

TSYLANA

By JAMES E. GUNN

To find a thief in a society where crime does not exist, there is only one answer —manufacture a thief to catch the thief!



AT 2:30 P.M. on Monday, October 21, 2055, I became a deviant — I left my job half an hour early.

I called my Department Director and told him I wasn't feeling well. It wasn't exactly a lie or I couldn't have told it, but it was

so close to one that I fidgeted nervously in my chair, facing the screen.

I wasn't feeling well, true — but it was all in my head.

The Director looked at me shrewdly. His name was Foreman; he had a dark face and black,



Illustrated by ASHMAN

bristling eyebrows that almost met over his nose. He had been Director for only a year. If there had been such a thing as dislike, I would have disliked him. As it was, he made my back stiffen and my throat tighten, which was a strange talent in an executive.

But he had a talent for character analysis, which was why he was Director instead of a Statistician 1st Class like me, and he asked, "How long has it been since you've seen your analyst?"

"Five years," I replied.

"That's too long, Norm," he

said, taking a kindly interest. "This might be psychosomatic."

"I resent that," I snapped, feeling my circulation speed up and my face grow warm. "My childhood was just as scientific as yours."

He had used a nasty word and he knew it. I realized immediately that he had used it deliberately for its shock value and my reaction had confirmed his snap diagnosis.

"Of course, Norm," he soothed. "Everyone's was. Just call me a cautious old fool and see an analyst for my sake. Okay?"

That was different. It was an order and I naturally would obey it. "Okay," I said quickly, not giving him a chance to specify what analyst and when.

I WAITED in the privacy of my office until the publicroom registered empty and walked through quickly to the publicdoor. Automatically, I punched the time clock. My premature departure would show up in the statistics, but for the first time in my life I didn't care.

"Norm has departed from the norm," I thought, and chuckled. I hadn't laughed like that since I was a child, and I stopped suddenly. It was a bad sign. The basis of humor is surprise and disappointed expectation; neither of them have any place in a

well-run world or a well-ordered personality.

I crossed the publichall to the elevator that was waiting and stopped, shocked. There was already someone in the elevator — a small, round, middle-aged stranger with a silvery thatch of hair cut short. His astonishment at my careless intrusion on his privacy was obvious, but he recovered quickly.

As I was stepping back, mumbling my apologies, he said gently, "Wait, brother." I waited. "You've got troubles, brother," he went on with impersonal kindness. "See an analyst! Don't wait another twenty-four hours! Meanwhile, be my guest."

Overwhelmed by his benevolence, I accepted his offer and rode with him to the publicfloor in silence. As we parted he handed me a yellowed piece of stiff paper and said cryptically, "If life ain't dandy, see Andy."

After his silvery head had disappeared in the crowd outside, I looked at the paper. It said:

ANDREW Q. REDNIK
Freelance Analyst
and
Public Headshrinker

I shrugged, crumpled it in my hand and looked around for a

publican. I couldn't find any. I stuck it in my pocket and forgot about it; I had more important worries.

I put on my publicface and merged with the crowd moving past Statistical Center. The street, of course, is common and there is no right of privacy there. In the street, we are anonymous.

I maneuvered myself into the subway stream and rode home in the proper manner, my arms folded across my chest, my eyes, behind their one-way glasses, fixed on a spot just above the head of the farthest person. My thoughts were torment.

I was a Statistician 1st Class. It was a good thing to be and I was contented with it. Naturally. The annual Examinations had tested me, classified me and placed me, as they had everyone. Statistician 1st Class was the ideal position for a person with my intelligence and psychological profile.

AN almost forgotten economic theory had an excellent aphorism: *From everyone according to his ability — to everyone according to his need.* It hadn't worked for those almost forgotten economists; it wasn't an economic theory — it was a psychological concept and they had no means whatever of determining a person's ability or his need.

That was before Kinder made psychology a science and produced a society that worked. Everyone had a job that suited his talents and his psychological needs, and everyone was happy because his needs were satisfied.

Children were raised scientifically and, when they were grown, they were treated as human beings, with certain inalienable rights. A society so built could not help but be happy.

For one hundred years, the world had rocked along on an even keel. It did not go anywhere or want to; it already was there. Everybody was happy instead of swinging back and forth from gloom to ecstasy.

Ecstasy is a dangerous emotion. As a statistician, I knew that all things balance out. Ecstasy must be paid for in misery. And it is the extremes that really rock the boat and threaten society.

