

EXCLUSIVE: RUSSIAN SF-INITIATIVE

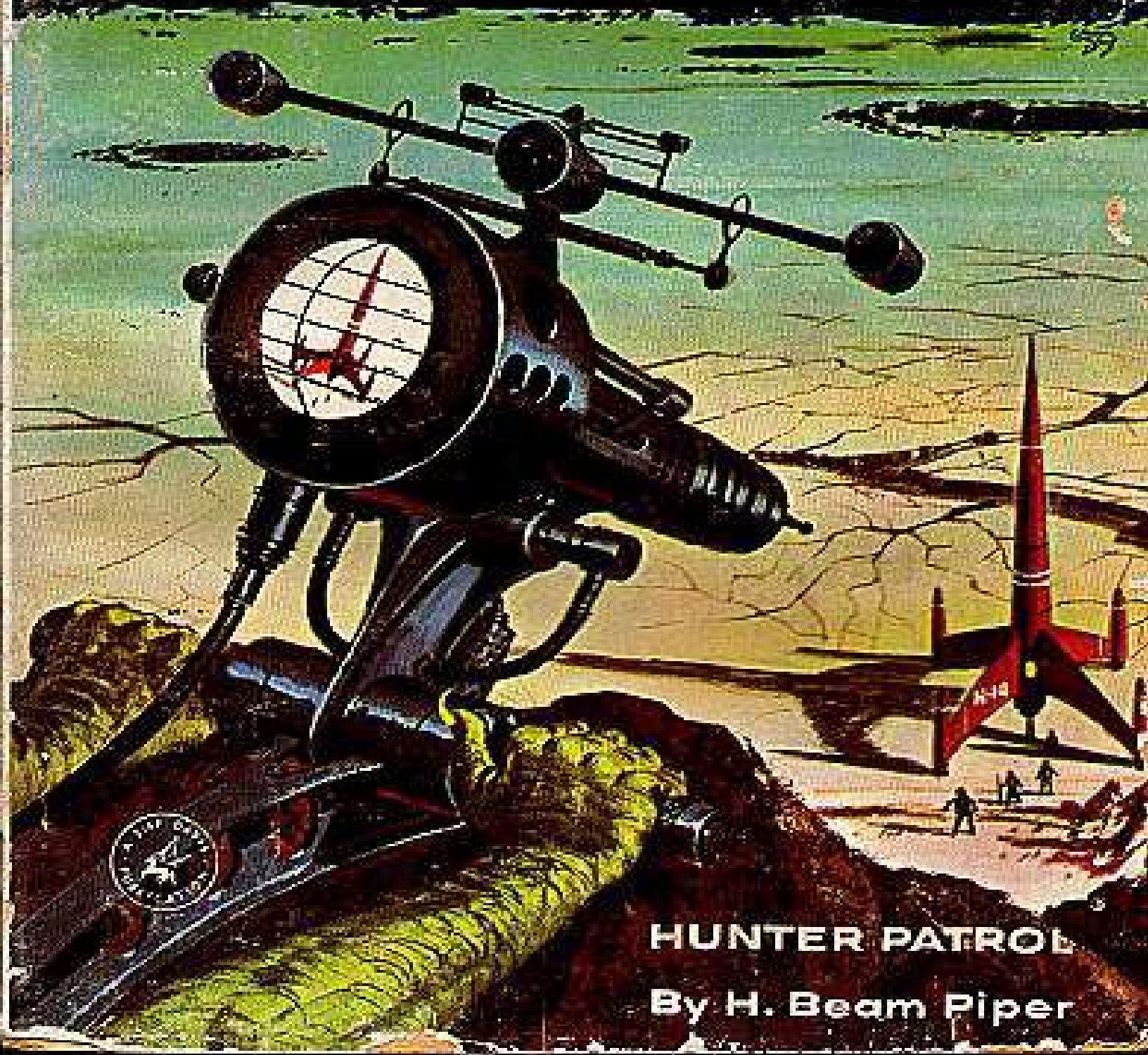
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SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

MAY



HUNTER PATROL

By H. Beam Piper

Hunter Patrol

At the crest of the ridge, Benson stopped for an instant, glancing first at his wrist-watch and then back over his shoulder. It was 0539; the barrage was due in eleven minutes, at the spot where he was now standing. Behind, on the long northeast slope, he could see the columns of black oil smoke rising from what had been the Pan-Soviet advance supply dump. There was a great deal of firing going on, back there; he wondered if the Commies had managed to corner a few of his men, after the patrol had accomplished its mission and scattered, or if a couple of Communist units were shooting each other up in mutual mistaken identity. The result would be about the same in either case – reserve units would be disorganized, and some men would have been pulled back from the front line. His dozen-odd UN regulars and Turkish partisans had done their best to simulate a paratroop attack in force. At least, his job was done; now to execute that classic infantry maneuver described as, “Let's get the hell outa here.” This was his last patrol before rotation home. He didn't want anything unfortunate to happen.

There was a little ravine to the left; the stream which had cut it in the steep southern slope of the ridge would be dry at this time of year, and he could make better time, and find protection in it from any chance shots when the interdictory barrage started. He hurried toward it and followed it down to the valley that would lead toward the front – the thinly-held section of the Communist lines, and the UN lines beyond, where fresh troops were waiting to jump from their holes and begin the attack.

There was something wrong about this ravine, though. At first, it was only a vague presentiment, growing stronger as he followed the dry gully down to the valley below. Something he had smelled, or heard, or seen, without conscious recognition. Then, in the dry sand where the ravine debouched into the valley, he saw faint tank-tracks – only one pair. There was something wrong about the vines that mantled one side of the ravine, too....

An instant later, he was diving to the right, breaking his fall with the butt of his auto-carbine, rolling rapidly toward the cover of a rock, and as he did so, the thinking part of his mind recognized what was wrong. The tank-tracks had ended against the vine-grown side of the ravine, what he had smelled had been lubricating oil and petrol, and the leaves on some of the vines hung

upside down.

Almost at once, from behind the vines, a tank's machine guns snarled at him, clipping the place where he had been standing, then shifting to rage against the sheltering rock. With a sudden motor-roar, the muzzle of a long tank-gun pushed out through the vines, and then the low body of a tank with a red star on the turret came rumbling out of the camouflaged bay. The machine guns kept him pinned behind the rock; the tank swerved ever so slightly so that its wide left tread was aimed directly at him, then picked up speed. Aren't even going to waste a shell on me, he thought.

Futilely, he let go a clip from his carbine, trying to hit one of the vision-slits; then rolled to one side, dropped out the clip, slapped in another. There was a shimmering blue mist around him. If he only hadn't used his last grenade, back there at the supply-dump....

The strange blue mist became a flickering radiance that ran through all the colors of the spectrum and became an utter, impenetrable blackness....

There were voices in the blackness, and a softness under him, but under his back, when he had been lying on his stomach, as though he were now on a comfortable bed. They got me alive, he thought; now comes the brainwashing!

