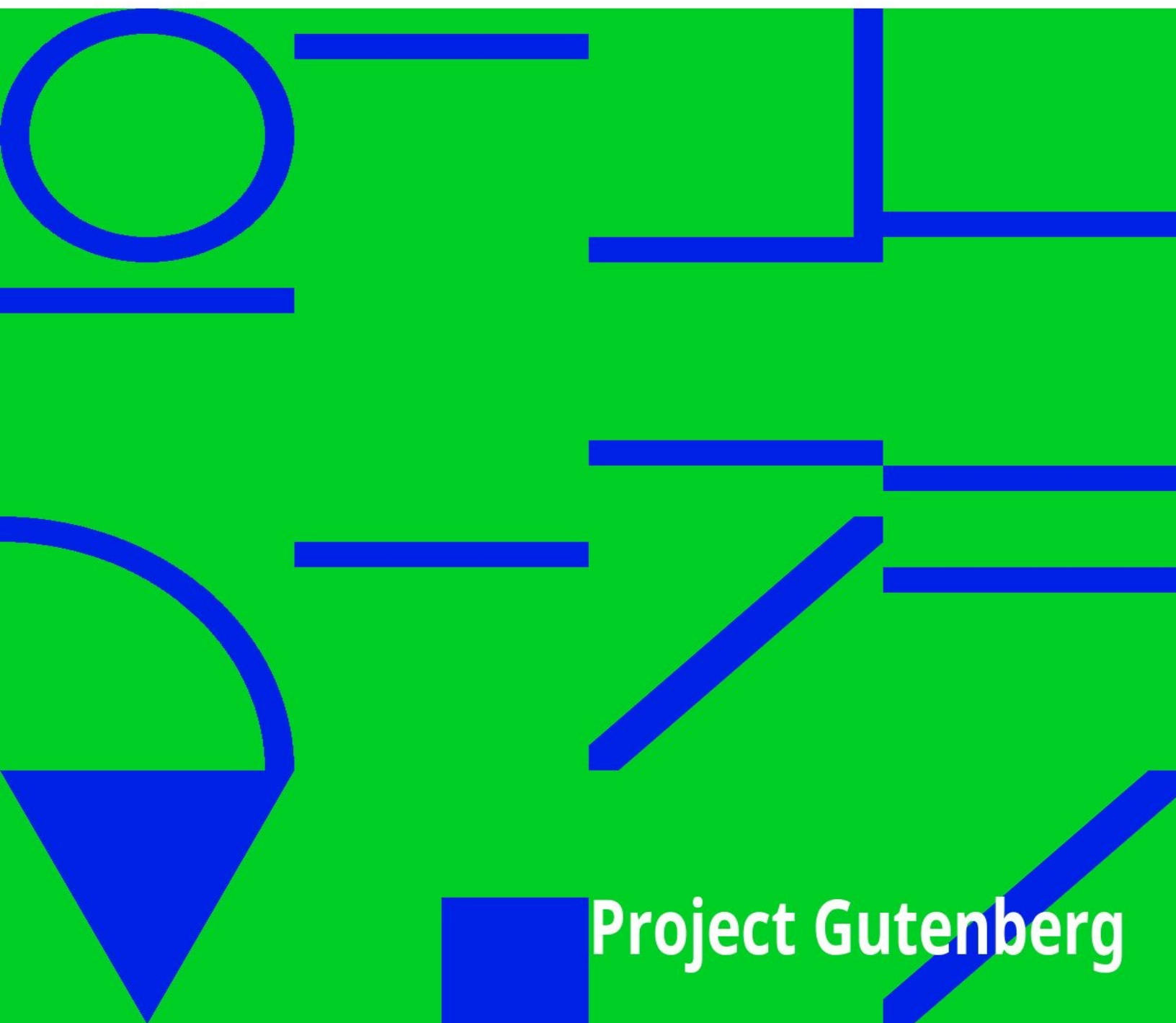


We're Friends, Now

Henry Hasse



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*The little man stood in front of the
monstrous machine as the synaptic
drone heightened to a scream. No ...
no, he whispered. Don't you
understand....*

WE'RE FRIENDS, NOW

By HENRY HASSE

ILLUSTRATED by VARGA

Today more than other days Raoul Beardsley felt the burden, the dragging sense of inevitability. He frowned; he glanced at his watch; he leaned forward to speak to the copter pilot and then changed his mind. He settled back, and from idle habit adjusted his chair-scope to the familiar broad-spoked area of Washington just below.

"I'll *not* have it happening again today!" he told himself grimly ... and at once his thoughts quavered off into many tangles of self-reproach. "Blasted nonsense the way I've been acting. A *machine*, a damned gutless machine like that! Why do I persist in letting it get to me?"

He pondered that and found no solace. "Delusion," he snorted. "Hyper synapse-disorder ... that's how Jeff Arnold would explain *me*. I wish he'd confine his diagnostics to the Mechanical Division where it belongs! He's amused, they're all amused at me—but damn it they just don't know!"

