, with a cruising speed much faster than the cop-ter's: hence the circles. And it was maneuvering to stay directly overhead as the copter moved.

"Anyhow," said Arthur, without paying much attention to what he was saying, "you've transmitted the tape, haven't you? They can't stop that."

"To hell with the tape," said Higsbee precisely. "I am think-ing of saving our necks."

They climbed, and rose between two of the lesser Cascades. On the other side, a low overcast was gathering over the big lake and the country beyond. Higsbee nosed the copter down. "Horton, Hunter, Hildebrand," he muttered, reading the map. "Yonna Valley, Kitts, Bonanza—all in a twenty-mile line. Good." Feathers of cloud began to whip past them, thickening slowly; Arthur thought he could make out two of the villages Higsbee had mentioned, strung out along a creek. Then the landscape wheeled majestically around through half a circle;' creek and villages slid out of sight.

"Not going to land there after all?"

"I never meant to," said Higsbee. "I hope they'll think. I was fool enough—it'll keep them busy hunting for a while—but one copter landing is an event in little places like those. Our only chance is to lose ourselves in the nearest mob—right there at the tip of the lake. Klamath Falls."

*Pop. 22,000, Tourist resort,* Arthur read from the code at the edge of the map. "What'll we do, join a boating party, or sightseers?"

"Neither. We'll go where the real mob is—in Store."

It was, of course, the best possible place to hide. But just as' they reached the top of the first upstair, Higsbee in the lead, a woman appeared at the stairhead, blocking their way.

It happened too quickly. Arthur thought Higsbee had merely lost his balance; but as the body toppled, twisting, Arthur saw the long knife-hilt standing out, just below the sternum.

He watched with detachment—too shocked to feel anything—as Higsbee's body rolled and slid toward the bottom, Con-sumers scuttling aside to give it room. Then he turned toward the woman; only a second or two had passed; the stair above him was just sliding in under the guard. He recognized the woman. It was the olive-skinned one, Madam Gertrude—the first one who had spoken to him at the Hamblings'.

And, staring at him as he rose, she took a deep breath and screamed: "Guard!" It was miraculous: the golden uniforms appeared everywhere in the crowd, below him and above. "Murder!" screamed Madam Gertrude. "He killed that man! I saw it myself"

His trial was quick.

Bound tight as a caterpillar in the adhesive tangler cords, and with a gag in his mouth to keep him from uttering any blasphemies, Arthur stood in the prisoner's box and heard the evidence: a taped record of Madam Gertrude Hambling's statement, and the statements of two of the arresting officers.

"Open and shut," said the magistrate. Her jowls trembled with revulsion. "I sentence it to Disposal. Take it away."

# Chapter 15. State Of Mind

Box and all, they had loaded him into the rear compartment of a golden Guard copter. They had opened the box from the rear and strapped a parachute on his back; it was less than com-fortable to lie on. They had cut the tangler cords and removed the gag, but he was shackled to a set of rings inside the box.

Over him was the curved, featureless roof of the compartment. Behind him, in the forward wall, there was a small win-dow through which the two Guards could inspect him if they felt like it. So far, they hadn't.

The compartment stank of fear. How many trussed bodies had been dumped in here—and where had they all gone?

More precisely, what had happened when they got there? Arthur—the new, College-trained Arthur—knew what no Con-sumer anywhere was supposed to know: that "Disposal" meant being deposited in a tiny pocket of territory, a few thousand square miles, of what had once been the State of Washington.

But that was no comfort.

It was mountainous country—the high ridge of the Cascades on the east, lordly Mt. Rainier to northward, Adams and St. Helens to the south. On the old maps, there were a few towns in between—Morton, Randle, East Creek Junction. Now there was nothing. The Immunes did not know, nobody knew what was there. All the midcontinental societies dumped their crimi-nals in the Blank because it was simpler and surer than the Great Desert or some other wasteland; but what happened to them, they didn't know.

They only knew that nobody ever came out again.

The vibration of the copter's engine altered subtly; the body swayed a little. They were hovering. Arthur thought he knew what that meant.

Without warning, the floor beneath him dropped away. He toppled with a yell, twisting out of the overturned box. Off to one side, the earth was wheeling with a vast, sickening slow-ness. Icy air stung his eyes and stopped his breath.

There was a tiny tug at his back, and, half a second later, *a* violent one that nearly split him in two. Stunned, Arthur found himself swinging pendulum-wise from a white flower of fabric that belled out over his head. The earth was under him where it belonged; the copter was out of sight somewhere above.

He was drifting rapidly, under a cold sunny sky, toward the edge of a low blanket of cloud ... no, not cloud; he couldn't make it out. Above him the copter came into view past the edge of the canopy. Its engine sounded suddenly odd. It seemed to be trying to turn, And not making it.

But the strangeness that wasn't cloud was coming toward him alarmingly fast. As he drifted it had spread out under him—neither cloud nor mist, but he couldn't see the ground through it, and the tall cloud-capped peaks beyond had some-how vanished, too. He was falling—toward what?

He looked around frantically for the copter. There, at any rate, it still was. But it was acting oddly: vanes spinning at full speed, fire spouting from the tubes, it ought to have been going somewhere; instead, it was settling lightly and deliberately, like *a* milkweed seed on a calm day. Come to think of it, Arthur realized, the wind seemed to have stopped, just about the time he crossed the line into this—but he still didn't know what to call it. Looking down, it was as if he were staring into water reflections with his eyes not focused right, as if he could blink and make sense out of it, but it kept shifting ...

He landed. The ground melted into view quite suddenly, and his feet touched with only the faintest jar.

He was erect on a sloping meadow of cropped, bright green grass, while the parachute slowly collapsed into an enormous white pancake at his feet. The strangeness, whatever it had been, was gone—there was the sky, of that sweet sharp blue that comes only in early autumn, and there, drifting down to a landing *on* the slope a few hundred yards below him, was the copter.

But a parachute landing, a faint memory suddenly reminded him, was supposed to be about equal to a fifteen-foot jump ...

*What was wrong?*

Here came the two guards, toiling up the slope. Down below, the copter had settled on one stubby wing and looked oddly fixed, like an old relic, overgrown with vines. He could see the Guards' faces now; they looked pale and strained.

"Mother of All," one of them kept saying. He looked dazed, and his eyes didn't seem to focus on Arthur. "It froze, right when I tried to turn. Just like that—the wheel froze. Mother of All."

"Uriah, there's the demon!" said the other one behind him, pointing. They both stepped back, elbows wide, and the second one pulled out a little gas-pellet gun. He pulled the trigger. The pellet rolled out of the barrel and dropped at his feet.

