



# SCIENCE FICTION

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## HEEL

by Philip Jose Farmer



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*There was something rotten in the  
planet named Truth ... rotten enough  
to call for the intervention of ...*

## **A Tourist Named Death**

## By CHRISTOPHER ANVIL

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Dan Redman walked swiftly and quietly down the broad hallway toward a door lettered:

A SECTION  
J. KIELGAARD  
DIRECTOR

As Dan opened the door, his trained glance caught the brief reflection of a strange, strong-featured face, and a lithe, powerful, and unfamiliar physique. Dan accepted this unfamiliar reflection of himself as an actor accepts makeup. What puzzled him was the peculiar silent smoothness with which his hand turned the knob, while his shoulder braced firmly and easily against the opening door. He stepped into the room in one sudden quiet motion.

The receptionist inside gave a visible start.

What kind of a job, Dan asked himself, did Kielgaard have for him this time?

The receptionist recovered her poise, to usher Dan into the inner office.

Kielgaard—big, stocky, and expensively dressed—glanced up from a sheaf of glossy photographs. He said bluntly, "Sit down. We've got a mess to straighten out."

"What's wrong?"

"A few years back, Galactic Enterprises discovered a totally undeveloped planet with no inhabitants. They claimed development rights and got to work to find an economical route to the planet, which is called Triax."

Kielgaard snapped a switch on the edge of his desk and the room lights dimmed out. Three stellar maps seemed to hang in space in front of Dan, one map directly above the other.

Kielgaard's voice said, "Galactic found a route to Triax that promised to be very economical. Watch."

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On the lowest map, the word "Earth" lit up, and a silver line grew out from it along the stellar map, then jumped up in a vertical straight line to the second map, traveled along this map almost to a place where the word "Truth" lit up. The line then jumped straight up to the third map and traveled along it to the word "Triax."

The room lighted and the maps vanished.

Kielgaard said, "In two subspace jumps and not too much normal-space traveling, Galactic can ship a cargo from Triax to Earth. That's a good, short route, but it comes too close to that planet called Truth."

Dan said, "Truth is the native name for the planet?"

"Exactly. Truth is inhabited. The inhabitants look much like us, and they're very highly developed technologically, though there is no sign that they use space travel in any form. The problem is that Galactic's cargo ships will pass close enough to Truth so that the inhabitants—call them Truthians—will eventually detect them and may or may not like the idea. Galactic's worry is that after sinking a lot of money into the development of Triax, and just as it's about to make a profit on the planet, these Truthians may blossom out with a fleet of commerce raiders, or else claim sovereignty over all contiguous space and land Galactic in a big court fight." Kielgaard glanced at Dan with a smile. "Suppose you were running Galactic and had this problem. What would you do?"

"Try to vary the route. But subspace being what it is, a mild variation of the starting point can produce an abrupt shift in the place where they come out."

Kielgaard nodded. "There's probably a usable route, but there's no telling when they'll find it. Meanwhile, the development license only runs so long before Galactic has to show proof of progress."

"What's this Truth look like?"

"Earth-type, with cities and towns scattered over its surface at random, some of the cities remarkably advanced, some antique, with forest and wilderness in between, and only haphazard communications between cities."

Dan frowned. "Well, then, I'd set down an information team, brain-spy some of the inhabitants, and ease agents into key cities and towns. At the same time, I'd go on looking for a new route, and do enough work on Triax to keep the development license. When things clear up on Truth, I'd develop Triax further."

Kielgaard nodded. "A sound and sensible plan. That is exactly what Galactic did. And after a slow start, things began to straighten out very nicely, too. The more Truth cleared up, the more Galactic invested in Triax. And then, one day, this photograph came in."

Kielgaard held out a photograph showing a busy street corner in a city at night. A brightly clothed crowd was walking along the sidewalk past store windows showing a variety of merchandise.

Kielgaard said, "Look down that street. You see a low building, part way down the block, with a wide chimney?"

"Yes," said Dan, "I see it."

"Look just above the top of the chimney."

"You mean this arrow-shaped constellation?"

Kielgaard nodded. "There is no such arrow-shaped constellation visible from Truth."

"Then this photo is a fake?"

"They're all fakes. What apparently happened is that someone managed to get a spy into Galactic's planning division, and through him found out when and where Galactic's agents were to be set down. They grabbed the agents one by one soon after each agent landed. Since then, they've sent back reports to build up a purely synthetic picture of the planet. The only reports Galactic can rely on are the original impressions of the information team they set down to begin with."

WILL.

Dan whistled. "So someone is working Galactic into position to jerk the rug out from under it."

"Exactly."

"What's Galactic doing?"

"They're trying hard to keep this quiet. But meanwhile, no one knows for sure who the spy is."

"A nice situation," said Dan. "What do we do about this planet Truth?"

---

"Well," said Kielgaard, "the first thing we do is set a man down and let him get the lay of the land. We get more agents ready to move in right behind him. We intend to use the best men available, and nothing but the latest and best equipment. If things turn out as we intend them to, whatever organization started this will come out slit up the middle, stuffed, roasted, and with an apple in its mouth."

Dan said cautiously, "Who's the first agent we set down on this planet?"

"You," said Kielgaard. "And you're going to be up against a deadly proposition. Our opponent is established on the planet, and we're going in cold. Fortunately, we've sunk a good part of our profits into research and it's about to pay off. We have, for instance, installed in your body cavity a remarkably small organo-transceiver. It uses a new type of signal which should escape detection under any circumstances you're likely to face on Truth."

---

"So I can be more or less constantly in touch with you?"

"In any period of relative calm, yes. During violent action, the interference of other currents in your brain would drown out the signal. But we've also run a series of delicate taps to your optic and auditory nerves, so we should have continuous contact by sight and sound."

"You mentioned that the cities and towns on the planet were separated by wilderness. How do I travel?"



"We have a new type of unusually small mataform transceiver." Kielgaard reached in a drawer and tossed on his desk a smooth olive-colored object little larger than a package of cigarettes. "The range is only a few hundred miles, but it uses the new type of signal I've mentioned, which eliminates the problem of orbiting a set of satellites to relay the signal. The problem of first putting the mataform transceiver in the place where you want to go is tricky, but we have a little glider that ought to do the trick."

He showed Dan how to use the glider, and several other new items of equipment, then frowned and sat back. "The worst of this is, we don't know exactly what to expect on the planet. Some big organization could even be trying to take over the planetary government. If so, a lot will depend on what stage things are in when you land. To give you as much chance as possible, your body has been carefully restructured to give you exceptional strength and endurance. The neuro-conditioning lab has recreated in your nervous system the reflexes of one of the deadliest agents ever known. Don't be surprised if you perform certain actions almost before you're aware of your own intentions. It has to be that way to cut down the risks."

Dan and Kielgaard shook hands, and Dan went out to check his equipment.

Early the next day, he was on a fast spaceship to the planet called Truth.

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Dan was dropped low over the night side of the planet in a vaned capsule that whirled straight down, burst open on contact with the water, and sank. From this capsule, a small boat nosed out toward the coast.