Beardsley's rotund body sagged at the thought. Adjusting the chair-scope, he fixed his gaze on the broad facade of Crime-Central Building far across the city; again he felt the burgeoning embarrassment and foreboding, but he put it down with an effort before it reached the edge of fear. *Not today*, he thought fiercely. *No, by God, I just won't permit it to happen.*

There. So! He felt much better already. And he had really made good time this morning. Today of *all* days he mustn't keep ECAIAC waiting.

Beardsley was the only one not to panic when the infallible machine broke down.

Beardsley was the only one not to panic when the infallible machine broke down.

Mustn't.... Something triggered in Beardsley, and he was assailed with a perverse rebellion at the thought.



Must not? But why not? Why shouldn't he just *once* keep ECAIAC and Jeff Arnold and his clique stewing in their own tangle of tubes and electronic juice? And wouldn't *this*, he gloated, be the perfect day for it! Arnold especially—just once to shatter that young man's complacent routine....

No. Beardsley savored the thought tastily, and let it trickle away, and the look of glee on his cherubic face was gone. For too many years his job as serological "coördinator" (Crime-Central) had kept him pinned to the concomitant routine. Pinned or crucified, it was all the same; in crime analysis as in everything these days, personal sense of achievement had been too unsubtly annihilated. Recalling his just completed task—the Citizen Files and *persona-tapes* and the endless annotating—Beardsley felt himself sinking still further into that mire of futility that encompassed neither excitement nor particular pride.

He brought himself back with a grimace, aware that he was clutching the briefcase of tapes possessively from long habit. The pilot had touched the news-stat, and abruptly one of the new "commerciappeals" grated on Beardsley's senses:

"... we repeat, yes, PROT-O-SUDS is now available in *flake* or *cake* or the new attachable *luxury-spray*. Remember, PROT-O-SUDS has *never* been laboratory-tested, it contains *no* miracle ingredients, *no* improved scientific formula, and NO LANOLIN. Then what is the new PROT-O-SUDS? I tell you frankly, friends, it is nothing but a lot of pure soft soap! Remember ... we make no fabulous claims for PROT-O-SUDS ... we assume that you are reasonably clean to start with! And now for your late breakfast news, PROT-O-SUDS takes you direct to the Central News Bureau for a final survey on the Carmack murder case...."

Beardsley groaned. New voice in the background, while the screen presented a slow montage. Cine-runs of the great Carmack himself, including those at the

International Cybernetics Congress a year ago ... survey of the murder scene, the Carmack mansion ... close-up of ECAIAC ... diagrammatic detail of ECAIAC ... then dramatically, the grim and imposing figure of George Mandleco, Minister of Justice.

And then the news-caster's voice: "... certain that final processing will go forward today. It would be a gross understatement to say that the Carmack Case has captured the attention of the nation, both officialdom and public alike! *Never* in the history of Crime-Central has there been such an undercurrent of speculation and excitement...."

"Excitement?" murmured Beardsley.

"And now it is heightened, by no less an authority than the Minister of Justice himself, who brought both plaudits and censure upon himself today with the outright statement that *deep-rooted political issues* may well be involved. As you must know by now, it was the murdered man himself—Amos Carmack—who some years ago carried on the incessant lobbying that resulted in ECAIAC being accepted *pro bono publico* by Crime-Central. What devastating irony! For now it is ECAIAC itself that must weigh each detail, correlate all factors, probe every motive and machination leading to the *murder of its creator*...."

"That's not entirely true, you know," muttered Beardsley.

Quick flicker, again a close-up of ECAIAC, and the drama-laden voice: "ECAIAC! Electronic Analysis Integrator and Computer. And now—an exclusive! From a very reliable source this reporter has learned that *three Primes* are involved...."

"Ha!" grated Beardsley.

"... and they will be broken down in quotient. Two must ultimately be eliminated—barring, of course, the possible emergence of any minor factor to status of Prime, which at this stage seems unlikely. It is estimated that by today or tomorrow at the latest Carmack's murderer will be brought to justice...."

Beardsley had taken as much as he could of this pseudo-factual mush. He jerked forward violently, rapped the pilot on the shoulder. "DAMN IT! WILL YOU SHUT THE DAMN THING OFF!"



He was immediately appalled at his outburst, and by the pilot's startled glance, but the stat went off immediately.

Beardsley leaned back muttering to himself. Carmack, Carmack! For seven weeks now he had lived with it intricately and intimately, as the case shoved everything else right off the news-stat. People took the latest echoes to bed with them, commuters gobbled it with their breakfast cereal. Thank God today would see the end, and they could once more have the hot South Polar crisis with their cereal.



Seven weeks! He clutched the bulging briefcase with a wearisome horror. Twenty-two persona-tapes from Central File, all neatly processed and ready for ECAIAC. End result of the endless chart sifts, emphasis (as always!) on parietosomatic recession, the slow emergence of minor constants, the inexorable trend toward Price Factor and then *verification, verification*, to each his own, with all the subtle and shaded values of the Augment Index brought finally to focus on the relevance-graph *Carmack*.

