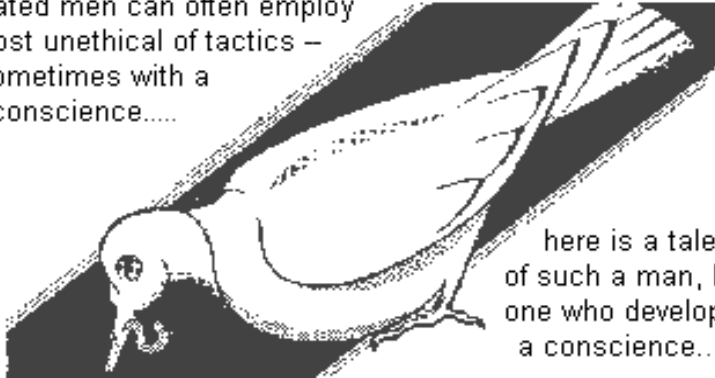


MACK REYNOLDS

Dedicated men can often employ the most unethical of tactics – and sometimes with a clear conscience.....



here is a tale of such a man, but one who developed a conscience.....

PACIFIST

IT WAS ANOTHER TIME, another space, another continuum.

Warren Casey called, "Boy! You're Fredric McGivern, aren't you?"

The lad stopped and frowned in puzzlement. "Well, yes, sir." He was a youngster of about nine. A bit plump, particularly about the face.

Warren Casey said, "Come along, son. I've been sent to pick you up."

The boy saw a man in his mid-thirties, a certain dynamic quality behind the facial weariness. He wore a uniform with which young McGivern was not familiar, but which looked reassuring.

"Me, sir?" the boy said. "You've been sent to pick me up?"

"That's right, son. Get into the car and I'll tell you all about it."

"But my father said . . ."

"Your father sent me, son. Senator McGivern. Now, come along or he'll be angry."

"Are you sure?" Still frowning, Fredric McGivern climbed into the helio-car. In seconds it had bounded into the second level and then the first, to speed off to the southwest.

It was more than an hour before the kidnapping was discovered.

Warren Casey swooped in, dropped two levels precipitately and brought the helio-car down in so dainty a landing that there was no perceptible touch of air cushion to garage top.

He fingered a switch with his left hand, even as he brought his right out of his jacket holding a badly bummed-out pipe. While the garage's elevator sunk into the recess below, he was loading the aged briar from an equally ancient pouch.

In the garage, Mary Baca was waiting nervously. She said, even though she must have been able to see the boy, "You got him?"

"That's right." Casey said. "I've given him a shot. He'll be out for another half hour or so. Take over, will you, Mary?"

The nurse looked down at the crumpled figure bitterly. "It couldn't have been his father. We have to pick on a child."

Casey flicked a quick glance at her as he lit the pipe. "It's all been worked out, Mary."

"Of course," she said. Her voice tightened. "I'll have him in the cell behind the rumpus room."

Down below he went to the room that had been assigned him and stripped from the uniform. He went into the bath and showered thoroughly, washing out a full third of the hair that had been on his head and half the color in that which remained. He emerged from the bath, little refreshed and some five years older.

He dressed in an inexpensive suit not overly well pressed and showing wear. His shirt was not clean, as though this was the second day he had worn it, and there was a food spot on his tie.

At the small desk he picked up an automatic pencil and clipped it into the suit's breast pocket and stuffed a bulky notebook into a side pocket. He stared down at the gun for a moment, then grimaced and left it. He departed the house by the front door and made his way to the metro escalator.

The nearest metro exit was about a quarter of a mile from Senator McGivern's residence and Warren Casey walked the distance. By the time he arrived he had achieved a cynical quality in his expression) of boredom. He didn't bother to look up into the face of whoever opened the door.

"Jakes," he said. "H.N.S. McGivern expects me."

"H.N.S.?" the butler said stiffly.

"Hemisphere News. Hemisphere News Service," Warren Casey yawned. "Fer crissakes, we gonna stand here all day? I gotta deadline."

