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# **DRUG ON THE MARKET**

GIVING credit where credit is due is, in most cases, a fine thing, but giving any credit to Leland Hale for ever having done a great and noble deed is, I submit, stretching things so far that words lose their meaning.

Motive is all-important in judging a thing like this, and Leland Hale's motives were never even vaguely pure or altruistic. Now, I'll admit that many a so-called philanthropist has endowed a hospital or a library for the purely selfish reason of wanting to go down in history as a philanthropist, and I'll admit that, even so, they should be given credit for having done something fine.

But if Leland Hale had ever endowed a hospital, it would have been for the purpose of making back a high multiple of the money invested within as short a time as possible. Any good he did for humanity was purely a by-product of the often intricate machinations he went through to further his own selfish ends.

As I have pointed out before, folk

legend has a terribly human tendency to make heroes out of even the vilest of villains, provided they are colorful enough in their actions and are not guilty of vileness just for the sake of vileness. A man may kill and rob and swindle with impunity, insofar as legend is concerned, provided he does it with dash and cleverness, and doesn't show any more cowardice than necessary. But the hero-worshipper wants no bluebeard or Giles de Rais, who butchers the helpless apparently for the sheer love of butchery, and he wants no colorless sneak-thief.

Leland Hale was neither. He neither enjoyed killing nor avoided it. He killed only when, to his way of thinking, it was necessary, although the accidental death of innocent bystanders was no concern of his. And although he could be as sneaky a sneak-thief as any, he could also be bold, and he was never colorless.

In these days of modern psychom-

etry, it is possible to dig out the motivations behind a man's actions, provided enough of those actions are known. Granted, our knowledge of the actions of Leland Hale, after a century has passed, are necessarily incomplete. The passage of time has dimmed some of the data, some have been distorted by legend, and some are simply non-existent. Hale, after all, was understandably secretive about the majority of his activities.

But, so far as we can tell, the man had no grudge against the Galaxy as a whole; he was not psychotic or more than normally neurotic; he was not warped by horribly traumatic experiences during childhood; he did not have any so-called "fixations" or "complexes" or what have you; he was not forced or driven to do what he did or be what he was. He did it because he damned well wanted to, because he enjoyed it.

Too many hero-worshiping pseudo-biographers have tried to excuse Leland Hale on the grounds that "he couldn't help some of the things he did because of his environment", but this theory holds no more water than the surface of Vega I. Granted, Hale, like anyone else, was forced by circumstances to do certain things, but very few of those acts were the ones which his apologists try to excuse for him.

It would be hard, for instance, for anyone with any respect for truth to explain away or soften the incident on Giffer.

The Galaxy is big, and, as far as the Interstellar Police of a century ago were concerned, too damned big. With five billion major wanted criminals moving about the Galaxy at any one time, plus sixty or seventy billion stay-at-homes, finding or tracking one man was not an easy job by a long shot. Even a normally intelligent criminal had a pretty good chance of eluding capture for

years, and with a man like Leland Hale, the odds against nabbing him were even higher.

The Planetary Police of Giffer (Kamis IV on the stellographic charts) were no slouches when it came to police work; their technological level was behind that of the main stream of the Galaxy, but they had reached Level 5, about that of Earth in the late 20th or early 21st Century, Old Style, and they did exceptionally well in policing their planet, only rarely needing help from the IP, and even more rarely asking for it.

But they couldn't possibly keep tabs on every crook in the known Universe, so it should not be considered surprising that they did not immediately leap from their swivel chairs when, as a matter of routine, they received the passenger list on the luxury liner *Bencolin* when it docked at the major spaceport of the planet on what was, in that hemisphere, a fine summer day.

The list was duly noted and filed, of course, but none of the officers that handled it took a second glance at the name of A. L. DeHallen, about midway through it, and many of them didn't even take a first glance. And, after all, why should they?

Mr. DeHallen himself was a portly man, so wide of shoulder that he looked squat, in spite of his six feet six. His hair was white, and his face seamed with smile-wrinkles that gave him a harmless, almost benign appearance. He strolled down the walkway from the ship as though he had absolutely nothing on his conscience, and, if the truth were known, he probably didn't.

He checked his luggage through customs, giving everyone an affable smile, and then took a twenty-minute skyride to one of the best hotels in Greatport City.

He checked in, went to his room, and dialed for the City Directory. He watched the listings move across the screen on the visiphone as he held

down the scan button. When the listings came to the W's, he eased up. When it reached the name he was looking for, he stopped the scan and looked at the number.

Then he blanked out the directory and dialed the number.

A pretty, smiling, blonde girl appeared. "Worldwide Pharmaceuticals, good afternoon," she said, with businesslike pleasantness.

The elderly-looking gentleman was all smiles. "Good afternoon. My name is DeHallen; A. L. DeHallen. I wish to speak to your Mr. Vekkor. He will recognize my name."

The girl smiled politely. "Yes, sir. We've been waiting for you to contact us since the *Bencolin* landed. I'll put you through to Mr. Vekkor right away."

The girl's face vanished, to be replaced by the face of a man. He was middle-aged, graying, jeweled, and saggy-faced, as though he had once been a hundred pounds overweight, but had recently pared off sixty pounds of the excess. His mouth, however, had a firm, businesslike set to it, and his eyes were a cold gray.

The businesslike mouth achieved a businesslike smile.

"Ah, Mr. DeHallen! I trust you had a good trip."

Those who are familiar with the chronicles of Leland Hale are well aware of Hale's delight in anagrammatical aliases, and even the newcomer has seen through "A. L. DeHallen" by this time, so we can dispense with further mummery and refer to Leland Hale by his right name.

Leland Hale smiled pleasantly and nodded. "An excellent trip, thank you, Mr. Vekkor. I am most happy to make your acquaintance."

"And I yours," said Vekkor. "I trust everything is in—ah—order?"

"Oh, yes. Yes, indeed. I have the—"

Vekkor held up his hand hastily. "Please!" he said sharply. Then,

looking rather apologetic, "Speaking over a public circuit is hardly the place for discussing private business." The sentence was somewhat tangled, but Hale nodded.

"I understand that things are somewhat different on Giffer," he said. "But you must remember that this is my first trip here." That was a flat lie. Leland Hale had thoroughly cased the planet Giffer for months before he took action.

"Do you have the *sample* with you?" Vekkor asked guardedly. His slight emphasis on the noun proclaimed it a circumlocution.

"That is why I called you," Leland Hale informed him pleasantly. "I have deposited it at the Customs office. I cannot import it without your guarantee that it is to be used for research purposes."