Sure, thought Beardsley. A thing of augment-indexing and psych-tapes, quite without possibility of error. Now in the *old* days of crime detection—it might have taken them seven months instead of weeks, not to mention frustration and leg-work and false-leads and sweat, but—

His mouth pulled down bitterly. *Serological Coördinator. Glorified file-clerk is more like it. High-salaried errand-boy.*

"Here we are, sir!" The pilot's voice jarred him to reality as the copter berthed.

Beardsley hurried toward the roof entrance. His faded blue suit, a size too large, flapped about him, and the outmoded felt hat seemed to sink to the level of his thick-lensed glasses. The guard greeted him, but suppressed a smile as the cherubic little man flashed his official pass.

For there was something about Raoul Beardsley that eternally evoked amusement—an air of vacuous innocence and a remote forlornness. He gave the appearance of a person who sold shoes during the day, washed his wife's dishes at night and then solved two or three galacti-gram puzzles before turning off the light precisely at ten. Few, if any, remembered that this nervous little man had

once been top Inspector of New York City's Homicide Bureau ... but that was a dozen long years ago. Since then he had seen the antiquated detective methods of 1960 disappear, and he had died a little, too, seeing his Homicide Bureau relegated to a mere subsidiary with the growth of the Coördinate and Mechanical Divisions. His appointment to Chief of Co-ördinants, Federal, was automatic and unquestioned; and Beardsley would have been the last to know, or to care, that he had correlated some eight million miles of serological data for the entrains of ECAIAC, a perfect record of not a single unsolved case.

And the penalty was in his eyes, if one cared to look beyond the thick-lensed glasses. No one ever did. They were remote eyes, a little bewildered, a little hurt ... a mirror gone dull from times remembered but irretrievably lost.



Beardsley stepped onto the corridor slidewalk, coasted to the escalator and rode it down. Still immersed in his thoughts, he pushed into ECAIAC's room ... *and again it happened.*

So shockingly sudden, there was not even time for remonstrance at himself. The feeling hit him as always before, straight and unerring, a surging impact that smashed forward and stopped him in his tracks, literally paralyzed.

He caught his breath convulsively. How often had he come here? And how often had this happened, even when he'd sworn he wouldn't let it? There was something about the sight and sound and feel of ECAIAC that got to him, that seeped beneath flesh and bone and into his brain and sent his senses singing. Beardsley managed to gulp, as he observed the shiny black colossus that filled the entire length of the ninety-foot room; a dozen techs scurried around it, taking notes, attentive to the flashing lights in red-and-green and the faint clicking of thousands of relays that rose in susurration.

But more than that arose. It was something that pervaded the room, not a pulsing but a *presence*, a sort of snapping intangible intelligence that reached beyond the audible and sheared at Beardsley's nerve-ends.

And it hadn't been there a moment before. That was the shocking thing. Beardsley knew that it *knew!* It was sentient, it was alive and aware and waiting, and it was listening.

As always, it knew that *he* had entered.

Beardsley gulped again, stood frozen for half a minute. None of the techs seemed to notice; they had often chided him about it, but he was used to that now. At last he broke the spell and made his legs move, feeling cold sweat as he hurried along the length of ECAIAC toward Arnold's office.

There ... just about there ... by the rheostats, where the four red lights and the two green made a baleful pattern against the black metal skin. He felt it stronger than ever this time, something reaching and sinister aimed solely at him. He skirted the place with a quick goosey hop, stumbled a little and felt panic, but made it all right to the office.

Beardsley hated these moments. He was still trembling as he made a hurried entrance. Sure enough, as if on cue Jeff Arnold glanced up from his charts and grinned.

"Ah, good morning, Beardsley! Now don't tell me our pet goo—uh—snapped at you again?"

It was the routine remark, but today Arnold was immediately contrite for a change. "Sorry," he said, and a certain weariness replaced the grin. He gestured to the alco-mech. "Can I dial you a drink? Feel in need of one myself!"

"Eleven-C," said Beardsley, and slumped into the pneumo-chair. Arnold rose and dialled 11-C, handed him the drink and dialled 9-R for himself. Sipping it, he moved around the desk.

There was something very strange and preoccupied in his movements, Beardsley thought, more than a mere tiredness. He had never seen Arnold this way.

"Yes sir, this is the day!" A muscle twitched in his corded neck; Arnold eased his long frame into a chair, rubbed thumb and forefinger at his eyes. "Been up half the night running off clearance tests. Can't afford to foul up on this one!"

Beardsley tossed off his drink and blinked at the fiery strength of it. Now why should Arnold say that? When had ECAIAC ever fouled up? He watched the man across the desk. Jeff Arnold was a vigorous, striking specimen, handsome in an athletic way, with long stubborn jaw and unhappy gray eyes beneath his unruly hair; the sort of face that intrigues women, Beardsley catalogued from past experience. And, he added, altogether too young a man to be operating a monster like ECAIAC.

