

# FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

NO. 32

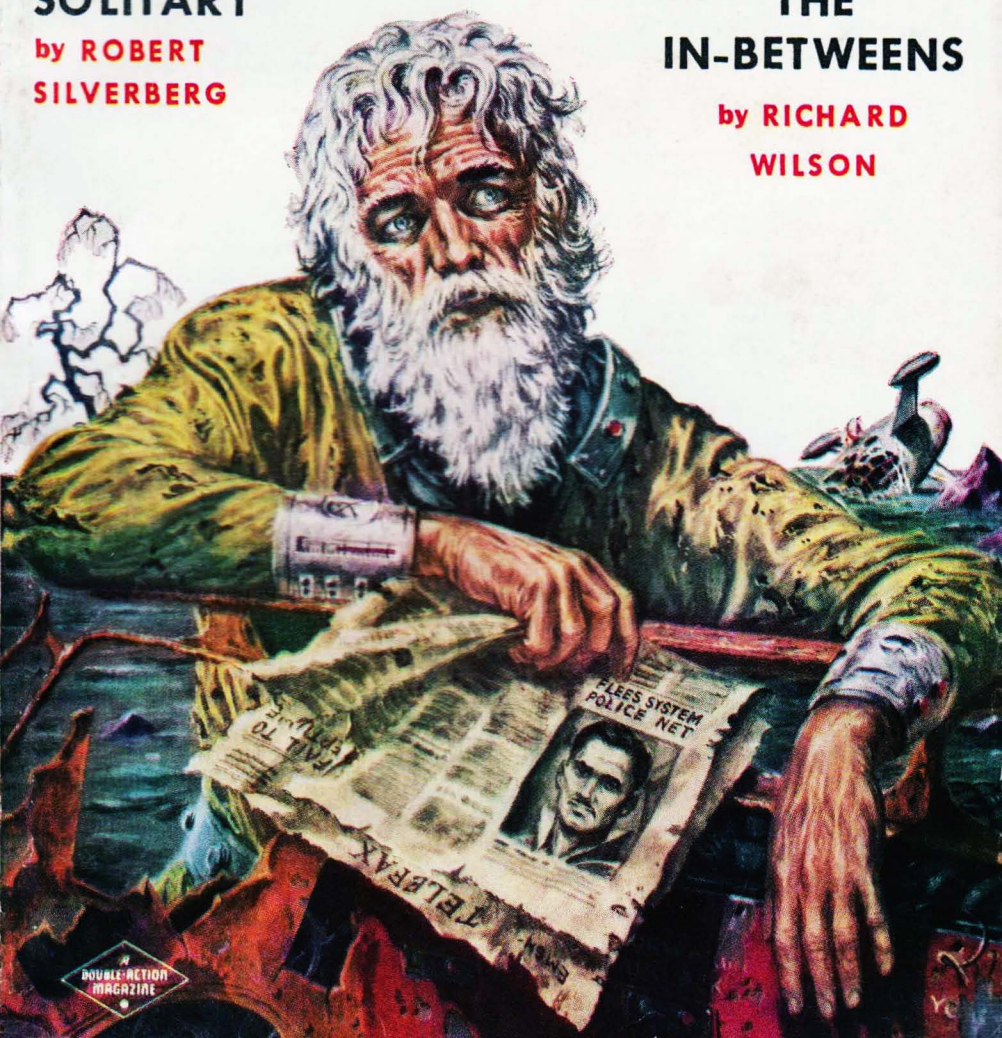
35¢

## SOLITARY

by ROBERT  
SILVERBERG

## THE IN-BETWEENS

by RICHARD  
WILSON



DOUBLE ACTION  
MAGAZINE

# FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

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## ● NOVEL

**MADE TO ORDER** ..... *Frank Belknap Long* 67  
John Tabor had desirable traits, according to the Big Brain, only there were already too many like him. So...his application for marriage permission was denied. But there was an alternative...

## ● SHORT STORIES

**SOLITARY** (illustrated on cover) ..... *Robert Silverberg* 4  
All the logical answers to Charcot's escape and disappearances had come up...but why should an escaped convict be logical?