In the cramped space inside, Dan checked a little gauge to be sure the boat's outer layer had adjusted to the water around it, so that there would be no sharp difference in the radiation of heat to show up on any infrared detector that might be in range. Then the boat nosed down with a *suck-swish* from the water-jet engine and began to pick up speed.

Several hours later, a thin flexible cable shot out from shallow water at the edge of the junglelike coastline. The cable whipped around the trunk of a tree well back from the water's edge, there was a faint low hum, a grating noise, and something slid up over the rocks and pebbles and came to rest among the tangled trunks and roots of the trees. A moment later, Dan was out and dragging the boat further inland.

When he was satisfied that the boat was safe, he glanced at his watch. The planet's large moon should soon be up and he intended to waste no time making his position more secure.

He broke open a carton of the little mataform transceivers, clipped several of them on small, almost completely transparent gliders, and checked to be sure the little auxiliary motors of the gliders were in working order. He slid on a helmet that fit tightly over his head and eyes, and sent up the first glider. As the faint whirl of the small engine receded, Dan could see before him in the helmet a clear view of the sea, with the thin rim of the planet's moon just rising, huge and blood-red, over the horizon.

The small sensor unit on the glider sent back an image from a safe height above the forest, and Dan switched the helmet from this glider long enough to send up another.

By dawn, he had landed gliders, with their small mataform transceivers, in isolated spots outside three moderate-sized cities within range of the boat. Dan then took another of the mataform units and buried it. Standing nearby, he mentally pronounced a key word.

As he did this, the electro-chemical change in a nervous tract triggered a tiny implanted device that sent its imperceptible signal to the mataform transceiver. The transceiver interpreted the signal, and for an instant Dan sensed a shift in the pattern of things around him.

Abruptly he was standing in the clearing where he had brought down the first glider. Around him were several tall wind-thrown trees. In the gray light of early dawn, he could barely make out the glider and little mataform unit clipped to it. A few minutes later, the unit was temporarily hidden, he had returned the glider to the boat, and he was picking up the second glider in a badly burned tract of forest near the second city.

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When the three mataform units were all hidden, Dan paused for a moment to think through the next step. The three gliders, invisible to the naked eye as they passed high above the tree tops, might possibly have shown up on any of a number of detection devices, to give away both the starting point and the places where they had landed. It was now Dan's problem to outwit these detection

devices.

Dan clipped another mataform transceiver to a glider, put on the control helmet, and sent the glider dodging low and carefully through the trees. He found a spot about two miles away that suited him and landed the glider. He swiftly unloaded the boat and carried its contents to the buried mataform unit, where he mentally pronounced a new key word, which triggered the unit and took him to the glider and transceiver he had just landed. In a short time, he had the contents of the boat stacked beside the glider.

Dan then disassembled the boat and engine, and stacked the parts beside the boat's piled-up contents. By now, the sun was well up, and Dan was becoming aware of a thrumming drone that grew steadily louder. He quickly dug up the buried mataform unit, clipped it to a glider, and hung the glider to an overhead limb by a green string, knotted so as to come undone at the first sharp pull.

Dan glanced around carefully and listened to the increasing drone. He looked up and studied a bumpy blue-green limb well overhead. This limb was located so that a spy unit on it would cover most of the place where the boat had been. Dan carefully gauged the speed with which the droning was coming closer, then went by the mataform to the pile of goods he had transferred, came back with a long tube, and sighted at the overhead limb. There was a *whoosh* and a small colorless blob with a tiny bump in the center spread out on the limb. The blob gradually turned blue-gray, matching the limb, and then the spy unit was indistinguishable from the limb's other bumps and irregularities.

The droning noise was now quite loud.

Dan went by the mataform to his new camp and put on the helmet he used to control the glider.

An instant later, the glider gave a whirl and jerked forward. The knot came untied, and the glider, carrying the mataform unit and a length of dark-green string, flitted out of sight amid the big tree trunks.

Dan, his hand on a knob at the side of the helmet, shifted his vision rapidly back and forth from the glider to the spy unit over the spot where the boat had been.

There now came into view, in the place where the boat had been, something that looked like a cross between an oversize bloodhound and a tiger. Right behind

this came a man with a rifle. Then another man, and another. The angle of vision did not let Dan see exactly where the men came from, but he supposed there was a jetcopter just overhead.

The tiger-like animal snuffled around, pawed at the ground, made trips into the jungle on all sides, and finally ran back toward the shore. The men followed close behind.

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Dan, shifting his attention back and forth from this scene to the glider, landed the glider nearby, just as the last of the men left the place where the boat had been. Dan quickly went to each of the three places near cities where he had landed the mataform transceivers, and moved each of them by glider well away from the places where they had landed. He left behind in each place a small spy unit.

He had just finished doing this when several loads of heavily armed men in jetcopters came down in all three places. The men, Dan noticed, wore no uniforms, and the copters were unmarked.

Dan said mentally, "Can you hear me, Kielgaard?"

"Loud and clear," came the familiar voice. "We're getting sight and sound perfectly."

"Have you got your corps of experts working on everything that comes in?"

"Naturally," said Kielgaard. "But I wouldn't advise you to stop and chat right now. Those boys seem to mean business."

"Do they look like planetary police to you?"

"No. They don't look like anything that was born on that planet."

"That's exactly the way they strike me. Well, maybe I can make them some more trouble."

Dan got out a map and noted a long, fairly straight road from one of the cities, near which he had a mataform transceiver, to another distant city. From this distant city, a winding river curled away to a city even more distant. That night, Dan intended to make use of road and river alike. But right now, he spent an hour or so moving his goods to a place further away from the landing; then he

partly reassembled the boat, and cat-napped till evening. He was awoken at frequent intervals by sudden drops of men and more of the tiger-like animals, at each of the four places where they had been before. Each time there was sudden activity at one of these places, a little alarm buzzed in Dan's ear, and he slid on the helmet to watch a renewed search of the ground.

He had the impression that someone had reported nothing was to be found, and that this word had been passed along to someone who had said there *must* be something there, and it had better be found or else. The search this time was much more careful. But it was not till the last place was searched that one of them came very close to the spy unit, and reached out toward it.

Dan regretfully slid back a protective cover at the lower edge of the helmet and pressed a button underneath. There was a dazzling flash, and then the scene was gone.

Dan would much rather have kept them thinking that maybe there was nothing to look for after all. But he could tell from their numbers and zeal that he was not likely to have very much his own way on this planet.

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That night, Dan sent a glider under power down the long road to the distant city. The glider was low enough to avoid the usual detectors, but happily free of the need to dodge an endless succession of tree trunks. The river served much the same purpose, so that well before dawn, Dan had mataform transceivers planted near each of the two new cities, and also at a place right at the edge of the river. From this spot, Dan threw out into the river a heavily weighted mataform transceiver. He returned to the partly assembled boat and methodically put it together again. This time, however, he fitted sections together differently and left the heavy engine out entirely. He put his arms around one end of the thing he had put together and mentally said a keyword.