Arnold indicated the empty glass. "Another?"

"No, I think not," Beardsley replied carefully.

Arnold hesitated, eyeing the briefcase in Beardsley's clutch. "It's been rough on you, too, I imagine. Hope there aren't more than thirty variants! We're set up for more, of course, but it'll necessitate—"

"Twenty-two," Beardsley assured him. Carefully, he spread the coded and sealed *persona-tapes* across the desk. "Fresh from Citizen-File Augment, everything annotated and cross-checked. Blood-count, emotional stasis, plethora, psychogeneological index, neuro-thalamic imbalance—every type factor is here. We really went to the Files on this case."

"Looks as if you did! How does it narrow down?"

"Fifteen possibles, four Logicals and three Primes—" Beardsley stopped abruptly. (That news-caster: how had he known there were three Primes? This stuff was not supposed to leak!) "Twenty-two who *knew* Carmack," he went on. "That includes associational as well as motive-opportunity factors, with a probability sphere of .004...."

Arnold nodded thoughtfully; his fingers moved unconscious and caressing across the edge of the desk. "Yes, I see. That's close! Good job," he said uncertainly.

"Should be! Seven weeks for annotation and code." Beardsley was watching Arnold's fingers; there was something aimless and fretful as they pushed among the code-sealed tapes. Beardsley made his voice casual. "If it interests you," he said, "yes—you are there."

He wanted a reaction and he got it.

"Me!" Arnold stiffened, pulled his fingers away hastily.

"That surprises you? Don't worry, you're not one of the Primes; probably be rejected on the first run. It's just that you once knew Carmack rather well. Cal

Tech, wasn't it, when Carmack was doing his special work on magnetronics? Naturally you've had contact since, due to the nature of your job."

Arnold nodded, frowning. "That's right. It just hadn't occurred to me that—"

Beardsley realized that he wasn't lying. *It was not the thought of his own tape that bothered Arnold.*

"Oh, we're thorough over at 'Coördinates Division!'" Beardsley laughed, making a minor joke of it. "Now here," he touched a spool labelled in red, "is your Basic Invariant. Carmack—Amos T. Murdered man. Found bludgeoned in library of his home, night of April 4. Age 56, held all outstanding patents on ECAIAC, worth millions, and"—he looked up, beaming—"leaves beautiful wife."

He paused for the merest moment. Save for a soft drumming of fingers on the desk, Arnold was silent.

"And here's a sub-Basic: Mrs. Carmack will be a rich woman now. She was considerably younger than Carmack—and she's been having an affair with another man." Beardsley smiled at Jeff Arnold. "That's a sociological note beyond our sphere, but we managed to get the data. I'll bet the department was appalled that such a gorgeous woman could be resolved into neo-Euclidian equations!"

"Why?" Arnold was suddenly irritable. "It's been done a thousand times before!"

"Of course," shrugged Beardsley. "And it's really up to ECAIAC, isn't it? A Prime can be negated, while on the other hand a variant can shift from possible to Logical to Prime. Or am I wrong? I've never been up on the mechanics."

Arnold grunted. "There's bound to be some correlatory shift! The Primes—how many did you say?"

"Three as of now."

Arnold rose abruptly, then strode to the alco-mech and dialled himself another drink. He took an uncommonly long time about it. "Look," he said, "we both know about these things! In a case like this there are bound to be political repercussions—" He hit Beardsley with a gauging glance. "Well," he blurted, "I have to admit I'm damn curious! Mind telling me who are the three Primes? Ah—strictly off the record, you understand."

Beardsley had expected something like this, and he was quite ready to answer; but he carefully removed his glasses, massaged the bridge of his nose and frowned. "Well, now...."

"Come on, give! I know it's against protocol and all that ... but hell! We'll have the answer anyway in a matter of hours."

Beardsley nodded with a show of thoughtfulness. "Yes, that's true, isn't it? Very well. But strictly off the record! I warn you—not only will the first Prime startle you, but the information could be dangerous!"

He waited a moment, then he leaned forward and whispered: "Mandleco!"



For a moment Arnold didn't move. His face was ludicrous. Then Beardsley saw his hands clench.

"Mandleco!" the word jolted from his lips. "George Mandleco, Minister of Justice? I don't believe you!"

"It's a fact," Beardsley told him. "Right now he equates into an uncertain Prime."

"Yes, yes ... but Mandleco! Good Lord...."

"I said *uncertain* Prime. As you mentioned yourself, there is sure to be a shift of variants. Surely you have faith in ECAIAC?"

"Of course! But Mandleco, why Mandleco?"

"Why not? He was a friend of Carmack's—or a business associate shall we say? He worked with Carmack on the ECAIAC lobby, was largely responsible for pushing it through."

"Yes, I—say, that's right! It would be in C-F...."

"There are things," murmured Beardsley, "in Central File that would astound you."