So I worked with the things I loved — the Computer, numbers, graphs — in a reasonably happy world and everything was rosy and private.

Until a week ago. Then it was still private but bleak.

Because I was what I was, I noticed it. Because I was what I was, I knew what it meant and I kept it to myself.

Now, because I was what I was, I had to do something about it.

My home was a conventional side-by-side duplex. I entered the common and went into my quarters and sat down at my desk. I waited long enough for my wife to notice that I was home — in case she was entertaining a lover — and then I punched for companionship.

Ordinarily a wife is the last person a man would choose, but I had to talk to somebody.

In a moment, the screen brightened. My wife's face appeared in it.

It seemed concerned; at another time, I would have worried about causing it. Naida was a good wife, mated to me intellectually and emotionally, and beautiful in my eyes.

"Norm!" she exclaimed. "What's the matter? You're home twenty-five minutes early."

"If you aren't occupied," I said formally, "I'd like the pleasure of your company."

"So early?" she asked, her eyes wide and startled.

"If it is congenial," I said stiffly.

"Of course," she said hurriedly. "It's just — I mean — five minutes?"

ONLY three minutes later, she swept into the common in her laciest negligee, looking unusually beautiful and desirable, but my mind was too troubled to be drawn off on a tangent.

"I've just uncovered a crime wave," I said miserably.

Disappointment wiped her smile away and then her features assumed a proper expression of tender attention. "What's crime?" she asked.

I was ready; I had asked the Computer. "An action that threatens the structure of society and is condemned by law."

"Like invasion of privacy?" she said brightly.

"Worse, Naida," I groaned. "Much worse."

"What could be worse than invasion of privacy?"

"Theft," I said in a low, harsh voice.

"Theft?"

"Taking something that doesn't belong to you."

"But I don't see how that could be worse than invasion of pri —"

"Invasion of privacy," I interrupted with inexcusable impatience, "can be thoughtless or accidental. Theft demands intent; it indicates a basic perversion of character."

It had been such a small thing at the start. Only a statistician would have seen it; only a statistician would have found it meaningful. A statistician works with figures day after day. There is a rhythm to statistics that sings to his inner ear, sweetly, soothingly; a dissonance is a frightful thing.

Statistical analysis was the vital job of my world. Everyone felt that way about his work, of course, but in the case of statistical analysis it was true. The duty of every society is to establish a norm and to correct marked deviations from it. In my world, statistical analysis established the norm and the analysts did the correction — what there was of it.

Last Monday, I had been scanning the Computer's daily summary. Everything had been going smoothly: *1,173,476 gal. water purified/1,173,476 gal. water consumed; 9,328 births/9,328 deaths . . .*

And finally, at the bottom of the sheet: *1 candy reward taken from baby.*

"Without consent?" Naida asked.

"How could the child consent? It couldn't even talk!"

"But that wasn't in the summary."

"No, I got the details from the nursery. The foster-mother had just given the reward to the child for compassionate behavior and had left him to enjoy it in privacy. His angry wails brought her back. The reward was gone. Someone walking past had snatched it from the baby's hands. The child was furious; his social development received a setback that will take years to overcome. Al-

though he could not describe the thief, the child exhibited a sharp and unwarranted suspicion of the nursery analyst. Presumably the thief was a man."

"How awful!" Naida shuddered. "It might have been one of our children."

I FROWNED at her. "Not ours, Naida. Society's children. We have no right to make emotional claims on them — no right, therefore, even to know which of them is ours. All children are our children; all men are our brothers."

"Yes, Norm," she said dutifully. "Norm," she went off on her own tangent, "could we have another? Child, I mean?"

I sighed heavily; it was a familiar question. "Our request is in, Naida. What else can I do? All right," I added hastily, "I'll ask again about the quota for our genetic bracket."

"Norm," Naida said distantly, "I think I'll apply for nursery duty."

I sighed again. "Yes, dear." Every month she applied, and every month she was turned down. She had the wrong psychological profile for the nursery; she couldn't help smothering the children with sticky, indiscriminate mother love and creating all sorts of fixations and complexes in them. The analysts would

sooner have admitted a hooded cobra.

"Candy from a baby!" she said, switching back with mercurial ease. "That's terrible! But it doesn't seem so very serious."

I massed my thoughts for a frontal assault on the fortress of her understanding. "Society is a delicately balanced mechanism. Societies in motion can absorb and dampen harmful vibrations, but our society is at rest. One anti-social act makes it quiver; one anti-social individual can throw the whole thing out of alignment."