"Well, step in here, sir. I'll check." The other turned and led the way.

Casey stuck a finger into his back. His voice went flat. "Don't get excited and maybe you won't get hurt. Just take me to the Senator, see? Don't do nothing at all that might make me want to pull this trigger."

The butler's face was gray. "The senator is in his study. I warn you ... sir ... the police shall know of this immediately."

"Sure, sure, Mac. Now just let's go to the study "

"It's right in there . . . sir."

"Fine," Casey said. "And what's that, under the stairway?"

"Why, that's a broom closet. The downstairs maid's broom . . ."

Casey brought his flat hand around in a quick clip. The servant folded up with a lung-emptying sigh and Casey caught him before he hit the floor, pushed and wedged him inside. He darted a hand to a vest pocket and brought forth a syrette. "That'll keep you out for a couple of hours," he muttered, closing the closet door.

He went over to the heavy door which the butler had indicated as Senator McGivern's study, and knocked on it. In a moment it opened and a husky in his mid-twenties, nattily attired and of obvious self-importance, frowned at him.

"Yes?" he said

"Steve Jakes of Hemisphere News," Warren Casey said. "The editor sent me over . . ." As he talked, he sidestepped the other and emerged into the room beyond.

Behind the desk was an older edition of nine-year-old Fredric McGivern. A Fredric McGivern at the age of perhaps fifty, with what had been boyish plump cheeks now gone to heavy jowls.

"What's this?" he growled.

Casey stepped further into the room. "Jakes, Senator. My editor..."

Senator Phil McGivern's ability included cunning and a high survival factor. He lumbered to his feet. "Walters! Take him!" he snapped. "He's a fake!" He bent over to snatch at a desk drawer.

Walters was moving, but far too slowly.

Warren Casey met him half way, reached forward with both hands and grasped the fabric of the foppish drape suit the secretary wore. Casey stuck out a hip, twisted quickly, turning his back halfway to the other. He came over and around, throwing the younger man heavily to his back.

Casey didn't bother to look down. He stuck a hand into a side pocket, pointed a finger at McGivern through the cloth.

The other's normally ruddy face drained of colour. He fell back into his chair.

Warren Casey walked around the desk and brought the gun the other had been fumbling for from the drawer. He allowed himself a deprecating snort before dropping it carelessly into a pocket.

Senator Phil McGivern was no coward. He glowered at Warren Casey. "You've broken into my home—criminal," he said. "You've assaulted my secretary and threatened me with a deadly weapon. You will be fortunate to be awarded no more than twenty years."

Casey sank into an easy chair so situated that he could watch both McGivern and his now unconscious assistant at the same time. He said flatly, "I represent the Pacifists, Senator. Approximately an hour ago your son was kidnapped. You're one of our top priority persons. You probably realize the implications."

"Fredric! You'd kill a nine-year-old boy!"

Casey's voice was flat. "I have killed many nine-year-old boys, Senator."

"Are you a monster!"

"I was a bomber pilot. Senator."

The other, who had half risen again, slumped back into his chair.

"But that's different."

"I do not find it so."

In his hard career, Phil McGivern had faced many emergencies. He drew himself up now. "What do you

want—criminal? I warn you, I am not a merciful man. You'll pay for this, Mr. . . ."

"Keep calling me Jakes, if you wish," Casey said mildly. "I'm not important. Just one member of a widespread organization."

"What do you want?" the Senator snapped.

"How much do you know about the Pacifists, McGivern?"

"I know it to be a band of vicious criminals!"

Casey nodded agreeably. "It's according to whose laws you go by. We have rejected yours."

"What do you want?" the Senator repeated.

"Of necessity," Casey continued, evenly, "our organization is a secret one; however, it contains some of the world's best brains, in almost every field of endeavour, even including elements in the governments of both Hemispheres."

Phil McGivern snorted his contempt.

