

# ASTOUNDING

SCIENCE

FICTION

Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.

## CONTENTS

SEPTEMBER, 1945 VOL. XXXVI, NO. 1

### SERIAL

WORLD OF A, by A. E. van Vogt . . . . . 7  
*Three Parts—Part Two*

### NOVELETTE

CAMOUFLAGÉ, by Lewis Padgett . . . . . 135

### SHORT STORIES

UNCOMMON SENSE, by Hal Clement . . . . . 47

THE INFIDELS, by Ross Rocklynne . . . . . 63

THE POWER, by Murray Leinster . . . . . 83

DEADLY HOST, by Raymond F. Jones . . . . . 115

### ARTICLE

THE ELUSIVE MICROVOLT, by George O. Smith 101

### READERS' DEPARTMENTS

THE EDITOR'S PAGE . . . . . 6

IN TIMES TO COME . . . . . 165

Editor

JOHN W. CAMPBELL, JR.

COVER BY TIMMING

Illustrations by Kramer, Orban and Williams

The editorial contents have not been published before, are protected by copyright and cannot be reprinted without publisher's permission. All stories in this magazine are fiction. No actual persons are designated by name or character. Any similarity is coincidental.

Monthly publication issued by Street & Smith Publications, Incorporated, 133 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. Allen L. Grammer, President; Gerald E. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; Henry W. Salston, Vice President and Secretary. Copyright, 1945, in U. S. A. and Great Britain by Street & Smith Publications, Inc. Registered as Second-class Matter, February 7, 1935, at the Post Office at New York, under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Subscriptions to Countries in Pan American Union, \$2.75 per year; elsewhere, \$3.25 per year. We cannot accept responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts or artwork. Any material submitted must include return postage.

\$2.50 per Year in U. S. A. Printed in  the U. S. A. 23¢ per Copy

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE SEPTEMBER 18, 1945



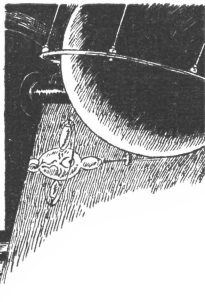
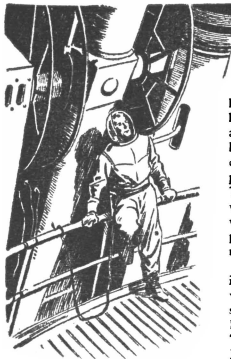
# Camouflage

by

LEWIS PADGETT

*A neat little tale of a man who was no longer a man—by reason of an atomic explosion, he'd become a brain in a can—who was hidden in plain sight. And of a gang of crooks who had to find and kill him, before he killed them!*

Illustrated by Orban



Talman was sweating by the time he reached 16 Knobhill Road. He had to force himself to touch the annunciator plate. There was a low whirring as photoelectrics checked and O.K.'d his fingerprints; then the door opened and Talman walked into the dim hallway. He glanced behind him to where, beyond the hills, the spaceport's lights made a pulsating, wan nimbus.

Then he went on, down a ramp, into a comfortably furnished room where a fat, gray-haired man was sitting in an easy-chair, fingering a highball glass. Tension was in Talman's voice as he said, "Hello, Brown. Everything all right?"

A grin stretched Brown's sagging

cheeks. "Sure," he said. "Why not? The police weren't after you, were they?"

Talman sat down and began mixing himself a drink from the server near by. His thin, sensitive face was shadowed.

"You can't argue with your glands. Space does that to me anyway. All the way from Venus I kept expecting somebody to walk up to me and say, 'You're wanted for questioning.'"

"Nobody did."

"I didn't know what I'd find here."

"The police didn't expect us to head for Earth," Brown said, rumpiling his gray hair with a shapeless paw. "And that was your idea."

"Yeah. Consulting psychologist to—"

"—to criminals. Want to step out?"

"No," Talman said frankly, "not with the profits we've got in sight already. This thing's big."

Brown grinned. "Sure it is. Nobody ever organized crime before, in just this way. There wasn't any crime worth a row of pins until we started."

"Where are we now, though? On the run."

"Fern's found a foolproof hide-out."

"Where?"

"In the asteroid belt. We need one thing, though."

"What's that?"

"An atomic power plant."

Talman looked startled. But he saw that Brown wasn't kidding.

After a moment, he put down his glass and scowled.

"I'd say it's impossible. A power plant's too big."

"Yeah," Brown said, "except that this one's going by space to Callisto."

"High-jacking? We haven't enough men—"

"The ship's under Transplant-control."

Talman cocked his head to one side. "Uh. That's out of my line—"

"There'll be a skeleton crew, of course. But we'll take care of them—and take their places. Then it'll simply be a matter of unhitching the Transplant and rigging up manuals. It isn't out of your line at all. Fern and Cunningham can do the technical stuff, but we've got to find out first just how dangerous a Transplant can be."

"I'm no engineer."

Brown went on, ignoring the comment. "The Transplant who's handling this Callisto shipment used to be Bart Quentin. You knew him, didn't you?"

Talman, startled, nodded. "Sure. Years ago. Before—"

"You're in the clear, as far as the police are concerned. Go to see Quentin. Pump him. Find out . . . Cunningham will tell you what to find out. After that, we can go ahead. I hope."

"I don't know. I'm not—"

Brown's brows came down. "We've got to find a hideout! That's absolutely vital right now. Otherwise, we might as well walk into the nearest police station and

hold out our hands for cuffs. We've been clever, but now—we've *got* to hide. Fast!"

"Well . . . I get that. But do you know what a Transplant really is?"

"A free brain. One that can use artificial gadgets."

"Technically, yeah. Ever seen a Transplant working a power-digger? Or a Venusian sea-dredge? Enormously complicated controls it'd normally take a dozen men to handle?"

"Implying a Transplant's a superman?"

"No," Talman said slowly, "I don't mean that. But I've got an idea it'd be safer to tangle with a dozen men than with one Transplant."

"Well," Brown said, "go up to Quebec and see Quentin. He's there now, I found out. Talk to Cunningham first. We'll work out the details. What we've got to know are Quentin's powers and his vulnerable points. And whether or not he's telepathic. You're an old friend of Quentin, and you're a psychologist, so you're the guy for the job."

"Yeah."

"We've got to get that power plant. *We've got to hide, now!*"

Talman thought that Brown had probably planned this from the beginning. The fat man was shrewd enough; he'd been sufficiently clever to realize that ordinary criminals would stand no chance in a highly technical, carefully specialized world. Police forces could call on

the sciences to aid them. Communication was excellent and fast, even between the planets. There were gadgets— The only chance of bringing off a successful crime was to do it fast and then make an almost instantaneous getaway.

But the crime had to be planned. When competing against an organized social unit, as any crook does, it's wise to create a similar unit. A blackjack has no chance against a rifle. A strong-arm bandit was doomed to quick failure, for a similar reason. The traces he left would be analyzed; chemistry, psychology, and criminology would track him down; he'd be made to confess. Made to, without any third-degree methods. So—

So Cunningham was an electronics engineer. Fern was an astrophysicist. Talman himself was a psychologist. Big, blond Dalquist was a hunter, by choice and profession, beautifully integrated and tremendously fast with a gun. Cotton was a mathematician—and Brown himself was the co-ordinator. For three months the combination had worked successfully on Venus. Then, inevitably, the net closed, and the unit filtered back to Earth, ready to take the next step in the long-range plan. What it was Talman hadn't known till now. But he could readily see its logical necessity.

In the vast wilderness of the Asteroid Belt they could hide forever, if necessary, emerging to pull off a coup whenever opportunity offered. Safe, they could build up an underground criminal organiza-

tion, with a spy-system flung broadcast among the planets—yes, it was the inevitable way. Just the same, he felt hesitant about matching wits with Bart Quentin. The man wasn't—human—any more—

He was worried on the way to Quebec. Cosmopolitan though he was, he couldn't help anticipating tension, embarrassment, when he saw Quent. To pretend to ignore that—accident—would be too obvious. Still— He remembered that, seven years ago, Quentin had possessed a fine, muscular physique, and had been proud of his skill as a dancer. As for Linda, he wondered what had happened on that score. She couldn't still be Mrs. Bart Quentin, under the circumstances. Or could she?