He cracked one eye open imperceptibly. Lights, white and glaring, from a ceiling far above; walls as white as the lights. Without moving his head, he opened both eyes and shifted them from right to left. Vaguely, he could see people and, behind them, machines so simply designed that their functions were unguessable. He sat up and looked around groggily. The people, their costumes – definitely not Pan-Soviet uniforms – and the room and its machines, told him nothing. The hardness under his right hip was a welcome surprise; they hadn't taken his pistol from him! Feigning even more puzzlement and weakness, he clutched his knees with his elbows and leaned his head forward on them, trying to collect his thoughts.

“We shall have to give up, Gregory,” a voice trembled with disappointment.

“Why, Anthony?” The new voice was deeper, more aggressive.

“Look. Another typical reaction; retreat to the foetus.”

Footsteps approached. Another voice, discouragement heavily weighting each syllable: “You're right. He's like all the others. We'll have to send him back.”

“And look for no more?” The voice he recognized as Anthony faltered between question and statement.

A babel of voices, in dispute; then, clearly, the voice Benson had come to label as Gregory, cut in:

“I will never give up!”

He raised his head; there was something in the timbre of that voice reminding him of his own feelings in the dark days when the UN had everywhere been reeling back under the Pan-Soviet hammer-blows.

“Anthony!” Gregory's voice again; Benson saw the speaker; short, stocky, gray-haired, stubborn lines about the mouth. The face of a man chasing an illusive but not uncapturable dream.

“That means nothing.” A tall thin man, too lean for the tunic-like garment he wore, was shaking his head.

Deliberately, trying to remember his college courses in psychology, he forced himself to accept, and to assess, what he saw as reality. He was on a

small table, like an operating table; the whole place looked like a medical lab or a clinic. He was still in uniform; his boots had soiled the white sheets with the dust of Armenia. He had all his equipment, including his pistol and combat-knife; his carbine was gone, however. He could feel the weight of his helmet on his head. The room still rocked and swayed a little, but the faces of the people were coming into focus.

He counted them, saying each number to himself: one, two, three, four, five men; one woman. He swung his feet over the edge of the table, being careful that it would be between him and the others when he rose, and began inching his right hand toward his right hip, using his left hand, on his brow, to misdirect attention.

“I would classify his actions as arising from conscious effort at cortico-thalamic integration,” the woman said, like an archaeologist who has just found a K-ration tin at the bottom of a neolithic kitchen-midden. She had the peculiarly young-old look of the spinster teachers with whom Benson had worked before going to the war.

“I want to believe it, but I'm afraid to,” another man for whom Benson had no name-association said. He was portly, gray-haired, arrogant-faced; he wore a short black jacket with a jewelled zipper-pull, and striped trousers.

Benson cleared his throat. “Just who are you people?” he inquired. “And just where am I?”

Anthony grabbed Gregory's hand and pumped it frantically.

“I've dreamed of the day when I could say this!” he cried. “Congratulations, Gregory!”

That touched off another bedlam, of joy, this time, instead of despair. Benson hid his amusement at the facility with which all of them were discovering in one another the courage, vision and stamina of true patriots and pioneers. He let it go on for a few moments, hoping to glean some clue. Finally, he interrupted.

“I believe I asked a couple of questions,” he said, using the voice he reserved for sergeants and second lieutenants. “I hate to break up this mutual admiration session, but I would appreciate some answers. This isn't anything like the situation I last remember....”

“He remembers!” Gregory exclaimed. “That confirms your first derivation by symbolic logic, and it strengthens the validity of the second....”

The schoolteacherish woman began jabbering excitedly; she ran through about a paragraph of what was pure gobbledegook to Benson, before the man with the arrogant face and the jewelled zipper-pull broke in on her.

“Save that for later, Paula,” he barked. “I'd be very much interested in your theories about why memories are unimpaired when you time-jump forward and lost when you reverse the process, but let's stick to business. We have what we wanted; now let's use what we have.”

“I never liked the way you made your money,” a dark-faced, cadaverous man said, “but when you talk, it makes sense. Let's get on with it.”

Benson used the brief silence which followed to study the six. With the exception of the two who had just spoken, there was the indefinable mark of the fanatic upon all of them – people fanatical about different things, united for different reasons in a single purpose. It reminded him sharply of some teachers' committee about to beard a school-board with an unpopular and expensive recommendation.

Anthony – the oldest of the lot, in a knee-length tunic – turned to Gregory.

“I believe you had better....” he began.

“As to who we are, we'll explain that, partially, later. As for your question, 'Where am I?' that will have to be rephrased. If you ask, 'When and where am I?' I can furnish a rational answer. In the temporal dimension, you are fifty years futureward of the day of your death; spatially, you are about eight thousand miles from the place of your death, in what is now the World Capitol, St. Louis.”

Nothing in the answer made sense but the name of the city. Benson

chuckled.

“What happened; the Cardinals conquer the world? I knew they had a good team, but I didn't think it was that good.”

“No, no,” Gregory told him earnestly. “The government isn't a theocracy. At least not yet. But if The Guide keeps on insisting that only beautiful things are good and that he is uniquely qualified to define beauty, watch his rule change into just that.”

“I've been detecting symptoms of religious paranoia, messianic delusions, about his public statements....” the woman began.

“Idolatry!” another member of the group, who wore a black coat fastened to the neck, and white neck-bands, rasped. “Idolatry in deed, as well as in spirit!”

The sense of unreality, partially dispelled, began to return. Benson dropped to the floor and stood beside the table, getting a cigarette out of his pocket and lighting it.

“I made a joke,” he said, putting his lighter away. “The fact that none of you got it has done more to prove that I am fifty years in the future than anything any of you could say.” He went on to explain who the St. Louis Cardinals were.

“Yes; I remember! Baseball!” Anthony exclaimed. “There is no baseball, now. The Guide will not allow competitive sports; he says that they foster the spirit of violence....”

The cadaverous man in the blue jacket turned to the man in the black garment of similar cut.

“You probably know more history than any of us,” he said, getting a cigar out of his pocket and lighting it. He lighted it by rubbing the end on the sole of his shoe. “Suppose you tell him what the score is.” He turned to Benson. “You can rely on his dates and happenings; his interpretation's strictly capitalist, of course,” he said.

Black-jacket shook his head. “You first, Gregory,” he said. “Tell him how he got here, and then I'll tell him why.”

“I believe,” Gregory began, “that in your period, fiction writers made some use of the subject of time-travel. It was not, however, given serious consideration, largely because of certain alleged paradoxes involved, and because of an elementalistic and objectifying attitude toward the whole subject of time. I won't go into the mathematics and symbolic logic involved, but we have disposed of the objections; more, we have succeeded in constructing a time-machine, if you want to call it that. We prefer to call it a temporal-spatial displacement field generator.”

“It's really very simple,” the woman called Paula interrupted. “If the universe is expanding, time is a widening spiral; if contracting, a diminishing spiral; if static, a uniform spiral. The possibility of pulsation was our only worry....”

“That's no worry,” Gregory reproved her. “I showed you that the rate was too slow to have an effect on....”

“Oh, nonsense; you can measure something which exists within a microsecond, but where is the instrument to measure a temporal pulsation that may require years...? You haven't come to that yet.”

“Be quiet, both of you!” the man with the black coat and the white bands commanded. “While you argue about vanities, thousands are being converted to the godlessness of The Guide, and other thousands of his dupes are dying, unprepared to face their Maker!”

