The Best Short Stories
of
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HOLT, RINEHART AND WINSTON • NEW YORK
The Concentration City

Noon talk on Millionth Street:

"Sorry, these are the West millions. You want 9775335th East."
"Dollar five a cubic foot? Sell!"
"Take a westbound express to 495th Avenue, cross over to a Red-Line elevator and go up a thousand levels to Plaza Terminal. Carry on south from there and you’ll find it between 568th Avenue and 422nd Street."

"There’s a cave-in down at KEN county! Fifty blocks by twenty by thirty levels."
"Listen to this—'PYROS STAGE MASS BREAKOUT! FIRE POLICE CORDON BAY COUNTY!'"
"It’s a beautiful counter. Detects up to .005 percent monoxide. Cost me three hundred dollars."
"Have you seen those new intercity sleepers? Takes only ten minutes to go up three thousand levels!"
"Ninety cents a foot? Buy!"

"You say the idea came to you in a dream?" the voice jabbed out.
"You’re sure no one else gave it to you?"
"No," M. said flatly. A couple of feet away from him a spot lamp threw a cone of dirty yellow light into his face. He dropped his eyes
from the glare and waited as the sergeant paced over to his desk, tapped his fingers on the edge, and swung around on him again.

“You talked it over with your friends?”

“Only the first theory,” M. explained quietly. “About the possibility of flight.”

“But you told me the other theory was more important. Why keep it quiet from them?”

M. hesitated. Outside somewhere a trolley shunted and clanged along the elevated. “I was afraid they wouldn’t understand what I meant.”

The sergeant laughed sourly. “You mean they would have thought you really were crazy?”

M. shifted uncomfortably on the stool. Its seat was only six inches off the floor and his thighs and lumbar muscles felt like slabs of inflamed rubber. After three hours of cross-questioning, logic had faded and he groped helplessly. “The concept was a little abstract. There weren’t any words for it.”

The sergeant snorted. “I’m glad to hear you say it.” He sat down on the desk, watched M. for a moment and then went over to him.

“Now look,” he said confidentially. “It’s getting late. Do you still think both theories are reasonable?”

M. looked up. “Aren’t they?”

The sergeant turned angrily to the man watching in the shadows by the window.

“We’re wasting our time,” he snapped. “I’ll hand him over to Psycho. You’ve seen enough, haven’t you, Doc?”

The surgeon stared thoughtfully at his hands. He was a tall heavy-shouldered man, built like a wrestler, with thick coarsely-lined features.

He ambled forward, knocking back one of the chairs with his knee.

“There’s something I want to check,” he said curtly. “Leave me alone with him for half an hour.”

The sergeant shrugged. “All right,” he said, going over to the door. “But be careful with him.”

When the sergeant had gone the surgeon sat down behind the desk and stared vacantly out of the window, listening to the dull hum of air through the huge ninety-foot ventilator shaft which rose out of the street below the station. A few roof-lights were still burning and two hundred yards away a single policeman slowly pa-
trolled the iron catwalk running above the street, his boots ringing across the darkness.

M. sat on the stool, elbows between his knees, trying to edge a little life back into his legs.

Eventually the surgeon glanced down at the charge sheet.

Name: Franz M.
Age: 20.
Occupation: Student.
Address: 3599719 West 783rd Str.,
    Level 549-7705-45 KNI (Local).
Charge: Vagrancy.

"Tell me about this dream," he said slowly, idly flexing a steel rule between his hands as he looked across at M.

"I think you've heard everything, sir," M. said.

"In detail."

M. shifted uneasily. "There wasn't much to it, and what I do remember isn't too clear now."

The surgeon yawned. M. waited and then started to recite what he had already repeated twenty times.

"I was suspended in the air above a flat stretch of open ground, something like the floor of an enormous arena. My arms were out at my sides, and I was looking down, floating—"

"Hold on," the surgeon interrupted. "Are you sure you weren't swimming?"

"No," M. said. "I'm certain I wasn't. All around me there was free space. That was the most important part about it. There were no walls. Nothing but emptiness. That's all I remember."

The surgeon ran his finger along the edge of the rule.

"Go on."

"Well, the dream gave me the idea of building a flying machine. One of my friends helped me construct it."

The surgeon nodded. Almost absently he picked up the charge sheet, crushed it with a single motion of his hand, and flicked it into the wastebasket.

"Don't be crazy, Franz!" Gregson remonstrated. They took their places in the chemistry cafeteria queue. "It's against the laws of hydrodynamics. Where would you get your buoyancy?"
“Suppose you had a rigid fabric vane,” Franz explained as they shuffled past the hatchways. “Say ten feet across, like one of those composition wall sections, with handgrips on the ventral surface. And then you jump down from the gallery at the Coliseum Stadium. What would happen?”

“You’d make a hole in the floor. Why?”

“No, seriously.”

“If it was large enough and held together you’d swoop down like a paper dart.”

“Glide,” Franz said. “Right.” Thirty levels above them one of the intercity expresses roared over, rattling the tables and cutlery in the cafeteria. Franz waited until they reached a table and sat forward, his food forgotten.

“And say you attached a propulsive unit, such as a battery-driven ventilator fan, or one of those rockets they use on the Sleepers. With enough thrust to overcome your weight. What then?”

Gregson shrugged. “If you could control the thing, you’d . . .” He frowned at Franz. “What’s the word? You’re always using it.”

“Fly.”

“Basically, Mattheson, the machine is simple,” Sanger, the physics lector, commented as they entered the Science Library. “An elementary application of the Venturi Principle. But what’s the point of it? A trapeze would serve its purpose equally well, and be far less dangerous. In the first place consider the enormous clearances it would require. I hardly think the traffic authorities will look upon it with any favor.”

“I know it wouldn’t be practicable here,” Franz admitted. “But in a large open area it should be.”

“Allowed. I suggest you immediately negotiate with the Arena Garden on Level 347-25,” the lector said whimsically. “I’m sure they’ll be glad to hear about your scheme.”

Franz smiled politely. “That wouldn’t be large enough. I was really thinking of an area of totally free space. In three dimensions, as it were.”

Sanger looked at Franz curiously. “Free space? Isn’t that a contradiction in terms? Space is a dollar a cubic foot.” He scratched his nose. “Have you begun to construct this machine yet?”

“No,” Franz said.
"In that event I should try to forget all about it. Remember, Mattheson, the task of science is to consolidate existing knowledge, to systematize and reinterpret the discoveries of the past, not to chase wild dreams into the future."

He nodded and disappeared among the dusty shelves.

Gregson was waiting on the steps.

"Well?" he asked.

"Let's try it out this afternoon," Franz said. "We'll cut Text Five Pharmacology. I know those Fleming readings backward. I'll ask Dr. McGhee for a couple of passes."

They left the library and walked down the narrow, dimly lit alley which ran behind the huge new Civil Engineering laboratories. Over 75 percent of the student enrollment was in the architectural and engineering faculties, a meager 2 percent in pure sciences. Consequently the physics and chemistry libraries were housed in the oldest quarter of the University, in two virtually condemned galvanized hutments which once contained the now closed Philosophy School.

At the end of the alley they entered the university plaza and started to climb the iron stairway leading to the next level a hundred feet above. Halfway up a white-helmeted FP checked them cursorily with his detector and waved them past.

"What did Sanger think?" Gregson asked as they stepped up into 637th Street and walked across to the Suburban Elevator station.

"He's no use at all," Franz said. "He didn't even begin to understand what I was talking about."

Gregson laughed ruefully. "I don't know whether I do."

Franz took a ticket from the automat and mounted the Down platform. An elevator dropped slowly toward him, its bell jangling.

"Wait until this afternoon," he called back. "You're really going to see something."

The floor manager at the Coliseum initialed the two passes.

"Students, eh? All right." He jerked a thumb at the long package Franz and Gregson were carrying. "What have you got there?"

"It's a device for measuring air velocities," Franz told him.

The manager grunted and released the stile.

Out in the center of the empty arena Franz undid the package and
they assembled the model. It had a broad fanlike wing of wire and paper, a narrow strutted fusilage and a high curving tail.

Franz picked it up and launched it into the air. The model glided for twenty feet and then slithered to a stop across the sawdust.

"Seems to be stable," Franz said. "We'll tow it first."

He pulled a reel of twine from his pocket and tied one end to the nose.