He watched the St. Lawrence, a dull silver bar, below the plane as it slanted down. Robot pilots—a narrow beam. Only during violent storms did standard pilots take over. In space it was a different matter. And there were other jobs, enormously complicated, that only human brains could handle. A very special type of brain, at that.

A brain like Quentin's.

Talman rubbed his narrow jaw and smiled wanly, trying to locate the source of his worry. Then he had the answer. Did Quent, in this new incarnation, possess more than five senses? Could he detect reactions a normal man could not appreciate? If so, Van Talman was definitely sunk.

He glanced at his seat-mate, Dan Summers of Wyoming Engineers,

through whom he had made the contact with Quentin. Summers, a blond young man with sun-wrinkles around his eyes, grinned casually.

"Nervous?"

"Could be that," Talman said. "I was wondering how much he'll have changed."

"Results are different in every case."

The plane, beam controlled, slid down the slopes of sunset air toward the port. Quebec's lighted towers made an irregular backdrop.

"They do change, then?"

"I suppose, psychically, they've got to. You're a psychologist, Mr. Talman. How'd you feel, if—"

"There might be compensations."

Summers laughed. "That's an understatement. Compensations . . . why, immortality's only one such . . . compensation!"

"You consider that a blessing?" Talman asked.

"Yes, I do. He'll remain at the peak of his powers for God knows how long. There'll be no deterioration. Fatigue poisons are automatically eliminated by irradiation. Brain cells can't replace themselves, of course, the way . . . say . . . muscular tissue can; but Quent's brain can't be injured, in its specially built case. Arteriosclerosis isn't any problem, with the plasmic solution we use—no calcium's deposited on the artery walls. The physical condition of his brain is automatically and perfectly controlled. The only ailments Quent can ever get are mental."

"Claustrophobia—No. You say

he's got eye-lenses. There'd be an automatic feeling of extension."

Summers said, "If you notice any change—outside of the perfectly normal one of mental growth in seven years—I'd be interested. With me—well, I grew up with the Transplants. I'm no more conscious of their mechanical, interchangeable bodies than a physician would think of a friend as a bundle of nerves and veins. It's the reasoning faculty that counts, and that hasn't altered."

Talman said thoughtfully, "You're a sort of physician, to the Transplants, anyway. A layman might get another sort of reaction. Especially if he were used to seeing . . . a face."

"I'm never conscious of that lack."

"Is Quent?"

Summers hesitated. "No," he said finally, "I'm sure he isn't. He's beautifully adjusted. The reconditioning to Transplant life takes about a year. After that it's all velvet."

"I've seen Transplants working, on Venus, from a distance. But there aren't many spotted away from Earth."

"We haven't enough trained technicians. It takes literally half a lifetime to train a man to handle Transplantation. A man has to be a qualified electronic engineer before he even starts." Summers laughed. "The insurance companies cover a lot of the initial expense, though."

Talman was puzzled. "How's that?"

"They underwrite. Occupational risk, immortality. Working in atomic research is dangerous, my friend!"

They emerged from the plane into the cool night air. Talman said, as they walked toward a waiting car, "We grew up together, Quentin and I. But his accident happened two years after I left Earth, and I never saw him since."

"As a Transplant? Uh-huh. Well, it's an unfortunate name. Some jackass tagged the label on, whereas propaganda experts should have worked it out. Unfortunately it stuck. Eventually we hope to popularize the—Transplants. Not yet. We're only starting. We've only two hundred and thirty of them so far, the successful ones."

"Many failures?"

"Not now. In the early days—It's *complicated*. From the first trephining to the final energizing and reconditioning, it's the most nerve-racking, brain-straining, difficult technical task the human mind's ever worked out. Reconciling a colloid mechanism with an electronic hookup—but the result's worth it."

"Technologically. I wonder about the human values."

"Psychologically? We-all . . . Quentin will tell you about that angle. And technologically you don't know the half of it. No colloid machine, like the brain, has ever been developed—till now. And this isn't purely mechanical. It's merely a miracle, the synthesis of intelligent living tissue with delicate, responsive machinery."

"But handicapped by the limitation of the machine—and the brain."

"You'll see. Here we are. We're dining with Quent—"

Talman stared. "*Dining?*"

"Yeah." Summers' eyes showed quizzical amusement. "No, he doesn't eat steel shavings. In fact—"

The shock of meeting Linda again took Talman by surprise. He had not expected to see her. Not now, under these altered conditions. But she hadn't changed much; she was still the same warm, friendly woman he remembered, a little older now, yet very lovely and very gracious. She had always had charm. She was slim and tall, her head crowned by a bizarre coiffure of honey-amber coils, her brown eyes without the strain Talman might have expected.

He took her hands. "Don't say it," he said. "I know how long it's been."

"We won't count the years, Van." She laughed up at him. "We'll pick up right where we left off. With a drink, eh?"

"I could use one," Summers said, "but I've got to report back to headquarters. I'll just see Quent for a minute. Where is he?"

"In there." Linda nodded toward a door and turned back to Talman. "So you've been on Venus? You look bleached enough. Tell me how it's been."

"All right." He took the shaker from her hands and swirled the Martinis carefully. He felt embarrassment. Linda lifted an eyebrow.

"Yes, we're still married, Bart and I. You're surprised."

"A little."

"He's still Bart," she said quietly. "He may not look it, but he's the man I married, all right. So you can relax, Van."

He poured the Martinis. Without looking at her, he said, "As long as you're satisfied—"

"I know what you're thinking. That it'd be like having a machine for a husband. At first . . . well, I got over that feeling. We both did, after a while. There was constraint; I suppose you'll feel it when you see him. Only that isn't important, really. He's— Bart." She pushed a third glass toward Talman, and he looked at it in surprise.

"Not—"

She nodded.

The three of them dined together. Talman watched the two-foot-by-two cylinder resting on the table opposite him and tried to read personality and intelligence into the double lenses. He couldn't help imagining Linda as a priestess, serving some sort of alien god-image, and the concept was disturbing. Now Linda was forking chilled, sauce-daubed shrimps into the metallic compartment and spooning them out when the amplifier signaled.

Talman had expected a flat, toneless voice, but the sonovox gave depth and timbre whenever Quentin spoke.

"Those shrimps are perfectly usable, Van. It's only habit that

makes us throw chow out after I've had it in my foodbox. I taste the stuff, all right—but I haven't any salivary juices."

"You—taste 'em."

Quentin laughed a little. "Look, Van. Don't try to pretend this seems natural to you. You'll have to get used to it."

"It took me a long time," Linda said. "But after a while I found myself thinking it was just the sort of silly thing Bart always used to do. Remember the time you put on that suit of armor for the Chicago board meeting?"

"Well, I made my point," Quentin said. "I forget what it was now, but—we were talking about taste. I can taste these shrimps, Van. Certain nuances are lacking, yeah. Very delicate sensations are lost on me. But there's more to it than sweet and sour, salt and bitter. Machines could taste years ago."

"There's no digestion—"

"And there no pylorospasm. What I lose in refinements of taste I make up for in freedom from gastrointestinal disorders."

"You don't burp any more, either," Linda said. "Thank God."

"I can talk with my mouth full, too," Quentin said. "But I'm not the super-machine-bodied-brain you're subconsciously thinking I am, chum. I don't spit death rays."

Talman grinned uneasily. "Was I thinking that?"

"I'll bet you were. But—" The timbre of the voice changed. "I'm not super. I'm plenty human, inside, and don't think I don't miss

the old days sometimes. Lying on the beach and feeling the sun on my skin, little things like that. Dancing in rhythm to music, and—"

"Darling," Linda said.

The voice changed again. "Yeah. It's the small, trivial factors that make up a complete life. But I've got substitutes now—parallel factors. Reactions quite impossible to describe, because they're . . . let's say . . . electronic vibrations instead of the familiar neural ones. I *do* have senses, but through mechanical organs. When impulses reach my brain, they're automatically translated into familiar symbols. Or—" He hesitated. "Not so much now, though."

Linda laid a bit of planked fish in the food-compartment. "Delusions of grandeur, eh?"