"Plop," said the Guard, dazedly.

The other one had a tangler gun in his hand. He aimed it at Arthur; his hand was shaking. "There!" he said, and pulled the trigger. The gun coughed apologetically; a few thin strands dripped dismally from the muzzle.

"'S bewitched us!" shouted Uriah, and they both turned and ran, diagonally down the slope, separating as they went. One disappeared into a brush-choked ravine, the other around the shoulder of a low ridge.

Arthur turned slowly. Everything looked so normal and ordinary, and yet—where was Mt. Adams? He remembered it clearly; it had been plainly in view when he was coming down—a big, imposing mountain. You couldn't miss it. Where was it now?

He thought he was facing south, but to make sure he turned around again. This time he saw something that hadn't been there before—a slender little man with a timid face, standing a little above him on the slope. He was dressed in a single white garment, shorts and singlet combined; it seemed a little in-adequate for the climate. "Hello there!" he called, wiggling his fingers.

"Hello," Arthur returned cautiously. The little fellow smiled and walked closer. He had a round, baby-pink face, with features as pale and indistinct as a child's drawing, "I knew you were coming," he remarked. "That's why I thought I'd come over and meet you, *Elkanah."*

Ignoring this last, Arthur said, "Which way is south, can you tell me?"

"South of what?" the little man asked vaguely. "It's all rela-tive, you know."

"South of here. The Blank. Which way is out?"

"Oh. Well, there isn't any way *out."*

He blinked mildly, craning his neck to look up at Arthur. “This is all there is,” he added. “I mean, there’s some more, up that way, but it’s all like this. *La ilaha illa allah.* You *can’t* get out of the *universe.”*

Cracked, Arthur thought uneasily. Was this what happened to people who were dropped into the Blank? Was that why they never came out—because they became convinced there was no place to go?

If so, why? Arthur tried once more. “We came in,” he said. “We flew in, in that.” He nodded toward the copter. Now there was an idea; if he could fix whatever was wrong with the machine.

“Oh, no,” the little man was saying. “Those things can’t fly, you know. They’re heavier than air. They *fall.”*

Arthur glanced at him, then peered down the slope again. Was there something odd about the way the copter looked, or not? Decisively, he started off down the slope.

Behind him, the little man’s voice said, “Would you like to see that one? All rightie.”

The grass flowed suddenly up past him, as if he had lost his footing and taken one gigantic, impossible step to catch him-self. He tried to fling himself backward, trembling all over. But he and the little man were standing quietly two feet away from the grounded copter. The moving earth was unaccountably still again.

And the copter, gray and rusty, *did* have vines growing all over it.

Arthur turned and stared at the meek little man. What he had just seen was impossible; therefore the little man had somehow persuaded him it had happened. Or, contrariwise, he had just *seen* it happen, and therefore it *wasn’t* impossible. “But I came in it,” he said. “I saw it land, right here.”

“Oh, *no*,” said the little man kindly. “You’ll soon get over that. Let’s go and get it taken care of now, shall we? You’ll feel so much better. Come along, Arthur.”

Arthur said, “How did you know my—” But the little man was twinkling away up the slope, his pink pipestem legs work-ing with careless energy. Arthur set his teeth and followed. Around the far side of a large boulder they came upon the Guard called Uriah, running as fast as he could go and not getting anywhere.

*“Quadhosh, quadhosh,* Uriah,” said the little man. “Come along, now.”

Uriah, pale and perspiring, looked as if he were about to faint. He gulped speechlessly and fell in behind Arthur.

Up at the top of the slope, back against a fallen tree, sat the other Guard. *“Quadhosh,* Daniel; come along with us,” and the Guard heaved himself up and followed along. They took a barely perceptible trail that meandered down into a fir-car-peted hollow and came up again, to all appearance, at the top of the high ridge that had been two miles away a moment before. Arthur was beyond wonder. Like the others, dazed in the cold pine-scented air, he followed and said nothing.

They trooped through the cathedral hush of an old pine forest, out onto a sun-drenched meadow. In the middle, half overgrown and tilted out of plumb, were what looked like the two oldest analogue machines in existence.

*“Here* we are,” said the little man happily. “Now just lie down here—” As the two Guards obeyed, he turned anxiously to Arthur. “You won’t mind waiting? We seldom have more than two at a time—it never seemed worth while to make an-other machine, but we can if you wish.”

"No, no," said Arthur numbly. "Go right ahead, I'm in no hurry." He was staring at the machines—bulky, angular things, half again the size of the ones he knew. The lettering on the dials was old-fashioned and dim

The little man was fussing around the two machines and the Guards on their cracked leather couches. After a moment he stepped back beaming. *"Lizkur,"* he said, waving his hand. The Guards' eyes promptly closed; both machines hummed, and the dial indicators swung over.

Where was the power coming from? Arthur poked the grass away from the base of the nearest machine, found the place where the power leads ought to be. There was nothing there at all.

The little man was at his elbow, disconcertingly. "The Power is all around us," he said, with a gold-toothed smile, and winked mysteriously.

Slack-jawed, Arthur looked back at the machine. He poked at the grass again, then stooped and pulled it aside. There at the bottom, in raised metal letters, he could read: PSYCHO-THERAPEUTIC EQUIPMENT CO., INC., *A Division of the Kusko Psychiatric Institute, Inc., Chicago, Illinois. Model 101.*

The very first production model—nearly a century and a half old! Even if it had a power source, it shouldn't still be running ... Arthur got up, with a buzzing in his head. The machines had stopped. The two Guards were getting up, look-ing as if someone had just promoted them to Chairmen of the World.

"Truth," said one of them intensely to the other, and made rippling motions with his fingers.

"Substance," agreed the other, letting his hands float in the air like water lilies.

They both glanced at Arthur and smiled distantly; then one of them, while the little man looked on approvingly, climbed onto his partner's shoulders and from there climbed a step higher into the empty air—and from there another step, and another, until he was a trudging figure dwindling, gnat-sized, against the clouds.

Arthur turned, and saw the other Guard frowning slightly, concentrating. After a moment a hair-thin golden halo glowed into being over his head. It hung unsupported and insubstan-tial. It pulsed rhythmically, like a Store sign.

"Oh, no!" said Arthur.

"Oh, yes," said the ex-Guard solemnly.

A large mountain lion dropped to the ground from nothing-ness, strolled past the Guard, and lay down. It was followed by a small woolly lamb, which curled up against the lion. Both of them stared offensively at Arthur.

