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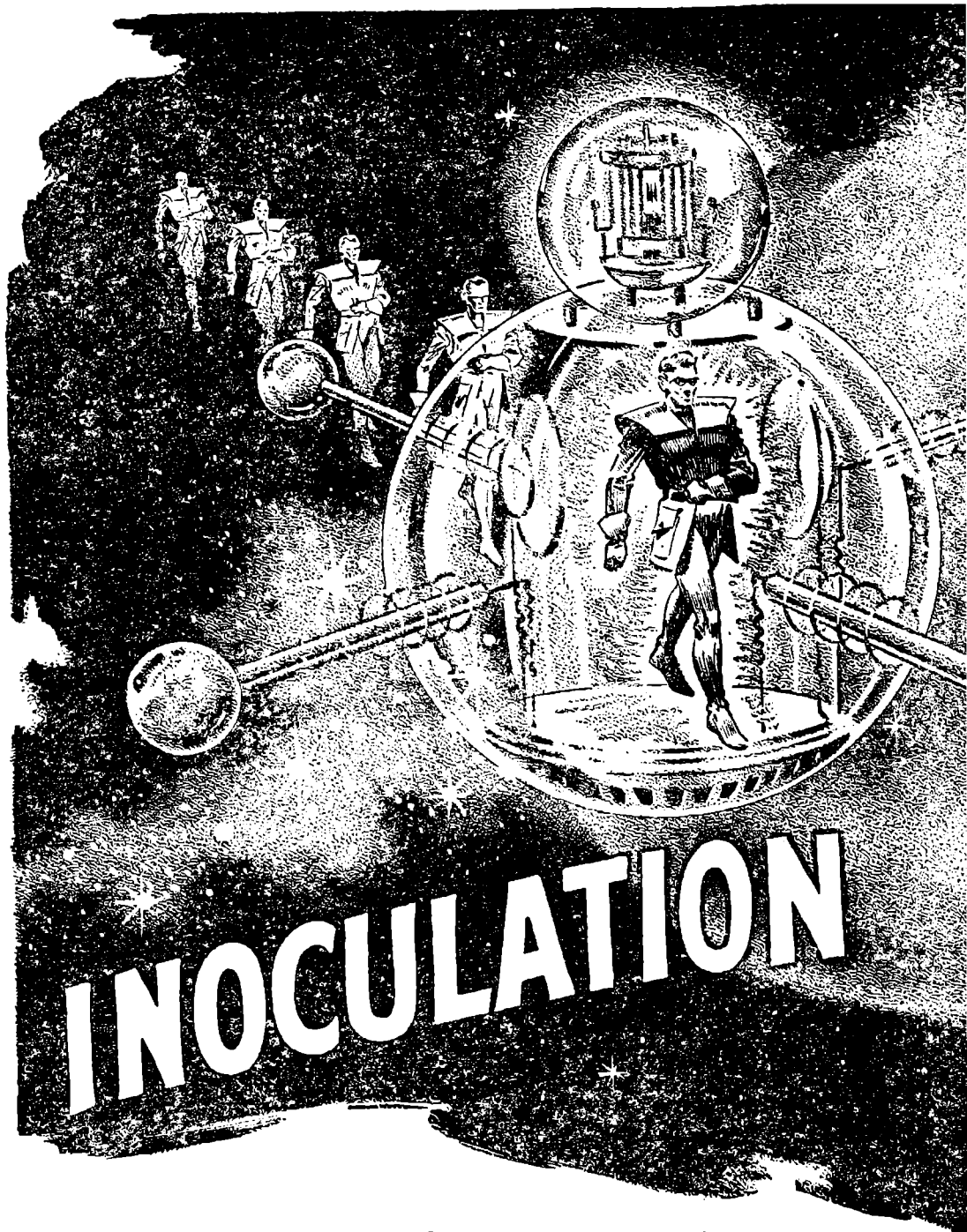
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Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones, illustrating a scene from "Diana and the Golden Ring."



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INOCULATION

By exposing a traitor, he became the leader of his people . . . only to learn that treachery may be another word for patriotism



By
Roger Flint Young

CO-ORDINATOR Dancin stared coldly at the colonel who had risen from his seat near the far end of the conference table.

"Colonel Fraden," Dancin acknowledged.

The thin, tired-looking little man in Space Patrol uniform bobbed his head, cleared his throat twice, then started to speak.

