

The Place Where Chicago Was

By

Jim Harmon

***Free*editorial** 

I

It was late December of 1983. Abe Danniels knew that the streets and sidewalks of Jersey City moved under their own power and that half the families in America owned their own helicopters. He was pleased with these signs of progress. But he was sweating. He thought he was getting athlete's foot instead of athletic legs from walking from the New Jersey coast to just outside of Marshall, Illinois.

The heat was unbearable.

The road shimmered before him in rows of sticky black ribbon, on which nothing moved. Nothing but him.

He passed a signal post that said "Caution—Slow" in a gentle but commanding voice. He staggered on toward a reddish metallic square set on a thin column of bluish concrete. It was what they called a sign, he decided.

Danniels drooped against the sign and fanned his face with his sweat-ringed straw cowboy hat. The thing seemed to have something to say about the mid-century novelist, James Jones, in short, terse words.

The rim of the hat crumpled in his fist. He stood still and listened.

There was a car coming.

It would almost have to stop, he reasoned. A man couldn't stand much of this Illinois winter heat. The driver might leave him to die on the road if he didn't stop. Therefore he would stop.

He jerked out the small pouch from the sash of his jeans. Inside the special plastic the powder was dry. He rubbed some between his hands briskly, to build up the static electricity, and massaged it into his hair.

The metal of the Jones plaque was fairly shiny. Under the beating noon sun it cast a pale reflection back at Danniels. His hair looked a reasonably uniform white now.

He started to draw the string on the pouch, then dipped his hand in and scooped his palm up to his mouth. He chewed on the stuff while he was securing the nearly flat bag in his sash. He swallowed the dough; the powder had been flour.

Danniels took the hat from beneath his arm, set it to his head and at last faced the direction of the engine whine.

The roof, hood and wheels moved over the curve of the horizon and

Danniels saw that the car was a brandless classic which probably still had some of the original, indestructible Model A left in it.

He pondered a moment on whether to thumb or not to thumb.

He thumbed.

The rod squealed to a stop exactly even with him. A door unfolded and a voice like a stop signal said flatly, "Get in."

Danniels got in. The driver was a teen-ager in a loose scarlet tunic and a spangled W.P.A. cap. The youth wouldn't have been bad-looking except for a sullen expression and a rather girlish turn of cheek, completely devoid of beard line. Danniels wrote him off as a prospective member of the Wolf Pack in a year or two.

But not just yet, he fervently hoped.

"Going far? I'm not," said the driver.

Danniels adjusted the knees of his trousers. "I'm going to—near where Chicago used to be."

"Huh?"

Danniels had forgotten the youth of his companion. "I mean I'm going to where you can't go any further."

The driver nodded smugly, relieved that the threat to the vastness of his knowledge had been dismissed. "I get you, Pop. I guess I can take you close to where you're headed."

They rode on in silence, both relieved that they didn't have to try to span the void between age and position with words.

"You aren't anywhere near starvation, are you?" the driver said suddenly, uneasy.

"No," Danniels said. "Anyway I've got money."

"Woodrow Wilson! I'll pull in at the next joint."

The next joint was carved out of the flat cross-section of hill that looked unmistakably like a strip ridge of a Colorado copper mine, but wasn't ... even barring the fact that this was Illinois. The rectangle of visible dinner was color-fused aluminum from between No. Two and Korea.

Danniels was glad to get into the shockingly cold air-conditioning. It was constant, if unhealthy. The chugging unit in the car failed a heartbeat every now and then for a sickening wave of heat.

The two of them pulled up wire chairs to a linoleum-top table in a mirrored

corner. A faint purple hectographed menu was stuck between appropriately colored plastic squeeze bottles labeled MUSTARD and BLOOD.

Danniels knew what the menu would say but he unfolded it and checked.

Steaks

Plankton .90

Juicy, rich-red tantalizing hamburger .17

Accessories

Mashed potatoes .40

Delectable oysters, all you can eat .09

Peas .35

Rich, fragrant cheese, large slice .02

Drinks

Coke .50

Milk, the forbidden wine of nature .01

Coffee (without) .50

Coffee (with) .02

A fat girl in white came to the table.

Danniels tossed the menu on the table. "I'll take the meat dinner," he said.

The teen-ager stared hard at the table top. "So will I."

"Good citizens," the waitress said, but the revulsion crept into her voice over the professional hardness.

Danniels looked carefully at his companion. "You aren't used to ordering meat."

"Pop," the youth began. Danniels waited to be told that being short of cash was none of his business. "Pop, on my leg. Kill it, kill it!"

Danniels leaned over the table startled and curious. A cockroach was feeling its way along a thin meridian of vari-colored jeans. Danniels pinched it up without injuring it and deposited it on the floor. It scurried away.

"Your kind make me sick," the driver said in lieu of thanks. "You act like a Fanatic but you're a Meat-Eater. How do you blesh that?"

Danniels shrugged. He did not have to explain anything to this kid. He couldn't be stranded.

The kid was under the same encephalographic inversion as the rest of the world. No human being could directly or indirectly commit murder, as long as the broadcasting stations every nation on earth maintained in self-defense continued to function.

These mechanical brain waves coated every mind with enforced pacifism. They could have just as easily broadcast currents that would have made minds swell with love or happiness. But world leaders had universally agreed that these conditions were too narcotic for the common people to endure.

Pacifism was vital to the survival of the planet.

War could not go on killing; but governments still had to go on winning wars. War became a game. The International War Games were held every two years. With pseudo-H bombs and mock-germ warfare, countries still effectively eliminated cities and individuals. A "destroyed" city was off-limits for twenty years. Nothing could go in or out for that period. Most cities had provided huge food deposits for emergencies.

Before the Famine.