“All right, you invented a time-machine,” Benson said. “In civvies, I was only a high school chemistry teacher. I can tell a class of juniors the difference between H₂O and H₂SO₄, but the theory of time-travel is wasted on me.... Suppose you just let me ask the questions; then I'll be sure of finding out what I don't know. For instance, who won the war I was fighting in, before you grabbed me and brought me here? The Commies?”

“No, the United Nations,” Anthony told him. “At least, they were the least exhausted when both sides decided to quit.”

“Then what's this dictatorship.... The Guide? Extreme Rightist?”

“Walter, you'd better tell him,” Gregory said.

“We damn near lost the war,” the man in the black jacket and striped trousers said, “but for once, we won the peace. The Soviet Bloc was broken up – India, China, Indonesia, Mongolia, Russia, the Ukraine, all the Satellite States. Most of them turned into little dictatorships, like the Latin American countries after the liberation from Spain, but they were personal, non-ideological, generally benevolent, dictatorships, the kind that can grow into democracies, if they're given time.”

“Capitalistic dictatorships, he means,” the cadaverous man in the blue jacket explained.

“Be quiet, Carl,” Anthony told him. “Let's not confuse this with any class-struggle stuff.”

“Actually, the United Nations rules the world,” Walter continued. “What goes on in the Ukraine or Latvia or Manchuria is about analogous to what went on under the old United States government in, let's say, Tammany-ruled New York. But here's the catch. The UN is ruled absolutely by one man.”

“How could that happen? In my time, the UN had its functions so subdivided and compartmented that it couldn't even run a war properly. Our army commanders were making war by systematic disobedience.”

“The charter was changed shortly after ... er, that is, after...” Walter was fumbling for words.

“After my death.” Benson finished politely. “Go on. Even with a changed charter, how did one man get all the powers into his hands?”

“By sorcery!” black-coat-and-white-bands fairly shouted. “By the help of his master, Satan!”

“You know, there are times when some such theory tempts me,” Paula said.

“He was a big moneybags,” Carl said. “He bribed his way in. See, New York was bombed flat. Where the old UN buildings were, it's still hot. So The Guide donated a big tract of land outside St. Louis, built these buildings – we're in the basement of one of them, right now, if you want a good laugh – and before long, he had the whole organization eating out of his hand. They just voted him into power, and the world into slavery.”

Benson looked around at the others, who were nodding in varying degrees of agreement.

“Substantially, that's it. He managed to convince everybody of his altruism, integrity and wisdom,” Walter said. “It was almost blasphemous to

say anything against him. I really don't understand how it happened....”

“Well, what's he been doing with his power?” Benson asked. “Wise things, or stupid ones?”

“I could be general, and say that he has deprived all of us of our political and other liberties. It is best to be specific,” Anthony said. “Gregory?”

“My own field – dimensional physics – hasn't been interfered with much, yet. It's different in other fields. For instance, all research in sonics has been arbitrarily stopped. So has a great deal of work in organic and synthetic chemistry. Psychology is a madhouse of ... what was the old word, licentiousness? No, lysenkoism. Medicine and surgery – well, there's a huge program of compulsory sterilization, and another one of eugenic marriage-control. And infants who don't conform to certain physical standards don't survive. Neither do people who have disfiguring accidents beyond the power of plastic surgery.”

Paula spoke next. "My field is child welfare. Well, I'm going to show you an audio-visual of an interesting ceremony in a Hindu village, derived from the ancient custom of the suttee. It is the Hindu method of conforming to The Guide's demand that only beautiful children be allowed to grow to maturity."

The film was mercifully brief. Even in spite of the drums and gongs, and the chanting of the crowd, Benson found out how loudly a newborn infant can scream in a fire. The others looked as though they were going to be sick; he doubted if he looked much better.

"Of course, we are a more practical and mechanical-minded people, here and in Europe," Paula added, holding down her gorge by main strength. "We have lethal-gas chambers that even Hitler would have envied."

"I am a musician," Anthony said. "A composer. If Gregory thinks that the sciences are controlled, he should try to write even the simplest piece of music. The extent of censorship and control over all the arts, and especially music, is incredible." He coughed slightly. "And I have another motive, a more selfish one. I am approaching the compulsory retirement age; I will soon be invited to go to one of the Havens. Even though these Havens are located in the most barren places, they are beauty-spots, verdant beyond belief. It is of only passing interest that, while large numbers of the aged go there yearly, their populations remain constant, and, to judge from the quantities of supplies shipped to them, extremely small."

“They call me Samuel, in this organization,” the man in the long black coat said. “Whoever gave me that alias must have chosen it because I am here in an effort to live up to it. Although I am ordained by no church, I fight for all of them. The plain fact is that this man we call The Guide is really the Antichrist!”

“Well, I haven't quite so lofty a motive, but it's good enough to make me willing to finance this project,” Walter said. “It's very simple. The Guide won't let people make money, and if they do, he taxes it away from them. And he has laws to prohibit inheritance; what little you can accumulate, you can't pass on to your children.”

“I put up a lot of the money, too, don't forget,” Carl told him. “Or the Union did; I'm a poor man, myself.” He was smoking an excellent cigar, for a poor man, and his clothes could have come from the same tailor as Walter's. “Look, we got a real Union – the Union of all unions. Every working man in North America, Europe, Australia and South Africa belongs to it. And The Guide has us all hog-tied.”

“He won't let you strike,” Benson chuckled.

“That's right. And what can we do? Why, we can't even make our closed-shop contracts stick. And as far as getting anything like a pay-raise...”

“Good thing. Another pay-raise in some of my companies would bankrupt them, the way The Guide has us under his thumb...” Walter began, but he was cut off.

“Well! It seems as though this Guide has done some good, if he's made you two realize that you're both on the same side, and that what hurts one hurts both,” Benson said. “When I shipped out for Turkey in '77, neither Labor nor Management had learned that.” He looked from one to another of them. “The Guide must have a really good bodyguard, with all the enemies he's made.”

Gregory shook his head. “He lives virtually alone, in a very small house on the UN Capitol grounds. In fact, except for a small police-force, armed only with non-lethal stun-guns, your profession of arms is non-existent.”

"I've been guessing what you want me to do," Benson said. "You want this Guide bumped off. But why can't any of you do it? Or, if it's too risky, at least somebody from your own time? Why me?"

"We can't. Everybody in the world today is conditioned against violence, especially the taking of human life," Anthony told him.

"Now, wait a moment!" This time, he was using the voice he would have employed in chiding a couple of Anatolian peasant partisans who were field-stripping a machine gun the wrong way. "Those babies in that film you showed me weren't dying of old age..."

"That is not violence," Paula said bitterly. "That is humane beneficence. Ugly people would be unhappy, and would make others unhappy, in a world where everybody else is beautiful."

"And all these oppressive and tyrannical laws," Benson continued. "How does he enforce them, without violence, actual or threatened?"

Samuel started to say something about the Power of the Evil One; Paula, ignoring him, said:

"I really don't know; he just does it. Mass hypnotism of some sort. I know music has something to do with it, because there is always music, everywhere. This laboratory, for instance, was secretly soundproofed; we couldn't have worked here, otherwise."