Vekkor raised an eyebrow. "I should think that so small an amount—" Then he stopped, as though he didn't care to continue with the obvious.

Leland Hale looked properly shocked. "I hope you are not suggesting, Mr. Vekkor, that I should attempt to smuggle five kilogram through Customs. In the first place, it would be unethical; in the second, impossible."

Vekkor's eyes bugged. His jaw hung vacuously for a moment, then snapped closed. He swallowed with effort. "Five kilogram?" he said. Then he pulled himself together. "I see. Very well. I shall contact Customs immediately. It would probably be best if I met you there; we will both have to sign certain papers. The usual red tape, you know."

Leland Hale nodded, smiling. "Certainly. Of course. Whenever it is convenient for you."

"I'll have to make a few calls," said Vekkor. "I'll call you back in an hour and let you know."

"Excellent," said Hale. "That will

give me time to freshen up and eat lunch."

Vekkor said, "Fine," and broke the circuit.

In these days, if anyone in the civilized Galaxy is a dynodine addict, it's because he hasn't had more than two or three doses of the stuff. After that, if he's got any sense, he goes to a hospital for treatment; if he doesn't have any sense, somebody will take him to the hospital by force.

Not so, a century ago. Today, dynodine is given for several neurological ills, because the antidote, made from the drug itself, is, like dynodine, cheap and plentiful. A hundred years ago, dynodine was one of the most expensive substances in the known universe, and the antidote was even more so.

Originally, dynodine was produced from a plant, or rather, a plant-animal, a unicellular thing that grows in the seas of Venturis V. Each of the little things has only a relatively few molecules of the drug in it, so it takes literally tons of the one-celled plant-animals to get a gram of dynodine. Since the micro-organism involved will grow only in the seas of Venturis V, it is easy to see that before it was synthesized the drug commanded fantastically high prices.

If it had not been for the side effects, dynodine would have been used only as a medicine, and there would have been no trouble with it. But it did have side effects—lovely ones. And, naturally, the stuff quickly became a marketable substance for the underworld of half a hundred planets. Traffic in the drug was rigorously controlled, but since a single microgram is an effective dose, it was difficult for any search, no matter how thorough, to keep every bit of it off any planet.

For anyone to be blithely toting around five kilogram of the stuff was not only highly suspicious, but

almost unheard of. To say that it took adroit and convincing talking to get the package through customs is to understate the problem. For a while, it looked as though only an act of the Planetary Assembly would do the trick. But Leland Hale's elocution carried such conviction that he could, figuratively, talk himself out of a locked bank vault, and it is not to be expected that the persuasive powers of A. L. DeHallen were any poorer.

At any rate, by sunset the five thousand grams of dynodine which DeHallen had brought to Giffer was safely ensconced in the vaults of the Worldwide Pharmaceutical Company of Greatport City, Giffer, and, after a very tasty and highly successful business dinner with Mr. Jaym Vekkor, Mr. A. L. DeHallen took his leave and toddled off to bed.

DeHallen went to bed, but Leland Hale did not. The plexiskin mask that made DeHallen the kindly-looking soul that he seemed was carefully peeled off, and from beneath it emerged the hard, handsome features of Leland Hale. The white surface-dye came out of Hale's hair, leaving it a dark brown, and a simple change in posture removed the droopy shoulders and the sagging belly that had belonged to DeHallen. Leland Hale was himself again.

He had work to do.

The Hotel Grandview was what was known in those days as a "tight-security" hotel. Each floor on each wing was presided over—guarded—by a security officer who made sure that no one went in or out without authorization. Between the front door of the lobby and the door of his room, a guest had to pass half a dozen alert men who had their eyes open for everything. It was the boast of the Hotel Grandview that no guest had ever been robbed or murdered on their premises. That was not

strictly true, but it is true that the culprit had been nabbed within minutes after the commission of the few crimes that did occur.

In view of this, it is noteworthy that every one of the security men were willing to take their solemn oath that Mr. A. L. DeHallen had retired at exactly 2130 hours on the evening in question, and had not been seen again until 0800 hours the next morning. Neither did they see any strangers in the hotel. All was as it should be.

In these days of phototraps and electroshorters, it is difficult to understand how anyone could ever make use of an invisibility suit. Any criminal foolish enough to wear one would be spotted before he walked a dozen paces on any civilized planet of the Galaxy. But we must keep it in mind that at that time, the invisibility suit was a closely guarded secret of the Interstellar Police; most people did not even know they existed, and thus had no need for any defenses against them.

Leland Hale, then, strolled blithely out of the hotel right past the unseeing eyes of seven security officers and thrice again as many hotel guests.

Anyone who has ever worn an invisibility suit knows that strolling blithely in one is a difficult feat indeed for the amateur. Like a disembodied spirit, you seemingly float above the ground without legs, arms, or body, and, lacking the sense of sight to guide those members, it takes practice before you can know where they are to within a fraction of an inch by feel alone. Stairways, especially, are difficult to maneuver around on, and tumbling head over haunches down a staircase tends to destroy any illusion that there is no one on the stairs.

But Leland Hale strolled along blithely, wearing a regulation suit formerly belonging to the Special

Services Division of the Interstellar Police, a suit which the IP thought had been destroyed in an explosion on Argolix.

There are many drawbacks to wearing an invisibility suit, and one of them is transportation difficulties. Hailing an aircab is obviously impossible, and getting aboard a tubeway leaves one open to the possibility of being jostled by a fellow traveler, which is disconcerting to everybody involved. Walking along a crowded thoroughfare has its drawbacks, too, but Leland Hale had decided that it was the only method, so he walked.

An hour later, having avoided all difficulties thus far, he found himself in one of the residential districts of Greatport City. Walking down the streets in this part of town was like walking down a roofless corridor; here were the walled acres of the wealthy, all carefully guarded, and bugged to a fare-the-well. Leland Hale was fairly sure he could get into any one of them, but there was no need of betraying that fact just yet.

So far, no one on Giffer had seen his face, which was just the way he wanted it. But now he was ready to show that face—to one man who would appreciate it.

The street was well lighted, so what he had to do would require precise timing if he didn't want to be seen suddenly appearing out of nowhere by a passer-by when he cut off the power of his invisibility suit. The entrance to the particular estate he wanted was half a block away, just around the next corner. He went to the corner, and waiting until just the right moment, he switched off the suit just as he turned the corner. To anyone watching, it was as if he had simply walked around the corner of the twenty-foot wall. He went on walking, just as nonchalantly as if he had business there—which, as a matter of cold fact, he had.