The river water rushed coldly around him, gritty with silt sweeping along the bottom. There was a *chug* in his ears as the water triggered off the grab anchors around the rim of the shelter. Dan said another key word and he was inside. He snapped on a light and looked carefully around, but found no sign of a leak.

He transferred the rest of his goods, checked to see that the selective membrane panel was keeping the oxygen at the right level inside, then lay down to catch up on sleep.

The following day, he took three of his small transceivers, and went by the mataform to a place outside the nearest city.

A short walk along a winding trail took Dan past a series of huts and cabins to a rough covered stand displaying combs, brooms, and other simple merchandise, along with a dusty case of what looked like soda pop, and a dust-covered carton of what appeared to be candy bars. The soda pop was labeled "GAS," and the candy had a card labeled "TOOTHROT." The girl in charge of the stand smiled and said, "Good morning, Death."

There was no one else around, and the girl spoke in a perfectly natural way, so Dan smiled back and said, "Good morning."

But as he walked on down the trail, he said mentally, "Kielgaard?"

Kielgaard's voice replied, "I heard it, Dan. We're checking at this end to see if it's some error in the vocabulary we implanted in your brain." A moment later, Kielgaard said, "As nearly as we can tell here, 'Death' is the word she used."

"Funny."

Dan rounded a bend in the trail and came to a moderately wide road, paved with smooth blocks of stone. To his right was a wall about ten feet high, with an open gate and a city street visible behind it. From somewhere came the steady beat of a drum. Dan started toward the gate, but had to jump aside as a heavily armed column of troops marched out, their faces set and their feet striking the ground in an unvarying cadence.

As the last of the troops went by, a man standing nearby turned to Dan and said, "Well, there they go. We won't be seeing some of them again in this life."

Dan nodded noncommittally, and the man looked at him sharply, then grinned and said, "Good hunting."

"Thank you," said Dan. He could hear a faint muttering somewhere in the background, which he took to be Kielgaard and his experts, trying to understand this latest exchange.

Dan followed the man through the city gates, and walked past a variety of small

shops selling baked goods, meats, groceries, hand tools, books, and appliances.

Dan noted the location of the bookstore, so that on the way back he could buy some books. He wanted to transmit the contents of the books; the staff of experts could learn a great deal from a cross-section of a planet's fiction and non-fiction.

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As Dan walked toward the center of the city, he noted that the buildings grew larger, and the shops turned into big department stores. These all looked much the same as the ones on Earth, or on many other technologically advanced planets. The merchandise showed only minor differences in design. Looking in a hardware store, for instance, Dan discovered that ordinary screwdrivers had a short curved crosspiece on the handle—apparently a thumb rest to give greater leverage in turning. Aside from such minor differences, everything seemed the same.

Dan had just decided that the planet looked almost like home when he came to a low building with a paved yard. Into the yard trundled several small carts, similar to the kind used to transfer baggage in railroad and mataform depots back home. On these carts, however, were canvas covers, which were thrown back to reveal fully clothed human forms. On all but one cart, the human forms wore the same kind of white garment, trimmed in various colors. These forms—bodies, Dan supposed—were lifted from the carts by attendants who handled them with the greatest care and respect.

On the other cart, though, the bodies wore street clothes. These bodies were grabbed under the arms, dragged to a black door like the door of a furnace, set in the wall of the building, and shoved through the door head first. As the bodies were shoved in, Dan saw the sunlight glint on what looked like tight metal cords around their necks, bearing oblong metal tags.

Several men had stopped while Dan glanced in to watch this scene. Dan now overheard their comments, which were made in tense angry tones:

"Look at that. If this referendum isn't over soon, it'll dust the lot of us over the forest."

"It's all these charges and accusations that make the trouble. Why we can't do it like civilized human beings, I don't know."

"The trouble is, there's no precedent."

THE PROBLEM IS, THERE'S NO PRECEDENT.

The men walked away.

Dan had the out-of-focus sensation of a man who comes into a room where a joke has already been half-told.

He glanced at the low building. "Are you getting all this, Kielgaard?"

"We're getting it. But I hope it makes more sense to you than it does to us."

"Well, it doesn't."

Dan glanced around, noted the discreet word "DISPOSAL" printed on the face of the small building where the bodies were shoved through what looked like a furnace door. Dan thought he could see what was going on here, but the reasons for the things that were happening were totally obscure to him.

It was in the next block that he began to get some sort of an idea, when he saw a large poster bearing a blue triangle standing point down. Stamped over this triangle were large letters: VOTE YES!

Several blocks away was a big poster showing a green triangle, its base down, and bearing the words: VOTE NO!

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Both posters were dented, scratched, and spattered, as if stones and rotten fruit had been thrown at them. But, though Dan watched carefully as he walked on toward the center of the city, he saw no clue as to what the voting was about. He was also puzzled to find that, though there were many stores, and a fair number of what looked like hotels, office buildings, and apartment houses, there seemed to be no factories, large or small.

The people passing here were another source of uncertainty. As Dan approached the center of the city, he began to sense the peculiar air of freedom that he had noticed in resort towns on a dozen planets. And yet this did not look to him like a resort town. Moreover, it was hard to gauge the mood of the people passing by, because nearly all seemed to react to his presence in some way. Some looked suddenly alarmed, a few looked furtive, others seemed pleased and smiled at him. A considerable number of the women had a thrilled look when they saw him.



Dan walked another block and saw part of the reason for the resort-town atmosphere. Across the street was a sweeping expanse of green. In the far end of this green was an enormous swimming pool, with floats and concrete islands dotted through it to hold diving boards that were almost constantly in use.

Dan, wanting to watch the passersby without their watching him, stepped into a quiet, old-fashioned-looking bookstore that fronted on the green. He looked out the many-paned front window and immediately noticed a change in the people. Without his inexplicably disturbing influence, nearly all of the people fell into two distinct categories. One group had a depressed and angry look. The other group looked cheerful and carefree. Aside from their mood, they didn't seem to differ noticeably in dress, age, or any other way.

Dan glanced around the bookstore and saw that it, like the other stores, could be transplanted to Earth, and—except for the unfamiliar lettering on storefront and book titles—would hardly be noticed. He nodded to an elderly woman working at a small desk to one side of the store, then walked to the rear, where the stacks of books left a far corner partially in shadow and out of sight from the front of the store. Dan stooped, glanced at the dusty row of books on the bottom shelf, and slid a mataform transceiver behind the books.

He walked back to the front of the store, stepped out on the sidewalk, and saw a cart come slowly along in the street. This was the kind of cart he had seen earlier. The outstretched figures of men lay bumping loosely on the cart, metal cords with oblong tags tight around their necks. Dan stepped over to note that the tags he could see all read:

—KILL—

UNAUTHORIZED

---

There was a buzz of indignation from the crowd on the sidewalk as the cart went by.

Then there was a sudden silence.

Dan glanced around.

Walking along the sidewalk toward him was a man about his own height and build, who moved with controlled catlike steps.

The man looked directly at Dan and called out: "Hello, Death!"

The people on the sidewalk rushed to get out of the way. Abruptly the man's arm swung back and forward.

"Catch."

Something flashed in the air.