"Delusions of alteration—but no delusion, my love. You see, Van, when I first turned into a Transplant, I had no standard of comparison except the arbitrary one I already knew. That was suited to a human body—only. When, later, I felt an impulse from a digger-gadget, I'd automatically feel as if I had my foot on a car-accelerator. Now those old symbols are fading. I . . . feel . . . more directly now, without translating the impulses into the old-time images."

"That would be faster," Talman said.

"It is. I don't have to think of the value of pi when I get a pi signal. I don't have to break down the equation. I'm beginning to sense what the equation means."



"Synthesis with a machine?"

"Yet I'm no robot. It doesn't affect the identity, the personal essence of Bart Quentin." There was a brief silence, and Talman saw Linda look sharply toward the cylinder. Then Quentin continued in the same tone. "I get a tremendous bang out of solving problems. I always did. And now it's not just on paper. I carry out the whole task myself, from conception to finish. I dope out the application, and . . . Van, I *am* the machine!"

"Machine?" Talman said.

"Ever noticed, when you're driving or piloting, how you identify yourself with the machine? It's an extension of you. I go one step farther. And it's satisfying. Suppose you could carry empathy to the limit and *be* one of your patients while you were solving his problem? It's an—ecstasy."

Talman watched Linda pour sauterne into a separate chamber. "Do you ever get drunk any more?" he asked.

Linda gurgled. "Not on liquor—but Bart gets high, all right!"

"How?"

"Figure it out," Quentin said, a little smugly.

"Alcohol's absorbed into the blood-stream, thence reaching the brain—the equivalent of intravenous shots, maybe?"

"I'd rather put cobra venom in my circulatory system," the Transplant said. "My metabolic balance is too delicate, too perfectly organized, too upset by introducing foreign substances. No, I use elec-

trical stimulus—an induced high-frequency current that gets me high as a kite."

Talman stared. "And that's a substitute?"

"It is. Smoking and drinking are irritants, Van. So's thinking, for that matter! When I feel the psychic need for a binge, I've a gadget that provides stimulating irritation—and I'll bet you'd get more of a bang out of it than you would out of a quart of mescal."

"He quotes Housman," Linda said. "And does animal imitations. With his tonal control, Bart's a wonder." She stood up. "If you'll excuse me for a bit, I've got some K. P. Automatic as the kitchen is, there are still buttons to push."

"Can I help?" Talman offered.

"Thanks, no. Stay here with Bart. Want me to hitch up your arms, darling?"

"Nope," Quentin said. "Van can take care of my liquid diet. Step it up, Linda—Summers said I've got to get back on the job soon."

"The ship's ready?"

"Almost."

Linda paused in the doorway, biting her lips. "I'll never get used to your handling a spaceship all by yourself. Especially that thing."

"It may be jury-rigged, but it'll get to Callisto."

"Well . . . there's a skeleton crew, isn't there?"

"There is," Quentin said, "but it isn't needed. The insurance companies demand an emergency crew. Summers did a good job, rigging the ship in six weeks."

"With chewing gun and paper

clips," Linda remarked. "I only hope it holds." She went out as Quentin laughed softly. There was a silence. Then, as never before, Talman felt that his companion was . . . was . . . had changed. For he felt Quentin gazing at him, and—Quentin wasn't there.

"Brandy, Van," the voice said. "Pour a little in my box."

Talman started to obey, but Quentin checked him. "Not out of the bottle. It's been a long time since I mixed rum and coke in my mouth. Use the inhaler. That's it. Now. Have a drink yourself and tell me how you feel."

"About—?"

"Don't you know?"

Talman went to the window and stood looking down at the reflected fluorescent shining in the St. Lawrence. "Seven years, Quent. It's hard to get used to you in this—form."

"I haven't lost anything."

"Not even Linda," Talman said. "You're lucky."

Quentin said steadily, "She stuck with me. The accident, five years ago, wrecked me. I was fooling around with atomic research, and there were chances that had to be taken. I was mangled. Butchered, in the explosion. Don't think Linda and I hadn't planned in advance. We knew the occupational risk."

"And yet you—"

"We figured the marriage could last, even if—But afterward I almost insisted on a divorce. She convinced me we could still make a go of it. And we have."

Talman nodded. "I'd say so."

"That . . . kept . . . me going, for quite a while," Quentin said softly. "You know how I felt about Linda. It's always been just about a perfect equation. Even though the factors have changed, we've adjusted." Suddenly Quentin's laugh made the psychologist swing around. "I'm no monster, Van. Try and get over that idea!"

"I never thought that," Talman protested. "You're—"

"What?"

Silence again. Quentin grunted.

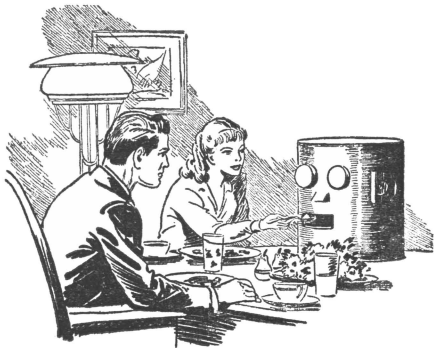
"In five years I've learned to notice how people react to me. Give me some more brandy. I still imagine I taste it with my palate. Odd how associations hang on."

Talman poured liquor from the inhaler. "So you figure you haven't changed, except physically."

"And you figure me as a raw brain in a metal cylinder. Not as the guy you used to get drunk with on Third Avenue. Oh, I've changed—sure. But it's a normal change. There's nothing innately alien about limbs that are metal extensions. It's one step beyond driving a car. If I were the sort of super-gadget you subconsciously think I am, I'd be an utter introvert and spend my time working out cosmic equations." Quentin used a vulgar expletive. "And if I did that, I'd go nuts. Because I'm no superman. I'm an ordinary guy, a good physicist, and I've had to adjust to a new body. Which, of course, has its handicaps."

"What, for example?"

"The senses. Or the lack of



them. I helped develop a lot of compensatory apparatus. I read escapist fiction, I get drunk by electrical irritation, I taste even if I can't eat. I watch teleshows. I try to get the equivalent of all the purely human sensory pleasures I can. It makes a balance that's very necessary."

"It would be. Does it work, though?"

"Look. I've got eyes that are delicately sensitive to shades and gradations of color. I've got arm-attachments that can be refined down until they can handle microscopic apparatus. I can draw pictures—and, under a pseudonym, I'm a pretty popular cartoonist. I do that as a sideline. My real job

is still physics. And it's still a good job. You know the feeling of pure pleasure you get when you've worked out a problem, in geometry or electronics or psychology—or anything? Now I work out questions infinitely more complicated, requiring split-second reaction as well as calculation. Like handling a spaceship. More brandy. It's volatile stuff in a hot room."

"You're still Bart Quentin," Talman said. "but I feel surer of that when I keep my eyes shut. Handling a spaceship—"

"I've lost nothing human," Quentin insisted. "The emotional basics haven't changed. It . . . isn't really pleasant to have you come in and look at me with plain horror, but I

can understand the reason. We've been friends for a long time, Van. You may forget that before I do."

Sweat was suddenly cold on Talman's stomach. But despite Quentin's words, he felt certain by now that he had part of the answer for which he had come to Quebec. The Transplant had no abnormal powers—there were no telepathic functions.

There were more questions to be asked, of course.

He poured more brandy and smiled at the dully-shining cylinder across the table. He could hear Linda singing softly from the kitchen.

The spaceship had no name, for two reasons. One was that she would make only a single trip, to Callisto; the other was odder. She was not, essentially, a ship with a cargo. She was a cargo with a ship.

Atomic power plants are not ordinary dynamos that can be dismantled and crated on a freight car. They are tremendously big, powerful, bulky, and behemothic. It takes two years to complete an atomic set-up, and even after that, the initial energizing must take place on Earth, at the enormous standards control plant that covers seven counties of Pennsylvania. The Department of Weights, Measures, and Power has a chunk of metal in a thermostatically-controlled glass case in Washington; it's the standard meter. Similarly, in Pennsylvania, there is, under fantastic precautionary conditions,

the one key atomic-disruptor in the Solar System.

