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THE WAY OUT

By RICHARD R. SMITH

How do you kill a man without killing him?

***Unless that question could be answered, Earth
would lose the war, and every Earthman would die!***

Illustrated by RICHARD KLUGA

THE ROOM was a maze of mirrors that reflected his nightmare image. At first he had tried to close his eyes but found that they had done something to them. He could not close them and was forced to look at the thing in the

hundreds of mirrors, seeing it from all angles.

He had tried to sleep—thinking that, if asleep, he would not see the mirrors and himself. But they had injected drugs into his body—drugs that made sleep

impossible except when they wanted him to sleep. A human body had to have a minimum of sleep; they knew what that minimum was and gave it to him when they wanted him to have it.

But even sleep was no release. During those first days, he discovered that a man unable to close his eyes will *see* while he sleeps. And in every dream the mirrors and the nightmare were there, superimposed upon the dream as two negatives placed one upon another. If he dreamed that he was a child again, playing in the fields and chasing rabbits, the nightmare image was there, superimposed upon the dream. If he dreamed that he was a teen-ager, walking Betty home from the movies and holding her soft hand in his, it was there—hovering in the air around them. No matter what he dreamed, it was there.

He found that there was one relief from the nightmare and only one. They had left his right arm intact. *In the event*, he thought, *that I give in, I will be able to write the answers they want to know*. But that was not a complete relief. To stare at the smoothness and perfection of flesh on his right arm for long periods was to admit that the rest of his body was . . .

They were clever with pain, he thought. Pain, he had realized during those first days, was a

monumental thing to a man. Pain was the first sensation experienced by a man: the slap of the doctor's hand and the first breath of air in lungs unaccustomed to breathing. And pain was the very last sensation that a man experienced: the pain of death. Crowded in between those two sensations that represented a person's life span, pain was the dominant impetus. What drove a man to do anything except the impetus of pain and the instinct to avoid pain? A man did a million things to avoid physical pain. To avoid hunger pains, a man would eat; to avoid the pain of coldness, a man would light a fire; to avoid aching muscles, a man would make a wheel to carry his burden; to lessen that burden, a man would split an atom. . . . And a man did a million other things to avoid emotional pain. To avoid the pain of loneliness, a man would make friends; to avoid the pain of boredom, a man would play a game; to avoid the pain of ugliness, a man would create beauty. . . .

Not an unpleasant reality, he realized. Not unpleasant because it was necessary. Nothing in the universe moved unless a force pushed or pulled it. A man unable to sense physical or emotional pain would do *nothing*. There would be nothing to push him. As wind moved clouds, pain moved man.

The sight of his body was not exactly painful to him. They had not disfigured him; they had only *changed* him. To disassociate him from his body, no doubt. What they had done to him many would call an "atrocious," he realized. But, in a war, every time one soldier killed another, it was an "atrocious"—one man had taken the life of another. *They* had a job to do and they were doing it.

Successfully, he knew. When they came the next time, he would tell them what they wanted to know. *Want to know where Fort Meade is located on Earth? Give me a map and I'll show you. How many soldiers do we have in the mountain range a hundred miles from here? I'll give you my best estimate. I'll tell you anything you want!*

Pain was the impetus to push a man, he knew. They had pushed him and pushed him. Doing their job. And they had pushed him far enough. A man was not linked to other men and his nation and his world by tangible threads. A man was separate and distinct; a man's body was a world in itself. He had been pushed into his world by pain. Somewhere—beyond the wall of pain that came or vanished when they wanted—somewhere, he had friends, an army, a world called Earth. By they didn't matter. *His* world mattered. . . .

And, oddly, he wasn't afraid of pain any more. It was just a thing, a thing to be avoided in any way. And he wasn't to be pitied. They had *changed* him. Sergeant Chester Gregg wasn't a man any more. He was something that could be added to and subtracted from, a pliable thing that could be prodded and molded, an object that could be pushed this way and that way. . . .

MURPHY raised his head. He could tell from the flashes of artillery fire that they were surrounded. Antarian artillery had a purplish flash of light that their own guns did not have. And he could see: in every direction there was an occasional flash of purplish light. The flashes formed a circle—a circle around them.