As they ran forward the model lifted gracefully into the air and followed them around the stadium, ten feet off the floor.

"Let's try the rockets now," Franz said.

He adjusted the wing and tail settings and fitted three firework display rockets into a wire bracket mounted above the wing.

The stadium was four hundred feet in diameter and had a roof two hundred and fifty high. They carried the model over to one side and Franz lit the tapers.

There was a burst of flame and the model accelerated off across the floor, two feet in the air, a bright trail of colored smoke spitting out behind it. Its wings rocked gently from side to side. Suddenly the tail burst into flames. The model lifted steeply and looped up toward the roof, stalled just before it hit one of the pilot lights, and dived down into the sawdust.

They ran across to it and stamped out the glowing cinders.

"Franz!" Gregson shouted. "It's incredible! It actually works."

Franz kicked the shattered fuselage.

"Of course it works," he said impatiently, walking away. "But as Sanger said, what's the point of it?"

"The point? It flies! Isn't that enough?"

"No. I want one big enough to hold me."

"Franz, slow down. Be reasonable. Where could you fly it?"

"I don't know," Franz said fiercely. "But there must be somewhere. Somewhere!"

The floor manager and two assistants, carrying fire extinguishers, ran across the stadium to them.

"Did you hide that match?" Franz asked quickly. "They'll lynch us if they think we're pyros."

Three afternoons later Franz took the elevator up 150 levels to 677-98, where the Precinct Estate Office had its bureau.

"There's a big development between 493 and 554 in the next sec-
tor," one of the clerks told him. "I don't know whether that's any good to you. Sixty blocks by twenty by fifteen levels."

"Nothing bigger?" Franz queried.

The clerk looked up. "Bigger? No. What are you looking for? A slight case of agoraphobia?"

Franz straightened the maps spread across the counter.

"I wanted to find an area of more or less continuous development. Two or three hundred blocks long."

The clerk shook his head and went back to his ledger. "Didn't you go to Engineering School?" he asked scornfully. "The City won't take it. One hundred blocks is the maximum."

Franz thanked him and left.

A southbound express took him to the development in two hours. He left the car at the detour point and walked the three hundred yards to the end of the level.

The street, a seedy but busy thoroughfare of garment shops and small business premises running through the huge ten-mile-thick BIR Industrial Cube, ended abruptly in a tangle of ripped girders and concrete. A steel rail had been erected along the edge and Franz looked down over it into the cavity, three miles long, a mile wide, and twelve hundred feet deep, which thousands of engineers and demolition workers were tearing out of the matrix of the City.

Eight hundred feet below him unending lines of trucks and rail cars carried away the rubble and debris, and clouds of dust swirled up into the arc lights blazing down from the roof.

As he watched a chain of explosions ripped along the wall on his left and the whole face suddenly slipped and fell slowly toward the floor, revealing a perfect cross-section through fifteen levels of the City.

Franz had seen big developments before, and his own parents had died in the historic QUA County cave-in ten years earlier, when three master pillars had sheared and two hundred levels of the City had abruptly sunk ten thousand feet, squashing half a million people like flies in a concertina, but the enormous gulf of emptiness still made his imagination gape.

All around him, standing and sitting on the jutting terraces of girders, a silent throng stared down.

"They say they're going to build gardens and parks for us," an elderly man at Franz's elbow remarked in a slow patient voice. "I
even heard they might be able to get a tree. It’ll be the only tree in the whole county.”

A man in a frayed sweat shirt spat over the rail. “That’s what they always say. At a dollar a foot promises are all they can waste space on.”

Below them a woman who had been looking out into the air started to simper nervously. Two bystanders took her by the arms and tried to lead her away. The woman began to thresh about and an FP came over and dragged her away roughly.

“Poor fool,” the man in the sweat shirt commented. “She probably lived out there somewhere. They gave her ninety cents a foot when they took it away from her. She doesn’t know yet she’ll have to pay a dollar ten to get it back. Now they’re going to start charging five cents an hour just to sit up here and watch.”

Franz looked out over the railing for a couple of hours and then bought a postcard from one of the vendors and walked back thoughtfully to the elevator.

He called in to see Gregson before returning to the student dormitory.

The Gregsons lived up in the West millions on 985th Avenue, in a top three-room flat right under the roof. Franz had known them since his parents’ death, but Gregson’s mother still regarded him with a mixture of sympathy and suspicion, and as she let him in with her customary smile of welcome he noticed her glancing quickly at the detector mounted in the hall.

Gregson was in his room, happily cutting out frames of paper and pasting them onto a great rickety construction that vaguely resembled Franz’s model.

“Hullo, Franz. What was it like?”

Franz shrugged. “Just a development. Worth seeing.”

Gregson pointed to his construction. “Do you think we can try it out there?”

“We could do.” Franz sat down on the bed, picked up a paper dart lying beside him, and tossed it out of the window. It swam out into the street, lazed down in a wide spiral and vanished into the open mouth of a ventilator shaft.

“When are you going to build another model?” Gregson asked.

“I’m not.”

"That's not what I'm after."
"I don't get you, Franz. What are you after?"
"Free space."
"Free?" Gregson repeated.
Franz nodded. "In both senses."
Gregson shook his head sadly and snipped out another paper panel. "Franz, you're crazy."
Franz stood up. "Take this room," he said. "It's twenty feet by fifteen by ten. Extend its dimensions infinitely. What do you find?"
"A development."
"Infinitely!"
"Nonfunctional space."
"Well?" Franz asked patiently.
"The concept's absurd."
"Why?"
"Because it couldn't exist."
Franz pounded his forehead in despair. "Why couldn't it?"
Gregson gestured with the scissors. "It's self-contradictory. Like the statement 'I am lying.' Just a verbal freak. Interesting theoretically, but it's pointless to press it for meaning." He tossed the scissors onto the table. "And anyway, do you know how much free space would cost?"
Franz went over to the bookshelf and pulled out one of the volumes. "Let's have a look at your street atlas."
He turned to the index. "This gives a thousand levels. KNI County, one hundred thousand cubic miles, population thirty million."
Gregson nodded.
Franz closed the atlas. "Two hundred fifty counties, including KNI, together form the 493rd Sector, and an association of fifteen hundred adjacent sectors comprise the 298th Local Union."
He broke off and looked at Gregson. "As a matter of interest, ever heard of it?"
Gregson shook his head. "No. How did—"
Franz slapped the atlas onto the table. "Roughly $4 \times 10^{15}$ cubic Great-Miles." He leaned on the window ledge. "Now tell me: what lies beyond the 298th Local Union?"
"Other Unions, I suppose," Gregson said. "I don't see your difficulty."
"And beyond those?"
"Further ones. Why not?"
"Forever?" Franz pressed.
"Well, as far as forever is."
"The great street directory in the old Treasury Library on 247th Street is the largest in the County," Franz said. "I went down there this morning. It occupies three complete levels. Millions of volumes. But it doesn't extend beyond the 598th Local Union. No one there had any idea what lay further out. Why not?"
"Why should they?" Gregson asked. "Franz, what are you driving at?"
Franz walked across to the door. "Come down to the Bio-History Museum. I'll show you."

The birds perched on humps of rock or waddled about the sandy paths between the water pools.
"ARCHAEOPTERYX," Franz read off one of the cage indicators. The bird, lean and mildewed, uttered a painful croak when he fed a handful of beans to it.
"Some of these birds have the remnants of a pectoral girdle," Franz said. "Minute fragments of bone embedded in the tissues around their rib cages."
"Wings?"
"Dr. McGhee thinks so."
They walked out between the lines of cages.
"When does he think they were flying?"
"Before the Foundation," Franz said. "Three hundred billion years ago."

When they got outside the Museum they started down 859th Avenue. Halfway down the street a dense crowd had gathered and people were packed into the windows and balconies above the Elevated, watching a squad of Fire Police break their way into a house.

The bulkheads at either end of the block had been closed and heavy steel traps sealed off the stairways from the levels above and below. The ventilator and exhaust shafts were silent and already the air was stale and soupy.
"Pyros," Gregson murmured. "We should have brought our masks."
"It's only a scare," Franz said. He pointed to the monoxide detectors which were out everywhere, their long snouts sucking at the air. The dial needles stood safely at zero.
"Let's wait in the restaurant opposite."

