

# Chapter 1: It's All a Lie! Plato and Philip K Dick on Discovering What's "Real"

Sci Fi and Philosophy: Course Notes | Brendan Shea, Ph.D. ([Brendan.Shea@rctc.edu](mailto:Brendan.Shea@rctc.edu))

Welcome to Science Fiction and Philosophy. This course "textbook" consists of a collection of lecture notes and selected readings (philosophical works and science-fiction short stories). It's still very much a work in progress, so please let me know if you have ideas for corrections or additions!

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## 1 CONTENTS

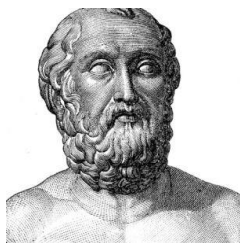
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2	Plato's Cave Analogy and the Nature of Philosophy.....	1
2.1	What Happens in Plato's <i>Republic</i> ? .....	2
2.2	What are Plato's Views?.....	3
2.3	How Do I Learn to Be Wise? The Story of the Cave? .....	4
2.4	Final Thoughts: How to do Philosophy .....	6
2.5	Review Questions .....	7
3	Reading: We Can Remember It for You Wholesale (by Philip K Dick) .....	7
3.1	Review Questions .....	22

## 2 PLATO'S CAVE ANALOGY AND THE NATURE OF PHILOSOPHY

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In this first section, we'll learn about Plato and his famous "Allegory of the Cave"). It will also be a convenient way to talk about what "philosophy" is and what might be the point of studying it. This allegory (about being "fooled" about the ultimate nature of reality one lives in) has served as the basis for MANY science fiction films and short stories, from the Matrix and the Truman Show to WandaVision and Alice in Wonderland.



**Plato** (428 BCE – 347 BCE) was a philosopher in Classical Athens (a city in modern-day Greece). He wrote over 30 dialogues on justice, knowledge, friendship, love, physics, and other topics. The twentieth-century philosopher Alfred Whitehead once said that all later philosophy was “a series of footnotes to Plato.” There is a clear sense in which this is true: Plato was the first writer to formulate a vast number of philosophical problems regarding morality, religion, the acquisition of scientific knowledge, the importance of literature and art, and the structure of a good government. However, Plato didn’t *finish* philosophy since his (often tentative) answers to these various questions have been challenged and revised by the last 2,500 years of science, philosophy, and so on.

When Plato was young, his teacher **Socrates** was tried and executed for “corrupting the youth” and “denying the gods of the state.” (Athens was the world’s first democracy, and the citizens on the jury voted to execute Socrates.) This event profoundly influenced Plato, who often used Socrates as a character in many dialogues. These dialogues include his most famous book, *The Republic*, in which the analogy of the cave appears. Other notable works by Plato include *The Apology of Socrates* (about Socrates’ trial), *Euthyphro* (about the relationship between religion and morality), *Crito* (about civil disobedience and our duty to obey laws), *Phaedo* (about the soul), and *Meno* (about knowledge).

## 2.1 WHAT HAPPENS IN PLATO’S *REPUBLIC*?

*SOCRATES: I went down yesterday to the Piraeus with Glaucon the son of Ariston, that I might offer up my prayers to the goddess; and also because I wanted to see in what manner they would celebrate the festival, which was a new thing. I was delighted with the procession of the inhabitants; but that of the Thracians was equally, if not more, beautiful. When we had finished our prayers and viewed the spectacle, we turned in the direction of the city; and at that instant Polemarchus the son of Cephalus chanced to catch sight of us from a distance as we were starting on our way home, and told his servant to run and bid us wait for him. The servant took hold of me by the cloak behind, and said: Polemarchus desires you to wait. (Plato, *The Republic*, Bk 1)*

**Why should I care?** Plato’s *Republic* is probably the most important work of philosophy by any Greek or Roman writer, and it would prove to be a *massive* influence on subsequent philosophers, political theorists, Jewish-Christian-Islamic theologians, and writers. It holds a central place in the so-called “Western Canon.” It’s also well-written (at least for a philosophy book!).

**What is the plot?** The *Republic* consists of a (fictional) dialogue that is supposedly written from the perspective of Socrates, who is recording what happened the previous day. When the story begins, Socrates and Glaucon (Plato’s brother) have attended a new religious festival in the Piraeus (the port of Athens). They have started the long walk home (which would have taken several hours). They are intercepted by Polemarchus and Adeimantus (also Plato’s brother), and go to the house of Cephalus (Polemarchus’s father), where they meet with some other people, including a nasty guy named Thrasymachus. The bulk of the subsequent conversation takes place at the house. They are trying to define “justice” and end up describing a perfectly just city called the “Republic” or *kallipolis*.

**What is it *really* about?** The study of philosophy is often broken into four sub-disciplines: **metaphysics** (the study of existence at the most basic level), **epistemology** (the study of knowledge, and how we learn things), **ethics** (the study of personal and social morality), and **logic** (the study of reasoning). In the *Republic*, Plato discusses all four branches of philosophy, and offers a detailed, unified picture of society and the individual’s place in it. He also tries to show how studying philosophy can help us as individuals and as a society.

## 2.2 WHAT ARE PLATO'S VIEWS?

*"Plato possessed the art to dress up illiberal suggestions in such a way that they deceived future ages, which admired the Republic without ever becoming aware of what was involved in its proposals. It has always been correct to praise Plato, but not to understand him. This is the common fate of great men. My object is the opposite. I wish to understand him, but to treat him with as little reverence as if he were a contemporary English or American advocate of totalitarianism."* (Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*)

There have been thousands of articles and books written about *The Republic*, and it's notoriously tough to say exactly what Plato is up to in the book, especially since Plato never tells us, "Here's what I think." However, at least in *The Republic*, the character of Socrates seems to defend something like the following conclusions:

**What are Plato's metaphysical views?** Plato is a **metaphysical realist** about everything: he thinks that numbers exist, that objective ethical truth exists, that immortal souls exist, and that the abstract perfect bed exists (though it's not exactly clear *where* these things exist). He believes the abstract, non-physical things called **forms** are the foundation on which everything else is "built. He dislikes **anti-realism** in just about every forms.

**What are Plato's epistemological views?** Plato defends **rationalism**, which is the view that the most critical knowledge comes from rational reflection and NOT from observation or experimentation. He thinks that mathematics has the right idea: any idea worth having (even those concerning things like medicine or politics) should be figured out from self-evident first principles. He is opposed to **empiricism**, which claims that the most important knowledge comes from the five senses.

**What is PLATONISM?** Plato's combined metaphysical and epistemological views are sometimes called **Platonism**. Contemporary Platonists are usually a bit less ambitious than Plato and often confine their claims to things such as ethics or mathematics. However, there are still notable scientists (Einstein, for example) who are pretty Platonist. An "ethical Platonist" believes that the truth (or falsity) of claims about ethics is determined by something entirely independent of humans and their interests.

**What are Plato's ethical and political views?** Plato is a strong proponent of **ethical realism**, which is the view that there are objective, interpersonal ethical truths that hold for all times and peoples. Plato is suspicious of democracy since he thinks democratic governments often pander to people's worst natures, and are easy prey for demagogues and tyrants. The "Republic" he describes is governed by **philosopher-kings (or philosopher-queens)**, who are essentially extremely well-educated people who care *only* about the good of society. The cave analogy is, among other things, supposed to show how to train a philosopher-ruler (it's tough!)