There was only one requirement for fuel; it was best to filter it through a wire screen with, approximately, a one-inch gauge. And that was an arbitrary matter, for convenience in setting up a standard of fuels. For the rest, atomic power ate anything.

Few people played with atomic power; the stuff's violent. The research engineers worked on a stagger system. Even so, only the immortality insurance—the Transplantidea—kept neuroses from developing into psychoses.

The Callisto-bound power plant was too big to be loaded on the largest ship of any commercial line, but it had to get to Callisto. So the technicians built a ship around the power plant. It was not exactly jury-rigged, but it was definitely unstandardized. It occasionally, in matters of design, departed wildly from the norm. The special requirements were met deftly, often unorthodoxy, as they came up. Since the complete control would be in the hands of the Transplant Quentin, only casual accommodations were provided for the comfort of the small emergency crew. They weren't intended to wander through the entire ship unless a breakdown made it necessary, and a breakdown was nearly impossible. In fact, the vessel was practically a living entity. But not quite.

The Transplant had extensions—tools—throughout various sections of the great craft. Yet they were specialized to deal with the job in

hand. There were no sensual attachments, except auditory and ocular. Quentin was, for the nonce, simply a super spaceship drive control. The brain cylinder was carried into the craft by Summers, who inserted it—somewhere!—plugged it in, and that finished the construction job.

At 2400 the mobile power plant took off for Callisto.

A third of the way to the Martian orbit, six spacesuited men came into an enormous chamber that was a technician's nightmare.

From a wall amplifier, Quentin's voice said, "What are you doing here. Van?"

"O.K.," Brown said. "This is it. We'll work fast now. Cunningham, locate the connection. Dalquist, keep your gun ready."

"What'll I look for?" the big, blond man asked.

Brown glanced at Talman. "You're certain there's no mobility?"

"I'm certain," Talman said, his eyes moving. He felt naked exposed to Quentin's gaze, and not liking it.

Cunningham, gaunt, wrinkled and scowling, said, "The only mobility's in the drive itself. I was sure of that before Talman double-checked. When a Transplant's plugged in for one job, it's limited to the tools it needs for that job."

"Well, don't waste time talking. Break the circuit."

Cunningham stared through his vision plate. "Wait a minute. This isn't standardized equipment. It's

experimental . . . casual. I've got to trace a few . . . um."

Talman was surreptitiously trying to spot the Transplant's eye lenses, and failing. From somewhere in that maze of tubes, coils, wires, grids and engineering hash, he knew, Quentin was looking at him. From several places, undoubtedly—there'd be over-all vision, with eyes spotted strategically around the room.

And it was a big room, this central control chamber. The light was misty yellow. It was like some strange, unearthly cathedral in its empty, towering height, a hugeness that dwarfed the six men. Bare grids, abnormally large, hummed and sparked; great vacuum tubes flamed eerily. Around the walls above their heads ran a metal platform, twenty feet up, a metal guard rail casually precautionary. It was reached by two ladders, on opposite walls of the room. Overhead hung a celestial globe, and the dim throbbing of tremendous power murmured in the chlorinated atmosphere.

The amplifier said, "What is this, piracy?"

Brown said casually, "Call it that. And relax. You won't be harmed. We may even send you back to Earth, when we can figure out a safe way to do it."

Cunningham was investigating lucite mesh, taking care to touch nothing. Quentin said, "This cargo isn't worth highjacking. It isn't radium I'm carrying, you know."

"I need a power plant," Brown remarked curtly.

"How did you get aboard?"

Brown lifted a hand to mop sweat from his face, and then, grimacing, refrained. "Find anything yet, Cunningham?"

"Give me time. I'm only an electronics man. This setup's screwy. Fern, give me a hand here."

Talman's discomfort was growing. He realized that Quentin, after the first surprised comment, had ignored him. Some indefinable compulsion made him tilt back his head and say Quentin's name.

"Yeah," Quentin said. "Well? So you're in with this gang?"

"Yes."

"And you were pumping me, up in Quebec. To make sure I was harmless."

Talman made his voice expressionless. "We had to be certain."

"I see. How'd you get aboard? The radar automatically dodges approaching masses. You couldn't have brought your own ship alongside in space."

"We didn't. We got rid of the emergency crew and took their suits."

"Got rid of them?"

Talman moved his eyes toward Brown. "What else could we do? We can't afford half-measures in a gamble as big as this. Later on, they'd have been a danger to us, after our plans started moving. Nobody's going to know anything about it, except us. And you." Again Talman looked at Brown. "I think, Quent, you'd better throw in with us."

The amplifier ignored whatever implied threat lay in the suggestion.

"What do you want the power plant for?"

"We've got an asteroid picked out," Talman said, tilting his head back to search the great crowded hollow of the ship, swimming a little in the haze of its poisonous atmosphere. He half expected Brown to cut him short, but the fat man didn't speak. It was, he thought, curiously difficult to talk persuasively to someone whose location you didn't know. "The only trouble is, it's airless. With the plant, we can manufacture our own air. It'd be a miracle if anybody ever found us in the asteroid belt."

"And then what? Piracy?"

Talman did not answer. The voice-box said thoughtfully, "It might make a good racket, at that. For awhile, anyhow. Long enough to clean up quite a lot. Nobody will expect anything like it. Yeah, you might get away with the idea."

"Well," Talman said, "if you think that, what's the next logical step?"

"Not what you think. I wouldn't play along with you. Not for moral reasons, especially, but for motives of self-preservation. I'd be useless to you. Only in a highly intricate, widespread civilization is there any need for Transplants. I'd be excess baggage."

"If I gave you my word—"

"You're not the big shot," Quentin told him. Talman instinctively sent another questioning look at Brown. And from the voice-box

on the wall came a curious sound like a smothered laugh.

"All right," Talman said, shrugging. "Naturally you won't decide in our favor right away. Think it over. Remember you're not Bart Quentin any more—you've got certain mechanical handicaps. While we haven't got too much time, we can spare a little—say ten minutes—while Cunningham looks things over. Then . . . well, we aren't playing for marbles, Quent." His lips thinned. "If you'll throw in with us and guide the ship under our orders, we can afford to let you live. But you've got to make up your mind fast. Cunningham is going to trace you down and take over the controls. After that—"

"What makes you so sure I can be traced down?" Quentin asked calmly. "I know just how much my life would be worth once I'd landed you where you want to go. You don't need me. You couldn't give me the right maintenance even if you wanted to. No, I'd simply join the crewmen you've already disposed of. I'll give you an ultimatum of my own."

"You'll—what?"

"Keep quiet and don't monkey with anything, and I'll land in an isolated part of Callisto and let you all escape," Quentin said. "If you don't, God help you."

For the first time Brown showed he had been conscious of that distant voice. He turned to Talman.

"Bluff?"

Talman nodded slowly. "Must be. He's harmless."

"Bluff," Cunningham said, without looking up from his task.

"No," the amplifier told him quietly, "I'm not bluffing. And be careful with that board. It's part of the atomic hookup. If you fool with the wrong connections, you're apt to blast us all out of space."

Cunningham jerked back from the maze of wires snaking out of the bakelite before him. Fern, some distance away, turned a swarthy face to watch. "Easy," he said. "We've got to be sure what we're doing."

"Shut up," Cunningham grunted. "I do know. Maybe that's what the Transplant's afraid of. I'll be plenty careful to stay clear of atomic connections, but—" He paused to study the tangled wires. "No. This isn't atomic—I think. Not the control leads, anyway. Suppose I break this connection—" His gloved hand came up with a rubber-sheathed cutter.

The voice-box said, "Cunningham—don't." Cunningham poised the cutter. The amplifier sighed.

"You first, then. Here it is!"

Talman felt the transparent face plate slap painfully against his nose. The immense room bucked dizzily as he went reeling forward, unable to check himself. All around him he saw grotesque spacesuited figures reeling and stumbling. Brown lost his balance and fell heavily.

Cunningham had been slammed forward into the wires as the ship abruptly decelerated. Now he hung like a trapped fly in the tangle, his limbs, his head, his whole body jerking and twitching with spas-

modic violence. The devil's dance increased in fury.