Casey went on, an eye taking in the fact that Walters, laid out on the floor, had stirred and groaned softly. "Among our number are some capable of charting world development. By extrapolation, they have concluded that if your policies are continued nuclear war will break out within three years."

The other flushed in anger, finding trouble in controlling his voice. "Spies! Subversives! Make no mistake about it. Jakes, as you call yourself, we realize you're nothing more than cat's-paws for the Polarians."

The self-named Pacifist chuckled sourly. "You should know better. Senator. Our organization is as active on the Northern Hemisphere as it is on this one." Suddenly he came quickly to his feet and bent over Walters who had begun to stir. Casey's hand flicked out and clipped the other across the jawbone. The secretary collapsed again, without sound.

Warren Casey returned to his chair. "The point is that our experts are of the opinion that you'll have to drop out of politics. Senator McGivern. I suggest a resignation for reasons of health within the next week."

There was quick rage, then steaming silence while thought processes went on. "And Fredric?" McGivern growled finally. Casey shrugged. "He will be freed as soon as you comply."

The other's eyes narrowed. "How do you know I'll stick to my promise? A contract made under duress has

no validity.”

Casey said impatiently, “Having Fredric in our hands now is a minor matter, an immediate bargaining point to emphasize our position. Senator, we have investigated you thoroughly. You have a wife of whom you are moderately fond, and a mistress whom you love. You have three adult children by your first wife, and four grandchildren. You have two children by your second wife, Fredric and Janie. You have a living uncle and two aunts, and five first cousins. Being a politician, you have many surface friends, which we shall largely ignore, but you also know some thirty persons who mean much to you.”

McGivern was beginning to adjust to this abnormal conversation. He growled, “What’s all this got to do with it?”

Warren Casey looked into the other’s eyes. “We shall kill them, one by one. Shot at a distance with a rifle with telescopic sights. Blown up by bomb. Machine gunned, possibly as they walk down the front steps of their homes.”

“You’re insane! The police. The . . .”

Casey went on, ignoring the interruption. “We are in no hurry. Some of your children, your relatives, your friends, your mistress, may take to hiding in their-panic. But there is no hiding—nowhere on all this world. Our organization is in no hurry, and we are rich in resources. Perhaps in the doing some of us will be captured or dispatched. It’s beside the point. We are dedicated. That’s all we’ll be living for, killing the people whom you love. When they are all gone, we will kill *you*. Believe me, by that time it will be as though we’re-motivated by compassion. All your friends, your loved ones, your near-of-kin, will be gone.”

“We will kill, kill, kill—but in all it will be less than a hundred people. It will not be thousands and millions of people. It will only be *your* closest friends, *your* relatives, *your* children and finally *you*. At the end, Senator, you will have some idea of the meaning of war.”

By the end of this, although it was delivered in an almost emotionless voice, Phil McGivern was pushed back in his swivel chair as though from physical attack. No repeated, hoarsely, “You’re insane.”

Warren Casey shook his head. “No, it is really you, you and those like you, who are insane. Wrapped up in your positions of power, in your greed for wealth in the preservation of your privileges, you would bring us into a conflagration which would destroy us all. You are the ones who are insane.”

The Pacifist agent leaned forward. “Throughout history, Senator, there have been pacifists. But never such pacifists as we. Always, in the past, they have been laughed at or sneered at in times of peace, and imprisoned or worse in time of war.”

"Cowards," Senator McGivern muttered in distaste.

Casey shook his head and chuckled. "Never, Senator. Don't look for cowards among pacifists and conscientious objectors. It takes courage to buck the current of public opinion. A coward is often better off in the ranks and usually safer. In modern war, at least -until the advent of nuclear conflict, only a fraction of the soldiers ever see combat. The rest are in logistics, in a thousand branches of behind the lines work. One man in twenty ever glimpses the enemy."

McGivern snapped, "I'm not interested in your philosophy, criminal. Get to the point. I want my son back."