They edged their way over to the restaurant, sat down in the window, and ordered coffee. This, like everything else on the menu, was cold. All cooking appliances were thermostated to a maximum 95°F., and only in the more expensive restaurants and hotels was it possible to obtain food that was at most tepid.

Below them in the street a lot of shouting went up. The FP's seemed unable to penetrate beyond the ground floor of the house and had started to baton back the crowd. An electric winch was wheeled up and bolted to the girders running below the curb, and half a dozen heavy steel grabs were carried into the house and hooked around the walls.

Gregson laughed. "The owners are going to be surprised when they get home."

Franz was watching the house. It was a narrow shabby dwelling sandwiched between a large wholesale furniture store and a new supermarket. An old sign running across the front had been painted over and evidently the ownership had recently changed. The present tenants had made a halfhearted attempt to convert the ground floor room into a cheap stand-up diner.

The FP's appeared to be doing their best to wreck everything and pies and smashed crockery were strewn all over the pavement.

"Crowd's pretty ugly," Franz said. "Do you want to move?"

"Hold on."

The noise died away and everyone waited as the winch began to revolve. Slowly the hawsers wound in and tautened, and the front wall of the house bulged and staggered outward in rigid jerky movements.

Suddenly there was a yell from the crowd.

Franz raised his arm.

"Up there! Look!"

On the fourth floor a man and woman had come to the window and were looking down frantically. The man helped the woman out onto the ledge and she crawled out and clung to one of the waste pipes.

The crowd roared, "Pyros! You bloody pyros!"

Bottles were lobbed up at them and bounced down among the police. A wide crack split the house from top to bottom and the floor on which the man was standing dropped and catapulted him backward out of sight.
Then one of the lintels in the first floor snapped and the entire house tipped over and collapsed.

Franz and Gregson stood up involuntarily, almost knocking over the table.

The crowd surged forward through the cordon. When the dust had settled there was nothing left but a heap of masonry and twisted beams. Embedded in this was the battered figure of the man. Almost smothered by the dust he moved slowly, painfully trying to free himself with one hand, and the crowd started roaring again as one of the grabs wound in and dragged him down under the rubble.

The manager of the restaurant pushed past Franz and leaned out of the window, his eyes fixed on the dial of a portable detector.

Its needle, like all the others, pointed to zero.

A dozen hoses were playing on the remains of the house and after a couple of minutes the crowd shifted and began to thin out.

The manager switched off the detector and left the window, nodding to Franz.

"Damn pyros. You can relax now, boys."

Franz pointed at the detector.

"Your dial was dead. There wasn't a trace of monoxide anywhere here. How do you know they were pyros?"

"Don't worry, we knew." He smiled obliquely. "We don't want that sort of element in this neighborhood."

Franz shrugged and sat down. "I suppose that's one way of getting rid of them."

The manager eyed Franz unpleasantly. "That's right, boy. This is a good five-dollar neighborhood." He smirked to himself. "Maybe a six-dollar now everybody knows about our safety record."

"Careful, Franz," Gregson warned him when the manager had gone. "He may be right. Pyros do take over small cafés and food bars."

Franz stirred his coffee. "Dr. McGhee estimates that at least fifteen percent of the City's population are submerged pyros. He's convinced the number's growing and that eventually the whole City will flame out."

He pushed away his coffee. "How much money have you got?"

"On me?"
“Altogether.”
“About thirty dollars.”
“I’ve saved up fifteen,” Franz said thoughtfully. “Forty-five dol-

lars; that should be enough for three or four weeks.”
“Where?” Gregson asked.
“On a Supersleeper.”
“Super—!” Gregson broke off, alarmed. “Three or four weeks! What do you mean?”
“There’s only one way to find out,” Franz explained calmly. “I can’t just sit here thinking. Somewhere there’s free space and I’ll ride the Sleeper until I find it. Will you lend me your thirty dollars?”
“But Franz—”
“If I don’t find anything within a couple of weeks I’ll change tracks and come back.”
“But the ticket will cost...” Gregson searched “... billions. Forty-five dollars won’t even get you out of the Sector.”
“That’s just for coffee and sandwiches,” Franz said. “The ticket will be free.” He looked up from the table. “You know...”
Gregson shook his head doubtfully. “Can you try that on the Supersleepers?”
“Why not? If they query it I’ll say I’m going back the long way around. Greg, will you?”
“I don’t know if I should.” Gregson played helplessly with his coffee. “Franz, how can there be free space? How?”
“That’s what I’m going to find out,” Franz said. “Think of it as my first physics practical.”

Passenger distances on the transport system were measured point to point by the application of $a = \sqrt{b^2 + c^2 + d^2}$. The actual itinerary taken was the passenger’s responsibility, and as long as he remained within the system he could choose any route he liked.

Tickets were checked only at the station exits, where necessary surcharges were collected by an inspector. If the passenger was unable to pay the surcharge—ten cents a mile—he was sent back to his original destination.

Franz and Gregson entered the station on 984th Street and went over to the large console where tickets were automatically dispensed.
Franz put in a penny and pressed the destination button marked 984. The machine rumbled, coughed out a ticket, and the change slot gave him back his coin.

"Well, Greg, good-bye," Franz said as they moved toward the barrier. "I'll see you in about two weeks. They're covering me down at the dormitory. Tell Sanger I'm on Fire Duty."

"What if you don't get back, Franz?" Gregson asked. "Suppose they take you off the Sleeper?"

"How can they? I've got my ticket."

"And if you do find free space? Will you come back then?"

"If I can."

Franz patted Gregson on the shoulder reassuringly, waved and disappeared among the commuters.

He took the local Suburban Green to the district junction in the next county. The Greenline train traveled at an interrupted 70 mph and the ride took two and a half hours.

At the Junction he changed to an express elevator which got him up out of the Sector in ninety minutes, at 400 mph.

Another fifty minutes in a Through-sector Special brought him to the Mainline Terminus which served the Union.

There he bought a coffee and gathered his determination together. Supersleepers ran east and west, halting at this and every tenth station. The next arrived in seventy-two hours' time, westbound.

The Mainline Terminus was the largest station Franz had seen, a vast mile-long cavern tiered up through thirty levels. Hundreds of elevator shafts sank into the station and the maze of platforms, escalators, restaurants, hotels, and theaters seemed like an exaggerated replica of the City itself.

Getting his bearings from one of the information booths Franz made his way up an escalator to Tier 15, where the Supersleepers berthed. Running the length of the station were two gigantic steel vacuum tunnels, each two hundred feet in diameter, supported at thirty-foot intervals by massive concrete buttresses.

Franz walked slowly along the platform and stopped by the telescopic gangway that plunged into one of the airlocks.

Two hundred and seventy degrees true, he thought, all the way, gazing up at the curving underbelly of the tunnel. It must come out somewhere. He had forty-five dollars in his pocket, sufficient coffee
The Concentration City

and sandwich money to last him three weeks, six if he needed it, time anyway to find the City's end.

He passed the next three days nursing coffees in any of the thirty cafeterias in the station, reading discarded newspapers and sleeping in the local Red trains, which ran four-hour journeys around the nearest sector.

When at last the Supersleeper came in he joined the small group of Fire Police and municipal officials waiting by the gangway, and followed them into the train. There were two cars: a sleeper which no one used, and a day coach.

Franz took an inconspicuous corner seat near one of the indicator panels in the day coach, pulled out his notebook and got ready to make his first entry.


"Coming out for a drink?" a Fire Captain across the aisle asked. "We have a ten-minute break here."

"No thanks," Franz said. "I'll hold your seat for you."

Dollar five a cubic foot. Free space, he knew, would bring the price down. There was no need to leave the train or make too many inquiries. All he had to do was borrow a paper and watch the market averages.


"They're slowly cutting down on these Sleepers," someone told him. "Everyone sits in the day coach. Look at this one. Seats sixty, and only four people in it. There's no need to move around. People are staying where they are. In a few years there'll be nothing left but the suburban services."

Ninety-seven cents.

At an average of a dollar a cubic foot, Franz calculated idly, it's so far worth about $4 \times 10^{27}.

"Going on to the next stop, are you? Well, good-bye, young fellow."

Few of the passengers stayed on the Sleeper for more than three or four hours. By the end of the second day Franz's back and neck ached from the constant acceleration. He got a little exercise walking up and down the narrow corridor in the deserted sleeping coach,
but had to spend most of his time strapped to his seat as the train began its long braking runs into the next station.


