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Illustrating *Gateway to Strangeness*

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Ziff-Davis Publishing Company
Editorial and Executive Offices
One Park Avenue
New York 16, New York
ORegon 9-7200
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Midwestern and Circulation Office
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ROGUE PSI

By JAMES H. SCHMITZ

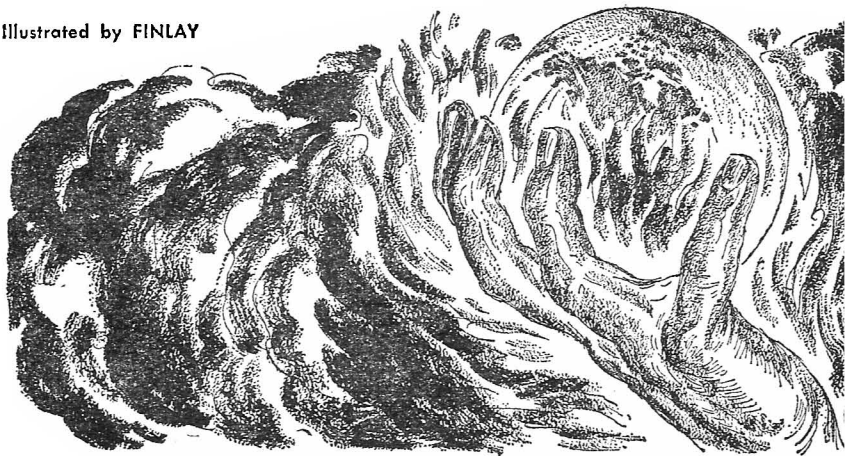
How do you trap a man who has the entire world at his mercy?

SHORTLY after noon, a small side door in the faculty restaurant of Cleaver University opened and a man and a woman stepped out into the sunlight of the wide, empty court between the building and the massive white wall opposite it which bordered Cleaver Spaceport. They came unhurriedly across the court towards a transparent gate sealing a tunnel passage in the wall.

As they reached the center of

the court, a scanning device in the wall fastened its attention on them, simultaneously checking through a large store of previously registered human images and data associated with these. The image approaching it on the left was that of a slender girl above medium height, age twenty-six, with a burnished pile of hair which varied from chestnut-brown to copper in the sun, eyes which appeared to vary between blue and gray, and an air of com-

Illustrated by FINLAY





posed self-reliance. Her name, the scanner noted among other details, was Arlene Marguerite Rolf. Her occupation: micromachinist. Her status: MAY PASS.

Miss Rolf's companion was in his mid-thirties, big, rawboned and red-haired, with a formidably bulging forehead, eyes set deep under rusty beetle-brows, and a slight but apparently habitual scowl. His name was also on record: Dr. Frank Dean Harding. Occupation: marine geologist. Status—

At that point, there was an odd momentary hesitancy or blurring in the scanner's reactions, though not quite pronounced enough to alert its check-mechanisms. Then it decided: MAY NOT PASS. A large sign appeared promptly in brilliant red light on the glassy surface of the wall door.

WARNING—SOMATIC BARRIERS!
*Passage Permitted to Listed
Persons Only*

THE man looked at the sign, remarked dourly, "The welcome mat's out again! Wonder if the monitor in there can identify me as an individual."

"It probably can," Arlene said. "You've been here twice before—"

"Three times," Frank Harding corrected her. "The first occasion was just after I learned you'd taken the veil. Almost two

years now, isn't it?" he asked.

"Very nearly. Anyway, you're registered in the university files, and that's the first place that would be checked for an unlisted person who showed up in this court."

Harding glanced over at her. "They're as careful as all that about Lowry's project?"

"You bet they are," Arlene said. "If you weren't in my company, a guard would have showed up by now to inform you you're approaching a restricted area and ask you very politely what your business here was."

Harding grunted. "Big deal. Is someone assigned to follow you around when you get off the project?"

She shrugged. "I doubt it. Why should they bother? I never leave the university grounds, and any secrets should be safe with me here. I'm not exactly the gabby type, and the people who know me seem to be careful not to ask me questions about Ben Lowry or myself anyway." She looked reflective. "You know, I do believe it's been almost six months since anyone has so much as mentioned diex energy in my presence!"

"Isn't the job beginning to look a little old after all this time?" Harding asked.

"Well," Arlene said, "working with Doctor Ben never gets to be boring, but it is a rather restric-

tive situation, of course. It'll come to an end by and by."

Harding glanced at his watch, said, "Drop me a line when that happens, Arlene. By that time, I might be able to afford an expert micromachinist myself."

"In a dome at the bottom of some ocean basin?" Arlene laughed. "Sounds cosy—but that wouldn't be much of an improvement on Cleaver Spaceport, would it? Will you start back to the coast today?"

"If I can still make the afternoon flight." He took her arm. "Come on. I'll see you through the somatic barrier first."

"Why? Do you think it might make a mistake about me and clamp down?"

"It's been known to happen," Harding said gloomily. "And from what I hear, it's one of the less pleasant ways to get killed."

Arlene said comfortably, "There hasn't been an accident of that kind in at least three or four years. The bugs have been very thoroughly worked out of the things. I go in and out here several times a week." She took a small key from her purse, fitted it into a lock at the side of the transparent door, twisted it and withdrew it. The door slid sideways for a distance of three feet and stopped. Arlene Rolf stepped through the opening and turned to face Harding.

"There you are!" she said.

"Barely a tingle! If it didn't want to pass me, I'd be lying on the ground knotted up with cramps right now. 'By, Frank! See you again in two or three months, maybe?"

Harding nodded. "Sooner if I can arrange it. Goodby, Arlene."

He stood watching the trim figure walk up the passage beyond the door. As she came to its end, the door slid silently shut again. Arlene looked back and waved at him, then disappeared around the corner.

Dr. Frank Harding thrust his hands into his pockets and started back across the court, scowling absently at nothing.

THE living room of the quarters assigned to Dr. Benjamin B. Lowry on Cleaver Spaceport's security island was large and almost luxuriously furnished. In pronounced contrast to the adjoining office and workrooms, it was also as a rule in a state of comfortable disorder. An affinity appeared to exist between the complex and the man who had occupied it for the past two years. Dr. Lowry, leading authority in the rather new field of diex energy, was a large man of careless and comfortable, if not downright slovenly personal habits, while a fiendish precisionist at work.