That is the point, Senator. Today we Pacifists have become realists. We are willing to fight, to kill and to die, in order to prevent war. We are not interested in the survival of individuals, we are of the opinion that another war will destroy the race, and to preserve humanity we will do literally anything."

McGivern thumped a heavy fist on his chair arm. "You fool! The Northern Hemisphere seeks domination of the whole world. We must defend ourselves!"

The Pacifist was shaking his head again. "We don't care who is right or wrong—if either side is. It finally gets to the point where that is meaningless. Our colleagues are working among the Polarians, just as we are working here in the Southern Hemisphere. Persons such as yourself, on the other side, are courting death just as you are by taking steps that will lead to war."

Warren Casey stood. "You have one week in which to resign your office, Senator. If you fail to, you will never see your son Fredric again. And then, one by one, you will hear of the deaths of your relatives and friends."

The Pacifist agent came quickly around the desk and the older man, in an effort to escape, pushed his chair backward and tried to come to his feet. He was too clumsy in his bulk. Warren Casey loomed over Mm, slipped a syrette into the other's neck.

Senator Phil McGivern, swearing, fell to his knees and then tried to come erect. He never made it. His eyes first stared, then glazed, and he dropped back to the floor, unconscious.

Warren Casey bent momentarily over Walters, the secretary, but decided that he was safe for a time. He shot a quick look about the room. What had he touched? Had he left anything?

He strode quickly from the room, retracing the path by which the butler had brought him fifteen minutes earlier, and let himself out the front door.

"His cab pulled up before the aged, but well-preserved, mansion, and he dropped coins into the vehicle's toll box and then watched it slip away into the traffic.

He walked to the door and let himself be identified at the screen. When the door opened he strolled through.

A young woman, her face so very earnest in manner that her natural prettiness was all but destroyed, sat at the desk.

Rising, she led the way and held the door open for him and they both entered the conference room. There were three men there at the table, all of them masked.

Casey was at ease in their presence. He pulled a chair up across from them and sat down. The girl took her place at the table and prepared to take notes.

The chairman, who was flanked by the other two, said, "How did the McGivern affair go, Casey?"

"As planned. The boy proved no difficulty. He is now at the hide-away in charge of Operative Mary Baca."

"And the Senator?"

"As expected. I gave him full warning."

"The secretary, Walters. He was eliminated?"

"Well, no. I left him unconscious."

There was a silence.

One of the other masked men said, "The plan was to eliminate the secretary to give emphasis to the Senator as to our determination."

Casey's voice remained even. "As it worked out, it seemed expedient to follow through as I did."

The chairman said, "Very well. The field operative works with considerable range of discretion. No one can foresee what will develop once an operation is under way."

Warren Casey said nothing.

The second board member sighed. "But we had hoped that the sight of a brutal killing, right before him, might have shocked Phil McGivern into submission immediately. As it is now, if our estimates of his character are correct, the best we can hope for is capitulation after several of his intimates have been dispatched."

Casey said wearily, "He will never capitulate, no matter what we do. He's one of the bad ones."

The third board member, who had not spoken to this point, said thoughtfully, "Perhaps his immediate assassination would be best." The chairman shook his head. "No. We've thrashed this all out. We want to use McGivern as an example. In the future, when dealing with similar cases, our people will be able to threaten others with his fate. We'll see it through, as planned." He looked at Casey. "We have another assignment for you."

Warren Casey leaned back in his chair, his face expressionless, aside from the perpetual weariness. "All right," he said.

The second board member took up an assignment sheet. "It's a Priority One. Some twenty operatives are involved in all." He cleared his voice. "You've had interceptor experience during your military career?"

Casey said, "A year, during the last war. I was shot down twice and they figured my timing was going, so they switched me to medium bombers."

"Our information is that you have flown the Y-36G."

"That's right." Casey wondered what they were getting to.

"The board officer said, "In two weeks the first class of the Space Academy graduates. Until now, warfare has been restricted to land, sea and air. With this graduation we will have the military erupting into a new medium."

"I've read about it," Casey said.

