

Looking for Something?

Mirsar Wees, chief indoctrinator for Sol III sub-prefecture, was defying the intent of the Relaxation-room in his quarters. He buzzed furiously back and forth from metal wall to metal wall, his pedal-membrane making a cricket-like sound as the vacuum cups disengaged.

"The fools!" he thought. "The stupid, incompetent, mindless fools!"

Mirsar Wees was a Denebian. His race had originated more than three million earth years ago on the fourth planet circling the star Deneb—a planet no longer existing. His profile was curiously similar to that of a tall woman in a floor-length dress, with the vacuum-cup pedal-membrane contacting the floor under the "skirt." His eight specialized extensors waved now in a typical Denebian rage-pattern. His mouth, a thin transverse slit entirely separate from the olfactory-lung orifice directly below it, spewed forth a multi-lingual stream of invective against the assistant who cowered before him.

"How did this happen?" he shouted. "I take my first vacation in one hundred years and come back to find my career almost shattered by your incompetence!"

Mirsar Wees turned and buzzed back across the room. Through his vision-ring, an organ somewhat like a glitter-

ing white tricycle-tire jammed down about one-third of the distance over his head, he examined again the report on Earthling Paul Marcus and maintained a baleful stare upon his assistant behind him. Activating the vision cells at his left, he examined the wall chronometer.

"So little time," he muttered. "If only I had someone at Central Processing who could see a deviant when it comes by! Now I'll have to take care of this bumble myself, before it gets out of hand. If they hear of it back at the bureau..."

Mirsar Wees, the Denebian, a cog in the galaxy-wide korad-farming empire of his race, pivoted on his pedal-membrane and went out a door which opened soundlessly before him. The humans who saw his flame-like profile this night would keep alive the folk tales of ghosts, djinn, little people, fairies, elves, pixies ...

Were they given the vision to see it, they would know also that an angry overseer had passed. But they would not see this, of course. That was part of Mirsar Wees' job.

It was mainly because Paul Marcus was a professional hypnotist that he obtained an aborted glimpse of the rulers of the world.

The night it happened he was inducing a post-hypnotic command into the mind of an audience-participant to his show on the stage of the Roxy Theater in Tacoma, Washington.

Paul was a tall, thin man with a wide head which appeared large because of this feature although it really was not. He wore a black tailcoat and formal trousers, jewelled cuff links and chalkwhite cuffs, which gleamed and flashed as he gestured. A red spotlight in the balcony gave a Mephisto cast to his stage-setting, which was dominated by a backdrop of satin black against which gleamed two giant, luminous eyes. He was billed as "Marcus the Mystic" and he looked the part.

The subject was a blonde girl whom Paul had chosen because she displayed signs of a higher than ordinary intelligence, a general characteristic of persons who are easily hypnotized. The woman had a good figure and showed sufficient leg when she sat down on the chair to

excite whistles and cat-calls from the front rows. She flushed, but maintained her composure.

"What is your name, please?" Paul asked.

She answered in a contralto voice, "Madelyne Walker."

"Miss or Mrs.?"

She said, "Miss."

Paul held up his right hand. From it dangled a gold chain on the end of which was a large paste gem with many facets cut into its surface. A spotlight in the wings was so directed that it reflected countless star-bursts from the gem.

"If you will look at the diamond," Paul said. "Just keep your eyes on it."

He began to swing the gem rhythmically, like a pendulum, from side to side. The girl's eyes followed it. Paul waited until her eyes were moving in rhythm with the swinging bauble before he began to recite in a slow monotone, timed to the pendulum:

"Sleep. You will fall asleep . . . deep sleep . . . deep sleep . . . asleep . . . deep asleep . . . asleep . . . asleep . . ."

Her eyes followed the gem.

"Your eyelids will become heavy," Paul said. "Sleep. Go to sleep. You are falling asleep . . . deep, restful sleep . . . healing sleep . . . deep asleep . . . asleep . . . asleep . . . asleep . . ."

Her head began to nod, eyelids to close and pop open, slower and slower. Paul gently moved his left hand up to the chain. In the same monotone he said, "When the diamond stops swinging you will fall into a deep, restful sleep from which only I can awaken you." He allowed the gem to swing slower and slower in shorter and shorter sweeps. Finally, he put both palms against the chain and rotated it. The bauble at the end of the chain began to whirl rapidly, its facets coruscating with the reflections of the spotlight.

Miss Walker's head fell forward and Paul kept her from falling off the chair by grasping her shoulder. She was in deep trance. He began demonstrating to the audience the classic symptoms which accompany this—in-

sensitivity to pain, body rigidity, complete obedience to the hypnotist's voice.

The show went along in routine fashion. Miss Walker barked like a dog. She became the dowager queen with dignified mien. She refused to answer to her own name. She conducted the imaginary symphony orchestra. She sang an operatic aria.