"All right. I can see that you'd need somebody from the past, preferably a soldier, whose conditioning has been in favor rather than against violence. I'm not the only one you snatched, I take it?"

"No. We've been using that machine to pick up men from battlefields all over the world and all over history," Gregory said. "Until now, none of them could adjust.... Ugh!" He shuddered, looking even sicker than when the film was being shown.

"He's thinking," Walter said, "about a French officer from Waterloo who blew out his brains with a pocket-pistol on that table, and an English archer from Agincourt who ran amok with a dagger in here, and a trooper of the Seventh Cavalry from the Custer Massacre."

Gregory managed to overcome his revulsion. "You see, we were forced to take our subjects largely at random with regard to individual characteristics, mental attitudes, adaptability, et cetera." As long as he stuck to high order abstractions, he could control himself. "Aside from their professional lack of repugnance for violence, we took soldiers from battlefields because we could

select men facing immediate death, whose removal from the past would not have any effect upon the casual chain of events affecting the present.”

A warning buzzer rasped in Benson's brain. He nodded, poker-faced.

“I can see that,” he agreed. “You wouldn't dare do anything to change the past. That was always one of the favorite paradoxes in time-travel fiction... Well, I think I have the general picture. You have a dictator who is tyrannizing you; you want to get rid of him; you can't kill him yourselves. I'm opposed to dictators, myself; that – and the Selective Service law, of course – was why I was a soldier. I have no moral or psychological taboos against killing dictators, or anybody else. Suppose I cooperate with you; what's in it for me?”

There was a long silence. Walter and Carl looked at one another inquiringly; the others dithered helplessly. It was Carl who answered.

“Your return to your own time and place.”

“And if I don't cooperate with you?”

“Guess when and where else we could send you,” Walter said.

Benson dropped his cigarette and tramped it.

“Exactly the same time and place?” he asked.

“Well, the structure of space-time demands...” Paula began.

“The spatio-temporal displacement field is capable of identifying that spot – “ Gregory pointed to a ten-foot circle in front of a bank of sleek-cabineted, dial-studded machines “ – with any set of space-time coordinates in the universe. However, to avoid disruption of the structure of space-time, we must return you to approximately the same point in space-time.”

Benson nodded again, this time at the confirmation of his earlier suspicion. Well, while he was alive, he still had a chance.

“All right; tell me exactly what you want me to do.”

A third outbreak of bedlam, this time of relief and frantic explanation.

“Shut up, all of you!” For so thin a man, Carl had an astonishing voice. “I worked this out, so let me tell it.” He turned to Benson. “Maybe I'm tougher than the rest of them, or maybe I'm not as deeply conditioned. For one thing, I'm tone-deaf. Well, here's the way it is. Gregory can set the machine to function automatically. You stand where he shows you, press the button he shows you, and fifteen seconds later it'll take you forward in time five seconds and about a kilometer in space, to The Guide's office. He'll be at his desk now. You'll have forty-five seconds to do the job, from the time the field collapses around you till it rebuilds. Then you'll be taken back to your own time again. The whole thing's automatic.”

“Can do,” Benson agreed. “How do I kill him?”

“I'm getting sick!” Paula murmured weakly. Her face was whiter than her gown.

“Take care of her, Samuel. Both of you'd better get out of here,” Gregory said.

“The Lord of Hosts is my strength, He will.... Uggggh!” Samuel gasped.

“Conditioning's getting him, too; we gotta be quick,” Carl said. “Here. This is what you'll use.” He handed Benson a two-inch globe of black plastic. “Take the damn thing, quick! Little button on the side; press it, and get it out of your hand fast...” He retched. “Limited-effect bomb; everything within two-meter circle burned to nothing; outside that, great but not unendurable heat. Shut your eyes when you throw it. Flash almost blinding.” He dropped his cigar and turned almost green in the face. Walter had a drink poured and handed it to him. “Uggh! Thanks, Walter.” He downed it.

“Peculiar sort of thing for a non-violent people to manufacture,” Benson said, looking at the bomb and then putting it in his jacket pocket.

“It isn't a weapon. Industrial; we use it in mining. I used plenty of them, in Walter's iron mines.”

He nodded again. “Where do I stand, now?” he asked.

“Right over here.” Gregory placed him in front of a small panel with three buttons. “Press the middle one, and step back into the small red circle and stand perfectly still while the field builds up and collapses. Face that way.”

Benson drew his pistol and checked it; magazine full, a round in the chamber, safety on.

“Put that horrid thing out of sight!” Anthony gasped. “The ... the other thing ... is what you want to use.”

“The bomb won't be any good if some of his guards come in before the field re-builds,” Benson said.

“He has no guards. He lives absolutely alone. We told you...”

“I know you did. You probably believed it, too. I don't. And by the way, you're sending me forward. What do you do about the fact that a time-jump seems to make me pass out?”

“Here. Before you press the button, swallow it.” Gregory gave him a small blue pill.

“Well, I guess that's all there is,” Gregory continued. “I hope...” His face twitched, and he dropped to the floor with a thud. Carl and Walter came forward, dragged him away from the machine.

“Conditioning got him. Getting me, too,” Walter said. “Hurry up, man!”

Benson swallowed the pill, pressed the button and stepped back into the red circle, drawing his pistol and snapping off the safety. The blue mist closed in on him.

This time, however, it did not thicken into blackness. It became luminous, brightening to a dazzle and dimming again to a colored mist, and then it cleared, while Benson stood at raise pistol, as though on a target range. He was facing a big desk at twenty feet, across a thick-piled blue rug. There was a man seated at the desk, a white-haired man with a mustache and a small beard, who wore a loose coat of some glossy plum-brown fabric, and a vividly blue neck-scarf.

The pistol centered on the v-shaped blue under his chin. Deliberately, Benson squeezed, recovered from the recoil, aimed, fired, recovered, aimed, fired. Five seconds gone. The old man slumped across the desk, his arms extended. Better make a good job of it, six, seven, eight seconds; he stepped forward to the edge of the desk, call that fifteen seconds, and put the muzzle to the top of the man's head, firing again and snapping on the safety. There had been something familiar about The Guide's face, but it was too late to check on that, now. There wasn't any face left; not even much head.

A box, on the desk, caught Benson's eye, a cardboard box with an envelope, stamped *Top Secret! For the Guide Only!* taped to it. He holstered his pistol and caught that up, stuffing it into his pocket, in obedience to an instinct to grab anything that looked like intelligence matter while in the enemy's country. Then he stepped back to the spot where the field had deposited him. He had ten seconds to spare; somebody was banging on a door when the blue mist began to gather around him.

He was crouching, the spherical plastic object in his right hand, his thumb over the button, when the field collapsed. Sure enough, right in front of him, so close that he could smell the very heat of it, was the big tank with the red star on its turret. He cursed the sextet of sanctimonious double-crossers eight thousand miles and fifty years away in space-time. The machine guns had stopped – probably because they couldn't be depressed far enough to aim at him, now; that was a notorious fault of some of the newer Pan-Soviet tanks – and he rocked back on his heels, pressed the button, and heaved, closing his eyes. As the thing left his fingers, he knew that he had thrown too hard. His muscles, accustomed to the heavier cast-iron grenades of his experience, had betrayed him. For a moment, he was closer to despair than at any other time in the whole phantasmagoric adventure. Then he was hit, with physical violence, by a wave of almost solid heat. It didn't smell like the heat of the tank's engines; it smelled like molten metal, with undertones of burned flesh. Immediately, there was a multiple explosion that threw him flat, as the tank's ammunition went up. There were no screams. It was too fast for that. He opened his eyes.

