



The Telenizer

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When I saw the blood dripping from the tap in the bathtub, I knew that someone had a telenosis beam on me, and I breathed a very audible sigh of relief.

During the past few days, I had begun to wonder if I was really cracking up.

When you start seeing visions of a bearded gent with a halo, or having vague but wonderful dreams about some sort of perfect world, feeling intense loyalties to undefined ideals, and experiencing sudden impulses, sometimes cruel and sometimes kind—you know that something's wrong.

At least I do.

If he—whoever he was—had just kept up the slow, subtle pace he'd maintained for the past two or three days, he would have had me in a little while. For whatever he wanted.

But now, he'd overplayed his hand. I knew, at least, what was going on. Who was doing it, or why, I still didn't know—nor whether I could stand it, even knowing.

The thick, bright red blood dripping steadily from the water tap in the bath tub wasn't so bad.

I stood before the mirror, with my softly humming razor in my hand, and I watched the blood ooze from the tap, quiver as it grew heavy and pregnant, then pull itself free and fall with a dull *plonk* to the enamel as another drop began to form.

That wasn't so bad. But my sigh of relief became a gurgle of almost hysterical apprehension as I braced myself for what might come, with the telenizer knowing that I was aware.

There was something I could do—should do—but my mind refused to focus. It bogged down in a muck of unreasoning terror and could only scream *Why? Why? Why?*

The drops of blood from the water tap increased both in size and rapidity, as I watched. Heavy, red, marble-sized tears followed one another from the tap, *plonk, plonk, plonk*, splashing in the tub and on the floor. Faster and faster, and then the drip became a flow, a gush, as though the vein of some giant creature had been slashed.

The tub filled rapidly, and blood flowed like a crimson waterfall over the edge and across the floor toward me.

I heard a tiny howling, and looked down.

I screamed and threw the soft, brown, fuzzy, squirming puppy-thing that had been a razor into the advancing tide of blood.

The fuzzy thing shattered when it hit the blood, and each of the thousand pieces became another tiny puppy-thing that grew and grew, yapping and swimming in the blood. The tide was now rising about my shoes.

I backed away from the mirror, trembling violently. I forced myself to slosh through the thick blood into the bedroom, groping for a bottle of whisky on the bureau.

"What the hell are you doing here?" the boss asked when I opened his office door and peeked in. "You're supposed to be in Palm Beach. Well, damn it, come on in!"

I clung to the door firmly as I maneuvered myself through the opening. And when I closed the door, I leaned back against it heavily.

I could see the boss—Carson Newell, managing editor of Intergalaxy News Service—half rising from behind his big desk across the room; but he was pretty dim and I couldn't get him to stay in one place. His voice was clear enough, though:

"Must be mighty important to bring you back from... . Damn it, Langston, are you drunk?"

I grinned then, and said, "Carshon. Carton. Old boy. Do you know that telenosis therapy is no sonofabitchin' good on alcoholics?"

Carson Newell sat back down, frowning.

I stumbled to a chair by the corner of his desk and gripped the arms tightly.

"Telenosis therapy," I repeated, "is just no—"

"Snap out of it," Newell barked. "It's no good on dumb animals, either, and you're probably out of range by now, anyway."

He took a small bottle from his desk and tossed a yellow Anti-Alch pill across the desk to me. I popped it into my mouth.

It didn't take long to work. A few minutes later, still weak and a little trembly, I said, "Would have thought of that myself, if I hadn't been so damn drunk."

The boss grunted. "Now what's this business about telenosis?"

"Somebody's been using it on me," I said. "Maliciously. Damn near drowned in a lake of blood from a water faucet."

"Couldn't have been DTs?"

"I'm serious. It's been going on for three or four days now. Not the blood. That's what gave it away. But other things."

"You've been working pretty hard lately," Newell reminded me.

"Which is why I'm on vacation and all nice and relaxed. Or at least, I *was*. No, it's not that. Listen, Carson, I admit that I'm no technical expert on telenosis. But a long time ago—seven or eight years ago, I guess—I did a feature series on it. I learned a little bit. Enough to save my life this time."

Newell shrugged. "Okay. You probably know more about it than I do. I just know it's damned restricted stuff." He paused thoughtfully. "Any missing telenizer equipment would cause a helluva fuss, and there hasn't been any fuss."

"No machines in Palm Beach or vicinity that somebody on the inside could be using illegally?" And then I answered that question myself: "No ... I doubt it. The machines are used only in the larger hospitals."

"Don't suppose you have any hunches?"

I shook my head slowly, frowning. "You couldn't really call it a hunch. Just a bare possibility. But I noticed on a news report the other day that Isaac Grogan—you know, 'the Millionaire Mayor of Memphis,' released about a month ago, bribery and corruption sentence—anyway, he's taken up temporary residence in Palm Beach."

The boss rubbed his chin. "As I recall, you did an exposé series on him four or five years ago. Corroborated by official investigation, and Grogan was later sentenced. You thinks he's after revenge?"

I raised a hand warningly. "Now, hold on—I said it was a bare possibility. All I know is that Grogan hates my guts—or might think he has some reason to. I know that Grogan is in Palm Beach, and that I've been under telenosis attack. There's no necessary connection at all."

"No," Newell said. "But it's something to start on." He looked at his wrist watch. "Tell you what. It's nearly noon now. Let's go out for lunch, and while I'm thinking, you can tell me all you remember about telenosis."

It's altogether possible that you may have no more than barely heard of telenosis—its technical details are among the most closely guarded secrets of our time. So I'll go over some of the high spots of what I told Newell.

Mind you, I'm no authority on the subject, and it has been a full seven years since I have done any research on it. However, I learned all I know from Dr. Homer Reighardt, who, at the time, was the world's outstanding authority.

Telenosis, nowadays, is confined almost exclusively to use in psychiatric hospitals and corrective institutions. It's used chiefly on neurotics. In

cases of extreme dementia, it's worthless. In fact, the more normal you are, the more effective the telenosis.

Roughly—without going into any of the real technicalities—it's this way:

Science has known for a long time that electrical waves emanate from the brain. The waves can be measured on an electroencephalograph, and vary with the physiological and psychological condition of the individual. Extreme paranoia, for example, or epilepsy, or alcoholism are accompanied by violent disturbances of the waves.

Very interesting, but... .

It wasn't until 2037 that Professor Martin James decided that these brain waves are comparable to radio waves, and got busy inventing a device to listen in on them.

The result, of course, was telenosis. The machine that James came up with, after twenty years of work, could not only listen in on a person's thoughts, which are carried on the brain waves, but it could transmit messages to the brain from the outside.

"Unless the waves are in a state of disturbance caused by alcohol or insanity or some such thing?" Newell commented.

I nodded.

"The word 'telenosis' comes from 'hypnosis,' doesn't it?"

"Yes, but not very accurately," I said. "In hypnosis, you need some sort of visual or auditory accompaniment. With telenosis, you can gain control of a person's mind directly, through the brain waves."

"You say 'gain control of a person's mind,'" Newell said. "Do you mean that if you tell someone who is under telenosis to do something, he's got to do it?"

"Not necessarily," I said. "All you can do with telenosis is transmit thoughts to a person—counting visual and auditory sensations as thoughts. If you can convince him that the thoughts you're sending are *his* thoughts ... then you can make him do almost anything. But if he knows or suspects he's being telenized—"

"I'm with you," Newell interrupted. "He still gets the thoughts—visions and sounds or what have you—but he doesn't have to obey them."

I nodded. My mind was skipping ahead to more immediate problems. "Don't you suppose we ought to notify Central Investigation Division right away? This is really a problem for them."

But Newell was there ahead of me. "So was the Memphis affair," he said.

I raised my eyebrows.

"Meaning," the boss continued, "that I'd like to give your hunch a play first."

"But it's not even a hunch," I objected. "How?"

"Well, by having you interview Grogan, for instance... ."

I opened my mouth and almost shook my head, but Newell hurried on. "Look, Earl, it's been a long time since Intergalaxy has scored a good news beat. Not since the Memphis exposé, in fact. Remember that? Remember how good it felt to have your name on articles published all over the world? Remember all the extra cash? The fame?"

I grunted.

"Now before you say anything," Newell said, "remember that when you started on that case you didn't have a thing more concrete to go on than you have right now—just a half a hunch. Isn't that right? Admit it!"

"M'm."

"Well, isn't it worth a chance? What can we lose?"

"Me, maybe. But... ."

The boss said nothing more. He knew that if he let me do the talking, I'd soon argue myself into it. Which I did.

Five minutes later, I shrugged. "Okay. What, specifically, do you have in mind?"

"Let's go back to the office," Newell said.

It was just a short walk. Or, I should say, it would have been a short walk, if we had walked.

But New York was one of the very last cities to convert to the "level" transportation system. It had been one hell of an engineering feat, but for Amerpean ingenuity and enterprise nothing is impossible, so the job had finally been tackled and completed just within the past year. And the novelty of the ambulator bands on pedestrian levels was still strong for native New Yorkers.

So instead of leaving the restaurant on the vehicle level, where we happened to be, and taking an old fashioned sidewalk stroll to the IGN building, Newell insisted on taking the escalator up to the next level and then gliding along on an amband.

That's just the sort of person he is.

When we got back up to his office, he asked, "Isn't there some sort of defense against telenosis? I mean, other than alcohol or insanity?"

I thought for a moment. "Shouldn't be too hard to devise one. All you need is something to set up interference vibrations on the same band as the brain waves you're guarding."

"Sounds simple as hell. Could one of our men do it?"