The graduation will be spectacular. The class is small, only seventy-five cadets, but already the school is expanding. All the other services will be represented at the ceremony."

Warren Casey wished the other would get to the point.

"We want to make this a very dramatic protest against military preparedness," the other went on. "Something that will shock the whole nation, and certainly throw fear into everyone connected with arms."

The chairman took over. "The air force will put on a show. A flight of twenty Y-36Gs will buzz the stand where the graduating cadets are seated, waiting their commissions."

Realization was beginning to build within Casey.

"You'll be flying one of those Y-36Gs," the chairman pursued. His next sentence came slowly. "And the

guns of your craft will be the ones in the flight that are loaded.”

Warren Casey said, without emotion, “I’m expendable, I suppose?”

The chairman gestured in negation. “No. We have plans for your escape. You make only the one pass, and you strafe the cadets as you do so. You then proceed due north, at full speed . . .”

Casey interrupted quickly. “You’d better not tell me any more about it. I don’t think I can take this assignment.”

The chairman was obviously taken aback. “Why, Warren? You’re one of our senior men and an experienced pilot.”

Casey shook his head, unhappily. “Personal reasons. No operative is forced to take an assignment he doesn’t want. I’d rather skip this, so you’d best not tell me any more about it. That way it’s impossible for me to crack under pressure and betray someone.”

“Very well,” the chairman said, his voice brisk. “Do you wish a vacation, a rest from further assignment at this time?”

“No. Just give me something else.”

One of the other breed members took up another piece of paper. The matter of Professor Leonard LaVaux,” he said.

Professor Leonard LaVaux lived in a small bungalow in a section of town which had never pretended to more than middle class status. The lawn could have used a bit more care, and the roses more cutting back, but the place had an air of being comfortably lived in.

Warren Casey was in one of his favored disguises, that of a newspaperman. This time he bore a Press camera, held by its strap. There was a gadget bag over one shoulder. He knocked, leaned on the door jam, assumed a bored expression and waited.

Professor LaVaux seemed a classical example of stereotyping. Any producer would have hired him for a scholar’s part on sight. He blinked at the pseudo-journalist through bifocals.

Casey said, “The Star, Professor. Editor sent me to get a few shots.”

The professor was puzzled. “Photographs? But I don’t know of any reason why I should be newsworthy at this time.”

Casey said, "You know how it is. Your name gets in the news sometimes. We like to have something good right on hand to drop in. Editor wants a couple of nice shots in your study. You know, like reading a book or something."

"I see," the professor said. "Well, well, of course. Reading a book, eh? What sort of book? Come in, young man."

"Any book will do," Casey said with journalistic cynicism. "It can be Little Red Riding Hood, far as I'm concerned."

"Yes, of course," the professor said. "Silly of me. The readers would hardly be able to see the title."

The professor's study was a man's room. Books upon books, but also a king-size pipe-rack, a small portable bar, two or three really comfortable chairs and a couch suitable for sprawling upon without removal of shoes.

LaVaux took one of the chairs, waved the supposed photographer to another. "Now," he said. "What is procedure?"

Casey looked about the room, considering. "You live here all alone?" he said, as though making conversation while planning his photography.

"A housekeeper," the professor said.

"Maybe we could work her in on a shot or two."

"I'm afraid she's out now."

Casey took the chair the other had offered. His voice changed tone. "Then we can come right to business," he said.

The professor's eyes flicked behind the bifocals. "I beg your pardon?"

Warren Casey said, "You've heard of the Pacifists, Professor?"

"Why . . . why, of course. An underground, illegal organization." The professor added, "Quite often accused of assassination and other heinous crimes, although I've been inclined to think such reports exaggerated, of course."

"Well, don't," Casey said curtly.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I'm a Pacifist operative. Professor LaVaux and I've been assigned to warn you to discontinue your present research or your life will be forfeit."