The turret and top armor of the tank had vanished. The two massive treads had been toppled over, one to either side. The body had collapsed between them, and it was running sticky trickles of molten metal. He blinked, rubbed his eyes on the back of his hand, and looked again. Of all the many blasted and burned-out tanks, Soviet and UN, that he had seen, this was the most completely wrecked thing in his experience. And he'd done that with one grenade....

At that moment, there was a sudden rushing overhead, and an instant later the barrage began falling beyond the crest of the ridge. He looked at his watch, blinked, and looked again. That barrage was due at 0550; according to the watch, it was 0726. He was sure that, ten minutes ago, when he had looked at it, up there at the head of the ravine, it had been twenty minutes to six. He puzzled about that for a moment, and decided that he must have caught the stem on something and pulled it out, and then twisted it a little, setting the watch ahead. Then, somehow, the stem had gotten pushed back in, starting it at the new setting. That was a pretty far-fetched explanation, but it was the only one he could think of.

But about this tank, now. He was positive that he could remember throwing a grenade.... Yet he'd used his last grenade back there at the supply dump. He saw his carbine, and picked it up. That silly blackout he'd had, for a second, there; he must have dropped it. Action was open, empty magazine on the ground where he'd dropped it. He wondered, stupidly, if one of his bullets couldn't have gone down the muzzle of the tank's gun and exploded the shell in the chamber.... Oh, the hell with it! The tank might have been hit by a premature shot from the barrage which was raging against the far slope of the ridge. He reset his watch by guess and looked down the valley. The big attack would be starting any minute, now, and there would be fleeing Commies coming up the valley ahead of the UN advance. He'd better get himself placed before they started coming in on him.

He stopped thinking about the mystery of the blown-up tank, a solution to which seemed to dance maddeningly just out of his mental reach, and found himself a place among the rocks to wait. Down the valley he could hear everything from pistols to mortars going off, and shouting in three or four racial intonations. After a while, fugitive Communists began coming, many of them without their equipment, stumbling in their haste and looking back over their shoulders. Most of them avoided the mouth of the ravine and hurried by to the left or right, but one little clump, eight or ten, came up the dry stream-bed, and stopped a hundred and fifty yards from his hiding-place to make a stand. They were Hindus, with outsize helmets over their turbans. Two of them came ahead, carrying a machine gun, followed by a third with a flame-thrower; the others retreated more slowly, firing their rifles to delay pursuit.

Cuddling the stock of his carbine to his cheek, he divided a ten-shot burst between the two machine-gunners, then, as a matter of principle, he shot the man with the flame-thrower. He had a dislike for flame-throwers; he killed every enemy he found with one. The others dropped their rifles and raised their hands, screaming: “Hey, Joe! Hey, Joe! You no shoot, me no shoot!”

A dozen men in UN battledress came up and took them prisoner. Benson shouted to them, and then rose and came down to join them. They were British – Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders, advertising the fact by inconspicuous bits of tartan on their uniforms. The subaltern in command looked at him and nodded.

“Captain Benson? We were warned to be on watch for your patrol,” he said. “Any of the rest of you lads get out?”

Benson shrugged. “We split up after the attack. You may run into a couple of them. Some are locals and don't speak very good English. I've got to get back to Division, myself; what's the best way?”

“Down that way. You'll overtake a couple of our walking wounded. If you don't mind going slowly, they'll show you the way to advance dressing station, and you can hitch a ride on an ambulance from there.”

Benson nodded. Off on the left, there was a flurry of small-arms fire, ending in yells of “Hey, Joe! Hey, Joe!” – the World War IV version of “Kamarad”!

His company was a non-T/O outfit; he came directly under Division command and didn't have to bother reporting to any regimental or brigade commanders. He walked for an hour with half a dozen lightly wounded Scots, rode for another hour on a big cat-truck loaded with casualties of six regiments and four races, and finally reached Division Rear, where both the Division and Corps commanders took time to compliment him on the part his last hunter patrol had played in the now complete breakthrough. His replacement, an equine-faced Spaniard with an imposing display of fruit-salad, was there, too; he solemnly took off the bracelet a refugee Caucasian goldsmith had made for his predecessor's predecessor and gave it to the new commander of what had formerly been Benson's Butchers. As he had expected, there was also another medal waiting for him.

A medical check at Task Force Center got him a warning; his last patrol had brought him dangerously close to the edge of combat fatigue. Remembering the incidents of the tank and the unaccountably fast watch, and the mysterious box and envelope which he had found in his coat pocket, he agreed, saying nothing about the questions that were puzzling him. The Psychological Department was never too busy to refuse another case; they hunted patients gleefully, each psych-shark seeking in every one proof of his own particular theories. It was with relief that he watched them fill out the red tag which gave him a priority on jet transports for home.

Ankara to Alexandria, Alexandria to Dakar, Dakar to Belém, Belém to the shattered skyline of New York, the "hurry-and-wait" procedures at Fort Carlisle, and, after the usual separation promotion, Major Fred Benson, late of Benson's Butchers, was back at teaching high school juniors the difference between H₂O and H₂SO₄.

There were two high schools in the city: McKinley High, on the east side, and Dwight Eisenhower High, on the west. A few blocks from McKinley was the Tulip Tavern, where the Eisenhower teachers came in the late afternoons; the McKinley faculty crossed town to do their after-school drinking on the west side. When Benson entered the Tulip Tavern, on a warm September afternoon, he found Bill Myers, the school psychologist, at one of the tables, smoking his pipe, checking over a stack of aptitude test forms, and drinking beer. He got a highball at the bar and carried it over to Bill's table.

“Oh, hi, Fred.” The psychologist separated the finished from the unfinished work with a sheet of yellow paper and crammed the whole business into his brief case. “I was hoping somebody'd show up....”

Benson lit a cigarette, sipped his highball. They talked at random – school-talk; the progress of the war, now in its twelfth year; personal reminiscences, of the Turkish Theater where Benson had served, and the Madras Beachhead, where Myers had been.

“Bring home any souvenirs?” Myers asked.

“Not much. Couple of pistols, couple of knives, some pictures. I don't remember what all; haven't gotten around to unpacking them, yet.... I have a sixth of rye and some beer, at my rooms. Let's go around and see what I did bring home.”

They finished their drinks and went out.

“What the devil's that?” Myers said, pointing to the cardboard box with the envelope taped to it, when Benson lifted it out of the gray-green locker.

“Bill, I don't know,” Benson said. “I found it in the pocket of my coat, on my way back from my last hunter patrol.... I've never told anybody about this, before.”

“That's the damndest story I've ever heard, and in my racket you hear some honeys,” Myers said, when he had finished. “You couldn't have picked that thing up in some other way, deliberately forgotten the circumstances, and fabricated this story about the tank and the grenade and the discrepancy in your watch subconsciously as an explanation?”