"Interesting, but how could you demonstrate it?"
"It's just an odd idea of mine," Franz said, screwing up the sketch and dropping it in the disposal chute. "Hasn't any real application."
"Curious, but it rings a bell somewhere."
Franz sat up. "Do you mean you've seen machines like this? In a newspaper or a book?"
"No, no. In a dream."

Every half-day's run the pilot signed the log, the crew handed it over to their opposites on an eastbound sleeper, crossed the platform, and started back for home.

One hundred twenty-five cents.
$8 \times 10^{33}$.

4th Day: West 270°. Federation 1,255.

"Dollar a cubic foot. You in the estate business?"
"Starting up," Franz said easily. "I'm hoping to open a new office of my own."

He played cards, bought coffee and rolls from the dispenser in the washroom, watched the indicator panel and listened to the talk around him.

"Believe me, a time will come when each union, each sector, almost I might say, each street and avenue will have achieved complete local independence. Equipped with its own power services, aerators, reservoirs, farm laboratories..."

The car bore.
$6 \times 10^{75}$.

5th Day: West 270°. 17th Greater Federation.

At a kiosk on the station Franz bought a clip of razor blades and glanced at the brochure put out by the local chamber of commerce.

"Twelve thousand levels, ninety-eight cents a foot, unique Elm Drive, fire safety records unequaled..."

He went back to the train, shaved and counted the thirty dollars left. He was now ninety-five million Great-Miles from the suburban station on 984th Street and he knew he couldn't delay his returr
The Concentration City

much longer. Next time he'd save up a couple of thousand. $7 \times 10^{127}$.

7th Day: West 270°. 212th Metropolitan Empire.

Franz peered at the indicator.
"Aren't we stopping here?" he asked a man three seats away. "I wanted to find out the market average."
"Varies. Anything from fifty cents a—"
"Fifty!" Franz shot back, jumping up. "When's the next stop? I've got to get off!"
"Not here, son." He put out a restraining hand. "This is Night Town. You in real estate?"
Franz nodded, holding himself back. "I thought . . ."
"Relax." He came and sat opposite Franz. "It's just one big slum. Dead areas. In places it goes as low as five cents. There are no services, no power."
It took them two days to pass through.
"City Authority are starting to seal it off," the man told him.
"Huge blocks. It's the only thing they can do. What happens to the people inside I hate to think."
He chewed on a sandwich. "Strange, but there are a lot of these black areas. You don't hear about them, but they're growing. Starts in a back street in some ordinary dollar neighborhood; a bottleneck in the sewage disposal system, not enough ash cans, and before you know it—a million cubic miles have gone back to jungle. They try a relief scheme, pump in a little cyanide, and then—brick it up. Once they do that they're closed for good."
Franz nodded, listening to the dull humming air.
"Eventually there'll be nothing left but these black areas. The City will be one huge cemetery. What a thought!"

10th Day: East 90°. 755th Greater Metropolitan—
"Wait!" Franz leaped out of his seat and stared at the indicator panel.
"What's the matter?" someone opposite asked.
"East!" Franz shouted. He banged the panel sharply with his hand but the lights held. "Has the train changed direction?"
"No, it's eastbound," another of the passengers told him. "Are you on the wrong train?"
“It should be heading west,” Franz insisted. “It has been for the last ten days.”

“Ten days!” the man exclaimed. “Have you been on this Sleeper for ten days? Where the hell are you going?”

Franz went forward and grabbed the car attendant.

“Which way is this train going? West?”

The attendant shook his head. “East, sir. It’s always been going east.”

“You’re crazy,” Franz snapped. “I want to see the pilot’s log.”

“I’m afraid that isn’t possible. May I see your ticket, sir?”

“Listen,” Franz said weakly, all the accumulated frustration of the last twenty years mounting inside him. “I’ve been on this…”

He stopped and went back to his seat.

The five other passengers watched him carefully.

“Ten days,” one of them was still repeating in an awed voice.

Two minutes later someone came and asked Franz for his ticket.

“And of course it was completely in order,” the police surgeon commented.

He walked over to M. and swung the spot out of his eyes.

“Strangely enough there’s no regulation to prevent anyone else doing the same thing. I used to go for free rides myself when I was younger, though I never tried anything like your journey.”

He went back to the desk.

“We’ll drop the charge,” he said. “You’re not a vagrant in any indictable sense, and the Transport authorities can do nothing against you. How this curvature was built into the system they can’t explain. Now about yourself. Are you going to continue this search?”

“I want to build a flying machine,” M. said carefully. “There must be free space somewhere. I don’t know… perhaps on the lower levels.”

The surgeon stood up. “I’ll see the sergeant and get him to hand you over to one of our psychiatrists. He’ll be able to help you with that dream.”

The surgeon hesitated before opening the door. “Look,” he began to explain sympathetically, “you can’t get out of time, can you? Subjectively it’s a plastic dimension, but whatever you do to your-
you a probationary release. Don’t worry, the psychiatrists will straighten everything out for you.”

When the surgeon had left, M. stared emptily at the floor, too exhausted to feel relieved. He stood up and stretched himself, walking unsteadily around the room.

Outside the last pilot lights were going out and the patrolman on the catwalk under the roof was using his torch. A police car roared down one of the avenues crossing the street, its rails screaming. Three lights snapped on along the street and then one by one went off again.

M. wondered why Gregson hadn’t come down to the station. Then the calendar on the desk riveted his attention. The date exposed on the flyleaf was the twelfth of August. That was the day he had started off on his journey.

Exactly three weeks ago.

Today!

Take a westbound Green to 298th Street, cross over at the intersection and get a Red elevator up to Level 237. Walk down to the station on Route 175, change to a 438 suburban and go down to 795th Street. Take a Blueline to the Plaza, get off at 4th and 275th, turn left at the roundabout and...

You’re back where you started from. $HELL \times 10^n$. 
For the first few days all went well.

"Keep away from windows and don’t think about it," Dr. Neill told them. "As far as you’re concerned it was just another compulsion. At eleven thirty or twelve go down to the gym and throw a ball around, play some table tennis. At two they’re running a film for you in the neurology theater. Read the papers for a couple of hours, put on some records. I’ll be down at six. By seven you’ll be in a manic swing."

"Any chance of a sudden blackout, Doctor?" Avery asked.

"Absolutely none," Neill said. "If you get tired, rest, of course. That’s the one thing you’ll probably have a little difficulty getting used to. Remember, you’re still using only thirty-five hundred calories, so your kinetic level—and you’ll notice this most by day—will be about a third lower. You’ll have to take things easier, make allowances. Most of these have been programmed in for you, but start learning to play chess, focus that inner eye."

Gorrell leaned forward. "Doctor," he asked, "if we want to, can we look out of the windows?"

Dr. Neill smiled. "Don’t worry," he said. "The wires are cut. You couldn’t go to sleep now if you tried."
Neill waited until the three men had left the lecture room on their way back to the Recreation Wing and then stepped down from the dais and shut the door. He was a short, broad-shouldered man in his fifties, with a sharp, impatient mouth and small features. He swung a chair out of the front row and straddled it deftly.

“Well?” he asked.

Morley was sitting on one of the desks against the back wall playing aimlessly with a pencil. At thirty he was the youngest member of the team working under Neill at the Clinic, but for some reason Neill liked to talk to him.

He saw Neill was waiting for an answer and shrugged.

“Everything seems to be all right,” he said. “Surgical convalescence is over. Cardiac rhythms and EEG are normal. I saw the X ray this morning and everything has sealed beautifully.”

Neill watched him quizzically. “You don’t sound as if you approve.”

Morley laughed and stood up. “Of course I do.” He walked down the aisle between the desks, white coat unbuttoned, hands sun deep in his pockets. “No, so far you’ve vindicated yourself on every point. The party’s only just beginning, but the guests are in dam good shape. No doubt about it. I thought three weeks was a little too early to bring them out of hypnosis, but you’ll probably be right there as well. Tonight is the first one they take on their own. Let’s see how they are tomorrow morning.”

“What are you secretly expecting?” Neill asked wryly. “Massive feedback from the medulla?”

“No,” Morley said. “There again the psychometric tests have shown absolutely nothing coming up at all. Not a single trauma. He stared at the blackboard and then looked round at Neill. “Yes, a cautious estimate I’d say you’ve succeeded.”