Arnold was staring at the coded tapes. "Mandleco," he breathed. "And with elections coming up!" He shook himself out of the daze. "The—the other two Primes?"

"Next is not so startling. A really strong Recessive Factor there ... Professor Karl Losch."

Arnold jerked erect suddenly. "Losch? Say, I remember him! Now *there's* a man pursued by bad luck. He was working along similar lines to Carmack—in fact, wasn't he in Carmack's employ for a while?—but Carmack was first with the patents. You don't suppose that Losch—"

"I'm not supposed to suppose," Beardsley said softly. "But clinically, it is interesting to note that motive factor alone equates Losch from Logical into Prime. *Plus* a high neuro-thalamic imbalance—132 over 80 on the last Index, with pronounced efforts at suppression."

He watched Arnold absorb that, and went on: "Now for the third Prime. I think it'll interest you...."



He waited deliberately. He looked at Jeff Arnold for a long moment and saw that the man was calm. Too calm. So absolutely motionless that it wasn't real.

"Third Prime. A strong one, believe me. In a way most interesting of all." He pressed the words out slowly and flatly. "The third Prime," said Beardsley, "is ... Pederson."

He watched Arnold relax ever so slowly, leaning back, the tension going away as he uncoiled in the chair; but the young man's face wasn't so much relieved as it was puzzled.

"Pederson. Pederson? I don't seem to—You can't mean *Brook* Pederson, the one-time tele-columnist?"

"None other. I don't suppose you remember, but back in '60 he opposed the ECAIAC lobby. I mean *opposed* it, *fought* it! Predicted that Government installation of such a machine would not inspire confidence, that the nation's crime rate would rise ... he saw nothing but chaos. For a while there he was quite a man. Got himself a following. Had ambitions."

"But I do remember it!" Arnold thumped the desk. "Of course! Pederson headed a bloc against 'Carmack's Folly,' but he backed the wrong horse, and when the bubble burst he was out in the cold. Became a laughing stock." Arnold paused,

and his glance held something of shrewdness and a livening challenge. "Actually, Pederson couldn't have been more wrong. In those first two years ECAIAC reduced the crime-rate by some forty percent."

"So it's claimed!" This was a sore point and Beardsley rose to the bait. "It couldn't be that crime was on the down-grade already? I could show you plenty of statistics that—why, I could show you methods—"

"I'll just bet you could." Arnold gave a thin tolerant smile. "I refuse to enter *that argument* again, not with you, Beardsley. I for one trust in machines not in evolution. I've told you before...."



And Beardsley found himself sitting there with a flush of heat at his hair-roots, half-angry and half foolish as he realized how he had been baited.

Jeff Arnold was abruptly all business. He plunged his finger at a button, spoke into the intercom. "Joe! How's that test-run coming?"

"All-X so far! Give us ten minutes for clearance."

"Take twenty, but make sure it's *clearance*. Checked Quantitative, have you? How about feed-backs? ... yes ... what's that? Semantic circuits! Hell yes, check *all synaptics* for clearance! I want no excess data fouling up this run!"

He clicked off and sat there moodily, and Beardsley watched him, noting the quick nervous rhythm of Arnold's fingers. Arnold noticed it, too, and desisted.

"Look," he said. "Mandleco, Losch, Pederson. Those three Primes just don't make sense to me!"

"They don't?" Beardsley allowed just the proper note of resentment. "Surely you are not questioning Coördinates...."

"You know I'm not! But—"

Beardsley waited, knowing it was coming now. The thing Arnold had been aching to voice for the past five minutes.

"But—well, damn it, there is *Mrs. Carmack*, for example. As you pointed out yourself, she'll be a rich woman now! It would seem to me—"

"That she'd be a Prime? I'm surprised at you, Jeff; that's ancient thinking." If there was a trace of sarcasm, it was lost on Arnold. "Oh, I grant you it used to hold true—principle beneficiary was always prime suspect. Fiction especially was full of it. Queen, Dickson Carr, Boucher you—know the ilk. But with ECAIAC we've gotten away from all that, haven't we?"

Arnold stared at him suspiciously, hesitated, then brought it out with an effort. "Well—how *did* she equate?"

"Who? Oh yes, the beautiful widow. She only made Logical, and even that is borderline."

"I see." Arnold rose, dialled himself another drink, then changed his mind and put it down untouched. He turned to gather up the tapes, and his voice was apologetic.

"It's not that I'd ever questioned Coördinates Division! We're too closely aligned for that, Raoul..." (*First time he's ever used my first name*, thought Beardsley.) "You have a splendid record to uphold, as we do here at Mechanical. That's why ... well, I want to get this off as smoothly as possible!"

Something indefinable, a queasy feeling, took Beardsley about the middle. He said sharply: "Any reason why not?"

"No, not really. But in recent weeks—I tell you this in strictest confidence, understand!—in recent weeks it's been a rather ticklish thing to get total synaptic clearance."



Synaptics? Beardsley began thinking back to the Crime-Central "Required Annual Basic." The Mechanical had never been his strong point. He said uncertainly, "But—that's serious!"