“My subconscious is a better liar than that,” Benson replied. “It would have cobbled up some kind of a story that would stand up. This business....”

“Top Secret! For the Guide Only!” Myers frowned. “That isn't one of our marks, and if it were Soviet, it'd be tri-lingual, Russian, Hindi and Chinese.”

“Well, let's see what's in it. I want this thing cleared up. I've been having

some of the nastiest dreams, lately....”

“Well, be careful; it may be booby-trapped,” Myers said urgently.

“Don't worry; I will.”

He used a knife to slice the envelope open without untaping it from the box, and exposed five sheets of typewritten onion-skin paper. There was no letterhead, no salutation or address-line. Just a mass of chemical formulae, and a concise report on tests. It seemed to be a report on an improved syrup for a carbonated soft-drink. There were a few cryptic cautionary references to heightened physico-psychological effects.

The box was opened with the same caution, but it proved as innocent of dangers as the envelope. It contained only a half-liter bottle, wax-sealed, containing a dark reddish-brown syrup.

“There's a lot of this stuff I don't dig,” Benson said, tapping the sheets of onion-skin. “I don't even scratch the surface of this rigamarole about The Guide. I'm going to get to work on this sample in the lab, at school, though. Maybe we have something, here.”

At eight-thirty the next evening, after four and a half hours work, he stopped to check what he had found out.

The school's X-ray, an excellent one, had given him a complete picture of the molecular structure of the syrup. There were a couple of long-chain molecules that he could only believe after two re-examinations and a careful check of the machine, but with the help of the notes he could deduce how they had been put together. They would be the Ingredient Alpha and Ingredient Beta referred to in the notes.

The components of the syrup were all simple and easily procurable with these two exceptions, as were the basic components from which these were made.

The mechanical guinea-pig demonstrated that the syrup contained nothing harmful to human tissue.

Of course, there were the warnings about heightened psycho-physiological effects....

He stuck a poison-label on the bottle, locked it up, and went home. The next day, he and Bill Myers got a bottle of carbonated water and mixed themselves a couple of drinks of it. It was delicious – sweet, dry, tart, sour, all of these in alternating waves of pleasure.

“We do have something, Bill,” he said. “We have something that's going to give our income-tax experts headaches.”

“You have,” Myers corrected. “Where do you start fitting me into it?”

“We're a good team, Bill. I'm a chemist, but I don't know a thing about people. You're a psychologist. A real one; not one of these night-school boys. A juvenile psychologist, too. And what age-group spends the most money in this country for soft-drinks?”

Knowing the names of the syrup's ingredients, and what their molecular structure was like, was only the beginning. Gallon after gallon of the School Board's chemicals went down the laboratory sink; Fred Benson and Bill Myers almost lived in the fourth floor lab. Once or twice there were head-shaking warnings from the principal about the dangers of over-work. The watchmen, at all hours, would hear the occasional twanging of Benson's guitar in the laboratory, and know that he had come to a dead end on something and was trying to think. Football season came and went; basketball season; the inevitable riot between McKinley and Eisenhower rooters; the Spring concerts. The term-end exams were only a month away

when Benson and Myers finally did it, and stood solemnly, each with a beaker in either hand and took alternate sips of the original and the drink mixed from the syrup they had made.

“Not a bit of difference, Fred,” Myers said. “We have it!”

Benson picked up the guitar and began plunking on it.

“Hey!” Myers exclaimed. “Have you been finding time to take lessons on that thing? I never heard you play as well as that!”

They decided to go into business in St. Louis. It was centrally located, and, being behind more concentric circles of radar and counter-rocket defenses, it was in better shape than any other city in the country and most likely to stay that way. Getting started wasn't hard; the first banker who tasted the new drink-named Evri-Flave, at Myers' suggestion – couldn't dig up the necessary money fast enough. Evri-Flave hit the market with a bang and became an instant success; soon the rainbow-tinted vending machines were everywhere, dispensing the slender, slightly flattened bottles and devouring quarters voraciously. In spite of high taxes and the difficulties of doing business in a consumers' economy upon which a war-time economy had been superimposed, both Myers and Benson were rapidly becoming wealthy. The gregarious Myers installed himself in a luxurious apartment in the city; Benson bought a large tract of land down the river toward Carondelet and started building a home and landscaping the grounds.

The dreams began bothering him again, now that the urgency of getting Evri-Flave, Inc., started had eased. They were not dreams of the men he had killed in battle, or, except for one about a huge, hot-smelling tank with a red star on the turret, about the war. Generally, they were about a strange, beautiful, office-room, in which a young man in uniform killed an older man in a plum-brown coat and a vivid blue neck-scarf. Sometimes Benson identified himself with the killer; sometimes with the old man who was killed.

He talked to Myers about these dreams, but beyond generalities about delayed effects of combat fatigue and vague advice to relax, the psychologist, now head of Sales & Promotion of Evri-Flave, Inc., could give him no help.

The war ended three years after the new company was launched. There was a momentary faltering of the economy, and then the work of reconstruction was crying hungrily for all the labor and capital that had been idled by the end of destruction, and more. There was a new flood-tide of prosperity, and Evri-Flave rode the crest. The estate at Carondelet was finished – a beautiful place, surrounded with gardens, fragrant with flowers, full of the songs of birds and soft music from concealed record-players. It made him forget the ugliness of the war, and kept the dreams from returning so frequently. All the world ought to be like that, he thought; beautiful and quiet and peaceful. People surrounded with such beauty couldn't think about war.

All the world could be like that, if only...

The UN chose St. Louis for its new headquarters – many of its offices had been moved there after the second and most destructive bombing of New York – and when the city by the Mississippi began growing into a real World Capital, the flow of money into it almost squared overnight. Benson began to take an active part in politics in the new World Sovereignty party. He did not, however, allow his political activities to distract him from the work of expanding the company to which he owed his wealth and position. There were always things to worry about.

“I don't know,” Myers said to him, one evening, as they sat over a bottle of rye in the psychologist's apartment. “I could make almost as much money practicing as a psychiatrist, these days. The whole world seems to be going pure, unadulterated nuts! That affair in Munich, for instance.”

“Yes.” Benson grimaced as he thought of the affair in Munich – a Wagnerian concert which had terminated in an insane orgy of mass suicide. “Just a week after we started our free-sample campaign in South Germany, too....”

He stopped short, downing his drink and coughing over it.

“Bill! You remember those sheets of onion-skin in that envelope?”

“The foundation of our fortunes; I wonder where you really did get that.... Fred!” His eyes widened in horror. “That caution about 'heightened psycho-physiological effects,' that we were never able to understand!”

Benson nodded grimly. “And think of all the crazy cases of mass-hysteria – that baseball-game riot in Baltimore; the time everybody started tearing off each others' clothes in Milwaukee; the sex-orgy in New Orleans. And the sharp uptrend in individual psycho-neurotic and psychotic behavior. All in connection with music, too, and all after Evri-Flave got on the market.”

“We'll have to stop it; pull Evri-Flave off the market,” Myers said. “We can't be responsible for letting this go on.”