The other gaped, unable to adapt his mind to the shift in identity. Warren Casey said, "You're evidently not knowledgeable about our organization. Professor. I'll brief you. We exist for the purpose of preventing further armed conflict upon this planet. To secure that end, we are willing to take any measures. We are ruthless, Professor. My interest is not to convert you, but solely to warn you that unless your present research is ended you are a dead man."

The professor protested. "See here, I'm a scientist, not a politician. My work is in pure research. What engineers, the military and eventually the government do with applications of my discoveries is not my concern."

"That's right," Casey nodded agreeably. "Up to this point, you, like many of your colleagues, have not concerned yourself with the eventual result of your research. Beginning now, you do. Professor, or we kill you. You have one week to decide."

"The Government will protect me."

Casey shook his head. "No, Professor. Only for a time, even though they devote the efforts of a hundred security police. Throughout history, a really devoted group, given sufficient numbers and resources, could always successfully assassinate any person, in time."

"That was the past," the professor said, unconvinced. "Today, they can protect me."

Casey was still shaking his head. "Let me show you just one tool of our trade." He took up his camera and removed the back. "See this little device? It's a small, spring-powered gun which projects a tiny, tiny hypodermic needle through the supposed lens of this dummy camera. So tiny is the dart that when it imbeds itself in your neck, hand, or belly, you feel no more than a mosquito bite."

The professor was motivated more by curiosity than fear. He bent forward to look at the device. "Amazing," he said. "And you have successfully used it?"

"Other operatives of our organization have. There are few, politicians in particular, who can escape the news photographer. This camera is but one of our items of equipment, and with it an assassin has little trouble getting near his victim."

The professor shook his head in all but admiration. "Amazing," he repeated. "I shall never feel safe with a photographer again."

Warren Casey said, "You have no need for fear, Professor, if you abandon your current research."

Leonard LaVaux said, "And I have a week to decide? Very well, in a week's time I shall issue notice to the Press either that I have given up my research, or that I have been threatened by the Pacifists and demand protection."

Casey began to stand, but the professor raised a hand. "Wait a moment," he said. "I'd like to ask you a few questions."

The Pacifist looked at the other warily.

LaVaux said, "You're the first member of your organisation to whom I've ever spoken."

"I doubt it," Casey said.

"Ah? Very secret, eh? Members are everywhere, but undetected. Then how do you recruit new membership? Being as illegal as you are, of course, the initial approach must be delicate indeed."

"That's right," Casey nodded. "We take every precaution. A prospect isn't approached until it is obvious he is actually seeking an answer to the problem of outlawing war. Many persons, Professor, come to our point of view on their own. They begin discussing the subject, seeking answers, seeking fellows who think along the same line."

The professor was fascinated. "But even then, of course, mistakes must be made and some of your membership unmasked to the authorities."

"A hazard always faced by an underground."

"And then," the professor said triumphantly, "your whole organization crumbles. One betrays the next, under police coercion."

Casey laughed sourly. "No. That's not it. We profit by those who have gone before. The history of underground organizations is a long one. Professor. Each unit of five Pacifists know only those belonging to their own unit, and one co-ordinator. The co-ordinators, in turn, know only four other co-ordinators with whom they work, plus a section leader, who knows only four other section leaders with whom *he* works, and so forth right to the top officials of the organization."

"I see," the professor murmured. "So an ordinary member can at most betray four others, of course. But when the police capture a co-ordinator?"

"Then twenty-five persons are endangered," Casey admitted. "And occasionally it happens. But we have ten of thousands of members, Professor, and new ones coming in daily. We grow slightly faster than they seem able to catch us."

The professor switched subjects. "Well, no one would accuse you of being a patriot, certainly."

Casey contradicted him. "It's a different type of patriotism. I don't identify myself with this Hemisphere."

The other's eyebrows went up. "I see. Then you are a Polarian?"

Casey shook his head. "Nor do I identify myself with them. Our patriotism is to the human race. Professor. This is no longer a matter of nation, religion or hemisphere. It is a matter of species survival.