Dan's impulse was to jump aside, then tackle the man. Instead, his body turned slightly. His right hand, already partly raised, whipped in a short arc, caught something, flicked it to his left, and blurred straight out again.

The man opposite Dan blinked and jumped aside.

At the same instant, Dan's left hand shot out.

There was a gasp from the crowd. The man collapsed with the butt of a knife jutting from his chest.

A voice behind Dan said warmly, "Superb! A return attack complete in one stroke!"

Dan turned to see three alert, strong-looking men. One counted bills from a thick roll. The second opened up a square case with carrying handle. The third was unwinding an armband with a badge on it.

The man with the case held it out. "If you'll just put your fingertips on these plates, so we'll be sure to get your mating credits—"

Dan sensed from the waiting attitude of the people watching that this was some kind of test. Unhesitatingly, he held out his fingertips. There were also two bright flashes as a small tube was held to Dan's eyes.

Once Dan could see again, everyone seemed relaxed and friendly. The crowd was excitedly arguing the details of what had happened. The man with the roll of bills handed over a small fistful, saying, "Double, for the return at one stroke."

The man with the armband put it on Dan's arm as he rapidly recited the words of some rote formula, of which all Dan caught was a frequent reference to "the Code," and the words "peril and deadly danger," and the last words, "now say, 'I

do."

"I do," said Dan, fervently wishing he were somewhere else.

The man with the case was beaming as he snapped the little rod inside. He said genially, "I always know an honest fight when I see it. And these days it's a real pleasure to—"

Just then, he clapped the case shut.

The case gave out a clang like the general alarm on a space cruiser under surprise attack.

The crowd gave a shout. "Unauthorized kill!"

The three men beside Dan jumped forward.



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Dan's left hand lashed out to smash the nearest of the three men in the midsection. The flat edge of his right hand struck the second man just below the nose; then Dan had thrown the first man back against the third, had whirled around and seen the crowd start to surge across the sidewalk to block his escape. He sprinted directly past this crowd, so that when it completely blocked the sidewalk an instant later, he was cut off from the view of the three men he had just knocked down.

Dan did not doubt that these three men were officials of the planet, and he strongly suspected that they were armed and knew how to use their weapons.

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Across the street, at the edge of one corner of the green, was a tall hedge of flowering shrubs, back of which was a grove of young trees. Dan dodged past carts and small, square, silent automobiles, and ran through this hedge. Behind him there was a shout of anger.

To Dan's left were two young trees, growing close together. Dan still had with him two of his little mataform units, and he quickly thrust one of them between the two dark, slender tree trunks.

An instant later, he was in the dark corner of the bookstore, hearing the angry shouts dwindle into the distance outside. The door of the store closed as the elderly woman who ran the store stepped outside, apparently to see what had happened.

A moment later, Dan was in the shelter under the river. He worked quickly with a small brush and some dye, then got out another set of clothes. He checked his appearance swiftly and thoroughly.

Then with more of a tanned look than he had had before, with much darker hair, and wearing entirely different clothes, Dan mataformed back to the bookstore. The elderly woman was standing by the front window as he came forward, to pick up a thin scientific volume lying on a table and say, "I believe you were outside when I came in."

"Oh," she said, "the most frightful thing just happened." She then gave a highly inaccurate account of Dan's fight with the knife man, and described how the crowd was hunting him down right now at the far end of the park.

Dan took his change and said, "I'll have to go look."

He stepped outside and could see the path of the crowd with no difficulty. The flowering shrubs were flattened, and the ground under the trees showed the marks of many feet. Dan recovered his mataform unit and walked a short distance to look down toward the far end of the green, where the swimmers were all out of the pool—probably so that it could be searched for Dan.

He turned around and noticed near the bookstore a large restaurant, built in a style that made him think of an old English tavern. Several men looking well contented came out. Dan realized he was hungry.

He went in, and from a weird merry-go-round serving apparatus got a steak indistinguishable from those at home, and a selection of unfamiliar side dishes that looked good to him, but made other diners nearby wince. Dan paid for his selection and sat down.

During the meal, someone at a nearby table began to talk loudly, and someone else shouted, "Spacerot!" There was a momentary hush in the restaurant, and two burly men in white jackets quickly crossed to the table and spoke firmly to the diners. Peace was restored, and the two burly men wove back through several

parties just leaving the restaurant, and separated to stand quietly but alertly near the far wall.

As Dan ate, he thought, "Kielgaard!"

"Right here."

"Do you make any sense out of what we've seen so far?"

"I get the impression something's about to snap, but I don't know what. Or as my experts here tell me, 'It's too early to venture an opinion.'"

"That," thought Dan, "is likely to be the trouble with this place. By the time we find out what's going on, it will be too late to do anything about it. We're going to have to play hunches to crack this one in time."

Kielgaard said fervently, "*How* we crack it makes no difference to me, so long as we *do* crack it."

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While Dan ate, a considerable crowd of people went out the front door, and two couples came in. The restaurant, however, remained very nearly full.

"Something tells me," Dan thought, "that there must be a lot more to this planet than meets the eye."

He got up and walked toward the back of the restaurant. What he had taken for the rear wall turned out to be merely a wall that divided one section of the restaurant from another equally large, where waitresses served individual tables.

A flight of carpeted steps led down to men's and women's rest rooms and a gently sloping, softly lighted hallway. People were coming up the hall in considerably greater numbers than they went down, and Dan was startled to see that they reacted to him exactly as the crowd outside had, before he had gone into the bookstore to watch them unnoticed.

Dan went to the men's rest room, washed, and inconspicuously studied himself in the mirror. He looked very much different than he had before. Why, then, did the people react in the same way?

Dan concealed a mataform unit in the dimly lit lounge outside the washroom, then went out and down the hall. He had gone perhaps thirty steps when a lithe man coming the other way saw him, whipped out a gun, and shouted, "*Death!*"

One instant Dan was walking down the right side of the hall. A split fraction of an instant later, he had thrown himself to the other side of the hall.

There was a swift, bright flash.

Someone screamed.

The gun went spinning and Dan had the man on the floor, both hands locked at his throat. It was a severe struggle for Dan to loosen his hands.

A crowd gathered so quickly that there was scarcely room to stand. A man carrying a small box with a handle forced his way through. Dan had his captive, half-unconscious, on his feet. Improvising rapidly, Dan said, "I think that was unauthorized."

The man with the carrying case said grimly, "We'll soon find out." He held the man's fingertips to plates in the case, flashed a small tube in his eyes, and shut the case. There was a loud clang.

Two powerfully built men wearing armbands with shields stepped up. One glanced at Dan and said, "Want to finish him? He's yours, by rights."

Someone in the crowd said, "*Question* him! Find out which side is behind this!"

The man with the carrying case said sternly, "That's neither here nor there. The only question is, which side is *right*?"

There was a tense silence. It occurred to Dan that this planet might not be called Truth for nothing. He was still gripping his captive by the arms and wanted in the worst way to question him. But how, in this crowd? And then he remembered that he still had one mataform unit with him.