He was slumped now in an armchair on the end of his spine,

fingering his lower lip and staring moodily at the viewphone field which formed a pale-yellow rectangle across the living room's entire south wall, projecting a few inches out into the room. Now and then, his gaze shifted to a narrow, three-foot-long case of polished hardwood on the table beside him. When the phone field turned clear white, Dr. Lowry shoved a pair of rimless glasses back over his nose and sat up expectantly. Then he frowned.

"Now look here, Weldon—!" he began.

Colors had played for an instant over the luminous rectangle of the phone field, resolving themselves into a view of another room. A short, sturdily built man sat at a desk there, wearing a neat business suit. He smiled pleasantly out of the field at Dr. Lowry, said in a casual voice, "Relax, Ben! As far as I'm concerned, this is a command performance. Mr. Green just instructed me to let you know I'd be sitting in when he took your call."

"Mr. Green did *what*?"

The man in the business suit said quickly, "He's coming in now, Ben!" His hand moved on the desk, and he and the room about him faded to a pale, colorless outline in the field. Superimposed on it appeared a third room, from which a man who

wore dark glasses looked out at Dr. Lowry.

He nodded, said in a briskly amiable manner, "Dr. Lowry, I received your message just a minute ago. As Colonel Weldon undoubtedly has informed you, I asked him to be present during this discussion. There are certain things to be told you, and the arrangement will save time all around.

"Now, doctor, as I understand it, the situation is this. Your work on the project has advanced satisfactorily up to what has been designated as the Fourth Stage. That is correct, isn't it?"

Dr. Lowry said stiffly, "That is correct, sir. Without the use of a trained telepath it is unlikely that further significant advances can be made. Colonel Weldon, however, has seen fit now to introduce certain new and astonishing conditions. I find these completely unacceptable as they stand and . . ."

"You're entirely justified, Dr. Lowry, in protesting against an apparently arbitrary act of interference with the work you've carried out so devotedly at the request of your government." One of Mr. Green's better-known characteristics was his ability to interrupt without leaving the impression of having done it. "Now, would it satisfy you to know that Colonel Weldon has

been acting throughout as my personal deputy in connection with the project—and that I was aware of the conditions you mention before they were made?"

DR. LOWRY hesitated, said, "I'm afraid not. As a matter of fact, I do know Weldon well enough to take it for granted he wasn't simply being arbitrary. I . . ."

"You feel," said Mr. Green, "that there are certain extraneous considerations involved of which you should have been told?"

Lowry looked at him for a moment. "If the President of the United States," he said drily, "already has made a final decision in the matter, I shall have to accept it."

The image in the phone field said, "I haven't."

"Then," Lowry said, "I feel it would be desirable to let me judge personally whether any such considerations are quite as extraneous as they might appear to be to . . ."

"To anybody who didn't himself plan the diex thought projector, supervise its construction in every detail, and carry out an extensive series of preliminary experiments with it," Mr. Green concluded for him. "Well, yes—you may be right about that, doctor. You are necessarily more aware of the instrument's final

potentialities than anyone else could be at present." The image's mouth quirked in the slightest of smiles. "In any event, we want to retain your ungrudging cooperation, so Colonel Weldon is authorized herewith to tell you in as much detail as you feel is necessary what the situation is. And he will do it before any other steps are taken. Perhaps I should warn you that what you learn may not add to your peace of mind. Now, does that settle the matter to your satisfaction, Dr. Lowry?"

Lowry nodded. "Yes, sir, it does. Except for one detail."

"Yes, I see. Weldon, will you kindly cut yourself out of this circuit. I'll call you back in a moment."

Colonel Weldon's room vanished from the phone field. Mr. Green went over to a wall safe, opened it with his back to Dr. Lowry, closed it again and turned holding up a small, brightly polished metal disk.

"I should appreciate it incidentally," he remarked, "if you would find it convenient to supply me with several more of these devices."

"I'll be very glad to do it, sir," Dr. Lowry told him, "after I've been released from my present assignment."

"Yes . . . you take no more chances than we do." Mr. Green raised his right hand, held the

disk facing the phone field. After a moment, the light in Dr. Lowry's living room darkened, turned to a rich, deep purple, gradually lightened again.

Mr. Green took his hand down. "Are you convinced I'm the person I appear to be?"

Lowry nodded. "Yes, sir, I am. To the best of my knowledge, there is no way of duplicating that particular diex effect—as yet."

ARLENE ROLF walked rapidly along the passage between the thick inner and outer walls enclosing Cleaver Spaceport. There was no one in sight, and the staccato clicking of her high heels on the lightgreen marblite paving was the only sound. The area had the overall appearance of a sun-baked, deserted fortress. She reached a double flight of shallow stairs, went up and came out on a wide, bare platform level with the top of the inner wall.

Cleaver Spaceport lay on her left, a twenty-mile rectangle of softly gleaming marblite absolutely empty except for the narrow white spire of a control tower near the far side. The spaceport's construction had been begun the year Arlene was born, as part of the interplanetary colonization program which a rash of disasters and chronically insufficient funds mean-

while had brought to an almost complete standstill. Cleaver port remained unfinished; no spaceship had yet lifted from its surface or settled down to it.

Ahead and to Arlene's right, a mile and a half of green lawn stretched away below the platform. Automatic tenders moved slowly across it, about half of them haloed by the rhythmically circling rainbow sprays of their sprinklers. In the two years since Arlene had first seen the lawn, no human being had set foot there. At its far end was a cluster of low, functional buildings. There were people in those buildings . . . but not very many people. It was the security island where Dr. Lowry had built the diex projector.

Arlene crossed the platform, passed through the doorless entry of the building beyond it, feeling the tingle of another somatic barrier as she stepped into its shadow. At the end of the short hallway was a narrow door with the words NONSPACE CONDUIT above it. Behind the door was a small, dimly lit cube of a room. Miss Rolf went inside and sat down on one of the six chairs spaced along the walls. After a moment, the door slid quietly shut and the room went dark.

For a period of perhaps a dozen seconds, in complete blackness, Arlene Rolf appeared to

herself to have become an awareness so entirely detached from her body that it could experience no physical sensation. Then light reappeared in the room and sensation returned. She stood up, smoothing down her skirt, and discovered smiling that she had been holding her breath again. It happened each time she went through the conduit, and no previous degree of determination to breathe normally had any effect at all on that automatic reaction. The door opened and she picked up her purse and went out into a hall which was large, well-lit and quite different in every respect from the one by which she had entered.