"A telenosis technician at one of the hospitals could do it quicker," I suggested.

"Without the sanction of C.I.D.? I doubt that."

"That's right," I agreed. "Okay. I'll run down to Technology and see what we can work out. It may take two or three days—"

"I'll see that it gets top priority. I want you to get back to Palm Beach as soon as you can."

As I was getting up to leave, Newell said, "Say, by the way, how's that health cult in Palm Beach—Suns-Rays Incorporated? Anything on that?"

Suns-Rays Incorporated was one of the chief reasons I was taking my vacation in Palm Beach, Fla., instead of in Sacramento, Calif., my home town. Carson Newell had heard about this crackpot religious group that was having a convention in Palm Beach, and he couldn't see why one of his reporters shouldn't combine business and pleasure.

And maybe that tells you a little more of the sort of person he is.

"It's a complete fraud," I told him. "They worship a glorified sunlamp and take regular treatments. Same time, they follow a strict diet and system of exercises—have their own little spot on one of the beaches. Guaranteed to cure what ails you."

"Who's the head?" Newell asked. "How many are there?"

"About twenty-five or thirty members, I'd say. That's not counting the few curiosity-seekers, like me. And nobody in particular seems to be in charge right now. I guess the big boss died, and they're holding this con-fab to elect a new one. Supposed to have the elections today, come to think of it. There's a great big scoop I missed."

"Any real news value in it?"

I shook my head. "Feature story, maybe, but it's pretty run-of-the-mill stuff, even at that."

"Well, stay with it," Newell said. "Just in case nothing pops on this telenosis deal. And get that defense mech as soon as possible."

"Do I get a real vacation after this is all over?" I asked, knowing what the answer would be.

"Scram," Newell replied. "I'm a busy man. Get going!"

Late afternoon of the next day, my defense mechanism was ready. They had taken a reading of my brain wave with a makeshift

electroencephalograph, and then a couple of electronics boys had tinkered around until they had a gadget that would throw out vibrations on exactly my wave-band.

Of course, not having any telenosis equipment, we weren't able to make a real check of the contraption's effectiveness. I had to take the technologists' word that it would work.

Frankly, I didn't feel any too well defended as I hopped the five o'clock stratoliner back to Palm Beach.

The defense mech was enclosed in a black case that looked like a portable radio or a portable typewriter or a small suitcase. When you opened the lid, there was a flat surface having only one dial—for volume. The vibrations had a radius of about three-quarters of a mile.

It was after six when I got back to my hotel. I had Grogan's address, and he wasn't too far from where I was staying—but Grogan is not the sort of person on whom you make a business call after business hours.

My confidence in the defense mech hadn't grown, but I knew of another sure-fire defense, so after dinner I went to the bar to start setting it up.

But I lugged the thirty-pound portable along, anyway, wishing that it looked a little more like a briefcase instead of a typewriter or a radio.

Not that it really mattered, though. I could have carried an open bird cage with a live and screaming Calypsonian *grimp*, odor and all, and still not have attracted any attention—because it wouldn't have been any more unusual than some of the guests at the hotel.

For a student of interplanetary biology, this would be a perfect observation post. There aren't many forms of extraterrestrial life that can accommodate themselves to Earth's conditions, but there are spots that go out of their way to provide suitable conditions for anything that comes along, and this was one of them.

In the two weeks I had been here, I had seen only one Calypsonian dominant, and he didn't happen to have a *grimp* with him. But there were a pair of Uranian *galgaque*—squat, gray, midget honeymooners—who smelled just as bad. They left a few days after I got here.

Then there had been at least half a dozen flimsy, ethereal little Venusians at one time or another, dragging themselves around and looking unhappy as hell. None of them stayed more than a few days, and they spent most of their time in the water.

I noticed one or two hairy, apelike dominants from Jupiter's third moon, and a few of the snaky, scaly, six-limbed creatures from the

second. In addition, there was a group of Vega VI dominants who were hard to distinguish from humans if you didn't look closely enough to notice their complete hairlessness and the absence of neck.

And of course there were the inevitable Martians—giant, big-chested, spindly-limbed, red-hued parodies of humanity; friendly, good-natured and alert. But I don't really suppose they should be classed among the oddities of the place.

As one of my colleagues commented in a national publication not long ago: "The only place a Martian is a novelty any more is on Mars."

I fully expect the 2080 census to show a Martian population on Earth more than double that of the home planet. So far, the Martians seem to be the only extraterrestrials who've really taken root here. And that's a problem, too.

But how the hell did I get off on that?

I was finishing my second martini, sitting in a booth with my feet propped on the seat opposite me and catching snatches of a conversation between an Earth girl and a Vega VI Romeo at a nearby table. It was pretty unsavory conversation, and I guess I was shaking my head sternly when a shadow fell over me.

"Another of the same," I said, looking up—but it wasn't the waiter.

It was an enormous, red-skinned, balloon-chested, white-togaed Martian, and his little wrinkled face was smiling like I was long-lost Uncle Eddie whom he hadn't seen for forty years. When he threw open his long, spindly arms and screeched a loud, "Ahh!" I was beginning to think maybe I was.

"Mr. Langston!" he shrilled. "How gladly to see you! Where been? We missing you colossal!" Then he slapped one fragile hand against his protruding chest, looked up at the ceiling and squeaked: "Clean living and Suns-Rays Incorporated!" He looked at me again, smiling.

"Huh?" I said. "Oh, yeah. Sure as hell. Clean living and Suns-Rays etcetera. Damn right. Pull up a chair, Blek, old boy."

As far as I'm concerned, one Martian looks pretty much like another; but now I recognized this one. There was only one extraterrestrial in the little screwball health-cult with which I had become rather loosely acquainted in the past two weeks, and this was him.

I moved my feet and Zan Matl Blekeke sat down, exuding sunshine and clean living all over the place. We ordered drinks. He was elated as blazes about something, and I decided I might as well let him tell me

about it—and knowing the typical Martian's haphazard use of the English language, I regarded the prospect as something of a challenge.

Zan Blekeke started right in telling me about it in his shrill, piping tones:

"Ah, Mr. Langston, wrong time go. Where been? Should have been meeting. I derelicted resident. Ha! Expected, yups?"

I replied, "Nups. Let's start over again. Something pretty damn important?"

He nodded.

"SRI meeting? Yesterday?"

He nodded again, smiling to beat hell.

I thought for a moment, then tried a shot in the dark, illogical as it was. "You lost your home? Derelicted resident?"

He looked like I'd stepped on his sore corn.

I tried again. "You don't mean you were kicked out of the group?"

He winced. "Oohhh, nooo! Opposition. Opposition."

"You mean there was too much opposition to your being kicked out, so you weren't?"

He slumped in his seat and regarded me balefully. With the pathos of a squeaky hinge, he said:

"Head man. Top dog. Derelicted resident. Boss. Wheel. Me. Zan Blekeke."

And if I didn't get it now, I just didn't deserve to know. But I got it.

"You were elected president?" I said.

Zan Blekeke nodded gratefully. "Yus and so. Undeserving awful, but... ." He heaved his chest in resignation.

"No. Not at all," I protested. "Why, I think that's wonderful. You're just the man for the job! Have another drink."

We ordered more drinks, and the Martian continued: "Membership obviousless that whatsoever I closest intimute of Dear Late Doctor—" here he raised his eyes again and clapped a hand to his chest before he finished—"I should wallow in step-tracks."

"Why, absolutely," I agreed emphatically. "No question about it."

From talking to some of the SRI members after meetings or at beach sessions, I had gained the definite impression that Zan Blekeke had been a sort of a servant to "Dear Late Doctor," and would continue to be a servant to whoever was elected in his place.

But instead, they had elected the Martian himself. Logical, in a cock-eyed way.

This was the first time I'd ever really talked to him. I'd seen him at the few meetings of SRI I had attended, but he had seemed pretty quiet there, letting others do most of the talking. He was in charge of administering the daily Sun-Ray treatments, which I had taken once or twice myself just for the experience; but on those occasions, he had been very cold and professional.

Closest intimate of Dear Late Doctor...

I had never been able to find out much about the Doctor. He was too sacred a subject for any of the members to even talk about. Of course, I hadn't tried very hard, because I wasn't especially interested in this assignment—I was supposed to be on vacation.

Now that a successor had been chosen, I wondered if the show was over and everyone could go home. I asked Blekeke about it.

"Not while yet," he replied. "Colonial could be. All live one. Dear Late Doctor—" hand to heart, face to Heaven, Amen—"often told wanted colossal."

It wasn't too clear, but I nodded anyway. Frankly, my interest in the whole thing was at a very low ebb. With the drinks and the effort of untangling Blekeke's twisted English, I was becoming listless and sleepy.

But he insisted on knowing where I had been when the meeting was held. I told him I'd had to hurry back to New York for a conference with my publisher.

He said, "Ah, yes. Writer." He pointed to the defense mech on the seat beside me. "That typer?"

"Huh? Oh, no ... that's a portable radio. Carry it around with me, in case the conversation gets dull." I was at the point where I didn't care much what I said.

He must have taken it as a gentle hint, because in a little while he got up and left, shrilling: "So gladly seeing you. Wanted know."

I nodded and waved a limp hand at him.

As I was passing the desk on the way up to my room, the clerk called, "Mr. Langston, Mr. Langston. Long distance call for you, sir. I was just ringing your room. You can take it in a booth there, if you wish, sir."

I nodded and walked to the row of vp booths. Closing the door, I sat down in front of the screen and picked up the mike. The visiphone screen lighted and the speaker crackled. The chubby face and shoulders of Carson Newell took form and floated on the plate.

