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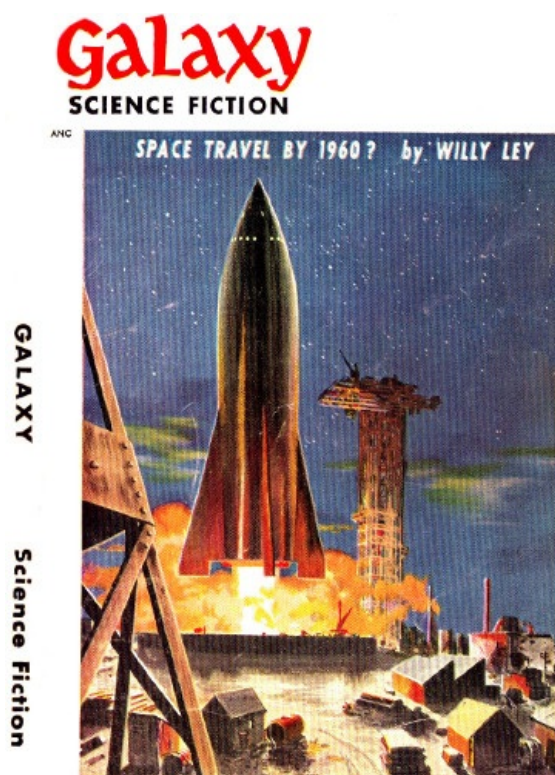
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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DELAY IN TRANSIT \*\*\*



# **DELAY IN TRANSIT**

**By F. L. WALLACE**

**Illustrated by SIBLEY**

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***An unprovoked, meaningless night attack is terrifying enough on your own home planet, worse on a world across the Galaxy. But the horror is the offer of help that cannot be accepted!***

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"Muscles tense," said Dimanche. "Neural index 1.76, unusually high. Adrenalin squirting through his system. In effect, he's stalking you. Intent: probably assault with a deadly weapon."

"Not interested," said Cassal firmly, his subvocalization inaudible to anyone but Dimanche. "I'm not the victim type. He was standing on the walkway near the brink of the thoroughfare. I'm going back to the habitat hotel and sit tight."

"First you have to get there," Dimanche pointed out. "I mean, is it safe for a stranger to walk through the city?"

"Now that you mention it, no," answered Cassal. He looked around apprehensively. "Where is he?"



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"Behind you. At the moment he's pretending interest in a merchandise display."

A native stamped by, eyes brown and incurious. Apparently he was accustomed to the sight of an Earthman standing alone, Adam's apple bobbing up and down silently. It was a Godolphian axiom that all travelers were crazy.

Cassal looked up. Not an air taxi in sight; Godolph shut down at dusk. It would be pure luck if he found a taxi before morning. Of course he *could* walk back to the hotel, but was that such a good idea?

A Godolphian city was peculiar. And, though not intended, it was peculiarly suited to certain kinds of violence. A human pedestrian was at a definite disadvantage.

"Correction," said Dimanche. "Not simple assault. He has murder in mind."

"It still doesn't appeal to me," said Cassal. Striving to look unconcerned, he strolled toward the building side of the walkway and stared into the interior of a small cafe. Warm, bright and dry. Inside, he might find safety for a time.

Damn the man who was following him! It would be easy enough to elude him in a normal city. On Godolph, nothing was normal. In an hour the streets would be brightly lighted—for native eyes. A human would consider it dim.

"Why did he choose me?" asked Cassal plaintively. "There must be something he hopes to gain."

"I'm working on it," said Dimanche. "But remember, I have limitations. At short distances I can scan nervous systems, collect and interpret physiological data. I can't read minds. The best I can do is report what a person says or subvocalizes. If you're really interested in finding out why he wants to kill you, I suggest you turn the problem over to the godawful police."

"Godolph, not godawful," corrected Cassal absently.

That was advice he couldn't follow, good as it seemed. He could give the police no evidence save through Dimanche. There were various reasons, many of them involving the law, for leaving the device called Dimanche out of it. The police would act if they found a body. His own, say, floating face-down on some quiet street. That didn't seem the proper approach, either.

"Weapons?"

"The first thing I searched him for. Nothing very dangerous. A long knife, a hard striking object. Both concealed on his person."

Cassal strangled slightly. Dimanche needed a good stiff course in semantics. A knife was still the most silent of weapons. A man could die from it. His hand strayed toward his pocket. He had a measure of protection himself.

"Report," said Dimanche. "Not necessarily final. Based, perhaps, on tenuous evidence."

"Let's have it anyway."

"His motivation is connected somehow with your being marooned here. For some reason you can't get off this planet."

That was startling information, though not strictly true. A thousand star systems were waiting for him, and a ship to take him to each one.

Of course, the one ship he wanted hadn't come in. Godolph was a transfer point for stars nearer the center of the Galaxy. When he had left Earth, he had known he would have to wait a few days here. He hadn't expected a delay of nearly three weeks. Still, it wasn't unusual. Interstellar schedules over great distances were not as reliable as they might be.

Was this man, whoever and whatever he might be, connected with that delay? According to Dimanche, the man thought he was. He was self-deluded or did he have access to information that Cassal didn't?

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Denton Cassal, sales engineer, paused for a mental survey of himself. He was a good engineer and, because he was exceptionally well matched to his instrument, the best salesman that Neuronics, Inc., had. On the basis of these qualifications, he had been selected to make a long journey, the first part of which already lay behind him. He had to go to Tunney 21 to see a man. That man wasn't important to anyone save the company that employed him, and possibly not even to them.

The thug trailing him wouldn't be interested in Cassal himself, his mission, which was a commercial one, nor the man on Tunney. And money wasn't the objective, if Dimanche's analysis was right. What *did* the thug want?

Secrets? Cassal had none, except, in a sense, Dimanche. And that was too well kept on Earth, where the instrument was invented and made, for anyone this far away to have learned about it.

And yet the thug wanted to kill him. Wanted to? Regarded him as good as dead. It might pay him to investigate the matter further, if it didn't involve too much risk.

"Better start moving." That was Dimanche. "He's getting suspicious."

Cassal went slowly along the narrow walkway that bordered each side of that boulevard, the transport tide. It was raining again. It usually was on Godolph, which was a weather-controlled planet where the natives like rain.

He adjusted the controls of the weak force field that repelled the rain. He widened the angle of the field until water slanted through it unhindered. He narrowed it around him until it approached visibility and the drops bounced away. He swore at the miserable climate and the near amphibians who created it.

A few hundred feet away, a Godolphian girl waded out of the transport tide and climbed to the walkway. It was this sort of thing that made life dangerous for a human—Venice revised, brought up to date in a faster-than-light age.

Water. It was a perfect engineering material. Simple, cheap, infinitely flexible. With a minimum of mechanism and at break-neck speed, the ribbon of the transport tide flowed at different levels throughout the city. The Godolphian merely plunged in and was carried swiftly and noiselessly to his destination. Whereas a human—Cassal shivered. If he were found drowned, it would be considered an accident. No investigation would be made. The thug who was trailing him had certainly picked the right place.

The Godolphian girl passed. She wore a sleek brown fur, her own. Cassal was almost positive she muttered a polite "Arf?" as she sloshed by. What she meant by that, he didn't know and didn't intend to find out.

"Follow her," instructed Dimanche. "We've got to investigate our man at closer range."

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Obediently, Cassal turned and began walking after the girl. Attractive in an anthropomorphic,

seal-like way, even from behind. Not graceful out of her element, though.

The would-be assassin was still looking at merchandise as Cassal retraced his steps. A man, or at least man type. A big fellow, physically quite capable of violence, if size had anything to do with it. The face, though, was out of character. Mild, almost meek. A scientist or scholar. It didn't fit with murder.

"Nothing," said Dimanche disgustedly. "His mind froze when we got close. I could feel his shoulderblades twitching as we passed. Anticipated guilt, of course. Projecting to you the action he plans. That makes the knife definite."

Well beyond the window at which the thug watched and waited, Cassal stopped. Shakily he produced a cigarette and fumbled for a lighter.

"Excellent thinking," commended Dimanche. "He won't attempt anything on this street. Too dangerous. Turn aside at the next deserted intersection and let him follow the glow of your cigarette."

The lighter flared in his hand. "That's one way of finding out," said Cassal. "But wouldn't I be a lot safer if I just concentrated on getting back to the hotel?"

"I'm curious. Turn here."

"Go to hell," said Cassal nervously. Nevertheless, when he came to that intersection, he turned there.

It was a Godolphian equivalent of an alley, narrow and dark, oily slow-moving water gurgling at one side, high cavernous walls looming on the other.

He would have to adjust the curiosity factor of Dimanche. It was all very well to be interested in the man who trailed him, but there was also the problem of coming out of this adventure alive. Dimanche, an electronic instrument, naturally wouldn't consider that.

"Easy," warned Dimanche. "He's at the entrance to the alley, walking fast. He's surprised and pleased that you took this route."

"I'm surprised, too," remarked Cassal. "But I wouldn't say I'm pleased. Not just now."

"Careful. Even subvocalized conversation is distracting." The mechanism concealed within his body was silent for an instant and then continued: "His blood pressure is rising, breathing is faster. At a time like this, he may be ready to verbalize why he wants to murder you. This is critical."

"That's no lie," agreed Cassal bitterly. The lighter was in his hand. He clutched it grimly. It was difficult not to look back. The darkness assumed an even more sinister quality.

"Quiet," said Dimanche. "He's verbalizing about you."

"He's decided I'm a nice fellow after all. He's going to stop and ask me for a light."

"I don't think so," answered Dimanche. "He's whispering: 'Poor devil. I hate to do it. But it's really his life or mine'."

"He's more right than he knows. Why all this violence, though? Isn't there any clue?"

"None at all," admitted Dimanche. "He's very close. You'd better turn around."

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Cassal turned, pressed the stud on the lighter. It should have made him feel more secure, but it didn't. He could see very little.