Some minds were more finely attuned to the encephalographic inversion than others. People so in tune with the wavelength of pacifism could not only not kill another human being, they could not even kill an animal. Vegetarianism was thrust upon a world not equipped for it. Some—like Danniels—who could not kill, still found themselves able to eat what others had killed. Others who could not kill or eat any once-living thing—even plants—rapidly starved to death. They were quickly forgotten.

Almost as forgotten as the Jonahs.

The War Dead.

Any soldier or civilian "killed" outside of a major disaster area (where he would be subject to the twenty years) became a man without a country—or a world. They were tagged with green hair by molecular exchange and sent on their way to starve, band together, reach a disaster area (where they would be accepted for the duration of the disaster), or starve.

Anyone who in any way communicated with a Jonah or even recognized the existence of one automatically became a Jonah himself.

It was harsh. And if it wasn't better than war it was quieter.

And more permanent.

The counterman with a greasy apron and hairy forearms served the plates. The meat had been lightly glazed to bring out the aroma and flavor but the blood was still a pink sheen on the ground meat. There were generous side

dishes of cheese and milk. Even animal by-products were passed up by the majority of vegetarians. Eggs had been the first to be dropped—after all, every egg was a potential life. Milk and associated products came to be spurned through sheer revulsion by association. Besides, milk was intended only to feed the animal's own offspring, wasn't it?

Danniels squirted blood generously from its squeeze bottle. Even vegetarians used a lot of it. It gave their plankton the gory look the human animal craved. Of course it was not really blood, only a kind of tomato paste. When Danniels had been a boy people called it catsup.

He tried to dig into his steak with vengeance but it tasted of ashes. Meat was his favorite food; he was in no way a vegetarian. But the thought of the Famine haunted him. Vegetable food was high in price and ration points. Most people were living on 2500 calories a day. It wasn't quite starvation and it wasn't quite a full stomach. It was hard on anybody who did more than an average amount of work. It was especially hard on children.

The Meat-Eaters helped relieve the situation. Some, with only the minimum of influence from the Broadcasters, ate nothing but meat. They were naturally aggressive morons who were doing no one favors, potential members of a Wolf Pack.

Danniels knew how to end the Famine.

The mob that was the men he had commanded had hunted him in the hills below Buffalo, and he had been hungry, with no time to eat, or rest, or sleep. Only enough time to think. He couldn't stop thinking. Panting over a smothered spark of campfire, smoldering moss and leaves, he thought. Drinking sparkling but polluted water from a twisting mountain stream and trying unsuccessfully to trap silver shavings of fish with his naked hands, he thought.

His civilian job was that of a genopseudoxenobeastimacroilogist, a specialized field with peacetime applications that had come out of the War Games—specialized to an almost comic-opera intensity. He knew virtually everything about almost nothing at all. Yet, delirious with hunger, from this he fashioned in his mind a way to provide food for everybody. Even Jonahs.

After they caught him—weeks before the Tag spot would have faded off—he wasn't sure whether his idea had been a sick dream or not. But he intended to find out. He wouldn't let any other mob stop him from that.

Danniels had decided he was against mobs, whether their violence and stupidity was social or anti-social. People are better as individuals.

The driver of the hot-rod was also picking at his food uncertainly. Probably

a social vegetarian, Danniels supposed. An irresponsible faddist.

The counterman stopped staring and cleared his throat apologetically. "This ain't the Ritz but it don't look good for customers to sit with hats on."

Danniels knew that applied to only non-vegetarians, but he put his Stetson, reluctantly, on an aluminum tree.

The teen-ager looked up. And did not go back to the food. Danniels knew that he had been found out.

The counterman went back to wiping down the bar.

The youth was still looking at Danniels.

"You better eat if you don't want me to be discovered," Danniels said gently.

Young eyes moved back and forth, searching, not finding.

"It won't do you any good to run," Danniels continued. "The waitress and the counterman will swear they had nothing to do with me. But you were driving me, eating with me."

"You can't let even a Jonah die," the youngster said in a hoarse whisper that barely carried across the table.

Danniels shook his head sadly. "It won't work. You might have slowed down enough to let me grab onto the rear bumper or tossed me out some food. But you took me into your car, sat down at a table with me."

"And this is the thanks I get!"

Danniels felt his face flush. "Look, son, this isn't a game where you can afford to play by good sportsmanship. That's somebody else's rules, designed to make sure you get at least no better a break than anyone else. You have to play by your rules—designed to give you the best possible break. Let's get out of here."

He wolfed the last bite and jammed his hat back on his head, pulling it down about his ears. The sweat band had rubbed the flour off his hair in a narrow band. A band of green. The mark of the Jonah.

In the last war games, Danniels had come into the sights of a Canadian's diffusion rifle. For six months he had worn a cancerous badge of luminosity over his heart. Until his comrades had trapped him and through a system similar to the one their rifles employed turned his hair to green and cast him out.

Danniels scooped up both checks and with deep pain paid both of them to save time. He wanted to get his companion out of there before he broke.

The heat struck at their faces like jets of boiling water. The authorities said nuclear explosion had had nothing to do with changing climatic conditions so radically, but something had.

The two of them were walking towards the parked car when the Wolf Pack got to them.

II

The horrible part was that Danniels knew they wouldn't kill him. No one could kill.

But the members of the Wolf Packs wanted to. They were the professional soldiers, policemen, prizefighters and gangsters of a society that had rejected them. They were able to resist some of the pacifism of the Broadcasters. In fact, they were able to resist quite a lot.

The first one was a round-shouldered little man with silver spectacles. He kicked Danniels in the pit of the stomach with steel-shod toes. A clean-cut athletic boy grabbed the running teen-ager and ripped the red tunic halfway off. From the pavement Danniels at last isolated the doubt that had been nagging him. His companion wore a tight tee-shirt under the coat. She was a girl.

Danniels saw a heavy shoe aimed at his face but it went far afield. Running feet went past him completely.

He was left alone, unharmed, with only the breath knocked out of him momentarily.

They were closing in on the girl who had picked him up.