The audience applauded at the correct places in the performance. Paul bowed. He had his subject deliver a wooden bow, too. He wound up to the finale.

"When I snap my fingers you will awaken," he said. "You will feel completely refreshed as though after a sound sleep. Ten seconds after you awaken you will imagine yourself on a crowded streetcar where no one will give you a seat. You will be extremely tired. Finally, you will ask the fat man opposite you to give you his seat. He will do so and you will sit down. Do you understand?"

Miss Walker nodded her head.

"You will remember nothing of this when you awaken," Paul said.

He raised his hand to snap his fingers...

It was then that Paul Marcus received his mind-jarring idea. He held his hand up, fingers ready to snap, thinking about this idea, until he heard the audience stirring restlessly behind him. Then he shook Ms head and snapped his fingers.

Miss Walker awakened slowly, looked around, got up, and exactly ten seconds later began the streetcar hallucinations. She performed exactly as commanded, again awakened, and descended confusedly from the stage to more applause and whistles.

It should have been gratifying. But from the moment he received *the* idea, the performance could have involved someone other than Paul Marcus for all of the attention he gave it. Habit carried him through the closing routine, the brief comments on the powers of hypnotism, the curtain calls. Then he walked back to his dressing room slowly, preoccupied, unbuttoning his studs on the way as he always did following the last performance of the night. The concrete cave below stage echoed to his footsteps.

In the dressing room he removed the tailcoat and hung it in the wardrobe. Then he sat down before the dressing table mirror and began to cream his face preparatory to removing the light makeup he wore. He found it hard to meet his own eyes in the mirror.

"This is silly," he told himself sourly. A knock sounded at the door. Without turning, he said, "Come in."

The door opened hesitantly and the blonde Miss Walker stepped into the room.

"Excuse me," she said. "The man at the door said you were in here and..."

Seeing her in the mirror, Paul turned around and stood up.

"Is something wrong?" he asked. Miss Walker looked around her as though to make sure they were alone before she answered. "Not exactly," she said.

Paul gestured to a settee beside his dressing table. "Sit down, won't you?" he asked. He returned to the dressing table as Miss Walker seated herself.

"You'll excuse me if I go on with this chore," he said, taking a tissue to the grease paint under his chin,

Miss Walker smiled. "You remind me of a woman at her nightly beauty care," she said.

Paul thought: Another stage-struck miss, and the performance gives her the excuse to take up my time. He glanced at the girl out of the corners of his eyes. "Not bad, though..."

"You haven't told me to what I owe the pleasure of your company," he said.

Miss Walker's face clouded with thought.

"It's really very silly," she said. Probably,

Paul thought.

"Not at all," he said. "Tell me what's on your mind."

"Well, it's an idea I had while my friends were telling me what I did on the stage," she said. She grinned wryly. "I had the hardest time believing that there actually wasn't a streetcar up there. I'm still not absolutely convinced. Maybe you brought in a dummy streetcar with a lot of

actors. Oh, I don't know!" She shook her head and put a hand to her eyes.

The way she said, "I don't know!" reminded Paul of his own idea; *the* idea. He decided to give Miss Walker the fast brush-off in order to devote more time to thinking this new idea through to some logical conclusion.

"What about the streetcar?" he asked. The girl's face assumed a worried expression. "I thought I was on a real streetcar," she said. "There was no audience, no... hypnotist. Nothing. Just the reality of riding the streetcar and being tired like you are after a hard day's work. I saw the people on the car. I smelled them. I felt the car under my feet. I heard the money bounce in the coin-catcher and all the other noises one hears on a streetcar—people talking, a man opening his newspaper. I saw the fat man sitting there in front of me. I asked him for his seat. I even felt embarrassed. I heard him answer and I sat down in his seat. It was warm and I felt the people pressing against me on both sides. It was very real."

"And what bothers you?" Paul asked.

She looked up from her hands which were tightly clasped in her lap.

"That bothers me," she said. "That streetcar. It was real. It was as real as anything I've ever known. It was as real as now. I believed in it. Now I'm told it wasn't real." Again she looked down at her hands. "What am I to believe?"

This is getting close to *the* idea, Paul thought.

"Can you express what bothers you in any other way?" he asked.

She looked him squarely in the eyes. "Yes," she said. "I got to thinking while my friends were talking to me. I got to wondering. What if all this—" she gestured around her—"our whole lives, our world, everything we see, feel, hear, smell, or sense in any way is more of the same. A hypnotic delusion!"

"Precisely!" Paul exhaled the word,

"What did you say?" she asked.

"I said, 'Precisely!'"

Her brows drew together. "Why?"