"It's just that we've found ECAIAC holding back excess data from previous runs. Fouls up the relays, takes hours to iron out the clearance." Arnold gave him a keen look. "More of a nuisance really, but the weirdest thing. Stubborn!"

Stubborn. Beardsley could have thought of a better word. Through the panelled glass he glimpsed the black metal sheathe of the monster out there, the shapeless crouching and malevolent winking lights, and he felt himself going to pieces

inside with a sudden shaking crumble; he hated himself for it but he couldn't stop it; his hands clenched until the knuckles showed white.

"... matter of time until we find the cause," Arnold was saying, "but I guarantee total clearance *today*. Shall we get on with it?" Hands loaded with tapes, he moved for the door.

"No!" Beardsley cried. "Arnold, if you don't mind, I—"

"Oh, for God's sake, not again! Raoul, I swear I'm going to do something about this phobia of yours; it's getting to be not so funny any more." With a show of exasperation, Arnold propelled him through the door. "I give you my absolute word our pet won't snap at you. Not today. It's going to be far too busy for the likes of you!"



And Jeff Arnold was right, Beardsley discovered. Those baleful overtones were gone, replaced by a sustained soft whisper along the ninety-foot hull—a rather impatient whisper but not at all unpleasant. Beardsley relaxed by slow degrees, but kept a cautious distance, while Arnold pointed out every light along the length flashing green for Total Clearance.

"She's rarin' to go," said Arnold with a display of good humor, "but we'll let her wait a while, eh?" He clapped a friendly arm across Beardsley's shoulder. "You just come along now and watch; I think your trouble is, you've never been properly introduced! We'll have no more of this feudin' and fussin' between you and ECAIAC."

So Beardsley, showing more courage than he felt, trailed the cyberneticist through every unit of final check-up. Much of it he knew already from the "Required Annual Basic" ... or thought he knew. For this was so different from the Manuals! He felt at once ashamed and awed as he viewed at first hand the unfolding schematic structure. He was thrilled at sight of the selectors and analyzers of processed beryllium, the logic-and-semantic circuits in complex little bundles, the sensitized variant-tapes waiting for transferral impress, all revealed by a flick of Arnold's fingers that threw open entire sheathed sections to bare the inner secrets. The thousands of tiny transistors amazed Beardsley. The endless array of electric eyes startled him. And the spongy centers of synaptic cell-clusters horrified him, recalling too vividly to mind what he knew of the

physical human brain.

Along the monstrous length he trailed Jeff Arnold; he trailed and he watched and he listened, not interfering once by word or gesture. And before it was over his heart was surging with a great revelatory beat because suddenly *he knew ... he knew....*

Arnold seemed in high good humor as they paced back. "So," he nudged Beardsley in the ribs, "we'll have no more of this nonsense between you and ECAIAC. Eh? You're just *bound* to be good friends now."

Beardsley didn't answer. The revelation was still too much with him. He watched as Arnold conferred with a group of his techs about a micro-chron, and the time was carefully noted for Central Record.

Then the first of the tapes went in. The Basic Invariant—Amos Carmack.

It reached synapse and a tiny blip registered on cue.

The rest of the tapes fed in, razoring through the rollers, past the selenic-sensitized tips of the relays. There was no progressive order. After the Basic Invariant progression didn't matter. Possible or Logical or Prime, all factors would correlate or cancel; any divergent status-shift would be duly handled by transferral impress.

Beardsley counted the tapes. Twenty ... twenty-one ... twenty-two.

The techs dispersed, taking up their various posts where special eject-tapes clicked out a second-by-second record of the progression.



Nothing much happened. The sound of ECAIAC became a steady inudant drone; or did Beardsley just imagine that he detected something of the *gleeful* in it? With an effort he put the thought from him, and keeping a cautious distance he took a turn around the monster, up one side and down the other.

He stopped by Jeff Arnold, who was jotting down figures from the chrono. That seemed silly, as nothing had happened yet.

Arnold glanced up and grinned at him, as if totally unconcerned that this was the

most repercussive case in the entire history of Crime-Central! A little disconcerted, Beardsley said, "What happens first?"

"Oh, plenty is *happening*. But the first you'll notice will be a total reject. Watch when that happens. Complete silence, every light red for exactly two and a half seconds—the reject, and then everything continues."

"How about Transferral Impress? You know—possible to Logical, or Logical to Prime?"

Arnold paused over his notes for the merest instant. "Why—it's progressive, of course. *That* you won't notice!"

Beardsley stared at him curiously, started to speak and then changed his mind. He wandered again, watching the techs but not interfering. And suddenly he was aware that the first total reject had come. It happened with smooth and sudden silence just as Arnold had described, ECAIAC breaking pace for mere seconds ... then all was clear again, and one of the techs hurried down the aisle with the tape, which he handed to Arnold.