- Plato (at least in the *Republic*) describes a **paternalistic** government that actively intervenes in citizens' lives to ensure that they are pursuing the "right" sorts of goals (i.e., the ones that will make actually make them happy, as opposed to what the people *think* will make them happy). The "Republic" contains laws concerning allowed religion/art/literature, citizens' family and sex lives, and private property (the rulers can't have any). In this sense, Plato has something in common with other critics of modern "liberal democracy," including both communists and religious conservatives (and Plato has been an important, though often indirect, influence on some members of both groups).
- Plato's political philosophy stands in sharp contrast to modern political **liberalism**, which holds that the government's goal is to help citizens lead the lives *they* want to lead. Liberals (including both "left-wing liberals" and right wing "libertarians") hold that a government should be neutral as to what is really "good" and should intervene in citizen's lives only if they are a threat to *other* people. So,

liberals are OK with laws against theft, rape, murder, etc. However, they would disagree with Plato's **paternalistic** idea that we should try to regulate citizens' unwise choices about drugs, sex, religion *for their own good*.

- The Republic is famous for its critique of democracy, which Socrates suggests would inevitably lead to tyranny when a clever tyrant would exploit the (largely ignorant) people's various fears and hatreds to rise to power. This process would be aided by things like the media (in this case, Greek theater and poetry), which gave people a warped perspective on reality.

**What does Plato think about logic?** Plato has two models for what counts as a good argument: the proofs given by geometers (where one starts with a first principle and shows what follows) and the **dialectic** method of question-and-answer used by Socrates (where one begins with an initial "hypothesis", figures out what is wrong with it, makes revisions, criticizes the *new* hypothesis, and so on).

## 2.3 HOW DO I LEARN TO BE WISE? THE STORY OF THE CAVE?

*"And now, I said, let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened: --Behold! human beings living in a underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets." (Plato, The Republic, Bk VII)*



In book 7 of the *Republic*, Plato uses the story of the cave to illustrate the relationship between the visible and intelligible world, and to provide an idea of how we can *train* people to become more ethical (or wise). While this story is supposedly "about" the philosopher-rulers' education, it also serves as a more general account of how Plato thinks education in ethics and philosophy is supposed to work.

1. Most people spend their lives attending to "shadows on the cave wall"—that is, they attend to *images* or *descriptions* of visible entities. For example, people who spent most of their lives browsing social media, playing video games, or blindly trusting whatever they were told about the world by a religious guru would fall into this class of people. Unless someone comes and "breaks your chains" (and makes you turn around), this is something like the "default" condition for humans.
2. A good education (in music and literature, athletics, and science) can help to get us "turn around" and see the real objects in the visible world (these are the puppets in the cave). Of course, this is a bit of a pain—when you first look toward the fire (which represents the real-world sun), you won't be able to see anything, and it will probably hurt your eyes at first. In Plato's view, the early Greek "scientists" have probably reached this stage—they have stopped accepting what they were told and have begun trying to understand the physical world.
3. Eventually, we need to stop *describing* the visible world and answer a more profound question "*Why* is the visible world the way it is?" To do this, we need to master the art of abstract thinking about the abstract *forms* of objects, instead of about individual objects themselves. The best way of learning to think about abstract forms of objects is through mathematics and geometry, which teaches us to see that the object of thought (e.g., a "triangle" or a "line") cannot possibly be identified with any particular, really existing

triangle or line. Plato calls this the **method of hypothesis**. In the cave analogy, the abstract forms of objects live *outside* the cave.

4. Finally, after the future philosopher-rulers have gotten the hang of thinking about abstract objects, they begin to practice dialectic (e.g., philosophical and ethical conversations about serious ethical, metaphysical, logical, and epistemological issues). Ultimately, they will finally see the **Form of the Good** itself. The Form of the Good is a bit mysterious, but it seems like “whatever it is that ultimately makes knowledge possible, and gives meaning to life.” This is represented by the Sun in the cave analogy—it provides the “light” that allows us to see everything else. Later Judeo-Christian-Islamic philosophers equate the Form of the Good with God, while more scientifically minded philosophers see it as reflecting something about the “in-built” structure of our brains.
5. After the philosopher-rulers have seen the Form of the Good (i.e., after they have finished their education, which will take until they are around fifty years old), we can send them back into the cave to help the other people. We shouldn’t expect that these other people will be immediately impressed by the philosophers, however; after all, the philosophers will be pretty bad at predicting the movements of the shadows on the cave wall (which is all the people in the cave care about). For this reason, the philosophers (who are just trying to help!) will often make the cave dwellers mad, and bad things will result (e.g., the people of Athens voted to put Socrates to death). However, this is a risk that the philosophers must take—after all, it isn’t the cave-dwellers’ *fault* that they don’t know any better, and the only way to help them is to educate them and to “show them the way out of the cave.”

One might ask: Why can’t we just skip all of this and teach *everyone* dialectic right away (and skip all the arduous training required of the future philosopher-rulers)? In practical terms: why do we need philosopher-rulers at all? Why can’t we just educate *everyone* to make the good ethical and philosophical decisions Plato expects of philosopher-rulers? While Plato doesn’t give the details, the *Republic* suggests that dialectic requires many skills you learn along the way “out of the cave.” These include the capacity to make objective, dispassionate judgments, the ability to think abstractly, the skill and endurance to work through long, detailed arguments, and the courage to abandon beliefs that turn out not to be supported by good reasons (no matter how important those beliefs are to you). In Plato’s view (at least in the *Republic*), trying to teach dialectic to people without this background might simply lead to the sorts of problems that constantly plague democracy: e.g., it would create even more politicians capable of making clever arguments, but wouldn’t do anything to ensure that these skills were used for the common good. (It’s also worth remembering that Ancient Athens had nothing like our modern-day K-12 or university systems, and most people had almost no “formal” education. Plato’s Academy was something like the “first” university ever, and it certainly couldn’t educate more than a small number of people.)

## 2.4 FINAL THOUGHTS: HOW TO DO PHILOSOPHY



Figure 1 *Escape from the Cave* (Brendan Shea × Dall-E)

Plato's Cave Analogy is among the most famous pieces of philosophy ever written, and debates about its correct interpretation have been going on for thousands of years (in particular, it's always been very unclear as to what Plato actually thinks, which was probably intentional on his part.) So, it's unlikely we can settle all these debates here. That being said, here are some key points that shouldn't be overlooked:

**Analogies, metaphors, and thought experiments are great. However, make sure to pay attention to the details.** Philosophical ideas and arguments are often tricky to understand, especially since they are (in many cases) trying to convince you that common sense is in some way mistaken. Because of this, thought experiments and analogies are often the best (or only) way for philosophers to communicate their ideas. However, when interpreting thought experiments, it's essential to look at the **WHOLE** thought experiment and

not just the general idea. So, for example, Plato's Cave thought experiment doesn't just consist of a bunch of people living in a cave, and his point isn't just the (obvious) one that many people have false beliefs. He's trying to communicate a much more complex idea of what reality is *really* like, and how we might go about finding out about it. Because of this, it's important to focus on the detail: what role do the puppets play? The fire? The world outside? And so on.

**Don't assume Plato (or any philosopher) agrees with you or (alternatively) that he is saying something that is obviously wrong.** There is an (understandable) temptation to read philosophers as saying something that you already know: either something you agree with, or that you already know is wrong. **DON'T DO THIS.** In most cases, philosophers are trying to raise *tough* questions or problems, and you should always be trying to figure out what these questions or issues are. In the Cave Analogy, Plato challenges ideas that many people (both in Ancient Greece and in the modern day) hold dear. These include the idea that experience is the source of knowledge, that the people can be trusted to govern themselves, and that the most important parts of existence are things with which we can directly interact. The Cave Analogy, if taken seriously, suggests that ordinary ways of thinking about science, democracy, religion, and many other things are deeply mistaken.