The suit now looked like an ordinary one-piece suit, except for the hood and gloves, which were so transparent as to be almost invisible. With an idle gesture, as though he were scratching his head in thought, he pushed back the hood, folding it into the collar. Similarly, he removed the gloves, concealing them in the cuffs. By this time, he had reached the door in the wall.

He went into the small areaway and stood there, facing the door, waiting. He knew there was no need to announce his presence. That had happened as soon as he stepped up to the door.

"Yes?" said a cautious voice.

"I'm here to see Mr. Ollicham," said Hale, addressing the eye he knew was concealed in the door.

"Who shall I say is calling?" asked the concealed owner of the voice.

"You don't," said Leland Hale. "Just flash him my pic."

There was a short pause, then, "One moment. I'll see if Mr. Ollicham is in."

Hale looked bored and said nothing.

After perhaps fifteen seconds, another voice, different from the first, came over the hidden speaker.

"Well, well! Look who's here!" The voice was dry and thin—almost whispery.

"If you won't mention any names," said Leland Hale coolly, "I won't."

"That sounds fair enough," said the other with a dry chuckle. "What do you want, old friend?"

"If you think," said Leland Hale, "that I am going to tell you that from out here, old buddy-buddy, you are beginning to suffer from senile dementia, in which case I want no truck with you."

The whispery chuckle came again. "You want me to let you in, eh? Now you wouldn't have anything—ah—

*personal* in mind, would you, my friend?"

"My, aren't we becoming cautious in our old age," Hale said mockingly. "No, this is strictly a business proposition, and I assure you that you're worth a damsite more to me alive than dead. I'm not armed."

There was a slightly puzzled note in the whispery voice as it said, "Yes, so my instruments tell me. However, I'll have to check that more carefully." There was a three-second pause, then, "Come in; the door will open."

Leland Hale strode forward, and the door slid aside.

On the other side were three men. Two of them held beamguns leveled at his midsection.

"Good evening, tots," said Leland Hale politely. But he didn't move any farther. One glance told him that the men holding the beamguns were stoked to the gunwales with dynodine. Their reactions would be half again as fast as normal, and not even Leland Hale wanted to go against odds like that.

The third man, who was unarmed, looked almost as formidable as the other two—or would have to anyone smaller than Leland Hale. He was perhaps a quarter of an inch shorter than Hale's six-six, and was just as broad across the shoulders and chest. "My instructions, sir," he said politely, "are to search you."

"You're welcome to do so, Pin-whistle" said Hale with equal politeness.

The other didn't turn a hair. "The name is Evrit, sir," he said mildly. "And now, sir, with your permission..."

The armed pair bracketed him while Evrit went through Leland Hale's clothing with expert hands. He found nothing simply because there was nothing to find. Hale watched him carefully and decided that Evrit wasn't a dynodine user. He didn't have the jumpy, too-fast mo-



tions of the addict, nor the pleased, self-satisfied look.

Evrit stepped back at last, thoroughly satisfied that Hale was innocent of anything more dangerous than his fists. "The gentleman is clean, Mr. Ollicham," he said.

"Very well," said the whispery voice in the air, "bring him on up to the house."

"Yes, sir," said Evrit. Then, to Hale, "If you'll be so good as to follow me, sir." And he turned and began walking toward the house. Hale followed, and the two gunmen fell in behind, their guns still unsheathed.

The huge house was set in the geometrical center of the hundred-yard-square, wall-enclosed yard. The grounds looked parklike, full of flowering shrubs and trees. There were almost no lights, and the yard was heavily shadowed in places, but Hale would have been willing to bet that any moving thing larger than a tiddlywink wouldn't get more than six inches before it was spotted and cut down. And he would have won that bet.

Once inside the house, the two gunmen were dismissed by Evrit. Hale knew why, and he silently congratulated himself on having decided to come into Ollicham's lair unarmed. The walls and ceiling and floor were lined with tell-tales, all of them leading, no doubt, to a robot brain in the basement. One phony move out of Hale, and there would be no more Hale; he was watched from every angle by a machine that had reflexes a thousand times faster than any human—even if he were full of dynamite.

"You seem to have all the modern conveniences," said Leland Hale.

"We do our best to make Mr. Ollicham's guests comfortable," said Evrit. He led the way into a huge room. "Mr. Ollicham will see you now, sir. Take the large mauve chair, sir, and make yourself comfortable.

You may dial for drinks from the arm of the chair."

"Fine," said Hale, heading for the chair.

"Oh, and, sir..." Evrit called after him.

Hale stopped. "Yes?"

"Please don't leave the chair without Mr. Ollicham's permission."

"I wouldn't think of it," said Hale sincerely.

"Thank you, sir," said Evrit, closing the door.

Leland Hale went over to the chair and sat down, as instructed, but he didn't dial for anything. He simply relaxed and waited.

Less than a minute later, he heard the door behind him sigh softly as it opened, but he didn't look around. There were gentle footsteps on the soft floor, and then a figure came into view. It was an incredibly aged figure, withered and bent with years. The hair was silvery and thin, showing the pink scalp beneath. The face was shriveled and wrinkled. Only the glittering, ratlike eyes showed that the brain inside that aged skull was still as nimble as it had been half a century before.

The ancient sat down carefully in a chair across from Hale and smiled, wrinkling the face further. "Well, Leland Hale, we may speak freely now. Not even Evrit knows what is going on in here—unless I permit it. What have you to say?"

Hale grinned in appreciation. "I never would have believed it. It's the perfect disguise, Granny."

The dry voice chuckled. "At my age, Leland, the difference between the sexes has vanished, except for a few—heh—shall we say, vestigial remnants. If I had actually been a man, I don't think I would now look much different than I do."

Hale nodded in agreement. "You're probably right. In fact, you have me puzzled."

"How so?"

"Ten years ago, you looked exactly as you do now, except that your hair was longer, and there was more of it—a great deal more. And, of course, you wore a woman's clothes. The hair, naturally, was artificial."

"Naturally. So?"

Hale grinned. "So, which is the disguise? Were you a man disguised as a woman on Prannon's World? Did you simply shed that disguise when you came here? Or is it the other way round?"

Again the chuckle. "I should just let you worry about that, Leland," said the whispery voice. "As I said, at my age it makes no difference whatever. The trouble is that you wouldn't worry at all; you're not the kind to worry over something like that. After all, if it doesn't matter to me, why should it matter to you? It wouldn't. So I'll simply say that, although a dozen decades has made me a neuter, I was once a woman."

"And I can believe that or not, as I choose, eh, Granny?"

She smiled. "As you choose. Tell me—how did you find me across all those light-years?"

It was Leland Hale's turn to smile. "Since you are the type to worry, Granny, I think I'll not tell you."