"We aren't organized to handle crime. We haven't had a theft for seventy-five years — I asked the Computer. There aren't even any laws against it. Incipient criminals are nipped in the nursery. We're like a long-isolated community coming in contact with an infectious disease for which we have lost our immunity. The way the Polynesians did, we may succumb to measles and smallpox."

Naida's eyes opened wide in an expression I had always found tremendously attractive; now it irritated me. "Goodness!" she exclaimed. "We aren't in danger of that, too?"

"No, no! It was just a comparison."

I stopped to gather together my scattered thoughts. "That was

last Monday. The next day, a child's walker was stolen from a nursery on the other side of town. Wednesday, a sack of marbles disappeared from the East Side. Thursday, a football was left overnight on a playing field; it wasn't there in the morning. On Friday, it was a teen-ager's convertible; on Saturday, the virginity of a girl who was strolling through Central Park."

"But that's silly! All he had to do was ask!"

"Of course. But that wouldn't have satisfied him."

Naida frowned thoughtfully. "It sounds exactly as if the thief were growing up."

"Sunday, he grew up," I groaned. "He stole ten million dollars from the First National Bank."

NAIDA sank back in the love-seat, shocked. "How could he do that?"

"No human tellers were present to check on the computer at the bank. When a routine series of drafts on the city's general fund, signed with signatures identical with those of the City Treasurer, were presented at a public cash booth, the money, in small, untraceable bills, was delivered without question. The discrepancy was discovered this morning."

"How do you know it wasn't

the Treasurer's real signature?"

"They were identical. Real signatures always have minor variations." I hesitated. "Or so the Computer said."

"What's being done about it?"

"Nothing. I tell you, Naida, we aren't equipped to handle something like this. They're passing it off at City Hall as a clerical error. They think the money will turn up in another account."

Naida looked at me steadily with her large, violet eyes. "And you know better."

She said it firmly, but I had to justify myself all the same. "Don't you see? It's because I'm a statistician. Computers don't make mistakes; only people do. Figures don't lie. And statistics predict the future automatically. With me, extrapolation is second nature; I follow the curve to the next intersection and I know what's coming."

"Somewhere in this city is a man who will wreck our society thoroughly and permanently on the jagged rocks of his frustrations. No one but me can see it. If I don't do something, this world of ours is gone. I've got to do something! Social consciousness is bred in me! I must protect society!"

"Norm!" she said, some of my panic finally reaching her. "What are you going to do?"

"That's what's bothering me," I

confessed. "I can't track down a criminal; it's not in my psychological profile. The bloodhound has been bred out of the human race, like all the rest of the socially destructive impulses. Imagine the frustration of a detective with nothing to detect!"

Naida wrinkled her forehead. "Isn't there an old saying: *It takes a thief to catch a thief?*"

I looked at her, startled. "Darling!" I said, and caught her up in my arms. "That's it. That's the answer."

She looked surprised, then pleased. The afternoon ended pretty much the way she had expected, after all.

THE SIGN on the door was an old one. The gilt had peeled away long ago, leaving only a black outline that read:

ANDREW Q. REDNIK
Freelance Analyst
and
Public Headshrinker

The building was old, too, a relic of pre-analytic days, a green-glass-and-aluminum eyesore, very pigeon-speckled.

As far as I could tell, Andrew Q. Rednik was the only tenant left in the towering monstrosity. Why he had an office on the thirty-seventh floor, I couldn't understand.

The elevators were all sealed and hung with tattered signs: **OUT OF ORDER**. I had climbed all thirty-seven flights of stairs and I wheezed in front of the door, not feeling well—not feeling well at all.

A small sign by an old-fashioned door knob said: *Grin and come in*. I went in, but I didn't grin. The waiting room was peeling chrome and split plastic.

Faded signs were tacked all over the walls:

DON'T KID WITH YOUR ID!

**EVEN MOSES
HAD NEUROSES**

I would have turned right around and gone back down those thirty-seven flights of stairs, but Rednik was the only freelance analyst listed in the directory. That was the disadvantage of nonconformity. It was also the advantage, I reflected with scrupulous fairness. Without Rednik, I would have been helpless; no other analyst would risk the uncertainties and inevitable frustrations of freelance existence.

There was an inner door. It was closed. There was a sign on it, too: *Sit down and consider your symptoms. The analyst will be with you in a moment*.