Paul turned toward her and rested his left elbow on the

dressing table. "Because," he said, "at the very moment I was telling you what you would do when you awakened, at the moment I was giving you the commands which resulted in your hallucination, I got the same idea."

"My goodness!" she said. The very mildness of her exclamation made it seem more vehement than if she had sworn.

Paul turned back to the dressing table mirror. "I wonder if there could be something in telepathy as well?"

Miss Walker looked at him in the mirror, the room seeming to draw in closely behind her. "It was an idea I couldn't keep to myself," she said. "I told my friends—I came with a married couple—but they just laughed at me. I decided on the spur of the moment to come back here and talk to you and I did it before I could lose my nerve. After all, you're a hypnotist. You should know something about this."

"It'll take some looking into," Paul said, "I wonder..." He turned toward Miss Walker. "Are you engaged tonight?"

Her expression changed. She looked at him as though her mother were whispering in her ear: "Watch out! Watch out! He's a man."

"Well, I don't know..." she said.

Paul put on his most winning smile. "I'm no backstage wolf," he said. "Please. I feel as though somebody had asked me to cut the Gordian knot, and I'd rather untie it—but I need help."

"What could we do?" she asked.

It was Paul's turn to hesitate. "There are several ways to approach the problem," he said. "We in America have only scratched the surface in our study of hypnotism." He doubled up his fist and thudded it gently on the dressing table. "Hell! I've seen witch doctors in Haiti who know more about it than I do. But..."

"What would you do first?" she asked.

"I'd... I'd..." Paul looked at her for a moment as though he really saw her for the first time. "I'd do this," he said. "Make yourself comfortable on that settee. Lean back. That's it."

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Well," Paul said, "it's pretty well established that these sensory hallucinations are centered in one part of the human nervous system which is laid bare by hypnotism. It's possible, by using hypnotism, to get at the commands other hypnotists have put there. I'm going to put you back in deep trance and let you search for the commands yourself. If something is commanding us to live an illusion, the command should be right there with all the others." "I don't know," she said.

"Please," Paul urged. "We might be able to crack this thing right here and now in just a few minutes."

"All right." She still sounded hesitant, but she leaned back as directed.

Paul lifted his paste gem from the dressing table and focused the table spotlight on it. "Look at the diamond," he said. . . .

This time she fell into the trance more readily. Paul checked her for pain threshold, muscular control. She responded appropriately. He began questioning: "Do you hear my voice?" "Yes," she said.

"Do you know what hypnotic commands are in your mind?" he asked.

There was a long pause. Her lips opened dryly. "There are ... commands," she said. "Do you obey them?" he asked. "I must."

"What is the most basic of these commands?" he asked.

"I... can ... not... tell."

Paul almost rubbed his hands. A simple 'Don't talk about it,' he thought

"Just nod your head if I repeat the command," he said.

"Does it say, 'You must not tell?'" Her head nodded.

Paul rubbed his hands against his pants legs and realized suddenly that he was perspiring excessively. "What is it you must not tell?" he asked. She shook her head without speaking. "You must tell me," he said. "If you do not tell me, your right foot will begin to burn and itch unbearably and

will continue to do so until you do tell me. Tell me what it is that you have been commanded not to tell."

Again she shook her head. She reached down and began to scratch her right foot. She pulled off her shoe.

"You must tell me," Paul said. "What is the first word of the command?"

The girl looked up at him, but her eyes remained unfocused.

"You ..." she said.

It was as though she had brought the word from some dark place deep within her and the saying of it was almost too much to bear. She continued to scratch her right leg.

"What is the second word?" Paul asked. She tried to speak, but failed. "Is it 'must'?" he asked. "Nod your head if it is." She nodded her head. "You 'must' what?" Again she was wordless.

He thought about it for a moment. "Sensory perception," he thought. He leaned forward. "Is it 'You must sense...'?" he asked. "Is it 'You must sense only...'?" She relaxed. Her head nodded and she said, "Yes." Paul took a deep breath.

"What is it 'You must sense only...'?" he asked. She opened her mouth, her lips moved, but no sound issued.

He felt like screaming at her, dragging the answer from her mind with his hands.

"What is it?" His voice cracked on the question. "Tell me!"

She shook her head from side to side. He noticed signs of awakening.

Again he took a deep breath. "What will happen to you if you tell me?" "I'll die," she said.

He leaned forward and lowered his voice to a confidential tone. "That is foolishness," he said. "You can't die just because you say a few words. You know that. Now tell me what it is that you have been ordered to sense."

She stared straight ahead of her at nothing, mouth open. Paul lowered his head to look directly into her eyes. "Do you see me?" he asked.

"No," she said.

"What do you see?" he asked.

"I see death."

"Look at me instead," Paul said. "You remember me."

"You are death," she said.

"That's nonsense! Look at me," she commanded.