A dim shadow rushed at him. He jumped away from the water side of the alley, barely in time. He could feel the rush of air as the assailant shot by.

"Hey!" shouted Cassal.

Echoes answered; nothing else did. He had the uncomfortable feeling that no one was going to come to his assistance.

"He wasn't expecting that reaction," explained Dimanche. "That's why he missed. He's turned around and is coming back."

"I'm armed!" shouted Cassal.

"That won't stop him. He doesn't believe you."

Cassal grasped the lighter. That is, it had been a lighter a few seconds before. Now a needle-thin blade had snapped out and projected stiffly. Originally it had been designed as an emergency surgical instrument. A little imagination and a few changes had altered its function, converting it into a compact, efficient stiletto.

"Twenty feet away," advised Dimanche. "He knows you can't see him, but he can see your silhouette by the light from the main thoroughfare. What he doesn't know is that I can detect every move he makes and keep you posted below the level of his hearing."

"Stay on him," growled Cassal nervously. He flattened himself against the wall.

"To the right," whispered Dimanche. "Lunge forward. About five feet. Low."

Sickly, he did so. He didn't care to consider the possible effects of a miscalculation. In the

darkness, how far was five feet? Fortunately, his estimate was correct. The rapier encountered yielding resistance, the soggy kind: flesh. The tough blade bent, but did not break. His opponent gasped and broke away.

"Attack!" howled Dimanche against the bone behind his ear. "You've got him. He can't imagine how you know where he is in the darkness. He's afraid."

Attack he did, slicing about wildly. Some of the thrusts landed; some didn't. The percentage was low, the total amount high. His opponent fell to the ground, gasped and was silent.

Cassal fumbled in his pockets and flipped on a light. The man lay near the water side of the alley. One leg was crumpled under him. He didn't move.

"Heartbeat slow," said Dimanche solemnly. "Breathing barely perceptible."

"Then he's not dead," said Cassal in relief.

Foam flecked from the still lips and ran down the chin. Blood oozed from cuts on the face.

"Respiration none, heartbeat absent," stated Dimanche.

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Horried, Cassal gazed at the body. Self-defense, of course, but would the police believe it? Assuming they did, they'd still have to investigate. The rapier was an illegal concealed weapon. And they would question him until they discovered Dimanche. Regrettable, but what could he do about it?

Suppose he were detained long enough to miss the ship bound for Tunney 21?

Grimly, he laid down the rapier. He might as well get to the bottom of this. Why had the man attacked? What did he want?

"I don't know," replied Dimanche irritably. "I can interpret body data—a live body. I can't work on a piece of meat."

Cassal searched the body thoroughly. Miscellaneous personal articles of no value in identifying the man. A clip with a startling amount of money in it. A small white card with something scribbled on it. A picture of a woman and a small child posed against a background which resembled no world Cassal had ever seen. That was all.

Cassal stood up in bewilderment. Dimanche to the contrary, there seemed to be no connection between this dead man and his own problem of getting to Tunney 21.

Right now, though, he had to dispose of the body. He glanced toward the boulevard. So far no one had been attracted by the violence.

He bent down to retrieve the lighter-*rapier*. Dimanche shouted at him. Before he could react, someone landed on him. He fell forward, vainly trying to grasp the weapon. Strong fingers felt for his throat as he was forced to the ground.

He threw the attacker off and staggered to his feet. He heard footsteps rushing away. A slight splash followed. Whoever it was, he was escaping by way of water.

Whoever it was. The man he had thought he had slain was no longer in sight.

"Interpret body data, do you?" muttered Cassal. "Liveliest dead man I've ever been strangled by."

"It's just possible there are some breeds of men who can control the basic functions of their body," said Dimanche defensively. "When I checked him, he had no heartbeat."

"Remind me not to accept your next evaluation so completely," grunted Cassal. Nevertheless, he was relieved, in a fashion. He hadn't *wanted* to kill the man. And now there was nothing he'd have to explain to the police.

He needed the cigarette he stuck between his lips. For the second time he attempted to pick up the rapier-lighter. This time he was successful. Smoke swirled into his lungs and quieted his nerves. He squeezed the weapon into the shape of a lighter and put it away.

Something, however, was missing—his wallet.

The thug had relieved him of it in the second round of the scuffle. Persistent fellow. Damned persistent.

It really didn't matter. He fingered the clip he had taken from the supposedly dead body. He had intended to turn it over to the police. Now he might as well keep it to reimburse him for his loss. It contained more money than his wallet had.

Except for the identification tab he always carried in his wallet, it was more than a fair exchange. The identification, a rectangular piece of plastic, was useful in establishing credit, but with the money he now had, he wouldn't need credit. If he did, he could always send for another tab.

A white card fluttered from the clip. He caught it as it fell. Curiously he examined it. Blank except for one crudely printed word, STAB. His unknown assailant certainly had tried.

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The old man stared at the door, an obsolete visual projector wobbling precariously on his head.

He closed his eyes and the lettering on the door disappeared. Cassal was too far away to see what it had been. The technician opened his eyes and concentrated. Slowly a new sign formed on the door.

**TRAVELERS AID BUREAU**  
**Murra Foray, First Counselor**

It was a drab sign, but, then, it was a dismal, backward planet. The old technician passed on to the next door and closed his eyes again.

With a sinking feeling, Cassal walked toward the entrance. He needed help and he had to find it in this dingy rathole.

Inside, though, it wasn't dingy and it wasn't a rathole. More like a maze, an approved scientific one. Efficient, though not comfortable. Travelers Aid was busier than he thought it would be. Eventually he managed to squeeze into one of the many small counseling rooms.

A woman appeared on the screen, crisp and cool. "Please answer everything the machine asks. When the tape is complete, I'll be available for consultation."

Cassal wasn't sure he was going to like her. "Is this necessary?" he asked. "It's merely a matter of information."

"We have certain regulations we abide by." The woman smiled frostily. "I can't give you any information until you comply with them."

"Sometimes regulations are silly," said Cassal firmly. "Let me speak to the first counselor."

"You are speaking to her," she said. Her face disappeared from the screen.

Cassal sighed. So far he hadn't made a good impression.

Travelers Aid Bureau, in addition to regulations, was abundantly supplied with official curiosity. When the machine finished with him, Cassal had the feeling he could be recreated from the record it had of him. His individuality had been capsuled into a series of questions and answers. One thing he drew the line at—why he wanted to go to Tunney 21 was his own business.

The first counselor reappeared. Age, indeterminate. Not, he supposed, that anyone would be curious about it. Slightly taller than average, rather on the slender side. Face was broad at the brow, narrow at the chin and her eyes were enigmatic. A dangerous woman.

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She glanced down at the data. "Denton Cassal, native of Earth. Destination, Tunney 21." She looked up at him. "Occupation, sales engineer. Isn't that an odd combination?" Her smile was quite superior.

"Not at all. Scientific training as an engineer. Special knowledge of customer relations."

"Special knowledge of a thousand races? How convenient." Her eyebrows arched.

"I think so," he agreed blandly. "Anything else you'd like to know?"

"Sorry. I didn't mean to offend you."

He could believe that or not as he wished. He didn't.

"You refused to answer why you were going to Tunney 21. Perhaps I can guess. They're the best scientists in the Galaxy. You wish to study under them."

Close—but wrong on two counts. They were good scientists, though not necessarily the best. For instance, it was doubtful that they could build Dimanche, even if they had ever thought of it, which was even less likely.

There was, however, one relatively obscure research worker on Tunney 21 that Neuronics wanted on their staff. If the fragments of his studies that had reached Earth across the vast distance meant anything, he could help Neuronics perfect instantaneous radio. The company that could build a radio to span the reaches of the Galaxy with no time lag could set its own price, which could be control of all communications, transport, trade—a galactic monopoly. Cassal's share would be a cut of all that.

His part was simple, on the surface. He was to persuade that researcher to come to Earth, *if he could*. Literally, he had to guess the Tunnesian's price before the Tunnesian himself knew it. In addition, the reputation of Tunnesian scientists being exceeded only by their arrogance, Cassal had to convince him that he wouldn't be working for ignorant Earth savages. The existence of such an instrument as Dimanche was a key factor.

Her voice broke through his thoughts. "Now, then, what's your problem?"

"I was told on Earth I might have to wait a few days on Godolph. I've been here three weeks. I want information on the ship bound for Tunney 21."

"Just a moment." She glanced at something below the angle of the screen. She looked up and her eyes were grave. "*Rickrock C* arrived yesterday. Departed for Tunney early this morning."

"Departed?" He got up and sat down again, swallowing hard. "When will the next ship arrive?"

"Do you know how many stars there are in the Galaxy?" she asked.

He didn't answer.

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"That's right," she said. "Billions. Tunney, according to the notation, is near the center of the Galaxy, inside the third ring. You've covered about a third of the distance to it. Local traffic, anything within a thousand light-years, is relatively easy to manage. At longer distances, you take a chance. You've had yours and missed it. Frankly, Cassal, I don't know when another ship bound for Tunney will show up on or near Godolph. Within the next five years—maybe."

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He blanched. "How long would it take to get there using local transportation, star-hopping?"

"Take my advice: don't try it. Five years, if you're lucky."

"I don't need that kind of luck."

"I suppose not." She hesitated. "You're determined to go on?" At the emphatic nod, she sighed. "If that's your decision, we'll try to help you. To start things moving, we'll need a print of your identification tab."

"There's something funny about her," Dimanche decided. It was the usual speaking voice of the instrument, no louder than the noise the blood made in coursing through arteries and veins. Cassal could hear it plainly, because it was virtually inside his ear.

Cassal ignored his private voice. "Identification tab? I don't have it with me. In fact, I may have lost it."

She smiled in instant disbelief. "We're not trying to pry into any part of your past you may wish concealed. However, it's much easier for us to help you if you have your identification. Now if you can't *remember* your real name and where you put your identification—" She arose and left the screen. "Just a moment."