He lowered himself into the foxhole.

"What?" Hank inquired.

"Surrounded."

"Are you sure?" Hank crouched in the semi-darkness as if about to pounce on something.

"Damn it, if you don't believe me, *take a look!*"

Hank hesitated. He was a tall, lanky person with red hair and boyish freckles. He had an awkward, self-conscious manner, and despite his powerful body, the freckles and manner made others think of him as a boy rather than a man. He was eighteen and combat had hardened his muscles

without hardening his appearance. "I believe you," he said. "Do you think we'll get out?"

"Hard to tell. Maybe."

Murphy leaned back and looked up at the dark sky. It was filled with stars, stars that twinkled, and intermingled with them were other points of light that were not stars. They were atomic explosions, and unlike the stars, they did not twinkle. An atomic explosion in outer space, without the pressure of atmosphere, expanded tremendously. When it reached the limit of expansion, it faded, and watching a battle in outer space was like watching a maze of tiny blinking lights. Murphy watched those tiny blips of light every night. One night, if he lived long enough, there would be no blips of light and that would mean that one side was beaten.

They were fighting and dying on Antares but their battle was a secondary one. It was the battle in outer space that would win the war. If the Antarians won that battle, then every Earthman on Antares would die because there would be no more supplies. If Earth won that battle, the Antarians would be beaten since they would have no way to stop Earth from sending more men and more supplies.

He closed his eyes and tried to concentrate on the problem of saving Hank's life. That was

his habit: every time he went into combat, he picked someone like Hank—a kid—and stuck with him. He would worry about that kid, whoever he might be, and try to keep him out of tight spots. It was his way of protecting himself. Whenever he worried about his own life, his mind always froze. But worrying about someone else was different.

"I think I'd rather die than be captured," Hank said. "I heard they have ways of making a guy talk—ways of making a guy tell them anything."

Murphy nodded his head in agreement. It would be better to die than to be captured. The war with the Antarians was different from the World Wars on Earth. Antarians were aliens and resembled lizards more than men. There was no way for them to disguise themselves effectively and they had no agents on Earth to learn the location of factories and military installations. From a thousand miles in space—if one of their ships were fast enough—they could photograph Earth's surface. Closer than a thousand miles, rockets from Earth's interceptor system could destroy a ship. Atomic rockets dropped from Antarian ships could zigzag through Earth's atmosphere at tremendous speeds and fifty per cent got through the interceptor system. But a ship containing enough fuel to take it from An-

tares to Earth and back was large and unmanueverable, and venturing closer than a thousand miles was fatal. And a photograph taken from a thousand miles does not show factories and military installations. Through magnification, the photograph will show rivers, mountain ranges, land masses, and varicolored patches of land that could be cities or *anything*. So the Antarians had been forced to hurl atomic bombs aimlessly. Those that got through the defensive system usually struck deserted areas.

The Antarians had only one choice: capture as many soldiers as possible and make them tell where military targets were located. And to them, men were an alien form of life. Their science was not adapted to the human body; they had no drugs to affect the human mind. In the middle of an interplanetary war, they could not spare the workers, time, wealth, and effort to invent drugs that had taken mankind itself years to produce. But it took them only a few minutes to make a whip. . . .

As Murphy listened, the distant rumble of exploding shells grew in volume. They were "walking" shells across the surrounded area. He flattened himself against the bottom of the foxhole and covered his ears with his hands. Even through his hands, the roar of explosions was

deafening, and he felt the ground shake while shell fragments whistled through the air above.

That was Antarian tactics, he remembered. Whenever possible, they surrounded an area; pounded it until there were only a few men left and then charged with their infantry, taking as many prisoners as possible.

The roar of exploding shells diminished in volume as the barrage moved farther away.

Silence.

Murphy checked his rifle and rose. He looked across a desolate terrain covered with craters and smouldering shell fragments. The forest near them—that weird forest of hundred-foot trees with green trunks and yellow leaves—was almost gone. The barrage had left only a few trees upright. Trees with their branches torn from them; trees that looked like shadowy fingers pointing at the stars.