**THE IN-BETWEENS** ..... *Richard Wilson* 22  
Robert Blane became the most ubiquitous of man ever...

**SINFUL CITY** ..... *Christopher Anvil* 52  
An edifying and unlifting tale of vice defeated and iniquity crushed.

**THE MILE** ..... *John Tara* 110  
Now if unborn children were capable of reflection on the human lot...

**NIGHTMARE CALL** ..... *Carol Emshwiller* 121  
A strange and unusual story, by the author of "Bingo and Bongo".

## ● FEATURES

**THE EDITOR'S PAGE** ..... *Robert A. W. Lowndes* 19  
Actually, just what is "Destructive Criticism"?

**MORE MAD MEN OF SCIENCE** (article) .....  
..... *L. Sprague de Camp* 40  
They weren't "mad" in the "mad monster" sense — just plain batty!

**READIN' AND WRITHIN'** ..... *Book Reviews* 113  
L. Sprague de Camp looks over recent scientific non-fiction.

**DOWN TO EARTH** (department) ..... *The Readers* 127  
Letters from readers, plus editorial comment.

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COVER BY EMSH    Illustrations by Emsh, Freas, and Orban

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FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION, Number 32, Spring 1957. Published quarterly by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC., 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices at 241 Church Street, New York 13, New York. Application for second class entry pending at the Post Office, Holyoke, Mass. Single copies 35¢; yearly subscription \$1.40. Entire contents copyright 1957 by Columbia Publications, Inc. Printed in U. S. A.



Charcot tore out the automatic communication system...

*Crime analyses were handled by TOTIVAC, which could handle and integrate more data in microseconds than a human being could in hours. But the trouble was that when TOTIVAC indicated, for example, that no one would try to hide on Bellatrix IV — a world devoid of all life — it only meant that such action would be illogical. And since all the logical places for the escaped convict, Charcot, to hide had been covered . . .*

# solitary

by Robert Silverberg

(author of "The Man With Talent")

**E**VER SINCE the computers came to be running things pretty much their own way, handling data and forming conclusions, the only way a man could achieve any notice in the galaxy was to do some original thinking—and by original, read *alogical*. An analog computer is a clever thing, with its countless supercooled cryotrons clicking off bits of information, ~~but~~ its mind is a limited sort of creature. Men, luckily, aren't limited to the flip-flop on-off type

of binary thinking that the computers specialize in.

Among those most painfully aware of this was George Brauer of Crime Bureau. Because the job of keeping data on the galaxy's criminals was so complex, Crime Bureau was among the first to be completely computerized. Its employees were reduced to the level of data-predigestors, selecting information to be programmed and fed to the computers. As the centuries passed, the human members of Crime

Bureau became less and less necessary to the scheme of things. They were mere adjuncts to the TOTIVAC that did the actual work.

This irked George Brauer.

**A**T THIRTY-ONE, he felt he was at a crossroads. This was his fifth year with Crime Bureau—and in those five years he had become an increasingly more skillful computer technician, nothing more. This was not why he had joined Crime Bureau.

He had been interested, being a serious, reflective man, in the concepts of crime and punishment, the philosophical determinance of guilt, mores and ethos, responsibility and necessary obligation. They fascinated him.

"You ought to join Crime Bureau," his college roommate told him sourly. "Always talking about murders and things, as if you were going to commit a couple."

"It's purely a scholarly interest," Brauer said. And when he graduated, he joined Crime Bureau.

At thirty-one he was at a crossroads.

Moodily he sat at his burnished duralplast desk in the magnificent Crime Bureau Ministratory in Upper Ontario, toying with the sheets of paper before him. They listed

statistics governing occurrence of voyeurism on Earth, and on the seventeen Norm Planets used as guideposts in such things. Brauer was supposed to integrate them, feed them to omnivorous TOTIVAC, and wait while the statistics came rattling back neatly interpreted. They were to be transmitted to Lurinar IX, an Earth-type planet afflicted simultaneously with a rash of voyeurism and with a starchily-puritanical ruling oligarchy, for benefit of the bemused and troubled Chief of Police there.