In the wall screen across the hall, the image of a uniformed man smiled at her and said, "Dr. Lowry has asked that you go directly to the laboratory on your return, Miss Rolf."

"Thank you, Max," she said. She had never seen Max or one of the other project guards in person, though they must be somewhere in the building. The screen went blank, and she went on down the long, windowless hall, the sound of her steps on the thick carpeting again the only break in the quiet. Now, she thought, it was a little like being in an immaculately clean, well-tended but utterly vacant hotel.

ARLENE pressed the buzzer beside the door to Dr. Lowry's quarters and stood waiting. When the door opened, she started forwards then stopped in surprise.

"Why, hello, Colonel Weldon," she said. "I didn't realize you would be on the project today." Her gaze went questioningly past him to Dr. Lowry who stood in the center of the room, hands shoved deep into his trousers pockets.

Lowry said wryly, "Come in, Arlene. This has been a surprise to me, too, and not a pleasant one. On the basis of orders coming directly from the top—which I have just confirmed, by the way—our schedule here is to be subjected to drastic rearrangements. They include among other matters our suspension as the actual operators of the projector."

"But why that?" she asked startled.

Dr. Lowry shrugged. "Ask Ferris. He just arrived by his personal conduit. He's supposed to explain the matter to us."

Ferris Weldon, locking the door behind Arlene, said smilingly, "And please do give me a chance to do just that now, both of you! Let's sit down as a start. Naturally you're angry . . . no one can blame you for it. But I promise to show you the absolute necessity behind this move."

He waited until they were seated, then added, "One reason—though not the only reason—for interrupting your work at this point is to avoid exposing both of you to serious personal danger."

Dr. Lowry stared at him. "And what's that supposed to mean?"

"Ben," Ferris Weldon asked, "what was the stated goal of this project when you undertook it?"

Lowry said stiffly, "To develop a diex-powered instrument which would provide a means of reliable mental communication with any specific individual on Earth."

Weldon shook his head. "No, it wasn't."

Arlene Rolf laughed shortly. "He's right, Ben." She looked at Weldon. "The hypothetical goal of the project was an instrument which would enable your department telepaths to make positive identification of a hypothetical Public Enemy Number One . . . the same being described as a 'rogue telepath' with assorted additional qualifications."

Weldon said, "That's a little different, isn't it? Do you recall the other qualifications?"

"Is that important at the moment?" Miss Rolf asked. "Oh, well . . . this man is also a dangerous and improbably gifted hypnotist. Disturb him with an ordinary telepathic probe or get

physically within a mile or so of him, and he can turn you mentally upside down, and will do it in a flash if it suits his purpose. He's quite ruthless, is supposed to have committed any number of murders. He might as easily be some unknown as a man constantly in the public eye who is keeping his abilities concealed . . . He impersonates people . . . He is largely responsible for the fact that in a quarter of a century the interplanetary colonization program literally hasn't got off the ground. . . ."

She added, "That's as much as I remember. There will be further details in the files. Should I dig them out?"

"No," Ferris Weldon said. "You've covered most of it."

DR. LOWRY interrupted irritably, "What's the point of this rigmarole, Weldon? You aren't assuming that either of us has taken your rogue telepath seriously. . . ."

"Why not?"

Lowry shrugged. "Because he is, of course, one of the government's blandly obvious fictions. I've no objection to such fictions when they serve to describe the essential nature of a problem without revealing in so many words what the problem actually is. In this case, the secrecy surrounding the project could have arisen largely from a concern

about the reaction in various quarters to an instrument which might be turned into a thought-control device."

Weldon asked, "Do you believe that is the purpose of your projector?"

"If I'd believed it, I would have had nothing to do with it. I happen to have considerable confidence in the essential integrity of our government, if not always in its good sense. But not everyone shares that feeling."

Ferris Weldon lit a cigarette, flicked out the match, said after a moment, "But you didn't buy the fiction?"

"Of course not."

Weldon glanced at Miss Rolf. "You, Arlene?"

She looked uneasy. "I hadn't bought it, no. Perhaps I'm not so sure now—you must have some reason for bringing up the matter here. But several things wouldn't make sense. If . . ."

Dr. Lowry interrupted again. "Here's one question, Weldon. If there did happen to be a rogue telepath around, what interest would he have in sabotaging the colonization program?"

Weldon blew two perfect smoke rings, regarded their ascent with an air of judicious approval. "After you've heard a little more you should be able to answer that question yourself," he said. "It was precisely the problems connected with the

program that put us on the rogue's trail. We didn't realize it at the time. Fourteen years ago. . . . Have you had occasion to work with DEDCOM, Ben?"

Lowry made a snorting sound. "I've had a number of occasions . . . and made a point of passing them up! If the government is now basing its conclusions on the fantastically unrealistic mishmash of suggestions it's likely to get from a deducting computer. . . ."

"Well," Ferris Weldon said deprecatingly, "the government doesn't trust DEDCOM too far, of course. Still, the fact that it is strictly logical, encyclopedically informed and not hampered by common sense has produced surprisingly useful results from time to time.

"Now don't get indignant again, Ben! I assure you I'm not being facetious. The fact is that sixteen years ago the charge that interplanetary colonization was being sabotaged was frequently enough raised. It had that appearance from the outside. Whatever could go wrong had gone wrong. There'd been an unbelievable amount of blundering.

NEVERTHELESS, all the available evidence indicated that no organized sabotage was involved. There was plenty of voluble opposition to the pro-

gram, sometimes selfish, sometimes sincere. There were multiple incidents of forgetfulness, bad timing, simple stupidity. After years of false starts, the thing still appeared bogged down in a nightmare of—in the main—honest errors. But expensive ones. The month-by-month cost of continuing reached ridiculous proportions. Then came disasters which wiped out lives by the hundreds. The program's staunchest supporters began to get dubious, to change their minds.

"I couldn't say at the moment which genius in the Department of Special Activities had the notion to feed the colonization problem to DEDCOM. Anyway, it was done, and DEDCOM, after due checking and rumination, not only stated decisively that it *was* a matter of sabotage, after all; it further provided us with a remarkably detailed description of the saboteur. . . ."

Arlene Rolf interrupted. "There had been only one saboteur?"

"Only one who knew what he was doing, yes."

"The rogue telepath?" Dr. Lowry asked.

"Who else?"