Neill leaned forward on his elbows. He flexed his jaw muscles. I think I’ve more than succeeded. Blocking the medullary synapse has eliminated a lot of material I thought would still be there—the minor quirks and complexes, the petty aggressive phobias, the basic change in the psychic bank. Most of them have gone, or at least they don’t show in the tests. However, they’re the side targets, and thanks to you, John, and to everyone else in the team, we’ve hit the bull’s-eye on the main one.”

Morley murmured something, but Neill ran on in his clipped
Manhole 69

voice. "None of you realize it yet, but this is as big an advance as the step the first ichthyoid took out of the protozoic sea three-hundred million years ago. At last we've freed the mind, raised it out of that archaic sump called sleep, its nightly retreat into the medulla. With virtually one cut of the scalpel we've added twenty years to those men's lives."

"I only hope they know what to do with them," Morley commented.

"Come, John," Neill snapped back. "That's not an argument. What they do with the time is their responsibility anyway. They'll make the most of it, just as we've always made the most, eventually, of any opportunity given us. It's too early to think about it yet, but visualize the universal application of our technique. For the first time Man will be living a full twenty-four-hour day, not spending a third of it as an invalid, snoring his way through an eight-hour peep show of infantile erotica."

Tired, Neill broke off and rubbed his eyes. "What's worrying you?"

Morley made a small, helpless gesture with one hand. "I'm not sure, it's just that I..." He played with the plastic brain mounted on a stand next to the blackboard. Reflected in one of the frontal whorls was a distorted image of Neill, with a twisted chinless face and vast domed cranium. Sitting alone among the desks in the empty lecture room he looked like an insane genius patiently waiting to take an examination no one could set him.

Morley turned the model with his finger, watched the image blur and dissolve. Whatever his doubts, Neill was probably the last person to understand them.

"I know all you've done is close off a few of the loops in the hypothalamus, and I realize the results are going to be spectacular. You'll probably precipitate the greatest social and economic revolution since the Fall. But for some reason I can't get that story of Chekhov's out of my mind—the one about the man who accepts a million-ruble bet that he can't shut himself up alone for ten years. He tries to, nothing goes wrong, but one minute before the time is up he deliberately steps out of his room. Of course, he's insane."

"So?"

"I don't know. I've been thinking about it all week."

Neill let out a light snort. "I suppose you're trying to say that
sleep is some sort of communal activity and that these three men are
now isolated, exiled from the group unconscious, the dark oceanic
dream. Is that it?"

"Maybe."

"Nonsense, John. The further we hold back the unconscious the
better. We’re reclaiming some of the marshland. Physiologically
sleep is nothing more than an inconvenient symptom of cerebral
anoxemia. It’s not that you’re afraid of missing, it’s the dream. You
want to hold on to your front-row seat at the peep show."

"No," Morley said mildly. Sometimes Neill’s aggressiveness sur­
prised him; it was almost as if he regarded sleep itself as secretly
discreditable, a concealed vice. “What I really mean is that for better
or worse Lang, Gorrell, and Avery are now stuck with themselves.
They’re never going to be able to get away, not even for a couple of
minutes, let alone eight hours. How much of yourself can you
stand? Maybe you need eight hours off a day just to get over the
shock of being yourself. Remember, you and I aren’t always going to
be around, feeding them with tests and films. What will happen if
they get fed up with themselves?”

"They won’t," Neill said. He stood up, suddenly bored by
Morley’s questions. “The total tempo of their lives will be lower than
ours, these stresses and tensions won’t begin to crystallize. We’ll
soon seem like a lot of manic-depressives to them, running round
like dervishes half the day, then collapsing into a stupor the other
half."

He moved toward the door and reached out to the light switch.
“Well, I’ll see you at six o’clock.”

They left the lecture room and started down the corridor together.
“What are you doing now?” Morley asked.

Neill laughed. “What do you think?” he said. “I’m going to get a
good night’s sleep.”

A little after midnight Avery and Gorrell were playing table tennis in
the floodlit gymnasium. They were competent players, and passed
the ball backward and forward with a minimum of effort. Both felt
strong and alert; Avery was sweating slightly, but this was due to
the arc lights blazing down from the roof—maintaining, for safety’s
sake, an illusion of continuous day—rather than to any excessive
exertion of his own. The oldest of the three volunteers, a tall and
somewhat detached figure, with a lean, closed face, he made no attempt to talk to Gorrell and concentrated on adjusting himself to the period ahead. He knew he would find no trace of fatigue, but as he played he carefully checked his respiratory rhythms and muscle tonus, and kept one eye on the clock.

Gorrell, a jaunty, self-composed man, was also subdued. Between strokes he glanced cautiously around the gymnasium, noting the hangarlike walls, the broad, polished floor, the shuttered skylights in the roof. Now and then, without realizing it, he fingered the circular trepan scar at the back of his head.

Out in the center of the gymnasium a couple of armchairs and a sofa had been drawn up around a Gramophone, and here Lang was playing chess with Morley, doing his section of night duty. Lang hunched forward over the chessboard. Wiry-haired and aggressive, with a sharp nose and mouth, he watched the pieces closely. He had played regularly against Morley since he arrived at the Clinic four months earlier, and the two were almost equally matched, with perhaps a slight edge to Morley. But tonight Lang had opened with a new attack and after ten moves had completed his development and begun to split Morley's defense. His mind felt clear and precise, focused sharply on the game in front of him, though only that morning had he finally left the cloudy limbo of posthypnosis through which he and the two others had drifted for three weeks like lobotomized phantoms.

Behind him, along one wall of the gymnasium, were the offices housing the control unit. Over his shoulder he saw a face peering at him through the circular observation window in one of the doors. Here, at constant alert, a group of orderlies and interns sat around waiting by their emergency trolleys. (The end door, into a small ward containing three cots, was kept carefully locked.) After a few moments the face withdrew. Lang smiled at the elaborate machinery watching over him. His transference onto Neill had been positive and he had absolute faith in the success of the experiment. Neill had assured him that, at worst, the sudden accumulation of metabolites in his bloodstream might induce a mild torpor, but his brain would be unimpaired.

"Nerve fiber, Robert," Neill had told him time and again, "never fatigues. The brain cannot tire."

While he waited for Morley to move he checked the time from the
clock mounted against the wall. Twelve-twenty. Morley yawned, his face drawn under the gray skin. He looked tired and drab. He slumped down into the armchair, face in one hand. Lang reflected how frail and primitive those who slept would soon seem, their minds sinking off each evening under the load of accumulating toxins, the edge of their awareness worn and frayed. Suddenly he realized that at that very moment Neill himself was asleep. A curiously disconcerting vision of Neill, huddled in a rumpled bed two floors above, his blood sugar low, his mind drifting, rose before him.

Lang laughed at his own conceit, and Morley retrieved the rook he had just moved.

"I must be going blind. What am I doing?"

"No," Lang said. He started to laugh again. "I've just discovered I'm awake."

Morley smiled. "We'll have to put that down as one of the sayings of the week." He replaced the rook, sat up, and looked across at the table tennis pair. Gorrell had hit a fast backhand low over the net and Avery was running after the ball.

"They seem to be OK. How about you?"

"Right on top of myself," Lang said. His eyes flicked up and down the board and he moved before Morley caught his breath back.

Usually they went right through into the end game, but tonight Morley had to concede on the twentieth move.

"Good," he said encouragingly. "You'll be able to take on Neill soon. Like another?"

"No. Actually the game bores me. I can see that's going to be a problem."

"You'll face it. Give yourself time to find your legs."

Lang pulled one of the Bach albums out of its rack in the record cabinet. He put a Brandenburg Concerto on the turntable and lowered the sapphire. As the rich, contrapuntal patterns chimed out he sat back, listening intently to the music.

Morley thought: Absurd. How fast can you run? Three weeks ago you were strictly a hepcat.

The next few hours passed rapidly.

At 1:30 they went up to the surgery, where Morley and one of the interns gave them a quick physical, checking their renal clearances, heart rate, and reflexes.
Dressed again, they went into the empty cafeteria for a snack and sat on the stools, arguing what to call this new fifth meal. Avery suggested "Midfood," Morley, "Munch."

At 2:00 they took their places in the neurology theater, and spent a couple of hours watching films of the hypno-drills of the past three weeks.