I started searching for the chair with the fewest splits in the bottom. Before I had it picked out,

the inner door opened and Rednik stuck his head out, looking wise and benevolent like an ex-

REDNIK
analyst
d
inker

**GRIN
AND
COME IN**

tinct, snow-capped volcano.

"Rednik?" I asked.

"It ain't Santa Claus, brother."

"Who?"

"Never mind," he said. "You wouldn't remember."



IN HIS office, he had an antique steel-and-plastic desk and a traditional red-leather couch. On second glance, the couch seemed more original than traditional. On the ceiling above it, where the eyes of the recumbent patient would naturally rest,

was still another sign: *Don't second-guess the analyst!*

"Now, boy, what's the trouble?" Rednik inquired paternally.

I sank into the ancient chair opposite the desk. "I've got to do something," I said desperately, "and it isn't in my profile."

"Naturally."

"What's natural about it?"

"Why else would you come to me? If it were in your profile, it would be done and forgotten." He sighed. "That's the one trouble with this world: there's no one capable of handling the unexpected. But then, if there were, it wouldn't be this kind of world at all."

"Are you saying that there's an advantage in being unadjusted?"

"That depends on what you mean by advantage. If you mean happiness — no. If you mean power — there's always an advantage in being different, if you can handle it. In the country of the normal, the neurotic man is king." He squinted at me shrewdly. "You want to be king?"

"Of course not!" I protested, offended. "I'm happy the way things are — except for one little problem. I don't want to change anything; I want to keep things from being changed. But I've got to find somebody, and when I find him, I've got to be able to do whatever is necessary."

"Ah!" Rednik said wisely. "The rabbit wants to become a tiger."

"A what?"

"A manhunter!"

"Oh. Yes."

His stubby fingers beat out a nervous rhythm on the desk. "You know what you're asking me to do. This is against all the an-

alytic regulations. It would mean my license if anyone found out."

"If you don't do it," I said somberly, "it may mean the end of the world."

He frowned at me speculatively. "As bad as that?"

"Every bit."

He slapped the desk decisively. "I'll do it."

"Why?" I asked bluntly, surprising myself. Already my psychological profile must have changed under the frustrations of the resolved situation, for my question was a glaring invasion of privacy.

BUT Rednik took no offense.

He wagged a roguish finger at me. "Ah-ah!" he chided. "Now you are trying to analyze me. Be patient." He chuckled suddenly. "Get it? Don't be an analyst! Be a patient!"

I didn't think it was the least bit funny.

He chuckled again. "You'll get your chance. But if you must have a reason, let us say for now that I'm bored."

"Bored? Then you aren't in the right job."

"Or perhaps I've been in the right job too long."

I glanced nervously at my watch. "Well, let's get started. I've got only two hours for lunch."

"We've started already. Don't you feel repressions lifting their

snaky heads in your subconscious?"

"Well, maybe," I admitted reluctantly. "But you haven't done anything!"

He sighed. "So we must be active about it, eh?" He got up from the desk and settled himself comfortably on the couch. Folding his hands across his chest, he said, "Walk around back there where I can't see you."

"But I'm the one who's supposed to lie on the couch!"

"That's analysis, when you get your repressions removed!" he snapped, raising up on one elbow to scowl at me. "This is reverse analysis: Now walk around back there!"

Annoyed, I went behind the couch while he got comfortable.

"The first thing I can remember," he began in a distant, reminiscing voice, "was when I was four years old. I saw my father kissing my mother and I ran over to them and hit my father. I kept yelling, 'Let her go! You're hurting her! I hate you! I hate you!' After that, relations between my father and me were a little strained. —"

"Your father!" I exclaimed. "Your mother! What are you talking about? You were living with them? What a nasty situation!"

He turned and glared at me. "You aren't very good at this sort of thing, are you? You're sup-

posed to listen, not comment."

I clamped my lips shut on an irritated retort.

"When I was twenty-seven," he went on easily, "I perfected analysis and revolutionized society —"

"What are you talking about?" I demanded indignantly. "Kinder perfected analysis a hundred years ago."

Wordlessly, he motioned toward the sign on the ceiling: *Don't second-guess the analyst!*

"I'm beginning to dislike you," I growled.

He beamed at me. "Fine. Soon it will blossom into loathing."

On the way back to Statistical Center, I followed a lone pigeon for two blocks. It finally got alarmed and flew away.