"I'm afraid I'm back to my old subject, gentlemen. I'm asking consideration of the Council for the granting of a higher priority to Dimensional Research." The Colonel looked nervously up and down the long table, glanced once at the Coordinator, then sat down quickly.

Dancin frowned in annoyance, shuffled the papers in his hands, waiting for someone to speak. He looked questioningly around the table, then straightened in his chair.

"I don't think I have anything to add to what I've said in the past on this subject. My opinion remains that the Outsiders reach fighting positions against us by travelling faster than light. Colonel Fraden persists in his belief that they come from another dimension.

"At present Dimensional Research is 17th on the priority list. There have been no new allocations to it

They strode into the vast machine one by one, and they emerged—somehow changed . . .

for some months, and I know of no reason to change its status. However, I'll no longer take responsibility for blocking Colonel Fraden's pet theory. I'm requesting a Council vote on the matter."

A few minutes later Co-ordinator Dancin again looked at Colonel Fraden.

"Seven in favor of granting your request, Colonel. Thirty-four members wish priority to remain as it is. Twelve members didn't vote. I assume they are undecided, or possibly are in favor of dropping Dimensional Research to a still lower priority."

Fraden bowed his head slightly. "I submit, Co-ordinator."

"Very well. Today's session of the Council is adjourned."

There was no movement at the table as the council members waited for Dancin to leave the Council Room through the Co-ordinator's Entrance.

The door closed behind him. Unobserved in the short hallway, Co-ordinator Dancin allowed his erect figure to slump; his face sagged, and in an instant all the appearance of cold, certain self-confidence was gone from him.

Colonel Fraden would have to be taken care of. The Space Patrol officer was entirely too close with his guessing, too willing to go on being certain he was right. Fortunately the man had little personality, practically no ability to influence other men's thinking. It was a wonder how he ever got on the Council.

Dancin shook his head, as though that might help him clear it, and walked down the hall as though he were a man under the sentence of death.

DANCIN walked slowly up the marble steps of his official res-

idence. He was erect now, young and fresh-looking, as though the grinding pressure of the day had affected him not a bit. He walked slowly, yet as a man who thought rather than as one who was tired and frightened to the core of him.

He waited for the butler to open the door, saw to it that a smile touched his lips.

"Good afternoon, Wilson."

"Good afternoon, sir... Chief Pastor and some of his men are waiting to see the Co-ordinator."

Dancin looked at him, uncomprehendingly.

"Who?"

"The Chief of the Council Police, Co-ordinator, and nine of his men. They're in the front study."

"All right, Wilson. I'll ring if I want you."

He didn't allow himself to think. If he thought about it he'd turn and run, try to get away. They couldn't have anything on him. It was probably— Probably— Probably something else. There couldn't be anything—

Pastor was a chunky little man whose face was always calm, always uninterested in his surroundings. His bright little eyes danced over the Co-ordinator's face, as though not really seeing it. His voice, when he spoke, had an unusual flat quality to it, a complete lack of any emotion.

"I hope the Co-ordinator will pardon our intrusion. I thought we had better see him at his Residence."

What did he mean, Dancin wondered. What was the man getting at? He knew Pastor's reputation; Coldly efficient, ambitious, ruthless. A bulldog with brains and imagination. The man was said to have a desire for glory and popularity. He'd be the kind who'd want the Co-ordinator's job. He— Dancin

checked the thoughts. After all, who wasn't after the Co-ordinator's job? Who was there who didn't want it?

"Quite all right, Chief. What is it?"

Pastor hesitated a moment, as though seeking the exact right words. "There's been a rumor my men picked up that an attempt might be made on the Co-ordinator's life. We've been unable to get any sort of information, but I thought the Co-ordinator should be informed of the rumor...I brought some of my men along—"

"It won't be necessary, Chief. I appreciate your interest, but I'm sure my life is in no more danger now than it usually is. And I'm sure your men have more important assignments."

Dancin tried to make his face reflect thoughts that went with his words. The whole business was flimsy, much too flimsy. Pastor was here with a story that was worthless on the face of it. Why?

Pastor bowed slightly. "As the Co-ordinator desires, of course." He turned slightly, looking at the men grouped behind him, nodded his head. They moved toward the door.

Dancin went with them, out into the big entrance hall, stood close to Wilson, watching the Chief and his men leave. Wilson closed the door behind them, turned with a puzzled expression on his aging face.

"Nine of them, Co-ordinator. Only nine of them went out."