"Glory!" said the ex-Guard. *"Mirabilia, mirabile dictu.* We can do anything we believe in *and* we *can believe in anything!"* He strolled off, followed by the lion and the lamb.

"Now then, your turn!" said the little man cheerfully, stand-ing beside one of the empty couches.

"I'd rather not," said Arthur desperately. Whatever happened to people under that antique analogue helmet, it broke all the rules he knew, and he wanted no part of it. He backed away a step. "If it's all the same to you—"

"But," said the little man in a wounded tone, "you can't stay here unless you take the treatment."

"That's it," Arthur told him. "I'll leave, if you'll just—"

"But there isn't anywhere to go. I *told* you that. Negative thoughts, negative thoughts—I shall have to be *firm*." The little man's hair, what there was of it, began to stand on end. Little blue sparks jumped between the nails of his outstretched hand, as, frowning, he pointed to the couch.

Arthur lay down.

When he came to, the first thing he saw was the little man's beaming, expectant face. He sat up slowly. Beyond the first face there were two more at different heights, constructed somewhat differently, but both, it seemed to Arthur, wearing exactly the same cheerful, prim expression.

Remembering the last thought he had had before he went under, Arthur gazed at the top of the first little man's head, concentrating: *Let there be a butterfly sitting there.*

He didn't know whether to be relieved or disappointed when nothing of the sort happened.

But the three gentlemen—all of whom, he saw now, wore the same hygienic one-piece garment—were still looking expectant. There was nothing to do but fake it and hope.

"Glory!" he said, booming it out from his chest.

All three beamed harder. "Perceptions," said the one on the left, making slow duckbill motions with one hand.

"Immanence," said the second, describing a circle in the air.

"Circularity," said the third, hooking his first and fourth fingers together.

"Constitutionality," said Arthur at random, waving his hands in what he hoped was a mystic pattern.

Apparently it was the wrong one. All three gentlemen jumped as if he had said a bad word; their prim smiles changed to frowns. When Arthur backed away, they all floated after him like balloons on a string. When he turned, more of them popped into view out of nowhere, all with the same sex-less pale faces and the same onion-eyes.

They were babbling, all at once. Hands were waved. Then they fell silent, staring at him in a ring. Their left hands came up and swung down again in unison, while they shouted a word that was like a thunderclap.

Arthur had squeezed his eyes shut and flung his arms up automatically. When he looked again, all the pale men were gone. He was standing in a ring of golden light that lay on the grass like melted butter. At the other side of it, ten feet away, a dark-haired young woman sat cross-legged, head down.

She looked up.

"You!" she said.

Arthur had trouble convincing himself that this was the girl he had last seen in the joy palace in Darien. It wasn't just the hair color—nothing about her matched his memory. He rea-lized, finally, with a curious icy shock, that it was himself who had changed. Three months in College had been enough to turn him mentally inside out; he wasn't the same person any more.

He found that disturbing. It didn't matter that he hadn't recognized Anne, except that it had made him understand that if he were to go back to Glenbrook now, and see his parents, they would be strangers ... If a thing like that could happen to you in so short a time, where could you expect an end to it? Was there any real unchangeable Arthur down at the bot-tom somewhere, or not?

They were walking along a narrow glen, heading southward in the late sunlight. The golden ring stayed sedately around them wherever they went, as if somebody up in the sky were following them with a searchlight. It was no hindrance at all, unless the two of them tried to walk in different directions; they had tried that only once, and Arthur's right foot still tingled from the shock.

"Forget about your troubles for a minute, if you think you can," Anne said wryly, "and finish telling me what happened in Conind."

Arthur did. When he got to Higsbee's death, she stopped short. He turned and looked at her; it seemed to him that she was pale. "Sorry," he said. "I forgot you knew him—was he anything special to you?"

"No," she said, "I don't think so," and listened without in-terrupting until he got to the end, the trial and Disposal.

"So you weren't able to get in touch with anyone—Lauder-milk, anybody at the College?"

"I didn't have time," he said. "Anyhow, Higsbee was my only contact."

She nodded impatiently. "Have you got any kind of com-municator, anything?"

"Just this," he said, pointing to the button in his ear. "One way—receiving only, and at that I haven't heard a sound out of it, let's see, since Higsbee picked me up outside the caves."

She clenched her fists impatiently.

"But Higsbee had already transmitted all the information," Arthur said.

"Do you know that? Are you sure?"

Arthur opened his mouth, and shut it again. "I think so. I remember now, I asked him but he didn't answer. Still, he must have, mustn't he? I can't think of any reason why not."

"Neither can I, but that's not good enough." She stopped, frowning, snapping her fingers nervously. "We've got to get out of here—or get a message out, at least." She stared thought-fully down the broad slope onto which the glen opened. "Does this look like anywhere near the place you landed?"

He looked around doubtfully. "It might be, but—no. No copter. If this were the place, it ought to be right down there."

"Count that out. Copters always disappear after the first few hours. The Cornanites don't believe in them."

"The who?"

"Cornanites. Cornan was their founder, the one who built the Blank. He didn't believe in copters, so they don't."

"Ha," Arthur said. Then he scowled. "Look—you've been here, since when?"

She murmured something.

"What?"

"More than a month. Now take another look around. How far inside the line would you say you drifted before you hit?"

Arthur considered. "Not far, I suppose—a hundred, a hun-dred fifty yards."

"Then that ought to be the line, right about there—at the top of that low ridge."

"Sure; but it isn't—there's nothing beyond there but *more* low ridges. No snow-capped mountains, and there ought to be two visible from here."

"I know. Still, unless we've made a mistake, that's the line. It is and it isn't. *Selah*."

"I don't understand you," said Arthur furiously. "If it is, where is it? If it isn't, what happened to it? A thing that's there is *there,* isn't it—whether anybody believes in it or not?"

Her body seemed to tense. She turned blindly toward him and took hold of the front of his robe. "If you knew," she said in a choked voice, "how glad I was to see you—"

Utterly surprised, Arthur helped her to sit down on the grassy bank. All the taut, controlled planes of her face had re-laxed into childlike curves. Her eyes were unfocused and glit-tery. Her hands jumped when they felt his, and clutched hard.

Arthur found himself able to free one arm, and put it around her. She was warm and trembling. Experimentally, he kissed her. He was only half prepared for the response that hurled her tight against him. He was bitten, clawed and bowled over before he recovered himself; then it was an equal contest.

Anne rolled over and sat up with a sigh. She smiled at Arthur. "I needed that," she said.