"I suppose they'll be coming now," Hank said.

"Any minute. They always follow a barrage."

"I won't surrender," Hank said as he checked his rifle. "I know that. There wouldn't be anything to gain."

"You couldn't surrender if you wanted to."

"Huh?"

"The Army doesn't allow it. You see, the Army tells you what to do, how to do it, when to do

it, and where to do it. There's regulations in the manuals to cover *everything*. If there aren't regulations about something, that's because the Army doesn't allow it. There are no regulations about how to surrender. That means you *can't* surrender."

"Suppose you haven't got anything to fight with?"

"No dice. If you've only got one bullet, you fire that bullet. Then you use your bayonet. If your bayonet breaks, then you pick up rocks and throw them, and if there aren't any rocks around, then you attack with your bare hands. In other words, you keep fighting until you kill them or they kill you. If you surrender, you're a traitor."

Hank was silent for a while. "If that's so," he said, "why do they have regulations about what to do *after* you're captured? You know, that 'Give only your name, rank, and serial number' stuff."

"That," explained Murphy with mock impatience, "is for those cases when a guy might be captured while unconscious. The Army's sensible. It knows you can't fight if you've been knocked unconscious by something."

"Did you hear the rumor," Hank went on, "that every guy going into combat has something done to him so he'll kill himself if he's captured? Hypnotism or something?"

"Uh-huh." Murphy wished

Hank hadn't mentioned that. He remembered, there at Fort Hendricks, something strange had happened. Take a battalion of men, line them up outside a hospital. One by one, as the men enter a room, give them an injection that knocks them cold. Keep them unconscious for days while you feed them through the veins, and then revive them, put them in a formation and march them back to their barracks without an explanation. Do something like that and you'll cause all sorts of rumors. Those men will wonder what happened to them while they were unconscious. The more they wonder, the more fantastic the rumors will get. . . .

"I doubt it," Murphy said. They had been whispering. No enemy followed a barrage so close that they were killed by their own shells, and Antarians could only move at a certain speed. That always left—immediately after a barrage—a few minutes during which they could talk or whisper in safety. But that time was limited and they fell silent now.

Murphy thought, *Somewhere out there, lizard-like things are crawling toward us. Any minute now, they'll be close enough to hear us if we make a sound, and they'll be waiting, hoping to hear a sound. They'll be holding their weapons with their tentacles as they move closer. They should be*

in a zoo where you could see them on Sunday afternoons and laugh. They're funny-looking, but it's hard to laugh at them while they're trying to kill you—

A rumble of sound.

Murphy swung his rifle, aiming through the sights. It was a tank. They had no hand grenades, and it was impossible to knock one out with a rifle. But, he reminded himself, he had explained to Hank. It was a soldier's job to fight, even with rocks if necessary.

No. It was one of their tanks!

"Let's go! Maybe they'll give us a ride!"

They climbed out of the fox-hole. Murphy ran toward the tank, raising his arms above his head—not a gesture of surrender, but a means of recognition. Antarians could walk on their hind legs but their physiology did not allow them to raise their forelegs above their heads as men could. At night, when nothing could be seen clearly, it was the most effective password.

The tank stopped.

A voice came at them through the darkness, "What the hell do you want?"

"Got room for two more?" Murphy inquired. "Give us a ride out. We're low on ammunition."

A moment's hesitation; then, "Get in."

Climbing into the tank was like climbing into a dark well.

When the lid closed behind them, there was no light. The darkness annoyed Murphy, but he realized it was necessary. There were no slits for the crew to see through: slits allowed bullets, radiation, and poison gas to enter a tank. The crew observed through periscopes that fitted tight against their faces; they were trained to work in the dark.

It was a long, rough ride through the night. Murphy listened to the crew members, the roar of the motor. Now and then there was the sharp bark of the tank's cannon, and even through four inches of steel and lead he heard the roar of shock waves from distant atomic explosions.

Hank whispered, "That wasn't right, was it? I mean, leaving like that and—"

"Ever hear of 'strategic withdrawal'?" Murphy asked. "We'll live to fight another day."