He glared uneasily at the spot where the first counselor wasn't. His *real* name!

"Relax," Dimanche suggested. "She didn't mean it as a personal insult."

Presently she returned.

"I have news for you, whoever you are."

"Cassal," he said firmly. "Denton Cassal, sales engineer, Earth. If you don't believe it, send back to—" He stopped. It had taken him four months to get to Godolph, non-stop, plus a six-month wait on Earth for a ship to show up that was bound in the right direction. Over distances such as these, it just wasn't practical to send back to Earth for anything.

"I see you understand." She glanced at the card in her hand. "The spaceport records indicate that when *Rickrock C* took off this morning, there was a Denton Cassal on board, bound for Tunney 21."

"It wasn't I," he said dazedly. He knew who it was, though. The man who had tried to kill him last night. The reason for the attack now became clear. The thug had wanted his identification tab. Worse, he had gotten it.

"No doubt it wasn't," she said wearily. "Outsiders don't seem to understand what galactic travel entails."

Outsiders? Evidently what she called those who lived beyond the second transfer ring. Were those who lived at the edge of the Galaxy, beyond the first ring, called Rimmers? Probably.

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She was still speaking: "Ten years to cross the Galaxy, without stopping. At present, no ship is capable of that. Real scheduling is impossible. Populations shift and have to be supplied. A ship is taken off a run for repairs and is never put back on. It's more urgently needed elsewhere. The man who depended on it is left waiting; years pass before he learns it's never coming.

"If we had instantaneous radio, that would help. Confusion wouldn't vanish overnight, but it would diminish. We wouldn't have to depend on ships for all the news. Reservations could be made ahead of time, credit established, lost identification replaced—"

"I've traveled before," he interrupted stiffly. "I've never had any trouble."

She seemed to be exaggerating the difficulties. True, the center was more congested. Taking each star as the starting point for a limited number of ships and using statistical probability as a guide—why, no man would arrive at his predetermined destination.

But that wasn't the way it worked. Manifestly, you couldn't compare galactic transportation to the erratic paths of air molecules in a giant room. Or could you?

For the average man, anyone who didn't have his own inter-stellar ship, was the comparison too apt? It might be.

"You've traveled outside, where there are still free planets waiting to be settled. Where a man is



welcome, if he's able to work." She paused. "The center is different. Populations are excessive. Inside the third ring, no man is allowed off a ship without an identification tab. They don't encourage immigration."

In effect, that meant no ship bound for the center would take a passenger without identification. No ship owner would run the risk of having a permanent guest on board, someone who couldn't be rid of when his money was gone.

Cassal held his head in his hands. Tunney 21 was inside the third ring.

"Next time," she said, "don't let anyone take your identification."

"I won't," he promised grimly.

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The woman looked directly at him. Her eyes were bright. He revised his estimate of her age drastically downward. She couldn't be as old as he. Nothing outward had happened, but she no longer seemed dowdy. Not that he was interested. Still, it might pay him to be friendly to the first counselor.

"We're a philanthropic agency," said Murra Foray. "Your case is special, though—"

"I understand," he said gruffly. "You accept contributions."

She nodded. "If the donor is able to give. We don't ask so much that you'll have to compromise your standard of living." But she named a sum that would force him to do just that if getting to Tunney 21 took any appreciable time.

He stared at her unhappily. "I suppose it's worth it. I can always work, if I have to."

"As a salesman?" she asked. "I'm afraid you'll find it difficult to do business with Godolphians."

Irony wasn't called for at a time like this, he thought reproachfully.

"Not just another salesman," he answered definitely. "I have special knowledge of customer reactions. I can tell exactly—"

He stopped abruptly. Was she baiting him? For what reason? The instrument he called Dimanche was not known to the Galaxy at large. From the business angle, it would be poor policy to hand out that information at random. Aside from that, he needed every advantage he could get. Dimanche was his special advantage.

"Anyway," he finished lamely, "I'm a first class engineer. I can always find something in that line."

"A scientist, maybe," murmured Murra Foray. "But in this part of the Milky Way, an engineer is regarded as merely a technician who hasn't yet gained practical experience." She shook her head. "You'll do better as a salesman."

He got up, glowering. "If that's all—"

"It is. We'll keep you informed. Drop your contribution in the slot provided for that purpose as you leave."

A door, which he hadn't noticed in entering the counselling cubicle, swung open. The agency was efficient.

"Remember," the counselor called out as he left, "identification is hard to work with. Don't accept a crude forgery."

He didn't answer, but it was an idea worth considering. The agency was also eminently practical.

The exit path guided him firmly to an inconspicuous and yet inescapable contribution station. He began to doubt the philanthropic aspect of the bureau.

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"I've got it," said Dimanche as Cassal gloomily counted out the sum the first counselor had named.

"Got what?" asked Cassal. He rolled the currency into a neat bundle, attached his name, and dropped it into the chute.

"The woman, Murra Foray, the first counselor. She's a Huntner."

"What's a Huntner?"

"A sub-race of men on the other side of the Galaxy. She was vocalizing about her home planet when I managed to locate her."

"Any other information?"

"None. Electronic guards were sliding into place as soon as I reached her. I got out as fast as I could."

"I see." The significance of that, if any, escaped him. Nevertheless, it sounded depressing.

"What I want to know is," said Dimanche, "why such precautions as electronic guards? What does Travelers Aid have that's so secret?"

Cassal grunted and didn't answer. Dimanche could be annoyingly inquisitive at times.

Cassal had entered one side of a block-square building. He came out on the other side. The agency was larger than he had thought. The old man was staring at a door as Cassal came out. He had apparently changed every sign in the building. His work finished, the technician was removing the visual projector from his head as Cassal came up to him. He turned and peered.

"You stuck here, too?" he asked in the uneven voice of the aged.

"Stuck?" repeated Cassal. "I suppose you can call it that. I'm waiting for my ship." He frowned. He was the one who wanted to ask questions. "Why all the redecoration? I thought Travelers Aid was an old agency. Why did you change so many signs? I could understand it if the agency were new."

The old man chuckled. "Re-organization. The previous first counselor resigned suddenly, in the middle of the night, they say. The new one didn't like the name of the agency, so she ordered it changed."

She would do just that, thought Cassal. "What about this Murra Foray?"

The old man winked mysteriously. He opened his mouth and then seemed overcome with senile fright. Hurriedly he shuffled away.

Cassal gazed after him, baffled. The old man was afraid for his job, afraid of the first counselor. Why he should be, Cassal didn't know. He shrugged and went on. The agency was now in motion in his behalf, but he didn't intend to depend on that alone.

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"The girl ahead of you is making unnecessary wriggling motions as she walks," observed Dimanche. "Several men are looking on with approval. I don't understand."

Cassal glanced up. They walked that way back in good old L.A. A pang of homesickness swept through him.

"Shut up," he growled plaintively. "Attend to the business at hand."

"Business? Very well," said Dimanche. "Watch out for the transport tide."

Cassal swerved back from the edge of the water. Murra Foray had been right. Godolphians didn't want or need his skills, at least not on terms that were acceptable to him. The natives didn't have to exert themselves. They lived off the income provided by travelers, with which the planet was abundantly supplied by ship after ship.

Still, that didn't alter his need for money. He walked the streets at random while Dimanche probed.

"Ah!"

"What is it?"

"That man. He crinkles something in his hands. Not enough, he is subvocalizing."

"I know how he feels," commented Cassal.

"Now his throat tightens. He bunches his muscles. 'I know where I can get more,' he tells himself. He is going there."

"A sensible man," declared Cassal. "Follow him."

Boldly the man headed toward a section of the city which Cassal had not previously entered. He believed opportunity lay there. Not for everyone. The shrewd, observant, and the courageous could succeed if—The word that the quarry used was a slang term, unfamiliar to either Cassal or Dimanche. It didn't matter as long as it led to money.

Cassal stretched his stride and managed to keep the man in sight. He skipped nimbly over the narrow walkways that curved through the great buildings. The section grew dingier as they proceeded. Not slums; not the show-place city frequented by travelers, either.

Abruptly the man turned into a building. He was out of sight when Cassal reached the structure.

He stood at the entrance and stared in disappointment. "Opportunities Inc.," Dimanche quoted softly in his ear. "Science, thrills, chance. What does that mean?"

"It means that we followed a gravity ghost!"

"What's a gravity ghost?"

"An unexplained phenomena," said Cassal nastily. "It affects the instruments of spaceships, giving the illusion of a massive dark body that isn't there."

"But you're not a pilot. I don't understand."

"You're not a very good pilot yourself. We followed the man to a gambling joint."

"Gambling," mused Dimanche. "Well, isn't it an opportunity of a sort? Someone inside is thinking of the money he's winning."

"The owner, no doubt."

Dimanche was silent, investigating. "It is the owner," he confirmed finally. "Why not go in,

anyway. It's raining. And they serve drinks." Left unstated was the admission that Dimanche was curious, as usual.

---

Cassal went in and ordered a drink. It was a variable place, depending on the spectator—bright, cheerful, and harmonious if he were winning, garish and depressingly vulgar if he were not. At the moment Cassal belonged to neither group. He reserved judgment.

An assortment of gaming devices were in operation. One in particular seemed interesting. It involved the counting of electrons passing through an aperture, based on probability.

"Not that," whispered Dimanche. "It's rigged."

"But it's not necessary," Cassal murmured. "Pure chance alone is good enough."

"They don't take chances, pure or adulterated. Look around. How many Godolphians do you see?"

Cassal looked. Natives were not even there as servants. Strictly a clip joint, working travelers.

Unconsciously, he nodded. "That does it. It's not the kind of opportunity I had in mind."

"Don't be hasty," objected Dimanche. "Certain devices I can't control. There may be others in which my knowledge will help you. Stroll around and sample some games."

Cassal equipped himself with a supply of coins and sauntered through the establishment, disbursing them so as to give himself the widest possible acquaintance with the layout.

"That one," instructed Dimanche.