Arthur absently patted himself, looking for cigarettes. He glanced up with a sheepish grimace; Anne smiled wryly and shook her head. "I haven't any, either. I've been here—five weeks. They've been trying to train me, every day. I was be-ginning to feel—" She stopped, her throat closed, and she plucked savagely at a blade of grass.

"I'm all right," she said after a moment. "I'm all *right."*

"Trying to train you, you said," Arthur ventured. "With the machines, all this time?"

She shook her head. "The machines wouldn't work on me, of course. They couldn't understand it. Evidently we're the first true Immunes ever to come here. It's upset the Cornanites ter-ribly—they feel they've got to convert me, or—" She stopped and swallowed convulsively again.

"Convert you to what?" Arthur asked. "That's what I was going to ask you to tell me, if you can. How does it work—where does it start from?"

"The machines," said Anne with strained patience, "are set up to make people believe they can accomplish anything, just by willing it to happen. And when you believe *it—really* be-lieve it—it seems that you really can do it."

They looked at each other. Arthur said "But," and his mouth began to form the silent syllable "How?"

"I don't know," said Anne. "It's one of the buried facul-ties." She hesitated, pinched up a tiny clot of

earth and grass-blades. “This is something Gordon explained to me once. I won’t say that I understood it, but I can give you as much as I got. Here’s what we know about ourselves and the uni-verse.” She showed him the pinch of dirt. “And here—” she waved her free arm—“is what’s left over. We just don’t know enough, to be sure we know all about anything. There are things we can’t do, probably, just because we never heard of them, or think they’re impossible.”

“But,” Arthur said, “if a power like this is really everything you say, then why is there just this little gang right here? By the law of probability, we all ought to have had it millions of years ago.”

She said slowly, “It isn’t viable. The Cornanites don’t believe in sex.”

He stared at her. “You don’t mean—”

“They don’t *believe* in it. So it doesn’t exist here. There aren’t any children born .... They don’t believe in death either, but once in a great while one of them gets tired. Then he just disappears. Into another plane of reality, they say. But if the other societies ever quit feeding them new people, eventually they’ll all wither away.”

“I was just thinking,” Arthur said, “I haven’t seen any women here. Except you.”

She laughed—a short, unpleasant sound. “There are women here, all right—or people who used to be women, just as there’re people who used to be men. You can’t tell them apart. They all cut their hair the same way.”

Arthur was looking at her in horror.

“Shall we talk about something else?” she asked, through her teeth.

Arthur thought a moment. “Talk about how to get out, would be the best. No, wait a minute—this is the same thing, really. Something else that was bothering me: analogue theory, in College—I remember the lecturer made a special point of this. That the analogue process can make the subject believe in something false to fact, but can’t protect him against the consequences of such belief. I mean, you can make a man believe there’s no chair in the middle of the room, but he’ll fall over it just the same. Now that’s the kind of thing I can’t square with this business .. I know, I *know* theory has to be altered to agree with observation, but *how*—”

A pleasant voice remarked, “It’s quite simple. Our Founder believed in the ability of the machines to give others the Power, and so of course they could.”

He, or she—a spare figure in the usual one-piece garment—stepped nearer and looked closely at Anne. She tried to turn her head away; Arthur could see her neck tendons straining; but she couldn’t turn.

“Not yet,” the, person said in a disappointed voice. “*Pollice verso.*” He, or it, went away.

Anne shook her head, eyes closed. “We haven’t got much time,” she said. “They’ll have a conference now. Then—what that one said. *Pollice verso.* That means they’ll destroy us.” She grunted, and her face twisted.

“What’s the matter?” said Arthur, touching her.

“All this time,” she whispered. “Telling me things ... Bleat-ing Goad! You don’t understand.” Her eyes widened and focused on him. “Five weeks—they’ve had five weeks. It’s turn-ing me inside out. You’re thinking it’s because they can’t convert me that way, just by talking and looking. *But they can*.”

Arthur sat stunned. “You mean it’s working—? Do they know?”

“No. Always—kept it down when they’re near. But it’s get-ting stronger.”

Her eyes closed again.

He shook her. “Come on—is this a time to give up?”

She had gone limp and wall-eyed, but he dragged her to her feet; after a moment she shoved him away. “Can walk myself,” she said faintly but clearly. She started off down the slope with Arthur behind, walking in a series of lurching arcs. As they mounted the next rise, she stared desperately at the blurred distance, trying to pick out some meaningful detail. Where was the invisible, intangible line? Here? There?

Anne sat down suddenly, and Arthur squatted down beside her and thought about it. Could it really be that the Blank was a self-contained Einsteinian universe—that, as the little man had kept saying, there was no way out? Arthur picked up a twig and sketched with it absently on the grass. Call this oval area the Blank. Here at the top, call that “A” and call the bottom “A’.” Call the left and right sides “B” and “B’,” and so on around—“C” opposite “C’,” “D” across from “D’,” meaning—meaning *that no matter where you tried to leave the Blank, you’d simply enter again from the opposite side.* And you wouldn’t be aware that you’d crossed all that territory back-wards in the wink of an eye, because to you, “C” and “C’” would be right next to each other.

So how could you ever tell where the line really was?

‘He traced his sketch over, macerating grass-blades, and stared at it hungrily. Well, suppose there was a certain little range of hills here, part inside the magic circle and part out-side—then to someone inside the Blank it would seem that the range chopped off abruptly, wouldn’t it? Same for other land-marks—big boulders, trees, anything that happened to be right on the line would seem to be chopped in half.

Excited, he stood up and stared around.

“Give them credit,” said Anne faintly.

... Credit, Arthur thought reluctantly, for being a little brighter than that. They could set the limits of the Blank any-where they liked; they didn’t have to chop boulders in half, or anything so crude.

Anne grunted, moving a little as if in pain. Her eyes were shut tight; her lips were parted. That was what was bothering him the most: what was happening to Anne? She had said she was afraid the Cornanites were converting her—making her into one of themselves. She was fighting it, evidently. If she lost—there’d be one more sexless mystic, and only one person left in the Blank who didn’t belong there: Arthur.

She grunted and moaned, and said suddenly, “Get ready!” With that, her eyes opened. She looked at Arthur with a flash of fear in her eyes, and started to get up.

But the ridge was abruptly crowded with white-clothed little persons, all standing still, all glitter-eyed, all looking in their direction. Anne shrank back against Arthur, and he put his arm around her.

One of the Cornanites pointed a hygienic finger: “What shall be done with them?”

And a chorus rose: “Woe! Woe!”

“In thy filthiness is lewdness,” said the first, “because I have cleansed thee and thou wast not cleansed, thou shalt not be cleansed from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my wrath toward thee to rest.”