**Philosophy, for Plato, is incompatible with both dogmatism and skepticism.** Plato's Socrates once claimed that he was the wisest of all humans since he alone knew that he "knew nothing." Socrates's basic idea seemed to be that most people (nearly all of us, actually) live as if we have good answers to the most important questions about life and how we should live it. He thought that self-examination would quickly reveal this sort of dogmatism is completely unfounded—we often have *no idea* how to defend our most cherished beliefs. However, Plato (and Plato's Socrates) are certainly **NOT** skeptics—he thinks there are better and worse ways of doing things, and figuring these out requires genuine effort and commitment. Of course, there is no guarantee that we'll ever arrive at the correct answer, but this is no excuse for not trying.

For example, Plato later seems to recant his Theory of Forms and some of his criticisms of democracy, but this didn't lead him to conclude that "all ideas were equal" or anything of the sort. In this sense, Plato's attitude should inspire us. While we should be highly critical of all ideas (including our own), it would be irresponsible to abandon the quest for better ideas, even if we are frustrated by our failures.

## 2.5 REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Pretend you are teaching the allegory of the cave to a group of 12-year-olds. Use simple, clear words and examples to explain both the structure of the allegory and "what it means." In your explanation, be sure to include each of the following parts: the shadows, the puppets, the fire, the objects in the world outside, and the cave.
2. During his life, Plato saw democratic Athens make many bad decisions, which led to a long, losing war with Sparta, a plague (caused in part by the response to the war), and the execution of Socrates. He also saw many Athenian citizens collaborate with the "Thirty Tyrants." In the *Republic*, Plato suggests these sorts of problems are a necessary consequence of allowing "the majority" (who don't have much expertise in governing and are mostly interested in helping out themselves and their families) to govern.
3. To what extent do you think these worries apply to modern democratic republics (such as the U.S.)? How might a defender of democracy respond to Plato's worries?

## 3 READING: WE CAN REMEMBER IT FOR YOU WHOLESALE (BY PHILIP K DICK)

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*From: The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction (1966)*

**About the Author.** Philip K Dick was born in Chicago in 1928 and raised in California. He dropped out of high school to join the US Navy, serving for two years as an aerial photographer. Following his discharge he worked briefly as a police reporter before moving to New York to pursue a career as a full-time writer. His first published story appeared in the magazine *Startling Stories* in 1950. His first novel, *Solar Lottery*, was published in 1955, followed by *The World Jones Made* (1956), *The Man Who Japed* (1956), *Vulcan's Hammer* (1960), *The Penultimate Truth* (1964), and *The Game-Players of Titan* (1963). In 1968 Dick won the Hugo Award for his novella "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale", which was adapted for the screen as *Total Recall*, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. His novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* was adapted for the screen as *Blade Runner*, starring Harrison Ford. In addition to his many short stories and novels, Dick wrote several works of non-fiction, including *The Shaving of Karl Marx* (1974) and *Valis* (1981). Philip K Dick died of a heart attack on March 2, 1982 at his home in Santa Ana, California.

Philip K. Dick's stories often explore philosophical themes such as the nature of reality, the meaning of life, and the relationship between humans and technology. His work often deals with questions of identity, morality, and faith, and he often uses elements of science fiction and the supernatural to explore these themes.

**[Brendan: Have you ever read anything by Philip K Dick? Watched any of the shows/movies based on his work?]**

### 3.1 WE CAN REMEMBER IT FOR YOU WHOLESALE

HE AWOKE--and wanted Mars. *The valleys*, he thought. *What would it be like to trudge among them?* Great and greater yet: the dream grew as he became fully conscious, the dream and the yearning. He could almost feel



the enveloping presence of the other world, which only Government agents and high officials had seen. A clerk like himself? Not likely.

"Are you getting up or not?" his wife Kirsten asked drowsily, with her usual hint of fierce crossness. "If you are, push the hot coffee button on the darn stove."

"Okay," Douglas Quail said, and made his way barefoot from the bedroom of their conapt to the kitchen. There; having dutifully pressed the hot coffee button, he seated himself at the kitchen table, brought out a yellow, small tin of fine Dean Swift snuff. He inhaled briskly, and the Beau Nash mixture stung his nose, burned the roof of his mouth. But still he inhaled; it woke him up and allowed his dreams, his nocturnal desires and random wishes, to condense into a semblance of rationality.

*I will go, he said to himself. Before I die I'll see Mars.*

It was, of course, impossible, and he knew this even as he dreamed. But the daylight, the mundane noise of his wife now brushing her hair before the bedroom mirror--everything conspired to remind him of what he was. *A miserable little salaried employee*, he said to himself with bitterness. Kirsten reminded him of this at least once a day and he did not blame her; it was a wife's job to bring her husband down to Earth. *Down to Earth*, he thought, and laughed. The figure of speech in this was literally apt.

"What are you sniggering about?" his wife asked as she swept into the kitchen, her long busy-pink robe wagging after her. "A dream, I bet. You're always full of them."

"Yes," he said, and gazed out the kitchen window at the hover-cars and traffic runnels, and all the little energetic people hurrying to work. In a little while he would be among them. *As always*.

"I'll bet it had to do with some woman," Kirsten said witheringly.

"No," he said. "A god. The god of war. He has wonderful craters with every kind of plant-life growing deep down in them."

"Listen." Kirsten crouched down beside him and spoke earnestly, the harsh quality momentarily gone from her voice. "The bottom of the ocean--our ocean is much more, an infinity of times more beautiful. You know that; everyone knows that. Rent an artificial gill-outfit for both of us, take a week off from work, and we can descend and live down there at one of those year-round aquatic resorts. And in addition--" She broke off. "You're not listening. You should be. Here is something a lot better than that compulsion, that obsession you have about Mars, and you don't even listen!" Her voice rose piercingly. "God in heaven, you're doomed, Doug! What's going to become of you?"

"I'm going to work," he said, rising to his feet, his breakfast forgotten. "That's what's going to become of me."

She eyed him. "You're getting worse. More fanatical every day. Where's it going to lead?"



Figure 2 Doug Quail visits Mars. (Brendan Shea x Dall-E)



"To Mars," he said, and opened the door to the closet to get down a fresh shirt to wear to work.

**[Brendan: Based on the opening scene, what do you think of Douglas Quail? Of Karen?]**

Having descended from the taxi Douglas Quail slowly walked across three densely-populated foot runnels and to the modern, attractively inviting doorway. There he halted, impeding mid-morning traffic, and with caution read the shifting-color neon sign. He had, in the past, scrutinized this sign before... but never had he come so close. This was very different; what he did now was something else. Something which sooner or later had to happen.

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*Was this the answer?* After all, an illusion, no matter how convincing, remained nothing more than an illusion. At least objectively. But subjectively--quite the opposite entirely.

And anyhow he had an appointment. Within the next five minutes.

Taking a deep breath of mildly smog-infested Chicago air, he walked through the dazzling polychromatic shimmer of the doorway and up to the receptionist's counter.

The nicely-articulated blonde at the counter, bare-bosomed and tidy, said pleasantly, "Good morning, Mr. Quail."

"Yes," he said. "I'm here to see about a Rekal course. As I guess you know."

"Not 'rekal' but recall," the receptionist corrected him. She picked up the receiver of the vidphone by her smooth elbow and said into it, "Mr. Douglas Quail is here, Mr. McClane. May he come inside, now? Or is it too soon?"

"Giz wetwa wum-wum wamp," the phone mumbled.