It received a coin. In return, it rewarded him with a large shower of change. The money spilled to the floor with a satisfying clatter. An audience gathered rapidly, ostensibly to help him pick up the coins.

---



"There was a circuit in it," explained Dimanche. "I gave it a shot of electrons and it paid out."

"Let's try it again," suggested Cassal.

"Let's not," Dimanche said regretfully. "Look at the man on your right."

Cassal did so. He jammed the money back in his pocket and stood up. Hastily, he began thrusting the money back into the machine. A large and very unconcerned man watched him.

"You get the idea," said Dimanche. "It paid off two months ago. It wasn't scheduled for another this year." Dimanche scrutinized the man in a multitude of ways while Cassal continued play. "He's satisfied," was the report at last. "He doesn't detect any sign of crookedness."

"*Crookedness?*"

"On your part, that is. In the ethics of a gambling house, what's done to insure profit is merely prudence."

---

They moved on to other games, though Cassal lost his briefly acquired enthusiasm. The possibility of winning seemed to grow more remote.

"Hold it," said Dimanche. "Let's look into this."

"Let me give *you* some advice," said Cassal. "This is one thing we can't win at. Every race in the Galaxy has a game like this. Pieces of plastic with values printed on them are distributed. The trick is to get certain arbitrarily selected sets of values in the plastics dealt to you. It seems simple, but against a skilled player a beginner can't win."

"Every race in the Galaxy," mused Dimanche. "What do men call it?"

"Cards," said Cassal, "though there are many varieties within that general classification." He launched into a detailed exposition of the subject. If it were something he was familiar with, all right, but a foreign deck and strange rules—

Nevertheless, Dimanche was interested. They stayed and observed.

The dealer was clumsy. His great hands enfolded the cards. Not a Godolphian nor quite human, he was an odd type, difficult to place. Physically burly, he wore a garment chiefly remarkable for its ill-fitting appearance. A hard round hat jammed closely over his skull completed the outfit. He was dressed in a manner that, somewhere in the Universe, was evidently considered the height of fashion.

"It doesn't seem bad," commented Cassal. "There might be a chance."

"Look around," said Dimanche. "Everyone thinks that. It's the classic struggle, person against person and everyone against the house. Naturally, the house doesn't lose."

"Then why are we wasting our time?"

"Because I've got an idea," said Dimanche. "Sit down and take a hand."

"Make up your mind. You said the house doesn't lose."

"The house hasn't played against us. Sit down. You get eight cards, with the option of two more. I'll tell you what to do."

Cassal waited until a disconsolate player relinquished his seat and stalked moodily away. He played a few hands and bet small sums in accordance with Dimanche's instructions. He held his own and won insignificant amounts while learning.

It was simple. Nine orders, or suits, of twenty-seven cards each. Each suit would build a different equation. The lowest hand was a quadratic. A cubic would beat it. All he had to do was remember his math, guess at what he didn't remember, and draw the right cards.

"What's the highest possible hand?" asked Dimanche. There was a note of abstraction in his voice, as if he were paying more attention to something else.

Cassal peeked at the cards that were face-down on the table. He shoved some money into the betting square in front of him and didn't answer.

"You had it last time," said Dimanche. "A three dimensional encephalocurve. A time modulated brainwave. If you had bet right, you could have owned the house by now."

"I did? Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because you had it three successive times. The probabilities against that are astronomical. I've got to find out what's happening before you start betting recklessly."

"It's not the dealer," declared Cassal. "Look at those hands."

They were huge hands, more suitable, seemingly, for crushing the life from some alien beast than the delicate manipulation of cards. Cassal continued to play, betting brilliantly by the only standard that mattered: he won.

---

One player dropped out and was replaced by a recruit from the surrounding crowd. Cassal ordered a drink. The waiter was placing it in his hand when Dimanche made a discovery.

"I've got it!"

A shout from Dimanche was roughly equivalent to a noiseless kick in the head. Cassal dropped the drink. The player next to him scowled but said nothing. The dealer blinked and went on dealing.

"What have you got?" asked Cassal, wiping up the mess and trying to keep track of the cards.

"How he fixes the deck," explained Dimanche in a lower and less painful tone. "Clever."

Muttering, Cassal shoved a bet in front of him.

"Look at that hat," said Dimanche.

"Ridiculous, isn't it? But I see no reason to gloat because I have better taste."

"That's not what I meant. It's pulled down low over his knobby ears and touches his jacket. His jacket rubs against his trousers, which in turn come in contact with the stool on which he sits."

"True," agreed Cassal, increasing his wager. "But except for his physique, I don't see anything unusual."

"It's a circuit, a visual projector broken down into components. The hat is a command circuit which makes contact, via his clothing, with the broadcasting unit built into the chair. The existence of a visual projector is completely concealed."

Cassal bit his lip and squinted at his cards. "Interesting. What does it have to do with anything?"

"The deck," exclaimed Dimanche excitedly. "The backs are regular, printed with an intricate design. The front is a special plastic, susceptible to the influence of the visual projector. He doesn't need manual dexterity. He can make any value appear on any card he wants. It will stay there until he changes it."

Cassal picked up the cards. "I've got a Loreenaroo equation. Can he change that to anything else?"

"He can, but he doesn't work that way. He decides before he deals who's going to get what. He concentrates on each card as he deals it. He can change a hand after a player gets it, but it wouldn't look good."

"It wouldn't." Cassal wistfully watched the dealer rake in his wager. His winnings were gone, plus. The newcomer to the game won.

He started to get up. "Sit down," whispered Dimanche. "We're just beginning. Now that we know what he does and how he does it, we're going to take him."

---

The next hand started in the familiar pattern, two cards of fairly good possibilities, a bet, and then another card. Cassal watched the dealer closely. His clumsiness was only superficial. At no time were the faces of the cards visible. The real skill was unobservable, of course—the swift bookkeeping that went on in his mind. A duplication in the hands of the players, for instance, would be ruinous.

Cassal received the last card. "Bet high," said Dimanche. With trepidation, Cassal shoved the money into the betting area.

The dealer glanced at his hand and started to sit down. Abruptly he stood up again. He scratched his cheek and stared puzzledly at the players around him. Gently he lowered himself onto the stool. The contact was even briefer. He stood up in indecision. An impatient murmur arose. He dealt himself a card, looked at it, and paid off all the way around. The players buzzed with curiosity.

"What happened?" asked Cassal as the next hand started.

"I induced a short in the circuit," said Dimanche. "He couldn't sit down to change the last card he got. He took a chance, as he had to, and dealt himself a card, anyway."

"But he paid off without asking to see what we had."

"It was the only thing he could do," explained Dimanche. "He had duplicate cards."

The dealer was scowling. He didn't seem quite so much at ease. The cards were dealt and the betting proceeded almost as usual. True, the dealer was nervous. He couldn't sit down and stay down. He was sweating. Again he paid off. Cassal won heavily and he was not the only one.

The crowd around them grew almost in a rush. There is an indefinable sense that tells one gambler when another is winning.

This time the dealer stood up. His leg contacted the stool occasionally. He jerked it away each time he dealt to himself. At the last card he hesitated. It was amazing how much he could sweat. He lifted a corner of the cards. Without indicating what he had drawn, determinedly and deliberately he sat down. The chair broke. The dealer grinned weakly as a waiter brought him another stool.

"They still think it may be a defective circuit," whispered Dimanche.

The dealer sat down and sprang up from the new chair in one motion. He gazed bitterly at the players and paid them.

"He had a blank hand," explained Dimanche. "He made contact with the broadcasting circuit long enough to erase, but not long enough to put anything in its place."

The dealer adjusted his coat. "I have a nervous disability," he declared thickly. "If you'll pardon me for a few minutes while I take a treatment—"

"Probably going to consult with the manager," observed Cassal.

"He is the manager. He's talking with the owner."

"Keep track of him."

---

A blonde, pretty, perhaps even Earth-type human, smiled and wriggled closer to Cassal. He smiled back.

"Don't fall for it," warned Dimanche. "She's an undercover agent for the house."

Cassal looked her over carefully. "Not much under cover."

"But if she should discover—"

"Don't be stupid. She'll never guess you exist. There's a small lump behind my ear and a small round tube cleverly concealed elsewhere."

"All right," sighed Dimanche resignedly. "I suppose people will always be a mystery to me."

The dealer reappeared, followed by an unobtrusive man who carried a new stool. The dealer looked subtly different, though he was the same person. It took a close inspection to determine what the difference was. His clothing was new, unrumped, unmarked by perspiration. During his brief absence, he had been furnished with new visual projector equipment, and it had been thoroughly checked out. The house intended to locate the source of the disturbance.

Mentally, Cassal counted his assets. He was solvent again, but in other ways his position was not so good.

"Maybe," he suggested, "we should leave. With no further interference from us, they might believe defective equipment is the cause of their losses."

"Maybe," replied Dimanche, "you think the crowd around us is composed solely of patrons?"

"I see," said Cassal soberly.

He stretched his legs. The crowd pressed closer, uncommonly aggressive and ill-tempered for mere spectators. He decided against leaving.

"Let's resume play." The dealer-manager smiled blandly at each player. He didn't suspect any one person—yet.

"He might be using an honest deck," said Cassal hopefully.

"They don't have that kind," answered Dimanche. He added absently: "During his conference with the owner, he was given authority to handle the situation in any way he sees fit."

Bad, but not too bad. At least Cassal was opposing someone who had authority to let him keep his winnings, *if he could be convinced*.

The dealer deliberately sat down on the stool. Testing. He could endure the charge that trickled through him. The bland smile spread into a triumphant one.

"While he was gone, he took a sedative," analyzed Dimanche. "He also had the strength of the broadcasting circuit reduced. He thinks that will do it."

"Sedatives wear off," said Cassal. "By the time he knows it's me, see that it has worn off. Mess him up."

---

The game went on. The situation was too much for the others. They played poorly and bet atrociously, on purpose. One by one they lost and dropped out. They wanted badly to win, but they wanted to live even more.