The ancient face darkened. "I could get the information."

"No," said Leland Hale calmly, "you won't. Because you won't even try. Do you think I'd come into this place without safeguards?"

After a moment, the old one chuckled again. "No. No, you wouldn't. I fancy myself an excellent teacher, Leland, and you were always a bright pupil—too bright. You're even clever enough and gutsy enough to walk in here without safeguards because you know that I can't afford to take the chance. I'm afraid I must admit that you're perfectly safe, Leland. Unless, of course, you do something stupid, in which case I will know that it is you, not I, who have

become afflicted with senile dementia."

"Your age has added to your wisdom, Granny," said Hale.

"I dare say," said Granny dryly. "Now, enough of this chattering. You didn't come here just to prove to your old Granny how smart you were; you have something on your mind, and these old nostrils smell money in the wind."

"Your nose was always keen, Granny. You used to be able to smell a five-stellor note three solar systems away."

"I still can," the whispery voice snapped. "Get to the point."

Leland Hale leaned forward in his chair, suddenly businesslike. "What are you paying for dynodine these days?"

Granny's eyes narrowed just the least bit, but the glitter in them became brighter. "Ten stellors per milligram."

Hale grinned mirthlessly. "You're getting a hundred times that from the users."

"That's right," Granny agreed. "One stellor per dose, average. Are you thinking of going into the retail business?"

Hale leaned back, shook his head. "No. In the first place, I know you've got a stranglehold on this whole planet as far as drugs go. In the second place, I haven't the time to get any competition started, even if I wanted to. That takes organization which I haven't established here. In the third place, I think the life would be much too dull for my tastes. Besides, if I'd wanted to sell the stuff retail, I'd hardly have come here to tell you about it."

Granny brushed that aside with a wave of a parchmented hand. "How much have you got?"

Leland Hale had been waiting for this moment. He let the words roll oratorically off his tongue. "Ten million stellors worth."

Unlike Vekkor, Granny did not become bug-eyed. There was only a disbelieving sniff. "If you had a kilo of dynodine, which I doubt, you couldn't possibly get it in to Giffer. This world has an extremely tight block against drugs. It comes in a gram at a time, not a kilogram at a time."

"Granny," said Hale, "you've made two errors. In the first place, I'm offering you *two* kilograms for ten million stellors, and in the second, I don't have to smuggle it in; it's already on Giffer."

"Explain," snapped Granny.

Nothing ever seemed to faze Granny. Until the dynodine was actually at hand, Granny would suspend belief. If and when it appeared, Granny would not be shocked, because reality never shocked that ancient brain.

"It's quite simple," said Hale. "I brought it in legally. Right past the Custom guards with a signed certificate to go with it. One of the nicest cons I've ever worked, though I say it myself."

The aged one remained silent, waiting.

"I picked the stuff up on Venturis V," Hale continued. "Never mind how; that's *my* business, not yours. Besides, it couldn't be done again in a million years. I saw a break and I took it, that's all; nothing fancy, really. I guarantee it can't be traced; they don't even know it's missing back on Venturis V. Otherwise, I couldn't have brought it to Giffer so openly."

"Never mind that," Granny said with deepening irritation in the whispery voice. "How did you get it through Customs?"

"It was a problem," admitted Hale. "Nobody—but *nobody*—ever has that much dynodine on them at one time. I suppose I could peddle the stuff off here and there over the next few years, but why take a hundred little

risks when one big one will do the job?"

"So I became Dr. A. L. DeHallen, an experimental biochemist. I contacted the Worldwide Pharmaceutical Company, here in Greatport, and told them I had perfected a method of synthesizing dynodine, that's all. Naturally, I had to bring proof, and what could be more convincing than a whole suitcase full of the stuff?"

Granny started to chuckle. It developed into a cackle. "Hehehehehe-hee-hee! What a mind! What a brain! And to think you learned so much from your old Granny! I never would have thought of that one! Heheheheh!" The chuckle stopped abruptly. "Go on! Where do you go from there?"

"Nothing could be simpler," said Leland Hale. "The stuff is now quite legally in the vaults of Worldwide. Tomorrow, I will steal it—never mind how; that, again, is my business. When I bring it to you, you will give me ten million stellors, and I will be on my way, flitting amongst the stars as a bee amongst the flowers."

"Piff!" said Granny, irritated. "So much spacedust! How will you leave? You can't have brought your private ship here; this isn't a primitive planet, backward though it may be. If you steal that stuff, A. L. DeHallen will be the first and most obvious suspect. You can't get off in your own *persona*, because Leland Hale would be spotted the minute he stepped out on the spacefield. And they won't let anyone leave after that stuff is found to be missing."

"My dear Granny," said Leland Hale with exasperation, "do you think I'm a complete idiot?"

"That dynodine belongs to me. I haven't taken a centi from Worldwide, and I don't intend to. When I steal it, I will substitute powdered sugar for it, plus a little powdered methylene blue to give it the proper

color. Tomorrow, when they test the stuff, they will find that it's sugar, and they'll call me on the carpet. I'll admit—or rather, DeHallen will admit, somewhat shamefacedly, that he is a phony. But, since, DeHallen hasn't taken any money, no fraud can be proven, and I'll simply be tossed out on my ear. Old man Vekkor won't even try to pull anything, because he'll be ashamed to admit that he was taken in by someone who claimed to have synthesized dynodine.

"Is that more to your taste?"

"Dear Leland," said the whispery old voice in admiration, "your Granny is very proud of you." Then the voice hardened. "But I haven't got ten million stellors. Five is the most I can offer."

Leland Hale shook his head solemnly. "Ten. You're getting it for half price as it is."

Granny considered. "Very well. I know how stubborn you are. I know I'm getting a bargain. I'll have to borrow, but— Well, heheh, *that is my business.*"

"That's an awful lot of cash, Granny."

"The syndicate here will back me," said Granny. "Provided, of course, that the stuff is real. It will mean selling stock all over the planet; it will mean converting holdings into cash at less than market value."

"I know," said Hale. "I appreciate that. That's why I'm offering it to you at half price."

"Actually, I'll be paying almost twenty millions for it in the long run," said the ancient. "I'll lose that much by getting the cash so quickly."

Hale grinned. "Don't kid your darling boy, Granny. You'll never lose anything in the long run or you wouldn't do it."

Granny sniffed. "You'd better go now. I'll be up all night as it is. I have to contact some people on the dayside of the planet so that I can start getting that cash immediately.

And, son—" The old voice grew hard and suddenly chill. "—if you don't deliver, you'll never get off this planet alive."