"Then if the department has had his description . . ."

"Why is he still at large?" Ferris Weldon asked, with a suggestion of grim amusement. "Wait till you hear what it

sounded like at the time, Ben! I'll give it to you from memory.

"Arlene has mentioned some of the points. The saboteur, DEDCOM informed us, was, first, a hypnotizing telepath. He could work on his victims from a distance, force them into the decisions and actions he wanted, leave them unaware that their minds had been tampered with, or that anything at all was wrong.

"Next, he was an impersonator, to an extent beyond any ordinary meaning of the word. DEDCOM concluded he must be able to match another human being's appearance so closely that it would deceive his model's most intimate associates. And with the use of these two talents our saboteur had, in ten years, virtually wrecked the colonization program.

"Without any further embellishments, DEDCOM's report of this malevolent superman at loose in our society would have raised official eyebrows everywhere. . . ."

"In particular," Miss Rolf asked, "in the Department of Special Activities?"

"In particular there," Weldon agreed. "The department's experience made the emergence of any human supertalents worth worrying about seem highly improbable. In any event, DEDCOM crowded its luck. It didn't stop

at that point. The problems besetting the colonization program were, it stated, by no means the earliest evidence of a rogue telepath in our midst. It listed a string of apparently somewhat comparable situations stretching back through the past three hundred years, and declared unequivocally that in each case the responsible agent had been the same—our present saboteur.”

WELDON paused, watched their expressions changing. A sardonic smile touched the corners of his mouth.

“All right,” Dr. Lowry said sourly after a moment, “to make the thing even more unlikely, you’re saying now that the rogue is immortal.”

Weldon shook his head. “I didn’t say it . . . and neither, you notice, did DEDCOM. The question of the rogue’s actual life span, whatever it may be, was no part of the matter it had been given to investigate. It said only that in various ways he had been interfering with mankind’s progress for at least three centuries. But added to the rest of it, that statement was quite enough.”

“To accomplish what?”

“What do you think?” Weldon asked. “The report passed eventually through the proper hands, was properly initialed, then filed with DEDCOM’s earlier abortions

and forgotten. Special Activities continued, by its more realistic standard investigative procedures, to attempt to find out what had bogged down the colonization program. As you’re aware, the department didn’t make much headway. And neither has the program.”

“The last is very apparent,” Lowry said, looking puzzled. “But the fact that you’ve failed to solve the problem seems a very poor reason to go back now to the theory of a rogue telepath.”

Weldon blew out a puff of smoke, said thoughtfully, “That wouldn’t have been too logical of us, I agree. But our failure wasn’t the reason for reviving DEDCOM’s theory.”

“Then what was your reason?” Irritation edged Lowry’s voice again.

“The unexpected death, five years ago, of one of the world’s better-known political figures,” Weldon said. “You would recognize the name immediately if I mentioned it. But you will not recognize the circumstances surrounding his death which I am about to relate to you, because the report published at the time was a complete falsehood and omitted everything which might have seemed out of the ordinary. The man actually was the victim of murder. His corpse was found floating in the Atlantic. That it

should have been noticed at all was an unlikely coincidence, but the body was fished out and identified. At that point, the matter acquired some very improbable aspects because it was well known that this man was still alive and in the best of health at his home in New York.

"It could have been a case of mistaken identification, but it wasn't. The corpse was the real thing. While this was being definitely established, the man in New York quietly disappeared . . . and now a number of people began to take a different view of DEDCOM's long-buried report of a hypnotizing telepath who could assume the identity of another person convincingly enough to fool even close friends. It was not conclusive evidence, but it did justify a serious inquiry which was promptly attempted."

"Attempted?" Arlene Rolf asked. "What happened?"

WHAT happened," Weldon said, "was that the rogue declared war on us. A limited war on the human race. A quiet, undercover war for a specific purpose. And that was to choke off any kind of investigation that might endanger him or hamper his activities. The rogue knew he had betrayed himself; and if he hadn't known of it earlier, he learned now about the report DEDCOM had made. Those were

matters he couldn't undo. But he could make it very clear that he wanted to be left undisturbed, and that he had methods to enforce his wishes."

Dr. Lowry blinked. "What could one . . ."

"Ben," Ferris Weldon said, "if you'll look back, you'll recall that a little less than five years ago we had . . . packed into the space of a few months . . . a series of the grimmest public disasters on record. These were not due to natural forces—to hurricanes, earthquakes, floods or the like. No, each and every one of them involved, or might have involved, a human agency. They were not inexplicable. Individually, each could be explained only too well by human incompetence, human lunacy or criminal purpose. But—a giant hotel exploded, a city's water supply was poisoned, a liner . . . yes, you remember.

"Now, notice that the rogue did not strike directly at our investigators. He did that on a later occasion and under different circumstances, but not at the time. It indicated that in spite of his immense natural advantages he did not regard himself as invulnerable. And, of course, he had no need to assume personal risks. By the public nonspace and air systems, he would move anywhere on earth within hours; and wherever he went, any hu-

man being within the range of his mind became a potential tool. He could order death at will and be at a safe distance when the order was executed. Within ten weeks, he had Special Activities on the ropes. The attempts to identify him were called off. And the abnormal series of disasters promptly ended. The rogue had made his point."

Arlene said soberly, "You say he attacked some of your investigators later on. What was that about?"

THAT was a year later," Weldon said. "A kind of stalemate had developed. As you're aware, the few operating telepaths in the government's employment are a daintily handled property. They're never regarded as expendable. It was clear they weren't in the rogue's class, so no immediate attempt was made to use them against him. But meanwhile we'd assembled—almost entirely by inference—a much more detailed picture of this opponent of mankind than DEDCOM had been able to provide. He was a freak in every way. His ability to read other minds and to affect them—an apparent blend of telepathy and irresistible hypnosis—obviously was a much more powerful and definite tool than the unreliable gropings of any ordinary telepath. But there was the curious point that

he appeared to be limited—very sharply limited—simply by distance, which to most of our trained telepaths is a meaningless factor, at least this side of interplanetary space. If one stayed beyond his range, the rogue was personally harmless. And if he could be identified from beyond his range, he also could be—and by that time almost immediately would have been—destroyed by mechanical means, without regard for any last-moment havoc he might cause.

"So the first security island was established, guarded against the rogue's approach by atmospheric blocks and sophisticated somatic barriers. Two government telepaths were brought to it and induced to locate him mentally.