The joint was jumping, and so was the dealer again. Sweat rolled down his face and there were tears in his eyes. So much liquid began to erode his fixed smile. He kept replenishing it from some inner source of determination.

Cassal looked up. The crowd had drawn back, or had been forced back by hirelings who mingled with them. He was alone with the dealer at the table. Money was piled high around him. It was more than he needed, more than he wanted.

"I suggest one last hand," said the dealer-manager, grimacing. It sounded a little stronger than a suggestion.

Cassal nodded.

"For a substantial sum," said the dealer, naming it.

Miraculously, it was an amount that equaled everything Cassal had. Again Cassal nodded.

"Pressure," muttered Cassal to Dimanche. "The sedative has worn off. He's back at the level at which he started. Fry him if you have to."

The cards came out slowly. The dealer was jittering as he dealt. Soft music was lacking, but not the motions that normally accompanied it. Cassal couldn't believe that cards could be so bad. Somehow the dealer was rising to the occasion. Rising and sitting.

"There's a nerve in your body," Cassal began conversationally, "which, if it were overloaded, would cause you to drop dead."

The dealer didn't examine his cards. He didn't have to. "In that event, someone would be arrested for murder," he said. "You."

That was the wrong tack; the humanoid had too much courage. Cassal passed his hand over his eyes. "You can't do this to men, but, strictly speaking, the dealer's not human. Try suggestion on him. Make him change the cards. Play him like a piano. Pizzicato on the nerve strings."

Dimanche didn't answer; presumably he was busy scrambling the circuits.

The dealer stretched out his hand. It never reached the cards. Danger: Dimanche at work. The smile dropped from his face. What remained was pure anguish. He was too dry for tears. Smoke curled up faintly from his jacket.

"Hot, isn't it?" asked Cassal. "It might be cooler if you took off your cap."

The cap tinkled to the floor. The mechanism in it was destroyed. What the cards were, they were. Now they couldn't be changed.

"That's better," said Cassal.

---

He glanced at his hand. In the interim, it had changed slightly. Dimanche had got there.

The dealer examined his cards one by one. His face changed color. He sat utterly still on a cool stool.

"You win," he said hopelessly.

"Let's see what you have."

The dealer-manager roused himself. "You won. That's good enough for you, isn't it?"

Cassal shrugged. "You have Bank of the Galaxy service here. I'll deposit my money with them *before* you pick up your cards."

The dealer nodded unhappily and summoned an assistant. The crowd, which had anticipated violence, slowly began to drift away.

"What did you do?" asked Cassal silently.

"Men have no shame," sighed Dimanche. "Some humanoids do. The dealer was one who did. I forced him to project onto his cards something that wasn't a suit at all."

"Embarrassing if that got out," agreed Cassal. "What did you project?"

Dimanche told him. Cassal blushed, which was unusual for a man.

The dealer-manager returned and the transaction was completed. His money was safe in the Bank of the Galaxy.

"Hereafter, you're not welcome," said the dealer morosely. "Don't come back."

Cassal picked up the cards without looking at them. "And no accidents after I leave," he said, extending the cards face-down. The manager took them and trembled.

"He's an honorable humanoid, in his own way," whispered Dimanche. "I think you're safe."

It was time to leave. "One question," Cassal called back. "What do you call this game?"

Automatically the dealer started to answer. "Why, everyone knows...." He sat down, his mouth open.

It was more than time to leave.

Outside, he hailed an air taxi. No point in tempting the management.

"Look," said Dimanche as the cab rose from the surface of the transport tide.

A technician with a visual projector was at work on the sign in front of the gaming house. Huge words took shape: WARNING—NO TELEPATHS ALLOWED.

There were no such things anywhere, but now there were rumors of them.

---

Arriving at the habitat wing of the hotel, Cassal went directly to his room. He awaited the delivery of the equipment he had ordered and checked through it thoroughly. Satisfied that everything was there, he estimated the size of the room. Too small for his purpose.

He picked up the intercom and dialed Services. "Put a Life Stage Cordon around my suite," he said briskly.

The face opposite his went blank. "But you're an Earthman. I thought—"

"I know more about my own requirements than your Life Stage Bureau. Earthmen do have life stages. You know the penalty if you refuse that service."

There were some races who went without sleep for five months and then had to make up for it. Others grew vestigial wings for brief periods and had to fly with them or die; reduced gravity would suffice for that. Still others—

But the one common feature was always a critical time in which certain conditions were necessary. Insofar as there was a universal law, from one end of the Galaxy to the other, this was it: The habitat hotel had to furnish appropriate conditions for the maintenance of any life-form that requested it.

The Godolphian disappeared from the screen. When he came back, he seemed disturbed.

"You spoke of a suite. I find that you're listed as occupying one room."

"I am. It's too small. Convert the rooms around me into a suite."

"That's very expensive."

"I'm aware of that. Check the Bank of the Galaxy for my credit rating."

He watched the process take place. Service would be amazingly good from now on.

"Your suite will be converted in about two hours. The Life Stage Cordon will begin as soon after that as you want. If you tell me how long you'll need it, I can make arrangements now."

"About ten hours is all I'll need." Cassal rubbed his jaw reflectively. "One more thing. Put a perpetual service at the spaceport. If a ship comes in bound for Tunney 21 or the vicinity of it, get accommodations on it for me. And hold it until I get ready, no matter what it costs."

He flipped off the intercom and promptly went to sleep. Hours later, he was awakened by a faint hum. The Life Stage Cordon had just been snapped safely around his newly created suite.

"Now what?" asked Dimanche.

"I need an identification tab."

"You do. And forgeries are expensive and generally crude, as that Huntner woman, Murra Foray, observed."

---

Cassal glanced at the equipment. "Expensive, yes. Not crude when we do it."

"We forge it?" Dimanche was incredulous.

"That's what I said. Consider it this way. I've seen my tab a countless number of times. If I tried to draw it as I remember it, it would be inept and wouldn't pass. Nevertheless, that memory is in my mind, recorded in neuron chains, exact and accurate." He paused significantly. "You have access to that memory."

"At least partially. But what good does that do?"

"Visual projector and plastic which will take the imprint. I think hard about the identification as I remember it. You record and feed it back to me while I concentrate on projecting it on the plastic. After we get it down, we change the chemical composition of the plastic. It will then pass everything except destructive analysis, and they don't often do that."

Dimanche was silent. "Ingenious," was its comment. "Part of that we can manage, the official engraving, even the electron stamp. That, however, is gross detail. The print of the brain area is beyond our capacity. We can put down what you remember, and you remember what you saw. You didn't see fine enough, though. The general area will be recognizable, but not the fine structure, nor the charges stored there nor their interrelationship."

"But we've got to do it," Cassal insisted, pacing about nervously.

"With more equipment to probe—"

"Not a chance. I got one Life Stage Cordon on a bluff. If I ask for another, they'll look it up and refuse."

"All right," said Dimanche, humming. The mechanical attempt at music made Cassal's head ache. "I've got an idea. Think about the identification tab."

Cassal thought.

"Enough," said Dimanche. "Now poke yourself."

"Where?"

"Everywhere," replied Dimanche irritably. "One place at a time."

Cassal did so, though it soon became monotonous.

Dimanche stopped him. "Just above your right knee."

"What above my right knee?"

"The principal access to that part of your brain we're concerned with," said Dimanche. "We can't photomeasure your brain the way it was originally done, but we can investigate it remotely. The results will be simplified, naturally. Something like a scale model as compared to the original. A more apt comparison might be that of a relief map to an actual locality."

"Investigate it remotely?" muttered Cassal. A horrible suspicion touched his consciousness. He jerked away from that touch. "What does that mean?"

"What it sounds like. Stimulus and response. From that I can construct an accurate chart of the proper portion of your brain. Our probing instruments will be crude out of necessity, but effective."

"I've already visualized those probing instruments," said Cassal worriedly. "Maybe we'd better work first on the official engraving and the electron stamp, while I'm still fresh. I have a feeling...."

"Excellent suggestion," said Dimanche.

Cassal gathered the articles slowly. His lighter would burn and it would also cut. He needed a



heavy object to pound with. A violent irritant for the nerve endings. Something to freeze his flesh....

Dimanche interrupted: "There are also a few glands we've got to pick up. See if there's a stimi in the room."

"Stimi? Oh yes, a stimulator. Never use the damned things." But he was going to. The next few hours weren't going to be pleasant. Nor dull, either.

Life could be difficult on Godolph.

---

As soon as the Life Stage Cordon came down, Cassal called for a doctor. The native looked at him professionally.

"Is this a part of the Earth life process?" he asked incredulously. Gingerly, he touched the swollen and lacerated leg.

---



Cassal nodded wearily. "A matter of life and death," he croaked.

"If it is, then it is," said the doctor, shaking his head. "I, for one, am glad to be a Godolphian."

"To each his own habitat," Cassal quoted the motto of the hotel.

Godolphians were clumsy, good-natured caricatures of seals. There was nothing wrong with their medicine, however. In a matter of minutes he was feeling better. By the time the doctor left, the swelling had subsided and the open wounds were fast closing.

Eagerly, he examined the identification tab. As far as he could tell, it was perfect. What the scanner would reveal was, of course, another matter. He had to check that as best he could without exposing himself.

Services came up to the suite right after he laid the intercom down. A machine was placed over his head and the identification slipped into the slot. The code on the tab was noted; the machine hunted and found the corresponding brain area. Structure was mapped, impulses recorded, scrambled, converted into a ray of light which danced over a film.

The identification tab was similarly recorded. There was now a means of comparison.

Fingerprints could be duplicated—that is, if the race in question had fingers. Every intelligence, however much it differed from its neighbors, had a brain, and tampering with that brain was easily detected. Each identification tab carried a psychometric number which corresponded to the total personality. Alteration of any part of the brain could only subtract from personality index.

The technician removed the identification and gave it to Cassal. "Where shall I send the strips?"