"You said nine when I came in."

Wilson shook his head. "The Chief and nine of his men. Ten of them came in...I'm sure."

"All right, Wilson. If you find the missing one around throw him out...I'm going to be down in the third basement for a while."

Dancin walked toward the eleva-

tor, then turned abruptly to the stairs. He went down the three flights slowly, keeping his left hand on the guide rail. First basement. No use worrying about Chief Pastor. Second basement. What had the man wanted?

Third basement. He turned to the left, walked along the narrow corridor. He'd almost reached the fourth door when he felt the concussion wave.

He swore softly, bitterly. The Outsiders were raiding the city, and no raid was scheduled. He hurried then, reached the fourth door and pushed it open.

GARRON heard the door open, shifted his position slightly, carefully, realizing for the first time how cramped his body had become. He moved his head slowly until it was at the edge of the big machine he was hidden behind.

The dim, apparently ever-burning bulbs showed the face of the man closing the door behind him. Garron felt a sense of relief that it was Co-ordinator Dancin.

Dancin spared no time to look around the small room but went directly to the corner where Garron had noticed the small desk. The Co-ordinator sat down in the well padded chair, picked up a microphone from the desk-top, leaned back in the chair and started to talk.

"September 17th," Garron heard him say into the microphone, "and no unusual progress can be recorded in the diary. Research in all lines is progressing well enough, but with no brilliant achievements.

"At the Council Meeting Colonel Fraden brought up the matter of increasing scope of Dimensional Research. It is possible that he is right, although the council voted him down.

"The Outsiders continue their attacks against the Solar System. Again the report must go in the diary that as yet we have no idea as to their origin, bases, or even guesses as to their physical make-up. All ships which fall to us continue to explode before they can be investigated, leaving no trace of their crews.

"As I've mentioned before I would like to move this Co-ordinators, Official Recording Diary to another location, along with all machinery in this room. It is only the wishes of previous Co-ordinators, as expressed in this diary, that make me leave it here in the third basement.

"In the matter of bringing remaining nations of the world under the control of the Co-ordinator's Council, it is my opinion that these half-dozen small and backward nations—"

* * *

Garron faced Pastor across the desk in the chief's private office. Garron's youngish, serious face still held the faint flush of shame.

"That's all it was, Chief. Just the Official Diary Room of the Co-ordinators. Apparently Co-ordinator Dancin doesn't even realize it is spy-proof. He wants to move the whole works someplace else, so he won't have to go to the third basement to record in it."

Pastor nodded heavily. His face showed no trace of his inner disappointments.

"All right, Garron. You still did your duty as a citizen and a scientist when you reported the matter to me. You went beyond this when you agreed to make the investigation yourself."

Garron flushed again. "After all, it was my hunch, Chief. I couldn't very well ask you to act officially

on such slight evidence."

"Well, we're all happy now, and we can forget the whole incident. In fact, we'd better."

"Yes, I guess we'd better. After all— Well, I'll be getting along. Chief."

Pastor nodded. "The pistols I loaned you—"

"Yes. I didn't need them of course." Garron reached into his pockets, brought out the two small weapons. "Let's see. This is the one you told me to use first, if I had to. Here you are. And here's the one you said to use if the other one didn't work... I don't think I've ever seen—"

Pastor reached out and took the second pistol from him, smiled to cover his abruptness.

"You didn't need them, so it's all right... What do you think of the latest raid?"

"Raid! Another one? When?"

"While you were in the Residence."

Garron shook his head. "I didn't hear it... Of course, I was in the third basement, but—"

PASTOR frowned slightly, then smiled. "I guess you couldn't hear it there, at that. The Outsiders concentrated the attack on the south side of the city. Then entirely destroyed one block, but there wasn't much other damage. We brought down twenty-seven of their ships with the new Nestors. We drove them away, as a matter of fact."

"Good... I was wasting my time. If I'd been operating the Pelap—"

"Yes, I thought of that... Perhaps next time, though."

"Certainly then. I won't take up any more of your time now, Chief."

Pastor watched the door close behind Garron, then sat back in his chair. Garron should have heard

the sound of the raid, even in the third basement. He picked up the second pistol he'd given Garron, pulled the trigger.

One side of the pistol fell away revealing the mechanism inside. Pastor reached in carefully, extracted the small spool, then looked at it thoughtfully.

He carried the spool to the player on the far side of his office, dropped it on the spindle, pressed the starting button. Then he turned the volume up and went back to his chair.