The man with the case was saying to the sullen crowd, "Maybe you think something's wrong. Maybe it is. All right, you know what to do—*go to the War Ruler*—"

Dan mentally pronounced a key word then opened his hands as he pronounced

Dan mentally pronounced a key word, then opened his hands as he pronounced another.

A momentary flash of dense jungle, and then he was in the corridor again, his prisoner gone.

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It all seemed to take a moment to register. As soon as it did, someone shouted, "Spacerot!" This word acted on the crowd like a blazing torch thrown into an explosives shack. They began smashing each other violently around in the crowded corridor. Dan barely recovered his mataform unit, which had fallen to the floor when he transferred his prisoner, and had a rough time merely staying on his feet. The savage pressing and crowding in the jammed corridor seemed to drive the crowd to hysteria.

Dan realized there was no way to tell when he might get loose. For the second time, he used the mataform unit to get out of the corridor. This time he went to the shelter under the river. He got some strong cord, went to the place in the jungle where his prisoner was, and tied him up. Then he returned to the shelter, fitted a set of small filters in his nostrils, and went back to the lounge outside the washroom near the corridor, carrying a small egg-shaped object. Someone happened to be looking at the spot where he appeared. Dan ignored the staring onlooker, went out to the corridor, and found that things were even worse than when he had left.

He threw the egg-shaped object at the wall of the corridor and ducked back into the lounge.

There was a loud *bang*, followed by a number of smaller explosions. Abruptly the lounge was filled with bright points of light and little popping noises. The air was permeated with a gray vapor. The people in the room sagged in their seats or collapsed on the floor, and Dan was very careful to breathe only through the filters in his nostrils. He mentally said a key word and he was in the corridor, standing on a mound of unconscious people. He worked till he found the transceiver, went by mataform back to the lounge, took the transceiver there in case the lounge should be searched, and walked back through the corridor over heaps of people, picked up the other mataform unit, and went on down the corridor.

He wasn't happy about the people behind him. When the concentration of the drug in the air reached a low enough point those on top of the heap were going

drag in the air reached a low enough point, those on top of the heap were going to come to, then those under them, till there was one writhing hysterical mass that would be even worse than it had been before he threw the bomb. The only good feature—if it could be called that—was that they would all very soon be violently nauseated, with an urgent need for fresh air, and yet would be too sickened and weak to head for the outside in a rush.

Thinking this, Dan rounded a corner and came to a dead stop.

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Directly before him was a short, wide, high-ceilinged cross-corridor with half a dozen doors swinging open as people hurried in, walked a few paces, and collapsed. Either side of this short hall was made of shiny metal containing numerous slots. As Dan watched, a man came through a door, and in one automatic motion jammed a coin in a slot, ripped off a ticket that popped out another slot, then suddenly blinked and jerked around to stare at the pile of people on the floor of the corridor. Then he collapsed.

Dan glanced from this man to the wall above the doors, which was brilliant with lights and moving letters, forming a maze that made him dizzy to look at:

SKL MACH OPS—80L6h4 S  
WANTED ON LEVEL 10  
MNL LBRS-647L25h2\*MN  
\*MEN WITH FAST REFLE  
PENSES PAID HOUSING

Dan strode forward and through a door with the numeral "1" over it.

Directly before him was a short dead-end hallway that abruptly vanished, and he was walking toward a crowd of hurrying people in an immense room.

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Glancing around, Dan again felt at home. The immense room reminded him of Grand Central Terminal back on Earth. One wall even had the same kind of huge map of the tunnels and cross-tunnels that gave underground access to stores in the area. But the map here was even larger and more complex. Near its face were spidery walks and moving stairways, so that people could examine individual parts from close at hand if they wanted.

Dan looked over the terminal carefully, then walked slowly along looking for a



place to hide one of his mataform units. He spotted, near a door in a corner, a poster on a stand showing a strong young man in uniform with a series of numbers, apparently dates, stretching out like a road before him. The stand held a poster on either side, and there was a place between them where Dan could slip one of the mataform units. An instant after he did this, he was in the shelter under the river.

Quickly, he got out a very light, strong two-man tent, an air mattress, a hypodermic, and a shiny half-globe with web straps at the back. He immediately went to the spot in the jungle where he had left his prisoner and found him thrashing furiously in an attempt to get loose. Dan injected a small quantity of a fast-acting hypnotic drug, and the man lay still. Then Dan set up the small tent and got the man inside on the mattress.

It was now getting dark outside, and, with the darkness, there was a rumble of thunder in the distance. Dan went back to the shelter, returned with a light, and adjusted the half-globe over the man's face and head, then fastened the straps behind his head. He inserted in the man's ears two little thimblelike devices, then said mentally, "Kielgaard?"

Kielgaard's voice answered, "We'll know in a minute." After a considerable pause, he said, "Yes, he's responding. Watch."

Very slowly, the man's right arm lifted from the mattress, then dropped limply.

Dan said, "You can handle it all from that end?"

"Easily. We've got a team here that will do nothing else but question him."

Dan nodded, aware that the voices of specially trained psychologists were now speaking in the man's ears, so that he heard nothing else, while he saw only what the screen in the half-globe projected directly into his eyes. Soon he should begin to talk, and what he said would be transmitted through subspace to Kielgaard's team of questioners. Then it might be possible to learn something of what was going on on this planet. But there was another way that might also help.

Dan glanced at his wristwatch and saw that it was late enough so that if this were Earth most stores would probably be closed by now. Dan didn't know how it was on this planet, but he pronounced a key word and was in the bookstore that faced

the green. The bookstore was closed.

Dan quickly selected an armload of books, brought them back to the shelter under the river, went back and got another stack of them. He set up a spidery device of light metal and piled the books near enough so the feed arms could reach them. A set of rubber-tipped rods like long skeletal fingers turned the pages, while the scanner on an overhead arm oscillated from a position over one page to a position over the other page.

Dan said, "How's it coming in, Kielgaard?"

"Speed it up a little."

Dan moved a small lever. The pages turned more quickly.

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Dan said, "We'll see how the feeder works before I leave it." Then he got out a mirror and went to work to change his appearance again.

The second book fed in with no difficulty, so Dan took four of his little mataform units, which was all he had room for, and went back to the terminal.

The crowd seemed to have thinned out somewhat, so he supposed the evening rush was about over. As in terminals nearly everywhere Dan had been, most of the people moved briskly, intent on their own affairs. No one paid much attention to Dan while he glanced around, noting the wall of flashing lights and moving letters, similar to but far larger than the one he had seen before, and a series of sizable blocky structures with large numerals suspended above them, and the stylized outlines of doorways on their four walls. People appeared in front of these doorways, or strolled directly toward them and vanished, hesitating only when a red glow outlined the door to show that someone was coming through from the other side.

In the center of the room toward either end were large silvery structures with the word "Information" hanging above them. Dan went to one and found that vertical blue lines divided it into twenty-four sections, with room left over for more that weren't there as yet, plus a section headed "General Information."