"Get him out of there!" Lindquist yelled.

"Hold it!" Fern shouted. "I'll cut the power—" But he didn't know how. Talman, dry-throated, watched Cunningham's body sprawling, arching, shaking in spastic agony. Bones cracked suddenly.

Cunningham jerked more limply now, his head flopping grotesquely.

"Get him down," Brown snapped, but Fern shook his head.

"Cunningham's dead. And that hookup's dangerous."

"How? Dead?"

Under his thin mustache Fern's lips parted in a humorless smile. "A guy in an epileptic fit can break his own neck."

"Yeah," Dalquist said, obviously shaken. "His neck's broken, all right. Look at the way his head goes."

"Put a twenty-cycle alternating current through yourself and you'd go into convulsions too," Fern advised.

"We can't just leave him there!"

"We can," Brown said, scowling. "Stay away from the walls, all of you." He glared at Talman. "Why didn't you—"

"Sure, I know. But Cunningham should have had sense enough to stay away from bare wires."

"Few wires are insulated around here," the fat man growled. "You said the Transplant was harmless."

"I said he had no mobility. And that he wasn't a telepath." Talman realized that his voice sounded defensive.

Fern said, "A signal's supposed to sound whenever the ship accelerates or decelerates. It didn't go off that time. The Transplant must have cut it out himself, so we wouldn't be warned."

They looked up into that humming, vast, yellow emptiness. Claustrophobia gripped Talman. The walls looked ready to topple in—to fold down, as though he stood in the cupped hand of a titan.

"We can smash his eye cells," Brown suggested.

"Find 'em." Fern indicated the maze of equipment.

"All we have to do is unhitch the Transplant. Break his connection. Then he goes dead."

"Unfortunately," Fern said, "Cunningham was the only electronic engineer among us. I'm only an astrophysicist!"

"Never mind. We pull one plug and the Transplant blacks out. You can do that much!"

Anger flared. But Cotton, a little man with blinking blue eyes, broke the tension.

"Mathematics — geometry — ought to help us. We want to locate the Transplant, and—" He glanced up and was frozen. "We're off our course!" he said finally, licking dry lips. "See that telltale?"

Far above, Talman could see the enormous celestial globe. On its dark surface a point of red light was clearly marked.

Fern's swarthy face showed a sneer. "Sure. The Transplant's running to cover. Earth's the nearest place where he can get help.



But we've plenty of time left. I'm not the technician Cunningham was, but I'm not a complete dope." He didn't look at the rhythmically-moving body on the wires. "We don't have to test every connection in the ship."

"O.K., take it, then," Brown grunted.

Awkward in his suit, Fern walked to a square opening in the floor and peered down at a mesh-metal grating eighty feet below. "Right. Here's the fuel-feed. We don't need to trace connections through the whole ship. The fuel's dumped out of that leader tube overhead there. Now look. Everything connected with the atomic power is apparently marked with red wax-crayon. See?"

They saw. Here and there, on bare plates and boards, were cryptic red markings. Other symbols were in blue, green, black and white.

"Go on that assumption," Fern said. "Temporarily, anyhow. Red's atomic power. Blue . . . green . . . um."

Talman said suddenly, "I don't see anything here that looks like Quentin's brain-case."

"Did you expect to?" the astrophysicist asked sardonically. "It's slid into a padded socket somewhere. The brain can stand more grays than the body, but seven's about tops in any case. Which, incidentally, is fine for us. There'd be no use putting high-speed potential in this ship. The Transplant couldn't stand it, any more than we could."

"Seven G's," Brown said thoughtfully.

"Which would black out the Transplant too. He'll have to remain conscious to pilot the ship through Earth atmosphere. We've got plenty of time."

"We're going pretty slow now," Dalquist put in.

Fern gave the celestial globe a sharp glance. "Looks like it. Let me work on this." He paid out a coil from his belt and hitched himself to one of the central pillars. "That'll guard against any more accidents."

"Tracing a circuit shouldn't be so hard," Brown said.

"Ordinarily it isn't. But you've got everything in this chamber—atomic control, radar, the kitchen sink. And these labels are only for construction convenience. There wasn't any blueprint to this ship. It's a single-shot model. I can find the Transplant, but it'll take time. So shut up and let me work."

Brown scowled but didn't say anything. Cotton's bald head was sweating. Dalquist wrapped his arm about a metal pillar and waited. Talman looked up again at the balcony that hung from the walls. The celestial globe showed a crawling disk of red light.

"Quent," he said.

"Yes, Van." Quentin's voice was quietly distant. Brown put one hand casually to the blaster at his belt.

"Why don't you give up?"

"Why don't you?"

"You can't fight us. Your getting Cunningham was a fluke. We're

on guard now—you can't hurt us. It's only a matter of time until we trace you down. Don't look for mercy then, Quent. You can save us trouble by telling us where you are. We're willing to pay for that. After we find you—on our own initiative—you can't bargain. How about it?"

Quentin said simply, "No."

There was silence for a few minutes. Talman was watching Fern, who, very cautiously paying out his coil, was investigating the tangle where Cunningham's body still hung.

Quentin said, "He won't find the answer there. I'm pretty well camouflaged."

"But helpless," Talman said quickly.

"So are you. Ask Fern. If he monkeys with the wrong connections, he's apt to destroy the ship. Look at your own problem. We're heading back toward Earth. I'm swinging into a new course that'll end at the home berth. If you give up now—"

Brown said, "The old statutes never were altered. The punishment for piracy is death."

"There's been no piracy for a hundred years. If an actual case came to trial, it might be a different matter."

"Imprisonment? Reconditioning?" Talman asked. "I'd a lot rather be dead."

"We're decelerating," Dalquist called, getting a firmer grip on his pillar.

Looking at Brown, Talman thought the fat man knew what he had in mind. If technical knowledge failed, psychology might not. And Quentin, after all, was a human brain.

*First get the subject off guard.*

"Quent."

But Quentin didn't answer. Brown grimaced and turned to watch Fern. Sweat was pouring down the physicist's swarthy face as he concentrated on the hookups, drawing diagrams on the stylopad he wore attached to his forearm.

After a while Talman began to feel dizzy. He shook his head, realizing that the ship had decelerated almost to zero, and got a firmer grip on the nearest pillar. Fern cursed. He was having a difficult time keeping his footing.

Presently he lost it altogether as the ship went free. Five space-suited figures clung to convenient handgrips. Fern snarled, "This may be deadlock, but it doesn't help the Transplant. I can't work without gravity—he can't get to Earth without acceleration."

The voice-box said, "I've sent out an S O S."

Fern laughed. "I worked that out with Cunningham—and you talked too much to Talman, too. With a radar meteor-avoider, you don't need signaling apparatus, and you haven't got it." He eyed the apparatus he had just left. "Maybe I was getting too close to the right answer, though, eh? Is that why—"

"You weren't even near it," Quentin said.

"Just the same—" Fern kicked himself away from the pillar, paying out the line behind him. He made a loop about his left wrist, and, hanging in midair, fell to studying the hookup.

Brown lost his grip on the slippery column and floated free like some over-inflated balloon. Talman kicked himself across to the railed balcony. He caught the metal bar in gloved hands, swung himself in like an acrobat, and looked down—though it wasn't really *down*—at the control chamber.

"I think you'd better give up," Quentin said.

Brown was floating across to join Fern. "Never," he said, and simultaneously four G's hit the ship with the impact of a pile driver. It wasn't forward acceleration. It was in another, foreplanned direction. Fern saved himself at the cost of an almost dislocated wrist—but the looped line rescued him from a fatal dive into uninsulated wiring.

Talman was slammed down on the balcony. He could see the others plummet to hard impacts on unyielding surfaces. Brown wasn't stopped by the floor plate, though.

He had been hovering over the fuel-feed hole when the acceleration was slammed on.

Talman saw the bulky body pop out of sight down the opening. There was an indescribable sound.

Dalquist, Fern, and Cotton struggled to their feet. They cautiously went toward the hole and peered down.

Talman called, "Is he—"

Cotton had turned away. Dalquist remained where he was, apparently fascinated, Talman a n thought, until he saw the man's shoulders heaving. Fern looked up toward the balcony.