"Wanted to be sure you got the latest dope on Grogan before you see him," Newell said. "Just now got the report."

"Go ahead," I said.

"Well, then—" The boss looked up from his note pad. "About how long had the telenosis been on you? How many days?"

"H'm. Don't know. It's hard to tell, if it's handled right. Weird nightmares, daydreams, absent-mindedness, sudden impulses, optical illusions—it can be telenosis, and it can be just you. I'd say three or four days, but—"

"Wouldn't necessarily prove anything, anyway," Newell broke in. "Here's the report on Grogan. Been out of Corrective for a little more than a month now. Went directly to Memphis. Cleared up business affairs there, then went to Palm Beach for vacation. Arrived late Tuesday afternoon—four days ago. Took a suite in Space Verge hotel with four quote secretaries unquote, and has refused to see anyone. No unusually large baggage. No unusual activities reported. So much for that."

He turned a page of the note pad and went on: "Corrective Institute record: responded favorably to treatment. Occupational training in administrative accounting. Special courses in business and political ethics. Now get this—it's the one thing that gives your hunch any credibility at all. Three months intermittent telenosis therapy for slight paranoiac tendencies. Response favorable. Dismissed from C.I. after five years, three weeks and six days. Classification: Apparent cure, but possibility of relapse."

We were both quiet for a while, looking at each other.

Then I said, "Well, I'll see him tomorrow. Remember, it's nothing but a hunch—not even that."

"Be careful, dammit," Newell cautioned.

... I woke up sometime in the early morning, before it was light, with a clicking noise in my ears. I lay there in bed, gazing into the darkness, wondering, yet knowing, what would happen if the defense mech should break down—if a tube should give out, or if some little coil should prove defective.

The clicking stopped after a while, but it was a long time before I got back to sleep.

I had no trouble getting an interview with Grogan. I'd known I wouldn't. It was a simple matter of calling his suite and telling the loose-mouthed, scar-cheeked "secretary" who answered that Earl Langston would like to make an appointment with Isaac Grogan for, say, 10:30.

"Grogan ain't seein' nobody," the secretary growled.

"Ask him," I said.

The face vanished and reappeared on the screen a few moments later. "Okay. Come up anytime you're ready."

"Fifteen minutes," I said, and replaced the mike.

I turned up the volume of the defense mech as high as it would go, and left it in my room when I left.

The same hideous secretary, with the loose jowels and the deep, livid scar on his right cheek, met me at the door of Grogan's suite.

"Th' boss'll see you in th' library," the bodyguard rumbled, and led me to the room. The door closed, but did not click behind me.

Isaac Grogan was slouched on a sofa, hands in his pockets, looking at the floor.

I stood for a moment, looking at him.

He had changed only a little in five years. He was a big man with a broad, pleasant face and thick black hair. A deep dimple divided his chin. The last time I'd seen him, he had been getting a little paunchy, and there had been wrinkles developing in his neck and bags under his eyes. But that had been from strain and worry, and he looked a lot better now.

"You're looking well," I told him.

"What the hell do you want?" Grogan said quietly. "Why can't you leave me alone? I don't want any trouble."

"Neither do I."

And suddenly I felt very awkward. What the hell *did* I want? Just exactly what had I expected to accomplish with this visit? I didn't really know.

I cleared my throat. "I've got one question, Grogan. Maybe two. Then I'll leave."

He looked at me.

"Do you still blame me for what happened in Memphis?" I asked.

Grogan shifted his position and gave a sort of half-laugh. "Langston, I've never liked you, and I don't now. But I can't say that I blame you for the Memphis mess—if I ever did. Now, what's your other question?"

"Telenosis," I said.

He waited, looking straight at me. "Well? What about it?"

"According to your C.I. record," I said, "you had three months of intermittent telenosis therapy."

He shrugged. "That's right. Lots of people do. You still haven't asked your question."

"Yes, I have," I replied. "I'll leave now. Thanks for your time."

The gorilla-secretary was opening the front door for me, when Grogan spoke again. "Langston."

I turned around.

Grogan was standing in the door of the library.

"Langston," he repeated. "I don't know what your angle is. I don't know why you came here, or whether you got what you wanted. Furthermore, I don't care much. Five years ago is not today, Langston. I've changed. Just the same, I don't believe I want to see you again. I don't like you. Okay?"

I said, "Okay," and left.

Back in my hotel room, I first turned down the volume of the defense mech, then sat down at the visiphone and put in a call to New York. The pudgy image of Carson Newell appeared.

"I'm stumped," I told him.

"What's the matter? Did you see Grogan?"

"Yeah. Just now."

"Well?"

"Nothing. I'm stumped. He's completely changed. If there was ever a case of full and complete correction, I'd say Grogan is it."

Newell tapped his fingertips together, then shrugged impatiently. "Well, hell, I don't think we're getting anywhere on this. I'll turn it over to the C.I.D. and let them worry about it."

"So what happens now?" I asked. "What am I supposed to do?"

"Take a vacation. But hang on to that defense mech. Stay in Palm Beach and contact me pronto if anything happens. Buzz me at least once a day, even if anything doesn't happen."

He started to put down the mike, then lifted it again. "How's the SRI?"

"Oh, that. I'll whip out a story on it in a couple of days."

"No hurry. Find out all you can about it. Give you something to do while you're waiting around."

He put down the mike and faded from the screen.

So I promptly did my damndest to forget all about Isaac Grogan and telenosis. I spent the rest of the day at the beach, sprawled out on the hot sand with the defense mech beside me and an army of people—humans and aliens—surrounding me. Only once, at about four o'clock, did the defense mech start going *click-click-click*. I timed it. It lasted three minutes and then quit.

When I got back to the hotel, at about five, a man fell into step with me as soon as I entered the lobby.

"Name's Maxwell," he told me. "C.I.D. I'm one of your bodyguards for a while."

"How many others do I rate?" I asked.

He was a tall, heavily built young man in his middle twenties. He carried a briefcase. We headed for the elevator.

"Only one," he replied, "but he'll stay pretty much out of sight. He'll join us in your room after a while. We have to ask you a lot of questions."

The other bodyguard, who slipped into my room without knocking twenty minutes later, was shorter, thinner and older. He was bald except for a gray fringe, and his name was Johnson.

The C.I.D. men spent a half-hour checking for hidden mikes and cameras before they said much of anything. Then they plopped down on the edge of the bed, and the young man opened his briefcase.

The older one said, "Have your dinner sent up here. We'll get started on some of these questions right away."

The questions were both exhaustive and exhausting. The older man, Johnson, fired the questions, and Maxwell wrote down the answers, occasionally inserting an inquiry of his own. They wanted to know everything—not only about my telenosis experiences and my knowledge of and contacts with Isaac Grogan, but everything I had done, said or thought during the past two weeks, everyone I had met and talked to, and everything we had talked about.

At the end of three and a half hours, I felt completely pumped out, and Maxwell had a sheaf of notes the size of a best-seller.

Johnson said, "Well, I guess that'll do for a starter. We'll have another session tomorrow."

He took the notes from Maxwell and put them in Maxwell's briefcase. He stood up. "I'll have these transcribed and maybe check around a little. I'll meet you here at six-thirty tomorrow night."

"What about—" I started. He cut me off: "Maxwell will stay with you. He's not to let you out of his sight. In case anyone asks, he's your brother-in-law from Sacramento."

I couldn't help laughing—but it was an admiring laugh. "You fellows are nothing if not thorough. Does my real brother-in-law, John Maxwell of Sacramento, know about this?" I was curious.

It was Maxwell who answered. "Your brother-in-law received a long-distance emergency call from you at noon today, telling him to join you immediately. Vision-reception was fuzzy, but he recognized your voice and took the first strato. I changed places with him in Denver, where I

happened to be stationed, and he was smuggled back home. He's with his family, but he'll have to stay in for a few days."

I shook my head. "It's marvelous. Thoroughness personified. Say, I'll bet you fellows even thought of getting defense mechanisms ... but where are they?"

Johnson and Maxwell looked at each other, jaws hanging.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Johnson said bitterly. "Thoroughness personified! Son of a... ." He slapped his hat on his bald head and dashed out the door without looking back.

Maxwell grimaced. He got up from the bed and walked to an easy chair and sat down again. "Well, Irvin Johnson will take care of *that* little detail. But it's going to take time... ."

"It would have taken time anyway—a day or so—even if you'd thought of it first thing," I said. "Besides, there's no danger until they find your wave-band, and that takes time, too."

But he remained disconsolate. Not because of the danger, but simply because they'd overlooked an angle. Under a system in which the agents are given maximum responsibility for details and planning, that would count heavily against them on their records. I almost felt guilty for reminding them.

I said, "John, look—if all else fails, there's one sure quick defense. Alcohol. I would say that under the circumstances, since you're supposed to be protecting *me*, we should keep *you* as well defended as possible."

"M'm?"

"You do drink, don't you?" I asked.

"Like a fish," Maxwell said, lunging to his feet.

When we were back in the room, Maxwell said: "Hell, I don't see that telenoshis is such a damn menash to society, if all you have to do is get drunk."

"You want a nation of alcoholics?" I said. I sat down on the bed and untied my shoes. "Anyway, whasha difference? D. T. horrors or 'noshis horrors? Whash worse?"

Maxwell grunted.

We both had to sleep in the same bed, and Maxwell was a restless sleeper. I had finally crept into the lower depths of slumber, where it was warm and snug, when he poked me sharply in the ribs.

"What's that?" he demanded. He was sitting up.