Dan studied the numerous slots, went to the General Information section and spent most of his change. He sat down with a small package of maps and folders and soon had before him a cross-sectional drawing showing a series of conical

and soon had before him a cross-sectional drawing showing a series of spherical layers one inside the other, labeled, "Level 1—Retail," "Level 2—Retail," "Level 3—Wholesale," "Level 4—Manufacturing," and so on, numbered from the outside in toward the center of the sphere, from one to twenty-five.

Dan sat perfectly still for a moment, looking at this. He leafed carefully through the folders, and was soon convinced that this wasn't a map of underground layers under just one city, but of an interconnected system that appeared to stretch over most of the planet. The surface was labeled, "Recreation—Ordeals—General."

The complex of underground layers seemed to be much thicker than separate floors of a building would be; the map showed cross-sections of buildings of many stories in the individual layers.

Dan studied the map further and found that Level 10 was marked, "Coordination—Government." Dan walked to the information machine and came back with a general map of Level 10, which was divided into sixteen sections. Sections 4 and 5 were headed "Government Sections," and Dan got large-scale maps of each of them.

What he was looking at was being reproduced far away on big screens, and instantly recorded, to be examined in detail by staffs of trained men. He was thankful this was so. The map was a maze of colored lines, blocks, and curves, with numbered lists up and down both sides and across the bottom.

Abruptly, Kielgaard's voice said, "Dan, see that dark purple oval a little to the left of the center of the page?"

"I see it." Dan glanced from the number to the list at the side of the page and read, "War Ruler's Control Center."

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Kielgaard said, "The staff going over those books thinks there is some sort of an arrangement by which a 'war ruler' takes over absolute power in an emergency. What would be a better way to take over the planet than to get control of this War Ruler and then provoke an emergency?"

Dan studied the purple oval on the map. "Yes. But what do we do about it?"

"The first of your reinforcements will be coming down tonight. If you can get near that control center and plant a few transceivers, we might be able to make a

good deal of trouble for anyone who may have seized it."

"I'll do my best," said Dan. He got up, put most of the maps and folders into a locker, and bought a ticket for Level 10, Section 4. As he turned, he noticed two men standing about twenty feet away, talking. On impulse, Dan went, not to the block that would take him to Level 10, but instead toward the station that his pamphlet had told him would take him to Section 6 of the same level he was on. As he rounded a corner and strode up a deserted corridor, he stooped and slid a mataform unit into the space between a waste container and the wall.

An instant later, he was back beside the posters where he had hidden a transceiver earlier.

Two men were walking in the same direction he had gone.

Dan followed them till they vanished, walking very rapidly now, around another corner.

He picked up the mataform transceiver and looked around for the blocky structure with the big number "10" over it. He saw it, after a moment, near the wall with the lights and moving letters on it.

"Kielgaard," he thought, "what do you suppose that wall is?"

"We think it's a sort of abbreviated classified ad arrangement."

"Sounds reasonable," Dan thought.

Dan was by now near the blocky structure with the big numeral "10" above it. Each of the four faces of the structure had four large doors outlined on it—one door for each of the sixteen sections of the level. Dan stepped up to the door marked "4" and it was immediately outlined in red. A voice said, "Travelers are reminded of the special restrictions now enforced at the governmental sections. To enter, you must present valid authorization papers, or state an acceptable reason for entering."

Dan stood perfectly still. He was fairly sure now that he must get into this section. But how?

At that moment, the lights of the huge wall of moving letters caught his

attention, and Kieigaard's voice said, "Dan, look to the left, about halfway up."

Dan looked and saw moving letters spell out:

S WANTED ON LEVEL 10 ALL CREDITS PAID SHORT TERM  
EMPLOYMENT

\*MEN WITH FAST REFLEXES WANTED ON LEVEL 10

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Dan realized he had seen parts of this ad spelled out twice at the terminal entrance. He didn't know if it was a trap or something he could use. He said, "I'm interested in a job on Level 10."

"You have examined the record?"

Dan had no idea what this meant. He said, "I understand men with fast reflexes are wanted on Level 10."

"One moment."

There was a short pause, then a new voice. "What we offer you is a special credit allotment sufficient for all normal mating and purchase needs. On account of these latest restrictions, I can't tell you exactly what the job is, but I can say this: The rewards are great. But you also might end up getting sprinkled over the forest. We've got a situation down here that has to be cleaned up fast. With the special referendum tomorrow, it might boil over and make an interstellar mess. We want you for a night's work. At the end you're either rich or dead. How about it?"

Dan thought of the two words "interstellar mess," used in connection with a "special referendum." He had the sensation that he was getting close.

"All right," he said.

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There was a blur as mataform stations shuttled him from one place to the next. Then he was walking into a large room holding about thirty men, all of whom had something of the look of big cats alert for prey.

Dan had hardly come in when a lithe man walked out on a raised platform, looked over the waiting men, and said, "I'd like to wait till there are more of us, but there isn't time. I'll come to the point without delay. I'll only explain it once, so listen carefully.

"On this level, we have the War Ruler's control center. Two levels up, there is the planetary zoo. Among the animals in the zoo is an ape about our size and general shape, with a thick layer of fur, strong muscles, and a sense of humor like a white-hot rivet dropped down your collar. By some process I don't understand, about fifty of these apes have gotten into a storeroom in an arms depot attached to the control center.

"With this referendum coming up to decide whether we should join the Stellar Union, every time there is a disturbance the election committee blames it on one faction or another. Using their emergency powers, they then clap on some new restriction to keep order till the referendum is over. If there is now a disturbance near the control center itself, tempers are going to shorten further. If the blame should be stuck on one side or the other, true or untrue, it could swing the vote either way.

"We have got to get those apes out of the arms depot right away. The trouble is, there's an alarm in the arms depot that can't be shut off except from the control center. Fire any kind of impact or vibration weapon in there, or change the composition of the atmosphere by pouring in gas, and the alarm automatically goes off in guard stations all over this level. If we had more time, we could starve them out. We don't have the time.

"The result is that we have to go after them with knives and clubs. Now, the apes are fast, they gang up, they throw things, and if they can, they'll grab you from opposite sides and pull your arms and legs off. That's very funny—for them. So we'll have to work together as a team and fight as hard as we know how."

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After the speaker finished, there was a silence in the room. Dan was thinking over the idea and he liked nothing about it. He had little enough time to do his job, and he did not want to spend it being pulled to pieces by apes. He called out, "Mind if I make a suggestion?"

"I'm willing to try anything. Let's hear it."

Dan said, "I don't know about anybody else here, but I am no team player myself. Let me go in alone first. You wait half an hour and then come in and see if there are fifty apes left."

Everyone craned to see who was offering to fight fifty wild apes singlehanded.

The man on the platform turned pale, but said, "Agreed. And if you win, you received the combined credits of all."

Dan found himself walking down a corridor, surrounded by well-wishers, to a room where several tables were loaded with hand-weapons. He picked up a short weighted club, and a short double-edge, razor-sharp sword. A few minutes later, he arrived at a heavy metal door studded with rivets and painted green.

Dan had intended to hide a transceiver nearby on the outside and spend as little time in the storeroom as possible. But everything had happened so fast, and there were so many eyes watching him, that he had no chance to hide a mataform unit anywhere.