"He went through the filter screen," he said. "It's a one-inch gauge metal mesh."

"Broke through?"

"No," Fern said deliberately. "He didn't break through. He went through."

Four gravities and a fall of eighty feet add up to something slightly terrific. Talman shut his eyes and said, "Quent!"

"Do you give up?"

Fern snarled, "Not on your life! Our unit's not that interdependent. We can do without Brown."

Talman sat on the balcony, held on to the rail, and let his feet hang down into emptiness. He stared across to the celestial globe, forty feet to his left. The red spot that marked the ship stood motionless.

"I don't think you're human any more, Quent," he said.

"Because I don't use a blaster? I've different weapons to fight with now. I'm not kidding myself, Van. I'm fighting for my life."

"We could still bargain."

Quentin said, "I told you you'd forget our friendship before I did. You must have known this high-jacking could only end in my death. But apparently you didn't care about that."

"I didn't expect you to—"

"Yeah," the voice-box said. "I

wonder if you'd have been as ready to go through with the plan if I'd still had human form? As for friendship—use your own tricks of psychology, Van. You look on my mechanical body as an enemy, a barrier between you and the real Bart Quentin. Subconsciously, maybe, you hate it, and you're therefore willing to destroy it. Even though you'll be destroying me with it. I don't know—perhaps you rationalize that you'd thus be rescuing me from the thing that's erected the barrier. And you forget that I haven't changed, basically."

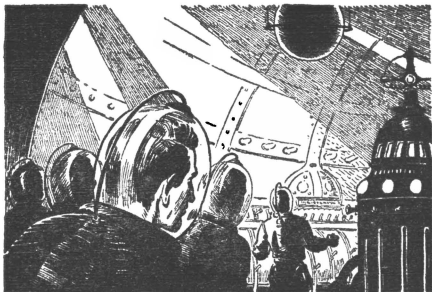
"We used to play chess together," Talman said, "but we didn't smash the pawns."

"I'm in check," Quentin countered. "All I've got to fight with are knights. You've still got castles and bishops. You can move straight for your goal. Do you give up?"

"No!" Talman snapped. His eyes were on the red light. He saw a tremor move it, and gripped the metal rail with a frantic clutch. His body swung out as the ship jumped. One gloved hand was torn from its grip. But the other held. The celestial globe was swinging violently. Talman threw a leg over the rail, clambered back to his precarious perch, and looked down.

Fern was still braced by his emergency line. Dalquist and little Cotton were sliding across the floor, to bring up with a crash against a pillar. Someone screamed.

Sweating, Talman warily descended. But by the time he had reached Cotton the man was dead.



Radiating cracks in his face-plate and contorted, discolored features gave the answer.

"He slammed right into me," Dalquist gulped. "His plate cracked into the back of my helmet—"

The chlorinated atmosphere within the sealed ship had ended Cotton's life, not easily, but rapidly. Dalquist, Fern and Talman matched glances.

The blond giant said, "Three of us left. I don't like this. I don't like it at all."

Fern showed his teeth. "So we're still underestimating that thing. From now on, hitch yourselves to pillars. Don't move without sound anchorage. Stay clear of everything that might cause trouble."

"We're still heading back toward Earth," Talman said.

"Yeah." Fern nodded. "We could open a port and walk out into free space. But then what? We figured we'd be using this ship. Now we've *got* to."

Dalquist said, "If we gave up—" "Execution," Fern said flatly. "We've still got time. I've traced some of the connections. I've eliminated a lot of hookups."

"Still think you can do it?" "I think so. But don't let go of your handgrips for a second. I'll find the answer before we hit atmosphere."

Talman had a suggestion. "Brains send out recognizable vibration patterns. A directional finder, maybe?"

"If we were in the middle of the Mojave, that would work. Not here. This ship's lousy with currents and radiations. How could

we unscramble them without apparatus?"

"We brought some apparatus with us. And there's plenty all around the walls."

"Hooked up. I'm going to be plenty careful about upsetting the *status quo*. I wish Cunningham hadn't gone down the drain."

"Quentin's no fool," Talman said. "He got the electronic engineer first and Brown second. He was trying for you then, too. Bishop and queen."

"Which makes me what?"

"Castle. He'll get you if he can." Talman frowned, trying to remember something. Then he had it. He bent over the stylopad on Fern's arm, shielding the writing with his own body from any photo-electrics that might be spotted around the walls or ceiling. He wrote: "He gets drunk on high frequency. Can do?"

Fern crumpled the tissue slip and tore it awkwardly into fragments with his gloved fingers. He winked at Talman and nodded briefly.

"Well, I'll keep trying," he said, and paid out his line to the kit of apparatus he and Cunningham had brought aboard.

Left alone, Dalquist and Talman hitched themselves to pillars and waited. There was nothing else they could do. Talman had already mentioned this high-frequency irritation angle to Fern and Cunningham; they had seen no value to the knowledge then. Now it might be the answer, with applied practical

psychology to supplement technology.

Meanwhile, Talman longed for a cigarette. All he could do, sweating in the uncomfortable suit, was to manipulate a built-in gadget so that he managed to swallow a salt tablet and a few gulps of tepid water. His heart was pounding, and there was a dull ache in his temples. The spacesuit was uncomfortable; he wasn't used to such personal confinement.

Through the built-in receiving gadget he could hear the humming silence, broken by the padding rustle of sheathed boots as Fern moved about. Talman blinked at the chaos of equipment and closed his eyes; the relentless yellow light, not intended for human vision, made little pulses beat nervously somewhere in his eye sockets. Somewhere in this ship, he thought, probably in this very chamber, was Quentin. But camouflaged. How?"

Purloined letter stuff? Scarcely. Quentin would have had no reason to expect hijackers. It was pure accident that had intervened to protect the Transplant with such an excellent hiding place. That, and the slapdash methods of technicians, constructing a one-job piece of equipment with the casual convenience of a slipstick.

But, Talman thought, if Quentin could be made to reveal his location—

How? Via induced cerebral irritation—intoxication?

Appeal to basics? But a brain couldn't propagate the species. Self-preservation remained the only

constant. Talman wished he'd brought Linda along. He'd have had a lever then.

If only Quentin had had a human body, the answer would not be so difficult to find. And not necessary by torture. Automatic muscular reactions, the old standby of professional magicians, could have led Talman to his goal. Unfortunately, Quentin himself was the goal—a bodiless brain in a padded, insulated metal cylinder. And his spinal cord was a wire.

If Fern could rig up a high-frequency device, the radiations would weaken Quentin's defenses—in one way, if not another. At present the Transplant was a very, very dangerous opponent. And he was perfectly camouflaged.

Well, not perfectly. Definitely no. Because, Talman realized with a sudden glow of excitement, Quentin wasn't simply sitting back, ignoring the pirates, and taking the quickest route back to Earth. The very fact that he was retracing his course instead of going on to Calisto indicated that Quentin wanted to get help. And, meanwhile, via murder, he was doing his utmost to distract his unwelcome guests.

Because, obviously, Quentin *could* be found.

Given time.

Cunningham could have done it. And even Fern was a menace to the Transplant. That meant that Quentin—was afraid.

Talman sucked in his breath. "Quent," he said, "I've a proposition. You listening?"

"Yes," the distant, terribly fa-

miliar voice said.

"I've an answer for all of us. You want to stay alive. We want this ship. Right?"

"Correct."

"Suppose we drop you by parachute when we hit Earth atmosphere. Then we can take over the controls and head out again. That way—"

"And Caesar is an honorable man," Quentin remarked. "But of course he wasn't. I can't trust you any more, Van. Psychiatrists and psychologists are too amoral. They're ruthless, because they feel the end justifies the means, and they rationalize away emotion and sentiment. You're an expert psychologist, Van, and that's exactly why I'd never take your word for anything."

"You're taking a long chance. If we do find the right hookup in time, there'll be no bargaining, you know."

"If."

"It's a long way back to Earth. We're taking precautions now. You can't kill any more of us. We'll simply keep working steadily till we find you. Now—what about it?"