Beardsley was aware of a wild pounding of pulse as he stared at the anonymous tape. One of the fifteen "possibles"? It might even be a rejected Logical. Mrs. Carmack? She was borderline. Or a Prime! It could be Mandleco himself—or Losch or Pederson. No ... it was unlikely any Primes would fall this early....

But maybe they were no longer Primes! Maybe *right now* Transferral Impress was at work, maybe one or more of them was being relegated to lower coördinate-status somewhere there in the entrails....

He felt a bounding excitement. And, as if reading his thoughts, Jeff Arnold gave him an amused look.

"Don't let it get to you, Raoul. I used to find it the same; we all do. But then you get to thinking, hell, why try to guess? Identities don't matter now!" He indicated the coded tape. "A total reject—anonymous. ECAIAC's way of telling us *that* person could not possibly be the murderer."

"But—you're not even curious?"

"At rejects? Why?" Arnold seemed perplexed. "Oh, you mean because *I'm* among the 'possibles.' Frankly it doesn't bother me. I know I'm not the murderer, and I have faith in ECAIAC. If this isn't my tape, the next will be—or the eighth, or the fifteenth."

Beardsley nodded slowly. With ECAIAC it was only the final equate that mattered, the total result of Cumulative. He saw the truth in that, and the perfection. Or—his eyes beneath the glasses came to a quick bright focus—was it quite perfection? He watched in silence as Arnold consulted the micro-chron and jotted more notes. *Rej. Q-9 (code): (.008 synap. circ.): 11:23 A.M.*

Beardsley wandered again, watching the techs. A sudden shivering seized him. How could they remain so calm? Were they so close to the forest they couldn't notice? Something was about to happen ... to him it was unmistakable, in the very atmosphere, sharpened and heightened by the four walls—a pervading sense of *wrongness* and a pyramiding tension.

Even Arnold wasn't aware; *audibly* nothing had changed, as ECAIAC continued its soft-clicking whisper and the techs methodically checked the progress tapes. Beardsley stood numbly for a moment, struggling against a welter of panic. Palms sweating, he moved a safe distance away and waited.

Eight minutes later came another reject. Six minutes later, the third. ECAIAC continued its blithe, soft-throated rhythm—but Beardsley was not fooled.

Someone sent out for coffee. It arrived in steaming thermo-containers. Beardsley was on his first cup of coffee when rejects 4, 5 and 6 came through.

He was on his second cup when number 7 ejected, and he had just taken a last swallow when all hell broke loose.



It wasn't much different from the other rejects. Total silence, every light in every section red ... trouble was, they couldn't seem to get together again. Some went back to green, others blinked with ominous uncertainty, still others said "to hell with it" and exploded in vicious shards of glass that sprayed across the room. That was only the beginning. Twenty feet from Beardsley came a louder explosion, a sort of muffled hissing. He ducked, as a complete bank of transistors zoomed past his head. From a dozen places along the ninety-foot

length angry trails of smoke poured out. A tech yelled "Damn!" as he pulled back a burned hand. Sheathes crashed open. Long strands of vari-colored wire burst out and began a crazy aimless writhing, accompanied by an ominous buzzing sound as if a swarm of angry metallic bees had escaped. Someone was yelling, "Master-switch! The master-switch!"

Beardsley saw Arnold leap to the master-switch, where he became entangled with a tech who was screaming at him, "My God, sir, hurry! It's BREAKDOWN!"

Cursing, Arnold shoved the man aside and pulled the controls.

But now that it was roused, ECAIAC didn't want to give up so easily. There came a staccato series of minor explosions—defiant gesture, thought Beardsley!—before silence engulfed the room together with a drift of acrid smoke.

It was acrid and *angry* smoke. From a safe distance Beardsley adjusted his glasses and observed the frantic, scurrying techs, many of them nursing burned hands. Aside from a pounding heart he was amazed at his own calm; nevertheless, he tread with caution as he approached Arnold, who was on his haunches dolefully surveying the area of major damage.

"Uh—is it something serious?"

Arnold glared up at him. "Overload on the feed-backs. If that's *all* it is, we can pull out the unit and replace it in a few hours."

"Never happened before, eh?"

"Not like this," Arnold groaned. "Lord—it just seemed to go berserk!"

Beardsley glanced around nervously. "You see? You see? I didn't think our beautiful friendship could last...."

Arnold snarled, "Get out, Beardsley! What the hell you doing here anyway? Go somewhere and read a book!"

"Yes. Yes, I—" Beardsley swallowed hastily. He then straightened, took a last look around and pulled himself together. Without a word, he turned and strode resolutely into Jeff Arnold's office; he closed the door carefully, then hurried over to the stat and pushed the button for priority.

"Hello," he said. "Mandleco's office? ... this is Mechanical Division ... no, I want *Mandleco* ... I don't care, get him I said! This is emergency! Put him on at once!"

Mandleco arrived twenty minutes later. The Minister of Justice was tall and raw-boned with a long hook-nose, a shock of whitening hair, and more than a suggestion of military arrogance. He paused for precisely one second in the doorway, then strode straight over to Jeff Arnold. Before saying a word he bent slightly and peered into the maze of mechanism.