THE sessions continued daily. Every day for a week, Rednik lay comfortably on his red-leather couch, rambling incoherently over an implausibly long and eventful existence, incident by incident, in disgusting detail, while I paced the floor behind him, longing to impart confidences of my own. He kept cutting me off.

Every day my repressions grew stronger and my disposition more touchy. I lost weight; I couldn't sleep; illogical impulses swept over me periodically.

I kept up my search for the

thief, poring over the daily summaries in spite of a growing distaste for the Computer, numbers and graphs. But I couldn't find another isolated statistic; the thief held his hand.

I repeatedly asked myself a question that had no answer: *What is there to steal when a man has stolen ten million dollars?*

Was I wrong? I wondered. Was the thief satisfied, his compulsion worked out? Was all my torment in vain?

There were no answers to these, either.

At home, I became brusque and tyrannical. I broke in on Naida unexpectedly with the tormented hope of finding her with a lover; when I was disappointed, as I always was, I stormed at her jealously anyway. When she was gone, I switched a couple of wires in her intercom so that it transmitted continuously, whether the receiver was turned on or not. After that, I sat for hours watching her move about her quarters unaware.

I found myself growing passionately in love with my own wife.

It was a vastly unsettling experience.

When I was at work, I called her several times a day. When I was home, I summoned her curtly at all hours.

Finally I became completely anti-social: I moved her and her belongings into my own quarters and sealed up her half of the duplex.

Oddly enough, Naida seemed to bloom under this boorish treatment. She smiled constantly. Often, as she went about her daily tasks, pushing buttons, selecting menus, she would laugh and sing. Women are inexplicable.

At the same time, I began developing strange interests in other women. The first time, I saw a girl on the street and obeyed an impulse to follow her. I followed her halfway across town before she turned and asked pleasantly, "What is you want?"

"You," I said bluntly.

She was too well raised, of course, to frustrate a fellow human being. Only much later did I realize that I hadn't even learned her name.

FROM a man who was satisfied with little, I became a tortured creature dissatisfied with abundance. Often I was unhappy. Sometimes I was miserable. And once or twice I felt the poignant stab of an ecstasy I had never dreamed.

My only consolation was that I was sacrificing myself for my world. *It had better be worth it,* I thought bitterly.

Still the thief did not strike.

The annual Examinations were upon me suddenly. In three days, I would submit my personality to their prodding and prying and precise judgments. I would do poorly. It would mean my job.

Brooding, unhappy, I returned to Rednik and his horrid revelations once more. I forced myself to open the door, my breath rasping in my throat. I closed it behind me and stared at it blindly for a moment, bracing myself for the ordeal that waited on the red-leather couch.

My blurred eyes focused. I saw something I should have seen seven days before.

The letters on the door spelled:

KINDER Q. WERDNA
tsylana ecnaleerF
dna
reknirhsdaeH cilbuP

I pronounced each word slowly. They made a kind of sense, like an ancient root language — like reverse analysis. A reverse analyst, of course, is a *tsylana*. A *tsylana ecnaleerf*.

I shuddered.

It made even more sense than that. *Rednik — Kinder. Kinder — Rednik*. It was the sort of thing a man would do who would put "Don't Kid with Your Id!" on his waiting room wall.

I burst through the inner door and said accusingly: "You're Kinder!"

"That's what I told you the first day," he said blandly.

"Because you didn't expect me to believe you."

He shrugged carelessly. "It was a matter of indifference whether you believed me or not."

"Everything you told me was true," I said with a shaky, horrified voice. "All that fantastic assemblage of enormities and atrocities."

"Perhaps. And, again, perhaps not."

His smile was infuriating.

I SHIVERED with the chill fury of my inability to pin him down. If there had been a weapon handy, I would have killed him without hesitation and without remorse. "I hate you!" I said violently. "Why? Why? Why make rules and then shatter them?"

"Let me tell you a story," he began.

"Not that again!"

"This is a different kind of story," he went on, unperturbed. "Once upon a time, there was a Creator. He made a man and a woman, and He created a perfect place for them to live in. He called it Paradise. Every day, He looked out on Paradise and saw the same stupid, happy people, not wanting anything because everything was available, not going anywhere because there was

nowhere to go, unchanging because there was no reason for change.

"Finally He was tempted to create a little sin and therewith He gave his creatures change, misery, ecstasy and free will. For without sin, there is no free will; without evil, there is no choice."

I stared at him vacantly. I couldn't stop thinking about a man named Kinder. "It's a lie," I said. "That would make you about a hundred and thirty years old. Nobody lives that long."