The chorus echoed in a chant.

Out of nowhere, one of the Cornanites suddenly had a candel-abrum in his hand. He waved it, the fourteen candle-flames swaying as he chanted: *"Eum a societate omnium Cornani-torum separamus, et a liminibus sanctae Conditoris Ecclesiae in coelo, et in terra excludimus."*

A queer chill was running up Arthur's torso. He turned to Anne and said, "What—?"

"Excommunicating us," she whispered. "He's reading us out of the world—"

Arthur grasped at a sudden hope. "Out of this world—back where we came from?"

"Out. Out of everything. Destroying us!"

*"—et damnatum cum diabolo, et angelis eius ."*

Now the chorus had candelabra too, and the whole ridge bloomed with pale light. *'Vikatah! Vikatah!"* they shouted.

Arthur tried to lift his feet, but they seemed riveted to the ground; Anne's limp weight nearly threw him off balance. Was she unconscious again?

"Anne!"

She didn't answer.

*"—doneo a diaboli laqueis resipiscat, et ad emendationem ."*

Anne was moaning and writhing in his arms; but suddenly she squirmed erect and he felt her back straighten firm. He couldn't see her face, but the nearest Cornanite stared at her pop-eyed and waved his candelabrum frantically. "Stop! Stop!" he shouted. "She is gaining the Power!"

Confusion: the chorus milled closer, the leader dropped his candelabrum. Anne was straining upward on tiptoe, taut as a cable, and it was painful for Arthur to hold her. She had his arm gripped tight and he couldn't let go. Then, to his horror, blue sparks began to play around the tips of her floating hair.

The leader pounced and snatched up his candelabrum again. "She wants to escape!" he shrilled. "Continue, *in interitum carnis—carnis, ut spiritus eius salvus fiat in die indicii.* All together"

Glaring like so many fiends, sparks crackling among them, the chorus shouted, *"Fiat, fiat, fiat!"*

Then there was a howl, and it seemed to Arthur that all the candelabra came hurtling through the air while the ground quaked under him

They had leaped, it seemed to him now. They had leaped, with Anne suddenly soaring forward, jolting Arthur along be-hind with an incredible strength. Anne had done it—had suc-cumbed and believed, and then used her new power to move them.

And they had landed.

The high hillside was silent. Looking around, dazed, Arthur discovered that the Cornanites were no longer there. Half a yard behind where they sat sprawled there began a belt of—not mist, but something distorting in the air, a twisting that hurt your eyes, a smoky confusion.

It was the edge of the Blank, and they were outside it. And there, to southward beyond a high ridge, was

a snowcapped monarch that could only be Mt. Adams.

Anne was slumped as pale as death, her forehead sweat-beaded, bluish lids sunken over her eyes. Arthur took her in his arms. “Anne! Anne?’

She groaned and stirred. After a moment she sat up, whisper-ing, “What happened? Where are we?”

Before he could answer, the long-forgotten communicator button in his ear suddenly began to shrill: *“Crash day! Crash day! A Coninder army is crossing the Gepro border near Sacra-mento. We have unconfirmed reports of two others across the continent. This is war, repeat, war!”*

# Chapter 15. World Enough

On the morning of the third day after they escaped from the Blank, they came down out of the hills, following a river all the way, to a dingy city built where the river flowed into the Columbia. It had taken them all that time, pushing themselves hard, to come a distance that Arthur’s Guard copter had crossed in about ten minutes.

Anne had changed. It had happened, Arthur surmised, back there in that instant when she had worked whatever miracle had gotten them unharmed out of the Blank. He hadn’t noticed till later, because there wasn’t much to notice. All the weirdness was gone out of her, but some of the life was gone too. She wouldn’t talk about that climactic moment, and wouldn’t let him talk about it; on every other subject she was quiet, sensible and reserved. She would respond readily to any question or remark, say what there was to be said in the few-est possible words, and stop. It was as if she had simply lost interest.

Arthur was hungry, dirty, chilled, and snappish with fatigue. But his voice receiver had been shrilling warnings at intervals for most of the first day; when it stopped for good, his alarm grew. It was the first time in his life that he’d been free to move and yet cut off from that endless stream of information that he associated with freedom. It was like being deprived of a drug. He felt that world-shaking, terrible, perhaps wonderful things—*something*—was going on in his absence, and it drove him wild.

Out there somewhere,-his world was shaking itself into a new pattern before he had had a chance to decide where he be-longed in it. Neither had he entirely decided how he felt about Anne, and now here she was, a sleepwalking stranger who had, it seemed to him, very possibly ruined herself in order to save his life ..

He left her hidden outside the town and went in to steal clothing and a copter. He moved quickly, with the minimum necessary caution and no more. He was in no mood to skulk. He was ragged, half-naked, bramble-scarred and out of breath, an instant object of suspicion to anyone who might see him; but he discovered that he wasn’t much worried about that.

Confidence and speed protected him. He got the copter and the clothes, discovering meanwhile that this was the town of Kelso, a good twenty miles farther west than they thought they had been heading. It was in Gepro territory, which meant at least that Arthur’s costume had trousers and Anne’s was big enough to cover her.

He put the copter down in the field where he had left Anne. She came over, fast enough but with that irritating looseness in her stride, as if it didn’t really matter whether she got there or not .... He hauled her in brusquely and took off again, tinker-ing with the communicator-vision dial with one hand.

“... third day of the demonist outbreaks,” said a voice abruptly, “Salem is still in the grip of Terror.” The picture bloomed in slowly; it was a young man, pausing for emphasis, with a nervous lock of hair down his forehead. The red com-ponent of the picture kept fading in and out as if something were wrong with

the equipment—or with the engineer. “Guards flown in from Spokane are again trying to quell the rioting in the downtown section. All Consumers and lower-grade Execu-tives are again warned to stay away from this area unless given special instruction.” He cleared his throat. “Formal Founder’s Day observances will be held all over the continent tomorrow, Founder Dine’s Day in the midwest, Founder Glasscock’s Day in the west, south and southwest. In Salem, the usual parade will not be held, owing to—”

Arthur turned it off. He turned to look at Anne; she was sitting beside him with a look of calm interest just fading from her face. She looked back at him, as if she were mildly curious about what he was going to say next, but could wait.

“Anne,” he said, “What do you know about Crash Day?”

“What do you want to know?”

He ground his teeth. “Where will the College people be by now? Laudermilk and all the rest? How do we get back in contact?”