At first he heard the sounds he'd heard before: His own voice giving the real pistol and the pistol with the recorder concealed inside to Garron. Then the approach to the residence, the butler's voice, and the noise of men moving around and talking softly in the study.

Then Garron had left them, made his way unobserved to the third basement. Pastor heard the player reproduce the sounds of Garron's footsteps in the small room in the third basement, the scuffling of his feet as he found concealment behind the machine. Then, for a long time there was silence except for the occasional rustle of Garron's clothing.

Then the sound of the door opening again and Co-ordinator Dancin entering and taking his chair beside the desk.

Pastor was only half listening. This would be the Co-ordinator recording in his diary. Garron had already given him the essential points of that.

"There's a raid on." It was Dancin's voice. "No raid was scheduled."

The reply came in a voice unlike any that Pastor ever heard. He sat up suddenly, paying close attention. The voice was— He wasn't sure; it was soft and harsh at the same time,

grating and soothing, almost human-sounding, yet with something about its every tone to show it could never have come from a human throat.

"An emergency raid, Dancin. I have just discovered that Colonel Fraden has been having some dimensional research projects pushed. The men got the answer—the answer, Dancin—less than an hour ago. It is necessary to destroy the area in which the research was being done. We can take no chances."

"No, I guess not." Dancin's voice sounded tired and weak. "I've been afraid of Fraden— Well, no matter ... We've just finished installation of the Nestor Defences here. I've promised great things for them."

"I am aware of that, Dancin. I have allocated twelve ships to be shot down by the Nestors. The raid will be beaten off after we have destroyed the research block."

"All right. Twelve ships isn't enough. Make it more."

"I can spare twenty-seven at this moment. It will mean no ships can be shot down for a while."

THERE WAS a silence, then Dancin's voice again. "The next raid will be against London on Monday. They have no Nestors as yet. Use the twenty-seven now, and let London have no hits. It will increase my prestige, at that. I've been basing a lot on the Nestor defences."

"Fourteen," the voice said. "Nineteen, twenty-five, twenty-seven. Your twenty-seven ships are down and exploded. Dancin, and all of them hit by Nestors. My ships are retreating. It was a victory for you, Dancin."

"Yes."

"You have a visitor, Dancin."

"What do you mean?"

"Before you came, another man

came into the room and hid behind one of the machines. I put him to sleep, of course."

"He came with Pastor. A detective."

"No, Dancin. I have read his surface thoughts. He is a scientist. He is the Department Head in charge of Unknown Spectrum Regions Preliminary Research."

"That's Garron, then. What the devil is he doing here?"

"He and his men developed what they call a Pelap. That is their provisional name for a personnel-locator-and-position-plotter. It is a viewing screen that works at long range and shows only living vegetable and animal matter. With it I gather they hoped to be able to look into Outsider ships and see what manner of people these invaders are."

"And they did?"

"They didn't have the chance. Garron decided it was too important to turn over to Controls. He wanted to direct it to your attention. Yesterday afternoon he watched you with it as you left the Council Meeting and came here."

"Why?"

"He had it in mind to tell you what you did, arouse your interest, and get you to agree to an early demonstration."

"Then why did he come here with Pastor?"

"Because while he was watching you yesterday you came into this room. You disappeared from his sight, of course, as soon as you came through the door into this dimension. But Garron thought this must be a spy-proof room, and he wondered why precautions were taken against a device which was unknown to any except himself and a couple of workers. So he went to Pastor."

"That Pastor—"

"Pastor was interested, but he was

unwilling to take any action. Apparently Garron was maneuvered to the point where he agreed to make the investigation himself if Pastor would get him into your residence. Pastor armed him with two pistols, just in case, and got him into the house. Garron came here, hid himself behind the machine. Then I put him to sleep."

"All right. I don't want any complications from this. I'll leave the room. You wake him up so he won't know he's been asleep. I'll come back in and—I'll think of something innocent enough. This can be the Official Diary Room, I guess...I'll convince him, then make it easy for him to get out of the Residence."

"That should do it...Don't struggle too hard, Dancin. Your time is about up, anyhow."

Dancin laughed shortly. "I'm good for a while longer. When I first got the job you gave me six months. I've lasted over a year."

"A record," the voice admitted. "Remember, though, that you are the fifty-seventh Co-ordinator in the forty-three years of the war against the Outsiders. And all Co-ordinators were appointed for life."