"Yes, Mr. Quail," she said. "You may go in; Mr. McClane is expecting you." As he started off uncertainly she called after him, "Room D, Mr. Quail. To your right."

After a frustrating but brief moment of being lost he found the proper room. The door hung open and inside, at a big genuine walnut desk, sat a genial-looking man, middle-aged, wearing the latest Martian frog-pelt gray suit; his attire alone would have told Quail that he had come to the right person.

"Sit down, Douglas," McClane said, waving his plump hand toward a chair which faced the desk. "So you want to have gone to Mars. Very good."

Quail seated himself, feeling tense. "I'm not so sure this is worth the fee," he said. "It costs a lot and as far as I can see I really get nothing." *Costs almost as much as going*, he thought.

"You get tangible proof of your trip," McClane disagreed emphatically. "All the proof you'll need. Here; I'll show you." He dug within a drawer of his impressive desk. "Ticket stub." Reaching into a manila folder, he produced a small square of embossed cardboard. "It proves you went--and returned. Postcards." He laid out four franked picture 3-D full-color postcards in a neatly-arranged row on the desk for Quail to see. "Film. Shots you took of local sights on Mars with a rented moving camera." To Quail he displayed those, too. "Plus the names of people you met, two hundred poscreds worth of souvenirs, which will arrive--from Mars--within the following month. And passport, certificates listing the shots you received. And more." He glanced up keenly at Quail. "You'll know you went, all right," he said. "You won't remember us, won't remember me or ever having been here. It'll be a real trip in your mind; we guarantee that. A full two weeks of recall; every

last piddling detail. Remember this: if at any time you doubt that you really took an extensive trip to Mars you can return here and get a full refund. You see?"

"But I didn't go," Quail said. "I won't have gone, no matter what proofs you provide me with." He took a deep, unsteady breath. "And I never was a secret agent with Interplan." It seemed impossible to him that Rekal, Incorporated's extra-factual memory implant would do its job--despite what he had heard people say.

"Mr. Quail," McClane said patiently. "As you explained in your letter to us, you have no chance, no possibility in the slightest, of ever actually getting to Mars; you can't afford it, and what is much more important, you could never qualify as an undercover agent for Interplan or anybody else. This is the only way you can achieve your, ahem, life-long dream; am I not correct, sir? You can't be this; you can't actually do this." He chuckled. "But you can have been and have done. We see to that. And our fee is reasonable; no hidden charges." He smiled encouragingly.

"Is an extra-factual memory that convincing?" Quail asked.

"More than the real thing, sir. Had you really gone to Mars as an Interplan agent, you would by now have forgotten a great deal; our analysis of true-mem systems--authentic recollections of major events in a person's life--shows that a variety of details are very quickly lost to the person. Forever. Part of the package we offer you is such deep implantation of recall that nothing is forgotten. The packet which is fed to you while you're comatose is the creation of trained experts, men who have spent years on Mars; in every case we verify details down to the last iota. And you've picked a rather easy extra-factual system; had you picked Pluto or wanted to be Emperor of the Inner Planet Alliance we'd have much more difficulty... and the charges would be considerably greater."

Reaching into his coat for his wallet, Quail said, "Okay. It's been my life-long ambition and so I see I'll never really do it. So I guess I'll have to settle for this."

"Don't think of it that way," McClane said severely. "You're not accepting second-best. The actual memory, with all its vagueness, omissions and ellipses, not to say distortions--that's second-best." He accepted the money and pressed a button on his desk. "All right, Mr. Quail," he said, as the door of his office opened and two burly men swiftly entered. "You're on your way to Mars as a secret agent." He rose, came over to shake Quail's nervous, moist hand. "Or rather, you have been on your way. This afternoon at four-thirty you will, um, arrive back here on Terra; a cab will leave you off at your conapt and as I say you will never remember seeing me or coming here; you won't, in fact, even remember having heard of our existence."

**[Brendan: In your own words, what happens in this scene? How would you describe the "argument" McClane gives for purchasing the service?]**

His mouth dry with nervousness, Quail followed the two technicians from the office; what happened next depended on them.

*Will I actually believe I've been on Mars?* he wondered. *That I managed to fulfill my lifetime ambition?* He had a strange, lingering intuition that something would go wrong. *But just what--*he did not know.

He would have to wait and find out.

The intercom on McClane's desk, which connected him with the work area of the firm, buzzed and a voice said, "Mr. Quail is under sedation now, sir. Do you want to supervise this one, or shall we go ahead?"

"It's routine," McClane observed. "You may go ahead, Lowe; I don't think you'll run into any trouble." Programming an artificial memory of a trip to another planet--with or without the added fillip of being a

secret agent--showed up on the firm's work-schedule with monotonous regularity. *In one month*, he calculated wryly, *we must do twenty of these... ersatz interplanetary travel has become our bread and butter.*

"Whatever you say, Mr. McClane," Lowe's voice came, and thereupon the intercom shut off.

Going to the vault section in the chamber behind his office, McClane searched about for a Three packet--trip to Mars--and a Sixty-two packet: secret Interplan spy. Finding the two packets, he returned with them to his desk, seated himself comfortably, poured out the contents--merchandise which would be planted in Quail's conapt while the lab technicians busied themselves installing false memory.

*A one-poscred sneaky-pete side arm*, McClane reflected; *that's the largest item. Sets us back financially the most.* Then a pellet-sized transmitter, which could be swallowed if the agent were caught. *Code book that astonishingly resembled the real thing...* the firm's models were highly accurate: based, whenever possible, on actual U.S. military issue. Odd bits which made no intrinsic sense but which would be woven into the warp and woof of Quail's imaginary trip, would coincide with his memory: half an ancient silver fifty cent piece, several quotations from John Donne's sermons written incorrectly, each on a separate piece of transparent tissue-thin paper, several match folders from bars on Mars, a stainless steel spoon engraved PROPERTY OF DOME-MARS NATIONAL KIBBUZIM, a wire tapping coil which--

The intercom buzzed. "Mr. McClane, I'm sorry to bother you but something rather ominous has come up. Maybe it would be better if you were in here after all. Quail is already under sedation; he reacted well to the narkidrine; he's completely unconscious and receptive. But--"

"I'll be in." Sensing trouble, McClane left his office; a moment later he emerged in the work area.

On a hygienic bed lay Douglas Quail, breathing slowly and regularly, his eyes virtually shut; he seemed dimly--but only dimly--aware of the two technicians and now McClane himself.

"There's no space to insert false memory-patterns?" McClane felt irritation. "Merely drop out two work weeks; he's employed as a clerk at the West Coast Emigration Bureau, which is a government agency, so he undoubtedly has or had two weeks' vacation within the last year. That ought to do it." Petty details annoyed him. And always would.

"Our problem," Lowe said sharply, "is something quite different." He bent over the bed, said to Quail, "Tell Mr. McClane what you told us." To McClane he said, "Listen closely."

The gray-green eyes of the man lying supine in the bed focused on McClane's face. The eyes, he observed uneasily, had become hard; they had a polished, inorganic quality, like semi-precious tumbled stones. He was not sure that he liked what he saw; the brilliance was too cold. "What do you want now?" Quail said harshly. "You've broken my cover. Get out of here before I take you all apart." He studied McClane. "Especially you," he continued. "You're in charge of this counteroperation."

Lowe said, "How long were you on Mars?"

"One month," Quail said gratingly.

"And your purpose there?" Lowe demanded.