"What's what?"

"Listen!"

I heard it. *Click-click-click*...

"What time is it?" I asked. My eyes were still closed, and I was damned if I was going to open them.

"Three fifty-seven. But what is—"

"Defense mech," I said. "Right on time. Every twelve hours. Tries to get me. Now go sleep."

I rolled over and shut my eyes even tighter—but I couldn't get all the way back to sleep. Not back down to the warm, dark depths. It was a long time before Maxwell even lay back down, and he rolled and twisted for the rest of the night. At six o'clock, he fell into a deep, quiet slumber, and I was wide awake, damn him. So I got up and dressed.

I found a news magazine I hadn't read, and occupied myself with it for an hour. Practically the entire issue was devoted to an analysis of the Martian immigration.

It went way back into history and discussed the folklore fear that humans had for centuries about a Martian invasion. And it pointed out that something very like a Martian invasion was taking place right now. One particular article concluded with what I considered an unnecessarily grim warning that unless something were done soon to check the flow of immigrants, Earth would soon be overrun with Martians.

Other articles in the magazine went into the causes and implications of the migration. One of the writers pointed out that Mars is a dying planet. In only a few thousand years, it will be too cold, too dry and too airless to support life.

The development of interplanetary travel a century earlier had provided the inhabitants with a means of escape. They could survive on Earth; now they could get to Earth; so they came to Earth.

One full article was devoted to the debates and pending legislation in World Council on the subject, but I didn't take the time to read it. I was fairly familiar with the current controversy, having followed the daily news reports, and besides, the reading was giving me a headache.

At seven o'clock, I considered going down for breakfast, but it occurred to me that it would be another black mark against Maxwell if I should be seen without him. Forgetting about the defense mech was enough for one case.

So I ordered breakfast brought up to the room. While I was waiting, and since I was sitting near it anyway, I flicked the TV switch and tuned in on the morning's news. Nothing earthshaking: a factory explosion in St. Louis; political unrest in India; death of a Vegan millionaire; speech in

The World Council by Delegate Machavowski of Eurasia in support of the Bagley-Dalton bill to establish a yearly immigration quota of ten thousand from all planets, one thousand from Mars; protest reply by a Martian sociologist at Yale; spacecruiser crashed on Calypso, twenty killed. And so on and so on.

My attention was held momentarily by the Martian question, since I was freshly informed on it.

While the two views of the issue did nothing to settle it in my mind, they did serve to remind me of my Martian friend, Zan Matl Blekeke, and the fact that I was supposed to be digging up a feature story on Suns-Rays Incorporated.

"What's on the agenda for today?" my pseudo-brother-in-law asked as I was finishing my coffee a half-hour later. He rolled out of bed, yawned and scratched his head vigorously. His hair was ruffled, but he looked rested, and I envied him to beat hell.

"You mean it's up to me?" I asked.

"Sure. You just go on with your normal everyday existence and ignore me, like I'm nothing but a shadow." He was still stretching lazily.

"Well, for the first thing, I'm going to see that we get a cot in here. There isn't room in that bed for both of us."

Maxwell grinned as he buttoned his shirt. "D'I kick you out of bed? Sorry. Should have warned you."

"Do you eat breakfast?" I asked him.

"Hell, yes. Like a wolf."

"Well, let's go down and get you some breakfast while I figure out my agenda for today."

I wasn't sure what I wanted to do—start working on that SRI feature, I supposed, so I could get it out of the way and either relax or concentrate on this telenosis business, which I was supposed to be forgetting about. I had most of the dope I needed for the story—atmosphere, first hand experience... .

Everything, it occurred to me, but the essential facts.

For instance, I would need to know more about Zan Blekeke himself—simple biographical data that shouldn't take too long to gather. A harder job would be finding out about "Dear Late Doctor." So far I didn't even know what his name was. And if none of the SRI members would talk about him... .

As Maxwell and I sat at a breakfast room table, I made a mental checklist of the points I would have to work on. I was staring out the window

at the flowers staging a color-riot in the garden, when suddenly Maxwell said:

"Say, Earl, about how long does it take to find out a guy's brain wave band?"

"Huh? What do you mean?" I looked at him. He was shoveling pancakes into his mouth like a fireman stoking a furnace.

He shrugged and swallowed. "You said there was no danger from telenosis until they found my wave band. Well, last night I had the damnedest nightmares, and I was just wondering—"

"Relax," I said. "Ever been telenized?"

"Not that I know of."

"Got nothin' to worry about, then. If you had been telenized, it's just possible they could have gotten your band number from the Telenosis Bureau. Which, by God, come to think of it, is where they probably got mine. But without that, or an electroencephalograph, it'd take weeks, at least."

"But can't it influence a lot of people at once? I mean, like mass hypnosis?"

"Sure be hell if it could," I said. "But I don't think it can. I don't know why not, but I definitely remember old Doc Reighardt saying it'd never been done."

He seemed to feel better. He finished his breakfast in relative silence. I was able to map out a general procedure for gathering all of the necessary SRI information.

First step was to get hold of Zan Blekeke again and have him tell me his life history. I shuddered at the prospect, but it had to be done.

"We're going to East Emerson beach," I told John Maxwell.

On the way, aboard a third-level bus, I asked him, "SRI ever been investigated by you people?"

"Damn if I know. Why?"

"Never mind. Save me a lot of trouble, maybe, if it had. Just a thought."

We found the SRI cultists at their usual place on the beach. It was a stretch on the far south end, a rough, gravelly portion quite a bit beyond the army of regular bathers.

As we approached, threading our way through the maze of umbrellas, tablecloths and people, people, people in practically all stages of nudity, I noticed that a makeshift rope fence enclosed the little group of SRIs where they were sprawled out doing their relaxing exercises. That was something new—the fence, I mean.

I started to crawl through the ropes, and one of the nearby recliners jumped to his feet, stood in front of me and made pushing motions with his hands.

"I'm sorry, sirs, but this is a meeting of The Suns-Rays Incorporated religious group. You are requested not to enter."

Now, he knew better than to say a silly thing like that to me. His name was Monte Bingham, and he knew damn well who I was, and I told him so. "I'm practically an ex-officio member in good standing myself," I said. "Wake up, you goof."

Monte Bingham turned slowly around and looked toward the big Martian, Zan Blekeke, who was sitting up with his spindly legs outstretched near the center of the enclosure.

Blekeke got to his feet and waddled toward us, waving Bingham aside. He was not smiling. He stood glaring at us.

"Whose?" he said with a swift, half-gesture toward Maxwell.

"Whose?" I repeated. "He's mine. I mean, he's my brother-in-law, John Maxwell, come to visit me from Sacramento. He's okay. What's going on? I just wanted to make an appointment to talk with you."

Blekeke heaved his big round bare chest. "Trying still disciple in," he replied.

"How's that? Discipline, you mean?"

"Yups. Laters out. Strangers out. No excepting. Can't."

"Yeah, but you know me, and John here—"

"Brother law oaks, but both laters. See hall hour halfish. Talk then. Treatment, yups?"

I said, "Well, I guess that'll be okay. Hour and a half, at the hall, huh?"

Blekeke said, "Yups," and turned away.

He took two steps and stopped. I saw his spine stiffen. His head turned slowly toward the water's edge where two dogs were running circles around each other, not far from the enclosure. As the dogs moved, Blekeke's head moved with them, back and forth and back again... .

Suddenly one of the dogs, the smaller one—a black and white spaniel with flapping ears—turned and raced through the SRI compound, bounding gracelessly over the sprawled bodies of SRI members. The larger German shepherd gave two woofs and leaped playfully in pursuit. They passed within about ten feet of Blekeke.

When the German shepherd barked, I heard a thin, drawn-out squeak, like a mouse with his tail caught in a trap, come from Blekeke. He turned around with incredible speed and took a half-step in our direction. His

face was distorted as though in pain, and for an instant I thought he had stepped on a jagged piece of glass or something.

But then I recognized the expression on his face. It was not pain.

It was terror.

I noticed now that he was trembling violently. He twirled again and started in the opposite direction, stopped and turned swiftly around once more. He acted as though he were surrounded on all sides by invisible Martian-eaters.

The dogs paused at the edge of the enclosure for a moment to stand on their hind legs and exchange playful blows; then they raced off together toward the more densely populated beach area.

Blekeke's face suddenly relaxed, and with a final shudder he controlled the trembling.

He was muttering: "Doggie, doggie, doggie" when he lowered his eyes to us, and he gave a little start as if he hadn't known we were standing there.

"Hall. Hour halfish," he said after a moment's pause. Then he turned and walked rapidly back into the midst of the prostrate SRI members and lay down.

Maxwell and I exchanged glances and walked away. I felt, all of a sudden, rather sad and depressed. When we had gone a respectable distance, I said, "Poor devil! Fear of dogs. It must be awful."

"Fear of dogs? Cynophobia? You think that's what it was?"

"Well, sure," I replied. "Only thing it could be."

Maxwell said, "First case I've ever seen of it."

"Me, too."

It was still not quite ten o'clock. We killed the next hour and a half basking in the Sun and taking occasional dips in the water. We had to go one at a time, because one of us had to stay and guard the defense mech.

At 11:30 we kept our appointment with Blekeke. He was alone in the SRI hall, a long, low, metal building located a half-mile down the beach from the general bathing area.

The hall had once been a storage warehouse of some kind—I have no idea what kind. But that had been a long time ago; and it was now used exclusively for SRI meetings.

There was another building near it, the ramshackle, rambling mansion of a long-dead millionaire, which had been appropriated by the SRI as

housing quarters for the members who did not care to stay in rooms or hotels in town. And most of them didn't.

