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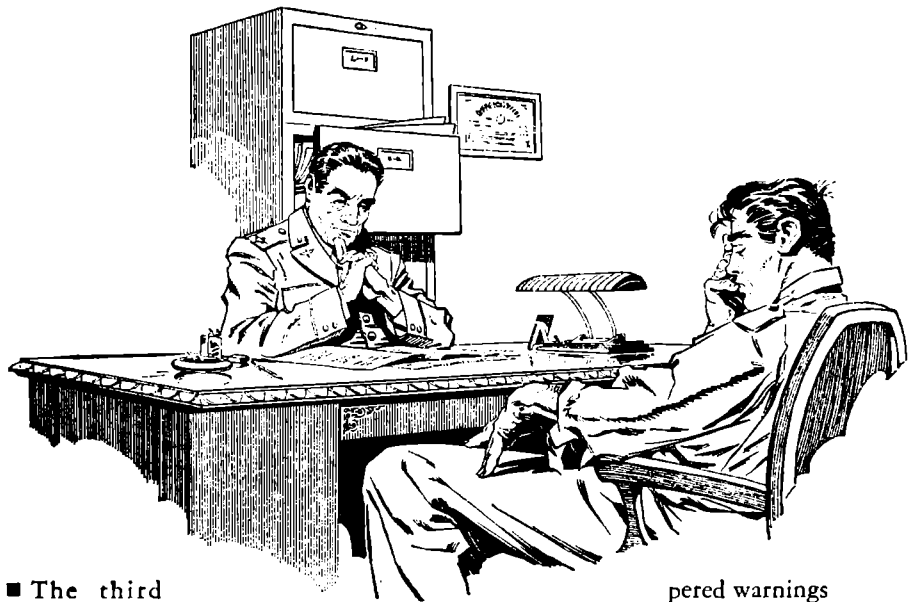


**BY DON
WESTLAKE**

LOOK

before you leap

Want a man with his heart on the right-hand side?
A left-handed red-head with one blue and one
brown eye? If you just check carefully enough
millions of men, you can expect to find
almost any anomaly you want...



■ The third day of bivouac Jeremy got so scared he went home. Just like that. And *that* scared him so much, he went right back. And then he spent a few days thinking about it.

Jeremy *knew* that it had been an hallucination. They were on bivouac, on night problem, with the tear gas bombs bursting in air, and everybody whispering, "Gas!", and the concealed Tactical Instructors having fun with rifle shots and flares and things that went bump in the night. Jeremy was one of a long line of basic trainees crawling through a pitch-black dry drainage pipe, the curved roughness of the pipe magnifying the sounds from outside. A couple of TI's had dropped tear gas bombs at either end of the pipe, and the whis-

pered warnings —"Gas!"—had echoed forward and back toward Jeremy, in the middle of the pipe.

By this time, Jeremy was just about as frightened as he could possibly be anyway. And then he heard the whispers, and he pulled off his fatigue cap with one hand, and his glasses with the other hand, and that didn't leave any hands for the gas mask.

He skittered frantically, all crouched and cramped in the pipe, trying to hold cap and glasses in one hand and put the gas mask on with two hands, and it was pitch-black so he couldn't see a thing, and then he dropped the gas mask, and couldn't find it.

And the first whiff of tear gas reached him.

And he could *feel* the young terror of all the other basic trainees in the pipe, reduced to harried sewer-crawling by a world they never made.

One second, there he was in the pipe, his heart pounding like a jack hammer. The next second, he was huddled over on hands and knees atop his own bed at home. The bedroom door was open, and soft light filtered up from the living room downstairs, and he could recognize his room, his bed, his desk, the full-length mirror on the closet door, the painting of a collie hanging on the wall over the bureau. *I'm crazy!* he thought wildly.

And the next second, he was back in the pipe in the miserable dark, hands fumbling for the gas mask. He found it, and got it on at last, and the people behind him were pushing and swearing. He crawled through the pipe and ran with the rest.

Colonel Brice stood on the road across the ravine, watching the scurrying basic trainees down below, and wondering whether there'd be one in this group or not. He watched the TI's drop their tear gas bombs down toward the entrances of the drainage pipe, listened to the crash and boom of the combat simulation from up and down the length of the ravine, and he hoped there would be one. There wasn't any reason for this, otherwise.

He wondered how much longer he could fight modernization on this front. He had the older staff officers

on his side, of course; none of them would ever really believe in their heart of hearts that the every-man-a-rifleman-first concept was obsolete now. But there were younger men coming up, men who realized that this week of bivouac was a farce, that its only result was to terrify, anger, and occasionally maim the basic trainees. The vast majority of Air Force enlisted men were going to be clerks or technicians, in support of the airplanes and missiles which were the actual combat arm. Besides, reducing the sixteen weeks of Army basic training to a five-day bivouac was, at the least, overly optimistic.

Thank heaven, the colonel thought, *for the military mind. Or is that a contradiction in terms?* But, at any rate, as long as the military mind retains its basic qualities of blind unadaptability, every single enlisted man in the Air Force would go through this bivouac: Colonel Brice's field experiment.

And if they phase out the bivouac, he thought, *I'll just have to find some other way to screen these people.*

The colonel looked up at the control shack just in time to see the door open and Ed Clark stick his head out to speak to the runner.

They've found someone! he thought, and started for the control shack, not waiting for the runner to come down to him. Behind him, the TI's with the tear gas bombs looked after him, and then glanced at one another and shrugged. Neither of them knew where Colonel Brice fit into the general scheme of things.

No one seemed to know. But he was always there, every week, every Wednesday night, to watch the night problem.

The runner met the colonel halfway up the slope. "Mr. Clark wants to see you, sir," he said.

"I know," said the colonel. "Thank you."

"Yes, sir."

The colonel held in the smile he felt tugging at his lips. The runner was so frankly curious. Only three people on this base were allowed into the control shack, or knew what went on in there. The colonel himself, and Ed Clark, and Paul Swanson. Not even Lieutenant general Poole, the base commander, knew anything about the colonel and his two assistants, and not even he was allowed inside the control shack, a fact which pleased the good general not at all.

There was no way to open the door from the outside. The colonel knocked, and Ed Clark pushed the door open for him. "Come on in, sir," he said. "We've got a real dilly this time."

The colonel stepped into the shack and closed the door, glancing at Clark and Paul Swanson, seated over by the TV screen.

The three men were of decided types. Colonel James Brice, tall and lean in his blue uniform, was square-jawed and thin-lipped, his brown eyes deep set beneath shaggy brows, his gray hair cropped close to his skull. Before the Second World War, he had been an anthropologist, associated with a New England univer-

sity. He had learned to fly a plane, since there were some areas of the world which could be reached by no other kind of vehicle, and when the war had come along he had wound up in the Army Air Corps. He had stayed in the service, switching over to the new-born Air Force in 1947, and settled into Intelligence in 1949.

Ed Clark was twenty-six and looked ten years younger. His boyish, cheerful face was topped by pale blond hair in the inevitable crewcut. He was tall and slender, looking exactly like a first-string center on a high school basketball team. He was wearing tan slacks and a short-sleeved white shirt, open at the collar. He and Paul Swanson were both enlisted men, and took the prerogative given Intelligence personnel to wear civilian clothing. The base finance officer was the only individual on the base outside this room who knew their ranks. They sirred only Colonel Brice, and were called Mister by both enlisted men and officers on the base.

Paul Swanson was short and wiry, black-haired and full-lipped. He was twenty-three, and looked five years older. He came originally from New York City, and no one could have mistaken his place of origin. Dressed now in black trousers and a pale-green shirt, he glumly watched the dim figures moving across the television screen, piped up from the infra-red camera concealed in the drainage pipe down at the ravine.

The colonel looked at the TV

screen for a second, then looked back at Ed Clark. "What is it this time?" he asked.

"I'm not sure," Clark admitted. "We did get a picture of him, though, so we'll be able to identify him."

"Well, what did he *do*?" asked the colonel.

It was Paul Swanson who answered. "He disappeared."

"He did what?"

"It was just for a second," Swanson went on. "I almost missed it, it was so fast. But he just up and disappeared. And then, a second later, he came right back again."

"Disappeared," mused the colonel. "Invisibility? *That* one I don't go for. You don't just suddenly change your entire body chemistry to glass."

"He did it," said Swanson simply.

"He learned it in the Orient," suggested Clark. "The mysterious power to cloud men's minds."

"Cloud men's minds, maybe," said the colonel. "Cloud an infra-red television camera, never. Particularly when you don't know it's there."

"Maybe he did," said Swanson.

"A telepath?" The colonel brightened. If that's what it is, at last—but why the disappearing act?" He turned to Swanson. "What was his reaction to it? How did he act after he'd done it? Guilty, pleased with himself, or what?"

"Scared to death," said Swanson. "I don't think he'd planned on doing it. He just got rattled, and did it."

"So what do we do now?" asked Clark.

"Sit and wait," said the colonel.

"Identify him, and keep an eye on him. But there's no sense approaching him until we find out exactly what it is he's doing and what his attitude toward it all is." The colonel glanced at the TV screen again. The basic trainees were still crawling hurriedly through the drainage pipe, the line pausing intermittently to hurriedly don gas masks and then crawl on.

"He disappeared," said the colonel softly, and shook his head.

It wasn't until the next day that things slowed down enough for Jeremy to think about what had happened in the drainage pipe. That afternoon, he sat on the sunlit grass with the rest of the basic trainees in his flight, and listened to a man in pressed fatigues explain the principles of the carbine.

Then he had time to think. And to get scared all over again.

It had been an hallucination. It *must* have been an hallucination, there was no other way to explain it.

He worried and fretted and chewed his thumb-knuckle all afternoon, and by nightfall he had himself convinced. Never mind the clarity and reality of that scene, the feel of the texture of the bedspread beneath his hands, or how accurately he had seen himself reflected in the closet mirror. Home was seven hundred miles away.

He had *not* gone home. It had been an hallucination.

He convinced himself at last, and

for three days he stayed convinced. And then he got the letter from his mother.

The letter itself was simply one of the newsy, chatty notes he had come to expect from his mother in his seven weeks in the Air Force. But one sentence in it stood out as though it were written in fire.

The sentence concerned Jeremy's dog, Andrew. "*I thought at last we'd broken Andrew of the habit of sleeping on your bed.*" his mother wrote, "*but last night he did it again, leaving muddy marks all over the bedspread. He was gone, of course, by the time I got there.*"

Two days later, bivouac being over and the flight back at the barracks, Jeremy went on sick call. To the man-with-clipboard who marched the sick call group to the infirmary, he said, "I'm having hallucinations." To the white-garbed medic who questioned him at the infirmary, he said, "I'm having hallucinations." To the sour-looking doctor who got around to him at ten o'clock, he said, "I'm having hallucinations."