"I'm aware of that, Granny," said Leland Hale.

The ancient one moved a withered hand on the arm of the chair.

"Evril!"

"Yes, Mr. Ollicham?" came Evrit's smooth voice.

"Show our visitor out." Then Granny looked at Hale. "As soon as I have left the room, you may get up from that chair. Not before. When you do, go straight to the door you came in through. Evrit will be waiting."

Leland Hale had very few "good" qualities, in the sense that a religious man might use the word, but there is no doubt that he had strong qualities, and that one of these was the ability to improvise. He was a meticulous, careful, detailed plotter, but if something went awry, or if unforeseen factors turned up, he was ingenious enough to use them to improve the outcome of his machinations rather than allow them to destroy him by stubbornly sticking to what might be a dangerously obsolete plan. Nor did such changes in plan, sudden though they might be, ever disturb his outward equilibrium. His brain could work at high speed while he listened blandly to a conversation over a cup of hot spice-tea or played a poker game over a cold deck.

Having returned to his hotel unseen by the same method he had left it, Leland Hale slept for a few hours, then rose and spent an hour reaffixing the plexiskin mask and redyeing his hair, so that when he emerged for breakfast on the stroke of eight he was again Mr. A. L. DeHallen, the portly, smiling visitor from off-planet. He ate a leisurely meal, pored over the local newsfac as though it were of monumental interest, rose, paid his check, went outside, grabbed

an aircab and at precisely half past nine presented himself at the laboratories of Worldwide Pharmaceuticals, briefcase in hand.

Mr. Jaym Vekkor greeted him effusively and offered him a chair.

"Sit down, Mr. De Hallen, sit down," he said bubblingly as he rubbed his hands together. "You know, it's a pleasure to do business with you and your company. Imagine! To be given the complete techniques and data on the synthesis of dynodine, and for such a trifling sum as five million stellors! Why, it's amazing! It seems as though there must be a catch somewhere."

Mr. DeHallen looked hurt and astonished. "A catch? Really, sir, do you mean—"

"Oh, no, no," said Vekkor, raising a hand in horror at the words he had allowed to pass his lips. "I only meant that it seemed rather like a dream!"

"You have my credentials, sir," said DeHallen stiffly. "If you—"

"Please sir! You *must* accept my apologies! I really had no intention of..."

After a bit, Mr. DeHallen allowed himself to be mollified to the extent that he deigned to explain how his own company, the Meunster Biochemical Corporation of Sykk III, intended to profit by what was practically a giveaway program.

"The secret would leak out eventually," he said, "and, besides, this great boon to humanity must be spread widely. The present monopoly of the drug by Venturis V is intolerable.

"So we decided that we would sell the secret of the process to one large drug house on one planet in each of the major sectors of the Galaxy, thereby giving them a sector-wide monopoly—for a time, at least. Our own sector, of course, was not included, since we will keep the monopoly there. Certainly, you should be able to make back your five mil-

lion several times over before the secret becomes commonplace."

"Easily," said Vekkor beaming, "easily."

"We, of course, will reap our own profits from our sector, and our reward for the discovery will be the monies paid us by your own house and the others. A tidy sum, but not, I think, too large, in view of the work we have done."

"Indeed not," agreed Vekkor wholeheartedly.

"However," DeHallen said, picking up his thick briefcase, "I have here our standard contract." He opened the briefcase and pulled forth a bulky sheaf of papers. "It is, as you see, a registered form, backed by the Interstellar Police. You will want your legal staff to check it with a semantic analyzer, of course, but I can assure you that it's quite binding and quite fair. And I have been instructed to inform you that it's a take-it-or-leave-it agreement; there will be no changes whatever."

Vekkor looked doubtful for a moment, then he smiled as he took the heavy sheaf. "We'll have it checked, of course, but I feel sure it will be quite satisfactory." He slid the contract into the acceptor slot in his desk and said: "Miss Bourmel, have this routed to the legal department. Tell them take it or leave it."

"Yes, sir," said a soft voice.

"Thank you." Vekkor said. He smiled again at Leland Hale. "And now, sir, if you'll come with me, we'll go down to the vault and get the sample you brought." His smile grew broader. "I can hardly wait to see our Dr. Fyatheg's face when we dump five kilograms of dynodine in his lap for analysis." He chuckled immoderately. Hale had a feeling that Vekkor was not personally fond of Dr. Fyatheg.

Leland Hale said: "You wish to begin analysis immediately?"

Vekkor betrayed a sudden attack

of suspicion, which he tried hard to cover and almost succeeded. "Certainly, Mr. DeHallen. Our Dr. Fyatheg always begins at ten. Did you wish to postpone it for some reason?"

"I see no reason to," said Leland Hale. "The sooner, the better, in fact."

Dr. Fyatheg was a brown-skinned, fussy, balding little man in his late thirties, obviously one of those "A-place-for-everything-and-everything-in-its-place" men. After talking to him for five minutes, Leland Hale had pegged him as a cookbook chemist; the kind of technician who was a precisionist in following the techniques already evolved by others, but utterly incapable of formulating any on his own.

But if Vekkor had had any idea of disconcerting the little chemist with the announcement that there were five kilograms of dynodine to be analyzed, he was sadly mistaken.

"Dynodine," said Dr. Fyatheg. "Yes, indeed. Quite a standard technique. Quite. With, I may say, some very elegant methods involved in checking on the *cis* and *trans* positions of the double bond in the seventh linkage. The normal position, you know, is the *cis*, but the wrong step at the sublimation stage of the extraction can change the bond to *trans*, thereby greatly weakening the physiological effect of the drug."

It was obvious that, to Dr. Fyatheg, five thousand grams of dynodine was not fifty million stellors worth of drug, it was simply a goodly dollop of complex molecules to be analyzed.

The guards brought in the multi-million-stellor container, set it on the chemist's table, and went out. Dr. Fyatheg looked the cannister over carefully, then, without looking at Leland Hale, stuck out his hand, palm up. "The key," he said. Wordlessly, Hale handed over the key.

Fyatheg applied it and opened the

cannister. It was filled to within an inch of the brim with a pastel blue powder.

"Ah, yes," said Fyatheg. "Mmm-hmm." With a small spatula, he ladled a pinch of the stuff into a very tiny glass vial. Then he looked up at Hale and Vekkor.

"If you will excuse me gentlemen. I must get to work."

"How long will this take?" asked Vekkor.

"Three, perhaps four hours. More, if I am disturbed."

Leland Hale and Jaym Vekkor took the hint.