“We can't stop, either. There's at least a two months' supply out in the hands of jobbers and distributors over whom we have no control. And we have all these contractual obligations, to buy the entire output of the companies that make the syrup for us; if we stop buying, they can sell it in competition with us, as long as they don't infringe our trade-name. And we can't prevent pirating. You know how easily we were able to duplicate that sample I brought back from Turkey. Why, our legal department's kept busy all the time prosecuting unlicensed manufacturers as it is.”

“We've got to do something, Fred!” There was almost a whiff of hysteria in Myers' voice.

“We will. We'll start, first thing tomorrow, on a series of tests – just you and I, like the old times at Eisenhower High. First, we want to be sure that Evri-Flave really is responsible. It'd be a hell of a thing if we started a public panic against our own product for nothing. And then....”

It took just two weeks, in a soundproofed and guarded laboratory on Benson's Carondelet estate, to convict their delicious drink of responsibility for that Munich State Opera House Horror and everything else. Reports from confidential investigators in Munich confirmed this. It had, of course, been impossible to interview the two thousand men and women who had turned the Opera House into a pyre for their own immolation, but none of the tiny minority who had kept their sanity and saved their lives had tasted Evri-Flave.

It took another month to find out exactly how the stuff affected the human nervous system, and they almost wrecked their own nervous systems in the process. The real villain, they discovered, was the incredible-looking long-chain compound alluded to in the original notes as Ingredient Beta; its principal physiological effect was to greatly increase the sensitivity of the aural nerves. Not only was the hearing range widened – after consuming thirty CC of Beta, they could hear the sound of an ultrasonic dog-whistle quite plainly – but the very quality of all audible sounds was curiously enhanced and altered. Myers, the psychologist, who was also well grounded in neurology, explained how the chemical produced this effect; it meant about as much to Benson as some of his chemistry did to Bill Myers. There was also a secondary, purely psychological, effect. Certain musical chords had definite effects on the emotions of the hearer, and the subject, beside being directly influenced by the music, was rendered extremely open to verbal suggestions accompanied by a suitable musical background.

Benson transferred the final results of this stage of the research to the black notebook and burned the scratch-sheets.

“That's how it happened, then,” he said. “The Munich thing was the result of all that Götterdämmerung music. There was a band at the baseball park in Baltimore. The New Orleans Orgy started while a local radio station was broadcasting some of this new dance-music. Look, these tone-clusters, here, have a definite sex-excitation effect. This series of six chords, which occur in some of the Wagnerian stuff; effect, a combined feeling of godlike isolation and despair. And these consecutive fifths – a sense of danger, anger, combativeness. You know, we could work out a whole range of emotional stimuli to fit the effects of Ingredient Beta....”

“We don't want to,” Myers said. “We want to work out a substitute for Beta that will keep the flavor of the drink without the psycho-physiological effects.”

“Yes, sure. I have some of the boys at the plant lab working on that. Gave them a lot of syrup without Beta, and told them to work out cheap additives to restore the regular Evri-Flave taste; told them it was an effort to find a cheap substitute for an expensive ingredient. But look, Bill. You and I both see, for instance, that a powerful world-wide supra-national sovereignty is the only guarantee of world peace. If we could use something like this to help overcome antiquated verbal prejudices and nationalistic emotional

attachments....”

“No!” Myers said. “I won't ever consent to anything like that, Fred! Not even in a cause like world peace; use a thing like this for a good, almost holy, cause now, and tomorrow we, or those who would come after us, would be using it to create a tyranny. You know what year this is, Bill?”

“Why, 1984,” Benson said.

“Yes. You remember that old political novel of Orwell's, written about forty years ago? Well, that's a picture of the kind of world you'd have, eventually, no matter what kind of a world you started out to make. Fred, don't ever think of using this stuff for a purpose like that. If you try it, I'll fight you with every resource I have.”

There was a fanatical, almost murderous, look in Bill Myers' eyes. Benson put the notebook in his pocket, then laughed and threw up his hands.

“Hey, Joe! Hey, Joe!” he cried. “You're right, of course, Bill. We can't even trust the UN with a thing like this. It makes the H-bomb look like a stone hatchet.... Well, I'll call Grant, at the plant lab, and see how his boys are coming along with the substitute; as soon as we get it, we can put out a confidential letter to all our distributors and syrup-manufacturers....”

He walked alone in the garden at Carondelet, watching the color fade out of the sky and the twilight seep in among the clipped yews. All the world could be like this garden, a place of peace and beauty and quiet, if only.... All the world *would* be a beautiful and peaceful garden, in his own lifetime! He had the means of making it so!

Three weeks later, he murdered his friend and partner, Bill Myers. It was a suicide; nobody but Fred Benson knew that he had taken fifty CC of pure Ingredient Beta in a couple of cocktails while listening to the queer phonograph record that he had played half an hour before blowing his brains out.

The decision had cost Benson a battle with his conscience from which he had emerged the sole survivor. The conscience was buried along with Bill Myers, and all that remained was a purpose.

Evri-Flave stayed on the market unaltered. The night before the national election, the World Sovereignty party distributed thousands of gallons of Evri-Flave; their speakers, on every radio and television network, were backgrounded by soft music. The next day, when the vote was counted, it was found that the American Nationalists had carried a few backwoods precincts in the Rockies and the Southern Appalachians and one county in Alaska, where there had been no distribution of Evri-Flave.

The dreams came back more often, now that Bill Myers was gone. Benson was only beginning to realize what a large fact in his life the companionship of the young psychologist had been. Well, a world of peace and beauty was an omelet worth the breaking of many eggs....

He purchased another great tract of land near the city, and donated it to the UN for their new headquarters buildings; the same architects and landscapists who had created the estate at Carondelet were put to work on it. In the middle of what was to become World City, they erected a small home for Fred Benson. Benson was often invited to address the delegates to the UN; always, there was soft piped-in music behind his words. He saw to it that Evri-Flave was available free to all UN personnel. The Senate of the United States elected him as perpetual U. S. delegate-in-chief to the UN; not long after, the Security Council elected him their perpetual chairman.

In keeping with his new dignities, and to ameliorate his youthful appearance, he grew a mustache and, eventually, a small beard. The black notebook in which he kept the records of his experiments was always with

him; page after page was filled with notes. Experiments in sonics, like the one which had produced the ultrasonic stun-gun which rendered lethal weapons unnecessary for police and defense purposes, or the new musical combinations with which he was able to play upon every emotion and instinct.

But he still dreamed, the same recurring dream of the young soldier and the old man in the office. By now, he was consistently identifying himself with the latter. He took to carrying one of the thick-barrelled stun-pistols always, now. Alone, he practiced constantly with it, drawing, breaking soap-bubbles with the concentrated sound-waves it projected. It was silly, perhaps, but it helped him in his dreams. Now, the old man with whom he identified himself would draw a stun-pistol, occasionally, to defend himself.

The years drained one by one through the hour-glass of Time. Year after year, the world grew more peaceful, more beautiful. There were no more incidents like the mass-suicide of Munich or the mass-perversions of New Orleans; the playing and even the composing of music was strictly controlled – no dangerous notes or chords could be played in a world drenched with Ingredient Beta. Steadily the idea grew that peace and beauty were supremely good, that violence and ugliness were supremely evil. Even competitive sports which simulated violence; even children born ugly and misshapen....