The doctor looked a little more sour. "What sort of hallucinations?" he wanted to know. "Girls, or pink elephants?"

"Neither." And Jeremy told him what had happened, and showed him the letter from his mother.

The doctor was looking increasingly sour. "What else?" he demanded.

"That's all."

"You said hallucinations."

"Just the one," said Jeremy. "Just that one."

The doctor glowered at the letter from Jeremy's mother, and then glowered at Jeremy. "You wouldn't be malingering, would you?" he demanded.

"No, sir," said Jeremy. He was getting scared again—basic training was a good place to learn how to be scared—and he was devoting a lot of time to trying to cover it. If the doctor thought he were scared, he would think it was because Jeremy was guilty of something. Like malingering, which meant goofing off by faking sickness, and which could result in a court-martial.

"You wouldn't be," continued the doctor, glowering more than ever, "angling for a section eight, would you? You figure you'd rather be a nut than an airman, is that it?"

"No, sir," said Jeremy.

The doctor dropped the letter on his desk where Jeremy could reach it, and leaned back. "I don't know what you want from me," he said. "You aren't physically sick. You say you had this one hallucination five days ago, and now here you are on sick call. What do you want *me* to do about it?"

"I keep worrying," Jeremy told him. "I keep thinking as though it really happened. I can't think about anything else."

The doctor sighed, looked sour, shook his head. "There's nothing I can do," he said. "Forget it. If it was an hallucination, so what? It's all

over, and it didn't come back. So forget about it."

"That's why I'm here, sir," said Jeremy. "I *can't* forget about it."

"You want to see a psychiatrist, is that it?" The doctor's tone showed clearly that this proved his earlier suspicions, that Jeremy was a faker trying to get a section eight, hoping to get an insanity discharge.

Jeremy almost said no. He didn't want anybody to think he was a malingerer or a fake. He didn't want anybody to think that he would try to lie his way out of the Air Force.

But the memory of the last five days was too strong in him. He'd been sleeping poorly, he hadn't been able to concentrate on anything, his marching had deteriorated to worse than what it had been his very first day in basic training, he was goofing up on inspection, he was generally confused and miserable over this thing. So he nodded and said, "Yes, sir, I guess so."

The doctor sighed. "All right, airman," he said heavily. He made a brief note in Jeremy's medical record, and wrote something else on a small sheet of paper which he clipped to the record folder. "You come on sick call Thursday morning," he said. "Go on back to your flight now."

"Yes, sir," said Jeremy. He got to his feet. "Thank you, sir."

The doctor mumbled, and looked sour.

The chief surgeon was being diffi-

cult. He, too, was a bird colonel—just recently having received his eagles, from the obvious pleasure he took in making life difficult for another officer of equal rank—and he saw no reason why he should do what Colonel Brice wanted. "Medical records," he said pompously, "are classified material. Authorized personnel only. I'm afraid I'll have to know your reason for wanting to see this man's records, and also your request will most definitely have to come through the proper channels. You must know, Colonel Brice, the proper procedure for—"

"Ketchup," said the colonel, disgusted. Since his two boys had grown old enough to understand and imitate the vocabulary of their elders, this had become the colonel's one swear word, and it was usually disconcerting to other people the first time they heard him use it.

It was disconcerting to the chief surgeon. "I beg your pardon?"

"Where's your hot line?" demanded the colonel.

"Well, really, Colonel, it requires an emergency of—"

"Ketchup," said the colonel again. He came around the chief surgeon's desk and, over that astonished gentleman's protests, proceeded to open desk drawers.

The bright red phone was in the bottom drawer on the right-hand side. The colonel picked it up, waited a second, and then said, "Brice. For Corey." He waited a few seconds more, and then said, "Jack? I'm fine. I want some records and—Right you

are." Deadpan, he handed the receiver to the chief surgeon.

The chief surgeon, bug-eyed, put the phone to his ear and announced his name and rank. Then he listened, nodded vacantly, said, "Of course, sir. Certainly, sir," and put the receiver gently back onto its cradle. He closed the door, and in a chastened voice said, "I had no idea—"

"That's all right, Colonel. Now, if I could have the medical records—"

"Of course. Certainly. Immediately."

It took, as a matter of fact, just about ten minutes for the records to get into Colonel Brice's hands. Then the colonel, at his request, was given an empty office where he and Clark and Swanson could look them over at leisure.

They already knew quite a bit about their man: Jeremy Masters, Airman Basic, AF12451995; twenty years, five months and twelve days old; born in Crane City, Pennsylvania; lived there all his life until he went away to attend a small liberal arts college at Marshall, in the same state; two years of college, average grades; enlistment in the Air Force; score of 73 on the Armed Forces Qualification Test. Stanine scores ranging between six and eight, with a nine on clerical; negative police check; a class one physical profile on everything except eyes, where he had a two, being somewhat nearsighted; no known subversive activities, and made no sports teams in high school or college; studied trumpet four years, not very good at it.

And now they learned one thing more. What the disappearance act meant.

"He went home," said Clark softly, wonderingly. "He up and went home."

The colonel nodded. "I've been waiting for a telepath," he said. "And I guess I'm still waiting for one. But it looks as though I've finally got hold of a real live teleport."

"He refuses to believe it," said Swanson. He tapped the doctor's scrawled notation on Jeremy Masters' medical record. "He's talked himself into thinking it was an hallucination, you notice?"

"Just wait till we tell him different," said Clark.

"No," said the colonel.

The other two looked at him, questioning. "You aren't going to tell him?" asked Clark.

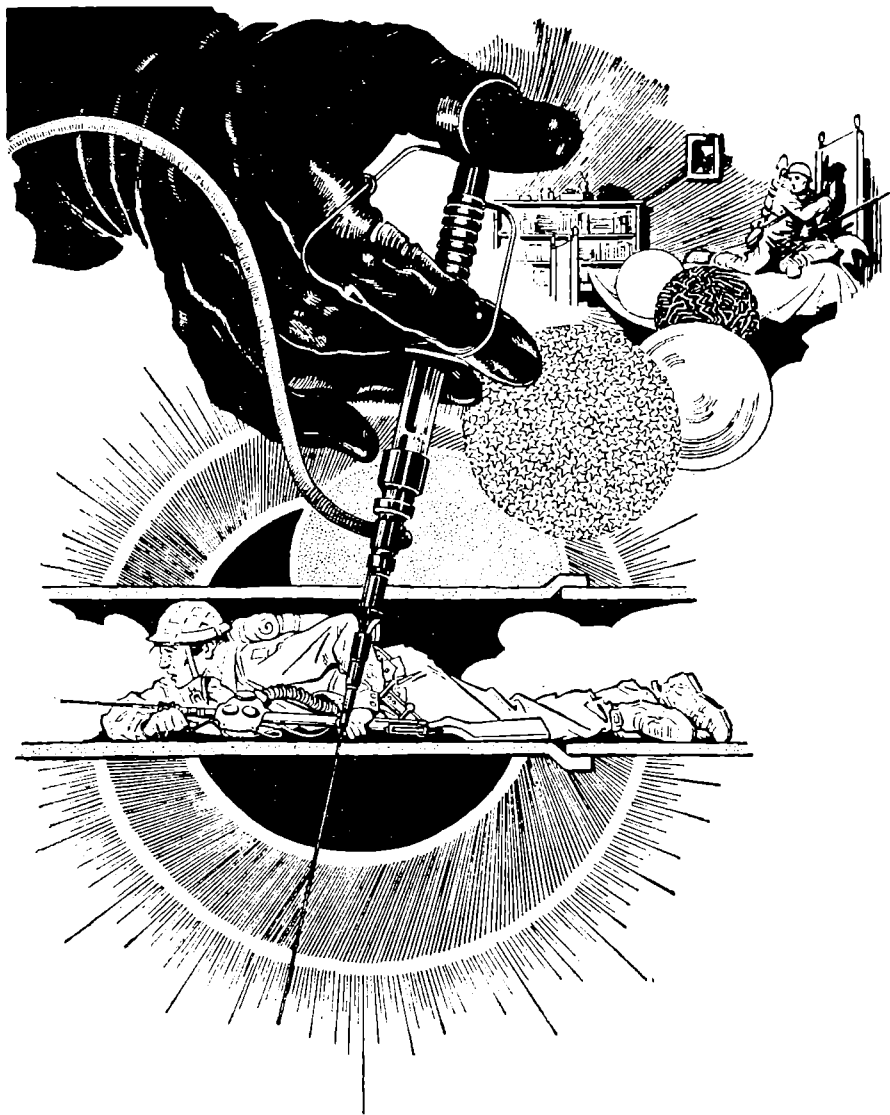
The colonel shook his head.

"Why not?"

"However he managed to do it," explained the colonel, "he's managed now to get rid of the knowledge. It won't do any good to just go to him and tell him he really did teleport after all. He won't believe it, to begin with. He'll think it's some sort of crazy psychological test. And even if he does believe it, so what? He obviously doesn't have any control over the ability. He's no good to us as a man who teleported once and can't remember how."

"So what do we do?" Clark asked.

The colonel closed the medical records folder. "We let nature take



its course for a while," he said. "With a nudge or two in the right direction from us."

Jeremy had seen the doctor on Monday. He had three more days of distracted incompetence to live through, with the TI calling him a yardbird and a goof-up and a few less printable things, and then it was finally Thursday, and he went back on sick call again.

This time, the white-garbed medic took his name and went away and came back and said, "You sit over there."

"Over there" was a small alcove containing three leather sofas. Four miserable looking basic trainees were already there. Jeremy joined them, and waited. There was no conversation at all among the five; they were all too full of their own frightened thoughts.

At eleven-thirty, another white-garbed medic came along. "Follow me," he said, and walked off.

Jeremy and the other four followed him out a side door. There was a truck parked there and, at the medic's brief order, they climbed up into the back. Planks were stretched benchlike across the interior. They sat down, braced themselves, and fifteen minutes later the truck jerked forward and drove out of the base.

They rode for two hours, and then they arrived at Robinson Air Force Base, on which there was a hospital. The truck bounced to a stop in front of the hospital, and the medic

came around and said, "O.K., come on out."

Jeremy and the other four clambered down from the truck.

The medic said, "Any of you guys hungry, go on to the chow hall with the driver here. If you ain't hungry, come on with me. And if you go to the chow hall, you get right back here after you eat. I'll be waiting inside by the desk."