There was a loud clang as the heavy door swung shut behind him. Then he was in a big dimly lighted room with a twelve-foot aisle running down the center, a narrower aisle along each wall, and high piles of wooden crates and wirebound heavy cardboard cartons spaced five feet apart to either side of the central aisle. There was a strong smell of damp dirty fur. On the floor partway up the aisle lay what looked like a clothed human arm.

From the far end of the building came a series of low gruff barks. A humping motion ran along like a wave up the aisle and over the piles of crates toward Dan.

He glanced briefly to either side at the solid concrete walls of the building, felt behind him. The door was locked.

It flashed through his mind that up till now he had had good luck on this planet.

Dan saw, in the nearest corner of the room, several pipes that ran up from the floor and were bent to travel along near the ceiling. He quickly slipped a mataform unit behind these pipes on the floor, then cut into a cardboard carton about fifteen feet away and put another unit inside. He tossed a third on top of the nearest pile of cartons, mentally said a key word, and was on the pile slashing open a carton to slide the unit inside. Then he was on the floor in the corner.

In the dim light, the shadowy figures came toward him. Their long arms swung up and a barrage of rifle parts, bayonets, scabbards, and helmets smashed into the corner. Dan was fifteen feet away when they hit. An instant later, he was



back, kicking the rubble out of the corner. There was a repeated gruff cough, then the aisles were jammed, and he had a brief view of bared teeth in fur-covered faces, and hairy arms that reached out to grasp him. There was a grisly laugh that started as a low chuckle and ended on a high-pitched wavering note.

Dan mentally pronounced a key word and he was on the pile of cartons with a half a dozen apes. The short sword flicked out and back. Other apes sprang from the next pile of cartons. Dan dropped the weighted club, threw his last mataform unit toward the top of a pile across the aisle, and an instant later had recovered it, dropped to the floor, and raced up the aisle.

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There was noise like teeth clicking together and then the wavering laugh burst out again as the apes turned to chase him up the aisle. Dan slid the transceiver into a slit-open carton and whirled as the leaders rushed toward him. The short sword flashed out and back in rapid thrusts, and abruptly Dan was on top of the first pile of cartons. He recovered the weighted club, glanced down at the apes turning to rush up the aisles, and then suddenly he was with them, slamming the last few of them over the heads with the weighted club.

He thrust, stabbed, and smashed, now in one place, now another, always striking the gibbering horde where they were fewest and most off-balance.

After a long, hideous interval, there came a silence. Dan could see that there were four heaps of dead or unconscious apes, the only live ones were a few clinging to overhead beams with their eyes shut.

Dan recovered his transceivers and made his way to one of the few windows in the room. This was about seven feet from the floor, heavily barred, with its glass panes broken out. Dan pulled himself up and looked out at a walk and a high wall a few feet away. He cut the sleeve of his shirt into strips and knotted the strips together with a transceiver tied onto either end, so that one transceiver hung on the outside and the other on the inside.

Then Dan was outside, in an underground part of the planet where no one was supposed to be without an official permit.

The air seemed as fresh as outdoors, while overhead there was the appearance of the sky on a heavily overcast day. There was light enough to see by, but it was apparently dimmed to provide an artificial night.

Dan saw no one, and said mentally, "Kielgaard?"

Kielgaard's voice had a hoarse sound. "Are you out of that place?"

"I'm out of it—thank heaven."

"Amen. But listen, things have taken a nasty turn."

"What's happened?"

"We've questioned that prisoner. The outfit behind this trouble is Trans-Space. But they don't have the control center. Instead, they've got the headquarters of the election committee that controls the referendum. Trans-Space is representing itself as the government of an interstellar league of planets. They have everything set up to falsify the vote tomorrow."

Dan frowned. "What of it? I can still plant the mataform transceivers and we can bring men down from above."

"Yes, but Trans-Space has a mataform terminal set up in the terminal election headquarters. It hooks into the local system and connects with an outpost in the jungle on the surface. Trans-Space has been building up to this day for over three years. The election headquarters is manned like a fortress. It's in immediate touch with the outpost on the surface where they've got an army of reinforcements."

Dan stood still, thinking. He remembered the official with the carrying case in the corridor overhead, who had said to the angry crowd, "Go to the War Ruler." Dan mentioned the incident and said, "What about this War Ruler and his emergency powers?"

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Kielgaard said, "It looked promising to us at first, but actually that's as if someone should say, 'England is in peril. Go to King Arthur.'"

"What?" said Dan, puzzled.

"The War Ruler is a myth. A thousand years or more ago, after a terrific internal war, they had a famine. They also had a huge army to disband, headed by a very popular leader. The army apparently threatened to take over the planet, but by a clever gimmick the government put off the crisis. They announced that their

clever gimmick, the government put off the crisis. They announced that their scientists had discovered a way to halt the flow of time after the famine—and the War Ruler marched the whole army loyally into a kind of big mausoleum where they presumably killed the lot of them with a quick-acting gas. That is the War Ruler's Control Center.

"Ever since then, they've been making ritual gestures. They stock new arms of standard design nearby, and recruit a number of fresh soldiers to join the old—as a population control measure. To make the illusion complete, they say that any man or woman who sincerely believes the state to be in peril can enter the control center, by passing through a lethal field that kills the insincere and lets the sincere through alive. A number of people have tried it and got killed, so now they don't try any more."

"Where is this place?" asked Dan.

"If we read your map rightly, that wall in front of you marks the edge of the field surrounding it."

Dan set down one of the mataform units and mentally pronounced a keyword.

He was in the shelter under the river.

An instant later he was back by the wall, a glider and the control helmet in his hands. He clipped a transceiver to the glider and guided it toward a huge, dark-stained building with the look of a fortress. He sent the glider around to the front of the building and saw two huge bronze doors, one of which stood open. There was a totally still, motionless look about the place that Dan did not care for. But the glider had come to a closed inner door and that was as far as it could go. Dan took off the control helmet, drew a deep breath and said a key word.

He was standing in the huge hall, before the closed door. He opened the door.

Before him was a room with tall slit windows, and as Dan went in, he could see dimly, but, like a man in a hall of mirrors, what he saw did not make sense.

Distorted shapes and forms, with bright points and blots of light, shifted as he moved, and shifted again as he moved closer, to see one leg of what looked like a very old, faded table. A heavy cable ran up the leg to the top, where there was a switch, and a bronze plate with the words, "Open Switch."

Dan reached for the switch, and hesitated. If Kielgaard's theory was right, he would now be electrocuted, or otherwise disposed of.

He swallowed hard, reached the rest of the way, and opened the switch.

A pall of choking dust spread over the room, with the sound of coughing all around him and the rustle of clothing and stamping of feet.

Dan wiped his streaming eyes, and saw a man in uniform behind the desk, all but one corner of which looked new.

The man stared at Dan and said, "So soon? What's happened?"

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Dan glanced around. The huge room was filled with tough, weary-looking men in combat uniform, all fully armed and equipped. He thought fast, turned back to the man behind the desk and said earnestly, "Peace is restored to the planet. It's been rebuilt and the damage is all repaired. But now, fantastic as it may seem, an enemy has come down to this world from outer space—"

The man at the desk angrily brought down his fist. "No one lives in outer space! That's foolishness!"