This Pack was all men, although there were female and co-ed groups just as vicious. Beating up a girl, Danniels knew, would give an added sexual kick to their usual masochosadism.

They were a Pack. A mob. They were like the soldiers who had hunted him down and had him permanently tagged a Jonah. His men had been looked upon favorably by his society, while the Wolf Pack was so ill-favored it was completely ignored in absolute contempt. But they were the same in the essentials: a mob.

And once again Danniels, who was incapable of harming the smallest living creature, wanted to kill men. But he couldn't.

All his life he had experienced this mad fury of desire and it shamed him.

He wanted to destroy men of stupidity, greed and brutality on sight. Any other kind of conflict with them was weak compromise.

At times, he wondered if this atavistic if pro-survival trait had not shamed him so much that he over-compensated for it by violently refusing to take any kind of life. Like all men of his time, he asked himself: how much of my mind is the Broadcasters' and how much me?

If he couldn't destroy, he could defend.

With the idea still only half-formed, he lurched to his feet and stumbled into the side of the hot-rod. He fumbled open the heated metal door and slid under the wheel.

He thumbed the drive on savagely and roared down on the mob.

Rubber screamed, whined and smelled as he applied the brakes just soon enough for the men to jump out of the way—away from the girl.

He folded back the door he hadn't latched, leaned down, grabbed the teenager by the leg and dragged her bruised form bumping up into the car.

The little man with silver glasses tried to reach into the car.

Danniels swung the door back into his face.

The glasses didn't break; but everything else did.

With one foot under the girl and the other on her, Danniels tagged the illegal acceleration wire most cars had rigged under the dashboard and raced away into the brassy sunshine.

She was slouched against his shoulder when the stars blazed out in the moonless night.

Tires hummed beneath them and their headlights ate up the white-striped typewriter ribbon before them.

The girl opened her eyes, hesitated as they focused on the weave pattern of denim in his shirt, and said, "Where are they?"

"Back there some place," Danniels told her. "They followed in their cars, a couple on motorcycles. But they must have been scared of traffic cops on the main highway. They dropped out."

She sat up and ran her fingers through her cropped mouse-colored hair. Her quick glance at him was questioning; but she answered her own question and reluctantly absorbed the truth of it. She knew he knew.

The girl huddled in the tatters of her bright tunic.

"Just what do you expect to get out of helping me?" she asked.

Danniels kept his eyes on the road. "A free trip to Chicago."

"You'll get us both arrested!" she shrilled. "Nobody can get past those roadblocks."

He nodded to himself, not caring if she saw the gesture in the uncertain light from the auto gauges.

"All right," she admitted. "I know what Chicago is. That's no crime."

"You ought to," Danniels said. "You're from there."

She was tired. It was a moment before she could continue fighting. "That's foolish—"

He hadn't been sure. If she hadn't hesitated he might have given up the notion.

"That getup was what was foolish," Danniels snorted. "Anybody would know you were trying to hide something as soon as they found out the masquerade."

"You wouldn't have found it out," she said, "if one of that Pack hadn't torn my jacket off."

"I really don't know. It might be animal magnetism, if there is such a thing. But I can't be around a woman for long without knowing it. I repeat: why?"

"I—I didn't know what they would do to a girl outside."

"For Peace sake, why did you have to come out at all?"

The girl was silent for a mile.

"Most Chicagoans think the rest of the world has reverted to barbarism," she told him.

"A common complaint of city dwellers," he observed.

"Don't joke!" she demanded. "Our food is running out. We have enough to last five more years if the present birth-death cycle maintains itself."

Danniels whistled mournfully.

"And you have—let's see—about seven more years to go."

She nodded.

"I came out to see what chance there was of ending this senseless blockade."

"None at all," he snapped. "No one is going to risk breaking the rules of the War Games just to save a few million lives."

"But they will have to! The Broadcasters will make them."

"You would be surprised at how much doublethink people can practice about not killing," he assured her from bitter, personal experience. "They don't know for certain that you will be starving in there, so they will be free to keep you inside."

The girl straightened her shoulders, emphasizing the femininity of her slender form.

"We'll tell them," she said. "I'll tell them."

Danniels almost smiled, but not quite. His hands tightened on the steering wheel and he kept his eyes to the moving circle of light against the night.

"You open your mouth about Chicago to the authorities or anyone else and they will slap you under sedation and keep you there until you die of old age. They used to drop escapees back into the cities by parachute. But too many of them were inadvertently killed; they are more subtle these days. By the way," he said very casually, "how did you escape?"

She told him where to go in a primitive, timeless fashion.

"No," Danniels said. "I'm going to Chicago."

"Not with me," the girl assured him quietly. "We have enough to feed without bringing in another Jonah. Besides you might be an F.B.I. man or something trying to find our escape route."

"I'd be a Mountie then. The F.B.I. has deteriorated pretty badly. Spent itself on political security. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police lends us men and women during peacetime. Up until the War Games anyway—even though Britain would like to see us constantly disrupted. But," he said heavily, "I am not a government agent of any kind. Just the Jonah I appear to be."

She shivered. "I can't take the responsibility. I can't either expose our escape route—or bring in another mouth, to bring starvation a moment closer."

"Look, what can I call you?" he demanded in exasperation.

"Julie. Julie Amprey."

"Abe Danniels. Look, Julie—"

"You were named after Lincoln?" she asked quietly.

"A long time after. Look, Julie, I want to get into Chicago because of the old Milne Laboratories." He caught his breath for a long second. "They are still standing?"

Julie nodded and looked ahead, through the insect-spotted windscreen.

"Partial operation, when I left."

Danniels gave a low whistle. "Lord, after all these years!"

"We manage."

"Fine! Julie, I'm sure that if I can get back in a laboratory I can find a way of ending this condemned Famine—inside Chicago and outside."

"That sounds a little like delusions of grandeur to me," the girl said uncertainly.