Jeremy wasn't hungry. It was past lunchtime, but he wasn't hungry. He was too nervous to be hungry.

Apparently, all the others felt the same way. The five of them trooped into the hospital behind the medic. Another medic took over at that point and led them down an endless series of halls to an alcove almost exactly like the one they'd left two hours ago back at the infirmary, and left them sitting there.

Half an hour later, an Airman First Class with a clipboard came over and called out a name. One of the five stood up and said, "That's me, sir."

"Don't call me 'sir,'" said the Airman First Class absently. "Follow me."

Jeremy was the second one called, twenty minutes later. He remembered not to call the Airman First Class "sir," and he felt very small as he followed the man-with-clipboard down the green corridors past all the white rooms.

The psychiatrist looked like the doctor, except he had less hair. He sat on one side of the desk, and

Jeremy sat on the other, and he listened impassively as Jeremy described his hallucination. When Jeremy was finished, the psychiatrist said, "This wasn't real?"

"No, sir," said Jeremy. "I mean, how could it be? It must have been an hallucination."

"Then what's the problem?" the psychiatrist asked him. "If you *believed* it, if you really thought you'd gone home for a minute, then we'd have a problem on our hands. But if you already realize it was an hallucination, then I don't see the difficulty."

"I *know* it was an hallucination," said Jeremy. "But I can't forget it. It's as though I really believed it. I just can't get it out of my mind. It scares me."

The psychiatrist studied his fingernails. "I'll tell you frankly," he said, not looking up, "I have the feeling you're blowing this thing all out of proportion. I'm not saying you're doing it consciously, I don't know whether you are or not. But here's what I think. I think you're sorry you enlisted, and you wish you were home. I think you wish there were some way you could get out of the Air Force. So, to give you the benefit of the doubt, I think you've talked yourself into believing you had this hallucination, with some vague idea of getting a section eight."

"No, sir," started Jeremy, but the psychiatrist raised a hand for silence.

"I'll tell you the rest of what I think," he said. "I think there's the possibility you're making this whole thing up, that you're *consciously* try-

ing to wangle a section eight. That's a possibility. But I also think it's more likely that you yourself don't exactly realize what you're doing. But consider the hallucination itself. Home. You wanted to go home. You still want to go home."

"No, sir," said Jeremy. He was still frightened, but he was beginning to get a little angry, too. Seven weeks of basic training had dulled his self-respect, but hadn't totally deactivated it. This bland witch doctor was calling him a liar and a sneak. "It isn't like that at all, sir," he said.

"It isn't? Well, then, you tell me what it *is* like."

"This thing—happened," said Jeremy. "I don't know what it was. It *felt* real, it felt as though I were really home. It only lasted a second, and then I was right back again. But it felt real, and then I got that letter from my mother, and I just can't get rid of the idea that maybe it really did happen. I know it's impossible—but it *happened*."

The psychiatrist said, "Um-m-m." He studied his fingernails again. At length, he said, "You don't really want a section eight, boy. Or do you have the idea an asylum is better than the Air Force? It isn't. You're in your seventh week of basic training. You have four weeks to go. I realize basic training is rough, but it has to be, and things will calm down once you complete it. If you aren't careful, right now you can put a black mark on your record that will stay there for the rest of your life."

"Sir," said Jeremy desperately, "I

can't sleep, I can't eat, I can't concentrate on anything. I don't know what to do. I want somebody to help me."

"If I saw the problem—" started the psychiatrist. He shrugged and pursed his lips and studied his fingernails. At length, he said, "Do you know what sodium amytal is?"

"Yes, sir. A truth serum."

"Not exactly, but that's close enough. I'm thinking of giving you an injection of sodium amytal. There's either more or less to this than you're telling me. Now, if you want, you can stand up and walk out of here now and go on back to your outfit, and no questions asked. If you stay here, and under sodium amytal you tell me you're faking, you'll face court-martial action. Do you understand that?"

Jeremy nodded. "Yes, sir."

"Well? What's your decision?"

Jeremy's hands clenched in his lap. He wasn't faking, he knew he wasn't faking. He *had* seen the hallucination.

But what good would it do to convince this man he was telling the truth? The psychiatrist was right, an insane asylum was a lot worse than the Air Force.

No. It was the truth. This thing had happened, and if Jeremy didn't get some help soon, it would drive him crazy.

Then he wondered, *What kind of help do I want?*

I want someone to explain it away.

That was it, that was the core of it. No matter how much he *knew*

that it had been an hallucination, no matter how often he convinced himself of that, he still didn't believe it. Way down inside, he believed it had really happened, he had really gone home.

And that was what he wanted, somebody to shake that belief, somebody to prove to him that he was wrong, somebody to explain that hallucination away. Until that was done, he would just go on worrying about it and being frightened of it.

"I'll stay, sir," he said.

The psychiatrist said, "Um-m-m," again. He nodded, and got to his feet. "Come with me."

There was a high leather-covered cot in the next room, beside some complicated-looking apparatus. At the psychiatrist's orders, Jeremy rolled up his left sleeve and stretched out on the cot. The intravenous injection began, and the psychiatrist alternated between studying his watch and peering at Jeremy's face.

It was a strange sensation. First the prick of the needle, and then a spreading warmth and a drowsiness, and the end to worry. It was so pleasant, so pleasant to know that there was nothing to be afraid of, nothing to worry about, that nothing in all the world was really very important. He could even stop hiding the truth.

Time passed sluggishly, and when the psychiatrist spoke at last his voice was far away and muffled. "What is your name?"

It took no effort to talk. He was easy and relaxed, and he didn't care.

"Jeremy Masters," he said.

"And how old are you?"

"Twenty."

"How tall?"

"Six foot."

"Did you have an hallucination a week ago yesterday?"

Why not tell him the truth? It didn't matter. "No."

There was a pause, and then the psychiatrist said, "What's your mother's first name?"

Jeremy smiled. "Alma."

"What's your father's first name?"

"Richard."

"Why did you lie about the hallucination?"

"I was afraid to tell the truth."

"I see. And what is the truth?"

Why not? "I went home."

The pause this time was longer, and when the psychiatrist spoke again his voice was somewhat sharper. "You really went home?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I was afraid."

"How did you do it?"

Jeremy frowned, trying to concentrate. But it was too much trouble, the answer was too far down. "I don't know," he said. "I don't remember."

"Could you do it again?"

No hesitation this time. "Yes."

"Let's see you."

Jeremy thought it over, and slowly shook his head. "I can't. Not now."

"Why not?"

"You're looking at me."

"I'll turn my back."

"No. It isn't dark."

"It has to be dark?"

"Yes. And nobody seeing me. And . . . and right now I have to be scared."

"What do you mean, right now?"

"Maybe . . . maybe I'll get better. I don't know."

"I see. And have you ever done this before?"

"No."

"Then how did you know you could do it?"

"I didn't. It scared me."

"But you really did go home?"

"Yes. I really did go home."

The psychiatrist sighed, and moved around the room a bit, and then he came back and asked Jeremy some questions about girls, and whether or not he liked the Air Force (he didn't), and whether or not there was any epilepsy in his family (there wasn't). Then the psychiatrist said, "All right. You take a nap now, and I'll talk to you later." He did something with the needle that was still in Jeremy's arm, and Jeremy went to sleep.

The psychiatrist's name was Holland, and his rank was Captain. And he was very very curious. "Quite frankly," he said, "I wonder what your interest in this man is."

"Quite frankly," said the colonel, "it's none of your business. I don't mean to be overly tough with you, but I'm afraid that's the way it has to be. I'll be the one asking all the questions, and you'll be the one giving all the answers."

Captain Holland's face froze. He

had plainly decided that he didn't like this overbearing colonel very much at all. Well, that was too bad. It would be nice to be liked, but it wouldn't get much accomplished. And the colonel meant to get things accomplished.

"You gave him sodium amytal, is that right?"

Captain Holland nodded, stiffly.

"What did he say beforehand?"

"That he had had an hallucination."

"And under the narcoanalysis?"

"He admitted that he believed the delusion. That he believed he had gone home. Wish-fulfillment, nothing more."

"It's a little early for an analysis," said the colonel. He got to his feet and paced the floor, ignoring the cold gaze of the captain. At length, he said, "What do you plan to do with him?"

"Send him back to his outfit," said the captain. "This is only a temporary thing. Given other things to think about, it'll wear off."

"No," said the colonel.

"What's that?"

"You'll send him to the hospital at Dover," said the colonel. "For observation and treatment."

"But . . . but that's absurd. He doesn't need observation and treatment, all he needs is a few days to forget all this."

"It could be," said the colonel, "that I don't want him to forget it."

"Sir," said the captain stiffly, "my first duty is to my patient. I must strongly protest any attempt to make this delusion seem overly important to him. We could blow it up now to

the point where there would be—"

"Your first duty," cut in the colonel, "is to the Air Force, and through the Air Force to your country."

"I don't see how badgering a poor airman basic is going to be of any advantage at all to either the Air Force or the nation."

"You don't have to see that, Captain. All you have to do is take my word for it."

"I assure you, sir, that I fully intend to protest this action of yours—"

"Ketchup!" snorted the colonel. "Protest all you want."

"In all my years in the service—"

"You still haven't learned to obey orders. Now, listen to me. This is important. You are to tell that boy that he is being sent to another hospital for observation. You are not to mention me at all, and you are not to tell him your own personal feelings on the subject."

"Until I have a direct order from the surgeon general," said the captain hotly, "I have no intention of so mishandling a simple case like—"

"You *have* a direct order, Captain. From me."

The office door opened, and Ed Clark stuck his head in. "The plane's ready, Colonel," he said.

"Fine." The colonel started for the door, and paused to look back at the captain. "This is important, Captain," he said, "vitaly important. You can be sure I'm not making myself difficult for the fun of it."

"Yes, sir," said the captain grimly.

"Thank you," said the colonel, "for your co-operation."

Jeremy woke up starving. The light seeping through the closed Venetian blinds over the room's one window was tinged with red, so it must be late afternoon.

He sat up and swung his legs over the side of the cot. He felt refreshed, but dizzy.

And then he remembered the questions, and his own answers, and his hands clutched the leather covering of the cot as he stared across the room.

He believed it. He couldn't kid himself any more, he couldn't try to convince himself any more that it was just an hallucination. He believed it, he knew it, and so did the psychiatrist.

He shouldn't have come here. He should have hidden it, held it down, learned to live with it. Because now the psychiatrist knew, and the psychiatrist could come to only one conclusion.

That Jeremy Masters was crazy.