"You don't," said Cassal. "I have a private message to go with them."

"But that will invalidate the process."

"I know. This isn't a formal contract."

Removing the two strips and handing them to Cassal, the technician wheeled the machine away. After due thought, Cassal composed the message.

Travelers Aid Bureau Murra Foray, first counselor:

If you were considering another identification tab for me, don't. As you can see, I've located the missing item.

He attached the message to the strips and dropped them into the communication chute.

---

He was wiping his whiskers away when the answer came. Hastily he finished and wrapped himself, noting but not approving the amused glint in her eyes as she watched. His morals were his own, wherever he went.

"Denton Cassal," she said. "A wonderful job. The two strips were in register within one per cent. The best previous forgery I've seen was six per cent, and that was merely a lucky accident. It couldn't be duplicated. Let me congratulate you."

His dignity was professional. "I wish you weren't so fond of that word 'forgery.' I told you I mislaid the tab. As soon as I found it, I sent you proof. I want to get to Tunney 21. I'm willing to do anything I can to speed up the process."

Her laughter tinkled. "You don't *have* to tell me how you did it or where you got it. I'm inclined to think you made it. You understand that I'm not concerned with legality as such. From time to time the agency has to furnish missing documents. If there's a better way than we have, I'd like to know it."

He sighed and shook his head. For some reason, his heart was beating fast. He wanted to say more, but there was nothing to say.

When he failed to respond, she leaned toward him. "Perhaps you'll discuss this with me. At greater length."

"At the agency?"

She looked at him in surprise. "Have you been sleeping? The agency is closed for the day. The first counselor can't work all the time, you know."

Sleeping? He grimaced at the remembrance of the self-administered beating. No, he hadn't been sleeping. He brushed the thought aside and boldly named a place. Dinner was acceptable.

Dimanche waited until the screen was dark. The words were carefully chosen.

"Did you notice," he asked, "that there was no apparent change in clothing and makeup, yet she seemed younger, more attractive?"

"I didn't think you could trace her that far."

"I can't. I looked at her through your eyes."

"Don't trust my reaction," advised Cassal. "It's likely to be subjective."

"I don't," answered Dimanche. "It is."

---

Cassal hummed thoughtfully. Dimanche was a business neurological instrument. It didn't follow that it was an expert in human psychology.

---

Cassal stared at the woman coming toward him. Center-of-the-Galaxy fashion. Decadent, of course, or maybe ultra-civilized. As an Outsider, he wasn't sure which. Whatever it was, it did to the human body what should have been done long ago.

And this body wasn't exactly human. The subtle skirt of proportions betrayed it as an offshoot or deviation from the human race. Some of the new sub-races stacked up against the original stock much in the same way Cro-Magnons did against Neanderthals, in beauty, at least.

Dimanche spoke a single syllable and subsided, an event Cassal didn't notice. His consciousness was focused on another discovery: the woman was Murra Foray.

He knew vaguely that the first counselor was not necessarily what she had seemed that first time at the agency. That she was capable of such a metamorphosis was hard to believe, though pleasant to accept. His attitude must have shown on his face.

"Please," said Murra Foray. "I'm a Huntner. We're adept at camouflage."

"Huntner," he repeated blankly. "I knew that. But what's a Huntner?"

She wrinkled her lovely nose at the question. "I didn't expect you to ask that. I won't answer it now." She came closer. "I thought you'd ask which was the camouflage—the person you see here, or the one at the Bureau?"

He never remembered the reply he made. It must have been satisfactory, for she smiled and drew her fragile wrap closer. The reservations were waiting.

Dimanche seized the opportunity to speak. "There's something phony about her. I don't understand it and I don't like it."

"You," said Cassal, "are a machine. You don't have to like it."

"That's what I mean. You *have* to like it. You have no choice."

Murra Foray looked back questioningly. Cassal hurried to her side.

The evening passed swiftly. Food that he ate and didn't taste. Music he heard and didn't listen to. Geometric light fugues that were seen and not observed. Liquor that he drank—and here the sequence ended, in the complicated chemistry of Godolphian stimulants.

Cassal reacted to that smooth liquid, though his physical reactions were not slowed. Certain mental centers were depressed, others left wide open, subject to acceleration at whatever speed he demanded.

Murra Foray, in his eyes at least, might look like a dream, the kind men have and never talk about. She was, however, interested solely in her work, or so it seemed.

---

"Godolph is a nice place," she said, toying with a drink, "if you like rain. The natives seem happy enough. But the Galaxy is big and there are lots of strange planets in it, each of which seems ideal to those who are adapted to it. I don't have to tell you what happens when people travel. They get stranded. It's not the time spent in actual flight that's important; it's waiting for the right ship to show up and then having all the necessary documents. Believe me, that can be important, as you found out."

He nodded. He had.

"That's the origin of Travelers Aid Bureau," she continued. "A loose organization, propagated mainly by example. Sometimes it's called Star Travelers Aid. It may have other names. The aim, however, is always the same: to see that stranded persons get where they want to go."

She looked at him wistfully, appealingly. "That's why I'm interested in your method of creating identification tabs. It's the thing most commonly lost. Stolen, if you prefer the truth."

She seemed to anticipate his question. "How can anyone use another's identification? It can be done under certain circumstances. By neural lobotomy, a portion of one brain may be made to match, more or less exactly, the code area of another brain. The person operated on suffers a certain loss of function, of course. How great that loss is depends on the degree of similarity between the two brain areas before the operation took place."

She ought to know, and he was inclined to believe her. Still, it didn't sound feasible.

"You haven't accounted for the psychometric index," he said.

"I thought you'd see it. That's diminished, too."

Logical enough, though not a pretty picture. A genius could always be made into an average man or lowered to the level of an idiot. There was no operation, however, that could raise an idiot to the level of a genius.

The scramble for the precious identification tabs went on, from the higher to the lower, a game of musical chairs with grim over-tones.

She smiled gravely. "You haven't answered my implied question."

The company that employed him wasn't anxious to let the secret of Dimanche get out. They didn't sell the instrument; they made it for their own use. It was an advantage over their competitors they intended to keep. Even on his recommendation, they wouldn't sell to the agency.

Moreover, it wouldn't help Travelers Aid Bureau if they did. Since she was first counselor, it was probable that she'd be the one to use it. She couldn't make identification for anyone except herself, and then only if she developed exceptional skill.

The alternative was to surgery it in and out of whoever needed it. When that happened, secrecy was gone. Travelers couldn't be trusted.

---

He shook his head. "It's an appealing idea, but I'm afraid I can't help you."

"Meaning you won't."

This was intriguing. Now it was the agency, not he, who wanted help.

"Don't overplay it," cautioned Dimanche, who had been consistently silent.

She leaned forward attentively. He experienced an uneasy moment. Was it possible she had noticed his private conversation? Of course not. Yet—

"Please," she said, and the tone allayed his fears. "There's an emergency situation and I've got to attend to it. Will you go with me?" She smiled understandingly at his quizzical expression. "Travelers Aid is always having emergencies."

She was rising. "It's too late to go to the Bureau. My place has a number of machines with which

I keep in touch with the spaceport."

"I wonder," said Dimanche puzzledly. "She doesn't subvocalize at all. I haven't been able to get a line on her. I'm certain she didn't receive any sort of call. Be careful. This might be a trick."

"Interesting," said Cassal. He wasn't in the mood to discuss it.

Her habitation was luxurious, though Cassal wasn't impressed. Luxury was found everywhere in the Universe. Huntner women weren't. He watched as she adjusted the machines grouped at one side of the room. She spoke in a low voice; he couldn't distinguish words. She actuated levers, pressed buttons: impedimenta of communication.

At last she finished. "I'm tired. Will you wait till I change?"

Inarticulately, he nodded.

"I think her 'emergency' was a fake," said Dimanche flatly as soon as she left. "I'm positive she wasn't operating the communicator. She merely went through the motions."

"Motions," murmured Cassal dreamily, leaning back. "And what motions."

"I've been watching her," said Dimanche. "She frightens me."

"I've been watching her, too. Maybe in a different way."

"Get out of here while you can," warned Dimanche. "She's dangerous."

---

Momentarily, Cassal considered it. Dimanche had never failed him. He ought to follow that advice. And yet there was another explanation.

"Look," said Cassal. "A machine is a machine. But among humans there are men and women. What seems dangerous to you may be merely a pattern of normal behavior...." He broke off. Murra Foray had entered.

Strictly from the other side of the Galaxy, which she was. A woman can be slender and still be womanly beautiful, without being obvious about it. Not that Murra disdained the obvious, technically. But he could see through technicalities.

The tendons in his hands ached and his mouth was dry, though not with fear. An urgent ringing pounded in his ears. He shook it out of his head and got up.

She came to him.

The ringing was still in his ears. It wasn't a figment of imagination; it was a real voice—that of Dimanche, howling:

"Huntner! It's a word variant. In their language it means Hunter. *She can hear me!*"

"Hear you?" repeated Cassal vacantly.

She was kissing him.

"A descendant of carnivores. An audio-sensitive. She's been listening to you and me all the time."

"Of course I have, ever since the first interview at the bureau," said Murra. "In the beginning I couldn't see what value it was, but you convinced me." She laid her hand gently over his eyes. "I hate to do this to you, dear, but I've got to have Dimanche."

She had been smothering him with caresses. Now, deliberately, she began smothering him in actuality.

Cassal had thought he was an athlete. For an Earthman, he was. Murra Foray, however, was a Huntner, which meant hunter—a descendant of incredibly strong carnivores.

He didn't have a chance. He knew that when he couldn't budge her hands and he fell into the airless blackness of space.

---

Alone and naked, Cassal awakened. He wished he hadn't. He turned over and, though he tried hard not to, promptly woke up again. His body was willing to sleep, but his mind was panicked and disturbed. About what, he wasn't sure.

He sat up shakily and held his roaring head in his hands. He ran aching fingers through his hair. He stopped. The lump behind his ear was gone.