"It was my field for ten years. Before the last War Games. I had time to think while my platoon was hunting me down, after I had been tagged out. I thought faster than I ever thought before."

Julie studied his face for a long moment.

"What was your idea?"

"The encephalographic inversion patterns of the Broadcasters," he said quickly, "can be applied to animals as well as human beings, on the right frequencies. Even microscopic animals. Bacteria. If you control the actions of bacteria, you control their reproduction. They could be made to multiply and assume different forms—the form of food, for example."

Danniels took a deep breath and plunged into his idea as they drove on through the deepening night. He talked and explained to her, and, in doing so, he clarified points that he hadn't been sure of himself.

He stopped at last because his throat was momentarily too dry to continue.

"It's too big a responsibility for me," Julie said.

Defeat stung him so badly he was afraid he had slumped physically. But it won't be permanent defeat, he told himself. I've come this far and I'll find some other way into Chicago.

"I haven't the right to turn down something this big," Julie said. "I'll have to let you put it to the mayor and the city council."

He relaxed a trifle, condemning himself for the weak luxury. He couldn't afford it yet. He ran his fingers through his flour-dusted green hair and the electricity of the movement dragged off much of the whiteness. His skin, like that of most people, had been given a slight negative charge by molecularization to repel dirt and germs. The powder was anxious to remove itself and dye or bleach refused to take at all.

"We're nearing the rim of the first blockade zone," Danniels told the girl. "Where to?"

"Circle around to first unrestricted beach of the lake shore."

"And then."

"Underwater."

Illegal traffic in and out of Disaster Areas was not completely unheard of. There was a small but steady flow both ways that the authorities could not or would not completely check. The patrols seemingly were as alert as humanly possible. Capture meant permanent oblivion for Disaster Residents under sedation, while Outsiders got prescribed periods of Morphine-induced antipode depression of the brain, a rather sophisticated but effective form of torture. A few minutes under the drug frequently had an introspective duration of years. Therefore, under the typical sentence of three months, a felon lived several lifetimes in constant but varying stages of acute agony and post-hysterical terror.

While few personalities survived, many useful human machines were later salvaged by skillful lobotomies.

Lake Michigan beaches were pretty good, Danniels observed. Better than at Hawaii. This one had been cleaned up for a sub-division that had naturally never been completed. It had been christened Falstaff Cove, although it was almost a mathematically straight half mile of off-white sand.

He had shifted to four-wheel drive at the girl's direction and bored through the sand to the southernmost corner of the beach, where it blurred into weeds, rocks, dirt and incredible litter. He braked. The car settled noticeably.

"There's a two-man submarine out there in the water under the overhang," Julie said without prompting. "We got it from the Armed Forces Day display at Soldier's Field."

"What I'd like to know is how you get the car in and out of it?" Danniels said.

Anger, disgust and fatigue crossed the girl's face. It was after all, a very young face, he thought. "We have Outside contacts of sorts," she said. "Nobody trusts them very much."

He nodded. There was a lot of money in the Federal Reserve Vaults inside the city.

The two of them got out of the car.

Julie stripped off her jeans, revealing the bottom half of a swimsuit and nicely turned, but pale, legs. "We'll have to wade out to the sub."

"What about the car?" Danniels asked. "Is your friend going to pick it up?"

"No! They don't know about this place."

He reached in the window and turned the ignition. "Want me to run it off into the water? You don't want to tag this spot for the authorities."

"No, I—I guess not. I don't know what to do! I'm not used to this kind of thing. I don't know why I ever come. We paid an awful lot for the car...."

He found the girl's wailing unpleasant. "It's your car, but take my advice. Let me get rid of it for you."

"But," she protested, "if you run it into the water they can see from the air in daylight. I know. They used to spot our sub. Why not run it off into those weeds and little trees? They'll hide it and maybe we could get it later."

It wasn't a bad idea but he didn't feel like admitting it. He gunned the rod into the tangle of undergrowth.

Danniels came back to the girl with his arms and face laced with scratches from the limbs.

He tried to roll his trousers up at the cuff but they wouldn't stay. So he would spend a soggy ten minutes while they dried.

He told the girl to go ahead and he went after her, marking the spongy wet sand and slapping into the white-scummed, very blue water.

The tiny submarine was just where Julie had said it would be. He waited impatiently as she worked the miniature airlock.

They squeezed down into the metallic hollowness of the interior and Julie screwed the hatch shut, a Mason lid inappropriately on a can of sardines.

There were a lot of white-on-black dials that completely baffled Danniels. He had never been particularly mechanically minded. His field was closer to pure science than practical engineering. Because of this, rather than in spite of it, he had great respect for engineering.

It bothered him being in such close quarters with a woman after the months of isolation as a Jonah, but he had enough of the conventions of society fused into him and enough other problems to attempt easing his discomfort.

"It isn't much further," Julie at last assured him.

He was becoming bored to the point of hysteria. For the past several months he hadn't had much diversion but he had not been confined to what was essentially an oil drum wired for light and sound.

One of the lights changed size and pattern.

He found himself tensing. "That?" He pointed.

"Sonadar," Julie hissed. "Patrol boat above us. Don't make any noise."

Danniels pictured the heavily equipped police boat droning past above them and managed to keep quite silent.

Something banged on the hull.

It came from the outside and it rang against the port side, then the starboard. The rhythm was the same, unbroken. Danniels knew somehow the noise from both sides were made by the same agency. Something with a twelve-foot reach.

Something that knew the Morse code.

Da-da-da. Dit-dit-dit. Da-da-da.

S. O. S.

Help.

"It's not the police," Julie said. "We've heard it before." She added, "They used to dump non-dangerous amounts of radioactives into the lake," as she decided the police boat had gone past and started up the engines again.

Danniels never forgot that call for help. Not as long as he lived.

III

The electron microscope revealed no significant change in the pattern of the bacteria.