After a pause Quentin said, "I'd rather take my chances. I know technological values better than I do human ones. As long as I depend on my own field of knowledge, I'm safer than if I tried to deal in psychology. I know coefficients and cosines, but I don't know much about the colloid machine in your skull."

Talman lowered his head; sweat

dripped from his nose to the interior of the face plate. He felt a sudden claustrophobia; fear of the cramped quarters of the suit, and fear of the larger dungeon that was the room and the ship itself.

"You're restricted, Quent," he said, too loudly. "You're limited in your weapons. You can't adjust atmospheric pressure in here, or you'd have compressed already and crushed us."

"Crushing vital equipment at the same time. Besides, those suits can take a lot of pressure."

"Your king's still in check."

"So is yours," Quentin said calmly.

Fern gave Talman a slow look that held approval and faint triumph. Under the clumsy gloves, manipulating delicate instruments, the hookup was beginning to take shape. Luckily, it was a job of conversion rather than construction, or time would have been too short.

"Enjoy yourself," Quentin said. "I'm slamming on all the G's we can take."

"I don't feel it," Talman said.

"All we can take, not all I could give out. Go ahead and amuse yourselves. You can't win."

"No?"

"Well—figure it out. As long as you stay hitched in one place, you're reasonably safe. But if you start moving around, I can destroy you."

"Which means we'll have to move—somewhere—in order to reach you, eh?"

Quentin laughed. "I didn't say



so. I'm well camouflaged. *Turn that thing off!*"

The shout echoed and re-echoed against the vaulted roof, shaking the amber air. Talman jerked nervously. He met Fern's eye and saw the astrophysicist grin.

"It's hitting him," Fern said. Then there was silence, for many minutes.

The ship abruptly jumped. But the frequency inductor was securely moored, and the men, too, were anchored by their lines.

"Turn it off," Quentin said again. His voice wasn't quite under control.

"Where are you?" Talman asked. No answer.

"We can wait, Quent."

"Keep waiting, then! I'm . . . I'm not distracted by personal fear. That's one advantage of being a Transplant."

"High irritant value," Fern murmured. "It works fast."

"Come on, Quent," Talman said persuasively. "You've still got the instinct of self-preservation. This can't be pleasant for you?"

"It's . . . too pleasant," Quentin said unevenly. "But it won't work. I could always stand my liquor."

"This isn't liquor," Fern countered. He touched a dial.

The Transplant laughed; Talman noted with satisfaction that oral control was slipping. "It won't work, I say. I'm too . . . smart for you."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. You're not morons—none of you are. Fern's a good

technician, maybe, but he isn't good enough. Remember, Van, you asked me in Quebec if there'd been any . . . change? I said there hadn't. I'm finding out now that I was wrong."

"How?"

"Lack of distraction." Quentin was talking too much; a symptom of intoxication. "A brain in a body can never concentrate fully. It's too conscious of the body itself. Which is an imperfect mechanism. Too specialized to be efficient. Respiratory, circulatory—all the systems intrude. Even the habit of breathing's a distraction. Now the ship's my body—at the moment—but it's a perfect mechanism. It functions with absolute efficiency. So my brain's correspondingly better."

"Superman."

"Super efficient. The better mind generally wins at chess, because it can foresee the possible gambits. I can foresee everything you might do. And you're badly handicapped."

"Why?"

"You're human."

Egotism, Talman thought. Was this the Achillean heel? A taste of success had apparently done its psychological work, and the electronic equivalent of drunkenness had released inhibitions. Logical enough. After five years of routine work, no matter how novel that work might be, this suddenly altered situation—this change from active to passive, from machine to protagonist—might have been the catalyst. Ego. And cloudy thinking.

For Quentin wasn't a super-brain. Very definitely he was not. The higher an I. Q., the less need there is for self-justification, direct or indirect. And, oddly, Talman suddenly felt absolved of any lingering compunctions. The real Bart Quentin would never have been guilty of paranoid thought-patterns.

So—

Quentin's articulation was clear; there was no slurring. But he no longer spoke with soft palate, tongue and lips, by means of a column of air. Tonal control was noticeably altered now, however, and the Transplant's voice varied from a carrying whisper to almost a shout.

Talman grinned. He was feeling better, somehow.

"We're human," he said, "but we're still sober."

"Nuts. Look at the telltale. We're getting close to Earth."

"Come off it, Quent," Talman said wearily. "You're bluffing, and we both know you're bluffing. You can't stand an indefinite amount of high frequency. Save time and give up now."

"You give up," Quentin said. "I can see everything you do. The ship's a mass of traps anyway. From up here all I have to do is watch until you get close to one. I'm planning my game ahead, every gambit worked out to checkmate for one of you. You haven't got a chance. You haven't got a chance. You haven't got a chance."

*From up here*, Talman thought. Up where? He remembered little Cotton's remark that geometry could be used to locate the Transplant. Sure. Geometry and psychology. Halve the ship, quarter it, keep bisecting the remainders—

Not necessary. *Up* was the key-word. Talman seized upon it with an eagerness that didn't show on his face. *Up*, presumably, reduced by half the area they'd have to search. The lower parts of the ship could be ruled out. Now he'd have to halve the upper section, using the celestial globe, say as the dividing line.

The Transplant had eye cells spotted all over the ship, of course, but Talman tentatively decided that Quentin thought of himself as situated in one particular spot, not scattered over the whole ship, localized wherever an eye was built in. A man's head is his locus, to his own mind.

Thus Quentin could see the red spot on the celestial globe, but that didn't necessarily mean that he was located in a wall facing that hemisphere of the sphere. The Transplant had to be trapped into references to his actual physical relation to objects in the ship—which would be hard, because this could be done best by references to sight, the normal individual's most important link with his surroundings. And Quentin's sight was almost omnipotent. He could see everything.

There had to be a localization—somehow.

A word-association test would do

it. But that implied co-operation. Quentin wasn't that drunk!

Nothing could be gauged by learning what Quentin could *see*—for his brain was not necessarily near any one of his eyes. There would be a subtle, intrinsic realization of location on the Transplant's part; the knowledge that *he*—blind, deaf, dumb except through his distant extensor sensory mechanisms—was in a certain place. And how, except by too obviously direct questioning, could Quentin be made to give the right answers?

It was impossible, Talman thought, with a hopeless sense of frustrated anger. The anger grew stronger. It brought sweat to his face, rousing him to a dull, aching hatred of Quentin. All this was Quentin's fault, the fact that Talman was prisoned here in this hateful spacesuit and this enormous death trap of a ship. The fault of a machine—

Suddenly he saw the way.

It would, of course, depend on how drunk Quentin was. He glanced at Fern, questioned the man with his eyes, and in response Fern manipulated a dial and nodded.

"Damn you," Quentin said in a whisper.

"Nuts," Talman said. "You implied you haven't any instinct for self-preservation any more."

"I . . . didn't—"

"It's true, isn't it?"

"No," Quentin said loudly.

"You forget I'm a psychologist, Quent. I should have seen the angles before. The book was open, ready to read, even before I saw

you. When I saw Linda."

"Shut up about Linda!"

Talman had a momentary, sick vision of the drunken, tortured brain somewhere hidden in the walls, a surrealistic nightmare. "Sure," he said. "You don't want to think about her yourself."

"Shut up."

"You don't want to think about yourself, either, do you?"

"What are you trying to do, Van? Get me mad?"

"No," Talman said, "I'm simply fed up, sick and disgusted with the whole business. Pretending that you're Bart Quentin, that you're still human, that we can deal with you on equal terms."

"There'll be no dealing—"

"That's not what I meant, and you know it. I've just realized what you are." He let the words hang in the dim air. He imagined he could hear Quentin's heavy breathing, though he knew it was merely an illusion.

"Please shut up, Van," Quentin said.

"Who's asking me to shut up?"

"I am."

"And what's that?"

The ship jumped. Talman almost lost his balance. The line hitched to the pillar saved him. He laughed.

"I'd be sorry for you, Quent, if you were—you. But you're not."

"I'm not falling for any trick."

"It may be a trick, but it's the truth too. And you've wondered about it yourself. I'm dead certain of that."

"Wondered about what?"