He finished the breakfast which he had prepared for himself – he trusted no food that another had touched – and knotted the vivid blue scarf about his neck before slipping into the loose coat of glossy plum-brown, then checked the stun-pistol and pocketed the black notebook, its plastileather cover glossy from long use. He stood in front of the mirror, brushing his beard, now snow-white. Two years, now, and he would be eighty – had he been anyone but The Guide, he would have long ago retired to the absolute peace and repose of one of the Elders' Havens. Peace and repose, however, were not for The Guide; it would take another twenty years to finish his task of remaking the world, and he would need every day of it that his medical staff could borrow or steal for him. He made an eye-baffling practice draw with the stun-pistol, then holstered it and started down the spiral stairway to the office below.

There was the usual mass of papers on his desk. A corps of secretaries had screened out everything but what required his own personal and immediate attention, but the business of guiding a world could only be reduced to a certain point. On top was the digest of the world's news for the past twenty-four hours, and below that was the agenda for the afternoon's meeting of the Council. He laid both in front of him, reading over the former and occasionally making a note on the latter. Once his glance strayed to the cardboard box in front of him, with the envelope taped to it – the latest improvement on the Evri-Flave syrup, with the report from his own chemists, all conditioned to obedience, loyalty and secrecy. If they thought he was going to try that damned stuff on himself....

There was a sudden gleam of light in the middle of the room, in front of his desk. No, a mist, through which a blue light seemed to shine. The stun-pistol was in his hand – his instinctive reaction to anything unusual – and pointed into the shining mist when it vanished and a man appeared in front of him; a man in the baggy green combat-uniform that he himself had worn fifty years before; a man with a heavy automatic pistol in his hand. The gun was pointed directly at him.

The Guide aimed quickly and pressed the trigger of the ultrasonic stunner. The pistol dropped soundlessly on the thick-piled rug; the man in uniform slumped in an inert heap. The Guide sprang to his feet and rounded the desk, crossing to and bending over the intruder. Why, this was the dream that had plagued him through the years. But it was ending differently. The young man – his face was startlingly familiar, somehow – was not killing the old man. Those years of practice with the stun-pistol....

He stooped and picked the automatic up. The young man was unconscious, and The Guide had his pistol, now. He slipped the automatic into his pocket and straightened beside his inert would-be slayer.

A shimmering globe of blue mist appeared around them, brightened to a dazzle, and dimmed again to a colored mist before it vanished, and when it cleared away, he was standing beside the man in uniform, in the sandy bed of a dry stream at the mouth of a little ravine, and directly in front of him, looming above him, was a thing that had not been seen in the world for close to half a century – a big, hot-smelling tank with a red star on its turret.

He might have screamed – the din of its treads and engines deafened him – and, in panic, he turned and ran, his old legs racing, his old heart pumping madly. The noise of the tank increased as machine guns joined the uproar. He felt the first bullet strike him, just above the hips – no pain; just a tremendous impact. He might have felt the second bullet, too, as the ground tilted and rushed up at his face. Then he was diving into a tunnel of blackness that had no end....

Captain Fred Benson, of Benson's Butchers, had been jerked back into consciousness when the field began to build around him. He was struggling to rise, fumbling the grenade out of his pocket, when it collapsed. Sure enough, right in front of him, so close that he could smell the very heat of it, was the big tank with the red star on its turret. He cursed the sextet of sanctimonious double-crossers eight thousand miles and fifty years away in space-time. The machine guns had stopped – probably because they couldn't be depressed far enough to aim at him, now; that was a notorious fault of some of the newer Pan-Soviet tanks. He had the bomb out of his pocket, when the machine guns began firing again, this time at something on his left. Wondering what had created the diversion, he rocked back on his heels, pressed the button, and heaved, closing his eyes. As the thing left his fingers, he knew that he had thrown too hard. His muscles, accustomed to the heavier cast-iron grenades, had betrayed him. For a moment, he was closer to despair than at any other time in the whole phantasmagoric adventure. Then he was hit, with physical force, by a wave of almost solid heat. It didn't smell like the heat of the tank's engines; it smelled like molten metal, with undertones of burned flesh. Immediately, there was a multiple explosion that threw him flat, as the tank's ammunition went up. There were no screams. It was too fast for that. He opened his eyes.

The turret and top armor of the tank had vanished. The two massive treads had been toppled over, one to either side. The body had collapsed between them, and it was running sticky trickles of molten metal. He blinked, rubbed his eyes on the back of his hand, and looked again. Of all the many blasted and burned-out tanks, Soviet and UN, that he had seen, this was the most completely wrecked thing in his experience. And he'd done that with one grenade....

Remembering the curious manner in which, at the last, the tank had begun firing at something to the side, he looked around, to see the crumpled body in the pale violet-gray trousers and the plum-brown coat. Finding his carbine and reloading it, he went over to the dead man, turning the body over. He was an old man, with a white mustache and a small white beard – why, if the mustache were smaller and there were no beard, he would pass for Benson's own father, who had died in 1962. The clothes weren't Turkish or Armenian or Persian, or anything one would expect in this country.

The old man had a pistol in his coat pocket, and Benson pulled it out and

looked at it, then did a double-take and grabbed for his own holster, to find it empty. The pistol was his own 9.5 Colt automatic. He looked at the dead man, with the white beard and the vivid blue neck-scarf, and he was sure that he had never seen him before. He'd had that pistol when he'd come down the ravine....

There was another pistol under the dead man's coat, in a shoulder-holster; a queer thing with a thick round barrel, like an old percussion pepper-box, and a diaphragm instead of a muzzle. Probably projected ultrasonic waves. He holstered his own Colt and pocketed the unknown weapon. There was a black plastileather-bound notebook. It was full of notes. Chemical formulae, yes, and some stuff on sonics; that tied in with the queer pistol. He pocketed that. He'd look both over, when he had time and privacy, two scarce commodities in the Army....

At that moment, there was a sudden rushing overhead, and an instant later, the barrage began falling beyond the crest of the ridge. He looked at his watch, blinked, and looked again. That barrage was due at 0550; according to his watch, it was 0726. That was another mystery, to go with the question of who the dead man was, where he had come from, and how he'd gotten hold of Benson's pistol. Yes, and how that tank had gotten blown up. Benson was sure he had used his last grenade back at the supply-dump.

The hell with it; he'd worry about all that later. The attack was due any minute, now, and there would be fleeing Commies coming up the valley ahead, of the UN advance. He'd better get himself placed before they started coming in on him.

He stopped thinking about the multiple mystery, a solution to which seemed to dance maddeningly just out of his mental reach, and found himself a place among the rocks to wait, and while he waited, he looked over the plastileather-bound notebook. In civil life, he had been a high school chemistry teacher, but the stuff in this book was utterly new to him. Some of it he could understand readily enough; the rest of it he could dig out for himself. Stuff about some kind of a carbonated soft-drink, and about a couple of unbelievable-looking long-chain molecules....

After a while, fugitive Communists began coming up the valley to make their stand.

Benson put away the notebook, picked up his carbine, and cuddled the stock to his cheek....