Maxwell was interested in the house, but I couldn't tell him anything about it. I had never been in it, whereas I had been in the hall several times. Of course, there was nothing much to explain about the hall—it was practically bare.

The Sun Ray stood like an altar at one end. About thirty-five folding chairs were lined up in rows facing the Ray. That was all.

Blekeke was doing something to the lamp part of the Ray when we came in—tightening the bulb, apparently. It was a very simple contraption. Nothing but a padded, white-sheeted reclining table suspended over the full length of which was the lamp. The thing was operated by a bank of controls wired up a few feet away from the table.

"Infra-red heat lamp," Maxwell whispered.

"Sure," I said. "But don't say so."

Blekeke saw us and jumped down from the platform and greeted us with open arms, apologizing for his rude behavior on the beach.

I told him to forget about it; that I just wanted to ask him a few questions so I could write up my story about SRI—give him a little free publicity.

Blekeke beamed. Said he'd be glad to help all he could.

But before I had a chance to ask any questions, he was blabbering: "Give treatment. New, improve. Much healthier. Give try." And he was pushing us toward the machine.

I was not the least bit interested in taking a treatment, and I tried to tell him so, as kindly as I could. But he was insistent.

Finally we agreed to take the treatment, hoping he would get it out of his system. I handed the defense mech to Maxwell and lay down. Couldn't tell a damn bit of difference. Ten minutes of warmth and dozy relaxation, and that's it. You don't feel a bit different after it's over than you did before.

Unless you're a good cultist, and convince yourself by auto-suggestion that all your bodily ills have been miraculously—if temporarily—baked out.

After Maxwell had been given the treatment, I tried again to get Blekeke pinned down to answering some of my questions, but it was no good.

He was obliging, cooperative and friendly as hell, but his heart just wasn't in it. He had to tell us about the improvements in the Ray, and when I threw specific questions at him, he always managed to answer

with some reference to the Ray and start all over again—and it was all pure gibberish.

I gave up. We parted with mutual benedictions, and John Maxwell and I walked away, toward the one-track road leading to the old mansion.

"What do *you* do in a situation like this?" I asked him.

He shrugged. "Try somebody else."

We walked up the front steps of the mansion, and I punched the doorbell.

It was no go there, either. The cultist who opened the door, whom I remembered as a shoe salesman from Boise, informed us firmly and none too politely that no one could enter without the explicit and written permission of President Matl Blekeke. He showed no sign of recognizing me. He slammed the door.

I gave emphatic utterance to an unprintable word and said, "Let's go back to town."

Johnson showed up in the room promptly at six-thirty, as he had promised, again slipping in without knocking. He threw his briefcase and his hat on the bed and pulled up a chair to the cardtable where Maxwell and I were playing chess.

"How about the defense mechs?" Maxwell asked.

"Hospital in New York is working on 'em," Johnson said. "Promised they'd have 'em ready tomorrow morning. I'm going up tonight, after I get through here, so I can pick 'em up right away."

"Quick work," I said.

"Any new developments on this end? I've been too busy today getting things organized to keep an eye on you."

"Every twelve hours Langston's defense mech starts clicking," Maxwell said. "Four o'clock this morning and four o'clock this afternoon."

"So he's not giving up on you, anyway," Johnson said. "We know he's still around. What else? Anything new come up?"

I shrugged. "Spent the whole day on a wild goose chase—from my point of view. Trying to dig up information for my feature about Sun-Rays Incorporated."

Johnson nodded. "No luck, huh?"

I told him about the so-called interview with Blekeke that morning, and how in the afternoon I had tried to contact those SRI members who I knew had been living in town. That had been futile, too; all of them had moved to the house on the beach. Then Maxwell and I had spent a

couple of hours in the library, checking reference books for some mention of SRI or any of its members. With no results.

Johnson recognized the frustration in my voice. "Don't let it get you down," he said.

I asked him if the C.I.D. had ever investigated the cult.

"Not yet," he said. "Not that I know of. But everyone that you've had any contact with since you've been here is being checked thoroughly. And since that includes the SRI cult, it'll get a very complete going-over."

I said, "Well, shucks, then. All I have to do is sit back and let you fellows dig up the information I need."

"That, of course, depends on how the information is classified after it's processed," Johnson corrected. "Maybe you can use it and maybe you can't." He shrugged. "Well, I've got a whole new batch of questions here for you. That's my job right now. Let's get at 'em."

After Johnson was gone and I again felt mentally empty, I turned to Maxwell, who was pacing the floor restlessly: "Well, shall we go down and set up your defense barrier again?"

"Let's take a walk," he said. "I've got a headache. Fresh air might help."

"Suits me," I replied. "I know of a little bar seven or eight blocks from here... ."

I stopped because he was already going out the door, and I had to get up from the chair, grab the defense mech and run after him.

He wasn't hurrying, just walking casually, but not waiting for anything.

In the elevator, on the way down, he said, "Those defense mechs. God damn. I wish those defense mechs... ."

I nudged him. The elevator operator was looking at him closely, and there's no use taking any chances. He ought to know better.

He was out of the elevator as soon as the door opened at ground level. He walked toward the front entrance. I had to run again to catch up with him.

"Hey, what's the hurry?" I asked. "Can I come along too?"

He didn't answer, just kept walking. Looking straight ahead, still not hurrying, but moving rapidly nevertheless. When we got outside, he turned right and continued at the same steady pace.

I tugged at his arm. "Hey, the bar I mentioned is the other way."

He shook my hand loose and kept walking. "I want to go this way."

I shrugged and trotted to keep up with him. "Okay. If you know of a better place, we'll go there. But—"

"This damn headache," he said. "I've had it all day. All afternoon."

"My fault," I said. "I started you puzzling over a problem that concerns only me... ."

He wasn't listening.

There were few pedestrians on this level of traffic; most people who walked places took the ambulators on the second level. Down here the sidewalks were narrow and the curbs high, the streets being used almost exclusively for heavy transfer and delivery trucks.

A high metal railing along the street-side of the walk prevented careless pedestrians from stepping in the path of the huge, swift, rumbling vehicles.

But there were no railings at the intersections.

And at the next intersection, Maxwell stepped off the curb, shifted his course just a fraction, and went on at a tangent that would have had him smack in the middle of a truck-traffic lane.

I grabbed his arm and pulled hard, to get him headed back in the right direction.

"What the hell are you trying to do—get yourself killed?"

Which was almost exactly what I'd started to say. But he was the one who said it.

So I just said, "*Huh?*"

He jerked his arm free and continued walking—straight toward an oncoming 100-ton semi.

I had a sudden idea of what was going on, and acted rapidly.

I set the defense mech down, because you can't handle a man Maxwell's size with only one hand. I grabbed his arm again, this time with both hands, and pulled as hard as I could. It jerked him off balance and out of danger. The semi roared past.

And Maxwell turned on me with sudden, violent anger.

"Listen," he snapped, "what in hell's the matter with you? What do you think you're doing?"

I didn't argue with him. I took careful aim and threw a haymaker, giving it everything I had. It caught the point of his chin squarely and jarred me to my ankle.

He swayed a little bit and his face went blank, but he didn't fall.

For which I shall be eternally grateful.

Another giant semi, still nearly a block away, was hurtling toward us. If Maxwell had fallen, I could not possibly have dragged him out of the way in time. And the semi couldn't have stopped in that distance.

As it was, I was able to snatch up the defense mech with one hand and propel Maxwell to the opposite curb, just seconds before the truck went by with a whiz and a rattle.

I got Maxwell onto an escalator leading to the second level before his legs buckled. Then he went to his knees. I managed to get his arm around my shoulder and hoist him back to his feet before we reached the top.

On the second level there were no vehicles; quite a few pedestrians glided by in both directions, on several different speeds of ambulator bands.

I spotted a bar down the street and dragged Maxwell onto a amband going that way.

By the time I got him inside and settled in a booth, he was beginning to recover, shaking his head and muttering to himself.

I ordered a whole bottle of Scotch and handed Maxwell a glass of the stuff. He took it automatically and drank half of it as though it were water.

He put the glass down quickly and half rose from his seat, clutching his throat and gasping. I handed him another glass, this one containing water. He drank it and sat back down, slowly.

"Drink the rest of that Scotch," I said. "Drink it quick and don't ask any questions. Someone's got a telenosis beam on you, and he isn't kidding."

It penetrated, for he emptied the glass with short but rapid gulps. I filled the glass again and ordered more water. It took him fifteen minutes to kill the glass this time, taking only a little sip of Scotch for every deep gulp of water. But he got it down, though he was nearly unconscious at the end.

"Listen," I said, reaching over to shake his limp shoulder. "Are you still with me? For the love of heaven, don't pass out on me—that's about the worst thing you could do. John!"

He jerked his head and regarded me with unfocused eyes. "Huh? Wash matter, ole fren? I'm wish ya. Wish ya ta the end. Washer trouble, huh?"

I said, "John, listen. You're in danger. We've got to get you out of here. Out of town. Back to New York. Right away! Do you understand?"

He nodded limply. I wasn't sure whether he really understood or not. But if he could only walk, it wouldn't make much difference.

If only he didn't pass out ... it wasn't very far. Just back to the door, then into the elevator instead of going onto the street at this level. Then,

on the third level, only the few feet necessary to catch a bus or a cab to take us to the strato-port.