Rednik sighed. "One hundred and twenty-seven, boy. You didn't listen good. And that isn't unusual in this era of the integrated personality. Lots of people will live that long. Doctors used to be familiar with diseases they called psychosomatic. Today it works the other way around: the mind makes the body well instead of sick. Well, boy, good-by," he said abruptly. "The treatment is over."

"You mean I'm finished?" I exclaimed.

"No. *I'm* finished. *You've* just begun. You have frustrations enough. Frustrations are like rabbits, you know. From now on, they will breed themselves."

"But —" I began, and the next moment he was gone.

Only it wasn't the next moment. Two hours had passed in the flicker of a thought. I was

late getting back to the office and Foreman spoke sharply to me.

It was completely frustrating.

A GAIN and again, I went back to Rednik's office, climbing the thirty-seven flights of stairs with painful persistence, but the place was as deserted as the rest of the building. The only change was a slowly deepening layer of dust on the signs, the desk and the red-leather couch.

It was a constant irritation.

But soon there was no time for that. The annual Examinations were at hand. For three nights, I did not sleep. I twisted in my pneumatic crib, trying to think of something I could do, but all I could think of was a foolish phrase that kept running through my mind on anapestic feet: *In the country of the normal, the neurotic man is king.*

But I wasn't a king. I was so far from being king that I was going to lose my job, such as it was. I couldn't even find the thief I had set out upon this cruel road to catch, for whom all this torment had been necessary.

And then, the night before the Examinations, I sat up straight in my crib and shouted: "That's it!"

A few days before, I would have hurried to the analyst if I had started talking to myself.

"That's what?" mumbled Naida, startled out of her sleep, sitting up beside me looking quite beautiful.

But my eyes were filled with another vision. "Shhh!" I said. "Go back to sleep!"

"Yes, dear," she said meekly.

I got up, dressed quickly and hurried to the office. It was ghostly at that time of night, but I soon forgot my environment. I was too busy formulating a question for the Computer.

The Computer was, actually, Statistical Center, and the offices in it were little cavities scooped out of the giant brain. Statistics is the common denominator of all phenomena and the Computer knew everything — including the questions asked in previous Examinations and the weighting of the answers.

It could compare the questions and answers of earlier Examinations, graph their evolution and extrapolate the questions that would be asked this year and the answers I needed. My job was to phrase that order in Computer language.

It took me until dawn.

The moment I set it in, the Computer started chattering. A sheaf of papers began piling up on my desk.

It was a shock: the Computer was fast, but not that fast. There had to be another answer, a two-

part answer: (1) this was no extrapolation; the questions and answer for this year's Examinations were already on file; and (2) someone had already asked for them.

LIFE HAD become very confusing lately. For a society planned from womb to tomb, where there was a place for everyone and everyone was in his place, it was presenting me with a lot of surprises.

I picked up the sheaf of papers, folded them and stuffed them into my blouse. A man could have any position in the world, I thought. All he had to do was to ask the Computer.

No normal person would, of course. That would be cheating. And no normal person would want a position for which he was not suited.

But, then, my thief was not normal.

Neither was I.

I assumed my publicface and moved with the growing crowd to the giant, sprawling Examinations building. I submitted my profile card to a scanner. It clucked out a cubicle assignment. I would quickly become lost, trying to find it, but loudspeakers called out directions constantly: "ONE-A TURN RIGHT; ONE-B TURN LEFT. IF YOU HAVE A RED CARD, YOU ARE IN THE WRONG WING;

TURN AROUND AND GO BACK TO THE FIRST CORRIDOR PAINTED RED AND FOLLOW IT TO THE END."

I sank wearily into the cubicle's padded chair. It was lucky I had the answers; I was in no condition to figure them out for myself.

There was a slot for my profile card. As soon as I had pushed the card into it, the Examinations began. On the screen in front of me, the following question appeared:

There are many types of pleasure and we do not all like the same things. Of the following activities, choose the one which would please you the most:

- 1) *Eating a delicious meal*
- 2) *Finishing a difficult job*
- 2) *Supervising a large operation*
- 4) *Bringing pleasure to a friend*
- 5) *Making love to a beautiful woman*

I stared at the choices blankly, unable to decide which of them I would really prefer, unable even to determine which of them I should prefer. I slipped the sheaf of papers out of my blouse and found the first question. The right choice was 4.

I SIGHED and punched the fourth button on the panel under the screen and had a horrid

thought: *Had the Computer understood me?*

There was one outcome of the Examinations that nobody talked about: elimination. It was a sort of artificial selection of desired characteristics.