As he worked, Brauer found himself envying that Chief of Police. Stranded on a backwater world as he was, at least the man had a chance to deal with crime and criminals first hand, not with the ever-present TOTIVAC peering over his shoulder. Brauer plodded gloomily through the long columns, then sent the whole tape whirring into the innards of the computer.

Pulses flitted down tantalum cryotrons; information was bandied and conclusions drawn. And Brauer ground his fist into his chin in boredom.

**T**HE COMPUTER took all the trial-and-error out of things. To be sure, TOTIVAC operated on a trial-and-error system itself, as did any analog computer. But the inter-



val between successive trials was often less than a micro-microsecond, and a speed of that order allowed for all the wrong guesses a machine would be likely to make in a two-minute span.

Two minutes. The data came chittering back at him. Without even looking at it, Brauer tossed it in the upper basket on his desk.

Stultification—that was the word. A man had to do a little thinking on his own. It was all right to use the computer as a tool to simplify the process of thought—but not as a substitute for it.

On a sudden impulse he stuck a requisition form in his typewriter, which was an antiquated manual model, and tapped out a brief message: SEND ME DATA CARDS ON CURRENT FILE OF UNSOLVED CRIMES.

He glanced at what he had written, scowled, then added for benefit of the computer: TIME LIMITATION: LAST THIRTY YEARS. SPACE LIMITATION: THIS GALAXY.

Brauer paused, then tacked on a second postscript: HOP TO IT, OR I'LL PUT KETCHUP IN YOUR FEED LINES.

**H**E INTEGRATED the requisition form and shot it

downward into TOTIVAC's bowels. An instant later the red light over his desk blazed, indicating a message from the computer, and the machine replied: COERCION INVALID-DATES REQUISITION. PLEASE DELETE SAME OR FACE PENALTY.

Brauer could imagine the storm his whimsical threat had kicked up down in the defensive banks of the computer; probably they were busy monitoring the cooling system, the fuel input, and anything else that might be construed as a "feed line," on guard for a sudden influx of ketchup.

COERCION DELETED, he replied. NO DANGER OF DESTRUCTION BY KETCHUP.

The warning-light blinked out; the computer's hackles were subsiding.

Moments later came the deluge.

He had asked for the current file of unsolved cases; he got it. It came spilling out of the computer's orifice with a rush and a roar, card after card covered with TOTIVAC's neat typing. Brauer blinked as the cards piled up. There were a lot of people in the galaxy, and a great many crimes—and if even just a bare fraction went unsolved—

He sighed. There was no

way to interrupt the machine, now that it had begun to disgorge. The computer was reaching into the depths of its files, coming up with cases that had been on the books for decades. At least five thousand cards were on his desk now, and still they came.

**T**HE COMMUNICATOR chimed. Brauer grabbed it and heard his superior bark, "Brauer, what are you *doing*?"

"Original research, Chief," he said smoothly. "The machine's a little over-enthusiastic, that's all."

"Oh? Research on what?"

"I'd prefer not to talk about it until I'm finished. I may need a short leave of absence, too."

"I suppose it can be arranged," the Chief said gruffly, and broke the contact.

Brauer stared balefully at the mounting stack of cards. All right; he had announced he was working on something. Now he would have to follow through.

A second stack of five thousand cards had appeared, and it seemed as if the computer was well on its way toward delivering a third when abruptly a single card fluttered out of the orifice and the message-light flashed. Brauer snatched up the communication.

END OF IMMEDIATE-

ACCESS OPEN FILES.  
THERE WILL BE DELAY  
OF ONE HUNDRED EIGHTY  
SECONDS WHILE SEC-  
ONDARY FILES ARE  
SEARCHED.

"No there won't!" Brauer half-shouted. Quickly he pecked out a reply: DATA ALREADY DELIVERED IS SUFFICIENT FOR PROJECT. TERMINATE SEARCH WITHOUT FURTHER ACTIVITY.

A pause, then the response: ACKNOWLEDGED. TERMINATED.