Murphy slept at times. One time, after being awakened by a nearby explosion, one of the tank crew asked him his name and what unit he was with. He said he would radio their unit and ask if their CO had orders for them. Murphy gave his name and unit, then fell asleep again.

Sometime during the night, he felt a hand shaking him. "You lucky stiffs," a voice in the darkness said. "Your CO says you're to return to Earth on the next ship."

COLONEL DONOVAN climbed out of the jeep and walked a distance. He was a tall, husky man with powerful shoulders and prematurely gray hair. His face was hard and weather-beaten, and his eyes held the only hint of his intelligence. He did not have the delicate features and slender fingers of an intellectual, but his gray eyes were cold and alert. He had climbed to the rank of colonel partly by his physical strength and partly by that deceptive intelligence. He had an aggressive way of tackling a problem, a way of prodding it and beating it with his mind as if it were a physical thing and he were beating it with his fists. During his career, he had solved numerous problems with his different approach. The intellectuals, the men who solved problems, had minds as alike as if they had been cut from the same pattern. A definite type of physique produced a definite mentality-type, and a definite mentality-type produced a definite way of thinking. The intellectuals were similar in body and mind, and their answers were often too similar. When the UN wanted a *different* answer, it called upon men such as Donovan.

And Donovan had a new problem.

He lit a cigarette without looking away from the ruins. The ruins of Fort Meade; he could see

at a glance that it had been a direct hit. Every building had been leveled, the ground scorched and fused into weird glass-like substances. There had been no burial details: of all the thousands of soldiers at the Fort, there had been no remains to bury.

He had no special purpose in viewing the ruins except to goad his mind. Reports on his desk in the New Pentagon had informed him of the facts: seven military bases such as Fort Meade had been bombed by the Antarians. All direct hits.

It meant one of two things. One: the Antarians could take a photograph of Earth from a thousand miles and spot military installations on that photograph. Two: they had tortured prisoners and learned the locations. Number one was improbable; number two was very probable.

He wondered, *How do you prevent a man from giving information?* It was an important problem. There seemed to be no way to prevent the Antarians from taking prisoners, no way to prevent them from torturing prisoners. If they captured enough prisoners, they could learn the location of every military base and war plant on Earth. Every soldier knew the location of something vital; almost every soldier could point to it on an aerial map. It was a simple mat-

ter of spotting rivers and mountain ranges and judging distances.

The possibilities of preventing their men from talking were few, he realized. There was the standard answer: give a pill to every soldier and tell him to swallow the pill if he's captured. But that was the wrong answer. It had been used before, but only in the case of espionage agents. Used on an army of men, it would have a demoralizing effect. It would imply that you expected them to be captured. And what percentage of men would commit suicide? Besides that, the news would sooner or later leak out to the civilian population and have a demoralizing effect upon *them*. How would millions of mothers and wives feel if they knew their sons and husbands had been ordered to kill themselves if captured?

No, suicide pills were not the answer. It had to be something different, something original, and as foolproof as anything could be. Preferably a way to kill a captured soldier—a way that the soldier was not aware of. Death seemed the only solution. Any man, tortured hard enough and long enough, would talk. How could you keep that man from talking except by killing him? And still, it wasn't *right* to kill your own men!

How, he thought, can you kill a man without killing him?

HANK was pacing the floor. "We're on our way, Murph. Back to Earth. No more combat. We'll train other guys how to fight. Instructors. What a deal! Weekend passes, girls, beer, fried chicken, real milk—"

"Lay off," Murphy said. "We aren't there yet."

Sitting there on the edge of the cot, he struggled for a sense of reality. Nothing seemed real. Nothing had seemed *real* since they left the foxhole. There everything had seemed *real*: the coldness and wetness of the mud beneath them, the stars in the sky above them, a thousand other things. But, in the tank, there had been nothing but darkness and voices in the darkness. The tank had broken through the Antarian lines and taken them directly to a spaceport. There, in a thick fog—so thick that you could see only a few feet in any direction—they had boarded the ship. In the darkened ship, they had been led to this compartment. They had seen only two men aboard the ship. One crew member—seen at a distance—and Gregg, the ship's captain. Now they were in outer space, in a small compartment aboard a huge ship. It didn't seem real, and he felt as if they were walking through a shadowy dream.