When the program ended they started down for the gymnasium, the night almost over. They were still relaxed and cheerful; Gorrell led the way, playfully teasing Lang over some of the episodes in the films, mimicking his trancelike walk.

"Eyes shut, mouth open," he demonstrated, swerving into Lang, who jumped nimbly out of his way. "Look at you; you're doing it even now. Believe me, Lang, you're not awake, you're somnambulating." He called back to Morley, "Agreed, Doctor?"

Morley swallowed a yawn. "Well, if he is, that makes two of us." He followed them along the corridor, doing his best to stay awake, feeling as if he, and not the three men in front of him, had been without sleep for the last three weeks.

Though the Clinic was quiet, at Neill's orders all lights along the corridors and down the stairway had been left on. Ahead of them two orderlies checked that windows they passed were safely screened and doors were shut. Nowhere was there a single darkened alcove or shadow trap.

Neill had insisted on this, reluctantly acknowledging a possible reflex association between darkness and sleep: "Let's admit it. In all but a few organisms the association is strong enough to be a reflex. The higher mammals depend for their survival on a highly acute sensory apparatus, combined with a varying ability to store and classify information. Plunge them into darkness, cut off the flow of visual data to the cortex, and they're paralyzed. Sleep is a defense reflex. It lowers the metabolic rate, conserves energy, increases the organism's survival potential by merging it into its habitat..."

On the landing halfway down the staircase was a wide, shuttered window that by day opened out onto the parkscape behind the Clinic. As he passed it Gorrell stopped. He went over, released the blind, then unlatched the shutter.

Still holding it closed, he turned to Morley, watching from the flight above.

"Taboo, Doctor?" he asked.

Morley looked at each of the three men in turn. Gorrell was calm
and unperturbed, apparently satisfying nothing more sinister than an idle whim. Lang sat on the rail, watching curiously with an expression of clinical disinterest. Only Avery seemed slightly anxious, his thin face wan and pinched. Morley had an irrelevant thought: 4:00 A.M. shadow—they'll need to shave twice a day. Then: why isn't Neill here? He knew they'd make for a window as soon as they got the chance.

He noticed Lang giving him an amused smile and shrugged, trying to disguise his uneasiness.

"Go ahead, if you want to. As Neill said, the wires are cut."

Gorrell threw back the shutter, and they clustered around the window and stared out into the night. Below, pewter-gray lawns stretched toward the pines and low hills in the distance. A couple of miles away on their left a neon sign winked and beckoned.

Neither Gorrell nor Lang noticed any reaction, and their interest began to flag within a few moments. Avery felt a sudden lift under the heart, then controlled himself. His eyes began to sift the darkness; the sky was clear and cloudless, and through the stars he picked out the narrow, milky traverse of the galactic rim. He watched it silently, letting the wind cool the sweat on his face and neck.

Morley stepped over to the window and leaned his elbows on the sill next to Avery. Out of the corner of his eye he carefully waited for any motor tremor—a fluttering eyelid, accelerated breathing—that would signal a reflex discharging. He remembered Neill's warning: "In Man sleep is largely volitional, and the reflex is conditioned by habit. But just because we've cut out the hypothalamic loops regulating the flow of consciousness doesn't mean the reflex won't discharge down some other pathway. However, sooner or later we'll have to take the risk and give them a glimpse of the dark side of the sun."

Morley was musing on this when something nudged his shoulder.

"Doctor," he heard Lang say. "Doctor Morley."

He pulled himself together with a start. He was alone at the window. Gorrell and Avery were halfway down the next flight of stairs.

"What's up?" Morley asked quickly.

"Nothing," Lang assured him. "We're just going back to the gym." He looked closely at Morley. "Are you all right?"
Manhole 69

Morley rubbed his face. "God, I must have been asleep." He glanced at his watch. Four-twenty. They had been at the window for over fifteen minutes. All he could remember was leaning on the sill. "And I was worried about you."

Everybody was amused, Gorrell particularly. "Doctor," he drawled, "if you're interested I can recommend you to a good narcotomist."

After 5:00 they felt a gradual ebb of tonus from their arm and leg muscles. Renal clearances were falling and breakdown products were slowly clogging their tissues. Their palms felt damp and numb, the soles of their feet like pads of sponge rubber. The sensation was vaguely unsettling, allied to no feelings of mental fatigue.

The numbness spread. Avery noticed it stretching the skin over his cheekbones, pulling at his temples, and giving him a slight frontal migraine. He doggedly turned the pages of a magazine, his hands like lumps of putty.

Then Neill came down, and they began to revive. Neill looked fresh and spruce, bouncing on the tips of his toes.

"How's the night shift going?" he asked briskly, walking round each one of them in turn, smiling as he sized them up. "Feel all right?"


Neill roared, slapped him on the shoulder and led the way up to the surgery laboratory.

At 9:00, shaved and in fresh clothes, they assembled in the lecture room. They felt cool and alert again. The peripheral numbness and slight head torpor had gone as soon as the detoxication drips had been plugged in, and Neill told them that within a week their kidneys would have enlarged sufficiently to cope on their own.

All morning and most of the afternoon they worked on a series of IQ, associative, and performance tests. Neill kept them hard at it, steering swerving blips of light around a cathode screen, juggling with intricate numerical and geometric sequences, elaborating word chains.

He seemed more than satisfied with the results.

"Shorter access times, deeper memory traces," he pointed out to Morley when the three men had gone off at 5:00 for the rest period. "Barrels of prime psychic marrow." He gestured at the test cards.
spread out across the desk in his office. "And you were worried about the Unconscious. Look at those Rorschachs of Lang’s. Believe me, John, I’ll soon have him reminiscing about his fetal experiences."

Morley nodded, his first doubts fading.

Over the next two weeks either he or Neill was with the men continuously, sitting out under the floodlights in the center of the gymnasium, assessing their assimilation of the eight extra hours, carefully watching for any symptoms of withdrawal. Neill carried everyone along, from one program phase to the next, through the test periods, across the long hours of the interminable nights, his powerful ego injecting enthusiasm into every member of the unit.

Privately, Morley worried about the increasing emotional overlay apparent in the relationship between Neill and the three men. He was afraid they were becoming conditioned to identify Neill with the experiment. (Ring the meal bell and the subject salivates; but suddenly stop ringing the bell after a long period of conditioning and it temporarily loses the ability to feed itself. The hiatus barely harms a dog, but it might trigger disaster in an already oversensitized psyche.)

Neill was fully alert to this. At the end of the first two weeks, when he caught a bad head cold after sitting up all night and decided to spend the next day in bed, he called Morley into his office. "The transference is getting much too positive. It needs to be eased off a little."

"I agree," Morley said. "But how?"

"Tell them I’ll be asleep for forty-eight hours," Neill said. He picked up a stack of reports, plates, and test cards and bundled them under one arm. "I’ve deliberately overdosed myself with sedatives to get some rest. I’m worn to a shadow, full fatigue syndrome, load cells screaming. Lay it on."

"Couldn’t that be rather drastic?" Morley asked. "They’ll hate you for it."

But Neill only smiled and went off to requisition an office near his bedroom.

That night Morley was on duty in the gymnasium from 10:00 P.M. to 6:00 A.M. As usual he first checked that the orderlies were ready
with their emergency trolleys, read through the log left by the previous supervisor, one of the senior interns, and then went over to the circle of chairs. He sat back on the sofa next to Lang and leafed through a magazine, watching the three men carefully. In the glare of the arc lights their lean faces had a sallow, cyanosed look. The senior intern had warned him that Avery and Gorrell might overtire themselves at table tennis, but by 11:00 P.M. they stopped playing and settled down in the armchairs. They read desultorily and made two trips up to the cafeteria, escorted each time by one of the orderlies. Morley told them about Neill, but surprisingly none of them made any comment.

Midnight came slowly. Avery read, his long body hunched up in an armchair. Gorrell played chess against himself.

Morley dozed.

Lang felt restless. The gymnasium’s silence and absence of movement oppressed him. He switched on the Gramophone and played through a Brandenburg, analyzing its theme trains. Then he ran a word-association test on himself, turning the pages of a book and using the top right-hand corner words as the control list.

Morley leaned over. “Anything come up?” he asked.

“A few interesting responses.” Lang found a notepad and jotted something down. “I’ll show them to Neill in the morning—or whenever he wakes up.” He gazed up pensively at the arc lights. “I was just speculating. What do you think the next step forward will be?”