"Thank goodness," Brauer said fervently. He stared at the heaps of data-cards in a somewhat glassy-eyed manner, feeling like the sorcerer's apprentice. But at least he had managed to shut off the flow.

**H**E LIFTED the uppermost card and skimmed it. Tall thin Sirian suspected of shoplifting in Third City of Vega IV twenty-nine point nine years before, never apprehended. Further details other side.

The second card was even less promising. Child's pet stolen by large hairy man on morning of 7 July 2561, planet Earth. Pet never recovered. Details other side.

The card had been in the files thirty years. Someone could gain more than a little prestige, Brauer thought, sim-

ply by clearing junk like this out of the memory banks. By now the stolen pet, unless it had been a Galapagos turtle, was long since dead, and the bereaved child grown to manhood. And yet the "crime" was still carried as unsolved.

He reached for a third card. Like the first two, it dated back thirty years. But it was considerably more interesting. Brauer read it once perfunctorily, then went back and examined it in detail.

CHARCOT, Edward Hammond. Born 21 Dec 2530, New York City, Earth (Sol III). Criminal record: petty theft, apprehended 8 Nov 2547, corrective term one month. Released for good behavior. Kidnapping, apprehended 12 Jan 2558, escaped from custody 17 Jan 2558, relocated 11 June 2559, concluded 4 October 2559. Trial begun 18 June correctory, transshipped to Procyon IV 7 November 2559. Entered upon life term 11 Jan 2560, escaped from Procyon Correctory 12 May 2560. Still at large (see Additional Data Sheet 101 in request file.)

**B**RAUER flexed the card between two fingers and dug back in his memory—a memory not nearly as retentive as TOTIVAC's, but unusually good as mere organic ones went. He was investigating the data stored away in his youth, in his period of greatest criminological enthusiasm, before

the disillusionment of joining Crime Bureau.

Edward Charcot. Yes, he remembered Charcot, even though the case had been most notorious only a month or two after Brauer's birth. Charcot had been a cheap criminal, a petty hood of the sort that no amount of careful breeding seemed likely ever to eradicate from human genetic lines. He had committed a particularly vicious kidnapping thirty-odd years ago, and he had been caught. And, unless Brauer's memory was at fault, he was to date the only man ever to break out of the Procyon Correctory.

With nervous haste he shoved the umpteenth-thousand data cards back into the computer's orifice and punched out a new requisition: SEND ADDITIONAL DATA SHEET 101 ON CHARCOT, EDWARD HAMMOND.

Moments later the sheet arrived. To his satisfaction Brauer saw he had been right: Charcot's notoriety was based on the fact that he was the only man ever to escape from Procyon's airtight correctory.

He had stolen a one-man warship somehow, and struck out for point's unknown before anyone knew he was missing. One of the minor mysteries of the case was



how Charcot had managed to escape—but since no one before or since had succeeded in getting off Procyon IV, it was considered that the experiment was non-repeatable. The major mystery was Charcot's whereabouts.

The data sheet listed all reports, reliable and otherwise, of his location. He had been seen (or half-seen) at a dozen places radiating in a more-or-less straight line out toward the region of Bellatrix, and there the trail vanished. A sporadic search of the six planets of Bellatrix had revealed nothing.

**T**HOUGHTS tumbled through Brauer's mind.

Who Edward Charcot was didn't much matter, nor the fact that Charcot had humiliated the penologists by getting out in an escape-proof correctory, not that he was responsible for a fairly ghastly crime. No.

He had disappeared, though—and that offended Brauer's sense of order. In a galaxy so carefully regulated by analog computers, men didn't disappear. At least, not easily. Of course, this Charcot was a clever chap, obviously—but still, where could he have gone?

The trail led toward Bella-

trix and its system. Brauer licked his lips reflectively. A major attempt had, no doubt, been made toward finding Charcot. It had failed.

Why? Some deficiency inherent in the nature of the pursuit, no doubt. Brauer's pulse-rate started climbing. Here was a chance for original research; here was a chance for an ordinary flesh-and-blood man, with a built-in capacity for making cockeyed guesses, to show up a billion-unit cryotronic computer with its deplorably binary way of thinking.