Maybe I am, he thought. *Maybe I really am.*

The door opened, and the psychiatrist looked in. "Ah," he said, with false joviality, "you're awake. And I imagine you're hungry. You woke up just in time for dinner. Come along."

The psychiatrist was angry about something, Jeremy could *feel* it, but he was too worried about himself to pay any attention to the feeling. "I told you, didn't I?" he said.

"Yes, you did."

"Am I crazy?"

The psychiatrist looked away.

"No," he said. He started to say something, then obviously changed his mind and said instead, "There's an ambivalence there. You believe that this hallucination was real, and yet you understand that such a belief is a symptom of mental imbalance. You haven't been completely captured by the illusion. I don't think it will take too long to straighten you out."

"Will I be staying in the hospital here?"

The psychiatrist made an angry gesture. "Only till tomorrow," he said. "Then you'll be going to another hospital."

"An asylum?"

"No. Another Air Force hospital. For . . . for observation, that's all."

"I see," said Jeremy hopelessly.

The false joviality was back. "Don't worry about it," the psychiatrist said. "You *want* to be cured, and that's half the battle."

The next half hour was a confusing one for Jeremy. The psychiatrist turned him over to a man-with-clipboard, who turned him over to a starched smiling nurse, who traded him a set of blue-gray hospital pajamas for his uniform fatigues, and who then turned him over to another patient, a lanky buck-toothed grinner named Bob, who took him away to the hospital chow hall for dinner.

And all through that half hour, and all through dinner, and all through the long bright evening in the eight-man ward where he was to sleep that night, he kept remembering what the psychiatrist had said.



"You WANT to be cured, and that's half the battle."

If he had traveled seven hundred miles in one split second—if he had traveled seven hundred miles in one

split second—
did he want to be cured?

The next day, a different starched nurse gave him back his uniform, and at ten hundred hours he followed yet another man-with-clipboard to a bus, which he boarded

with nine other people. The bus was ancient, still painted the Army olive drab, and it bounced and jounced across the base to the flight line where, two hours later, the ten of them were put on a goony bird and told to fasten their safety belts. Then, after another ten minutes, the plane took off.

After seven weeks of basic training, Jeremy was used to this kind of treatment. No one told him where he was going, or how long it would take to get there, or what would happen next, or much of anything else, but that was the Air Force way. One was moved from place to place, and one simply followed and hoped for the best.

The plane ride took an hour and a half. Jeremy had time to get used to the novelty of flying in an airplane and looking out the window at the patchwork quilt below, and spent a while looking at the other passengers. Seven of them were clearly patients like himself, dressed in rumpled fatigues and looking worried but fatalistic. The last two were also in fatigues, but the fatigues were neat and pressed, and encircled at the waist by cartridge belts from which dangled holstered automatics.

Guards. Without anyone mentioning the fact, without anyone talking to him at all, he had passed progressively through the stages from basic trainee to patient to prisoner.

His depression wasn't dispelled after the plane landed. The guards herded the seven onto another bus, and they were driven to a gray stucco

building with bars on the windows of all five floors.

And the next two days were routine. The routine, that is, that Jeremy had come to expect from the Air Force. There was the checking out of pajamas and bedding, there was the assignment to a ward, there was the filling out of innumerable forms, there was the lecture by a Staff Sergeant on the degree of cleanliness to be maintained in Jeremy's "area"—that section of space-time which included his bed and bedside table in the eight-man ward—there was the bad chow hall food, and there was the hillbilly three beds away who owned a small radio which was at all times tuned in to Wheeling, West Virginia.

On the third day, there was another psychiatrist, a major named Grildquist. Major Grildquist was a fat bald man in a rumpled uniform. He smiled at all times, and his eyes were ice-blue and watchful.

The first interview with Major Grildquist was exactly like the interview with the psychiatrist at the other hospital. There were the questions and the answers, and then the sodium amytal and more questions and answers. And then he was sent back to the ward.

He lay miserable in the bed, listening unwillingly to Wheeling, West Virginia, and wondering what was going to become of him.

He should have kept it to himself. It was too late now, and now he knew it. He should have kept it to himself.

The four of them were sitting around the living room of Colonel Brice's suite in the BOQ, drinking beer and talking things over. Colonel Brice paced the floor, caged and impatient. Ed Clark sat on the arm of the sofa, happily eager. Paul Swanson sat slumped on the sofa, apparently bored and half-asleep. And Major Grildquist sat on the edge of his chair, his round face open and excited.

"Teleportation!" exclaimed the major. "That was the one I was willing to bet we'd never find, and, by golly, here's one right here!"

"I wanted a telepath," said the colonel grumpily. Inaction always made him grouchy, even when he understood the need for inaction, for waiting-and-seeing. "I *need* a telepath," he went on. "Somebody to dig down into the bottom of that fool boy's mind and find out what makes him tick. He doesn't understand the thing himself; he's devoting all his energies to denying it ever happened."

"A natural reaction," said the major complacently. "He'll get over it. Once he understands that it really did happen to him, and that it's an ability we can use—"

"That's just it," snapped the colonel. He stopped his pacing to glower at Major Grildquist. "Once he understands. But how are we going to get him to understand?"

"We could tell him," suggested Paul Swanson.

"No. He wouldn't believe it, and

he wouldn't be any closer to finding out just how he managed to do it in the first place. We've got to *force* it out of him. We've got to find some way to force him into such a position that he'll *have* to use that talent of his again. We've got to force him to believe in himself, and then we've got to force him to understand himself."

"It isn't going to be all that easy," suggested the major.

"I don't care whether it's easy or not," the colonel told him. "I just want it done. And it's your job to do it."

The major nodded, unruffled. He'd known Jim Brice for twelve years. He understood that the colonel's abruptness wasn't so much the result of a nasty personality as it was the result of his single-minded desire to get the job done. The major realized that no offense was intended, and so no offense was taken.

"I'll do the job," he told the colonel. "Or at least I'll take a healthy stab at it."

"A healthy stab isn't enough. I want that boy's ability out on the surface, where I can get some use out of it."

"You talk as though you owned him," the major chided gently.

"I do," said the colonel. "I own his ability, at any rate. Or I will, once you dig it out for me."

"Own it?"

"I'll get the use of it," said the colonel. "I can't teleport myself, but I don't have to, not if I have someone else who can do it for me. I'll get the

use of his ability, and what's that if it isn't ownership?"

"If I didn't know you better," the major said, "I'd think you were power-mad."

"Not power-mad. Power-hungry. That I am. I have a job to do, and a tricky job, and I need all the power I can get, in order to do that job. And I need the power locked up in that boy's mind."

"Us slaves do O.K.," said Ed Clark, grinning.

"I own *his* ability," said the colonel, pointing at Ed. "I get to use it through him, and he doesn't feel as though I'm some sort of evil mastermind. Do you, Ed?"

"Sure I do," said Clark, the grin even broader than before. "But it's worth it, to get to wear civvies and eat in the BOQ."

"It's a pity," said the colonel, "that brains and psi-talent don't always go together."

"Simple Simon met a psi-man," said Clark.

Paul Swanson spoke up for the first time. "Simple Simon *was* a psi-man," he said. He looked at Clark. "Hi, Simon."

"Knock it off," said the colonel. He looked back at the major. "What do you intend to do with this boy?"

"Run him through the mill," said Grildquist. "Give him the hurry-up-and-wait routine, and wait for him to realize he's on the treadmill. He isn't going to cough up that ability you want until he realizes it's the only way he's going to get off the treadmill."

"How long?" demanded the colonel.

The major shrugged. "A finite time," he said. "If I try to rush him too fast, he's liable to react in the opposite direction, shove the whole thing so far down into the subconscious we'll *never* get it out."

"I want that boy," said the colonel grimly.

"Patience, Jim," said the major. "Patience. I'll give him to you on a silver platter."

After that first interview with the new psychiatrist, Major Grildquist, Jeremy was completely ignored for three days. He spent most of his time in the floor dayroom, playing Ping-pong or pinochle with other patients, reading old magazines, and writing reassuring letters to his parents. He didn't want them to know yet what had happened to him, so he told them he'd caught a flu bug of some kind, it was nothing serious, but he'd probably be in the hospital for a few days.

And he waited for the psychiatrists to cure him. He wanted to be cured, and the other psychiatrist had said that that was half the battle.

But nothing happened. He waited, and waited, and waited, and nothing happened.

Until the afternoon of the fourth day. Then he was transferred from the eight-man ward to a single room.

By this time, he knew the hospital scuttlebutt. A man in a ward was relatively healthy, and could expect

either to be discharged from the service on a medical, or be returned to duty in a short time.

But a man in a single room wasn't healthy at all. A man in a single room could expect either to stay there for a long while or get a section eight discharge and be transferred to a Veterans Administration hospital.

The room he was transferred to was small, squarish, pale gray and Spartan. An army cot, with blue Air Force blankets, a metal bureau, and a metal armless chair with upholstered seat, was all the furniture in the room. There was an ashtray atop the bureau, and he was allowed to smoke.

He did so. He paced the floor, and smoked, and worried, and tried to get this whole thing straightened out in his mind.

He was in a hospital, and he was clearly one step from an insane asylum. And yet he was the same person he'd been all his life, with the same attitudes and memories and beliefs. He hadn't suddenly started seeing little green men or believing that he was being persecuted, he hadn't gone raging around with a knife, or gone around setting buildings on fire. He hadn't retreated into an unreachable corner of his brain, and he hadn't developed a second personality, and he hadn't started believing he was the lost heir to the Tasmanian throne, having been stolen as an infant by gypsies.

He was one short step from an insane asylum, and he had given none

of the indications of insanity that he had ever heard of or could possibly recognize. So, why was he one step from an insane asylum?

Because he had traveled seven hundred miles in much less than a second. He had done it twice, once going and once coming. He hadn't intended to do it, he didn't know how he had managed to do it, and he fervently wished he'd never done it. But it had happened, and he remembered it and believed his memory, and that's why he was moving slowly but steadily toward an insane asylum.

Teleportation. That was the word. There was, at least, a word for it, even though nobody believed in it, just as there was a word for luck even though nobody really believed in the powers of luck good or bad, and just as there had been a word for space-ship long before people believed that things like sputniks and moon shots were really possible.

Now, here was the crux of the matter. Was teleportation a thing like luck, something that nobody believed in with just cause. In other words, had he teleported himself home and back, or was he nuts?

He paced the floor and smoked, paced the floor and smoked, and tried to work it all out to a sensible conclusion. He already knew all the arguments in favor of his having teleported—the absolute reality of the second spent at home, the letter from his mother, his own conviction—and now he listed against them the

arguments in favor of delusion and madness.