"It turned out to be another mistake. If our unfortunate prodigies gained any information about the rogue, they didn't live long enough to tell us what it was. Both committed suicide within seconds of each other."

"The rogue had compelled them to do it?" Arlene asked.

"Of course."

"And was this followed," Dr. Lowry asked, "by another public disaster?"

"No," Weldon said. "The rogue may have considered that unnecessary. After all, he'd made his point again. Sending the best of

our tame telepaths after him was like setting spaniels on a tiger. Ordinarily, he could reach a telepath's mind only within his own range, like that of any other person. But if they were obliging enough to make contact with him, they would be instantly at his mercy, wherever he might be. We took the hint; the attempt wasn't repeated. Our other telepaths have remained in the seclusion of security islands, and so far the rogue has showed no interest in getting at them there."

Weldon stubbed his cigarette out carefully in the ashtray beside him, added, "You see now, I think, why we feel it is necessary to take extreme precautions in the further handling of your diex projector."

THERE was silence for some seconds. Then Dr. Lowry said, "Yes, that much has become obvious." He paused, pursing his lips doubtfully, his eyes absent. "All right," he went on. "This has been rather disturbing information, Ferris. But let's look at the thing now.

"We've found that diex energy can be employed to augment the effects of the class of processes commonly referred to as telepathic. The projector operates on that theory. By using it, ordinary mortals like Arlene and myself can duplicate some of the

results reportedly achieved by the best-trained telepaths. However, we are restricted in several ways by our personal limitations. We need the location devices to direct the supporting energy to the points of the globe where the experiments are to be carried out. And so far we have not been able to 'read the mind'—to use that very general term—of anyone with whom we are not at least casually acquainted."

Weldon nodded. "I'm aware of that."

"Very well," Lowry said. "The other advantage of the projector over unaided natural telepathy is its dependability. It works as well today as it did yesterday or last week. Until a natural telepath actually has been tested on these instruments, we can't be certain that the diex field will be equally useful to him. But let's assume that it is and that he employs the projector to locate the rogue. It should be very easy for him to do that. But won't that simply—in your phrasing—put him at the rogue's mercy again?"

Weldon hesitated, said, "We think not, Ben. A specialist in these matters could tell you in a good deal more detail about the functional organization in the mind of a natural telepath. But essentially they all retain unconscious safeguards and resistances which limit their tele-

pathic ability but serve to protect them against negative effects. The difference between them and ourselves on that point appears to be mainly one of degree."

Lowry said, "I think I see. The theory is that such protective processes would be correspondingly strengthened by employing the diex field. . . ."

"That's it," Weldon said. "To carry the analogue I was using a little farther, we might again be sending a spaniel against a tiger. But the spaniel—backed up by the projector—would now be approximately tiger size . . . and tiger-strong. We must assume that the rogue would be far more skilled and deadly in an actual mental struggle, but there should be no struggle. Our telepath's business would be simply to locate his man, identify him, and break away again. During the very few seconds required for that, the diex field should permit him to hold off the rogue's assault."

Dr. Lowry shook his head. "You can't be sure of it, Ferris!" he said. "You can't be sure of it at all."

Weldon smiled. "No, we can't. We don't really know what would happen. But neither, you see, does the rogue."

Lowry said hesitantly, "I'm afraid I don't follow you."

"Ben," Weldon said, "we don't

expect your diex projector will ever be put to the use we've been discussing just now. That isn't its purpose."

Lowry looked dumfounded. "Then what is its purpose?"

ARLENE ROLF's face had gone pale. "Doctor Ben," she said, "I believe Colonel Weldon is implying that the rogue already knows about the diex projector and what might be attempted with it."

Weldon nodded. "Of course, he knows about it. How many secrets do you think can be kept from a creature who can tap the minds of anybody he encounters? You can take it for granted that he's maintained information sources in every department of the government since the day we became aware of his existence. He knows we're out to get him. And he isn't stupid enough to allow things here to develop to the point where one of our telepaths is actually placed in front of that projector. He can't be sure of what the outcome would be. After all, it might . . . very easily . . . be fatal to him."

Lowry began, "Then I don't . . ." He checked himself, gave Arlene Rolf a bewildered look. "Are *you* still with this madman, Arlene?"

Her smile was twisted. "I'm afraid so! If I am, I don't like the situation at all. Colonel Wel-

don, have you people planned to use the diex projector as a trap for the rogue?"

"As bait for a trap," Weldon said. "Ben, put yourself in the rogue's place. He regards this entire planet as his property. But now the livestock is aware of him and is restless. On the technological side it is also becoming more clever by the decade—dangerously clever. He can still keep us in our place here, and so far he's succeeded in blocking a major exodus into the solar system where his power would vanish. But can he continue indefinitely? And can he find any enjoyment in being the lord of all Earth when he has to be constantly on guard now against our efforts to get rid of him? He's blocked our first thrusts and showed us that he can make it a very costly business to harass him too seriously. But the situation is as unsatisfactory to him as to us. He needs much more effective methods of control than were required in the past to bring us back to heel."

Lowry said, "And the diex projector . . ."

Weldon nodded. "Of course! The diex projector is the perfect solution to the rogue's problems. The security islands which so far have been our principle form of defense would become meaningless. He could reach any human mind on Earth directly and

immediately. Future plots to overthrow him would stand no chance of success.

"The rogue has shown no scientific ability of his own, and the handful of other men who might be capable at present of constructing a similar instrument have been placed beyond his reach. So he has permitted the development of the projector to continue here, though he could, of course, have put an abrupt stop to it in a number of ways. But you may be sure that he intends to bring the diex projector into his possession before it actually can be used against him."

Arlene said, "And he's assumed to know that the projector is now operational, aside from any faults that might still show up in the tests?"

"Yes," Weldon said.

She went on, "Does the fact that I was allowed to leave the project several times a week—actually whenever I felt like it—have something to do with that?"

WELDON said, "We believe that the rogue has taken advantage rather regularly of that arrangement. After all, there was no more dependable way of informing himself of the exact state of affairs on the project than . . ."

"Than by picking my mind?"

Weldon hesitated, said,

"There's no denying that we have placed you both in danger, Arlene. Under the circumstances, we can offer no apology for that. It was a matter of simple necessity."

"I wasn't expecting an apology, Colonel Weldon." Her face was white. "But I'm wondering what the rogue is supposed to attempt now."