Danniels decided to feed the white mice. He got out of his plastic chair and took a small cloth bag of corn from the warped, sticking drawer of the lab table.

Rationing out a handful of the withered kernels, he went down the rows of cages. A few, with steel instead of aluminum wiring, were flecked with rust. The mice inside were all healthy. Danniels was not using them in experiments; he was incapable of taking their lives. But some experimenter after him might use them. In any case, he was also incapable of letting them starve to death.

He had been out of jail less than two weeks.

The city council had thrown him into the Cook County lockup until they decided what to do with him. He hadn't known what happened to the girl, Julie Amprey, for bringing him back with her.

He was surprised to see Chicago functioning as well as it was after thirteen

years of isolation. There were still a few cars and trucks running here and there, although most people walked or rode bicycles. But the atmosphere seemed heavy and the buildings dirtier than ever. The city had the aura of oppression and decay he thought of as belonging to nineteenth century London.

Danniels had waited out New Year's and St. Valentine's in a cell between a convicted burglar and an endless parade of drunks. Finally, two weeks ago the mayor himself came, apologizing profusely but without much feeling. Danniels was escorted to the old Milne Laboratory buildings and told to go to work on his idea. He had, they said, two weeks to produce. And he was getting nowhere.

His deadline was up. The deadline of the real world. But the one he had given himself was much, much more pressing.

"You'll kill yourself if you don't get some sleep," the girl's voice said behind his back.

Danniels closed the drawer on the nearly depleted sack of grain. It was the girl. Julie Amprey. He had been expecting her but not anticipating her. He didn't like her very much. The only reason he could conceive for her venture Outside was a search for thrills. It might be understandable, if immature, in a man; but he found it unattractive in a woman. He had no illusions about masculine superiority, but women were socially, if not physically and emotionally, ill-equipped for simple adventuring.

Julie was more attractive dressed in a woman's clothes, even if they were a dozen years out of style. Her hair had a titian glint. She was perhaps really too slender for the green knit dress.

"It's a big job," he said. "I'm beginning to think it's a lifetime job."

He half-turned and motioned awkwardly at the lab table and the naked piece of electronics.

"That's the encephalographic projector I jury-rigged," he explained.

"You can spare me the fifty-cent tour," Julie said.

He wondered how she had managed to get so irritating in such a short lifetime. "There's not much else to see," Danniels grunted. "I've got some reaction out of the bacteria, but I can't seem to control their reproduction or channel them into a food-producing cycle."

Julie tossed her head.

"Oh, I can tell you why you haven't done that," she said.

He didn't like the way she said that. "Why?"

"You don't want to control them," Julie said simply. "If you really control them, you'll cause some to be recessive. You'll breed some strains out of existence. You'll kill some of them. And you don't want to kill any living thing."

She was wrong.

He wanted to kill her.

But he couldn't. She was right about the bacteria. He should have realized it before. He had planned for almost a year, and worked for two weeks; and this girl had walked in and destroyed everything in five minutes. But she was right; he spun towards the door.

"Where are you going?" she demanded.

"I'm leaving. See what somebody else can do with the idea."

"But where are you going?" Julie repeated.

"Nowhere."

And he was absolutely right.

Danniels walked aimlessly through the littered streets for the rest of the day and night. He couldn't remember walking at night, but neither could he remember staying anywhere when he discovered dawn in the sky.

It was that time of dawn that looks strangely like an old two-color process movies that they show on TV occasionally—all orange and green, with no yellow to it at all, when even the truest black seems only an off-brown or a sinister purple.

He shivered in the chill of morning and decided what to do.

He would have to walk around for a few hours even yet.

The drink his friend, Paul, placed before him was not entirely distinct. Neither were the bills he had in his hand. It was money the mayor's hireling had given him to use for laboratory supplies. Danniels peeled off a bill of uncertain denomination and gave it to his friend. Paul seemed pleased. He put it into the pocket of his white shirt, the pocket eight inches below and slightly to the left of the black bow tie, and polished the bar briskly.

Danniels picked up the glass and sipped silently until it was empty.

"Do you want to talk about anything, Abe?" Paul asked solicitously.

"No," Danniels said cheerfully. "Just give me another drink."

"Sure thing."

Danniels studied his green hair in the glass. Here, the mark of the Jonah wasn't important. Not yet. But he would be unwelcome even here after the time of Disaster ran out. He would have to move on sooner or later. Eventually—why not now? That slogan went better than the one in pink light over the mirror—The Beer That Made Milwaukee Famous. There hadn't been any Milwaukee beer here for thirteen years. Most of the stuff came out of bathtubs.

Why not now?

He smoothed another bill on the damp polished wood and negotiated his way through the hazy room.

Outside, he turned a corner and the city dropped away from him. He seemed to be in a giant amusement park with acres of empty ground patterned off in squares by unwinking dots of light.

He grinned to himself, changed direction with great care, and started down the one-way street to the lake front.

He heard the footsteps behind him.

Danniels put his palm to the brick wall, scaling posters, and turned.

The clean-cut young man smiled disarmingly. "I saw you in at Paul's. You'll never make it home under your own power. Better let me take you in my cab."

Danniels knocked him out on his feet with a clean right cross.

He blinked down at the boy. Self-preservation had become instinctive with him during his months as a wandering Jonah.

Gnawing at his under lip, he studied the twisted way the supposed cabbie lay. If he really were.... Danniels patted the man down and brought something out of a hip pocket.

He inspected the leather blackjack, weighing it critically in his hand.

It slid out of his palm and thudded heavily on the cracked sidewalk.

Danniels shrugged and grinned and moved unsteadily away. Towards the lake.

The lake looked gray and winterish.

There was no help for it.

Danniels swung his leg over the rust-spotted railing and looked down to where the water lapped at crumbling bricks blotched with green. He peered out over the water. Only a few miles to the beach where he had left the car parked in the undergrowth. He would have preferred to use the little sub, but

he could swim it if he had to.