He decided to find Edward Charcot.

**T**HE FIRST step was to activate the communicator.

"Chief, this is Brauer. I want to request a three-month leave from duty."

"With or without pay?"

Brauer hesitated, then boldly said, "With. It's to do that special research job I was talking about."

There was a pause. "Three months with pay...it may be rough on our budget, Geourge. Can you tell me anything about the research?"

"I'm going to find Edward Charcot," Brauer said.

The reaction was predictable: "Who?"

"Charcot. The kidnapper who escaped from Procyon

Correctory in 2560. Remember?"

"Oh—that one. Hmmm. All right. Fill out the form, integrate it yourself, and feed it to the machine. You know how to do it. I'll see to it your leave's approved."

Brauer rapidly integrated the leave-request and let TOTIVAC have it. Then he formulated a new requisition: SEND ALL DATA AVAILABLE ON CHARCOT, EDWARD HAMMOND.

Moments later he had it, including duplicates of the data-card and Additional Data Sheet 101; the machine was damnably literal about "all data" requests.

Brauer cleared his desk and proceeded to examine the information. Most of it was a repetition of what he had already learned; he skimmed through that, and also through most of Charcot's biography. He wasn't interested in that.

**H**E WAS interested in the post-escape part of the data. Included in the packet were transcripts of statements by men who had allegedly seen Charcot (or thought they had) in one guise or another after his much-publicized escape. Someone—Brauer hoped it was a man, and not just a watchful

facet of TOTIVAC—had charted a probability-pattern with each report of Charcot carefully inked in according to a weighted color-spectrum of credibility, ranging from bright cerise for "fairly reliable" down to dark violet for "totally untrustworthy."

The color-chart led undeniably toward Bellatrix. And appended to the packet was the report of the scouting-mission that had searched the area for Charcot.

Apparently TOTIVAC had analyzed the six planets of Bellatrix and had concluded that Charcot would be on either Bellatrix II, III, or VI, all of which were inhabited by reasonably docile forms of intelligent life.

Scout-ship CD102-X3 had diligently searched Bellatrix II, III, and VI. There had been no sign of Charcot. Whereupon, the trail having trickled out, the Charcot file had been dumped into "Unsolved," and probably had mouldered there unmolested until Brauer's requisition had released it.

Humming gently to himself, Brauer rummaged through the rest of the packet. Included was a telefax sheet, now somewhat yellowed with age, dated 12 May 2560, point of origin Procyon IV. It showed a photo of the escapee—he

was a darkly handsome, almost suave-looking man, Brauer noted, with a faint mustache, deep-set eyes, a smirk rather than a smile on his lips. A shrewd man, Brauer decided, even though it was an elementary rule of criminology to place little weight upon superficialities of appearance. Yet in Charcot's case, his actions bore out the testimony of his features: it took a shrewd man to get out of Procyon Correctory.

The telefax sheet went on to mention the reward offered for information leading to Charcot's recovery, described him, gave a brief biography. Doubtless there still were some of these sheets mounted on post-office walls in obscure parts of the galaxy, Brauer thought.

He put the telefax sheet back in the file packet and restored the other material as well. He dumped it all into the receiving orifice.

SEND DATA ON THE BELLATRIX SYSTEM, he ordered the computer.

**B**ELLATRIX was a star of magnitude Plus 1.7, located 215 light-years from Earth. Relative to Earth, it was located in the constellation Orion, but of course visual proximity from an external point had nothing to do

with actual three-dimensional location in the universe.

According to the data Brauer had, Bellatrix had a planetary system comprising six worlds; Bellatrix I was 500,000,000 miles from its blazing primary, and the other five planets were arrayed in normally-distributed orbits up to a distance of three billion miles.

Brauer quickly ran through the survey reports on the six worlds.

Bellatrix I was uninhabited and uninhabitable; it took a regular roasting from the sun, and had a mean temperature of about 300°F.

Bellatrix II was inhabited; it was a watery world (the "water," however, in actuality being a mixture of liquefied halogens.) The natives were amiable chlorine-breathers whose hide resisted etching by the lakes of hydrogen fluoride common on the planet.