The meager lips twisted; Quail eyed him and did not speak. At last, drawling the words out so that they dripped with hostility, he said, "Agent for Interplan. As I already told you. Don't you record everything that's said? Play your vid-aud tape back for your boss and leave me alone." He shut his eyes, then; the hard brilliance ceased. McClane felt, instantly, a rushing splurge of relief.

Lowe said quietly, "This is a tough man, Mr. McClane."

"He won't be," McClane said, "after we arrange for him to lose his memory-chain again. He'll be as meek as before." To Quail he said, "So this is why you wanted to go to Mars so terribly bad."

Without opening his eyes Quail said, "I never wanted to go to Mars. I was assigned it--they handed it to me and there I was: stuck. Oh yeah, I admit I was curious about it; who wouldn't be?" Again he opened his eyes and surveyed the three of them, McClane in particular. "Quite a truth drug you've got here; it brought up things I had absolutely no memory of." He pondered. "I wonder about Kirsten," he said, half to himself. "Could she be in on it? An Interplan contact keeping an eye on me... to be certain I didn't regain my memory? No wonder she's been so derisive about my wanting to go there." Faintly, he smiled; the smile--one of understanding--disappeared almost at once.

McClane said, "Please believe me, Mr. Quail; we stumbled onto this entirely by accident. In the work we do--"

"I believe you," Quail said. He seemed tired, now; the drug was continuing to pull him under, deeper and deeper. "Where did I say I'd been?" he murmured. "Mars? Hard to remember--I know I'd like to see it; so would everybody else. But me--" His voice trailed off. *"Just a clerk, a nothing clerk."*

Straightening up, Lowe said to his superior. "He wants a false memory implanted that corresponds to a trip he actually took. And a false reason which is the real reason. He's telling the truth; he's a long way down in the narkidrine. The trip is very vivid in his mind--at least under sedation. But apparently he doesn't recall it otherwise. Someone, probably at a government military-sciences lab, erased his conscious memories; all he knew was that going to Mars meant something special to him, and so did being a secret agent. They couldn't erase that; it's not a memory but a desire, undoubtedly the same one that motivated him to volunteer for the assignment in the first place."

The other technician, Keeler, said to McClane, "What do we do? Graft a false memory-pattern over the real memory? There's no telling what the results would be; he might remember some of the genuine trip, and the confusion might bring on a psychotic interlude. He'd have to hold two opposite premises in his mind simultaneously: that he went to Mars and that he didn't. That he's a genuine agent for Interplan and he's not, that it's spurious. I think we ought to revive him without any false memory implantation and send him out of here; this is hot."

"Agreed," McClane said. A thought came to him. "Can you predict what he'll remember when he comes out of sedation?"

"Impossible to tell," Lowe said. "He probably will have some dim, diffuse memory of his actual trip, now. And he'd probably be in grave doubt as to its validity; he'd probably decide our programming slipped a gear-tooth. And he'd remember coming here; that wouldn't be erased--unless you want it erased."

"The less we mess with this man," McClane said, "the better I like it. This is nothing for us to fool around with; we've been foolish enough to--or unlucky enough to--uncover a genuine Interplan spy who has a cover so perfect that up to now even he didn't know what he was--or rather is." The sooner they washed their hands of the man calling himself Douglas Quail the better.

**[Brendan: Would you agree to be a spy if you knew your memory would be erased in this way?]**

"Are you going to plant packets Three and Sixty-two in his conapt?" Lowe said.

"No," McClane said. "And we're going to return half his fee."

"*Half!* Why half?"

McClane said lamely, "It seems to be a good compromise."

As the cab carried him back to his conapt at the residential end of Chicago, Douglas Quail said to himself, *It's sure good to be back on Terra.*

Already the month-long period on Mars had begun to waver in his memory; he had only an image of profound gaping craters, an ever-present ancient erosion of hills, of vitality, of motion itself. A world of dust where little happened, where a good part of the day was spent checking and rechecking one's portable oxygen source. And then the life forms, the unassuming and modest gray-brown cacti and maw-worms.

As a matter of fact he had brought back several moribund examples of Martian fauna; he had smuggled them through customs. After all, they posed no menace; they couldn't survive in Earth's heavy atmosphere.

Reaching into his coat pocket, he rummaged for the container of Martian maw-worms--

And found an envelope instead.

Lifting it out, he discovered, to his perplexity, that it contained five hundred and seventy poscreds, in cred bills of low denomination.

*Where'd I get this?* he asked himself. *Didn't I spend every 'cred I had on my trip?*

With the money came a slip of paper marked: One-half fee ret'd. By McClane. And then the date. Today's date.

"Recall," he said aloud.

"Recall what, sir or madam?" the robot driver of the cab inquired respectfully.

"Do you have a phone book?" Quail demanded.

"Certainly, sir or madam." A slot opened; from it slid a microtape phone book for Cook County.

"It's spelled oddly," Quail said as he leafed through the pages of the yellow section. He felt fear, then; abiding fear. "Here it is," he said. "Take me there, to Rekal, Incorporated. I've changed my mind; I don't want to go home."

"Yes, sir or madam, as the case may be," the driver said. A moment later the cab was zipping back in the opposite direction.

"May I make use of your phone?" he asked.

"Be my guest," the robot driver said. And presented a shiny new emperor 3-D color phone to him.

He dialed his own conapt. And after a pause found himself confronted by a miniature but chillingly realistic image of Kirsten on the small screen. "I've been to Mars," he said to her. "You're drunk." Her lips writhed scornfully. "Or worse."

" 's God's truth."

"When?" she demanded.

"I don't know." He felt confused. "A simulated trip, I think. By means of one of those artificial or extrafactual or whatever it is memory places. It didn't take."

Kirsten said witheringly, "You *are* drunk." And broke the connection at her end. He hung up, then, feeling his face flush. *Always the same tone*, he said hotly to himself. *Always the retort, as if she knows everything and I know nothing. What a marriage.* Keerist, he thought dismally.

A moment later the cab stopped at the curb before a modern, very attractive little pink building, over which a shifting polychromatic neon sign read: **REKAL, INCORPORATED.**

The receptionist, chic and bare from the waist up, started in surprise, then gained masterful control of herself. "Oh, hello, Mr. Quail," she said nervously. "H-how are you? Did you forget something?"

"The rest of my fee back," he said.

More composed now, the receptionist said, "Fee? I think you are mistaken, Mr. Quail. You were here discussing the feasibility of an extra-factual trip for you, but--" She shrugged her smooth pale shoulders. "As I understand it, no trip was taken."

Quail said, "I remember everything, miss. My letter to Rekal, Incorporated, which started this whole business off. I remember my arrival here, my visit with Mr. McClane. Then the two lab technicians taking me in tow and administering a drug to put me out." No wonder the firm had returned half his fee. The false memory of his "trip to Mars" hadn't taken--at least not entirely, not as he had been assured.

"Mr. Quail," the girl said, "although you are a minor clerk you are a good-looking man and it spoils your features to become angry. If it would make you feel any better, I might, ahem, let you take me out..."

He felt furious, then. "I remember you," he said savagely. "For instance the fact that your breasts are sprayed blue; that stuck in my mind. And I remember Mr. McClane's promise that if I remembered my visit to Rekal, Incorporated I'd receive my money back in full. Where is Mr. McClane?"

After a delay--probably as long as they could manage--he found himself once more seated facing the imposing walnut desk, exactly as he had been an hour or so earlier in the day.

"Some technique you have," Quail said sardonically. His disappointment--and resentment--was enormous, by now. "My so-called 'memory' of a trip to Mars as an undercover agent for Interplan is hazy and vague and shot full of contradictions. And I clearly remember my dealings here with you people. I ought to take this to the Better Business Bureau." He was burning angry, at this point; his sense of being cheated had overwhelmed him, had destroyed his customary aversion to participating in a public squabble.