“That depends. They might have gone to Reinosud, just north of Hermosillo. Or District Four, down in the Panhandle. Or Phoenix. Or they might still be in the underground section of the College, sealed off.”

“Well, what are people like us supposed to do—agents who’ve lost contact?”

“I know a drop address where we can wait until somebody gets in touch with us.”

Arthur considered this, and didn’t like it. “How long?”

“Hard to say. Probably not more than a week.”

Arthur’s fists clenched on the wheel. “Anne, we can’t wait a week. That’s a *war* down there.”

“Laudermilk knows about it now,” she said reasonably, “whether Gordon warned him or not. There’s no hurry.”

“Pretend there is,” Arthur told her. “What else can we do, besides hang around a drop address until we get wrinkles?”

She considered. “The only contact I have this far north is in Frisco.” She added, “Ten will get you one he isn’t there now.”

“All the same—” said Arthur.

The only way to get into downtown San Francisco was to take the copter in, in defiance of law. They saw other private copters over the city; the risk seemed worth taking. The streets were a scrambled mass of confusion. Judging by what they had seen from the air, it was nearly as bad in Berkeley and the Bay area. San Francisco had been invaded twice, once from Conind, once from Umerc.

Arthur watched as a handful of struggling Gepro and Conind citizens was engulfed by a ragged line of Umercers. It was not enough to hold them for long; the whole combination broke up and new groups began to form.

What he saw here was almost certainly being repeated in thousands of places, all across the continent. How had it grown so fast?

The address where Anne's contact might or might not be was several blocks down the street. Arthur had tried to call him from a booth inside the building where they had landed, but the channels were clogged with priority calls. There seemed to be only one thing for it, unless they gave up and went away, and that was to try to reach him on the ground, straight through the busiest part of the fighting.

Arthur surveyed the mob once more, then glanced doubt-fully at Anne. In this condition she'd be more hindrance than help, but he didn't like the idea of leaving her behind; he couldn't quite convince himself she could be trusted to be there when he got back.—If he got back.

"Come on," he said, and pulled her after him in a sprint down the sidewalk, close to the building line. For the first hun-dred yards they were lucky; everyone they passed was too busy to notice them. Then they struck an area where one of the big, whirlpooling concentrations was just breaking up.

A wild-eyed combatant lunged at Arthur; then another, and another. He straight-armed the first two; the third ducked un-der his hand, grabbed and hung on.

Failing to break the grip, Arthur worked an arm free and punched the man in the solar plexus. He dropped, but the pause had been fatal: they were surrounded, squeezed into the middle of a tight group of Gepros, surrounded in turn by yell-ing Umercs.

Arthur's impulse was to struggle; instead, he pulled Anne tighter against him and then relaxed, letting the crowd carry them. When the group was broken a few yards farther on by a spearhead of Coninders, he and Anne managed to get clear for another half-block's run before they were again captured. Released once more, Arthur saw the number they were looking for and pulled Anne through the doorway.

They looked each other over. They were disheveled and dusty, clothing ripped, faces shining with exertion; Anne had a scratch down one cheek, but that was the worst of it. Arthur urged her along the hall.

The apartment they wanted was locked; no one answered the signal. The lock, Arthur judged, was a simple latch type attached as an afterthought to the inside of the door; the house dated back to the early first century A. A., when locks had been thought unnecessary. He threw himself against the door experimentally, then again, harder, and again. Wood splintered; the door sagged open.

The apartment seemed empty. There were still clothes in the closets, foodstuffs in the autochef, but the air was stale and there was a thin film of dust over everything. Arthur prowled into the master bedroom and out again. Anne was standing near the doorway, staring at the carpet as if fascinated by the design; Arthur ignored her and went to a filing cabinet in an alcove across the room. After a moment, she followed him.

Arthur had just found, without surprise, that there was nothing at all in the filing cabinet, when suddenly there was a thin scuttling behind him and he turned to see somebody small and quick making for the door.

Arthur bounded after, nearly caught the small figure in the doorway, and did catch it just outside. It squeaked and whirled, all elbows; Arthur chopped it under the ear, and it collapsed.

It was a boy, about fifteen, dressed in the tatters of a middle-grade Consumer's outfit. Tears had streaked his face; there was a crust of dried blood at the corner of his mouth.

Arthur carried him back inside. "Who's this?" he demanded.

Anne peered closer, lifted the boy's face with gentle fingers. "Tommy Garcia," she said after a moment.

“Not an Immune—the Agent here used him for errands.”

“Then maybe he knows. Get some water.”

The boy moaned and came to. His wild glance went from Arthur to Anne.

“What were you doing in here?” Arthur demanded.

The boy cringed. “Mr. Paul, he said I could. What hap-pened, did I trip? He give me the key when he left, and he said to look after the place, but—”

“Where did Mr. Paul go?”

“He didn’t *say.* I wunt of come here, but I was just so tired, I had to lay down somewheres or die. I been captured three times. It don’t look like it’s never gone stop. I’m sure glad you folks are Gepros instead of them demons, like. I been captured already three—”

“Who captured you?” Arthur asked.

“First time, Umercs. That’s what they call themselves. They told me I’m a Umerc now, put me under that machine, and I tell you the *truth,* it was just like they said, I craved dirty food with ‘U/M’ on it and I wanted to capture more fellows to make them crave it too. And I got some too, but first thing you know the Coninds got me. That was yesterday. I tell you, I never worked so hard—”

Disgusted, Arthur took a last look around the room and went out. The boy and Anne trailed after him; the boy was still talking.

“—can’t rest hardly because you got to get them demons, like, but where at’s it all gone *end?”*

They huddled in the outer doorway, looking to see how the fighting went. “Who captured you the third time?” Arthur asked absently.

“*Wasn’t* no third time,” said the boy’s voice behind him. A thin cord descended around Arthur and Anne, and drew tight. The boy’s voice yelled lustily, *“Conboys! Conboys, over here!”*

Two Coninders detached themselves from the crowd and started over. Cursing, Arthur swung himself around, trying to locate the boy. The boy danced nimbly backward, holding the end of the cord; Arthur rushed him, carrying Anne along, and got close enough to kick him in the kneecap. He went down, looking horrified and reproachful, and Arthur was able to loosen the cord enough to slip it off before the two Coninders burst in. He knocked their heads smartly together, and went on out into the street with Anne.

The trip back was more eventful than the trip down; the crowd’s slow total motion still seemed to be in the other direc-tion. Arthur had to use his elbows a good deal, and his hands more than once.

The experience helped relieve his feelings, but not much; he was still simmering when they reached the copter again.

“That drop address I mentioned is just a few hundred miles away,” Anne said reflectively.