I shuddered and forced myself to go on. The next question had appeared and I had to answer it.

So it went, question after question, for three days, eight hours a day. After a few hours, the brain became so numb that the instinctive response was the only one possible.

But I had the answers—the right answers, I prayed. After a while, I stopped reading the questions and checked off numbers.

I slipped once. I waited nervously in my office after the Examinations were finished and finally my new profile was delivered with a pneumatic *thunk*. I ripped open the cardboard container and read:

The enclosed card has a magnetic reproduction of your new psychological profile and will become part of your permanent records. It indicates that you have a high altruism index and that your proper position is political leadership, 99.98% certain. There was only one higher index in the Examinations.

A new position, therefore, has been created for you. Beginning

tomorrow, you will fill the position of Deputy Mayor.

A cold elation filled my emotional centers. I let it spill over freely, because I had done what I set out to do. I had found the thief.

Symbolic thefts had not been enough for him. He had stolen, finally, the most significant thing available in this political subdivision: power.

Tomorrow, justice would catch up with the criminal.

Today, I would be busy. Just before quitting time, I located my new office in City Hall and put in a call to the Mayor. A little blonde secretary with an interestingly full lower lip answered.

"Is the new Mayor in?" I inquired cautiously.

"He's been here, sir, and gone. Will you leave a message?"

"No. I'll see him in the morning." *I would, too*, I thought grimly.

I went over the Mayor's office inch by inch and drawer by drawer. Next morning, I returned before ten and had plenty of time to do what was necessary before anyone arrived.

WHEN the Mayor's summons arrived, I was ready. I walked steadily down the narrow private corridor to his office, feeling a little breathless but under

remarkable control for the circumstances. I knocked at his door. A moment later, it slid aside.

"You!" I cried.

The new Mayor was Foreman. His black eyebrows knitted themselves together over his nose as he said, almost simultaneously, "What are you doing here?"

I recovered first. "I'm the new Deputy Mayor."

"Fantastic!"

"No more fantastic than you jumping to head of my department and then Mayor of the city."

"I've always been an executive. You're a statistician."

"I was a statistician."

I watched the statement soak in through several layers of preconceptions. His eyes were suddenly startled. "So! The old screwball sent somebody after me. I should have got rid of him when I had a chance."

"Rednik?"

His hand was below desk level. "Who else?" He raised his hand; in it was something blue, complicated and metallic. "And you just walk right in and announce yourself!"

"What's that?" I asked sharply.

"The card in the museum case called it a pistol. It propels explosive pellets by expansion of gases."

"Once a thief, always a thief," I sneered.

"Exactly. And now I'm going



to commit the ultimate theft — I'm going to steal your life."

"You can't get away with it."

"Of course I can. Who would question me if I said you suddenly went mad and blew yourself up?" He grinned suddenly. "In the country of the normal, the neu-

rotic man is king."

"I don't understand," I said.

"How did you slip through? You're what happened to me. What happened to you?"

"Who knows? Rednik said it was an unstable genetic pattern collapsing under the psychic

stresses of approaching middle age, but he was full of it up to his neck. Whatever it was, it made me cheat the Examinations into giving me a job I couldn't handle. I looked up Rednik. Every afternoon, he came to my office. I hated him!"

"Even then you were stealing time."

H HE GRINNED. "Don't think you can make me forget what I'm going to do. You're going to get it. Now." His hand tightened on the gun.

"You can't do it," I said. "You're a thief, not a murderer. Your conditioning is too strong for you to defy."

"Don't bet on it!" he got out between clenched teeth. He put his left hand on the pistol to help the right hand squeeze.

I watched him interestedly. "It's no use anyway," I said casually. "I came in early this morning and packed the barrel full of quick-setting plastic cement."

"Now I know you're lying. I'm not going to look at it and give you a chance to jump me." He squeezed the trigger.

I dived to the floor as the fragments flew over my head.

He had a strangely peaceful expression on his face when he died. Rednik had taught me this: the truth can be more deceptive than a lie.

The office was suddenly filled with people, forgetful of manners and propriety. "What happened? What happened?" asked the little blonde secretary. And then, more politely, "I beg your pardon for this intrusion, sir, but there was a loud noise in here."

I stared at her for a moment, speechless, struck by a sudden vision of the future. It was not at all what I had once imagined, but it would be interesting. The secretary would help me make it so, I was sure.