The surface below showed clearly in the globe lights.

Danniels dived.

Before he hit the water, he remembered that he should have taken off some of his clothes.

When he parted the icy foam with his body, he knew he had committed suicide. And he realized that that had been what he intended to do all along.

There was something in the lake holding him, and it had a twelve-foot reach.

It kept holding on to him under the surface of green ice and begging him for help. He couldn't breathe, and he couldn't help. Of the two, not being able to help seemed the worse. Not breathing wasn't so bad.... It hurt to breathe. It choked him. It was very unpleasant to breathe. He had much preferred not breathing to this....

Some time later, he opened his eyes.

A small, round-faced man was staring down at him through slender-framed spectacles. For a moment he thought it was the man in whose face he had smashed the car door at the diner weeks before. But this man was different—among other things his glasses were gold, not silver. Yet he was also the same. Danniels knew the signs of the Wolf Pack.

"How's your foot?" the little man asked in a surprisingly full-bodied voice.

Danniels instantly became aware of a dull sub-pain sensation in the toes of his left foot. He looked over the crest of his chest and saw the foot, naked below the cuff of his wrinkled trousers. The three smaller toes were red. No, maroon. A red so dark it was almost black. Fainter streaks of red shot away from the toes, following the tendon.

Danniels swallowed. "The foot doesn't feel so bad, but I think it is."

"We may have to operate," the small man said eagerly.

"How did I get out of the lake?"

"Joel. The man you knocked out. He came to and followed you. Naturally, he had to save your life. He banged your foot up dragging you ashore."

Or afterwards, Danniels thought.

Abruptly, the stranger was gone and a door was closing and latching on the other side of the room.

Danniels tried to rise and fell back, his head floating around somewhere

above him. Maybe a Wolf Pack member would have to save his life but he wouldn't have to bring him home and nurse him back to health.

Why?

He fell asleep without even trying to guess the answer.

He woke when they brought food to him.

Danniels finished with the tray and sat it aside.

The small man who had identified himself as Richard beamed. "I think you are strong enough to attend the celebration tonight."

Danniels did feel stronger after rest and food, but at the same time he felt vaguely dizzy and his leg was beginning to hurt. "What kind of a celebration?" he asked.

Richard chuckled. "Don't worry. You'll like it."

Danniels had seen the same expression of the faces of hosts at stag dinners; but with a Wolf Pack it was hard to know what to expect.

IV

The place he was in did not seem to be a house after all.

Danniels leaned on the shoulder of Richard, who helped him along solicitously. They entered a large chamber nearly a hundred feet wide. There were people there. It wasn't crowded but there were many people standing around the walls. A lot of them were holding three-foot lengths of wood.

Richard led him to a chair, the only one apparent in the room.

"I'll go tell we're ready now," the small man said, chuckling.

Danniels looked around slowly at the shadowed faces. Of those holding clubs, he knew only the man Richard had told him was Joel, the man who had pulled him from Lake Michigan. Apparently the ones with clubs were members of the Pack, while the others were observers and potential members. Among these, he spotted a member of the city council.

And Julie.

She stood in a loose sweater and skirt, her hands hugging her elbows, eyes intent on the empty center of the room. Danniels was reminded of some of the women he had seen at unorthodox political meetings.

Danniels was surprised to find that he wanted to talk to her. He might try

hobbling over to her or calling her over to him. But with the instinct he had developed while being hunted, he knew it was wrong to call attention to the two of them together.

He noticed that he was in line with the door. Julie would have to pass by him when she left ... after the celebration.

"The celebration begins in five minutes."

Someone he hadn't seen had shouted into the big room. The words bounced back slightly and hung suspended.

The people's waiting became an activity. Tension lived in the room.

And then the cat was released.

The Pack members moved apart from the rest and struck at the scrawny yellow beast. The cat didn't make it very far down the line. The men from the other end of the room moved up quickly to be in on the kill.

The clubs rose and fell even after it was clear there was no reason for it.

Their ranks parted and they left their handiwork where it could be admired.

It must be hard to find animals in a closed city like this, Danniels thought. It must be quite a treat to find one to beat to death.

He sat and waited for them to leave. But he found the Celebration was just beginning. The group was laughing and talking. Now that it was over they wanted to talk about it the rest of the evening. They had created death.

He searched out Julie Amprey again. She was looking at what they did. He thought she was sick at first. His lips thinned. Yes, she was sick.

Her eyes suddenly met his. Shock washed over her face, and in the next moment she was moving to him.

"So," she said coolly, "you found out my little secret. This is where I get my kicks."

He nodded, thinking of nothing to say.

"Did you ever read them?" she asked breathlessly. "All the old banned books—Poe and Spillane and Proust. The pornography of death. I grew up on them, so you see there's no harm in them. Look at me."

"You want to kill?" Danniels asked her.

She lit an expensive king-size cigarette. "Yes," she exhaled. "I thought I might join a Pack on the Outside. But, you'll remember, I didn't quite make it. I couldn't even kill a cockroach. I want to, but the damned Broadcasters keep interfering with me."

Richard came back, smiling broadly. "Well, Abe, has Miss Amprey been telling you of our plans to ruin the planet?"

Danniels was incredibly tired. He had been listening and arguing for hours.

"You're a scientist," Joel persisted. "Help us."

"There are different kinds of scientists," Danniels repeated. "I'm not a nuclear physicist."

"Right there." Richard tapped the pink rubber of his pencil against the map of Cook County. "Right there. An Armory no one else knows anything about. Enough H-bombs to wipe out human life on the planet. And rockets to send them in."

"The councilman may be lying," Danniels said. "How do you think he should happen to find it and no one else?"

"The information was in the city records," Richard said patiently, "but buried and coded so it would take twenty years to locate. Bureaucracy is an insidious evil, Abe."