“No! I’m not going to sit out the war. You can if you want—I’ll find you another copter.”

She let that go by. “That leaves Reinosud, the Panhandle, Phoenix and the College. Which?”

Arthur considered, gnawing a thumbnail. “There hasn’t been any specific danger to Immunes, that we

know of ..."

"No," Anne murmured.

"—or any breach in our security. If it had been me, I would have stayed put and pulled in my ears. We'll try the College."

The campus looked deserted, and was: nothing but a stray dog on the street, no one in Ad building, no one in the classrooms. Arthur made for the nearest underground entrance, and groped for the concealed door control. It wasn't there.

He looked more closely. There was not a seam or a hairline crack where the control panel or the door itself ought to be. He thumped the wall incredulously. It seemed solid; it was solid—it was an ordinary, lumpish, incredible, uncommunica-tive wall.

"Pull in your ears, you said," Anne murmured.

Arthur considered. They had been in the College for three-quarters of an hour now; if anybody was watching them from down below, it would seem he had decided not to let them in.

A muscle in Arthur's jaw began to jump. He rummaged around the laboratories, Anne following at her own pace, until he found some rags that would burn. He tied them around the tip of a lecturer's pointer, soaked them in lubricating oil, and set fire to them. A satisfactory amount of black greasy smoke billowed out.

Holding the torch, Arthur trotted along the hall, in and out of classrooms, watching every ventilator grid to see if smoke was sucked into it. On the tenth try, the smoke vanished.

Arthur stood under the grid, complacently watching his smoke pour out of sight, until there was a faint shoe-scrape behind him. He turned just in time to take the brunt of a tangler-gun discharge that glued him and Anne together. A gas capsule burst, at the instant when the blow's shock made him draw a breath. *Very efficient,* ran his last thought, *but you'd think they could have shown it sooner* ....

In the anteroom of what used to be the Conind club suite, several students were sitting under a huge mid-continent map speckled with colored pushpins. The pins were arranged in con-figurations that looked as if the normal shapes of Gepro, Umerc and Conind territory had melted and flowed. The map was much pricked, as if the pins had been moved around a lot, but no one was paying any attention to it now. Two of the students were working at orthotypers, one at a miniature litho press, one was making notes from a huge book of tables, and the rest were huddled around something Arthur couldn't see.

A blond young man—Hovey, the Archdeputy's proctor—came out of the inner rooms, moving fast. Their guide stopped him. "These two say they've been to the Blank and got out—by way of Frisco."

Hovey had stopped, fully attentive, looking and listening. He nodded curtly to Arthur, glanced at Anne, then at the guide. "Searched? Tested? All right." He consulted his watch. "Come on." Their guide faded back; Hovey herded them through the inner door.

Inside, the big central room was full of men and women at communicators. Hovey led them across to one of the smaller rooms, went in first, and motioned them after him.

Laudermilk sat behind the desk, listening to someone on a console communicator. He looked up absently; then his eyes focused and he turned slowly, his hands groping flat on the desk top. His old face

came apart at the wrinkles. He gulped for air, and tears leaked out of his eyes.

Hovey was at his side, concerned. “It’s all right—” said Laudermilk with an effort. “I’m sorry.” The tears were running down his face, but he smiled a wonderful shaky smile, look-ing at Arthur and Anne. “I thought you were both dead,” he told them.

At Laudermilk’s elbow the communicator said something querulous. Laudermilk turned to it with an exclamation. There was a garbled moment, while Hovey left, and Laudermilk ex-plained to the voice. “Two minutes,” he said. “Two minutes, only,” and pressed the OFF stud.

“Tell me,” he said, his voice trembling, “everything that’s happened to you. In two minutes.”

They tried. Long before the time was up the communicator was shrilling again, the “emergency” ‘light blinking furiously, and Laudermilk had to attend to it. “Yes?” The communica-tor muttered, clearly audible only where Laudermilk sat. “All right—no, just sit tight and watch.” Muttering. “That’s all. You can’t do any more; the conference is starting now.”

He switched off; immediately the board lighted again and he was telling someone to expect a replacement for the dis-trict board of supervisors within an hour. A moment later, he was bawling a description at Hovey and turning the outer office upside down until Hovey poked his head in again: “Got one—he’s in north Seven. Say three hours.”

Arthur listened, fascinated and on edge. Laudermilk was arranging for a group of Guard vehicles to evacuate an Im-mune day school in Tucson. He was sending a flying squad of engineers to safeguard power installations in Manhattan Beach. He was—Arthur stiffened—apparently arranging the de-tails of an assassination.

Eventually the calls began to slacken. Laudermilk took one more which, to judge by his expression, he had been waiting for. “Yes? ... *Yes.* That’s good news, Arnold. I’m immensely relieved ... Yes, I know they did, but all the same—” He laughed and switched off.

“The conference is over,” he told Arthur and Anne. “Now we can begin to relax.”

“What conference?” Arthur asked.

“Didn’t I tell you? The intersocial conference—very high level. It took them five mortal hours; how I wish I could have been there. Ranting and raving; like a zoo at feeding time. But they finally came to it; it was the only thing they could do, of course—it was what they went there for. The war is over—that is, in principle. Enforcing it will take a little longer.”

Laudermilk had a crowded little suite filled with all manner of strange things—tapestries, ivory chessmen, leather-bound books, bells, wood carvings, ancient golf clubs. While Arthur and Anne ate, Laudermilk brought them up to date. The rumors about Conind had so alarmed the ruling circles in both Umerc and Gepro that they had set up similar illicit analogue training programs. “—Proving,” said Laudermilk, “that there was at least one unabsorbed Immune, as we thought, in every one of them. That’s one good thing that has come out of this—in the general confusion, we managed to kill them all.”

Arthur stirred. “That woman in Portland. Hambling. Gertrude Hambling.”

“Yes. She was one; so was her sister Marcia, as it turned out.”

“Madam O’Ryan?” asked Anne.

"Yes; she too. There was a whole nest of them in Conind. Then there was Clay Willard MacKichan VIII in Gepro, and Noel-Noel Dilworth in Umerc, among others—both very highly placed. Quite dangerous. That's always been a weak spot of ours: we had no control over what went on in the ruling circles, anywhere."

Arthur raised an eyebrow involuntarily. He would have sworn the old man was not watching, but Laudermilk turned to him and added, "Too dangerous. The only way to get an Agent into any ruling family would be to plant him there at birth, and we were very much afraid the result of that would be just one more Stockholder, and probably a rather dan-gerous one. We could try to recruit him at any convenient age, of course, but would we dare? We thought not." He let his benevolent smile linger on Arthur for a moment, then turned to Anne again. "As it is," he said, "there's a mess that will take years to clean up. Gordon and Arthur helped a great deal. Short as it was, that warning gave us an advantage."