"To get possession of the projector?" Weldon hesitated again. "We don't know that exactly. We believe we have considered every possible approach, and whichever he selects, we're prepared to trap him in the process of carrying it out."

Dr. Lowry said, "But he must suspect that you intend to trap him!"

Weldon nodded. "He does, naturally. But he's under a parallel disadvantage there—he can't be certain what the traps are. You don't realize yet how elaborate our precautionary measures have been." Weldon indicated the small door in the wall beyond Dr. Lowry. "The reason I use only that private conduit to come here is that I haven't stepped off a security island for almost three years! The same has been true of anyone else who had information we had to keep from the rogue . . . including incidentally Mr. Green, whose occasional 'public appearances' during this critical period have been elabo-

ately staged fakes. We communicate only by viewphone; in fact, none of us even knows just where the others are. There is almost no chance that he can do more than guess at the exact nature of our plans."

"And with all that," Lowry said slowly, "you expect he will still go ahead and make a bid for the projector?"

"He will because he must!" Weldon said. "His only alternative would be to destroy this security island with everything on it at the last moment. And that is very unlikely. The rogue's actions show that in spite of his current troubles with us he has a vast contempt for ordinary human beings. Without that feeling, he would never have permitted the diex projector to be completed. So he will come for it—very warily, taking every precaution, but confident of outmaneuvering us at the end."

Arlene asked, "And isn't it possible that he will do just that?"

There was a barely perceptible pause before Weldon replied. "Yes," he said then, "it's possible. It's a small chance—perhaps only a theoretical one. But we're not omniscient, and we may not know quite as much about him as we think. It remains possible."

"Then why take even that risk?" Arlene asked. "Wouldn't it be better to destroy the projec-

tor now—to leave things as they are—rather than offer him a weapon which would reduce us all to helpless chattels again?”

Weldon shook his head. “Arlene, we can’t leave things as they are! Neither can the rogue. You know that really—even though you refuse to admit it to yourself at the moment.”

“I . . . what do you mean?”

THIS year,” Weldon said patiently, “we have the diex projector. What will we have five years from now when diex energy has been more fully explored? When the other fields of knowledge that have been opened in recent years begin to expand? We could, perhaps, slow down those processes. We can’t stop them. And, at any point, other unpredictable weapons may emerge . . . weapons we might use against the rogue, or that he might use against us.

“No, for both sides the time to act is now, unless we’re willing to leave the future to chance. We aren’t; and the rogue isn’t. We’ve challenged him to determine whether he or mankind will control this planet, and he’s accepted the challenge. It amounts to that. And it’s very likely that the outcome will have become apparent not many hours from now.”

Arlene shook her head but said nothing. Dr. Lowry asked,

“Ferris, exactly what is *our* role in this situation supposed to be?”

“For the next few hours,” Weldon said, “you’ll be instructing me in the practical details of operating the projector. I’ve studied your reports very carefully, of course, and I could handle it after a fashion without such help. But that isn’t good enough. Because—as the rogue knows very well—we aren’t bluffing in the least in this. We’re forcing him to take action. If he doesn’t”—Weldon nodded at the polished hardwood box on the table before Dr. Lowry—one of our telepaths presently *will* be placed before that instrument of yours, and the rogue will face the possibility of being flushed into view. And there is no point on the globe at this moment which is more than a few minutes’ flight away from one of our strike groups.

“So he’ll take action . . . at the latest as soon as the order is given to move our telepath to the Cleaver Project. But you two won’t be here when it happens. You’re not needed for that part, and while we’ve been talking, the main project conduit has been shunted from our university exit here to a security island outside the area. You’ll move there directly from the project as soon as you finish checking me out, and you will remain there until

Operation Rogue is concluded.

"And now let's get busy! I think it would be best, Ben, if I assumed Arlene's usual role for a start . . . secondary operator . . . and let you go through the regular pattern of contacts while I look on. What do you say?"

ARLENE ROLF had taken a chair well back from the table where the two men sat before the diex projector. She realized it had been an attempt to dissociate herself—emotionally as well as physically—from what was being done there, and that the attempt hadn't been at all successful. Her usual composure, based on the awareness of being able to adjust herself efficiently to the necessities of any emergency, was simply gone. The story of the rogue had been sprung on them too abruptly at this last moment. Her mind accepted the concept but hadn't really assimilated it yet. Listening to what Weldon had said, wanting to remain judiciously skeptical but finding herself increasingly unable to disbelieve him—that had been like a slow, continuous shock. She wasn't yet over it. Her thoughts wouldn't follow the lines she set them on but veered off almost incoherently every minute or two. For the first time in her adult life she was badly frightened—made stupid with fear—and finding it

something she seemed unable to control at will.

Her gaze shifted back helplessly to the table and to the dull-blue concave viewplate which was the diex projector's central section. Unfolded from its case, the projector was a beautiful machine of spider web angularities lifting from the flat silver slab of its generator to the plate. The blurred shiftings of color and light in the center of the plate were next to meaningless without the diex goggles Dr. Lowry and Weldon had fitted over their heads; but Arlene was familiar enough with the routine test patterns to follow their progress without listening closely to what was said. . . .

She wanted the testing to stop. She felt it was dangerous. Hadn't Weldon said they still couldn't be sure of the actual extent of the rogue's abilities? And mightn't the projector be luring their minds out now into the enemy's territory, drawing his attention to what was being done in this room? There had been seconds when an uncanny certainty had come to her that she could sense the rogue's presence, that he already was cynically aware of what they were attempting, and only biding his time before he interfered. That might be—almost certainly was—superstitious imagining, but the conviction had been strong.

Strong enough to leave her trembling.

But there was, of course, exactly nothing she could do or say now to keep them from going on. She remained silent.

So far it had been routine. A standard warm-up. They'd touched Vanderlin in Melbourne, Marie Faber in Seattle. The wash of colors in the viewplate was the reflection of individual sensory impressions riding the diex field. There had been no verbalizing or conscious response from the contacted subjects. That would come later. Dr. Lowry's face was turned momentarily sideways to her, the conical grey lenses of the goggles protruding from beneath his forehead like staring insect eyes.

SHE realized he must have said something to Weldon just now which she hadn't heard. Weldon's head was nodding in agreement. Dr. Lowry shifted back to the table, said, "Botucato, Brazil—an untried location. How the pinpointing of these random samplings is brought about is of course . . ." His voice dropped to an indistinct murmur as he reached out to the projector again.