Danniels rubbed his face with his palms. "I'm not even sure if I understand what you mean to do. You want to rocket the H-bombs out almost but not quite beyond Earth's gravitation and explode them so the fallout will be evenly distributed over the surface of the planet. You think it will cause no more than injury and destruction—"

"That's all," Joel said sharply.

Richard gave an eager nod.

They had had to convince themselves of that, he knew. "But why do you want to do anything as desperate as that?"

"Simple revenge." Richard's tone was even and cold. "And to show them what we can do if they don't cut off the Broadcasters." The small man's liquid brown eyes softened. "You've got to understand that we really don't want to kill people. Our actions are merely necessary demonstrations against insane visionary politics. I only want the Broadcasters shut off so I can do efficient police work—Joel, so that he can fight in the ring with the true will to win of a sportsman. The rest of us have equally good reasons."

"I think I understand," Danniels said. "I'll do what I can to help you."

Danniels was not surprised when Julie Amprey was in the raiding party. He was past the capacity for surprise.

He was getting around on his own today only because he was learning to stand the pain. It was worse. And he was weak and dizzy from a fever.

They had all managed to produce bicycles. Richard had even managed to find one for him with a tiny engine powered by solar-charged batteries.

Julie looked crisp and attractive in sweater and jeans. Joel was strikingly handsome in the clear sun, and even Richard looked like a jolly fatherly type.

As they wheeled down the street, Danniels was afraid only he with his wet, tossed green hair and drooping cheeks warped the holiday mood of those who in some other probability sequence were happy picnickers.

When they reached the place, Richard giggled nervously.

"It takes a code to open the hatch," he explained. "If Aldrich didn't decode it correctly there will be a small but effective chemical explosion in this area."

Danniels leaned against a maple, watching. The bicycles were parked in the brush and a shallow hole had been dug at an exact spot in the suburban park. Only a few inches below ground was the gray steel door flush with the level of grass.

Richard hummed as he worked a prosaic combination dial.

Finally there was a muffled click and a churning whine began.

The hatch raised jerkily and latched at right angles.

The Pack milled about the opening, excited. Joel got the honor of going down first. Richard seemed to fumble his chance for the glory, Danniels observed. The other men went down, one and one. And finally only Julie and Richard were left. He supposed that this meant the girl had been accepted as a full member of the Wolf Pack. That would change the whole character of the organization. He vaguely wondered who her sponsor was. Joel?

Julie and the little man came to him. They started to help him down into the opening and suddenly he was at the bottom of a ladder. Things were beginning to seem to him as if they were taking place underwater.

They walked down a corridor of shadow, lit only by tarnished yellow from red sparks caught on the tips of silver wire inside water-clear bulbs recessed in the concrete ceiling.

When they passed a certain point sparks showered from slots in opposite walls. They burned out ineffectively before they reached the floor of cross-hatched metallic mats.

"Power failing," Richard observed with a chuckle. "Congress should investigate the builders."

There was a large, sliding door many feet thick but so well-balanced it slid open easily. And they were there.

It was a big room full of many little rooms. Each little room had a door that a man could enter by stooping and a chair-ledge inside for him to sit and read or adjust instruments. The outside of the rooms were finished off cleanly in shining metal with large, rugged objects fitted to all sides. These were hydrogen bombs.

The Wolf Pack ranged joyously through the maze.

Danniels found one of several stacks of small instruments and sat down on it. The things looked like radios but obviously weren't.

Richard came to him, wringing his hands. "These bombs seemed to be designed to be dropped from bombers. There are supposed to be rockets here too. I hope the H-bombs will fit. They seem so bulky...."

"Perhaps the rockets have self-contained bomb units," Danniels suggested.

"Perhaps. We're all going off and try to find the rockets. You'd be amazed at all the cutoffs down here. I'll leave Joel here to look after you."

Danniels sat on the instruments. Joel stayed several hundred feet away, an uncertain shadow in the light, smoking a red dot of a cigarette. Somehow Danniels associated fire and munitions instead of atomics and felt uneasy.

He discovered Julie Amprey at his side. She didn't say anything. She seemed to be sulking. Like a spoiled brat, he thought.

He fingered one of the portable instruments from an open crate beside him. "Wonder what these are?" he said to break up the heavy silence.

"Pseudo-H Bombs," the girl snapped.

Of course. Just as money had to be backed by gold or silver reserves, every pseudo bomb or mock-gas had to be backed by the real thing which, after its representative had been used, was dismantled, neutralized or retired. International inspection saw to that.

"There's enough here to blow up the whole world ... if they were real," Danniels said.

The girl pointed out into the chamber. "Those are real."

Each nation had many times over the nuclear armament necessary to destroy human life. There was enough for that right in this vault—both in reality and in the Games.

Danniels stopped drifting and took a course. He stopped observing and began to act. There was a mob in action.

Even if they did somehow manage not to kill off the population with the fallout they were engineering, they would ruin farmland, create new recessive

mutations.

Famine would cease to be a psychological affliction for half the world and become a physiological reality instead ... for all the world.

He had failed in his plans to end the psychological Famine because of his own attunement to the Broadcasters. He wouldn't fail in stopping the new physiological Famine.

V

"Put that thing down," Joel said. "I don't trust you any further than I can spit, and that looks like a radio. You trying to warn the city council?"

Danniels put down the instrument. One wouldn't do it, and he could tell from Joel's eyes that he would get a very bad experience out of disobeying him.

"You were going to do something," Julie said. "What were you trying to do with that pseudie?"

"How do you know so much about this stuff?" Danniels demanded.

"My father told me all he found out from the records. He's Councilman Aldrich."

He rested his eyes for a second. "But your name—?" he heard himself say.

"My stepfather, I should have said. Mother married him when I was two. What were you going to do?"

"I," he said, "intended to end it all. All of this. All of it Outside. End everything."

The girl turned from him.

"Then why don't you do it?"