"I'm not forgetting. That's why I've lasted...I'll go out now. You can wake Garron."

Pastor heard the Co-ordinator leave his desk and go out the door. Then there were vague rustlings that must be the sounds of Garron waking up. The door opened again, and Pastor heard the footsteps, the sound of Garron shifting his position so he could see better.

"September 17th," came Dancin's voice, "and no unusual progress can be recorded in the diary. Research in all—"

Pastor ceased to listen. That was the talk to convince Garron.

PASTOR walked slowly, shoulders squared, trying to assure himself, through the marble hall. He felt the sweat in the palms of his clenched hands, and told himself over and over again that he must be calm.

He stopped before the entrance to the Council Hall and faced the aging sergeant-at-arms.

"I request admittance as a citizen."

The wrinkled old face came around to meet him, and deep in them old eyes sparkled to hear the beginnings of the well known ritual.

"As a citizen you are represented inside."

"Is there one inside who challenges the Co-ordinator for me?"

"There is none... The price of the challenge is death. Would you have it on your head?"

"Yes. Or on that of the Co-ordinator."

"Very well, Citizen." The sergeant-at-arms rose, joints cracking audibly, to his feet, pressed the button that caused the great doors to the Council Hall to open. "Members of the Council," his voice was shrill and quavering, yet loud enough, "a citizen comes with a challenge."

Pastor waited while the stir went through the members seated at the long table, saw them turn and twist that they might see the challenger. Then he entered, cursing his sweating palms, and strode deliberately toward the head of the table.

Dancin had risen, his face whitening as he saw Pastor. Pastor stopped, scarcely a foot from the Co-ordinator, stared into his eyes. It was a moment before he realized the sergeant-at-arms was beside him, urging him to turn and face the Council.

Pastor turned and saw that Colo-

nel Fraden was standing, apparently he'd not been in the research block when it was destroyed in yesterday's raid.

"Chief Pastor, it is the privilege but seldom the custom for members of the council to speak before the charges have been made. I would like to take advantage of that privilege."

Pastor nodded his head slightly. This would give him time to compose himself; he was glad the Colonel had broken in. Perhaps the old boy would lay some groundwork for him.

"There have been, in the years of the war, many challenges. Most of them have been successful, for it is hard for a Co-ordinator to defend himself in the midst of a war which we are definitely not winning.

"Many of the Co-ordinators have deserved to go to their deaths. The practice of allowing the challenger to name the new Co-ordinator—and it is usually the challenger himself—has resulted in many Co-ordinators coming to office who were unqualified for the position.

"Co-ordinator Dancin, more than a year ago, successfully challenged and replaced a man who should not have been in office. My own feeling is that Dancin did his people a service both when he removed and when he replaced. I cannot say that I have always agreed with the present Co-ordinator, but I can say that I believe his actions have been for the most part wise, his decisions just, and his overall policies suited to the defence of our system."

Pastor heard a few voices raised in agreement, glanced around the conference table to see heads nodding in approval.

"Therefore," Colonel Fraden continued, "I'd suggest you think carefully before you go so far that you

cannot withdraw. I think the present members of the Council will not uphold any charges of Inefficiency or Incompetence against the present Co-ordinator."

A number of voices were raised now, and Pastor saw that the sympathies were definitely with Dancin. He smiled grimly.

"I appreciate your comments, Colonel... However, I am not here with the usual charges of Inefficiency and Incompetence. I charge Co-ordinator Dancin with treason and collaboration with the enemy."

There was a gasp or two, sudden in the air, and then silence among the members. Colonel Fraden, Pastor saw, was stunned and shaken, very slowly taking his seat again, as though he had nothing more to say.

It was Dancin who spoke. "You have proof?" His words were only whispers in the air, yet they seemed to carry throughout the hall. There was a stir, as though some members had a growing realization that the charges might be true.

"Yes, I have proof."

"Perhaps—Pastor, if I may speak to you alone—"

It was Colonel Fraden who spoke, without rising, his face turned toward the Co-ordinator, yet his eyes not seeming to see him. "Make your defence before the council."

There were murmurs of agreement.

Dancin started to speak, his face pleading for understanding. Then he hesitated and was silent.

"Your defence, man!" It was Fraden again.

"I have none...I am guilty as charged."

In the silence the sergeant-at arms took hold of Dancin, started to lead him away, unresisting. A council member rose to her feet.