"A very sad thing," I said gravely. "The Mayor was demonstrating an ancient weapon and it exploded."

"He's dead?" she gasped and looked at me with wide blue eyes. "Then you'll be Mayor!"

"Why," I exclaimed in mock surprise, "so I will!"

IT WAS almost quitting time before the mess was cleaned up and I could relax behind the Mayor's desk.

Mayor! The word had a good sound to it. Governor sounded better, though. And President was best of all.

But they would have to wait their turn.

I chuckled. *In the country of the normal, the neurotic man is king.*

But for some obscure reason, I couldn't relax. I couldn't under-

stand why. I had found my thief and punished him. I had power and the promise of more power. What more could a neurotic want?

What about Rednik-Kinder? I thought. What was he doing? Was he lying on a couch somewhere, working his twisted magic on some new patient? Was he creating another neurotic to come after me?

I flipped open the switch of the office communicator. "Attention, everyone. In view of the emergency, office hours will be until four o'clock today." I called Personnel. "I want two strong men with quick reflexes and high loyalty indexes. And I want all public records searched for a freelance analyst named Rednik or Kinder. Or any freelance analyst at all."

There, I thought, that should do it!

But I still couldn't relax. I twisted in my pneumatic crib that night until Naida snuggled up to me and said, "What's the matter, darling? Can't you sleep?"

I pushed her away roughly. "No!"

I knew what I lacked: security. There was no security for a neurotic. If he had security, he would not be a neurotic.

Even if I found Rednik-Kinder and got rid of him somehow, it wouldn't do me any good. The

measures I had taken to find him and to protect myself would create imbalances which would lead inevitably to my destruction.

My world was no longer the country of the normal. Society was on the move again, picking up speed before the winds of passion, blowing across unknown seas toward some unknown destination.

There was one saying Rednik-Kinder had forgotten to tell me; *Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown.*

— JAMES E. GUNN

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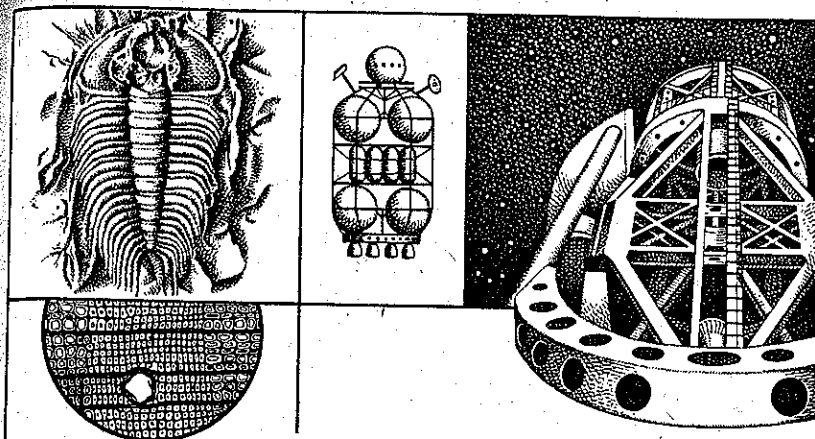
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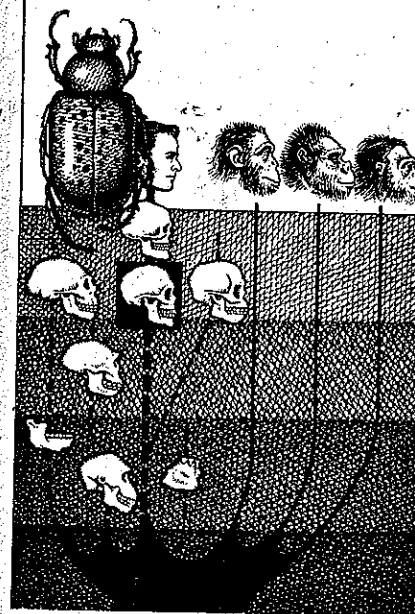
for your information

By WILLY LEY

THE HOLLOW EARTH

ABOUT two years ago, I received in the mails an envelope postmarked Lindau, which I knew to be a town near Lake Constance. It was adorned with two rubber stamps: one was simply the name and address of the sender; the other said (in German, of course), "Do not throw away. Please pass this on." Inside were two small pamphlets, one in German and one in English, both substantially the same, advertising matter for three books written by one Karl Neupert.

Below Mr. Neupert's picture



FOR YOUR INFORMATION