We are not interested in politics, socio-economic systems or ideology, other than when they begin to lead to armed conflict between nations."

The professor considered him for a long silent period. Finally, he said, "Do you really think it will work?"

"How's that?" Warren Casey said. For some reason, this earnest, fascinated, prying scientist appealed to him. He felt relaxed during the conversation, a relaxation, he realized, that had been denied him for long months now.

Trying to keep the world at peace by threatening, frightening, even assassinating those whom you decide are trending toward war. Do you think it will work?"

All the wariness was back, suddenly. The months-long tiredness, and doubt, and the growing nausea brought on by violence, violence, violence. If only he could never hear the word kill again.

He said, "When I first joined the Pacifists, I was positive they had the only answer. Now I've taken my stand, but perhaps I am not so sure. Why do you think it won't?"

The scientist pointed a finger at him. "You make a basic mistake in thinking this a matter of individuals. To use an example, in effect what you are saying is, kill the dictator and democracy will return to the country. Nonsense. You put the cart before the horse. That dictator didn't get into power because he was so fabulously capable that he was able to thwart a whole nation's desire for liberty. He, himself, is the product of a situation. Change the situation and he will disappear, but simply assassinate him and all you'll get is

another dictator.”

The other’s words bothered Warren Casey. Not because they were new to him, subconsciously they’d been with him almost from the beginning. He looked at the scientist, waiting for him to go on.

LaVaux touched himself on the chest with his right forefinger. “Take me, I am doing work in a field that can be adapted to military use, although that is not my interest. Actually, I am contemptuous of the military. But you threaten my life if I continue. Very well. Suppose you coerce me and I drop my research. Do you think that “will stop investigation by a hundred, a thousand other capable men? Of course not. My branch of science is on the verge of various break-throughs. If I don’t make them, someone else will. You don’t stop an avalanche by arresting the roll of one rock.”

A tic began in the cheek of Casey’s usually emotionless face. “So you think . . .” he prompted.

LaVaux” eyes brightened behind the bifocals. He was a man of enthusiastic opinions. He said, “Individuals in the modern world do not start wars. It’s more basic than that. If the world is going to achieve the ending of warfare, it’s going to have to find the causes of international conflict and eliminate them.” He chuckled. “Which, of course, opens up a whole new line of investigation.”

Warren Casey stood up. He said, “Meanwhile, Professor, I represent an organization that, while possibly wrong, doesn’t agree with you. The ultimatum has been served. You have one week.”

Professor LaVaux saw him to the door.

“I’d like to discuss the subject further, some day,” he said. “But, of course, I suppose I won’t be seeing you again.”

“That’s right,” Casey said. He twisted his mouth wryly. “If we have to deal with you further, Professor, and I hope we don’t, somebody else will handle it.” He looked at the other and considered momentarily rendering the stereotyped-looking scientist unconscious before he left.

But he shook his head. Lord, he was tired of violence.

As he walked down the garden path to the gate, Professor LaVaux called, “By the way, your disguise. You’ll find there are several excellent oral drugs which will darken your complexion even more effectively than your present method.”

Almost, Warren Casey had to laugh.

He was between assignments, which was a relief. He knew he was physically as well as mentally worn. He was going to have to take the board up on that offer of a prolonged vacation.

Taking the usual precautions in the way of avoiding possible pursuit, he returned to his own apartment. It had been a week, what with one assignment and another, and it was a pleasure to look forward to at least a matter of a few hours of complete relaxation.

He shed his clothing, showered, and then dressed in comfortably old clothing. He went to the tiny kitchen and prepared a drink, finding no ice since he had unplugged the refrigerator before leaving.

Casey dropped into his reading chair and took up (the paperback he'd been reading when summoned a week ago to duty. He had forgotten the subject. Ah, yes, a swashbuckling historical novel. He snorted inwardly. It was all so simple. All the hero had to do was kill the evil duke in a duel and everything would resolve itself.