Looking morose, as well as cautious, McClane said, "We capitulate, Quail. We'll refund the balance of your fee. I fully concede the fact that we did absolutely nothing for you." His tone was resigned.

Quail said accusingly, "You didn't even provide me with the various artifacts that you claimed would 'prove' to me I had been on Mars. All that song-and-dance you went into--it hasn't materialized into a damn thing. Not even a ticket stub. Nor postcards. Nor passport. Nor proof of immunization shots.

Nor--"

"Listen, Quail," McClane said. "Suppose I told you--" He broke off. "Let it go." He pressed a button on his intercom. "Shirley, will you disburse five hundred and seventy more 'creds in the form of a cashier's check made out to Douglas Quail? Thank you." He released the button, then glared at Quail.

Presently the check appeared; the receptionist placed it before McClane and once more vanished out of sight, leaving the two men alone, still facing each other across the surface of the massive walnut desk.

"Let me give you a word of advice," McClane said as he signed the check and passed it over. "Don't discuss your, ahem, recent trip to Mars with anyone."

"What trip?"

"Well, that's the thing." Doggedly, McClane said, "The trip you partially remember. Act as if you don't remember; pretend it never took place. Don't ask me why; just take my advice: it'll be better for all of us." He had begun to perspire. Freely. "Now, Mr. Quail, I have other business, other clients to see." He rose, showed Quail to the door.

Quail said, as he opened the door, "A firm that turns out such bad work shouldn't have any clients at all." He shut the door behind him.

**[Brendan: How does Quail “determine” his memory (of a trip to Mars) is false (though he’s of course wrong!)? In your own experience, is there anyway of telling “from the inside” of whether your own memories are accurate or not?]**

On the way home in the cab Quail pondered the wording of his letter of complaint to the Better Business Bureau, Terra Division. As soon as he could get to his typewriter he'd get started; it was clearly his duty to warn other people away from Rekal, Incorporated.

When he got back to his conapt he seated himself before his Hermes Rocket portable, opened the drawers and rummaged for carbon paper--and noticed a small, familiar box. A box which he had carefully filled on Mars with Martian fauna and later smuggled through customs.

Opening the box he saw, to his disbelief, six dead maw-worms and several varieties of the unicellular life on which the Martian worms fed. The protozoa were dried-up, dusty, but he recognized them; it had taken him an entire day picking among the vast dark alien boulders to find them. A wonderful, illuminated journey of discovery.

*But I didn't go to Mars*, he realized.

*Yet on the other hand--*

Kirsten appeared at the doorway to the room, an armload of pale brown groceries gripped. "Why are you home in the middle of the day?" Her voice, in an eternity of sameness, was accusing.

"Did I go to Mars?" he asked her. "You would know."

"No, of course you didn't go to Mars; you would know that, I would think. Aren't you always bleating about going?"

He said, "By God, I think I went." After a pause he added, "And simultaneously I think I didn't go." "Make up your mind."

"How can I?" He gestured. "I have both memory-tracks grafted inside my head; one is real and one isn't but I can't tell which is which. Why can't I rely on you? They haven't tinkered with you." She could do this much for him at least--even if she never did anything else.

Kirsten said in a level, controlled voice, "Doug, if you don't pull yourself together, we're through. I'm going to leave you."

"I'm in trouble." His voice came out husky and coarse. And shaking. "Probably I'm heading into a psychotic episode; I hope not, but--maybe that's it. It would explain everything, anyhow."

Setting down the bag of groceries, Kirsten stalked to the closet. "I was not kidding," she said to him quietly. She brought out a coat, got it on, walked back to the door of the conapt. "I'll phone you one of these days soon," she said tonelessly. "This is goodbye, Doug. I hope you pull out of this eventually; I really pray you do. For your sake."



"Wait," he said desperately. "Just tell me and make it absolute; I did go or I didn't--tell me which one." *But they may have altered your memory-track also*, he realized.

The door closed. His wife had left. *Finally!*

**[Brendan: What do you think—is Kirsten gaslighting Quail, or not?]**

A voice behind him said, "Well, that's that. Now put up your hands, Quail. And also please turn around and face this way."

He turned, instinctively, without raising his hands.

The man who faced him wore the plum uniform of the Interplan Police Agency, and his gun appeared to be UN issue. And, for some odd reason, he seemed familiar to Quail; familiar in a blurred, distorted fashion which he could not pin down. So, jerkily, he raised his hands.

"You remember," the policeman said, "your trip to Mars. We know all your actions today and all your thoughts--in particular your very important thoughts on the trip home from Rekal, Incorporated." He explained, "We have a tele-transmitter wired within your skull; it keeps us constantly informed."

A telepathic transmitter; use of a living plasma that had been discovered in Luna. He shuddered with self-aversion. The thing lived inside him, within his own brain, feeding, listening, feeding. But the Interplan police used them; that had come out even in the homeopapes. So this was probably true, dismal as it was.

"Why me?" Quail said huskily. What had he done--or thought? And what did this have to do with Rekal, Incorporated?

"Fundamentally," the Interplan cop said, "this has nothing to do with Rekal; it's between you and us." He tapped his right ear. "I'm still picking up your mental processes by way of your cephalic transmitter." In the man's ear Quail saw a small white-plastic plug. "So I have to warn you: anything you think may be held against you." He smiled. "Not that it matters now; you've already thought and spoken yourself into oblivion. What's annoying is the fact that under narkidrine at Rekal, Incorporated you told them, their technicians and the owner, Mr. McClane, about your trip--where you went, for whom, some of what you did. They're very frightened. They wish they had never laid eyes on you." He added reflectively, "They're right."

**[Brendan: If police COULD detect people's thoughts, would it be fair to use their "thoughts" as reasons to arrest/prosecute them? Why or why not?]**

Quail said, "I never made any trip. It's a false memory-chain improperly planted in me by McClane's technicians." But then he thought of the box, in his desk drawer, containing the Martian life forms. And the trouble and hardship he had had gathering them. The memory seemed real. And the box of life forms; that certainly was real. Unless McClane had planted it. Perhaps this was one of the "proofs" which McClane had talked glibly about.

*The memory of my trip to Mars, he thought, doesn't convince me--but unfortunately it has convinced the Interplan Police Agency. They think I really went to Mars and they think I at least partially realize it.*

"We not only know you went to Mars," the Interplan cop agreed, in answer to his thoughts, "but we know that you now remember enough to be difficult for us. And there's no use expunging your conscious memory of all this, because if we do you'll simply show up at Rekal, Incorporated again and start over. And we can't do anything about McClane and his operation because we have no jurisdiction over anyone except our own people. Anyhow, McClane hasn't committed any crime." He eyed Quail, "Nor, technically, have you. You didn't go to Rekal, Incorporated with the idea of regaining your memory; you went, as we realize, for the

usual reason people go there--a love by plain, dull people for adventure." He added, "Unfortunately you're not plain, not dull, and you've already had too much excitement; the last thing in the universe you needed was a course from Rekal, Incorporated. Nothing could have been more lethal for you or for us. And, for that matter, for McClane."

Quail said, "Why is it 'difficult' for you if I remember my trip--my alleged trip--and what I did there?" "Because," the Interplan harness bull said, "what you did is not in accord with our great white allprotecting father public image. You did, for us, what we never do. As you'll presently remember--thanks to narkidrine. That box of dead worms and algae has been sitting in your desk drawer for six months, ever since you got back. And at no time have you shown the slightest curiosity about it. We didn't even know you had it until you remembered it on your way home from Rekal; then we came here on the double to look for it." He added, unnecessarily, "Without any luck; there wasn't enough time."