If he *couldn't* walk, I didn't know what I'd do. Whoever the telenosis operator was, I was sure he had followed us to this bar through Maxwell's mind. That's the way telenosis works. Alcohol sets up a complete barrier, and contact is broken entirely; but about all a blow on the head does is immobilize the victim—visions, commands and other impressions can still penetrate, and the operator can still receive whatever sensations his victim may have.

Maxwell hadn't been unconscious enough for us to be safe. Someone wanted our blood. We had to move fast.

And if he couldn't manage to walk at all... .

He couldn't, exactly. But he could get to his feet and lurch and stumble along after a fashion.

It accomplished the same purpose.

I got him to the third level, and we stood at the entrance of the bar while I got myself oriented.

I had made a tactical error. Vehicles going to the strato-port stopped on the other side of the street. And to get there, I would now have to walk Maxwell all the way down to the end of the block to a pedestrian cross-walk, then halfway back up the other side.

The alternative was to go down again and cross in the middle of the block on the pedestrian level, which is what I should have done in the first place.

But I wanted to get as far away from the bar as possible and as soon as possible. So I shrugged and turned to my left, shoving and dragging Maxwell with me.

As I did so, my defense mech started clicking.

Maxwell stumbled and nearly fell. I shoved him against the side of a building and leaned against him to keep him up. The liquor had hit him hard. If he once went down, there would be no getting him up. Not by me.

We did better after I wrapped one of his arms around my shoulder. I could carry part of his weight and I had better control of him. I kept him as close to the storefronts as possible, to minimize the possibility of being recognized from a moving vehicle in the street.

It didn't do a bit of good.

They'd probably spotted us as soon as we stepped away from the bar entrance. For all I know, they had been waiting for us since we entered the bar.

Three of them. Sitting there in the illegally parked light passenger sedan just ahead of us.

I saw it when we were still fifteen feet away. I saw it, and I knew what it was, and I stopped.

The sedan wasn't really parked. It was just pulled over close against the curb, moving slowly toward us.

When I stopped, the sedan moved up quickly even with us, and two men stepped out.

I edged Maxwell toward a drugstore entrance a few feet to the left, but the men from the sedan were at our side in an instant.

"Hey, friend, got a match?" one of them asked for the benefit of a passing couple who glanced at us.

I recognized him. A deep criss-crossed scar ran from above his right cheekbone vertically down his cheek, ending in a big dent in his jaw bone. His lips were thick and loose.

For just an instant I was motionless, frozen, my right hand holding Maxwell's arm over my shoulder, my left hand gripping the quietly ticking defense mech.

Then I moved almost without thinking about it.

I released my grip on Maxwell's arm, shoving him against the thug that I didn't recognize. At the same time, I swung my defense mech, aiming at the head of my scarfaced acquaintance. He raised his arm, but the heavy case slammed into it and bounced off his forehead.

It probably broke his arm, and possibly fractured his skull. I didn't wait to find out.

Holding tightly to the defense mech, I darted into the store entrance. I left Maxwell blindly clutching the assailant into whose path I had thrown him. I didn't worry about Maxwell. They could have him. If I got away, they wouldn't dare kill him. And if I didn't get away, they would kill both of us.

The escalator was just inside the door to the right, and I ran down the downward-moving steps, doubling back to the left at the bottom, and out the door on the pedestrian level. I turned left again and ran to the corner, crossed the street and ran three-fourths the length of the block.

I glanced backward and didn't see anyone running after me, so I entered a late-hour department store. I wasn't safe yet, and I didn't feel

safe, but I felt encouraged enough to slow down to a fast walk through the aisles of the men's clothing section.

I had to get to a visiphone, first of all, and call Newell in New York. And then—well, I wasn't sure. Hide, somewhere. Keep from being captured.

It took me three minutes of rapid wandering through the building to find a row of visiphone booths. I placed the call. While I waited, nervously crossing and uncrossing my legs, peering intermittently out the window to see if there was any sign of pursuit, I had time to think.

I had time to think, but I didn't think. Not really. I was thinking of what I was going to tell Newell. Thinking of Maxwell being dragged away by Grogan's "secretaries," and wondering what would happen to him. But I didn't really think, and maybe it's just as well.

A little less than nine agonizing minutes elapsed before Newell's plump face appeared on the screen.

"You're late tonight," he said. "I was just on the verge of calling you. How're things going?"

I told him quickly, and with a minimum of detail, what had happened since our last session.

"It's Grogan, after all," I said. "I'd recognize that scarfaced gorilla of his anywhere. Get Grogan and—"

The boss nodded. "We'll get him. You let me worry about that. You've got to... . You say they were beaming telenosis on Maxwell? How the devil did they get his wave-band so soon?"

"You can worry about that one, too," I told him.

"Okay. Never mind. Where are you now? Never mind that either. Just stay there. Call the nearest police station and have them send someone after you. Get in a nice snug cell and stay put. We'll take care of Grogan and Maxwell. Okay, now. Don't waste any time."

We hung up together. Then I quickly dialed the operator and asked for the nearest sectional police station.

When the face of the desk sergeant flashed on the screen, I told him, "My name is Earl Langston. My life is in immediate danger. I'm in a vp booth near the Pacific Street entrance, number four, of Underhill's department store, second level."

"Stay where you are," the sergeant replied. "We'll have someone after you in ten or fifteen minutes."

In a surprisingly short time, an overweight, gray-uniformed policeman with a face like a bulldog rapped at the door of the booth.

I stood up and opened the door.

"Earl Langston?" he asked. I nodded and followed him to an elevator. We went up to the third level and then through a maze of aisles and departments before going out a door that opened on a parking lot.

The policeman led me to an unmarked auto and opened the back door for me. Two dogs barked at my heels as we walked to the vehicle. I shooed them off before I closed the door.

I leaned back on the soft cushions with a sigh and set the heavy defense mech on the edge of the seat beside me, still holding the handle loosely with one hand.

The motor purred as we moved slowly out of the parking lot and into the street.

I paid no attention to where we were going. Just breathed another sigh and closed my eyes. At last, I could begin to relax. In just a few minutes, now, I'd be safe. I hadn't realized how tense I was. My neck muscles ached and my stomach slipped slowly from my chest cavity back down to where it belonged.

It seemed a long time ago that I had abandoned Maxwell to Grogan's thugs... . What had happened to him since then? How long ago had it been? Only half an hour? Not much longer, anyway.

Now again I had time to think, and this time I did think. I began to ask myself questions—to wonder about certain things.

How had Grogan learned Maxwell's wave-band so soon?

What was Grogan doing with a telenizer in the first place, and what was he up to? Just personal revenge against me?

How did I know for sure that it *was* Grogan?

That question startled me. I opened my eyes and sat up straight. In moving so suddenly, my hand knocked over the defense mech and it thudded to the floor. As I bent quickly to pick it up, it started clicking again.

Several things occurred to me at once, then, and my stomach wadded itself into a tight ball and shot up again to press against my heart. My neck and back muscles tightened.

The first thing that struck me, I think, was that the defense mech had started clicking *again*. It had been clicking before... . As Maxwell and I left the bar, the defense mech had begun clicking steadily. Then—sometime—it had stopped. Probably when I hit Scarface with it. But I hadn't noticed. And for thirty minutes—closer to forty-five, now... .

There was no particular sequence to the flood of realizations that rushed my consciousness next and left me feeling weak and shaky.

The desk sergeant had said ten minutes. The policeman had gotten there in less than five. We were driving, not through side streets toward a police station, but along a high-speed lane of a main thoroughfare, away from the city. Two dogs had yapped at my heels. The "police" vehicle was unmarked—unusual if not illegal.

When I looked at the driver, he was not, of course, a policeman.

He was one of Grogan's bodyguards—the one into whose arms I had thrown Maxwell not long ago.

He was staring straight ahead at the road, his spread-nosed face composed. He hadn't noticed anything.

I took a deep breath and leaned back again, half-closing my eyes. But I did not relax. The clicking of the defense mech seemed thunderous to me, but if the driver heard it, he gave no indication. Perhaps it would have meant nothing to him if he did hear it.

I tried to think of the problem at hand, but my mind refused to cooperate. It kept rushing back to events of the recent past and demanding reasons and explanations.

When the defense mech faltered and quietly stopped clicking, I was aware of it this time. My first impulse was to hit it with my hand and try to make it work again, but I restrained myself.

I controlled my thoughts firmly, holding them tight and shaping them carefully in my mind before letting them go.

The driver was again a policeman in the gray police uniform. We were once more driving slowly through city streets instead of speeding along a highway. Two dogs ran beside the auto, barking—the same two dogs that I had shooed before I closed the door.

I formed my thoughts: *I know who you are. It's no secret any more. But why? What are you trying to do?*

There was no reply.

It could mean one of two things. Either he simply didn't want to answer, or else he wasn't on the machine in person but was playing an impression-tape on my wave-band. I tried again.

You're licked, you know. Already you're licked. Even if my call to Newell was nothing but a telenosis dream—even if no one knows anything about this but me, you're still licked—

No reply. None of any kind. I'd expected at least to get a sinister chuckle, or a flood of horrors. But there was nothing more nor less than

what there had been—the policeman driving through quiet city streets, and the dogs barking.

Then it was just a recording, prepared in advance. My mind was not being followed in person. Not right now.

But that was no help and no assurance. I still didn't dare get out of the car. Or knock the driver over the head and take over the car myself. At ninety miles an hour, and with a visual impression of moving slowly along city streets, that would be a sure form of suicide.

Or would it?

Apparently I had no choice but to wait until we arrived at our destination and then do what I could—which might not be much.

Lord, if I could make another vp call before we got there!