The door opened and Captain Chester Gregg stepped into the room.

Gregg, Murphy reflected, looked as if he had been taken apart and put together again. There were lines in his face: not lines that came from facial muscles, but the clean-cut lines of a surgeon's scalpel—lines that divided his face into small sections. And the flesh from his forehead to his chin did not change shade gradually. Each section was a slightly different shade than the section next to it. Not a hideous effect, but noticeable when you looked at him closely. Gregg was evidently conscious of his appearance, for he stayed in the shadows as much as possible.

Gregg glanced around the room and grinned. "How do you like your quarters? Fancy, huh?"

"Great," Murphy said. "Almost as good as the Ritz. Are we the only passengers?"

Gregg nodded his head affirmatively. "We had to leave in a hurry. We were scheduled to take more men back, but the Antarians were about to take over that port. We were lucky to get out when we did."

Gregg hesitated, then went on, "You guys are going to have a tough job when you get back. Not as easy as you might think. I know. I was in the infantry for a while—in a training outfit. Hard work."

He placed some papers on the table. "Here's your homework."

"Homework?" Hank repeated.

"It's the newest thing," Gregg explained. "They figure that men who've been in combat with the Antarians can train recruits better than men back on Earth who've never even seen the Antarians. The plan is to train men like yourselves on the way back to Earth. No time wasted. That is, they plan to teach you how to train others. We have a colonel and a couple lieutenants aboard. You fill out those papers and they'll judge your knowledge of military procedure. Then they'll know exactly how much they'll have to teach you."

When Gregg left, Murphy examined the papers. As Gregg said, the papers were a test of their knowledge of military procedure. There were yes and no questions: questions such as *Describe procedure to infiltrate enemy lines, Describe procedure for establishing night patrols, Describe alternate code system*. Hundreds of questions.

And an aerial map. The question: *Give the approximate location of Fort Johnson*. And in small print at the bottom, the notation that this was a test of memory and ability to judge distance.

"Look at this, Hank."

Hank studied the map and question. "That's easy," he said. "I was stationed at Fort Johnson. There's Salt Lake. See? Fort Johnson is about—"

"I said *look*, not *talk*!" Murphy rose and glared at Hank. "You're stupid," he added.

"What's the matter with you?" Hank inquired, his jaw sagging.

"You're stupid," Murphy repeated. "Don't you ever question anything? This whole thing smells fishy." He paced the floor, glaring at the metal walls. There was something wrong with the compartment. It was like any compartment aboard any ship, but there was something *wrong*. He knew there was something wrong, but he couldn't pinpoint it. "It doesn't make sense. We were in a foxhole a few hours ago, and now we're on a ship headed for Earth. It doesn't make sense."

"We're going to be instructors."

"And that map is fishy," Murphy continued. "That's the sort of thing the Antarians would want to know. They have to photograph Earth from a thousand miles out. They'd like to know exactly where Fort Johnson is."

"Well, so what?"

"So *what*? Hasn't it occurred to you that maybe we're prisoners of the Antarians?"

"Are you serious?" Hank inquired. "How can we be prisoners?" He glanced around the room and shrugged his shoulders. "We were picked up by one of our own tanks and—"

"The Antarians capture our

tanks now and then. It could have been a trick."

"Our own men were aboard the tank!"

"We didn't *see* them. It was too dark inside the tank to see anything."

"We heard them," Hank insisted.

"That doesn't mean anything." Murphy remembered that they had been warned about Antarian "talkie" machines. The Antarians frequently tricked or forced a prisoner to talk for hours. The conversation was recorded, broken down according to individual sounds and recorded in a "talkie" machine. The machine resembled a typewriter, and an Antarian could reproduce any vocal sound by pressing one of its keys. A skilled Antarian linguist could use one of the machines and carry on a conversation with perfect English. They had been used during attempts to infiltrate their lines at night but, Murphy realized, one *could* have been used in the tank.

"Take it easy," Hank said. "You're imagining things. We're on one of our own ships!"