First, and most obvious, where had this mysterious talent suddenly come from? If he'd teleported, why didn't he know *how* he'd done it, and why couldn't he do it again? For that matter, why hadn't he done it before? If it required fear, he'd been afraid before in his life. The time out hiking as a Boy Scout, for instance, when he'd almost fallen over a cliff. The night he was in the car with Steve Chalmers and a couple of other guys, and Steve was high as a kite, and drove so madly down that mountain road toward town. Lots of times. If he could do it at all, why hadn't he done it long ago, and why couldn't he do it again now?"

Second, if he had really gone home, why hadn't he stayed there? Admitted, at that particular moment, in that drainage pipe, he had wished more than anything in the world to be safe at home, but if he had really succeeded in fulfilling that desire, why had he come right back?

Third, if he was going to go around thinking he was unique, some sort of superman with strange powers possessed by no one but himself, then he *was* a candidate for the twitch factory, and no questions asked. If he had the power to teleport, that must almost inevitably mean that *other* people had the power to teleport. Why hadn't they? After thousands of years of recorded history, why hadn't somebody somewhere along the line proved that teleportation was not a thing like luck?

Those were the three arguments, and when he lined them up against his own shaky conviction, the reality of a memory lasting just about one second, and an ambiguous sentence in a letter from his mother, the arguments against seemed pretty strong and the arguments for seemed pretty weak.

He lit a new cigarette from the butt of the old, and paced the floor some more. Never mind trying to bolster the arguments for, that wouldn't get anywhere. He had to forget for a few minutes that he was worried and afraid and that he hadn't the vaguest idea what the future held in store for him, and he had to concentrate on this problem just as calmly and logically as he could. The time had come to look for holes in the arguments against.

Number one, why hadn't he done it before? The only possibility was that it had required a certain narrow set of conditions before the ability could express itself. What, then, were the conditions?

Well, it had been dark, pitch-black, it hadn't been possible for him to see the rims of his glasses while he was wearing them. And he had been in a confined space. And he had been in a stress situation, feeling frantic, feeling that all was hopeless, and desiring more strongly than ever before in his life to be somewhere else. Some *specific* where else.

The first psychiatrist had asked him if he could teleport again. In his narcosynthesized condition he had

answered no, and had given two reasons: He wasn't alone, and there was no pressing need to go anywhere else.

All right, then. It required at least some but probably all of the conditions he'd just outlined. And could he honestly say that he had ever before in his life been in a situation with all of those conditions simultaneously present?

No, he couldn't.

Then that was why he'd never done it before.

And had there been, since then, any other time when all of those conditions had been simultaneously present?

No, there had not been.

Then that was why he hadn't done it again.

On to number two. If he had really gone home, why had he come right back? He tried to remember back to that second at home, tried to remember what his feelings and thoughts had been in the flash before returning to the point of departure.

He had been frightened. He had been *really* frightened that time, and he'd had every right to be. Sure, if he'd *planned* to teleport himself home, and he had then done it, he might simply have strolled on downstairs and said, "Hi, folks, I'm home."

But he hadn't planned it. And having the world suddenly shift seven hundred miles beneath you, without expecting it, is pretty shocking. The mind rejects the whole idea. The mind says, "This isn't happening!" The mind says, "Go back! This isn't

possible! This is madness and chaos and death!" And you jump right back again.

And *that* was why he hadn't stayed home. He'd been too shocked and terrified at being there. He had probably snapped back just in time to avoid either a heart attack or the loss of his mind.

And that left argument number three. If he could do it, why couldn't other people do it?

Well, let's narrow it down. Maybe *some* people can do it, just as some people can carry a tune and some people have 20-20 vision and some people can multiply four digit figures by three digit figures in their heads.

He could narrow it down, but that didn't help much. He could say that it was also, aside from being an occasional characteristic rather than an inevitable characteristic, one which developed with maturity. That was another possible reason for his never having done it before, but no matter how much he narrowed and hedged, it wasn't going to do much good unless he narrowed it all the way down to one, unless he drew a line with himself on one side and the whole human race on the other.

And then he remembered his Aunt Sara and his Uncle Fred, on his mother's side. Eight years ago, Uncle Fred was killed in an airplane accident out in California, on the western slope of one of the Rockies. The day after that, when the news came,

Aunt Sara, a kindly church-going old lady in her early sixties, insisted that she had had a premonition. Last night, she told anyone who would listen, at almost precisely the same time that poor Uncle Fred was dying against that mountainside, she swore she saw him standing in the kitchen, right next to the refrigerator. She had been in the living room, watching the television, in that mohair chair by the radiator, where she could look straight down the hall to the kitchen, and she swore she saw him standing there. And—the way she later told it—she'd said, "Why, Fred, what are you doing home so early?" And he was gone.

Of course, nobody had believed Aunt Sara. She kept on telling the story right up to the day of her death, a little over a year ago, and everybody just classed it as Aunt Sara's one lapse into mysticism, brought on by the death of Uncle Fred, and let it go at that.

Jeremy had told the story himself once, just once, and not with any belief in it. It was two years ago, when he'd been a freshman in college. He and a bunch of the other guys in the dorm were together having a bull session, and the conversation had gotten around to ghosts and voodoo and seances and mysticism in general. All of them, being college freshmen, had the world completely figured out, and to a man they put down all that mystical nonsense as a lot of mystical nonsense. They took turns telling stories they'd heard, about phony mediums and voodoo dolls and what-

not, and Jeremy added as his contribution the story of his Aunt Sara and his Uncle Fred. Aunt Sara was still alive then, and his telling of the story was rather sarcastic and not at all kind to the old lady.

Once he'd told the story, another freshman assured him pompously that what he had just described was "a very common phenomenon, especially in wartime." It seemed that the appearance of a loved one at just around the same moment when, it was later learned, that loved one was being killed in an enemy attack or a mine cave-in or an automobile accident, was one of the old standby situations of the believers in mysticism. It was even more common in mystical lore than the appearance of a long-dead relative. And it was, of course, all nonsense, easily explained by psychology.

Everything was easily explained by psychology, Jeremy realized now. Once you accepted the basic postulate that the mind could play tricks on a person, suddenly and without apparent reason, you could explain away just about anything that ever happened to anybody. You could prove to a man that the *Earth* was made of green cheese, if you first got him to accept the basic postulates of psychology.

Jeremy had believed the easy explanation of freshman psychology at the time. But now he'd been on the other end of that sort of visitation, and the easy explanations of psychology had a lot less appeal for him.

Because there was another explanation, one that didn't require labeling nice down-to-earth old ladies as sudden crackpots.

Say that the ability to teleport was present to a greater or lesser degree in all men, just as memory is present to a greater or lesser degree in all men. There are some men with photographic memories, who can remember every word of a seven hundred page chemistry text six months after reading it once. And there are some men who can never remember a telephone number or an appointment or a birthday or what they did with the other cuff link.

Say the ability to teleport was present in men in just as wide a range as the ability to remember. And say that that ability is so buried in the mind that it is almost unreachable. And the people who have the ability to the greatest degree—comparable to the people with total recall—even those people can't tap the ability until they get into a one hundred per cent frantic stress situation.

All right. Call these people with the greatest degree of teleporting ability *latents*. Say Uncle Fred was a latent teleport. He's sitting in the airplane, probably in a seat toward the rear of the plane, and suddenly the plane bucks and dips and dives straight for the mountain—he can look out the window and see that the right-hand wing has sheared off—and for the first time in his life he's in a situation desperate enough to reach all the way down to the teleporting ability, and he wishes frantically he

were home in his own kitchen, raiding the refrigerator, and all of a sudden he's home. Which for shock value is about equivalent to kissing a girl who suddenly and instantaneously turns into a crocodile. So he teleports right back, while he still has his sanity. And the plane plunges into the mountain.

What killed Uncle Fred? The plane crash? No. *The basic ingrained inability of the human mind to immediately reject a postulate which has been proved false* is what killed Uncle Fred.

And maybe that's why nobody had ever come along before to tell the world he'd teleported. Because it required the imminent danger of death to bring the latent ability to the surface, and because the human being, at the instinctive level, would rather die than have his world turned topsy-turvy.

Which was all well and good, except for one thing. *He* had teleported, and he hadn't been facing imminent death. He had probably felt *almost* as much blind panic as Uncle Fred, but *almosts* don't win ball games.

Unless age had something to do with it. Uncle Fred, at sixty-four, might have lived long enough, lived through enough variety of experience, and come to the age where the inevitability of death was real to him long enough ago, so that his panic at seeing the airplane wing fall off was just about as deep as Jeremy's* at twenty, having lived the normal fairly sheltered life of a middle-class

American boy, finding himself suddenly blind and helpless in sharply cramped quarters with tear gas drifting toward him from two directions. And the man on the battlefield, who also appeared to a loved one at the moment of his death, would undoubtedly have already been toughened more than Jeremy by wartime Army basic training, which is a lot rougher than



peacetime Air Force basic training any day in the week.

Or maybe—maybe he wasn't the first one to survive after all.

He studied that idea, turning it over and over in his mind. There might have been others like himself. Say the potentiality is strong enough in only a relatively few human beings. Say the potentiality is forced into actuality only in some of the latents. Say that the catalyst is a sudden-death situation in most cases, and only rarely does there come along someone as lucky as Jeremy, who found out he had the ability before it was too late.

That would still leave a number of teleports in the world. And, so far as Jeremy knew, there weren't any other teleports anywhere in the world at all.

So far as he knew.

But there might be some that he didn't know about. If there were, obviously, they wouldn't know about him. It might work both ways. Other individuals had discovered the ability. Some, totally disbelieving the truth, would push it out of their minds as hallucination, as Jeremy had tried to do. Some, reluctantly accepting the truth, would keep it a close secret, afraid that they would be considered crazy if they described their experience to anyone, would try to do it again—as Jeremy had tried—and would fail, and would simply go through life occasionally remembering the odd thing that had happened that summer at the lake.

And some would announce themselves, as Jeremy had done, and would be moved slowly and inevitably into lunatic asylums, and there they would stay, because they would be spending their entire lives in a situation of controlled slight stress, with never sufficient panic created to trigger the teleporting ability again.

Was that all of them?

Jeremy hoped not. If those were the three choices—to lie to yourself, to lie to others, or to be classed insane—then the people like Uncle Fred were the lucky ones after all.

There had to be another choice. Why couldn't a man hide the ability from others, but keep working on it himself, training himself to use it consciously? And then find others, there had to be a way that people with this ability could find one another. None of them would be able to tell the normal people, of course. If they tried, they'd be considered members of just another nut cult. And physical demonstrations, assuming it were even possible to train this ability and bring it under control, could be easily explained away. People who hadn't been present would say the magic words, "Mass hysteria," which make any piece of difficult evidence disappear like smoke, and people who *had* been present would say, "It's done with mirrors." "You can't fool me. He's twins!"