Dan said, his mind racing, "Whoever they are, they've seized a vital communications center! They've got men on guard, armed to the teeth. They've issued orders through captive government officials to seal off this part of the level from the public. They're trying to take over the whole government!"

There was a stir in the room and a low ugly rumble.

"I knew it," said the man behind the desk, jumping to his feet. "I knew they'd lie low and then creep back again when things are quiet. If we'd been demobilized, it would all have been for nothing. But we *aren't* demobilized!"

Abruptly there were shouted orders, and someone was gripping Dan by the arm. "Just lead the way. Show us where they are and we'll take care of the rest."

Dan said mentally, "Kielgaard?"

Kielgaard said, "Good Lord! Go straight outside and turn right."

Someone threw a switch beside the door. Outside, they followed Dan to the right. Behind him, Dan heard the mutter and cough of engines starting up. They were in a well-lighted street like that of a large city, but there was no traffic, either because it was late or because of the travel restrictions.

Kielgaard said, "Next left and it's in front of you."

Dan turned the corner. Directly before him was a large white marble building with a lawn on either side of a broad flight of steps, and guards on the sidewalk, the steps, and in emplacements in the shrubbery on either side of the steps.

One of them saw Dan and casually snapped a shot at him. Dan got back around the corner fast and looked around. On both sides of the street, men were lying flat at the bases of the buildings, or crouching in doorways. Down the street, they were running up a block to the left. Up the middle of the street came a tank. It paused just out of sight from the building around the corner, and an amplified voice boomed out, "This is the War Ruler. Get out of that building before the count of thirty, or we clean you out."

A voice began to count. There was a sound of fast footsteps on the sidewalk around the corner, and half a dozen men carrying guns came into view. Dan recognized some of the men who had searched the place where he'd landed his boat. One of them, not yet quite in a position to see the tank, called out irritably, "All right, you. Get out here!"

Then he caught sight of the men lying at the base of the buildings, and crouched in the doorways. He fired.

Flashes of light came from the men by the buildings. There was a roar and a grind and the tank rolled forward. A whistle blew. Dan heaved a mataform transceiver toward the emplacement at the base of the stairs, and an instant before it landed, he mentally pronounced a key word.

In the emplacement, he jerked the men away from their gun before they could fire a shot. He knocked them senseless, grabbed a rifle, and sprang up onto the staircase, with the intent of sprinting to the other side and diving into the emplacement there. Halfway across the steps, there was a sensation as if someone had smacked him between the shoulder blades with a rifle butt. He saw the stairs coming up to meet him, and then he saw nothing.

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He came to with a pretty face smiling at him through a sort of fog. The fog cleared away, and a highly attractive nurse was looking at him very admiringly. She said, "Sir, you have a visitor."

Dan glanced around and saw Kielgaard, a sorrowful look on his face.

Dan said as the nurse went out, "She spoke Truthian, didn't she?"

"She did. You're still on the planet."

"What's this 'sir' business and the pleasant smile for?"

Kielgaard said. "You're a hero. It shows, incidentally, how the best experts can make awe-inspiring mistakes. We gave you fast reflexes, thinking that would make you safer. But it turns out that the planet has a class of authorized assassins who hunt down criminals for a livelihood, and never get too numerous because they fight each other for extra credits and prestige. With your fast reflexes and built-in wariness, the populace immediately spotted you for one of these lawful assassins, so you couldn't have been more conspicuous."

Kielgaard shook his head. "Meanwhile, Trans-Space was bringing in hired killers to knock off the planet's lawful assassins at a huge bonus per head, in order to create an uproar so that the election committee, which they had already captured and conditioned, would clap on more restrictions, thus creating more tension, so that Trans-Space could swing the referendum at the last minute. You see, the most dangerous thing we could have done to you was to give you these extra-fast reflexes. But now, because of it, you're a hero." Kielgaard looked sad.

"Luckily," said Dan, "I'm still alive. And so were all those soldiers."

"Another mistake of the experts," said Kielgaard. "The highest authorities on Truth strongly suspected something was wrong with the protective field around the control center. This made them fearful that the scientific device to halt the flow of time hadn't worked either. This would have been a terrible catastrophe, so by a set of rationalizations that would do credit to a bunch of habitual liars, they evaded the whole issue. The experts and I made the mistake of drawing the logical conclusion. I'm glad it wasn't so."

"What happened to Trans-Space?"

Kielgaard stopped looking sad and smiled a smile of deep satisfaction. "Celestia

Kielgaard stopped looking sad and smiled a smile of deep satisfaction. "Galactic has its contract with this planet. Trans-Space is in a very anemic condition. The Truthians don't like people who lie, and they always settle their accounts very strictly."

Kielgaard's face subsided into its gloomy look.

Dan said, "What's wrong?"

"Well," said Kielgaard, "you see, you're a planetary hero for settling that business with Trans-Space. Also, you have—let's see"—he took out a slip of paper—"the equivalent of around six hundred thousand dollars spending money for cleaning out those apes, plus—I don't know how to translate this—six thousand mating credits. They have a weird system for romance, and these credits—"

Dan grinned. "Envious?"

"It isn't that," said Kielgaard. "I'm thinking how I'd feel in your place. These Truthians don't have any give in their system. Right's right, and wrong's wrong, and they hand out rewards and punishments irrespective of persons."

There was a sharp rap at the door.

Dan tried to sit up, but he was still too weak.

Kielgaard said sadly, "I tried to reason with them, but I might as well have talked to a wall."

"Listen," said Dan, becoming alarmed. "What's wrong?"

"I don't have the heart to tell you," said Kielgaard.

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Picking up a large briefcase, he said, "Do what you think best. I might mention that we're giving you a bonus, though I suppose that's no consolation."

The rap at the door was repeated and there were sounds of arguments outside.

"What's in that briefcase?" said Dan.

"A big version of the kind of metaform transceiver you used. There's a

A big version of the kind of matalorn transceiver you used. There's a dreadnaught of ours orbiting the planet with another transceiver like this on board. The key word, in case you should have use for it, is 'Krakior.'"

The door burst open and three men came in, arguing with a man in a white jacket.

"That doesn't matter," said the first man, a familiar-looking individual who was opening a square case with carrying handle. "The only question is, was it or was it not an unauthorized kill, and is this the man? We have our checker set up to answer this question and that's all there is to it." He glanced at Dan. "Hold out your fingertips, please, and touch those plates. Purely a routine check."

Behind the man with the case were two men with armbands and shields. One glanced disinterestedly at Dan and cocked his gun.

Dan looked at the head of A Section and said fervently, "Thank you, Kielgaard."

The doctor in the white jacket was arguing to no visible effect as the tube was held to Dan's eyes, snapped back into the case, and the case clapped shut, to give its loud alarm clang.

The assassin with the gun calmly leveled it at Dan and fired.

All he hit was a suddenly empty bed.

Dan had said the key word.

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