Bellatrix III was likewise inhabited; this was a large, low-mass world peopled by ruminant herbivores, four-legged but intelligent; the record showed a Terran settlement in operation there.

**B**RAUER continued to read. Bellatrix IV and V were both uninhabited: IV was a rocky unappealing world with a scant population of lichens

and nothing else. Life had simply not yet gained a foothold there. V was a gas giant of massive gravitational attraction; its surface was unstable, and explorers had deemed it unwise to land.

As for Bellatrix VI, it was an Earth-type world, somewhat colder on the mean, inhabited by humanoid creatures just entering the food-producing stage of culture. The scouts had recommended a closed status for this world, for fear of upsetting the normal development of the expanding culture. The closure had been approved.

Brauer then studied the report of the search once again. He was not surprised to read TOTIVAC'S evaluation of Charcot's possible whereabouts.

**B**ELLATRIX VI, being a closed world, was the most likely place for a callous criminal to hide, since there was little chance of his discovery on a closed world. Therefore VI had been the prime target of the searchers.

After that came III, since it was a livable and inhabited world. Further down the scale of probability was II, the water-world, where an Earthman could manage to survive if properly protected.

The other three worlds had

been rather casually dismissed: V, the gas giant, was eliminated completely, since it was impossible to survive long on a world without a solid surface; I, with its temperature of 300°, was docketed for only a cursory once-over, since it, too, was hardly promising as a hideout for an escaped criminal.

As for Bellatrix V, the utterly barren world, it was likewise dealt off by the computer with a mere once-over. After all, it was illogical that a fleeing man would choose to settle even for a few days on a world devoid of all life.

Brauer chuckled happily as he read TOTIVAC'S solemn conclusion. Illogical, indeed! Sure it was illogical. But all that meant was that no self-respecting computer would ever choose to hide there.

Happily, Brauer put away his data, confirmed his leave, and arranged for transportation. He requisitioned a one-man cruiser equipped with warp-drive and plenty of charts.

He was heading for Bellatrix.

Just before he left, he requisitioned the data file on Charcot once again, to check something. Yes; the reward was fifty thousand dollars. He wondered if it still stood, after these thirty years.

**EVEN BY** warp-drive, 215 light-years, takes a while to traverse. Brauer spent the time pleasantly, reading his collection of classics: Radin, Fell, Staub and Alexander, Caryl Chessman, Hornsfall and Wagley. They were part of his prized collection of 20th and 21st century criminology. Back then, he thought, a man had a chance to use his wits—not simply punch data in or out of a bunch of crytrons.

Crime, after all, was an irrational manifestation. It was foolish, then, to depend wholly on an inflexibly rational binary-orientated mind, or pseudo-mind, to make the top level decisions.

Take this business of Bellatrix, he thought. The silly search, over areas carefully preselected by T O T I V A C. Had any of the searchers bothered to deviate from the prescribed pattern? Probably not—and if they had, they probably had decided it would be unsafe to report such actions to the computer.

He emerged from warp uncomfortably close to Bellatrix itself. Brauer was not an experienced spaceman by any means, but a warpship was a simple device to operate. It had a built-in safety control that saw to it that its operator could do no wrong: in the event of a materialization in

an impossible place (such as within a planet) no paradox would result; the ship would simply and swiftly demolecularize itself. In the event of a crash-landing, the ship was equipped with a device that would automatically radiate a distress-pulse on a wide-band carrier that could be picked up anywhere within a radius of twenty light-years.

**H**E POPPED back into normal space not far from Bellatrix I, which happened to be at aphelion: just as well, he decided. Even half a billion miles from Bellatrix was too close to suit him.

Brauer had a definite plan of action which called for a speedy survey of the six planets, more to familiarize himself with the territory than anything else, and then a finetoothing of his two prime suspects.

He therefore brought the ship into a closed orbit around Bellatrix I, for his first look-see. And it was fairly evident that if Charcot had landed here, he had not survived. Bellatrix I was similar in general appearance to the dayside of Sol I: its baked, blistered surface was airless and lifeless. Shimmering pools of metal lay on the sands, as on Mercury. Here, though, there was no dark side and no

merciful twilight belt for an escaped convict to settle in: Bellatrix I rotated quite nicely on its axis, presenting each hemisphere in turn to the sun.