At that point, the ceiling light flickered. He had been told about that earlier in the day. It meant lights out in three minutes, and he was to be

in bed when the lights went out. And no smoking.

He crawled into bed, and soon the lights went out, and bars and moonlight formed a diagonal pattern on the wall to his right, shining through his one window. He stared at the pattern, and tried to think.

"I don't like it," said the colonel. "It's taking too long. Nothing's happening."

"Give it time, Jim," said the major gently. "It hasn't even been a week yet."

The four of them were once again in the colonel's suite at the BOQ. While Major Grildquist and the colonel talked, Ed Clark followed the conversation with his usual smiling eager attention, and Paul Swanson slouched moodily on the sofa, watching a pair of small steel balls orbit about one another in mid-air across the room.

"I don't care how long it's been," snapped the colonel. "You haven't done a thing yet. Paul, stop that."

Swanson looked suddenly guilty, and the steel balls flashed across the room and burrowed into his shirt pocket.

"Well, now, Jim," said the major, "I *have* done something. In less than a week, I have put that boy on tenterhooks. Give him a week or two more, and we'll—"

"I don't *have* a week or two more," said the colonel.

"Push, push, push," said the major

gently. "You don't really mean all that, Jim."

"The devil I don't." The colonel glanced over at Clark. "What's he doing now?"

"Still pacing the floor, I suppose," said the major. "Pity we have to treat him this way."

Clark cocked his head to one side and listened attentively. "Nope," he said. "He isn't doing anything. Just breathing."

"Blast," said the major. "Is he asleep?"

Clark listened a minute more, then shook his head. "Not from the sound of his breathing. He's awake, all right. I think he's sub-vocalizing. I wish I could pick that up."

"There," said the major. "You see? Sleepless nights. He was moved to a single room today, and he knows what that means."

"All right," said the colonel grudgingly. "You know your business, Ben."

"Of course I do."

"I just wish there were a way to speed it up."

"What do you suggest? I suppose I could go rushing into his room with a pistol and shoot at him. That might scare him enough to send him popping off home again. On the other hand, it might not. And then he wouldn't be around at all."

"Prima donnas," grumbled the colonel. He glowered at Clark and Swanson. "A bunch of prima donnas."

Clark grinned. A cigarette drifted up out of Swanson's shirt pocket,

came to rest between his lips, and a lighter came over from the table. His cigarette going and the lighter returned to the table, Swanson said, "I could jounce his bed a little if you want."

"No," said the colonel. "Ben's right. He knows what he's doing. But at least let me complain about it."

For two days, Jeremy was left to himself in the single room, allowed out of the room only at mealtimes, and to go to the head. On the third day, his thinking having progressed no farther than on the first day, he was introduced to group therapy.

Group therapy was ridiculous. A motley collection of fifteen or sixteen sad-looking individuals sat around a good-sized room in leather armchairs, and smoked, and told each other their problems. Then they told each other how to solve their problems. A psychiatrist in civilian clothing sat in a corner and nodded approvingly.

When Jeremy was asked what his personal twitch was, he answered shortly, "I teleported."

They then all took turns telling him why he had this particular delusion. A couple of his fellow-inmates, there because of sexual aberrations, found a sexual cause of this fantasy, equating it with the dream in which one imagines one is flying. A little guy with a pronounced persecution complex discovered that Jeremy had an unconscious persecution complex and wanted to run away. And so on.

Jeremy went to group therapy for three days, but he could never seem to get into the swing of things. He wasn't having *fun*, like the other fellows. So he was taken off group therapy, and left to stew alone in his room for two more days. Then he went back to narcoanalysis and Major Grildquist.

The sessions with Major Grildquist were, if nothing else, relaxing. The only time Jeremy could relax and ignore the doubts and the fear about his future was when he was under the influence of sodium amytal. Then it didn't matter any more. Nothing mattered, and he spoke easily and lazily, answering the major's questions and not bothering to worry.

The major had the same technique as the first psychiatrist. He would ask a bunch of questions about high school, and all of a sudden he would say something like, "How did you teleport?" Or, "Can you do it again?"

And his prompt baffled response would always be, "I don't know."

And then they would go back to questions about high school again.

After six days of this, Major Grildquist began to hint about a discharge. The facilities at this hospital were perhaps not adequate for the job ahead, he suggested. The facilities here were adequate only for those with temporary disorders, who could be cured and returned to duty in a relatively short time. It might be the best thing for Jeremy, all in all, to go to a hospital where they had more adequate facilities.

And then the major asked him, "Would you like a section eight, Jeremy?"

He was under sodium amytal, and the truth came promptly. "No, sir. No."

"Why not?"

"I don't want to be locked up."

"But couldn't you just teleport yourself out of any cell you were put in?"

"I . . . I don't know. I don't know how."

"How would you like to spend the rest of your life in a VA hospital, Jeremy?"

"Please. Please." Even through the mists of sodium amytal, he could feel the terror created by that suggestion. "No. Please, I want to be cured, I want to be all right. I wish it never happened, I wish, I wish, I wish it never happened."

"All right, Jeremy. Calm down. Take a nap, now, and we'll talk about it again later on. Just take it easy, boy."

But he couldn't take it easy. That night, he lay awake in his bed, staring at the ceiling. His whole life was ending here, was ending now. He was going to be just a number, a number and a body stored away in a lunatic asylum somewhere, for the rest of his life.

The next day, he announced himself cured. He told Major Grildquist that he had suddenly seen the truth. And then he proceeded to tell this truth, which turned out to be a long complicated explanation that includ-

ed just about everything that anyone had said to him over the last two weeks, including one or two points brought up by his team mates on the group therapy game.

Major Grildquist listened to all this in silence, and then he fed Jeremy some more sodium amytal, and the first question he asked was, "Did you ever teleport?"

Jeremy said, "Yes."

And that was that.

The following afternoon, Major Grildquist told him that the papers on his discharge had started their long arduous voyage through half the clerks in the Air Force. Jeremy listened to this, and thought about it all that night, and the next day he had a desperate suggestion to offer.

"Sir," he said to the major hesitantly, "I'd like to try an experiment, if I could."

"An experiment? What sort of experiment?"

"Well, the thing is, no matter how much I try to convince myself that I really didn't teleport, I just can't succeed. Now, I've thought it out, and I think maybe there are certain conditions that have to be met, a certain kind of situation I have to find myself in, before I can make this teleport thing work."

The major nodded. "You want to simulate the conditions, is that it?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what do you hope to gain from that?"

"Well, if it doesn't work . . . if I can't teleport . . . I don't see why that shouldn't convince me that the

whole thing was a delusion in the first place. I won't try to fool you or anything, I know that wouldn't work."

"I see," said the major.

"And if it *does* work," finished Jeremy, "then I'm sane after all."

"I see," said the major again. "You'll try to go home, same as last time?"

"Yes, sir. But this time I'll try to get some place where my mother can see me. Then I'll have proof."

"I'll think about it," said the major, deadpan. "Now, about this seventh-grade teacher of yours—"

"If he wants to try it," said the colonel, "I say fine. That's what we've been working for, after all."

"I'm not sure," said the major. "We might not get the conditions right—a hundred things could go wrong—and he won't be able to do it. Then he'll be half-convinced he didn't do it the first time, and we'll have lost instead of gained."

The colonel paced the floor, glowering at the rug. "This is the turning point," he said. "We get him, or we lose him, right here. What happens if you turn him down?"

"I'm not sure," admitted the major. "Either he'll revolt, and strain himself to do the trick without my co-operation, or he'll just throw in the towel and give up completely. I wouldn't even try to guess which way he'd go."

"So it's a fifty-fifty chance either way," said the colonel. "Is that it?"

"Just about."

"And what do you advise?"

"I frankly don't know what to ad-

vice, Jim. This is the point, as you say. We brought him this far—now I'm lost. From now on, plans and predictions don't mean a thing."

The colonel nodded. He stopped his pacing to glower at Ed Clark. "What do you think?" he demanded.

"Let him try it," said Clark promptly. "You've been trying to push him into action. He wants to take action now, let him do it."

"Paul?"

Swanson shrugged. "He's liable to know what he's doing," he said, "whether he knows it or not. Let him try."

"Ben?"

The major looked helpless. "I just don't know," he said. "I've grown to like the boy. I hate the thought of pushing him that close to the brink."

"You'd like to just send him home and forget about it?"

"Of course I would. Wouldn't you?"

"No," said the colonel savagely. "I need him too badly. I need him, and you need him, and the whole country needs him. We can't forget him, because we've got to have him."

"Then I suppose," said the major reluctantly, "we'd better let him try this experiment of his."

Four glasses of beer sailed in from the kitchenette. "I thought we could use some," said Swanson.

Major Grildquist waited two days before telling Jeremy they would try the experiment. And when he did tell him, Jeremy was so grateful he

could have cried. "Thank you, sir," he said, his voice breaking. "Thank you. And I won't try to fool you, I swear I won't. And whatever happens, I'll abide by it. If it doesn't work, then I'll know for sure."

"That's, uh, fine," said the major. He hustled at his desk, not looking Jeremy in the eye. "We'd better make the arrangements," he said.

Two medics were brought in, and they all discussed the physical equipment needed for the experiment. Cramped quarters, for one thing. One of the medics suggested they attach a strait jacket to him and stuff him into a broom closet. Pitch blackness, too, and that could be arranged by using the broom closet in the unused basement of the west wing, where the hall lights could be switched off and absolutely no light whatsoever could work its way into the broom closet, not even at high noon.

That left the third, and probably most important, ingredient, a stress situation. "I will think," Jeremy told them, "about insane asylums."

The arrangements completed, Jeremy was returned to his room. The experiment would be tried the next day.

He didn't get much sleep that night. He tossed and turned, and he went over and over the details of his plan, and he became fully convinced that it would never work in a million years.

A stress situation? Frantic panic? People don't consciously think themselves into panic, the environment forces panic on them.

It would never work. It was his only chance, his one and only chance, and it would never never never work.

By morning, he was a nervous wreck, already feeling the first faint touches of unreasoning fear. He wanted to call the whole thing off, because it couldn't possibly work and it wouldn't prove a thing, and he would still believe that he had teleported, and they would ship him off to an insane asylum faster than ever. He wanted to tell them to forget it, he'd have to think of something else, but he couldn't. He didn't dare open his mouth. And it was hopeless. He was doomed.