By the time they returned to Vekkor's office, the heavy contract had returned from the legal department with an appended note: *Excellent. Contract recommended.*

There was nothing left for Vekkor and "Mr. DeHalland" to do but sign the contract. It was contingent, of course, on the analysis being run by Dr. Fyatheg, but Leland Hale wasn't worried about that. He had other things on his mind.

As soon as Mr. A. L. DeHalland left the heavily-guarded Worldwide Pharmaceuticals plant after having promised to return in a couple of hours, he strolled around town, apparently aimlessly. He went into several places on little shopping tours, and bought drinks in several of the tonier hostleries.

After he had made certain that he was not being followed, he stepped into the washroom of one of the bars and simply never came out again.

But Leland Hale was making his way as rapidly as possible back to the Worldwide plant, clad in his invisibility suit, and carrying an equally invisible briefcase.

Half an hour later, he was standing inside the laboratory, watching Dr. Fyatheg putter over his machines and instruments which were busily

analyzing the dynodine. As Hale had half suspected, Fyatheg was using micro techniques. He had never had more than a tiny bit of the stuff to analyze in his life, and micro techniques were the only ones he knew.

The rest of the drug was still sitting where Hale had last seen it. It was as though it were no more than so much blue-tinted sugar. Soon, it would be.

Fyatheg, immersed in his work, took no notice of the peculiar things that were going on behind his back. The cannister of blue powder lifted into the air, tilted, and poured out a cascade of blue, which fell a few inches and seemingly vanished into nowhere.

A minute later, a similar cascade of blue powder materialized from empty air and flowed back into the cannister.

Then all was as it had been before. Almost.

Leland Hale, in his guise as pleasant-faced, elderly Mr. DeHallen, strolled into the Grandview Hotel, nodded politely to the security officers on duty, and retired to his room. Once there, he dialed an outside number on the phone and waited, humming happily to himself while the announcer circuit functioned. Then the screen glowed and the light patterns coalesced into the now familiar features of Evrit. "Yes, sir?" said he, politely.

"Tell Mr. O. I wish to speak with him," said Leland Hale.

"Very well, sir. One moment."

The screen flickered, and Evrit's face was replaced by the incredibly aged face of "Mr. Ollicham".

"I have the wherewithal to fulfill my part of the bargain," said Leland Hale evenly. "How about you?"

The ancient face split in a smile. "I think we can come to terms, as arranged."

"Good," said Hale. "Now, here's what I want you to do..."

Some hours later, and three thousand light-years away, a message was placed in the URGENT file of Interstellar Police Commander Desmon Shelley. It was only one of several, so it was nearly half an hour afterwards that Commander Shelley actually ran the message through his scanner. Immediately afterwards, he went into a flurry of activity that lasted another half hour, most of which consisted of sending messages hither and yon across the Galaxy and waiting for answers.

A century ago, interstellar communication beams were even more likely to get lost than they are today, and our own webworks are far from infallible. An ion storm, a sudden nova, the throbbing pulsation of a Cepheid variable star—any one of these and half a dozen other things can foul up communications. It took time to make sure that a message was sent ungarbled, and received in the same condition, even at the near-instantaneous velocity of subspace radio.

But when Commander Shelley was quite sure of his information, he called Captain Bradney W. Whitter to his office.

Whitter was a tough, shrewd law officer with twenty years of experience behind him and a mind that enabled him to keep one jump ahead of the average lawbreaker and almost even with the best. It had always rankled him that there was one man in the Galaxy that he could never quite catch up to, and when Commander Shelley mentioned that man's name, Whitter's eyes seemed to harden.

"Leland Hale," said the Commander, "is on the planet Giffer, in Sector 521."

"I know where it is," said Captain Whitter. "I've never been there, but I know it's listed as Kamis IV on the charts. What's he up to?"

"I got an anonymous message," said Shelley. "It was addressed di-

rectly to me at this office. All it says is that Leland Hale is on Giffer; it looks as though one of his old pals is giving him the doublecross."

The Interstellar Police, even then, had more than enough to do without paying more than routine attention to anonymous messages or the apprehension of a single criminal. The fact that a full Commander found the matter worth his personal attention attests to the importance of Leland Hale.

"I immediately got hold of the Giffer Planetary Police and asked them to check their immigration files," the Commander continued. "I asked them to check every landing by public or private vehicle in the last hundred days—ever since he pulled that job on Finistella, out near the periphery.

"They ran his specs through the computer, and came up with a name. A. L. DeHallen."

Whitter nodded grimly. "That's one of his pseudonyms, all right. Are they sure it's him?"

"Not completely. The identification is too tenuous. I wish we could rely on fingerprints and eyecone patterns, like the ancients could.

"But this thing is too choice to leave it up to the Giffer police. It seems that Mr. DeHallen is involved with importing dynodine to Giffer."

Whitter's eyebrows lifted, then went down in a scowl. "That sounds like Hale, the son-of-a-white-dwarf!"\*

Whitter was well aware of the dangers of the use of dynodine. It increases the rate of nerve impulse transmission through the nervous system and speeds up the metabolism by a factor of approximately 1.5, depending on the individual and the

strength of the dosage. To the person under the influence of dynodine, the rest of the world seems to move about a third slower than normal, which, in effect, it is. The trouble is that this excessive activity tends to burn out the nervous system, and makes the addict age rapidly—even more rapidly than one would expect from the fifty percent speed-up. The aging rate rises on an exponential curve, as the catabolic processes overtake and pass the anabolic.

Under the influence of the drug, the user feels both a sense of power, from the psychological effect of the speed-up in reflexes, and a dream-like sense of euphoria. The withdrawal symptoms are violent, often fatal, and always damaging to the mind. Suddenly deprived of the drug, the addict will feel the beginnings of the withdrawal symptoms within twenty-four hours. Within forty-eight hours, he is either dead or a hopeless imbecile.

The only antidote is known, logically enough, as antidynodine, and is a derivative of the drug itself.

As far as Captain Whitter was personally concerned, the punishment for anyone who dealt illegally in the drug was that he should be given doses of it for a year and then have the drug taken away from him—cold. In his mind, he relished the thought of doing just that to Hale.

"All right," he said tightly, "What's the set-up, Commander?"

"Nothing difficult—I hope. I have already sent out a pick-up-and-hold order to Giffer's Planetary Police. You get out there and take him off their hands. I don't care what he's done, we have a priority rating on Leland Hale, and we are going to exercise it. I don't want some piddling little Planetary government to give him a death sentence or something before we can get our hands on him." He looked darkly at the palms of his hands, which he held out in front of

\*This colorful, but now obsolete epithet has been traced by etymologists to the fact that the first white dwarf star known to humanity was the Companion (or Mate) of Sirius, which was known as the Dog Star.



him. "I want to get *my* hands on him."