"He did get through, then," Anne said. She seemed almost normal again, sitting there, proud in her rags ... Almost? She was normal, Arthur realized. When had it happened? He couldn't remember.

"Oh, yes," Laudermilk was saying. "He got through. We took defensive measures right away, that probably saved us heavy losses, perhaps even exposure. And of course we orga-nized a campaign immediately to keep the Guard out of the fighting as much as possible."

He turned to Arthur, whose bewilderment probably showed. "Now you see, that had two results. It increased the standing of all our people in the Guard—that's a useful by-product—and it saved the Guard forces to be used now, all working together."

"What I'm wondering," said Arthur, who was wondering about several things, "is what effect this will have on the people who've been through the fighting—not just seeing people of other societies, but in a sense *being* them. You talk about cleaning up a mess; is there any way to clean that up?"

Laudermilk looked unhappy. "We don't know. If you want my guess, there's going to be an appalling number of mental breakdowns in the next six months or so. What it amounts to is that we've all had a good shaking; if there had been any weapons used, of course, it would have been a different and uglier story."

"I was surprised at that," Anne put in. "Why weren't they? Conind had time to make them."

"You're thinking of the wars in history books," said Laudermilk. "I made the same mistake; we all did. Why kill people to get territory, when it's so much easier to convert them to loyal subjects?—so they thought. Well .... There's another reason, probably. It isn't easy for an untrained person to handle a killing weapon, even an Immune. The woman you spoke of, Sebastian, was exceptional. You haven't had weapons drill yet, have you? No, I thought not; that comes in the second year. Well—"

He reached into a drawer, and produced a squat object that looked something like a tangler gun and something like an archaic pistol. "This is what you'll use, chiefly. It's our own development; it fires a noisy missile that spreads on contact. I shouldn't anticipate, but you'll be firing at simulated human targets—quite realistic. My point is, you won't find it easy to do. It's an idea we don't *grow* up *used* to; we don't have the toy guns and bombs to play with that our ancestors once had. It will take you a session or two, probably, before you can pull the trigger, knowing what will happen to the target if you hit."

He laid the gun casually on the table before him. "They splatter," he said.

Arthur stared at it in sick fascination. Irrationally (because there had been no sound from that room) he was seeing again the bright wet blood on Hovey's sleeve.

“No, Arthur—” He looked up, startled. “That is not,” said Laudermilk, “the way we kill students at the College.” .

For a choked instant he could feel his face working, beyond his control; he knew that what he was feeling was written there nakedly.

“I’m sorry,” said Laudermilk after a moment, “but that was necessary. It’s clear enough, Arthur, that you haven’t got just the usual freshman doubts; you’ve learned something you weren’t meant to know about yet. Tell me what it was. If you have any reservations about me, or the College, or the Im-munes in general, tell me those, too. Let’s get it cleared up now.”

Arthur knew the futility of lying. He wasn’t prepared; he had given away too much. He took a deep breath. “Did you kill Flynn?” he demanded.

“Flynn?” Laudermilk looked reflective. “I can’t recall. Tell me something about him.”

Pages 188-189 of the Sphere 1967 text are missing

have a good reason to think that three people out of ten would be hopelessly insane without their ’angels.’ You want to get down from this tiger; so do we. Will you tell me how to go about it?”

Arthur made an irritable gesture. “Do it gradually. In a generation—”

“No. *Not enough sane people are being born to run the essential services*—food supply, power, sanitation. Eventually, of course, here and elsewhere, we Immunes will be forced to take control. We are trying to put that off as long as possible ... Yes, I mean it. We would like to delay that event until there are enough of us to fill the necessary posts, but we don’t think we’ll be that lucky. There is going to be a crash, in spite of all we can do, probably before this century is over. It’s not going to be pretty.”

After a moment he added, “When I said just now that each of us carries many lives in his hand, I meant lives of the Nor-mal population. We’re trustees, like it or not. Your grandchil-dren may be able to do what they please; I profoundly hope so. We do what we have to; some of that is not pretty, either. I don’t think I’d call us the least fortunate of human beings, though; I myself have had a full life, crowded with joys be-yond any reasonable anticipation ....”

Arthur discovered that the tension had somehow impercep-tibly drained out of him. The gun that lay near Laudermilk’s hand had lost its sinister significance: it was just another tool of the trade, to be used at its own moment, which was not now.

Watching Laudermilk—and Anne, sitting cool and watchful beside him—Arthur could hardly fit them to the unformed suspicion that had been growing in his mind: that there might be a third or a fourth reason why the College killed freshmen—too much concern with ideals, say, or an unfortunate associa-tion with other people’s bad luck (Anne’s capture in Darien, Higsbee’s death) ....

“Why did you come back, Arthur?” Laudermilk asked.

Fatigue was pulling at his shoulders. “Why?” he repeated stupidly.

Laudermilk nodded. “You had had these doubts about us even before you left, isn’t that true? You had a chance to think about it—you could easily have gone off on your own. Why didn’t you? Why did you come back?”

When Arthur hesitated, frowning, Laudermilk said kindly, “Shall I tell you? It was because you had nowhere else to go. You’re one of us, now. Anne?”

She nodded. “He’ll do.”

“I thought as much. We have made you unfit for any but an Agent’s life, Arthur. Can you resign yourself to that?” He put the gun away.

“Can try,” said Arthur, with an effort. He was so deliciously tired, it was almost too much trouble to think.

“I promise you no peace or contentment,” said Laudermilk softly, “no family in the old good sense, not even happiness—I think you both belong to a generation that will never know how to be happy. No prizes; you won’t live to see the world you make, and if our descendants shape it themselves, as I hope, it’ll be one you wouldn’t like if you could see it .... Nothing at all, except the rewards of competence and curiosity, and an occasional windfall of laughter. I think you will find it is enough.”

A few minutes later, he watched them leave together. Both of them were unsteady with fatigue; their arms were around each other’s waist. They were grimy; tattered and bedraggled, and the average Stockholders’ haberdasher, he thought, would not give a tenth-credit for either of them. But to Laudermilk (as he told himself ironically, yet content enough, sitting there in the weariness of his years) they were the most beautiful things in the world, this side of Jordan.

[1] “Mr. Migliozzius, welcome, welcome. I’m sorry I wasn’t here to greet you, but, to tell the truth—”