He ate three mouthfuls of breakfast, felt as though he had swallowed three round lead balls, and gave up all thought of food. He paced his room most of the morning, chain-smoking, his fingers shaking when he tried to light his cigarettes, his feet stumbling on nothing at all as he prowled back and forth in the room.

They came for him at eleven, and the sound of the key in the lock was so sudden and at this moment so loud, that he almost screamed and he almost fainted. When they put the strait jacket on him, they had to move his arms for him, he couldn't seem to make them work right. Major Grildquist looked at him oddly, and touched the back of his fingers to Jeremy's cheek, as though he couldn't believe there was any warmth in a cheek that gray. "Are you all right?" the major asked him.

It isn't going to work. He wanted

to say that, he wanted to yell it at the top of his lungs, but he couldn't. It was as though he were paralyzed, as though he were a clockwork doll set into motion, and he was walking toward the table edge, and there was no way to stop his motion and keep from falling off that table edge. He trembled all over when he felt the jacket tighten on him from behind, and then he held himself rigid, to keep from trembling again.

"Are you all right?"

He managed to get it out that time. "Yes." The one word was all he could muster.

Then they left the room, and he concentrated on walking. Raise the right leg, bend it slightly at the knee, swing it forward like pushing it through waist-deep water, straighten the knee joint, set the heel down, rock forward, raise the left leg, and repeat. Conscious motion, like learning to walk all over again, and the knowledge that he was going to fail, and he would live the rest of his life in a room like the one he'd just left.

They went down to the basement and stood by the broom closet. "There you are," said the major. "Cramped quarters. And we'll cut the lights once you're in there. We'll give you five minutes."

Jeremy shook his head violently. "No," he said, his voice hoarse and sandy. Five minutes alone in that darkness would kill him. Fail and get it over with.

He pronounced the words carefully, with someone else's bone-dry

tongue and palate. "One minute."

"Are you sure?" asked the major.

He nodded, spastically.

"All right, then."

The two medics helped him into the broom closet. "Good luck," said the major, his voice oddly inflected, and the door closed.

The broom closet was a tiny upright box so small that his shoulders practically touched both sides, and when the arms crossed in front of him inside the strait jacket touched the back wall, his shoulder blades were just barely brushing the door.

Light crept under the door, and then there was a click, and he was alone and in darkness. Black darkness, and silence, and the wild terror of failure.

He had had a plan. He would go home, as he had before, but this time he would go to the kitchen. His mother would be in the kitchen, getting lunch ready at this time of day, and she would see him. And then he would flash back here and he would tell them, "Call my mother, she just saw me, and that proves it, that proves I can do it and I'm not crazy."

And it couldn't possibly work.

He tried to concentrate on the kitchen—the familiar table and chairs and the curtains on the window over the sink—and he couldn't even visualize it. He couldn't even get a picture of the kitchen in his mind. He tried to think of his mother, he tried to wish himself home and with his mother, and he couldn't do it, he couldn't think, he couldn't concentrate on a thing. The thoughts

boiled through his mind, disjointed and screaming, and he couldn't think, he couldn't think, *he couldn't think!*

He tried to scream out his panic, but his throat was frozen shut and he could only mouth the words. "*Somebody help me!*"

He was standing in a living room. There was a green broadloom rug on the floor, a rust-colored sofa and two armchairs, drum tables and a coffee table. A man sat on the sofa, leaning forward over an open file folder on the coffee table. He was dressed in an Air Force uniform, with colonel's eagles on the shoulders. He was gray-haired and lean, with a craggy narrow-lipped face.

The man looked up and blinked in astonishment. "What the hell—?"

This wasn't home!

And he was back in pitch blackness, and this time his throat was open, and he screamed, and screamed, and screamed.

Light, and the door open, and hands grabbing him as he leaped jerking out, wide-eyed and still screaming. The hands held him and he was rushed along, his useless feet bump-bump-bumping against the steps as they hurried him up from the basement.

They put him in a bathtub, leaving the strait jacket on, and they attached a canvas cover over the whole top of the bathtub except where his head stuck out, and they ran very hot water into the tub.

After a while, they gave him a shot, and he stopped screaming and fell asleep.

He came *here!*" snapped the colonel. He pointed at the middle of the room. "Right there, he stood right there, and stared at me with the most panic-stricken eyes I have ever seen in my life."

"We shouldn't have done it," said the major. His voice was shaky, and he had switched to something stronger than beer. "We pushed him too hard. We shouldn't have done it."

"Ed!" The colonel whirled around. "What's he doing?"

"Nothing. They gave him a sedative, I guess. He's sound asleep."

"What about tomorrow?" demanded the colonel. He spun back to Major Grildquist. "How's he going to be tomorrow?"

"I don't know. Catatonic, maybe. Or maybe he'll snap out of it."

"If he does, if he snaps out of it—"

"I want to tell him, Jim," said the major. "I mean it, this is too much, we're driving that boy too far. I mean to tell him the truth."

"And waste the whole thing?" The colonel stood straddle-legged in front of the major, his hands on his hips. "Listen to me, Ben," he said. "Hear me good. You didn't have to look at that boy's face. I did. You don't have the final responsibility for what we're doing to him. I do."

"We don't have the *right*—"

"We don't have the right to lose him, Ben. We don't have the right to throw him away. We don't have any choice. I wish we did, but we don't."

"It's gone too far, Jim. I'm going

to tell him, tomorrow—if he's capable of understanding anything."

"And lose the whole thing? He's gone through a lot, Ben, I'll agree with you. And so have we. If you jump the gun on this thing, you're wasting all that trouble and all that torment. If you jump the gun, he's going to have gone through all this for nothing."

The major rubbed his forehead with the back of one pudgy hand. "You're right," he said at last. "I know you're right. But I look at that boy, and . . . never mind, you're right."

"It must be near the end now," said the colonel, more softly. "It shouldn't take too much longer."

The major shook his head. "What should I do?" he asked. "When I talk to him tomorrow. *If* I talk to him tomorrow, if he's in any condition to talk to anybody tomorrow."

"Tell him it didn't happen," said the colonel immediately. "Tell him it was another delusion. You know the lingo, do your best to convince him he's nutty as a fruit cake. And then let him stew on it a while."

Ed Clark cleared his throat hesitantly. "Does it have to go on any more, colonel?" he asked. "Couldn't we just go to him now and tell him the truth, and tell him we'll help him get the ability under control?"

"How are we going to help him?" the colonel demanded. "We don't know any more about it than he does. No, he's got to prove himself.

And in



order to prove himself, he's got to get that power of his under control."

"I guess so," said Clark.

"There's one thing more," said the colonel. "And it makes me even more sure we've got to push this boy to the limit."

"What's that?" asked Major Grildquist.

"He came here. He told you he was going to try going home again, but he came here. I would love to know how he happened to come here, why he decided to come to me."

"You're just a daddy to us all," said Clark.

"Might be," said Paul Swanson from his corner, "you've found that telepath you've been yelling for.

It took Jeremy two days to get calmed down to the point where he could walk and talk with reasonable accuracy. Then he had another interview with Major Grildquist. He tried to tell him what had happened, but it got too jumbled and confused, so they went back to the old standby, sodium amytal, and then he told the story clearly and completely, giving a full description of the room and the colonel, down to the sound of the colonel's voice.

After the effects of the narcoanalysis had worn off, Major Grildquist discussed the situation with him. "I'll speak frankly with you, Jeremy. You so obviously *want* to be cured that I really thought there was a chance we'd eventually get you squared away. I've been delaying the dis-

charge papers, hoping the idea of a section eight would help you snap out of this fixation. I went along with the experiment for the same reason."

"I saw him," said Jeremy dully. He was afraid to let himself get even a little bit excited, because he had trouble keeping himself under control.

Major Grildquist shook his head. "I was wrong," he said. "I want to apologize to you for that, Jeremy. The experiment had just the reverse effect from the one we were both hoping for, and I'll admit to you that I should have expected it. You *were* placed in a severe stress situation, one where you were being forced to prove yourself insane, and it was just too much for you. Consciously, you want to rid yourself of this delusion. Somewhere down in the subconscious, you want to hold onto it. Crammed into that lightless closet, you cracked wide open. The subconscious took over, gave you another teleportation hallucination—the second one that can't be proved one way or the other, significantly—and the end result is that you are now much more deeply rooted in your fixation than you were before we tried the experiment."

The major lit a cigarette with slightly-trembling fingers. "That was my fault," he said, "and I regret it. I wish I could go back and do it all over again, because this time I would stop and think about the implications of such an experiment, and I would never let you go through with it."

"I saw him," insisted Jeremy. "I can tell you just what he looked like, what the room looked like. You could find him, if you tried to."

"All the living rooms used by Air Force colonels all over the world? You'd be an old man before we finished checking, Jeremy, and then we'd just have to come tell you we hadn't found your man."

"I saw him," said Jeremy doggedly.

"Jeremy, look at it this way. The first time you teleported, you went home, isn't that right? Stress hit you, and you went home. But the second time, given at least as much stress, you *didn't* go home. Think about that. Why didn't you go home?"

"I don't know."

"You'd already done that. It was dangerous to try it again. Someone might be in the room where you claimed to have gone. You could give yourself just as convincing an hallucination this time, and have it all blown up by a statement from your mother, saying that she was dusting your room at the precise moment when you claimed to be there. You couldn't take the chance. You had to find some place else to go, some place where we could never check your story, where there would never be an opportunity for you to be proved wrong."

"No, sir," said Jeremy. "I saw him."

"You saw a living room very similar in appearance to the ward day-room where you've spent a lot of time, and you saw a man in Air Force uniform. Jeremy, *think*, boy! Doesn't that sound more like dream material

gathered from your real-world surroundings than like an actual teleportation?"

"You make sense, sir," said Jeremy. "But I still saw him. And I still heard his voice."

"All right, then," said the major. "Why that particular officer? You said you didn't know him. Two days ago, under narco, you admitted you'd never seen him before in your life, didn't know his name or where he was, and simply claimed you'd gone to him because he could help you. But you didn't know *how* he could help you? Don't you see what that means? There's only one way this hallucination could help you, and that is by fortifying your original belief."

"Yes, sir," said Jeremy woodenly.

The major sighed. "All right, Jeremy," he said. "We'll get the discharge papers moving now. You should be out of the Air Force in a week. And then you'll go to a VA hospital; where they'll be able to help you a lot more than I have."

"An asylum?"

"A special hospital, Jeremy. Don't worry, it won't be a 'Snake Pit' kind of place."

"Yes, sir," said Jeremy dully.