Careful, though. Even with no operator at the telenizer, I had to watch out for thought leakage. My thoughts were surely being recorded, and certain kinds of thoughts might trigger automatic precautionary measures.

I gave the defense mech a hard bang with my hand. It clicked twice. I got a brief glimpse of the highway flashing past and the lights of other vehicles.

Then the clicking stopped, and we were back in town, crawling along. I hit the defense mech again, a series of lighter blows, and it obediently clicked and this time continued clicking; and we were on the highway again.

Making an effort to control my breathing and to muffle the sound of my rapidly pounding heart, I leaned forward and examined the controls of the auto intently.

There was a phone. Not a visiphone, of course, but a phone nonetheless. A means of communication. There was also a luminous radar dial that might or might not mean automatic controls.

Which might or might not be in operation.

I concentrated on the hands and feet of the driver. Neither moved perceptibly. The course of the vehicle was straight and constant, though, so that didn't prove anything.

"Hey, where in hell is this police station?" I asked.

With a slight backward-turning motion of his head, the driver replied, "Almost there. Just a few minutes now."

As his head moved, his hands moved the wheel a bare fraction. The auto did not swerve.

I took a deep breath and hit the driver on the side of the head with my doubled right fist as hard as I could. He slumped, and I hit him again. His hands slid from the wheel ... and the car continued on its course.

I clambered into the front seat with the driver.

As I lifted the mike, the auto started slowing down, and I thought for a moment it wasn't electronically controlled after all. That was a horrible moment, and I clutched at the wheel instinctively, but the car still did not swerve.

So I quit worrying about that and dialed the number.

The conversation, once I had the call through, took quite a little while. I had to convince the man that I was serious. While I was talking, arguing frantically, the auto was slowing almost to a stop, maneuvering over to the turning lane on the right, making the turn and following a narrow road that crossed under the highway.

The urgency of my voice must have been pretty convincing, because the voice on the other end finally said, "Well, I'll do what I can, Mr. Langston, but it'll take time. Maybe an hour. Maybe more. And so help me, if this is a joke—"

"It's no joke," I pleaded. "Believe me, it isn't. Please make it as fast as you can. Civilization may be at stake." On that deliberately ominous note, I hung up.

Immediately I began thinking of the things I should have done, the machinery I should have set in motion instead of the one thing I had done. By all means, I ought to have notified the police directly. My notion that telenosis influenced all the police desk sergeants in town was hysterical, baseless. Well, I could call back, even now—

But I couldn't.

The car was moving at a relatively slow speed—but still over fifty miles an hour, on a narrow unpaved, downgrade road. Through the side window I saw dark trees and shadowy brush gliding by.

And then through the window I saw lighted storefronts, mail boxes, a few vague pedestrians on smooth sidewalks, and two dogs running tirelessly beside the car, barking as they ran....

Repeated pounding on the heavy black box did not restore reality.

Now I did not dare use the phone again or even think about it. I was sitting beside the driver, and the driver was sitting erect at the wheel.

On a sudden, stupid impulse, I struck at the driver's head, and my hand went through it without touching anything. I groped with my hand until I felt the man's limp head where my eyes said his shoulder was.

With a suppressed shudder, I drew my hand away and sat back in the seat to wait. It couldn't be long now.

The car turned a corner and continued at a much slower pace. It went perhaps a hundred yards before it pulled to the curb and stopped. Across the street I saw the police station. The entrance looked like any other store or business entrance, but a marquee-sign above the entrance read: "Section 4 Police Station."

The driver sat motionless behind the wheel. He would not move, I knew, until... .

I shrugged, picked up the defense mech, and opened the door.

Pedestrians walked by along the sidewalk, and autos glided in both directions on the street. Dogs yapped at my heels. I ignored them. They did not exist.

But I knew the police station did exist.

I walked directly toward the entrance—a long kitty-corner across the street. When a powerfully humming auto headed toward me, I closed my eyes and braced myself and continued walking.

It is not a pleasant sensation to be run down by a car—even a dream-car with no substance.

My skin was prickly and my palms moist. I could feel the blood pounding in my head.

The door to the police station was open. A short flight of stairs went up to another door that was closed. I did not ring the bell, but opened the door and stepped into the reception room.

The room was empty except for the uniformed policeman sitting at the radio bank on the other side of the railing with his back to me. He wore earphones.

As the door clicked shut, the policeman turned in his swivel chair to face me.

"Hello, Langston, we've been expecting you," he said.

It was Isaac Grogan.

I smiled and replied with calmness that amazed me:

"Yes, I daresay you have, Zan Matl Blekeke."

Maxwell and I were alone in the small, bare, brightly lighted but windowless room.

Blekeke had spent a half-hour after my arrival trying to find out how much I knew. But after my initial shocker—letting him know that I recognized him—I had kept my mind closed tightly; and I was keeping it

closed now. Blekeke was still listening in—I had no doubt of that. Maxwell knew it too, for he made no attempt at conversation.

He sat with his back to the walls in one corner, and I crouched in another corner, and we sat there, staring at the walls and at each other, not daring to speak or to think.

After about ten or fifteen minutes the door opened, and Blekeke stepped in. He was wearing earphones, and a wire trailed behind him. In one hand he carried a blaster.

He smiled broadly and nodded, once at each of us. "Something show you," he said. "Watching."

He pushed a button on the wall beside the door and the lights died. For an instant everything was black, and I braved myself. Then the wall beside Blekeke glowed, flickered—and a scene in black and white came into focus.

"This observer room," Blekeke said. "Show what camera top meeting hall see."

The scene was dim; a half-moon bobbed and splashed in ocean waves in the background. In the right foreground, close and large, dark and dull, was the spaceship.

It was Martian, but not military. An old cargo carrier. Its rear jets were extinguished, but the ship was vibrating.

Leaving? I wondered—and Blekeke caught my thought over the telenizer earphones.

No—just arriving, was his answer in my mind. *But it leave again very soon. You with. Soon no matter what you know. What did. Soon gone.*

How soon? I demanded.

Blekeke spoke aloud: "Very soon. Fifteen, twenty, half-hour minutes. Looking more. All way right."

I looked at the extreme right edge of the picture, where a rough, shadowy hillock arose. While I watched, an opening appeared in the hillock and a dim human figure emerged. It stood erect and walked across the stretch of gravel beach toward the spaceship. Another figure came from the hillock aperture and followed the first.

The thought came from Blekeke: *Cultists. Evidence. Prove my success.*

Success in what? Why? How?

Blekeke pushed the button on the wall again, and the lights were suddenly on, and the wall bare.

"No harm tell you now," he said. "Gone soon. No matter."

He leaned against the wall and crossed his fragile arms across his huge red chest. He said:

"Mars home dying. You know. Need more somewhere. Earth best, but some Earthmen deciding not want." He shrugged. "Dear Late Doctor—" he did not bother making the mystic sign—"was brilliant man. Dr. Homer Reighardt—know name? Psychiatrist. Very old. No, I not kill; death natural. I wanted live longer, but... ." he shrugged again. "Learned much from, howso. He founded cult. I his servant after joining. He idea very innocent—cure not really sick with mild 'nosis."

He smiled modestly. "I also brilliant person. Learn tech part much rapid. Apply own idea, which not so innocent. Fact, very insidious. Telenize right persons, they *want* Martian then! Vote to let come, yups?"

Maxwell broke in: "Then why didn't you start in on the right people at once? Why not set up your headquarters in Belgrade and telenize the World Council members, instead of playing around with a bunch of hypochondriacs here?"

Blekeke held up his hand. "So fast not so. Must work with what got. Doctor machine very simple, and he telling me not all. Not trusting even me all way. Needing much work, then. Muchness development. Six months I working, then need testing. SRI, oaks? So now have proof for Mars government, which verysome cautious. Demanding evidence."

This time I broke in. "Blekeke," I said, with some of the respect I was beginning to feel for him, "you're a patriot, I guess, and I have to admire you for that. But you're also a damned fool. You can't get away with this—and I think you know it. There are just too many loop-holes."

"Where loop-hole?"

"Well, in the first place, I made a phone call before I got here—while I was in the car and my defense mech was on. As a result, the police will be here in a very few minutes—probably before you can get to the rocket—"

Blekeke smiled blandly. "Where second place?"

"In the second place, assuming that you do get to the spaceship and take off before the police get here, it still won't matter. They *know*, now, who has been operating the telenizer. They can track you down. You'll be picked up long before you get to Mars." I stood up and strode purposefully toward him. "Give me the blaster, dammit. You're licked before you're even started."

Blekeke frowned and pointed the blaster at my chest. "Please. So fast not so. Go back corner, please."

I obediently returned to the corner and sat down. It had been worth a try.

The Martian lowered the weapon and smiled. "You too brave. I not like kill. But pfoof for loop-hole. All plugged. Looking what front-door camera see. Polices here now."

He pushed the button on the wall.

A police auto was screeching to a halt in the driveway before the big house, and a half-dozen uniformed men, armed with deadly blasters, were piling out. Another car was whipping around the final curve.

I knew that Maxwell was giving me a look of gratitude, but suddenly I wasn't sure it was warranted. I had assumed on a sort of blind faith that the police would get here in time—but as I watched the scene, I didn't feel so good.

For the policemen were not charging the house. They were not even looking at it.

They were milling around, aimlessly. No, not aimlessly, exactly. They were looking *for* something; but they weren't seeing it. One of them got back in the car and used the radio, and the others wandered around, glancing unseeingly in all directions.

"Mass telenosis?" I asked quietly, not taking my eyes from the scene, feeling my heart pound harder as I caught a glimpse of the bobbing, slower lights of another vehicle on the road far back.