“Forward where?” Morley asked.

Lang gestured expansively. “I mean up the evolutionary slope. Three hundred million years ago we became air-breathers and left the seas behind. Now we’ve taken the next logical step forward and eliminated sleep. What’s next?”

Morley shook his head. “The two steps aren’t analogous. Anyway, in point of fact you haven’t left the primeval sea behind. You’re still carrying a private replica of it around as your bloodstream. All you did was encapsulate a necessary piece of the physical environment in order to escape it.”

Lang nodded. “I was thinking of something else. Tell me, has it ever occurred to you how completely death-orientated the psyche is?”

Morley smiled. “Now and then,” he said, wondering where this led.
"It's curious," Lang went on reflectively. "The pleasure-pain principle, the whole survival-compulsion apparatus of sex, the superego's obsession with tomorrow—most of the time the psyche can't see farther than its own tombstone. Now why has it got this strange fixation? For one very obvious reason." He tapped the air with his forefinger. "Because every night it's given a pretty convincing reminder of the fate in store for it."

"You mean the black hole," Morley suggested wryly. "Sleep?"

"Exactly. It's simply a pseudodeath. Of course, you're not aware of it, but it must be terrifying." He frowned. "I don't think even Neill realizes that, far from being restful, sleep is a genuinely traumatic experience."

So that's it, Morley thought. The great father analyst has been caught napping on his own couch. He tried to decide which were worse—patients who knew a lot of psychiatry, or those who only knew a little.

"Eliminate sleep," Lang was saying, "and you also eliminate all the fear and defense mechanisms erected around it. Then, at last, the psyche has a chance to orientate toward something more valid."

"Such as...?" Morley asked.

"I don't know. Perhaps... Self?"

"Interesting," Morley commented. It was 3:10 A.M. He decided to spend the next hour going through Lang's latest test cards.

He waited a discretionary five minutes, then stood up and walked over to the surgery office.

Lang hooked an arm across the back of the sofa and watched the orderly room door.

"What's Morley playing at?" he asked. "Have either of you seen him anywhere?"

Avery lowered his magazine. "Didn't he go off into the orderly room?"

"Ten minutes ago," Lang said. "He hasn't looked in since. There's supposed to be someone on duty with us continuously. Where is he?"

Gorrell, playing solitaire chess, looked up from his board. "Perhaps these late nights are getting him down. You'd better wake him before Neill finds out. He's probably fallen asleep over a batch of your test cards."
Manhole 69

Lang laughed and settled down on the sofa. Gorrell reached out to the Gramophone, took a record out of the rack and slid it on to the turntable.

As the Gramophone began to hum Lang noticed how silent and deserted the gymnasium seemed. The Clinic was always quiet, but even at night a residual ebb and flow of sound—a chair dragging in the orderly room, a generator charging under one of the theaters—eddied through and kept it alive.

Now the air was flat and motionless. Lang listened carefully. The whole place had the dead, echoless feel of an abandoned building.

He stood up and strolled over to the orderly room. He knew Neill discouraged casual conversation with the control crew, but Morley’s absence puzzled him.

He reached the door and peered through the window to see if Morley was inside.

The room was empty.

The light was on. Two emergency trolleys stood in their usual place against the wall near the door, a third was in the middle of the floor, a pack of playing cards strewn across its deck, but the group of three or four interns had gone.

Lang hesitated, reached down to open the door, and found it had been locked.

He tried the handle again, then called out over his shoulder: “Avery. There’s nobody in here.”

“Try next door. They’re probably being briefed for tomorrow.”

Lang stepped over to the surgery office. The light was off but he could see the white enameled desk and the big program charts around the wall. There was no one inside.

Avery and Gorrell were watching him.

“Are they in there?” Avery asked.

“No.” Lang turned the handle. “The door’s locked.”

Gorrell switched off the Gramophone and he and Avery came over. They tried the two doors again.

“They’re here somewhere,” Avery said. “There must be at least one person on duty.” He pointed to the end door. “What about that one?”

“Locked,” Lang said, “Sixty-nine always has been. I think it leads down to the basement.”

“Let’s try Neill’s office,” Gorrell suggested. “If they aren’t in there
we’ll stroll through to Reception and try to leave. This must be some trick of Neill’s.”

There was no window in the door to Neill’s office. Gorrell knocked, waited, knocked again more loudly.

Lang tried the handle, then knelt down. “The light’s off,” he reported.

Avery turned and looked around at the two remaining doors out of the gymnasium, both in the far wall, one leading up to the cafeteria and the neurology wing, the other into the car park at the rear of the Clinic.

“Didn’t Neill hint that he might try something like this on us?” he asked. “To see whether we can go through a night on our own.”

“But Neill’s asleep,” Lang objected. “He’ll be in bed for a couple of days. Unless...”

Gorrell jerked his head in the direction of the chairs. “Come on. He and Morley are probably watching us now.”

They went back to their seats.

Gorrell dragged the chess stool over to the sofa and set up the pieces. Avery and Lang stretched out in armchairs and opened magazines, turning the pages deliberately. Above them the banks of arc lights threw their wide cones of light down into the silence.

The only noise was the slow left-right, left-right motion of the clock.

Three fifteen A.M.

The shift was imperceptible. At first a slight change of perspective, a fading and regrouping of outlines. Somewhere a focus slipped, a shadow swung slowly across a wall, its angles breaking and lengthening. The motion was fluid, a procession of infinitesimals, but gradually its total direction emerged.

The gymnasium was shrinking. Inch by inch, the walls were moving inward, encroaching across the periphery of the floor. As they shrunk toward each other their features altered: the rows of skylights below the ceiling blurred and faded, the power cable running along the base of the wall merged into the skirting board, the square baffles of the air vents vanished into the gray distemper.

Above, like the undersurface of an enormous lift, the ceiling sank toward the floor...
The motion was accelerating. What had once been the gymnasium was now a small room, seven feet wide, a tight, almost perfect cube. The walls plunged inward, along colliding diagonals, only a few feet from their final focus...

Avery noticed Gorrell and Lang pacing around his chair. "Either of you want to sit down yet?" he asked.
They shook their heads. Avery rested for a few minutes and then climbed out of the chair and stretched himself.

"Quarter past three," he remarked, pressing his hands against the ceiling. "This is getting to be a long night."

He leaned back to let Gorrell pass him, and then started to follow the others around the narrow space between the armchair and the walls.

"I don't know how Neill expects us to stay awake in this hole for twenty-four hours a day," he went on. "Why haven't we got a television set in here? Even a radio would be something."

They sidled around the chair together, Gorrell, followed by Avery, with Lang completing the circle, their shoulders beginning to hunch, their heads down as they watched the floor, their feet falling into the slow, leaden rhythm of the clock.

This, then, was the manhole: a narrow, vertical cubicle, a few feet wide, six deep. Above, a solitary, dusty bulb gleamed down from a steel grille. As if crumbling under the impetus of their own momentum, the surface of the walls had coarsened, the texture was that of stone, streaked and pitted...

Gorrell bent down to loosen one of his shoelaces and Avery bumped into him sharply, knocking his shoulder against the wall.

"All right?" he asked, taking Gorrell's arm. "This place is a little overcrowded. I can't understand why Neill ever put us in here."

He leaned against the wall, head bowed to prevent it from touching the ceiling, and gazed about thoughtfully.

Lang stood squeezed into the corner next to him, shifting his weight from one foot to the other.

Gorrell squatted down on his heels below them.

"What's the time?" he asked.

"I'd say about three fifteen," Lang offered. "More or less."

"Lang," Avery asked, "where's the ventilator here?"

Lang peered up and down the walls and across the small square of ceiling. "There must be one somewhere." Gorrell stood up and they shuffled about, examining the floor between their feet.

"There may be a vent in the light grille," Gorrell suggested. He
reached up and slipped his fingers through the cage, running them behind the bulb.

"Nothing there. Odd. I should have thought we'd use the air in here within half an hour."

"Easily," Avery said. "You know, there's something—"

Just then Lang broke in. He gripped Avery's elbow.

"Avery," he asked. "Tell me. How did we get here?"

"What do you mean, get here? We're on Neill's team."

Lang cut him off. "I know that." He pointed at the floor. "I mean, in here."

Gorrell shook his head. "Lang, relax. How do you think? Through the door."

Lang looked squarely at Gorrell, then at Avery.