"You mean you don't want our friends to succeed in torturing a sick world?"

"I don't like pain," she said. "There's something clean, positive and challenging about killing. I'd like to kill. But pain seems so pointless. If you can stop them, go ahead. I'll help you."

He was exhausted and in fever. "Joel won't let me."

"Then—kill him," she said.

He knew it was all useless, tired, stale, unrewarding. It was done. He was nothing, and the girl was less. The Pack would succeed and a tortured world would die of a greater famine because he had failed all down the line. And he blamed himself for making a mistake that actually was unimportant. For a moment, he had trusted the girl.

"You can kill him." Julie turned back and faced him. "How much do you think those Broadcasters can really control human beings? We aren't fighting wars because we don't want to. We've finally seen what war can do and we're scared. We've retreated. The human race is hiding just like you are now."

Danniels laughed.

She lunged forward, tense. For a moment he thought she had actually stamped her foot. "It's true, you fool! Doesn't the actions of these men prove it to you? They are going to risk destroying the planet. If pacifism really controlled them do you think they could do that?"

He mumbled something about Wolf Pack members.

"There's never been any law or moral credo that human beings couldn't break and justify within themselves some way," Julie intoned carefully. "People can do the same with the induced precepts of the Broadcasters. If you really want to stop them, you can—by killing Joel and going ahead."

"Maybe later," Danniels mumbled. "I'll think about it."

Julie slapped his face. He wondered why he didn't feel it.

"You don't have much time left," Julie whispered. "Don't you know what's wrong with your foot? Gangrene. You have to get those toes amputated soon or you'll die."

"Yes," he said numbly. "Must get amputation." But it didn't seem urgent. He felt he should get some rest first.

"It's too bad you can't allow the operation," the girl said sweetly. "You can't allow lives to be destroyed just to save your own personality."

"What lives?" he demanded.

"All the cells and microorganisms in your toes," Julie told him. "You know they'll die if you are operated on. Are they any worse than the little bacteria you refused to murder? I suppose it's just as well that you die. How can you stand it on your conscience to breathe all the time and burn up innocent germs in your foul breath?"

Danniels understood. To live was to kill.

Every instant he lived his old cells were dying and new ones being born.

So Danniels, who thought he could not kill any living thing, finally accepted himself as a killer. It wasn't human life he was taking ... but it was life.

If he could be wrong about taking any life at all—and he had always believed himself unable to kill anything—he might be wrong about being able to kill men. In spite of everything he had been taught and what he believed about the influence of the Broadcasters.

He studied Joel in the gloom. The man represented everything he loathed—stupidity, brutality, the mob. If I can kill anyone, he told himself, it should be Joel.

He could try. Yes, he could. And that was a victory in itself.

He moved, and that was another triumph over the physical defeat that was already upon him.

Joel looked up, narrow eyes widened, as Danniels came down on him.

Danniels caught him in the stomach with the flat of his palm and shoved up.

Joel gargled in the back of his throat and rammed his thumbs for the prisoner's eyes. Danniels nodded and caught the balls of the thumbs on his forehead. He brought his fist up sharply and hit Joel on the point of the chin. His head snapped but righted itself slowly. He lashed into Danniels' body with both eager hands and Danniels, weakened, went down before he had time to think about it.

From the crazy angle of the floor he saw far above him Joel's lips curl back and closer, further down, a shoe was lifted to kick. It was aimed at Danniels' swollen foot.

Danniels smiled. He shouldn't have done that. If he had acted like a man instead of an animal he would have been fine. But now ... Danniels rolled over quickly against the one leg of Joel's firmly on the floor. Off balance, Joel fell backwards with a curse, the back of his skull ringing against the side of one of the bombs.

Exertion was painting red lines across his vision but Danniels climbed to his knees, put his hands to Joel's corded throat and squeezed.

Yes. He knew he could kill. A few more seconds and he would be dead.

Danniels stopped.

There was no need to kill the boy. He would be unconscious long enough for him to do his job. And he found that fear had left him. He was no longer afraid of killing small things, because he was no longer afraid of killing men.

He had been able to kill when he had to, but more important, he had been able to keep from killing when it wasn't needed. He didn't need to be afraid of the old blood-lust—because he knew now he could best it.

And Julie had seen. She had seen something she had never believed was possible. That a man could keep from being a savage without the restraints of the Broadcasters or of society.

He limped to the stacked pseudies and sat down. "Now we can make it clean, Julie. We can end the whole mess. Ready?"

"Yes," she told him.

He picked up a pseudie and threw the switch.

The radio signal went out, and all over the world receivers noted a pseudo explosion in the heart of a Disaster Area. Danniels could imagine the men in the council room in the heart of the city seeing the flash and feeling the doom of a renewed twenty years of isolation and heading for the exact spot of the flash.

More signals flashed. And flashed. And flashed.

And he thought of the people all over the world wondering about the devastating sneak attack on the United States, and the incredible readings of the instruments.

"Keep working," Danniels said. "The Wolf Pack or the officials from the city will be here soon. I hope it's a dead heat. But," he said, "I think we've done it. But we can keep working on the safety margin."

"What have we done, Abe?" Julie asked trustingly.

He was going to feel foolish saying it. "We have just blown up the world according to the official records of the War Games."

"Then they'll have to start over," she said.

"Maybe," Danniels whispered. "If they do, we'll all start even. Everybody's a Jonah. The world is a Disaster Area. Maybe they'll start the War Games over. Or maybe they'll try the real thing again, now that they've seen how easy it is with pseudies."

He felt the numb foot and knew he would have to have an emergency operation if he survived the mobs that were coming. But he had a way of surviving mobs. He looked at Julie. He would see that their children could eat.

"At least," he said, triggering another H-bomb for the world's records, "it isn't a bad day when the world has been given a fresh slate, a new start."

There were footsteps outside, coming closer.



Liked This Book?

For More FREE e-Books visit Freeditorial.com