A second Interplan cop joined the first one; the two briefly conferred. Meanwhile, Quail thought rapidly. He did remember more, now; the cop had been right about narkidrine. They--Interplan--probably used it themselves. *Probably?* He knew darn well they did; he had seen them putting a prisoner on it. *Where would that be? Somewhere on Terra? More likely on Luna,* he decided, viewing the image rising from his highly defective--but rapidly less so--memory.

And he remembered something else. Their reason for sending him to Mars; the job he had done.

No wonder they had expunged his memory.

**[Brendan: What do you think Quail did?]**

"Oh, God," the first of the two Interplan cops said, breaking off his conversation with his companion. Obviously, he had picked up Quail's thoughts. "Well, this is a far worse problem, now; as bad as it can get." He walked toward Quail, again covering him with his gun. "We've got to kill you," he said.

"And right away."

Nervously, his fellow officer said, "Why right away? Can't we simply cart him off to Interplan New York and let them--"

"He knows why it has to be right away," the first cop said; he too looked nervous, now, but Quail realized that it was for an entirely different reason. His memory had been brought back almost entirely, now. And he fully understood the officer's tension.

"On Mars," Quail said hoarsely, "I killed a man. After getting past fifteen bodyguards. Some armed with sneaky-pete guns, the way you are." He had been trained, by Interplan, over a five year period to be an assassin. A professional killer. He knew ways to take out armed adversaries... such as these two officers; and the one with the ear-receiver knew it, too. If he moved swiftly enough--

The gun fired. But he had already moved to one side, and at the same time he chopped down the gun-carrying officer. In an instant he had possession of the gun and was covering the other, confused, officer.

"Picked my thoughts up," Quail said, panting for breath. "He knew what I was going to do, but I did it anyhow."

Half sitting up, the injured officer grated, "He won't use that gun on you, Sam; I pick that up, too. He knows he's finished, and he knows we know it, too. Come on, Quail." Laboriously, grunting with pain, he got shakily to his feet. He held out his hand. "The gun," he said to Quail. "You can't use it, and if you turn it over to me I'll guarantee not to kill you; you'll be given a hearing, and someone higher up in Interplan will decide, not

me. Maybe they can erase your memory once more, I don't know. But you know the thing I was going to kill you for; I couldn't keep you from remembering it. So my reason for wanting to kill you is in a sense past."

Quail, clutching the gun, bolted from the conapt, sprinted for the elevator. *If you follow me*, he thought, *I'll kill you. So don't.* He jabbed at the elevator button and, a moment later, the doors slid back.

The police hadn't followed him. Obviously they had picked up his terse, tense thoughts and had decided not to take the chance.

With him inside the elevator descended. He had gotten away--for a time. But what next? Where could he go?

The elevator reached the ground floor; a moment later Quail had joined the mob of peds hurrying along the runnels. His head ached and he felt sick. But at least he had evaded death; they had come very close to shooting him on the spot, back in his own conapt.

*And they probably will again*, he decided. *When they find me. And with this transmitter inside me, that won't take too long.*

Ironically, he had gotten exactly what he had asked Rekal, Incorporated for. Adventure, peril, Interplan police at work, a secret and dangerous trip to Mars in which his life was at stake--everything he had wanted as a false memory.

The advantages of it being a memory--and nothing more--could now be appreciated.

On a park bench, alone, he sat dully watching a flock of perts: a semi-bird imported from Mars' two moons, capable of soaring flight, even against Earth's huge gravity.

*Maybe I can find my way back to Mars*, he pondered. *But then what?* It would be worse on Mars; the political organization whose leader he had assassinated would spot him the moment he stepped from the ship; he would have Interplan and them after him, there.

*Can you hear me thinking?* he wondered. Easy avenue to paranoia; sitting here alone he felt them tuning in on him, monitoring, recording, discussing... He shivered, rose to his feet, walked aimlessly, his hands deep in his pockets. *No matter where I go*, he realized, *you'll always be with me. As long as I have this device inside my head.*

*I'll make a deal with you*, he thought to himself--and to them. *Can you imprint a false-memory template on me again, as you did before, that I lived an average, routine life, never went to Mars? Never saw an Interplan uniform up close and never handled a gun?*

A voice inside his brain answered, "As has been carefully explained to you: that would not be enough."

Astonished, he halted.

"We formerly communicated with you in this manner," the voice continued. "When you were operating in the field, on Mars. It's been months since we've done it; we assumed, in fact, that we'd never have to do so again. Where are you?"

"Walking," Quail said, "to my death." *By your officers' guns*, he added as an afterthought. "How can you be sure it wouldn't be enough?" he demanded. "Don't the Rekal techniques work?"

"As we said. If you're given a set of standard, average memories you get--restless. You'd inevitably seek out Rekal or one of its competitors again. We can't go through this a second time."

"Suppose," Quail said, "once my authentic memories have been canceled, something more vital than standard memories are implanted. Something which would act to satisfy my craving," he said. "That's been proved; that's probably why you initially hired me. But you ought to be able to come up with something else--"

something equal. I was the richest man on Terra but I finally gave all my money to educational foundations. Or I was a famous deep-space explorer. Anything of that sort; wouldn't one of those do?" Silence.

"Try it," he said desperately. "Get some of your top-notch military psychiatrists; explore my mind. Find out what my most expansive daydream is." He tried to think. "Women," he said. "Thousands of them, like Don Juan had. An interplanetary playboy--a mistress in every city on Earth, Luna and Mars. Only I gave that up, out of exhaustion. Please," he begged. "Try it."

"You'd voluntarily surrender, then?" the voice inside his head asked. "If we agreed, to arrange such a solution? If it's possible?"

After an interval of hesitation he said, "Yes." *I'll take the risk*, he said to himself, *that you don't simply kill me.*

**[Brendan: Would you be willing to sacrifice your most exciting/meaningful memories in order to save your own life? Why or why not?]**

"You make the first move," the voice said presently. "Turn yourself over to us. And we'll investigate that line of possibility. If we can't do it, however, if your authentic memories begin to crop up again as they've done at this time, then--" There was silence and then the voice finished, "We'll have to destroy you. As you must understand. Well, Quail, you still want to try?"

"Yes," he said. Because the alternative was death now--and for certain. At least this way he had a chance, slim as it was.

"You present yourself at our main barracks in New York," the voice of the Interplan cop resumed. "At 580 Fifth Avenue, floor twelve. Once you've surrendered yourself, we'll have our psychiatrists begin on you; we'll have personality-profile tests made. We'll attempt to determine your absolute, ultimate fantasy wish--then we'll bring you back to Rekal, Incorporated, here; get them in on it, fulfilling that wish in vicarious surrogate retrospection. And--good luck. We do owe you something; you acted as a capable instrument for us." The voice lacked malice; if anything, they--the organization--felt sympathy toward him.

"Thanks," Quail said. And began searching for a robot cab.

"Mr. Quail," the stern-faced, elderly Interplan psychiatrist said, "you possess a most interesting wishfulfillment dream fantasy. Probably nothing such as you consciously entertain or suppose. This is commonly the way; I hope it won't upset you too much to hear about it."

The senior ranking Interplan officer present said briskly, "He better not be too much upset to hear about it, not if he expects not to get shot."