"What door?" he asked calmly.

Gorrell and Avery hesitated, then swung around to look at each wall in turn, scanning it from floor to ceiling. Avery ran his hands over the heavy masonry, then knelt down and felt the floor, digging his fingers at the rough stone slabs. Gorrell crouched beside him, scrabbling at the thin seams of dirt.

Lang backed out of their way into a corner, and watched them impassively. His face was calm and motionless, but in his left temple a single vein fluttered insanely.

When they finally stood up, staring at each other unsteadily, he flung himself between them at the opposite wall.

"Neill! Neill!" he shouted. He pounded angrily on the wall with his fists. "Neill! Neill!"

Above him the light began to fade.

Morley closed the door of the surgery office behind him and went over to the desk. Though it was 3:15 A.M., Neill was probably awake, working on the latest material in the office next to his bedroom. Fortunately that afternoon's test cards, freshly marked by one of the interns, had only just reached his in-tray.

Morley picked out Lang's folder and started to sort through the cards. He suspected that Lang's responses to some of the key words and suggestion triggers lying disguised in the question forms might throw illuminating sidelong shots onto the real motives behind his equation of sleep and death.

The communicating door to the orderly room opened and an intern looked in.
"Do you want me to take over in the gym, Doctor?"
Morley waved him away. "Don't bother. I'm going back in a moment."

He selected the cards he wanted and began to initial his withdrawals. Glad to get away from the glare of the arc lights, he delayed his return as long as he could, and it was 3:25 A.M. when he finally left the office and stepped back into the gymnasium.

The men were sitting where he had left them. Lang watched him approach, head propped comfortably on a cushion. Avery was slouched down in his armchair, nose in a magazine, while Gorrell hunched over the chessboard, hidden behind the sofa.

"Anybody feel like coffee?" Morley called out, deciding they needed some exercise.

None of them looked up or answered. Morley felt a flicker of annoyance, particularly at Lang, who was staring past him at the clock.

Then he saw something that made him stop.

Lying on the polished floor ten feet from the sofa was a chess piece. He went over and picked it up. The piece was the black king. He wondered how Gorrell could be playing chess with one of the two essential pieces of the game missing when he noticed three more pieces lying on the floor nearby.

His eyes moved to where Gorrell was sitting.

Scattered over the floor below the chair and sofa was the rest of the set. Gorrell was slumped over the stool. One of his elbows had slipped and the arm dangled between his knees, knuckles resting on the floor. The other hand supported his face. Dead eyes peered down at his feet.

Morley ran over to him, shouting: "Lang! Avery! Get the orderlies!"

He reached Gorrell and pulled him back off the stool.

"Lang!" he called again.

Lang was still staring at the clock, his body in the stiff, unreal posture of a waxworks dummy.

Morley let Gorrell loll back onto the sofa, leaned over and glanced at Lang's face.

He crossed to Avery, stretched out behind the magazine, and jerked his shoulder. Avery's head bobbed stiffly. The magazine slipped and fell from his hands, leaving his fingers curled in front of his face.
Morley stepped over Avery's legs to the Gramophone. He switched it on, gripped the volume control, and swung it round to full amplitude. Above the orderly room door an alarm bell shrilled out through the silence.

"Weren't you with them?" Neill asked sharply.

"No," Morley admitted. They were standing by the door of the emergency ward. Two orderlies had just dismantled the electrotherapy unit and were wheeling the console away on a trolley. Outside in the gymnasium a quiet, urgent traffic of nurses and interns moved past. All but a single bank of arc lights had been switched off, and the gymnasium seemed like a deserted stage at the end of a performance.

"I slipped into the office to pick up a few test cards," he explained. "I wasn't gone more than ten minutes."

"You were supposed to watch them continuously," Neill snapped. "Not wander off by yourself whenever you felt like it. What do you think we had the gym and this entire circus set up for?"

It was a little after 5:30 A.M. After working hopelessly on the three men for a couple of hours, he was close to exhaustion. He looked down at them, lying inertly in their cots, canvas sheets buckled up to their chins. They had barely changed, but their eyes were open and unblinking, and their faces had the empty, reflexless look of psychic zero.

An intern bent over Lang, thumbing a hypodermic. Morley stared at the floor. "I think they would have gone anyway."

"How can you say that?" Neill clamped his lips together. He felt frustrated and impotent. He knew Morley was probably right—the three men were in terminal withdrawal, unresponsive to either insulin or electrotherapy, and a vise-tight catatonic seizure didn't close in out of nowhere—but as always refused to admit anything without absolute proof.

He led the way into his office and shut the door. "Sit down." He pulled a chair out for Morley and prowled off around the room, slamming a fist into his palm.

"All right, John. What is it?"

Morley picked up one of the test cards lying on the desk, balanced it on a corner and spun it between his fingers. Phrases swam through his mind, tentative and uncertain, like blind fish.
"What do you want me to say?" he asked. "Reactivation of the infantile imago? A regression into the great, slumbering womb? Or to put it more simply still—just a fit of pique?"

"Go on."

Morley shrugged. "Continual consciousness is more than the brain can stand. Any signal repeated often enough eventually loses its meaning. Try saying the word sleep fifty times. After a point the brain’s self-awareness dulls. It’s no longer able to grasp who or why it is, and it rides adrift."

"What do we do then?"

"Nothing. Short of rescoring all the way down to Lumbar One. The central nervous system can’t stand narcotomy."

Neill shook his head. "You’re lost," he said curtly. "Juggling with generalities isn’t going to bring those men back. First, we’ve got to find out what happened to them, what they actually felt and saw."

Morley frowned dubiously. "That jungle is marked private. Even if you do, is a psychotic’s withdrawal drama going to make any sense?"

"Of course it will. However insane it seems to us, it was real enough to them. If we know the ceiling fell in or the whole gym filled with ice cream or turned into a maze, we’ve got something to work on." He sat down on the desk. "Do you remember that story of Chekhov’s you told me about?"

"The Bet? Yes."

"I read it last night. Curious. It’s a lot nearer what you’re really trying to say than you know." He gazed around the office. "This room in which the man is penned for ten years symbolizes the mind driven to the furthest limits of self-awareness... Something very similar happened to Avery, Gorrell, and Lang. They must have reached a stage beyond which they could no longer contain the idea of their own identity. But far from being unable to grasp the idea, I’d say that they were conscious of nothing else. Like the man in the spherical mirror, who can only see a single gigantic eye staring back at him."

"So you think their withdrawal is a straightforward escape from the eye, the overwhelming ego?"

"Not escape," Neill corrected. "The psychotic never escapes from anything. He’s much more sensible. He merely readjusts reality to suit himself. Quite a trick to learn, too. The room in Chekhov’s story gives me an idea as to how they might have readjusted. Their par-
ticular equivalent of this room was the gym. I’m beginning to realize it was a mistake to put them in there—all those lights blazing down, the huge floor, high walls. They merely exaggerate the sensation of overload. In fact the gym might easily have become an external projection of their own egos.”

Neill drummed his fingers on the desk. “My guess is that at this moment they’re either striding around in there the size of hundred-foot giants, or else they’ve cut it down to their own dimensions. More probably that. They’ve just pulled the gym in on themselves.”

Morley grinned bleakly. “So all we’ve got to do now is pump them full of honey and apomorphine and coax them out. Suppose they refuse?”

“They won’t,” Neill said. “You’ll see.”

There was a rap on the door. An intern stuck his head through. “Lang’s coming out of it, Doctor. He’s calling for you.”

Neill bounded out.

Morley followed him into the ward.

Lang was lying in his cot, body motionless under the canvas sheet. His lips were parted slightly. No sound came from them, but Morley, bending over next to Neill, could see his hyoid bone vibrating in spasms.

“He’s very faint,” the intern warned.

Neill pulled up a chair and sat down next to the cot. He made a visible effort of concentration, flexing his shoulders. He bent his head close to Lang’s and listened.

Five minutes later it came through again.

Lang’s lips quivered. His body arched under the sheet, straining at the buckles, and then subsided.

“Neill... Neill...” he whispered. The sounds, thin and strangled, seemed to be coming from the bottom of a well. “Neill... Neill... Neill...”

Neill stroked his forehead with a small, neat hand.

“Yes, Bobby,” he said gently. His voice was feather-soft, caressing. “I’m here, Bobby. You can come out now.”