Brauer moved on. Bellatrix I held little promise.

He approached III next, since II was currently at the far end of its orbit. III was the low-mass world dominated by herbivores; Brauer allowed himself an amused chuckle at the thought of the Ecology prof who had gravely assured him that such a situation was impossible.

He scouted low; no sign of human inhabitation. Of course, on a quick buzz like that he had little expectation of uncovering Charcot. But III had already been covered fairly thoroughly by government searchers, and he trusted them to do a good job—within their limits.

Similarly II. TOTIVAC had directed them to search II, III, and VI. He was willing to assume they had done it properly.

The other three planets were different matters.

**B**RAUER took an interested look at Bellatrix II, moved on, buzzed barren IV, circled VI, and doubled back to V. As he had been warned, and as he expected, it was impossible—or at least certainly

risky—to get too close to mighty V. A landing was out of the question.

Having been through the entire system, Brauer now drew back, locked the ship in a stable orbit, and, pacing the cabin, began to develop hypotheses.

“The computer,” he said aloud somewhat selfconsciously, “is primarily rational. Having made the quasi-rational deduction that Charcot was somewhere in the Bellatrix system, it then proceeded to eliminate possibilities.

“Three of the planets are so unappealing that no man in his right mind would land on them. A fourth II—is inhabitable but scarcely satisfactory. The remaining two are possible choices for a man looking for a place to hide until the search for him died down.

“Item: Charcot stole a warp-ship. This tells the computer a number of things. One of them is that Charcot must have landed the ship voluntarily and not crashlanded somewhere, because had he crashlanded the ship, it would automatically have sent out distress signals. Since no distress signals were sent out, the ship did not crashland. *Ergo*, he either came out of warp in an impossible place and was demolecularized, or he landed safely on one of the inhabit-



able words. Probability favors the latter. Therefore, the computer suggested that planets VI, III, and II be searched, in that order."

**B**RAUER smiled. The computer had acted in perfect sanity—with one mistake. It hadn't allowed for the possibility that a man might be so demented as to deliberately *remove* so integral a part of his ship's equipment as the automatic distress-signal. It was possible to do so, though inconceivable. But after all, what if Charcot had made a bad landing, crushed a tailfin or two, and the signal had gone off—bringing half-a-dozen unwanted patrol ships down on him in a flash?

It was possible for Brauer to proceed computer-fashion from that one alogical postulate. Assuming Charcot either landed safely or crashlanded on one of the Bellatrix worlds, then either he landed safely on one of the three habitable worlds, and thus would have been found by TOTIVAC's searchers—or he crashlanded on one of the other three planets.

Since Charcot had not been found by the TOTIVAC searchers, and since he would not voluntarily have landed on worlds I, IV, or V, the conclusion had to be that Char-

cot had crashlanded on one of those planets.

Brauer grinned smugly. It was pure deduction—unlike the celebrations of the legendary Mr. Holmes, whose alleged "deductions" were actually more induction. The only thing that remained was the proof.

Brauer thought feelingly of the poor dupes feeding into to TOTIVAC, back there in Upper Ontario. How they would envy him!

**H**E READIED himself for the search.

Here, too, he was able to winnow down his candidates with a little thought. Had Charcot crashlanded on either I or V, the evidence of his presence would long since have been erased by the elements. Furthermore, V was impossible for Brauer to search.

But IV, lonely, barren IV—

Had Charcot crashed there, amid the disinterested lichens, there would still be proof: the wrecked spaceship, tools, perhaps even the body. Brauer had the most to gain by Charcot's having crashed on IV, and so he chose IV to begin his search.

He expected searching to be a painstaking job. He calculated he could cover the entire land mass of the planet in broad sweeps and do the job

properly in a month's time. Brauer was a patient man; he had many examples from the past as his guides to criminological technique.