"Are we? What have we seen of this ship except the corridor and this compartment? It could be. . . . Well, this compartment could be like a stage. It was so foggy outside, we couldn't see anything."

He paused to light a cigarette

and continued, "Gregg gave me the idea. I've seen Gregg before—at Fort Meade. I remember him but he doesn't remember me. Of course, that's natural. You meet a lot of guys in the army and you can't remember them all. But Gregg was in the Infantry like he said, and now he's a ship's captain. Our Army doesn't work like that. The Infantry doesn't take a man and train him to be a spaceship captain! That's the sort of thing the Antarians would do. They have a screwy theory about their soldiers being versatile."

Hank's eyebrows rose; there was a trace of doubt on his face. "We're here," he said nervously. "We can hear the ship's engines."

Murphy listened. True, they could hear a ship's engines. "Could be a recording," he said.

"If there's a possibility, maybe we shouldn't talk so damned much." Hank rose to his feet, frowning. "If you're right, they may have hidden microphones."

"What's the difference?" If they were prisoners, Murphy thought, there was no reason to keep the Antarians from knowing that they knew. There would be no chance to escape, no way out. Antarians took their prisoners far behind their lines. A man, a creature who walked upright on two legs, could not disguise himself and pass unnoticed among

creatures that resembled lizards and crawled on four legs. No, if they were prisoners they would be well behind the lines; there would be no way to escape. *But*, he wondered, *if we're prisoners, why are they trying to keep us from realizing it?* They had used a trick to get information, but they could have gotten the same information through torture. He knew: he was brave enough to die for his country, but not strong enough to—

What's wrong with this compartment? he interrupted the chain of thought. There was *something* wrong with the compartment. He could sense the wrongness. But what could be wrong with cots, a table, four walls, a ceiling, and a floor? There was nothing wrong with them, so that meant there was something wrong that was not in the compartment; a something that came in to the compartment from outside. *What*, he thought wildly, *is not in here but comes in here from outside?*

"I've got it!"

Hank jumped, startled. "What?"

"Vibrations," Murphy said. "There aren't any!"

Hank shrugged his shoulders. "It's important," Murphy said. "Remember the troopship that took us to Antares? I remember I had trouble sleeping because of the vibrations. Every ship has

vibrations. The engines kick up one hell of a fuss and the vibrations travel all over the ship. Not so bad in some places, but you can feel them anywhere."

He pressed his hands against a wall. Hank, some of the color draining from his face, did the same. "See?" Murphy inquired. "There are no vibrations. We're supposed to be in outer space, headed for Earth. *There should be vibrations!*"

He hit the wall with his fist.

He hit it harder.

The wall didn't sound *right*.

Taking his bayonet, he jabbed the wall. The blade cut through a thin layer of metal—a layer of metal no thicker than a sixteenth of an inch.

Laughing wildly, he cut a large rectangle; the section clattered to the floor, exposing a layer of wood. He kicked at the wood—dry, crumbling wood that gave way beneath his foot.

He climbed through the opening.

Hank followed him.

COLONEL DONOVAN studied the papers before him with blank eyes. Lately the Project had started to annoy his conscience, and the fact that it was a logical move did not lessen the annoyance. There at Fort Meade, he had faced the problem: How can you keep men from giving information when captured? It had been

a vital problem. Without a solution, the Antarians could have learned countless military secrets and ultimately won the war. Death had seemed the only solution, but it had not seemed right to deliberately murder their own men. He had asked himself: How can you kill a man without killing him? And he had come up with the answer: Drive him insane.

They had placed him in charge of the Project, and he had organized a group of psychologists, psychiatrists, chemists, doctors, and sociologists. He had asked them: Can you install the seeds of schizophrenia in a soldier—seeds that will bloom upon the realization that he is a prisoner of the enemy and *only* upon that realization?

The answer had been "Maybe"—and they had started on the Project.

The system had been developed after months of research and experiment. It worked through a combination of surgery, hypnosis; psychiatric, encephalographic, and chemical treatment. All given to a soldier while under drugs and hypnosis.