"Wait! Custom calls for imme-

diately death for a successfully challenged Co-ordinator. But circumstances here are unusual. He should be questioned—"

Pastor moved closer to the table, yet he was careful not to get too near the Co-ordinator's chair.

"That won't be required," he assured the Council. "I have all the information which will be needed." He tried to look modest. "After all, as Chief of Council Police it was my duty—"

THE THIRD basement and the fourth door. Pastor looked at it with satisfaction. As much satisfaction, perhaps, as he had gained from entering the Co-ordinator's Residence, a few minutes before, knowing it was his, and that he was mankind's appointed leader.

He'd stalled off questions of the Council, after the death of Dancin. Later he'd give them a report of sorts. The fact that the Outsiders came from another dimension would be held back until he was ready to produce it as the first great accomplishment as Co-ordinator.

He turned to the detectives who followed close behind them, saw they had their weapons ready. He looked down at the small box he carried gingerly in his hand.

"You men understand? You are not to come through that door unless the detector shows that I've dropped this box. If that happens, come in fast, ready to shoot."

The man wearing the earphones nodded. Pastor made sure of his grip on the box. It was held securely, but it could be dropped in an instant. Nothing could prevent him from dropping the box if he needed help.

He pushed open the door and went into the room.

The small basement room held an

accumulation of machinery which Pastor didn't understand. He saw the desk and chair which Garron had described to him. Over the desk he saw a large loudspeaker.

"Welcome, Co-ordinator Pastor."

He nearly dropped the box, held it with weakened fingers. The voice was the same he had heard in the recording.

"Drop the box if you wish, Co-ordinator... When you came through that door you also came into another dimension. Your signal would not be heard."

Pastor dropped the box, not as a signal, but knowing it was no longer of use to him.

"You're a machine!"

"Yes. Usually it takes a new Co-ordinator some time before he will accept that fact. I am a machine."

"New Co-ordinator? You mean you have had dealings with other Co-ordinators besides Dancin?"

"Yes. With all fifty-seven. You will make fifty-eight."

Pastor laughed shortly. "I'm not a collaborator."

"You will be... They all were... I give you a month, Pastor. You might last one month, or six months. I think a month."

"Thanks... But I think I will make it a life-time job."

"Of course. They've all done that."

"Yes... They were all traitors."

"I'm fighting your people. Pastor. This is an extension of me. There are other extensions hidden throughout the Solar System, others in this dimension we're in now. Every ship that attacks your people is only an extension of me."

"Why? Why does a machine fight us. What can we have that you, a machine, would want?"

"Nothing."

"Then why are you our enemy?"

"I'm not, Pastor. I'm your friend. You have yet to meet your enemies."

"We've been fighting a friend these forty-three years?"

"Yes... Twenty of your generations ago, Pastor, a great race came by your system. They were fleeing for their lives, leaving this galaxy entirely in their flight to get away from their enemies.

"Another race had started conquest of the galaxy, and these people could not stand against them. They were going down to defeat as did all other peoples who tried to defend their systems and their liberties. So my people fled."

"Your people?"

"THE PEOPLE who made me. They were much like yourselves. Not human, but intelligent animal life. In their flight they passed this system, investigated, and found your people."

"They found in you humans a race that might someday be able to fight against the Middens and win. They left me here to help you."

"Help?"

"Yes, help, Pastor. This war your people have fought for so long is merely an inoculation. It is giving them a taste of what is to come, so that they might be strong and prepared to fight, and win."

"If what you say is true the help seems rather drastic."

"It must be. I can't help you by warning you, or giving you weapons. I can only help by making you make yourselves strong. Already your weapons are getting better than those which my people had. If it were not for the secret of the dimension, I could not stand against you. That is why the Co-ordinator must see to it that there is no research in that line. I can give you the knowledge of the dimensions

when you need it. In the meantime you must develop other weapons against the coming of the Middens.

"You say you will not collaborate. All of the Co-ordinators have told me that. They have realized collaboration would mean their eventual deaths because they would be causing themselves to lose the confidence of the Council and be unsupported when they were challenged...I would have liked Dancin to have stayed in office, but— No

matter, Pastor, you will collaborate. And die for it."

Pastor closed his eyes and steadied himself. He remembered Dancin going to his death rather than talk. This wasn't what he wanted. He wanted the power and the glory of being Co-ordinator. Not the death that would come after a few short, frightened months.

He knew, even then, that he would collaborate.

THE END