No patience was needed, though. Luck, which is often scoffed at but which is a valid factor in detection, entered here—and, seventeen hours after his ship had entered the first of its search-maneuvers, Brauer's elaborate construction of guesswork and deduction was solidified when his mass-detectors recorded the presence of a spaceship crumpled on the rocks below.

A pulse thundered in his ears as he brought his ship down tenderly on Bellatrix IV's forbidding surface. It was a neat landing; atmospheric check reported the air breathable, and he rushed from his ship.

**A** HUNDRED yards away lay another one-man job, identical to his own. It had struck tail-first heavily, toppled, bashed its snout against an outcrop of what looked like dark basalt. Luckily it had landed hatch-upright, so its lone occupant had been able to clamber out. The hatch was open now.

Brauer approached, looked around for some sign of the skeleton. There was none; evidently Charcot had wan-

dered for some distance over the bare, arid world before his food ran out.

Brauer photographed the ship from several angles, then hoisted himself up and climbed inside. He blinked in surprise. The interior didn't seem to have been empty thirty years. The ship looked lived-in. *How—?*

Then he saw how. The resourceful Charcot had somehow tucked a Karster food synthesizer away in the ship before blasting off. A man could live a long time with just a food synthesizer. To one side of the machine lay a little heap of crushed rocks; evidently Charcot had been feeding rock to the synthesizer's molecular converter and thus literally living off the planet.

Otherwise, the ship was bare—no tapes, no comforts, just a cradle and the synthesizer. Brauer lurked around until he had confirmed another of his theories—the distress signal device had been crudely but efficiently ripped loose.

He took careful photos, then climbed through the hatch again.

And gasped.

A thin, ancient-looking figure, bent and angular, with a shaggy yellow-white beard, was straggling across the barren plain toward the ship.

Returning from a stroll, no doubt.

Charcot.

**I**T HAD to be Charcot. Thirty years of solitude had left their mark, but behind the dried skin and unkempt beard was still the sharp-eyed face of the shrewd young criminal pictured on the telefax sheet. Half-dizzy with incredulity, Brauer scrambled down the side of the ship, jumped—felt the impact of the rock jarring his feet—and hesitantly approached the old man.

It was not until they were twenty feet apart that the ancient showed any sign of having seen Brauer. Suddenly the old man paused, wobbled unsteadily on his feet, raised one gnarled hand, pointed from Brauer's ship to Brauer.

His dry lips worked. A harsh rumbling sound came forth; after much effort, the oldster managed to shape a tremulous word. "You—you—"

The effort and the shock was too great. He tottered, pivoted wildly, fell forward.

Brauer was galvanized out of his numbness. He ran to the old man, knelt, slid his hand inside the raged shirt, felt the bony chest.

Silence. The silence of death.

Brauer's finger encountered something folded beneath the

old man's shirt; with trembling hands he drew it out and examined it. It was tattered, denigmented with age, but still legible. It was the telefax sheet with the photo of the escaped convict. Brauer glanced from the smirking youthful face to the old man's.

**T**HERE WAS no doubt. This was Charcot. Somehow he had clung to life, with only the food synthesizer for a companion. He had been totally alone for thirty years, without so much as a book or a pet, on lifeless Bellatrix IV.

Brauer shuddered. No doubt, Charcot had believed he was gaining freedom when he broke out of the Correctory—but there, at least, he had been in humane hands, among men who would try to provide some sort of therapy and rehabilitation. Solitary confinement was cruel, barbarous; penal codes had outlawed it decades earlier.

He had trapped himself in a prison without walls. He had lived here thirty years alone. His "freedom" had in actuality been a punishment more terrible than any court would mete out. The shock of seeing another living being again had killed him.

Broodingly, Brauer pocketed the tattered telefax sheet and kicked away a pebble.

Then he shuffled back toward the outjutting hill. There wasn't even any soil on the planet in which to bury Charcot. He began to gather rocks for the old man's cairn.

Later, he subradioed a sim-

ple message to the nearest pickup-point for TOTIVAC's data-collectors. It said: IN THE MATTER OF THE ESCAPE OF CHARCOT, EDWARD HAMMOND—THE CASE IS CLOSED.

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