Although the originator of the system, no one had told him exactly how it worked. In such matters, it was the army's policy not to tell anyone who did not *have* to know. And, not being a scientist, he would not have un-

derstood all the mechanics if explained to him.

But he had a vague concept: A soldier realizes that he is a prisoner of the enemy, and the realization triggers a reaction planted in his mind. A reaction placed there by surgery, hypnosis; psychiatric, encephalographic and chemical treatment. The reaction forced the soldier into a schizophrenic dream—entirely separated from the world. A tight, permanent dream dissociated from all sensory perception. A dream that not even Antarian whips could reach.

And it annoyed his conscience: he was responsible for the insanity of thousands of their men. He could not help feeling that perhaps, if he had tried harder, he could have thought of another way. . . .

The door opened and Phillips burst into the room in his customary manner. He threw some papers on Donovan's desk. "Our new project," he said. "A tough one. Impossible, I should say."

While Donovan glanced at the papers, Phillips slumped in a chair and lit a cigarette. "The Antarians have made a counter-move," he explained. "We found a way to prevent them from torturing prisoners and getting information, but our system depends upon the realization by a soldier that he *is* a prisoner. The Antarians learned that and now

they have a new approach. They use our tanks that they've captured and pretend to be our troops while they trick information from our men. You see, our men have the treatment, but they don't realize they're prisoners, so the treatment doesn't work. Our new project is to find a way that our men will realize they're prisoners despite any trickery." He shrugged his shoulders as if the problem were a tangible thing and he wished to thrust it aside. "Anyway, the war is almost over and the Antarians are losing. I don't think it'll make any difference whether we find a solution or not. The war will probably be over before—"

He hesitated when he noticed Donovan's expression. "What's the matter?" he inquired. "You look sick."

"Nothing."

Phillips nodded his head. "I get it. The same old stuff. Your conscience is bothering you again." He leaned back in the chair, placed his hands behind his head and looked up at the ceiling. "You're foolish to let it bother you. You know what happened to me yesterday? On the way home, I had a flat tire. It was raining, muddy as all hell and I messed up my last clean uniform. The tire was ruined—now I haven't got a spare and can't buy one because of this damned war. My wife's sister, Louise, is stay-

ing with us now. Her husband was killed on Antares and she cries all night, every night. Now and then, she gets Martha crying. Last night I couldn't stand it so I went out and had a few drinks. I got charged with drunken driving, and when I got home this morning, I really caught it! Martha's talking about getting a divorce. She says I—"

Donovan groaned. "Phil. I'm interested in your problems. Someday we'll sit down together and cry on each other's shoulder, but—"

Phillips raised a hand. "I was trying to illustrate how we all have a hundred big and little troubles every day. The fact that the system prevented thousands of men from being tortured does not matter to you. Your stupid conscience hurts because you're responsible for driving men insane. But you don't understand. It's not a simple case of schizophrenia that our men get. It's a schizophrenic *dream*. The system blocks all sensory contacts and speeds up the mind. You know how a person dreams only a few seconds before he wakes up and that dream seems days or weeks long? Can you imagine how much a dream can be speeded up and clarified by drugs, how much a dream can be controlled by hypnotic suggestion, how much experience can be—"

MURPHY SAW that they were on a street, the tall, angular shadows of strange buildings all around them. He heard a shuffling noise and turned to see Antarians crawling toward them.

They were prisoners! For some reason, the Antarians had kept them from realizing it and—

A brief, intense pain ripped through his skull. He closed his eyes for a few seconds, then opened them. . . .

The Antarians were dead, their bodies riddled with bullets. There at the end of the street—*their troops!*

He looked up at the sky. There were no blinking pinpoints of light among the stars. The war was over! They had won!

The years that followed were good ones for Murphy. Although he had never written a line before, he wrote a novel about his war experiences and it became a best-seller. He went to Hollywood when a motion picture producer purchased the story and, unbelievably, became an actor. He had never considered himself a handsome man but millions of viewers considered him handsome and beautiful women were attracted to him. He married and became the father of two children. Life seemed like a dream . . . a perfect dream in which, day after day, year after year, everything was perfect. . . .