Arlene roused herself with an effort partly out of her foggy fears. It was almost like trying to awake from a heavy, uncomfortable sleep. But now there was

also some feeling of relief—and angry self-contempt—because obviously while she had been giving in to her emotional reactions, nothing disastrous had in fact occurred! At the table, they'd moved on several steps in the standard testing procedure. She hadn't even been aware of it. She was behaving like a fool!

The sensory color patterns were gone from the viewplate, and now as she looked, the green-patterned white field of the projector's location map appeared there instead. She watched Dr. Lowry's practiced fingers spin the coordinating dials, and layer after layer of the map came surging into view, each a magnified section of the preceding one. There was a faint click. Lowry released the dials, murmured something again, ended more audibly, "... twenty-mile radius." The viewplate had gone blank, but Arlene continued to watch it.

The projector was directed now towards a twenty-mile circle at ground level somewhere in Brazil. None of their established contacts were in that area. Nevertheless, something quite definite was occurring. Dr. Lowry had not expected to learn much more about this particular process until a disciplined telepathic mind was operating through the instrument—and perhaps not too much more then. But in some

manner the diex energy was now probing the area, and presently it would touch a human mind—sometimes a succession of them, sometimes only one. It was always the lightest of contacts. The subjects remained patently unaware of any unusual experience, and the only thing reflected from them was the familiar generalized flux of sensory impressions—

ARLENE ROLF realized she was standing just inside the open records vault of Dr. Lowry's office, with a bundle of files in her arms. On the floor about her was a tumbled disorder of other files, of scattered papers, tapes. She dropped the bundle on the litter, turned back to the door. And only then, with a churning rush of hot terror, came the thought, *What am I doing here? What happened?*

She saw Dr. Lowry appear in the vault door with another pile of papers. He tossed them in carelessly, turned back into the office without glancing in her direction. Arlene found herself walking out after him, her legs carrying her along in dreamlike independence of her will. Lowry was now upending the contents of a drawer to the top of his desk. She tried to scream his name. There was no sound. She saw his face for an instant. He looked thoughtful, absorbed in

what he was doing, nothing else. . . .

Then she was walking through the living room, carrying something—the next instant, it seemed, she'd reentered Lowry's office. Nightmarishly, it continued. Blank lapses of awareness followed moments in which her mind swayed in wild terrors while her body moved about, machinelike and competent, piling material from workshop and file cabinets helter-skelter into the records vault. It might have been going on for only three or four minutes or for an hour; her memory was enclosed in splinters of time and reality. But there were moments, too, when her thoughts became lucid and memory returned . . . Colonel Weldon's broad back as he disappeared through the narrow door in the living room wall into the private conduit entry, the strap of the diex projector case in his right hand; then the door closing behind him. Before that had been an instant when something blazed red in the projector's viewplate on the table, and she'd wondered why neither of the two men sitting before it made any comment—

Then suddenly, in one of the lucid moments, there was time for the stunned thought to form: *So the rogue caught us all!* Weldon's self-confidence and courage, Dr. Lowry's dedicated skill,

her own reluctance to be committed to this matter . . . nothing had made the slightest difference. In his own time, the rogue had come quietly through every defense and seized their minds. Weldon was on his way to him now, carrying the diex projector.

And she and Dr. Lowry? They'd been ordered by the rogue to dispose of every scrap of information dealing with the projector's construction, of course! They were doing it. And after they had finished—then what?

Arlene thought she knew when she saw Dr. Lowry close the vault, and unlock and plunge the destruct button beside the door. Everything in there would be annihilated now in ravening white fire. But the two minds which knew the secrets of the projector—

SHE must have made a violent effort to escape, almost overriding the rogue's compulsions. For she found herself in the living room, not ten feet from the door that opened into the outer halls where help might still have been found. But it was as far as she could go; she was already turning away from the door, starting back across the room with the quick, graceful automaton stride over which she had no control. And terror surged up in her again.

As she approached the far wall, she saw Dr. Lowry come out of the passage from the office, smiling absently, blinking at the floor through his glasses. He turned without looking up and walked behind her towards the closed narrow door before Colonel Weldon's nonspace conduit entry.

So it wasn't to be death, Arlene thought, but personal slavery. The rogue still had use for them. They were to follow where Weldon had gone. . . .

Her hand tugged at the door. It wouldn't open.

She wrenched at it violently, savagely, formless panic pounding through her. After a moment, Dr. Lowry began to mutter uneasily, then reached out to help her.

The room seemed suddenly to explode; and for an instant Arlene Rolf felt her mind disintegrating in raging torrents of whitelight.

SHE had been looking drowsily for some moments at the lanky, red-headed man who stood, faced away, half across the room before any sort of conscious understanding returned. Then, immediately, everything was there. She went stiff with shock.

Dr. Lowry's living room . . . she in this chair and Dr. Lowry stretched out on the couch. He'd



seemed asleep. And standing above him, looking down at him, the familiar raw-boned, big figure of Frank Harding. Dr. Frank Harding who had walked up to the Cleaver Spaceport entry with her today, told her he'd be flying back to the coast.

Frank Harding, the . . .

Arlene slipped quietly out of the chair, moved across the room behind Harding's back, watching him. When he began to turn, she darted off towards the open hall entry.

She heard him make a startled exclamation, come pounding after her. He caught her at the entry, swung her around, holding her wrists. He stared down at her from under the bristling red brows. "What the devil did you think you were doing?"

"You . . . !" Arlene gasped frantically. "You—" What checked her was first the surprise, then the dawning understanding in his face. She stammered, almost dizzy with relief, "I . . . I thought you must be . . ."

Harding shook his head, relaxed his grip on her wrists.

"But I'm not, of course," he said quietly.

"No . . . you're not! You wouldn't have had to . . . chase me if you were, would you?" Her eyes went round in renewed dismay. "But I don't . . . he has the diex projector now!"

Harding shook his head again and took her arm. "No, he doesn't! Now just try to relax a bit, Arlene. We did trap him, you know. It cost quite a few more lives at the end, but we did. So let's go over and sit down. I brought some whisky along . . . figured you two should be able to use a little after everything you've been through."

Arlene sat on the edge of a chair, watching him pour out a glass. A reaction had set in; she felt very weak and shaky now, and she seemed unable to comprehend entirely that the rogue had been caught.

She said, "So you were in on this operation too?"