"Dimanche!" he called, and looked at his abdomen.

There was a thin scar, healing visibly before his eyes.

"Dimanche!" he cried again. "Dimanche!"

There was no answer. Dimanche was no longer with him.

He staggered to his feet and stared at the wall. She'd been kind enough to return him to his own rooms. At length he gathered enough strength to rummage through his belongings. Nothing was missing. Money, identification—all were there.

He could go to the police. He grimaced as he thought of it. The neighborly Godolphian police

were hardly a match for the Huntner; she'd fake them out of their skins.

He couldn't prove she'd taken Dimanche. Nothing else normally considered valuable was missing. Besides, there might even be a local prohibition against Dimanche. Not by name, of course; but they could dig up an ancient ordinance—invasion of privacy or something like that. Anything would do if it gave them an opportunity to confiscate the device for intensive study.

For the police to believe his story was the worst that could happen. They might locate Dimanche, but he'd never get it.

He smiled bitterly and the effort hurt. "Dear," she had called him as she had strangled and beaten him into unconsciousness. Afterward singing, very likely, as she had sliced the little instrument out of him.

He could picture her not very remote ancestors springing from cover and overtaking a fleeing herd—

No use pursuing that line of thought.

Why did she want Dimanche? She had hinted that the agency wasn't always concerned with legality as such. He could believe her. If she wanted it for making identification tabs, she'd soon find that it was useless. Not that that was much comfort—she wasn't likely to return Dimanche after she'd made that discovery.

---

For that matter, what was the purpose of Travelers Aid Bureau? It was a front for another kind of activity. Philanthropy had nothing to do with it.

If he still had possession of Dimanche, he'd be able to find out. Everything seemed to hinge on that. With it, he was nearly a superman, able to hold his own in practically all situations—anything that didn't involve a Huntner woman, that is.

Without it—well, Tunney 21 was still far away. Even if he should manage to get there without it, his mission on the planet was certain to fail.

He dismissed the idea of trying to recover it immediately from Murra Foray. She was an audio-sensitive. At twenty feet, unaided, she could hear a heartbeat, the internal noise muscles made in sliding over each other. With Dimanche, she could hear electrons rustling. As an antagonist she was altogether too formidable.

---

He began pulling on his clothing, wincing as he did so. The alternative was to make another Dimanche. *If* he could. It would be a tough job even for a neuron expert familiar with the process. He wasn't that expert, but it still had to be done.

The new instrument would have to be better than the original. Maybe not such a slick machine, but more comprehensive. More wallop. He grinned as he thought hopefully about giving Murra Foray a surprise.

Ignoring his aches and pains, he went right to work. With money not a factor, it was an easy matter to line up the best electronic and neuron concerns on Godolph. Two were put on a standby basis. When he gave them plans, they were to rush construction at all possible speed.

Each concern was to build a part of the new instrument. Neither part was of value without the other. The slow-thinking Godolphians weren't likely to make the necessary mental connection between the seemingly unrelated projects.

He retired to his suite and began to draw diagrams. It was harder than he thought. He knew the principles, but the actual details were far more complicated than he remembered.

Functionally, the Dimanche instrument was divided into three main phases. There was a brain and memory unit that operated much as the human counterpart did. Unlike the human brain, however, it had no body to control, hence more of it was available for thought processes. Entirely neuron in construction, it was far smaller than an electronic brain of the same capacity.

The second function was electronic, akin to radar. Instead of material objects, it traced and recorded distant nerve impulses. It could count the heartbeat, measure the rate of respiration, was even capable of approximate analysis of the contents of the bloodstream. Properly focused on the nerves of tongue, lips or larynx, it transmitted that data back to the neuron brain, which then reconstructed it into speech. Lip reading, after a fashion, carried to the ultimate.

Finally, there was the voice of Dimanche, a speaker under the control of the neuron brain.

For convenience of installation in the body, Dimanche was packaged in two units. The larger package was usually surgiered into the abdomen. The small one, containing the speaker, was attached to the skull just behind the ear. It worked by bone conduction, allowing silent communication between operator and instrument. A real convenience.

It wasn't enough to know this, as Cassal did. He'd talked to the company experts, had seen the symbolical drawings, the plans for an improved version. He needed something better than the best though, that had been planned.

The drawback was this: *Dimanche* was powered directly by the nervous system of the body in which it was housed. Against Murra Foray, he'd be over-matched. She was stronger than he physically, probably also in the production of nervous energy.

One solution was to make available to the new instrument a larger fraction of the neural currents of the body. That was dangerous—a slight miscalculation and the user was dead. Yet he had to have an instrument that would overpower her.

Cassal rubbed his eyes wearily. How could he find some way of supplying additional power?

Abruptly, Cassal sat up. That was the way, of course—an auxiliary power pack that need not be surgiered into his body, extra power that he would use only in emergencies.

Neuronics, Inc., had never done this, had never thought that such an instrument would ever be necessary. They didn't need to overpower their customers. They merely wanted advance information via subvocalized thoughts.

It was easier for Cassal to conceive this idea than to engineer it. At the end of the first day, he knew it would be a slow process.

Twice he postponed deadlines to the manufacturing concerns he'd engaged. He locked himself in his rooms and took Anti-Sleep against the doctor's vigorous protests. In one week he had the necessary drawings, crude but legible. An expert would have to make innumerable corrections, but the intent was plain.

One week. During that time Murra Foray would be growing hourly more proficient in the use of *Dimanche*.

---

Cassal followed the neuronics expert groggily, seventy-two hours sleep still clogging his reactions. Not that he hadn't needed sleep after that week. The Godolphian showed him proudly through the shops, though he wasn't at all interested in their achievements. The only noteworthy aspect was the grand scale of their architecture.

"We did it, though I don't think we'd have taken the job if we'd known how hard it was going to be," the neuronics expert chattered. "It works exactly as you specified. We had to make substitutions, of course, but you understand that was inevitable."

He glanced anxiously at Cassal, who nodded. That was to be expected. Components that were common on Earth wouldn't necessarily be available here. Still, any expert worth his pay could always make the proper combinations and achieve the same results.

Inside the lab, Cassal frowned. "I thought you were keeping my work separate. What is this planetary drive doing here?"

The Godolphian spread his broad hands and looked hurt. "Planetary drive?" He tried to laugh. "This is the instrument you ordered!"

Cassal started. It was supposed to fit under a flap of skin behind his ear. A Three World saurian couldn't carry it.

He turned savagely on the expert. "I told you it had to be small."

"But it is. I quote your orders exactly: 'I'm not familiar with your system of measurement, but make it tiny, very tiny. Figure the size you think it will have to be and cut it in half. And then cut *that* in half.' This is the fraction remaining."

It certainly was. Cassal glanced at the Godolphian's hands. Excellent for swimming. No wonder they built on a grand scale. Broad, blunt, webbed hands weren't exactly suited for precision work.

Valueless. Completely valueless. He knew now what he would find at the other lab. He shook his head in dismay, personally saw to it that the instrument was destroyed. He paid for the work and retrieved the plans.

Back in his rooms again, he sat and thought. It was still the only solution. If the Godolphians couldn't do it, he'd have to find some race that could. He grabbed the intercom and jangled it savagely. In half an hour he had a dozen leads.

The best seemed to be the *Spirella*. A small, insectlike race, about three feet tall, they were supposed to have excellent manual dexterity, and were technically advanced. They sounded as if they were acquainted with the necessary fields. Three light-years away, they could be reached by readily available local transportation within the day. Their idea of what was small was likely to coincide with his.

He didn't bother to pack. The suite would remain his headquarters. Home was where his enemies were.

He made a mental correction—enemy.

---

He rubbed his sensitive ear, grateful for the discomfort. His stomach was sore, but it wouldn't be for long. The *Spirella* had made the new instrument just as he had wanted it. They had built an

even better auxiliary power unit than he had specified. He fingered the flat cases in his pocket. In an emergency, he could draw on these, whereas Murra Foray would be limited to the energy in her nervous system.

What he had now was hardly the same instrument. A Military version of it, perhaps. It didn't seem right to use the same name. Call it something staunch and crisp, suggestive of raw power. *Manche*. As good a name as any. *Manche* against *Dimanche*. *Cassal* against a queen.

He swung confidently along the walkway beside the transport tide. It was raining. He decided to test the new instrument. The Godolphian across the way bent double and wondered why his knees wouldn't work. They had suddenly become swollen and painful to move. Maybe it was the climate.

And maybe it wasn't, thought *Cassal*. Eventually the pain would leave, but he hadn't meant to be so rough on the native. He'd have to watch how he used *Manche*.

He scouted the vicinity of Travelers Aid Bureau, keeping at least one building between him and possible detection. Purely precautionary. There was no indication that Murra Foray had spotted him. For a Huntner, she wasn't very alert, apparently.

He sent *Manche* out on exploration at minimum strength. The electronic guards which *Dimanche* had spoken of were still in place. *Manche* went through easily and didn't disturb an electron. Behind the guards there was no trace of the first counselor.

He went closer. Still no warning of danger. The same old technician shuffled in front of the entrance. A horrible thought hit him. It was easy enough to verify. Another "reorganization" *had* taken place. The new sign read:

**STAR TRAVELERS AID BUREAU**  
**STAB *Your Hour***  
***of Need***  
**Delly Mortinbras, first counselor**

*Cassal* leaned against the building, unable to understand what it was that frightened and bewildered him. Then it gradually became, if not clear, at least not quite so muddy.

STAB was the word that had been printed on the card in the money clip that his assailant in the alley had left behind. *Cassal* had naturally interpreted it as an order to the thug. It wasn't, of course.

The first time *Cassal* had visited the Travelers Aid Bureau, it had been in the process of reorganization. The only purpose of the reorganization, he realized now, had been to change the name so he wouldn't translate the word on the slip into the original initials of the Bureau.

Now it probably didn't matter any more whether or not he knew, so the name had been changed back to Star Travelers Aid Bureau—STAB.

