

regarded as a doctor arriving for work with sores of smallpox on his face. But Joe Scott was a privileged person. Three months ago, he had been fired for an infraction of safety rules, which had caused a major wreck; two weeks ago, he had been reinstated in his job by order of the Unification Board. He was a friend of Fred Kinnan; he protected Kinnan's interests in his union, not against the employers, but against the membership.

"Sure," said Joe Scott. "I'll take the Comet. I'll get her through, if I go fast enough."

The fireman of Number 306 had remained in the cab of his engine. He looked up uneasily, when they came to switch his engine to the head end of the Comet; he looked up at the red and green lights of the tunnel, hanging in the distance above twenty miles of curves. But he was a placid, amicable fellow, who made a good fireman with no hope of ever rising to engineer; his husky muscles were his only asset. He felt certain that his superiors knew what they were doing, so he did not venture any questions.

The conductor stood by the rear end of the Comet. He looked at the lights of the tunnel, then at the long chain of the Comet's windows. A few windows were lighted, but most of them showed only the feeble blue glow of night lamps edging the lowered blinds. He thought that he should rouse the passengers and warn them. There had been a time when he had placed the safety of the passengers above his own, not by reason of love for his fellow men, but because that responsibility was part of his job, which he accepted and felt pride in fulfilling. Now, he felt a contemptuous indifference and no desire to save them. They had asked for and accepted Directive 10-289, he thought, they went on living and daily turning away in evasion from the kind of verdicts that the Unification Board was passing on defenseless victims—why shouldn't he now turn away from them? If he saved their lives, not one of them would come forward to defend him when the Unification Board would convict him for disobeying orders, for creating a panic, for delaying Mr. Chalmers. He had no desire to be a martyr for the sake of allowing people safely to indulge in their own irresponsible evil.

When the moment came, he raised his lantern and signaled the engineer to start.

"See?" said Kip Chalmers triumphantly to Lester Fuck, as the wheels under their feet shuddered toward. "*Fear* is the only practical means to deal with people."

The conductor stepped onto the vestibule of the last car. No one saw him as he went down the steps of the other side, slipped off the train and vanished into the darkness of the mountains.

A switchman stood ready to throw the switch that would send the Comet from the siding onto the main track. He looked at the Comet as it came slowly toward him. It was only a blazing white globe with a beam stretching high above his head, and a jerky thunder trembling through the rail under his feet. He knew that the switch should not be thrown. He thought of the night, ten years ago, when he had risked his life in a flood to save a train from a washout. But he knew that times had changed. In the moment when he threw the switch

and saw the headlight jerk sidewise, he knew that he would now hate his job for the rest of his life.

The Comet uncoiled from the siding into a thin, straight line, and went on, into the mountains, with the beam of the headlight like an extended arm pointing the way, and the lighted glass curve of the observation lounge ending it off.

Some of the passengers aboard the Comet were awake. As the train started its coiling ascent; they saw the small cluster of Winston's lights at the bottom of the darkness beyond their windows, then the same darkness, but with red and green lights by the hole of a tunnel on the upper edge of the windowpanes. The lights of Winston kept growing smaller, each time they appeared; the black hole of the tunnel kept growing larger. A black veil went streaking past the windows at times, dimming the lights: it was the heavy smoke from the coal-burning engine.

As the tunnel came closer, they saw, at the edge of the sky far to the south, in a void of space and rock, a spot of living fire twisting in the wind. They did not know what it was and did not care to learn.

It is said that catastrophes are a matter of pure chance, and there were those who would have said that the passengers of the Comet were not guilty or responsible for the thing that happened to them.

The man in Bedroom A, Car No. 1, was a professor of sociology who taught that individual ability is of no consequence, that individual effort is futile, that an individual conscience is a useless luxury, that there is no individual mind or character or achievement, that everything is achieved collectively, and that it's masses that count, not men.

The man in Roomette 7, Car No. 2, was a journalist who wrote that it is proper and moral to use compulsion "for a good cause," who believed that he had the right to unleash physical force upon others—to wreck lives, throttle ambitions, strangle desires, violate convictions, to imprison, to despoil, to murder—for the sake of whatever he chose to consider as his own idea of "a good cause," which did not even have to be an idea, since he had never defined what he regarded as the good, but had merely stated that he went by "a feeling"—a feeling unrestrained by any knowledge, since he considered emotion superior to knowledge and relied solely on his own "good intentions" and on the power of a gun.

The woman in Roomette 10, Car No. 3, was an elderly school teacher who had spent her life turning class after class of helpless children into miserable cowards, by teaching them that the will of the majority is the only standard of good and evil, that a majority may do anything it pleases, that they must not assert their own personalities, but must do as others were doing.

The man in Drawing Room B, Car No. 4, was a newspaper publisher who believed that men are evil by nature and unfit for freedom, that their basic interests, if left unchecked, are to lie, to rob and to murder one another—and, therefore, men must be ruled by means of lies, robbery and murder, which must be made the exclusive privilege of the rulers, for the purpose of forcing men to work, teach-