Blekeke said, "Yups. Plug all loop-hole. Police not see house, not see ship. No one see ship leave, not knowing Blekeke on board. Complete vanish." He shrugged. "Ship keep commercial schedule. Take auxiliary power to right course, then switch rocket. Stopped on way, maybe, so what? Telenize searchers, yups?"

"What about the house?" I asked.

"Go boom when we leave," Blekeke said.

Maxwell said, "Judas! Everyone will just assume that we and Blekeke and all the cultists have gone boom, too. That's likely to end the investigation right there. Slow it down plenty, at least."

Blekeke nodded applaudingly. "Yups. Is so."

He pushed the wall-button and we had the spaceship scene again. Men and Martians were loading large crates into the port of the ship. The other bulky boxes were being moved across the beach from the opening in the hill.

"Leaving soon now," Blekeke said as he switched the lights on. "That most of vital equipment. Other going boom. We work awful quickness, yups?"

"Just how do you mean?" I asked, more to kill time than out of real curiosity.

"Ha! You not knowing how quickness we work since morning—since getting Maxwell brain band on measure machine Sun Ray... ."

Maxwell exclaimed; "Oh, hell, of course! Son of a blunder! *That's* how you got it."

I had already figured that out, and I guessed it was the information Blekeke had gained from Maxwell's mind that was forcing him to act now, before he had planned.

"When learned you planning 'vestigate SRI, had move fast," Blekeke corroborated. "So did. Not know you law man till then. Only that Langston mind stopped 'nosis. Not even knowing why. Worried for while—whew!" He wiped the mock perspiration from his brow and smiled.

I said, "The thugs who attacked Maxwell and me were Grogan's men. May I ask now—just out of curiosity—were they telenized, or was Grogan?"

Blekeke seemed happy to reply. "Grogan. Reighardt happened work on Grogan in CI. Also your brain wave number in file, but I getting first on Sun Ray machine."

I had wondered about that, and there was another question that was bothering me.

"When you started that blood dripping in the bathtub," I said, "was that a deliberate attempt to scare me away, or was that part of the standard treatment?"

"Standard," Blekeke replied. "Subject no longer trust own senses after. But recognize 'nosis, so trying frighten you. Work good on others."

I started to ask another question, but he switched on the spaceship loading scene again.

A crane was hauling the last huge crate into the hold. All the humans—the SRI cultists—were apparently aboard ship. None were visible. A few Martians stood near the ship, some of them looking toward the hillock opening, and some watching the loading.

Suddenly two policemen came into view on the screen, walking casually over the hill in which the opening was located. At the top they halted and looked out over the ocean.

One of the men looked over his shoulder and pulled a bottle from an inside pocket. He offered it to his companion, who shook his head. The man shrugged and took a deep swallow himself, tucking the bottle inside his jacket again.

I caught a sudden note of mild alarm from Blekeke's mind, which reminded me that he was still listening for careless thoughts of mine.

The policemen continued walking toward the beach, heading to the right of the spaceship. I saw one of the Martians step back into the shadow of the ship. The others followed the policemen with their eyes.

"We best going now," Blekeke said. He reached to turn off the picture... .

And his hand froze. He saw the same thing I saw, and at just about the same time.

He saw a dog.

And he must have felt the triumphant, incoherent chortle that gushed from my mind.

The dog was a small, ragged, spotted terrier. It came trotting absent-mindedly over the hill after the policemen, and at the top it stopped. It quivered. It sat down, pointed its nose at the spaceship and opened its mouth in a howl I could almost hear.

Then the scene was gone; the lights in the room glowed; Blekeke was pointing the blaster at me.

And his trigger finger was trembling.

He was shaking, very slightly, all over. His red-hued skin had turned a much paler shade.

I don't think I moved a muscle while I waited for him to speak.

"I should killing you," he said. "Right now, I should killing you. Then maybe killing me. Or make boom." He laughed shrilly, almost hysterically. "You very cleverish. Finding one weakener. Tell polices bringing dogs."

"Why, no," I said. "As a matter of fact, I told the dogs to bring the police."

That caught his interest. His hand on the blaster relaxed enough so that I could breath.

"That call I made from the car, coming here," I said. "It wasn't to the police. After the results of my first call to them, I thought it was just possible that you had somehow telenized all the desk sergeants. I wasn't thinking too sharp just then. Anyway, I called the city dog pound,

instead. I told 'em to get as many dogs out here as fast as they possibly could."

Blekeke spoke in a very soft voice. "Cleverly, cleverly. And I giving self way."

"You sure did," I agreed. "There's dogs in every damn vision you dream up, you hate 'em so much. Same way some people have snakes."

Blekeke gestured with the blaster. He had regained some of his color, and he wasn't trembling. "Getting up now. We leaving. Not kill if not necessary."

Maxwell and I stood up. Blekeke backed through the door, motioning for us to follow. He walked us ahead of him along a corridor and down two flights of stairs, staying a safe distance behind us.

The entrance to the tunnel was in the basement, through a door that looked like any other door.

Blekeke took off the earphones he was wearing and tossed them aside.

"This 'nizer blow up with house," he said.

The tunnel was wide, straight and brightly lighted. The opposite end was a small black dot, but it didn't take us long to get there.

My thoughts were running wild, now that no one was listening.

The dogs had bothered Blekeke, but how badly? He seemed so damned sure of himself now. No hesitation at all. Or—was it merely resignation? I didn't know. But if he once got us aboard that spaceship, his plan had a ridiculously good chance of succeeding.

... And would that be so bad? Were his motives so ignoble, or his methods so very atrocious?

I drove that line of thought from my mind. I could think about that later... .

From the outside entrance of the tunnel, the dark spaceship seemed disturbingly close, and the expanse between it and us free of impediments of any kind. Only fifty or sixty quick steps, and then... . The Martians at the ship saw us and climbed aboard. The ship was beginning to vibrate again.

The two policemen were wandering around by the water's edge. We could hear the dogs howling. Several others had joined in now, but we couldn't see them. They were above us.

"Walk slow to ship," Blekeke instructed, tenseness obvious in his voice. "Casual. Like nothing. I right behind."

Maxwell and I glanced at each other and stepped from the aperture to the gravelly beach and started walking very slowly and casually toward the spaceship.

We had gone about ten feet when we heard, in the short intervals when the dogs weren't howling, the crunching footsteps of Blekeke behind us. They were faltering.

I couldn't resist a backward glance.

I saw about a half-dozen dogs on the hill behind and above Blekeke. They were squatting on their haunches, noses pointed at the spaceship, and they were creating the damndest racket I had ever heard. Surely the cops would at least *suspect* something!

Blekeke was walking stiffly, slowly, keeping the blaster pointed at us, making a visible effort not to turn around.

"Hey, you goddam dogs!" one of the policemen on the beach shouted. "Shut the hell up!" He picked up a rock and threw it, but he was too far away. The missile whizzed low over my head. I ducked instinctively, turning to see where the stone hit. It missed the dogs by a good fifteen or twenty feet.

Other policemen were appearing from the direction of the road, running anxiously toward the dogs, looking in the direction the dogs were pointing.

And seeing nothing.

Other dogs were appearing, too, some well within the vision of Blekeke—but another quick glance showed me that he was staring rigidly ahead and walking steadily.

We were entering the shadow of the spaceship. Less than twenty feet to go. Even in the dim light, I could almost distinguish the features of the Martian waiting there to haul us aboard.

The policemen on the beach were now walking back to join the others. The one who had yelled and thrown the stone now whistled shrilly, and shouted, "Commere, you lousy, flea-bitten mutts, and shut up!"

He whistled again. Insistently.

One dog stopped howling and slunk forward timidly, then halted.

The whistle was a shrill command.

I heard a soft gasp, perhaps a sob, from Blekeke.

The dog trotted slowly, reluctantly, forward, tail between its legs, growling and whining at the same time.

"Running! Running! Hurry!" Blekeke screamed.

Instead, I turned around to watch, and so did Maxwell.

The policeman continued to whistle. Another dog, a large, shaggy collie, left the pack. But it was not timid, and it paid no attention to the policemen—it had seen Blekeke, and it rushed at him, snarling and yapping.

The Martian made a gurgling noise. A shudder shook his frame, and he turned and fired.

I was watching, without really comprehending what I saw, the policeman who had been whistling. Abruptly he stopped whistling. He was *looking*. But not at the dogs, nor at the other policemen. Not even at the shaggy collie that vanished suddenly in a blinding flash.

He was looking at the spaceship. And seeing it. He rubbed a hand across his eyes.

When the collie was hit, the terrier which had slunk forward turned. At five feet from Blekeke, it growled and leaped at him.

Blekeke collapsed. The blaster dropped from his hand, and he crumpled into a trembling, twitching, sobbing lump on the ground.

I rushed to grab the blaster, and Maxwell kicked the snarling, frightened dog away.

At the same time, the policeman yelled, "Jupiter! It *is* a spaceship! I knew I seen somethin'. I may have had a drink, but I ain't crazy!"

He fired while he was yelling, and the Martian who had been leaning from the port ducked inside. The ship shuddered and rose quickly, with a rumble that was almost drowned by the racket the dogs were making.

The policeman rubbed his eyes. "Huh?... I coulda swore I saw a spaceship. Right *there*. Just *now*. Just a second ago."

"Man, you really *are* drunk," his companion said.

The house blew up an instant later. No policemen were killed or injured in the explosion. They were all gathered on the beach to see why the dogs were howling.

It took a bit of explaining.

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