"You're not human any more," Talman said gently. "You're a thing. A machine. A gadget. A spongy gray hunk of meat in a box. Did you really think I could get used to you—now? That I could identify you with the old Quent? You haven't any face!"

The sound-box made noises. They sounded mechanical. Then—"Shut up," Quentin said again, almost plaintively. "I know what you're trying to do."

"And you don't want to face it. Only you've got to face it, sooner or later, whether you kill us now or not. This . . . business . . . is an incident. But the thoughts in your brain will keep growing and growing. And you'll keep changing and changing. You've changed plenty already."

"You're crazy," Quentin said. "I'm no . . . monster."

"You hope, eh? Look at it logically. You haven't dared to do that, have you?" Talman held up his gloved hand and ticked off points on his sheathed fingers. "You're trying very desperately to keep your grip on something that's slipping away—humanity, the heritage you were born to. You hang on to the symbols, hoping they'll mean the reality. Why do you pretend to eat? Why do you insist on drinking brandy out of a glass? You know it might just as well be squirted into you out of an oil can."

"No. No! It's an aesthetic—"

"Garbage. You go to teleshows. You read. You pretend you're human enough to be a cartoonist. It's



a desperate, hopeless clinging to something that's already gone from you, all these pretenses. Why do you feel the need for binges? You're maladjusted, because you're pretending you're still human, and you're not, any more."

"I'm . . . well, something better—"

"Maybe . . . if you'd been born a machine. But you *were* human. You had a human body. You had eyes and hair and lips. Linda must remember that, Quent.

"You should have insisted on a divorce. Look—if you'd only been crippled by the explosion, she could have taken care of you. You'd have needed her. As it is, you're a self-sufficient, self-contained unit. She does a good job of pretending. I'll admit that. She tries not to think of you as a hopped-up helicopter. A gadget. A blob of wet cellular tissue. It must be tough on her. She remembers you as you used to be."

"She loves me."

"She pities you," Talman said relentlessly.

In the humming stillness the red telltale crept across the globe. Fern's tongue stole out and circled his lips. Lindquist stood quietly watching, his eyes narrowed.

"Yeah," Talman said, "face it. And look at the future. There are compensations. You'll get quite a bang out of meshing your gears. Eventually you'll even stop remembering you ever were human. You'll be happier then. For you can't hang on to it, Quent. It's going away. You can keep on pretending for a while, but in the end

it won't matter any more. You'll be satisfied to be a gadget. You'll see beauty in a machine and not in Linda. Maybe that's happened already. Maybe Linda knows it's happened. You don't have to be honest with yourself yet, you know. You're immortal. But I wouldn't take that kind of immortality as a gift."

"Van—"

"I'm still Van. But you're a machine. Go ahead and kill us, if you want, and if you can do it. Then go back to Earth and, when you see Linda again, look at her face. Look at it when she doesn't know you're watching. You can do that easily. Rig up a photoelectric cell in a lamp or something."

"Van . . . Van!"

Talman let his hands drop to his sides. "All right. Where are you?"

The silence grew, while an inaudible question hummed through the yellow vastness. The question, perhaps, in the mind of every Transplant. The question of—a price.

What price?

Utter loneliness, the sick knowledge that the old ties were snapping one by one, and that in place of living, warm humanity there would remain—a mental monster?

Yes, he had wondered—this Transplant who had been Bart Quent. He had wondered, while the proud, tremendous machines that were his body stood ready to spring into vibrant life.

*Am I changing? Am I still Bart Quent?*

*Or do they—the humans—look*

*on me as— How does Linda really feel about me now? Am I—*

*Am I— It?*

"Go up on the balcony," Quentin said. His voice was curiously faded and dead.

Talman made a quick gesture. Fern and Lindquist sprang to life. They climbed, each to a ladder, on opposite sides of the room, but carefully, hitching their lines to each rung.

"Where is it?" Talman asked gently.

"The south wall— Use the celestial sphere for orientation. You can reach me—" The voice failed.

"Yes?"

Silence. Fern called down, "Has he passed out?"

"Quent!"

"Yes— About the center of the balcony. I'll tell you when you reach it."

"Easy," Fern warned Lindquist. He took a turn of his line about the balcony rail and edged forward, searching the wall with his eyes.

Talman used one arm to scrub his fogged face plate. Sweat was trickling down his face and flanks. The crawling yellow light, the humming stillness from machines that should be roaring thunderously, stung his nerves to unendurable tension.

"Here?" Fern called.

"Where is it, Quent?" Talman asked. "Where are you?"

"Van," Quentin said, a horrible, urgent agony in his tone. "You can't mean what you've been saying. You can't. This is . . . I've

**CAMOUFLAGE**

got to know! I'm thinking of Linda!"

Talman shivered. He moistened his lips.

"You're a machine, Quent," he said steadily. "You're a gadget. You know I'd never have tried to kill you if you were still Bart Quentin."

And then, with shocking abruptness, Quentin laughed.

"Here it comes, Fern!" he shouted, and the echoes crashed and roared through the vaulted chamber. Fern clawed for the balcony rail.

That was a fatal mistake. The line hitching him to that rail proved a trap—because he didn't see the danger in time to unhook himself.

The ship jumped.

It was beautifully gauged. Fern was jerked toward the wall and halted by the line. Simultaneously the great celestial globe swung from its support, in a pendulum arc like the drive of a Gargantuan fly swatter. The impact snapped Fern's line instantly.

Vibration boomed through the walls.

Talman hung on to a pillar and kept his eyes on the globe. It swung back and forth in a diminishing arc as inertia overcame momentum. Liquid splattered and dripped from it.

He saw Lindquist's helmet appear over the rail. The man yelled, "Fern!"

There was no answer.

"Fern! Talman!"

"I'm here," Talman said.

"Where's—" Lindquist turned

his head to stare at the wall. He screamed.

Obscene gibberish tumbled from his mouth. He yanked the blaster from his belt and aimed it at the maze of apparatus below.

"Lindquist!" Talman shouted. "Hold it!"

Lindquist didn't hear.

"I'll smash the ship," he screamed. "I'll—"

Talman drew his own blaster, steadied the muzzle against the pillar, and shot Lindquist in the head. He watched the body lean over the rail, topple, and crash down on the floor plates. Then he rolled over on his face and lay there, making sick, miserable sounds.

"Van," Quentin said.

Talman didn't answer.

"Van!"

"Yeah."

"Turn off the inductor."

Talman got up, walked unsteadily to the device, and ripped wires loose. He didn't bother to search for an easier method.

After a long while the ship grounded. The humming vibration of currents died. The dim, huge control chamber seemed oddly empty now.

"I've opened a port," Quentin said. "Denver's about fifty miles north. There's a highway four miles or so in the same direction."

Talman stood up, staring around. His face looked ravaged.

"You tricked us," he mumbled.

"All along, you were playing us like fish. My psychology—"

"No," Quentin said. "You almost succeeded."

"What—"

"You don't think of me as a gadget, really. You pretended to, but a little matter of semantics saved me. When I realized what you'd said, I came to my senses."

"What I said?"

"Yeah. That you'd never have tried to kill me if I'd still been Bart Quentin."

Talman was struggling slowly out of his spacesuit. Fresh, clean air had already replaced the poison atmosphere of the ship. He shook his head dazedly.

"I don't see it."

Quentin's laughter rang out, filling the chamber with its warm, human vibrancy.

"A machine can be stopped or destroyed, Van," he said. "But it can't be—*killed*."

Talman didn't say anything. He was free of the bulky suit now, and

he turned hesitantly toward a doorway. He looked back.

"The door's open," Quentin said.

"You're letting me go?"

"I told you in Quebec that you'd forget our friendship before I did. Better step it up, Van, while there's still time. Denver's probably sent out helicopters already."

Talman swept one questioning look around the vast chamber. Somewhere, perfectly camouflaged among those mighty machines, was a small metal cylinder, cradled and shielded in its hidden socket. Bart Quentin—

His throat felt dry. He swallowed, opened his mouth, and closed it again.

He turned on his heel and went out. The muffled sound of his footsteps faded.

Alone in the silent ship, Bart Quentin waited for the technicians who would refit his body for the Callisto flight.

THE END.

---