That, he saw bitterly, was why Murra Foray had been so positive that the identification tab he'd made with the aid of *Dimanche* had been a forgery.

*She had known the man who robbed Cassal of the original one, perhaps had even helped him plan the theft.*

---

That didn't make sense to *Cassal*. Yet it had to. He'd suspected the organization of being a racket, but it obviously wasn't. By whatever name it was called, it actually was dedicated to helping the stranded traveler. The question was—which travelers?

There must be agency operatives at the spaceport, checking every likely prospect who arrived, finding out where they were going, whether their papers were in order. Then, just as had happened to *Cassal*, the prospect was robbed of his papers so somebody stranded here could go on to that destination!

The shabby, aging technician finished changing the last door sign and hobbled over to *Cassal*. He peered through the rain and darkness.

"You stuck here, too?" he quavered.

"No," said *Cassal* with dignity, shaky dignity. "I'm not stuck. I'm here because I want to be."

"You're crazy," declared the old man. "I remember—"

*Cassal* didn't wait to find out what it was he remembered. An impossible land, perhaps, a planet which swings in perfect orbit around an ideal sun. A continent which reared a purple mountain range to hold up a honey sky. People with whom anyone could relax easily and without worry or anxiety. In short, his own native world from which, at night, all the constellations were familiar.

Somehow, *Cassal* managed to get back to his suite, tumbled wearily onto his bed. The show-down wasn't going to take place.

Everyone connected with the agency—including Murra Foray—had been "stuck here" for one reason or another: no identification tab, no money, whatever it was. That was the staff of the Bureau, a pack of desperate castaways. The "philanthropy" extended to them and nobody else. They grabbed their tabs and money from the likeliest travelers, leaving them marooned here—

and they in turn had to join the Bureau and use the same methods to continue their journeys through the Galaxy.

It was an endless belt of stranded travelers robbing and stranding other travelers, who then had to rob and strand still others, and so on and on....

---

Cassal didn't have a chance of catching up with Murra Foray. She had used the time—and Dimanche—to create her own identification tab and escape. She was going back to Kettikat, home of the Huntners, must already be light-years away.

Or was she? The signs on the Bureau had just been changed. Perhaps the ship was still in the spaceport, or cruising along below the speed of light. He shrugged defeatedly. It would do him no good; he could never get on board.

He got up suddenly on one elbow. He couldn't, but Manche could! Unlike his old instrument, it could operate at tremendous distances, its power no longer dependent only on his limited nervous energy.

With calculated fury, he let Manche strike out into space.

"There you are!" exclaimed Murra Foray. "I thought you could do it."

"Did you?" he asked coldly. "Where are you now?"

"Leaving the atmosphere, if you can call the stuff around this planet an atmosphere."

"It's not the atmosphere that's bad," he said as nastily as he could. "It's the philanthropy."

"Please don't feel that way," she appealed. "Huntners are rather unusual people, I admit, but sometimes even we need help. I had to have Dimanche and I took it."

"At the risk of killing me."

Her amusement was strange; it held a sort of sadness. "I didn't hurt you. I couldn't. You were too cute, like a—well, the animal native to Kettikat that would be called a teddy bear on Earth. A cute, lovable teddy bear."

"Teddy bear," he repeated, really stung now. "Careful. This one may have claws."

"Long claws? Long enough to reach from here to Kettikat?" She was laughing, but it sounded thin and wistful.

Manche struck out at Cassal's unspoken command. The laughter was canceled.

"Now you've done it," said Dimanche. "She's out cold."

There was no reason for remorse; it was strange that he felt it. His throat was dry.

"So you, too, can communicate with me. Through Manche, of course. I built a wonderful instrument, didn't I?"



---

"A fearful one," said Dimanche sternly. "She's unconscious."



"I heard you the first time." Cassal hesitated. "Is she dead?"

Dimanche investigated. "Of course not. A little thing like that wouldn't hurt her. Her nerve system is marvelous. I think it could carry current for a city. Beautiful!"

"I'm aware of the beauty," said Cassal.

---

An awkward silence followed. Dimanche broke it. "Now that I know the facts, I'm proud to be her chosen instrument. Her need was greater than yours."

Cassal growled, "As first counselor, she had access to every—"

"Don't interrupt with your half truths," said Dimanche. "Huntners *are* special; their brain structure, too. Not necessarily better, just different. Only the auditory and visual centers of their brains resemble that of man. You can guess the results of even superficial tampering with those parts of her mind. And stolen identification would involve lobotomy."

He could imagine? Cassal shook his head. No, he couldn't. A blinded and deaf Murra Foray would not go back to the home of the Huntners. According to her racial conditioning, a sightless young tiger should creep away and die.

Again there was silence. "No, she's not pretending unconsciousness," announced Dimanche. "For a moment I thought—but never mind."

The conversation was lasting longer than he expected. The ship must be obsolete and slow. There were still a few things he wanted to find out, if there was time.

"When are you going on Drive?" he asked.

"We've been on it for some time," answered Dimanche.

"Repeat that!" said Cassal, stunned.

"I said that we've been on faster-than-light drive for some time. Is there anything wrong with that?"

Nothing wrong with that at all. Theoretically, there was only one means of communicating with a ship hurtling along faster than light, and that way hadn't been invented.

*Hadn't been until he had put together the instrument he called Manche.*

Unwittingly, he had created far more than he intended. He ought to have felt elated.

Dimanche interrupted his thoughts. "I suppose you know what she thinks of you."

"She made it plain enough," said Cassal wearily. "A teddy bear. A brainless, childish toy."

"Among the Huntners, women are vigorous and aggressive," said Dimanche. The voice grew weaker as the ship, already light-years away, slid into unfathomable distances. "Where words are concerned, morals are very strict. For instance, 'dear' is never used unless the person means it. Huntner men are weak and not over-burdened with intelligence."

The voice was barely audible, but it continued: "The principal romantic figure in the dreams of women...." Dimanche failed altogether.

"Manche!" cried Cassal.

Manche responded with everything it had. "... is the teddy bear."

The elation that had been missing, and the triumph, came now. It was no time for hesitation, and Cassal didn't hesitate. Their actions had been directed against each other, but their emotions, which each had tried to ignore, were real and strong.

The gravitor dropped him to the ground floor. In a few minutes, Cassal was at the Travelers Aid Bureau.

Correction. Now it was Star Travelers Aid Bureau.

And, though no one but himself knew it, even that was wrong. Quickly he found the old technician.

"There's been a reorganization," said Cassal bluntly. "I want the signs changed."

The old man drew himself up. "Who are you?"

"I've just elected myself," said Cassal. "I'm the new first counselor."

He hoped no one would be foolish enough to challenge him. He wanted an organization that could function immediately, not a hospital full of cripples.

The old man thought about it. He was merely a menial, but he had been with the bureau for a long time. He was nobody, nothing, but he could recognize power when it was near him. He wiped his eyes and shambled out into the fine cold rain. Swiftly the new signs went up.

**TRAVELERS AID BUREAU**  
**S. T. A. *with us***  
**Denton Cassal, first counselor**

---

Cassal sat at the control center. Every question cubicle was visible at a glance. In addition there was a special panel, direct from the spaceport, which recorded essential data about every newly arrived traveler. He could think of a few minor improvements, but he wouldn't have time to put them into effect. He'd mention them to his assistant, a man with a fine, logical mind. Not really first-rate, of course, but well suited to his secondary position. Every member quickly rose or sank to his proper level in this organization, and this one had, without a struggle.

Business was dull. The last few ships had brought travelers who were bound for unimaginably dreary destinations, nothing he need be concerned with.

He thought about the instrument. It was the addition of power that made the difference. Dimanche plus power equaled Manche, and Manche raised the user far above the level of other men. There was little to fear.

But essentially the real value of Manche lay in this—it was a beginning. Through it, he had communicated with a ship traveling far faster than light. The only one instrument capable of that was instantaneous radio. Actually it wasn't radio, but the old name had stuck to it.

Manche was really a very primitive model of instantaneous radio. It was crude; all first steps were. Limited in range, it was practically valueless for that purpose now. Eventually the range would be extended. Hitch a neuronically manufactured brain to human one, add the power of a tiny atomic battery, and Manche was created.

The last step was his share of the invention. Or maybe the credit belonged to Murra Foray. If she hadn't stolen Dimanche, it never would have been necessary to put together the new instrument.

The stern lines on his face relaxed. Murra Foray. He wondered about the marriage customs of the Huntners. He hoped marriage was a custom on Kettikat.

Cassal leaned back; officially, his mission was complete. There was no longer any need to go to Tunney 21. The scientist he was sent to bring back might as well remain there in obscure arrogance. Cassal knew he should return to Earth immediately. But the Galaxy was wide and there were lots of places to go.

Only one he was interested in, though—Kettikat, as far from the center of the Galaxy as Earth, but in the opposite direction, incredibly far away in terms of trouble and transportation. It would be difficult even for a man who had the services of Manche.

Cassal glanced at the board. Someone wanted to go to Zombo.

"Delly," he called to his assistant. "Try 13. This may be what you want to get back to your own planet."

Delly Mortinbras nodded gratefully and cut in.

Cassal continued scanning. There was more to it than he imagined, though he was learning fast. It wasn't enough to have identification, money, and a destination. The right ship might come in with standing room only. Someone had to be "persuaded" that Godolph was a cozy little place, as good as any for an unscheduled stopover.

It wouldn't change appreciably during his lifetime. There were too many billions of stars. First he had to perfect it, isolate from dependence on the human element, and then there would come the installation. A slow process, even with Murra to help him.

Someday he would go back to Earth. He should be welcome. The information he was sending back to his former employers, Neuronics, Inc., would more than compensate them for the loss of Dimanche.

Suddenly he was alert. A report had just come in.

Once upon a time, he thought tenderly, scanning the report, there was a teddy bear that could reach to Kettikat. With claws—but he didn't think they would be needed.

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