He caught himself up, Professor LaVaux" conversation coming back to him. Essentially, that was what he—what the Pacifists were trying to do. By filling the equivalent of the evil duke—individuals, in other words—they were hoping to solve the problems of the world. Nonsense, on the face of it.

He put down the novel and stared unseeing at the wall opposite. He had been an operative with the Pacifists for more than three years now. He was, he realized, probably their senior hatchet man. An agent could hardly expect to survive so long. It was against averages.

It was then that the screen of his telephone lit up.

Senator Phil McGivern's face glowered at him.

Warren Casey started, stared.

McGivern said, coldly, deliberately. The building is surrounded, Casey. Surrender yourself. There are more than fifty security police barring any chance of escape."

The Pacifist's mind snapped to attention. Was there anything he had to do? Was there anything in the apartment that might possibly betray the organization or any individual member of it? He wanted a few moments to think.

He attempted to keep his voice even. "What do you want, McGivern?"

"My son!" The Politician was glaring his triumph.

"I'm afraid Fredric is out of my hands," Casey said. Was the senator lying about the number of police? Was there any possibility of escape?"

Then whose hands is he in? You have him. Warren Casey, but we have you."

"He's not here," Casey said. There might still be a service he could perform. Some way of warning the organization of McGivern's method of tracking him down. "How did you know my name?" McGivern snorted. "You're a fool as well as a criminal. You sat in my office and spoke in the accent of your native city. I pinpointed that, immediately. You told me you'd been a bomber pilot and obviously had seen action, which meant that you'd been in the last war. Then as a pseudonym you used the name Jakes. Did you know that persons taking pseudonyms almost always base them on some actuality? We checked in your home city, and, sure enough, there was actually a newspaperman named Jakes. We questioned him. Did he know a former bomber pilot, a veteran of the last war? Yes, he did. A certain Warren Casey. From there on the job was an easy one - criminal. Now, *where is my son?*"

For a moment, Warren Casey felt weary compassion for the other. The senator had worked hard to find his boy, hard and brilliantly. "I'm sorry, McGivern, I really don't know." Casey threw his glass, destroying the telephone screen.

He was on his feet, heading for the kitchen. He'd explored this escape route long ago when first acquiring the apartment.

The dumbwaiter was sufficiently large to accommodate him. He wedged himself into it, slipped the rope through his fingers, quickly but without fumbling. He shot downward.

In the basement, his key opened a locker. He reached in and seized the submachine pistol and two clips of cartridges. He stuffed one into a side pocket, slapped the other into the gun, and threw off the safety. Already he was hurrying down the corridor toward the heating plant. He was counting on the fact that the security police had not sufficient time to discover that this building shared its central heating and air-conditioning plant with the apartment house adjoining.

Evidently they hadn't.

A freight elevator shot him to the roof of the next building. From here, given luck, he could cross to a still further building and make his getaway.

He emerged on the roof, shot a quick glance around.

Fifty feet away, their backs to him, stood three security police agents. Two of them armed with automatic rifles, the other with a handgun, they were peering over the parapet, probably at the windows of his apartment.

His weapon flashed to position, but then the long weariness overtook him. No more killing. Please. No more killing. He lowered the gun, turned and headed quietly in the opposite direction.

A voice behind him yelled, "Hey! Stop! You—

He ran.

The burst of fire caught Warren Casey as he attempted to vault to the next building. It ripped through him and the darkness fell immediately, and far, far up from below, the last thought that was ever signalled was *That's right!*

Fifteen minutes later Senator Phil McGivern scowled down at the meaningless crumpled figure. "You couldn't have captured him?" he said sourly.

"No, sir," the security sergeant defended himself. "It was a matter of shoot him or let him escape."

McGivern snorted his disgust.

The sergeant said wonderingly, "Funny thing was, he could've finished off the three of us. We were the only ones on the roof here. He could've shot us and then got away."

One of the others said, "Probably didn't have the guts."

"No," McGivern growled. "He had plenty of guts."

End.

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