He glanced around. "Uh-huh . . . Dome at the bottom of an ocean basin wasn't at all a bad headquarters under the circumstances. What put you and Dr. Ben to sleep was light-shock." He handed her the glass.

"Light-shock?" Arlene repeated.

"Something new," Harding said. "Developed—in another security island project—for the specific purpose of resolving hypnotic compulsions, including the very heavy type implanted by the rogue. He doesn't seem to have been aware of that project, or else he regarded it as one of our less important efforts which he could afford to ignore for the present. Anyway, light-shock

does do the job, and very cleanly, though it knocks the patient out for a while in the process. That side effect isn't too desirable, but so far it's been impossible to avoid."

"I see," Arlene said. She took a cautious swallow of the whisky and set the glass down as her eyes began to water.

FRANK HARDING leaned back against the table and folded his arms. He scowled thoughtfully down at her.

"We managed to get two persons who were suspected of being the rogue's unconscious stooges to the island," he said, "and tried light-shock out on them. It worked and didn't harm them, so we decided to use it here. Lowry will wake up in another hour at the latest and be none the worse. Of course, neither of you will remember what happened while the rogue had you under control, but . . ."

"You're quite wrong about that," Arlene told him. "I don't remember all of it, but I'm still very much aware of perhaps half of what happened—though I'm not sure I wouldn't prefer to forget it. It was like an extremely unpleasant nightmare."

Harding looked surprised. "That's very curious! The other cases reported complete amnesia. Perhaps you . . ."

"You've been under a heavy

strain yourself, haven't you, Frank?" she asked.

He hesitated. "I? What makes you think so?"

"You're being rather gabby. It isn't like you."

Harding grunted. "I suppose you're right. This thing's been tense enough. *He* may have enjoyed it—except naturally at the very end. Playing cat and mouse with the whole human race! Well, the mice turned out to be a little too much for him, after all. But of course nothing was certain until that last moment."

"Because none of you could be sure of anyone else?"

"That was it mainly. This was one operation where actually nobody *could* be in charge completely or completely trusted. There were overlaps for everything, and no one knew what all of them were. When Weldon came here today, he turned on a pocket transmitter so that everything that went on while he was being instructed in the use of the diex projector would be monitored outside.

"Outside was also a globe-scanner which duplicated the activities of the one attached to the projector. We could tell at any moment to which section of Earth the projector's diex field had been directed. That was one of the overlapping precautions. It sounded like a standard check run. There was a little more con-

versation between Lowry and Weldon than was normal when you were the assistant operator, but that could be expected. There were pauses while the projector was shut down and preparations for the next experiment were made. Normal again. Then, during one of the pauses, we got the signal that someone had just entered Weldon's private non-space conduit over there from this end. That was *not* normal, and the conduit was immediately sealed off at both exits. One more overlapping precaution, you see . . . and that just happened to be the one that paid off!"

Arlene frowned. "But what did . . ."

"Well," Harding said, "there were still a number of questions to be answered, of course. They had to be answered fast and correctly or the game could be lost. Nobody expected the rogue to show up in person at the Cleaver Project. The whole security island could have been destroyed in an instant; we knew he was aware of that. But he'd obviously made a move of some kind—and we had to assume that the diex projector was now suspended in the conduit.

BUT who, or what, was in there with it? The project guards had been withdrawn. There'd been only the three of you on the island. The rogue could have had

access to all three at some time or other; and his compulsions—until we found a way to treat them—were good for a lifetime. Any of you might have carried that projector into the conduit to deliver it to him. Or all three might be involved, acting together. If that was the case, the conduit would have to be reopened because the game had to continue. It was the rogue we wanted, not his tools. . . .

"And there *was* the other possibility. You and Dr. Ben are among the rather few human beings on Earth we could be sure were not the rogue, not one of his impersonations. If he'd been capable of building a diex projector, he wouldn't have had to steal one. Colonel Weldon had been with Special Activities for a long time. But he could be an impersonation. In other words, the rogue."

Arlene felt her face go white. "He was!" she said.

"Eh? How do you know?"

"I didn't realize it, but . . . no, go ahead. I'd rather tell you later."

"What didn't you realize?" Harding persisted.

Arlene said, "I experienced some of his feelings . . . after he was inside the conduit. He knew he'd been trapped!" Her hands were shaking. "I thought they were my own . . . that I . . . " Her voice began to falter.

"Let it go," Harding said, watching her. "It can't have been pleasant."

She shook her head. "I assure you it wasn't!"

"So he could reach you from nonspace!" Harding said. "That was something we didn't know. We suspected we still didn't have the whole picture about the rogue. But he didn't know everything either. He thought his escape route from the project and away through the conduit system was clear. It was a very bold move. If he'd reached any point on Earth where we weren't waiting to destroy him from a distance, he would have needed only a minute or two with the projector to win all the way. Well, that failed. And a very short time later, we knew we had the rogue in the conduit."

"How did you find that out?"

Harding said, "The duplicate global scanner I told you about. After all, the rogue *could* have been Weldon. Aside from you two, he could have been almost anyone involved in the operation. He might have been masquerading as one of our own telepaths! Every location point the diex field turned to during that 'test run' came under instant investigation. We were looking for occurrences which might indicate the rogue had been handling the diex projector.

"The first reports didn't start

to come in until after the Weldon imitation had taken the projector into the conduit. But then, in a few minutes, we had plenty! They showed the rogue had tested the projector, knew he could handle it, knew he'd reestablished himself as king of the world—and this time for good! And then he walked off into the conduit with his wonderful stolen weapon. . . ."

Arlene said, "He was trying to get Dr. Ben and me to open the project exit for him again. We couldn't, of course. I never imagined anyone could experience the terror he felt."

"There was some reason for it," Harding said. "Physical action is impossible in nonspace, so he couldn't use the projector. He was helpless while he was in the conduit. And he knew we couldn't compromise when we let him out.

"We switched the conduit exit to a point eight hundred feet above the surface of Cleaver Interplanetary Spaceport—the project he's kept us from completing for the past twenty-odd years—and opened it there. We still weren't completely certain, you know, that the rogue mightn't turn out to be a genuine superman who would whisk himself away and out of our reach just before he hit the marblite paving.

"But he wasn't. . . ." **THE END**

*"... might not the projector be luring
their minds now into the enemy's terri-
tory, drawing his attention to what was
being done in this room?"*

See Rogue Psi