"I'll do my best to bring him in," said Captain Whitter. He looked even grimmer. He still had a white scar in one leg which testified to Leland Hale's accuracy with a megadyne handgun.

"Alive, if possible," said the Commander coldly.

"Yes, sir," said Captain Whitter, mentally repeating the Commander's "*if possible*".

At almost the same time that the "pick-up-and-hold" order reached the Greatport City branch of Giffer's Planetary Police, they were also assailed by a great hue and cry from the officials of the Worldwide Pharmaceutical Company. Someone, it seemed, had absconded with the unimaginable loot of five kilograms of dynodine, which had vanished from under the allegedly watchful eyes of their chief analytical chemist. His first analysis had proved beyond doubt that the substance was, indeed, dynodine. But when a second sample had been taken from the container, it proved to be a mixture of powdered sugar and methylene blue, with only faint traces of dynodine.

Since A. L. DeHallen was also involved in that case, it seemed obvious that his arrest and detainment would aid materially in solving the crime.

An immediate close-down order went out to every spaceport on the planet. DeHallen would not be allowed to leave. Every private and public spaceship was grounded, despite the screams of various space-line authorities. Fortunately, the shut-down order didn't hold for more than fifteen minutes after it was issued. The Giffer Planetary Police nabbed their man.

No sooner had the order been put into effect, than the Giffer PP headquarters in Greatport City got a call from a particularly observant gate-man at the spaceport. A gentleman

calling himself Mr. A. L. DeHallen had boarded the liner *William Logan*, bound for Sykk III. The liner was being held for police investigation.

Since the Interstellar Police were interested in the matter, the Giffer PP sent their best men out to the spaceport to board the *William Logan* to arrest DeHallen. A squad of six tough cops, under the command of Sergeant J. J. Craig, took an air-car to the ship's berth.

Sergeant Craig was a young man in his early thirties. He was hard and tough and smart, and he had been warned that his quarry was dangerous.

He stationed two men at the airlock of the liner, armed with stunguns and megadyne handguns.

"Use your stunguns first," he said. "If anyone comes out of that lock except us, hit 'em. Don't use the beam-guns unless absolutely necessary; he's wanted alive. The rest of you come with me."

Craig, with his three remaining men, went into the ship. The purser, looking a little frightened, met them just inside the airlock.

"You're looking for this DeHallen?" He swallowed. "The captain got the word and told me to wait for you."

Sergeant Craig held out a trimesional photo. "That him?"

The purser nodded nervously. "That's him. He's in Room 19—" He pointed down a passageway. "—down there, first turn to—"

"Show us," said Craig peremptorily.

The purser swallowed and led the way.

Craig didn't bother to knock on the door of Room 19. He opened the door fast and stepped in, stungun leveled.

A broad, heavy-set gentleman with a kindly, wrinkled face and white hair looked up from his seat with mild amazement. "May I ask the meaning of this intrusion, sir?"

Craig kept his weapon pointing at the man's middle.

"Are you A. L. DeHallen?" he asked sharply.

"I am, sir," said the gentleman, still looking kindly, but puzzled.

"Let's see your identification, DeHallen," snapped the cop.

The man who called himself DeHallen stood up to a towering six feet six. "It's in my belt pocket," he said politely. "Do you want me to reach for it?"

"No," said Craig. "Stand where you are. Biffin, go get it. The rest of us will cover you."

One of the officers stepped gingerly over to the big man and relieved him of his identification packet. He had no trouble at all.

Sergeant Craig leafed through the packet, nodded, and said: "Okay, Mr. DeHallen; come with us. You're under arrest."

"And what, may I ask, is the charge?"

"Right now, suspicion of robbery. If we think of anything else, we'll let you know. Come along."

Mr. Jaym Vekkor, of the World-wide Pharmaceutical Company, looked through the transite door of the cell at the big man sitting quietly inside and said to the assembled police officers; "Yes, yes; that's Mr. DeHallen. Are you suggesting that he might have been the one who took the drug?"

"It sure as hell looks like it," said Sergeant Craig dryly.

"But this is ridiculous!" said Vekkor exasperatedly. "Mr. DeHallen is the one who brought us the drug!"

"And may I point out something?" interjected the bogus Mr. DeHallen. His voice sounded muffled from inside the escape-proof cell. "I ask you, Mr. Vekkor, did I *sell* you that dynodine? Did I *give* it to you?"

"Why—uh—no," Vekkor admitted. "It was merely brought as a sample."

"Exactly. Technically, then, the drug still belongs to me?"

"Yes."

"Then," said the prisoner triumphantly, "even if I did take it—which I didn't—you still can't hold me on suspicion of stealing from myself. It isn't legal."

Craig looked baffledly at Vekkor. "Is that right?"

"I'm afraid so," said Vekkor. He suddenly became angry. "Why aren't you out looking for the real culprit instead of harassing Mr. DeHalland? I demand that you release him!"

Craig looked a little confused, but, at that point, the legal deputy from the Planetary Prosecutor's office, who had been listening to the whole conversation, said: "We have reason to believe that this man's real name is not DeHallen, Mr. Vekkor. We think he is an interstellar criminal named Leland Hale."

The name registered with Vekkor. He opened his eyes a little wider, looked back at the man in the cell, and said: "Oh, my!"

"Now," continued the deputy prosecutor, "you mentioned something about a contract. Would you explain again what it was?"

"Again?" sniffed Vekkor. "I have not said what it was, and I don't intend to unless subpoenaed—in detail, that is. In broad, however, I can say that it is simply a business contract, whereby Mr. DeHallen's company has agreed to deliver certain things to my company for a certain consideration."

"I would like to point out," the prisoner interrupted as the deputy prosecutor started to speak, "that no money has changed hands as yet—isn't that right, Mr. Vekkor?"

"That's right."

"And the contract doesn't call for payment until delivery?"

"Right."

"And, finally, even if my company doesn't deliver the goods, they will

be liable only for a civil suit through the Interstellar Police, but under no consideration could criminal charges be brought."

Vekkor nodded. "That is absolutely correct."

Now it was the trial deputy's turn to look confused. But Sergeant Craig had regained his tongue.

"Look here," he said, "we can still hold him on suspicion of illegal trafficking in drugs. He must have taken that stuff to peddle it somewhere."

"If I brought it here to peddle it," said the prisoner logically, "why should I give it to Mr. Vekkor?" And before they could see the hole in that argument, he went on. "Besides, you can't hold me on suspicion of something as silly as that. I wasn't anywhere near the Worldwide plant at the time of the robbery; you haven't traced any of the drug to me except what was legally mine; you haven't caught me in any illegal act. Why am I being held?"