"I'll tell you the truth," said Major Gridquist to the colonel, "by the time I was finished talking, I'd half-convinced myself. I hope I didn't lay it on too thick."

"We'll soon find out," said the colonel. "I hope."

"What do we do now?" the major asked him.

"Now? Now, we start waiting. We've pushed him as far as we can. From here on, it's up to him. If he's ever going to get control of that ability of his, it'll be between now and the time he expects his discharge to come through. Ed, what's he doing?"

"He's pacing the floor."

"Good. That means he's thinking."

Jeremy was thinking. He was thinking harder than he ever had before, and all his thoughts circled and spiraled and whirlpooled around and finally bumped up against the same dead end.

The only proof he had was in his head. And if he were crazy, that wasn't very good proof at all.

That was the dead end. Either he was sane or he was crazy, and he no longer knew which he was.

If only he knew how he'd done it. If only he could just decide to go home and *poof* go home. If only he didn't have to be scared out of his wits before he could do it every time.

He paced back and forth in the small room until lights out, and then he lay atop the blankets on the bed, fully dressed, and started at the light-and-shadow pattern on the wall, and tried to figure out how he'd done it.

It was like reaching into a vat full of cosmolene and rocks. Somewhere down in there was a diamond, and all the rest were just pebbles. And he had to reach down in and find the diamond by touch alone.

And he couldn't even be sure the diamond was there.

He dug down in, reached down in, searched for the key. What had his mind done those two times? What had it done?

It wasn't just desire, that wasn't enough. There was a switch of some kind, a lever inside his brain, and he had to push that lever before he could do it.

Home. Think about home, about his own bed at home. That's where he wanted to go. Think about it, and push down deeper and deeper into his brain, and try to figure out what his brain had done those two times.

That?

The bed felt different.

His eyes were closed, and he kept them closed. His hands moved out from his sides, exploring the surface of the bed. And his hands didn't touch the roughness of Air Force blankets, they touched the smooth coolness of bedspread.

He held his breath, listening. Laughter, from downstairs, Laughter and applause and a voice. The television set.

A car drove by, he heard it.

His mother said something, down in the living room, her voice muffled by distance.

He was home.

Still not really sure, he opened his eyes, and the familiar shapes of his bedroom were around him, and it was real, it was real, and he was home.

And this time he knew how.

It was so easy. All you had to do was find it, and then it was so easy.

It was like multiplying numbers in your head. It was the spot where you

stored each digit of the answer until the multiplication was complete. A little cubbyhole down in the left-hand corner of the mind, and he'd never used it for anything but the temporary storage of numbers. But if he thought of a place—the hospital room—and did *that*—

And the pattern of light-and-shadow stripes was on the wall. He was back in the hospital.

He grinned.

"Sir," said Ed Clark, getting to his feet. "He just went away."

The other three turned to look at him. The major said, "What do you—" but the colonel shushed him with an impatient wave of his hand.

They waited, the colonel and Major Grildquist and Paul Swanson all watching Clark, and Clark listening, and after an interminable wait of almost three minutes, Clark grinned and relaxed and said, "He's back."

The colonel sighed, smiling. "He cracked it. See how long he was gone? This time, he cracked it. Paul, more beer."

"On its way," said Paul.

"The son of a gun," said the colonel, beaming from ear to ear and rubbing his hands together. "He cracked it."

Jeremy lay on the bed in the hospital room, getting used to the idea. He knew where it was now, he knew just how to make it work. So he wasn't crazy after all.

Tomorrow, by golly, he was going to show that major. "Watch this," he'd

say, and *flick*. And maybe the major could spend some time convincing himself that they were *both* crazy.

Tomorrow? Why wait for tomorrow?

There was that colonel, too.

He could go right now. The colonel would help him, somehow, whoever he was. Maybe he was one of the other teleports who'd managed to avoid winding up in a looney bin.

Then why hadn't he come here?

Never mind. He could go ask him.

Except that he didn't know where the colonel was.

Then how had he found him the last time?

He poked around some more, with greater confidence now, but there was nothing else, only that little switch down in the number-cubbyhole, that was all.

Maybe that was all it needed.

"Colonel Whoever-you-are," he whispered. "Here I come."

And *flick*.

And he was lying on the floor in the middle of the living room. And there was the colonel looking down at him, grinning as though his face would break. And two other people in civvies, off to the left.

And Major Grildquist!

Jeremy scrambled to his feet. "Major—!"

"O.K., Jeremy," said the colonel. "O.K., take it easy."

Jeremy looked from face to face, and they were all smiling, all four of them, smiling as though they were proud of him.

And all at once he saw why. "You

knew all along," he said wonderingly. "You knew all along."

"We did, Jeremy," said the colonel. "But none of us knew how to drag that ability of yours up where you could use it. You had to do that for yourself."

"You're teleports, too," said Jeremy. "I *knew* there had to be others, I knew it."

The colonel shook his head. "You're the first teleport I've run across," he said. "You're a very valuable property, boy."

Jeremy was bewildered. "But—"

"Colonel Brice," said the major gently, "is what you might call a talented scout. He looks for odd talents—like yours, for instance. And then he puts them to work."

"Work?"

"We'll have orders cut tomorrow," said the colonel, "transferring you to my outfit. You can say goodbye to the hospital and crazy psychiatrists like Ben there."

"Your outfit, sir? Jeremy was struggling with his bewilderment. "What outfit is that, sir?"

"What do you think? Intelligence."

Jeremy grinned. "Sure," he said. "Sure."

"You'll like the outfit," the colonel told him. "They're all madmen like you and those two."

Jeremy looked at the two young men in civilian dress. The colonel said, "Give him a slight demonstration, boys."

Paul Swanson said, "Think you could use a beer, Jeremy?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Coming up."

Jeremy watched wide-eyed as the full glass of beer sailed in from the kitchenette at waist height, made a sweeping left turn, and halted directly in front of him. He reached out hesitantly, half-afraid the whole thing was an illusion, and there he was holding a glass of beer in his hand.

"Ed," said the colonel, "what's going on next door?"

Clark characteristically cocked his head to one side. "Male voice saying, 'Why not?' sir," he reported.

"What's going on?"

"Just a second." Clark listened, and then grinned, getting a bit red-faced. "Well, sir," he said. "There's a major in that suite."

"Yes?"

"And a WAF Lieutenant, sir."

"Oh. Demonstration ended."

"Yes, sir."

The colonel turned back to Jeremy. "You see? And I have thirty-seven more of them. You bring the strength up to an even forty."

"I never even heard of such a thing," said Jeremy.

"I'm not surprised. This is just about the first secret weapon any nation has ever had that has a chance of staying secret. The whole thing is locked up inside your head. No plans to steal, nothing. And nobody would believe the truth, anyway."

Jeremy shook his head. "I don't . . . I don't get it. How did you know about me? I mean, in the first

place, before I was even sure of it myself. How did *you* know?"

The colonel smiled. "I screened you," he said. "I ran you and a few hundred thousand other boys through a sieve, and you're one of the forty who didn't just slide on through."

"A sieve? What kind of sieve? When?"

"The tunnel in your case," the colonel told him. "The drainage pipe, where you made your first jump. That's one of my sieves. Look, I'm in about the best position you can imagine for screening a big chunk of the human race for psi. I could screen for anything I wanted. Did you ever know anybody with his heart on the right side instead of the left?"

Jeremy shook his head.

"Of course not," said the colonel. "There're few of them. But the enlistment or induction physical comes up with one every once in a while. Practically every male American citizen goes through that physical. If you were looking for people with their hearts on the right side, there's your screening center, all set up for you."

"I see," said Jeremy doubtfully.

"It's the same with me," the colonel told him. "I've got my screening center, and it's called basic training. It puts the stressed on, it louses up your equilibrium, it rattles you like nothing you've ever been through before. Then it runs you through my sieve, that drainage pipe, which is as completely bugged as a movie set. I'm like a prospector panning a stream. Most of what washes through my pan

is silt, but every once in a while a little piece of gold shows up. Like Paul there, who couldn't find his gas mask with his hands, so the mask just came up to his face of his own accord."

"And me," said Jeremy.

The colonel nodded. "And you. And thirty-eight others, so far."

Clark laughed suddenly and the colonel turned to him. "Ed, stop listening! Leave the major alone."

"Yes, sir," said Clark. He sat down and looked attentive to the things going on in this room.

The colonel turned back. "You're going to be useful, Jeremy," he said. "We'll have to find out your range limitations, if any, and poke around after that other talent of yours—"

"Other talent, sir?"

"You came to me," the colonel reminded him. "You'd never heard of me, didn't know who or where I was, and yet you came straight to me. What did it? Telepathy? Whatever it is, we'll find it."

"I doubt it's telepathy, as such," said the major. "Some kind of increased sensitivity on the emotional level, I imagine."

"I imagine so," said the colonel sardonically. "What other kind of sensitivity do you know?"

"My psychological training coming out," said the major, grinning. "Reduce everything to jargon."

"Sir," said Jeremy hesitantly.

The colonel turned back to him. "What is it?"

"Sir, I've . . . well, it's been a

long time since . . . well, if I'd gone on through basic training, I'd have had a leave home by now, and . . . well, I was just wondering if I could get home for a few days and—"

"No," said the colonel, shaking his head. "I'm sorry, but no. We have too much to do, and too little time to do it in. We've lost weeks already."

Major Grildquist cleared his throat. "Jim, it might be a good idea—"

"I know, Ben, but we just don't have the time. Besides, Jeremy, I'm afraid you're classed as a military secret, at least for the time being. Not even your parents are to know about this ability of yours."

"Yes, sir," said Jeremy.

Paul Swanson chuckled. "Colonel," he said, "what are you going to do if Jeremy goes home anyway? Put him in the guardhouse?"

The colonel opened his mouth, and left it open. Then he shrugged and grinned and said, "All right, Jeremy. Go on home."

Jeremy's face lit up. "Thank you, sir!"

"But, Jeremy. Take the train, boy. You're a military secret now, remember that."

"Yes, sir," said Jeremy happily.

Major Grildquist heaved himself out of his chair. "I'll go arrange for the papers," he said, "and have your clothing sent to your room."

"Thank you, sir," said Jeremy.

"Be back here in five days," said the colonel. "Noon on Wednesday."

"Yes, sir." Jeremy grinned and disappeared.

The colonel sat down heavily in an armchair. "Paul," he snapped, "stop playing with that lamp. And Ed, leave that major alone."

The lamp clunked onto the table, and Ed Clark stopped looking attentive.

"Forty of them," muttered the colonel to himself. He shook his head, sighed, and carefully unwrapped a cigar. "Forty of them." ■