Her eyes opened wider. Paul stared into them. Her eyes seemed to grow and grow and grow and grow . . . Paul found himself unable to look away. There was nothing else in the world except two blue-gray eyes. A deep, resonant voice, like a low-register cello, filled his mind.

"You will forget everything that has happened tonight," it said. "You will die rather than remember. You will, you *must*, sense only those things which you have been commanded to sense. I, _____, command it.

Do you remember me?"

Paul's lips formed the word, "yes".

"Who am I?" the voice asked.

Paul dampened his dry lips with his tongue. "You are death," he said.

Bureaucracy has a kind of timeless, raceless mold which makes its communications recognizable as to type by the members of any bureau anywhere. The multiple copies, the precise wording to cover devious intent, the absolute protocol of address—all are of a pattern, whether the communication is to the Reconstruction Finance Corporation or the Denebian Bureau of Indoctrination.

Mirsar Wees knew the pattern as another instinct. He had been supervisor of indoctrination and overseer of the korad farming on Sol III for one hundred and fifty-seven of the planet's years. In that time, by faithfully following the letter of the Indoctrination Bureau's code and never an individual interpretation of its spirit, he had insured for himself a promotion to Coordinator of the entire Sol prefecture whenever such an opening occurred.

Having met another threat to his position and resolved it, knowing the security of his tenure, he sat before the mechanical secretary-transmitter in his office and dictated a letter to the Bureau. The vision-ring around his head glowed a dull amber as he relaxed the receptors in it. His

body stretched out comfortably, taking a gentle massage from the chair.

"There has been considerable carelessness lately with the training of neo-indoctrinators," he said into the communo-tube.

Let a few heads fall at the bureau, he thought.

"There seems to be a feeling that, because we of the Sol prefecture are dealing with lesser beings, a lesser amount of care need be taken with the prefecture's indoctrinators. I have just dealt with a first-order threat to the Sol III korad supply, a threat which was directly attributable to neo-indoctrinator carelessness. A deviant was allowed to pass through the hands of three of our latest acquisitions from the College of Indoctrinators. These indoctrinators have been sent back for retraining."

He thought in satisfaction: They will reflect that the korad secreted by the glands of our charges is necessary for their own immortality, and will be more severe at the training center because of that. And pensively: It is almost time for me to tell them of our breeding experiments to bring the korad glands to the exterior of these creatures, making more frequent draining possible. They will particularly appreciate the niceties of indoctrination—increasing the mating pattern, increasing individual peril and, thereby, the longevity gland secretion, and the more strict visual limitation to keep the creatures from discovering the change....

"I am sending a complete visio-corder report on how I met this threat," he spoke into the tube. "Briefly, I insinuated myself into the earth-being's presence and installed a more severe command. Standard procedure. It was not deemed practical to eliminate the creature because of the latest interpretations on command interference; it was felt that the being's elimination might set off further thought-patterns inimical to our designs.

"The creature was, therefore, commanded to mate with another of its ilk who is more stringently under our control. The creature also was removed from any labor involving the higher nerve-centers and has been put to another task, that of operating a transportation device called a streetcar.

"The mate has been subjected to the amputation of an appendage. Unfortunately, before I could take action, the creature I treated had started along an exceedingly clever line of action and had installed irremovable commands which made the appendage useless."

They will see how much of a deviant the creature was, he thought, and how careless the new indoctrinators were.

"The indoctrinator service must keep in mind at all times what happened to create the Sol planetoid belt. Those bodies, as we all know, once were the planet Dirad, the greatest korad source in the entire galaxy. Slipshod procedure employed by indoctrinators set up a situation similar to the one I have just nipped, and we were forced to destroy the entire planet. The potency of minds which have slipped from our control should be kept constantly before our attention. Dirad is an object lesson.

"The situation here is again completely normal, of course, and the korad supply is safe. We can go on draining the immortality of others—but *only as long as we maintain constant vigilance.*"

He signed it, "Cordially, Mirsar Wees, Chief Indoctrinator, Sol Sub-prefecture."

Someday, he thought, it will be "Coordinator."

Rising from the mechano-secretary, Mirsar Wees moved over to the "incoming" tube of his report-panel and noticed a tube which his new assistant had tabbed, with the yellow band of "extreme importance."

He inserted the tube into a translator, sat down, and watched as it dealt out the report:

"A Hindu creature has seen itself as it really is," the report said.

Mirsar Wees reached over and put a tracer-beam on his new assistant to observe how that worthy was meeting this threat.

The report buzzed on: "The creature went insane as per indoctrination command, but most unfortunately it is a member of a sect which worships insanity. Others are beginning to listen to its babblings."

The report concluded: "I make haste."

Mirsar Wees leaned back, relaxed and smiled blandly. The new assistant showed promise.