Sergeant Craig looked at the deputy prosecutor. The deputy prosecutor looked at Sergeant Craig. They both turned red and looked at the prisoner.

The deputy prosecutor said: "If you really are DeHallen, we will have to release you with our apologies—unless we turn up more evidence to link you to this. But we can't release you until the Interstellar Police officers get here; we're holding you only because of orders from the Area IP Headquarters."

"I'll sue, of course," said the bogus DeHalland mildly.

"Then you'll sue the IP, not us," said Sergeant Craig gloomily. "Meanwhile, you'll wait."

"I'll wait," said the prisoner calmly.

"Sure you will," said Craig. "Meanwhile, we'll get a couple of the boys to peel that plexiskin mask off you and find out what you really look

like. We want you all prettied up for when the IP gets here."

Three days passed while the communications webworks in that sector of the Galaxy sizzled with messages. Through all the official excitement, the prisoner, now stripped of the plexiskin mask which had made him look like a much older man, sat calmly in his cell, evidently doing the mental equivalent of twiddling his thumbs.

On the morning of the fourth day, an IP ship landed at the spaceport, and an impatient Captain Whitter fidgeted while the police aircar which had been waiting for him scooted through the sky toward the Planetary Police Headquarters at Greatport City.

When the aircar touched the landing deck on top of the building, Captain Whitter leaped out and went with his escort to the office where the chief of the Giffer PP sat scowling at some papers on his desk. Whitter introduced himself to the chief, amenities were exchanged, and Whitter said:

"I've come here to pick up Leland Hale."

"I know," said the chief worriedly, "I know. I hope you can find a charge against him; we can't find any law that he's broken here on Giffer."

"Keep looking," Whitter growled, "and you will. If Leland Hale ever landed on a planet without committing a crime, it was because the planet was uninhabited, undiscovered, and unknown. He breaks a law every morning the way normal people break their fasts. Where is he?"

"Down in the cell block."

"I hope so, Chief; I sincerely hope so. Because if he's gotten away, I'll probably boot you in the tailbone out of pure reflex action. Lead the way."

The Chief led the way to the cell block and then to the cell, where the prisoner, on the other side of the

transite door, could be seen lounging comfortably on his bunk. He sat up and looked at Captain Whitter without recognition.

Whitter stared, opened his mouth, closed it, turned to face the chief again, and bellowed: "Are you sure he's not wearing a mask?"

"Positive," said the chief. "Why? What's the matter? Why are you looking like that?"

"Because, you blithering idiot, *that's not Leland Hale!*" . .

An hour's work checking the brain-pattern of the prisoner merely served to confirm Whitter's statement. The man most certainly was not Leland Hale. He was about the same size and build, but there the resemblance ended.

"But who in the *Galaxy is he?*" asked Captain Whitter, on the verge of apoplexy.

"My name is A. L. DeHallen," the prisoner said stolidly for perhaps the hundredth time since his incarceration. "I am a respectable citizen of Sykk III, here on business. I have committed no crime, and I demand that you release me."

The chief sighed and looked up at Whitter. "He's right. We haven't got a thing against him. Even if he took the dynodine, we couldn't hold him, and we can't prove that he did. He might have sold it on the black market, but we can't prove that, either. We have no record on him—if he's off-planet, we wouldn't have, anyway, and if we did, we couldn't do much.

"We'll have to release him."

Whitter scowled. "What about this job he's supposed to have on Sykk III?"

"We checked on that. The Meunster Biochemical Corporation of Sykk III reports that they hired Mr. DeHallen a month or so ago, and sent him here to negotiate a business contract with Worldwide. He's clean.

After all there's no law says a man can't wear a plexiskin mask if he wants to. Lots of people with disfigured faces, who can't afford surgery—"

"I know, I know!" Whitter interrupted. "But I still say there's something fishy here! This whole thing smells like a Leland Hale trick! I know that crook, and this is one of his jobs! But where is he? What did he do? What happened?"

"Can I go now?" asked the prisoner coolly.

It was an hour later that they released him. Whitter insisted that he be followed, but he managed to shake the tail inside of forty-five minutes. Half an hour after that, he was at the door of the wall that surrounded the home of Mr. Ollicham.

"I am here, Mr. Ollicham," he said.

"So I see, Evrit," came the whispery voice. "How did it work out?"

"Well enough, sir," said Evrit, "but there are a few things that puzzled me."

"Well, come in and tell me about them," said the voice. Then there was a chuckle. "But I must say that our young friend Hale certainly got the worst of the bargain. A paltry ten million for two kilograms of dynodine. Hah! But come in, come in, and report in full."

"Yes, sir," said Evrit, as he stepped through the door.

Leland Hale, by this time, was many parsecs away. He had left on the *William Logan* while Evrit had decoyed the police away by assuming the disguise of "A. L. DeHallen". By the time the IP realized what had happened, he would have landed on Sykk III and be gone again in his own private ship. He had ten million stellors in cash stashed away in his briefcase, and three kilos of dynodine had been dumped after he'd sold two of them. It had been a shame that he couldn't sell them, but five kil-

grams would have glutted the market on Giffer, and there was no way to get the rest off the planet. Besides, Leland Hale was not the type to repeat himself. He considered it sloppy technique.

He grinned to himself as he thought of the shock old Granny-Ollicham would be getting in a few days.

"Mr. Ollicham! Please! Control yourself!" said Evrit.

"Control myself!" screeched the ancient. "How can you control yourself? Do you see what he's done? He's ruined me! Don't you read the newsfacs? Don't you hear with your ears?"

"Please, sir; your blood pressure!"

"Space take my blood pressure! That young fiend! Do you see what he did? He found out that that company on Sykk III actually *had* discovered a method of synthesizing dy-

nodine! They gave him a five kilo sample to bring here just to prove to Worldwide that they could do it! The contract was legitimate! Look at that newsfac! Look at it! Worldwide has announced that they can synthesize dynodine at a cost of one steller per kilogram! They can cure any addict for practically nothing! The bottom has dropped out of the market! Ten million stellors down the drain! He stole it!

"Damn him! *Damn him! Damn him!* He told the *truth!*" the old voice rose to a high shriek. "*He stole my—*"

Then the voice cracked suddenly, and the ancient figure slumped in the chair.

Evrit ran over quickly. "Mr. Ollicham! Mr. Ollicham! Is something wrong? Speak to me!"

But Mr. Ollicham never spoke nor moved again.