"Unlike the fantasy of wanting to be an Interplan undercover agent," the psychiatrist continued, "which, being relatively speaking a product of maturity, had a certain plausibility to it, this production is a grotesque dream of your childhood; it is no wonder you fail to recall it. Your fantasy is this: you are nine years old, walking alone down a rustic lane. An unfamiliar variety of space vessel from another star system lands directly in front of you. No one on Earth but you, Mr. Quail, sees it. The creatures within are very small and helpless, somewhat on the order of field mice, although they are attempting to invade Earth; tens of thousands of other ships will soon be on their way, when this advance party gives the go-ahead signal."

"And I suppose I stop them," Quail said, experiencing a mixture of amusement and disgust. "Singlehanded I wipe them out. Probably by stepping on them with my foot."

"No," the psychiatrist said patiently. "You halt the invasion, but not by destroying them. Instead, you show them kindness and mercy, even though by telepathy--their mode of communication--you know why they

have come. They have never seen such humane traits exhibited by any sentient organism, and to show their appreciation they make a covenant with you."

Quail said, "They won't invade Earth as long as I'm alive."

"Exactly." To the Interplan officer the psychiatrist said, "You can see it does fit his personality, despite his feigned scorn."

"So by merely existing," Quail said, feeling a growing pleasure, "by simply being alive, I keep Earth safe from alien rule. I'm in effect, then, the most important person on Terra. Without lifting a finger."

"Yes, indeed, sir," the psychiatrist said. "And this is bedrock in your psyche; this is a life-long childhood fantasy. Which, without depth and drug therapy, you never would have recalled. But it has always existed in you; it went underneath, but never ceased."

To McClane, who sat intently listening, the senior police official said, "Can you implant an extrafactual memory pattern that extreme in him?"

"We get handed every possible type of wish-fantasy there is," McClane said. "Frankly, I've heard a lot worse than this. Certainly we can handle it. Twenty-four hours from now he won't just wish he'd saved Earth; he'll devoutly believe it really happened."

The senior police official said, "You can start the job, then. In preparation we've already once again erased the memory in him of his trip to Mars."

Quail said, "What trip to Mars?"

No one answered him, so reluctantly, he shelved the question. And anyhow a police vehicle had now put in its appearance; he, McClane and the senior police officer crowded into it, and presently they were on their way to Chicago and Rekal, Incorporated.

"You had better make no errors this time," the police officer said to heavy-set, nervous-looking McClane.

"I can't see what could go wrong," McClane mumbled, perspiring. "This has nothing to do with Mars or Interplan. Single-handedly stopping an invasion of Earth from another star-system." He shook his head at that. "Wow, what a kid dreams up. And by pious virtue, too; not by force. It's sort of quaint." He dabbed at his forehead with a large linen pocket handkerchief.

Nobody said anything.

"In fact," McClane said, "it's touching."

"But arrogant," the police official said starkly. "Inasmuch as when he dies the invasion will resume. No wonder he doesn't recall it; it's the most grandiose fantasy I ever ran across." He eyed Quail with disapproval. "And to think we put this man on our payroll."

**[Brendan: Did you have any "stories" or "dreams" in which you saved the world when you were 9-10? Care to share them?]**

When they reached Rekal, Incorporated the receptionist, Shirley, met them breathlessly in the outer office. "Welcome back, Mr. Quail," she fluttered, her melon-shaped breasts--today painted an incandescent orange--bobbing with agitation. "I'm sorry everything worked out so badly before; I'm sure this time it'll go better."

Still repeatedly dabbing at his shiny forehead with his neatly folded Irish linen handkerchief, McClane said, "It better." Moving with rapidity he rounded up Lowe and Keeler, escorted them and Douglas Quail to the work area, and then, with Shirley and the senior police officer, returned to his familiar office. To wait.

"Do we have a packet made up for this, Mr. McClane?" Shirley asked, bumping against him in her agitation, then coloring modestly.

"I think we do." He tried to recall, then gave up and consulted the formal chart. "A combination," he decided aloud, "of packets Eighty-one, Twenty, and Six." From the vault section of the chamber behind his desk he fished out the appropriate packets, carried them to his desk for inspection. "From Eight-one," he explained, "a magic healing rod given him--the client in question, this time Mr. Quail--by the race of beings from another system. A token of their gratitude."

"Does it work?" the police officer asked curiously.

"It did once," McClane explained. "But he, ahem, you see, used it up years ago, healing right and left. Now it's only a memento. But he remembers it working spectacularly." He chuckled, then opened packet Twenty. "Document from the UN Secretary General thanking him for saving Earth; this isn't precisely appropriate, because part of Quail's fantasy is that no one knows of the invasion except himself, but for the sake of verisimilitude we'll throw it in." He inspected packet Six, then. *What came from this?* He couldn't recall; frowning, he dug into the plastic bag as Shirley and the Interplan olice officer watched intently.

"Writing," Shirley said. "In a funny language."

"This tells who they were," McClane said, "and where they came from. Including a detailed star map logging their flight here and the system of origin. Of course it's in their script, so he can't read it. But he remembers them reading it to him in his own tongue." He placed the three artifacts in the center of the desk. "These should be taken to Quail's conapt," he said to the police officer. "So that when he gets home he'll find them. And it'll confirm his fantasy. SOP--standard operating procedure." He chuckled apprehensively, wondering how matters were going with Lowe and Keeler.

The intercom buzzed. "Mr. McClane, I'm sorry to bother you." It was Lowe's voice; he froze as he recognized it, froze and became mute. "But something's come up. Maybe it would be better if you came in here and supervised. Like before, Quail reacted well to the narkidrine; he's unconscious, relaxed and receptive. But--" McClane sprinted for the work area.

On a hygienic bed Douglas Quail lay breathing slowly and regularly, eyes half-shut, dimly conscious of those around him.

"We started interrogating him," Lowe said, white-faced. "To find out exactly when to place the fantasy-memory of him single-handedly having saved Earth. And strangely enough--"

"They told me not to tell," Douglas Quail mumbled in a dull drug-saturated voice. "That was the agreement. I wasn't even supposed to remember. But how could I forget an event like that?"

*I guess it would be hard,* McClane reflected. *But you did--until now.*

"They even gave me a scroll," Quail mumbled, "of gratitude. I have it hidden in my conapt; I'll show it to you."

To the Interplan officer who had followed after him, McClane said, "Well, I offer the suggestion that you better not kill him. If you do they'll return."

"They also gave me a magic invisible destroying rod," Quail mumbled, eyes totally shut now. "That's how I killed that man on Mars you sent me to take out. It's in my drawer along with the box of Martian maw-worms and dried-up plant life."

Wordlessly, the Interplan officer turned and stalked from the work area.

*I might as well put those packets of proof-artifacts away*, McClane said to himself resignedly. He walked, step by step, back to his office. Including the citation from the UN Secretary General. After all--

The real one probably would not be long in coming.

**[Brendan: So, what did you think of the story?]**

### 3.2 REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. In your OWN words, give a 50-word summary of the main events of the story (this is a great way of remembering what happened!).
2. What are some similarities between the events depicted in this story and Plato's Cave Analogy? Some differences?
3. Earlier, we talked about some main "areas" of philosophy. Here are some questions related to each of these areas:
  - a. Metaphysics: What is it that makes us "who we are?" Our bodies? Our memories? Something else? Does Douglas Quail "remain the same person" as his memories are concealed/erased?
  - b. Ethics: Under what conditions would be OK to erase someone's memories without their consent? (For example, suppose that we could "kill" a potential serial killer by doing this? Would it be OK?).
  - c. Logic and Epistemology: It's a well-known fact that people remember the "same event" very differently. Can you give examples of this from your own life? Is there any way of "assuring" ourselves that our memories are the "correct ones?"