Beardsley wanted to say, "Do you find the cause of the trouble, sir?" But he held his tongue.

Mandleco straightened up, glaring. "Arnold, what is the meaning of this?"

"Breakdown, sir."

"I can see that! The cause, man, the cause!"

"I—it's only the feed-back, sir." Arnold struggled with the terminals, most of which were a fused and tangled mess. "Not as bad as it looks, I assure you. I've already contacted Maintenance; they're sending up a new unit."

"What precisely does that mean? Can you complete the run or not! This has got to go through today!"

Arnold touched a hot terminal, jerked back his hand and swore. "It will, sir. Give us a few hours. We had seven total rejects, so I doubt the tapes are at fault. More like a synaptic overload. Transferrals are okay, so I want to try it with a stepped-up synaptic check; that'll alleviate any overload without drain on the minor selective, which is better than setting up complete new correlation-grams."

It was too much for Mandleco. Grinding a fist in his palm, he stared into the matrix and muttered, "Unprecedented. Absolutely unprecedented! Arnold, I just can't understand *why*—"

"Happened pretty suddenly," Beardsley intruded. His voice was low and laden with meaning. "Almost as if it had gone berserk! And little wonder, if you ask me...."

Mandleco turned quickly. "Eh? What do you mean?"

"Well ... how would *you* feel if you had just been handed the news, out of the blue, that someone you loved had been brutally murdered? ECAIAC reacted, is all. She must have regarded Carmack as a father—"

Arnold looked up in amazement. "Beardsley, will you stop that crazy nonsense!"

"Nonsense?" Beardsley appeared hurt. "Why—you said yourself that you wanted me and ECAIAC to become great friends!" He appealed to Mandleco. "That's what he said, sir, and he even took pains to introduce me and all, and—"

"It was in the nature of a joke, sir!" Arnold's voice rose an octave. "A private little joke, and he's trying to make it appear—"

"Stop it, stop it!" Mandleco thundered. "Arnold—you get that new unit installed on the double! Put your best men on it. That's an order! Beardsley, I'm glad you had the presence of mind to contact me. Commendable, most commendable."

Arnold scowled, hit Beardsley with an accusing look.

"Above all," said Mandleco, "not a word of this must leak! *Damn* it, why should this have to happen *now*? Public confidence will be undermined if they think ECAIAC is—is—"

"Not infallible?" suggested Beardsley.

"Exactly. You hear me, Arnold? Not a word of this must get out!"

"I'm sure it won't," Arnold glared venomously at Beardsley, "if you'll just keep *him* away from the tele-stats."

The Minister of Justice walked away, still muttering something about public confidence and political repercussions. Beardsley kept pace beside him until they were across the room. Then he spoke, timidly at first.

"Pardon me, sir, but—I'd like to ask you something." His voice was low and confidential. "If you'll just look around you...."

"Eh?" Mandleco followed Beardsley's gesture, and for the first time he seemed to see the room in total. Shards of glass lay everywhere. A great tangle of wire was strewn half the length of ECAIAC, and a bank of transistors reposed against the far wall in pitiful ruin. The techs had already started a strip-down, their tools and units across the floor adding to the general confusion.

Mandleco said, "Well? What is it you—" His words stopped as if sliced in two by his teeth. "Yes. Yes, by God, I see what you mean!"

"Can you really conceive of operation in two hours? *Two hours*," Arnold said. "Two days, maybe. More likely in two weeks!"

Mandleco groaned as if in pain, staring around.

Beardsley pressed his point. "You'll pardon my saying it, sir, but I *do* realize what the Carmack Case means—to you personally. So much build-up and publicity, and the people demanding a verdict ... why, if the case were to snag now—"

"Unthinkable!" A shudder touched Mandleco's long, lean frame. "Out with it, man! What are you trying to say?"

Beardsley was suddenly sweating. He felt as if a long tube were inside of him, hot and throbbing, reaching up with a surge of pulse to his temples. *It had to be now. He had to say it.*

"Well," he gulped. "Just this, sir. I think the case can be cracked right now. Today. *Without ECAIAC.*"

"Nonsense! Without ECAIAC? Why, that's—"

"Sure. You think it's crazy. But I tell you *I can do it!*" Beardsley's words came fast and urgent. "I've followed this case from the beginning, I processed it, I'm familiar with every angle. I tell you, *I can deliver the killer.* Give me permission to try!"

Mandleco stared at Beardsley as if he were some queer specimen under a microscope; his mouth opened to speak, then he clamped his teeth tightly and strode away.

He turned back abruptly. "So you think you have the solution. You actually—do—think it!" His eyes narrowed down, no longer amused, as he fixed the little serologist with a peculiar gaze. "Go on, Beardsley. Your suggestion at least has the novelty of imagination!"

"The novelty of experience," Beardsley said bitterly. "*With your permission and co-operation* I can solve this case, together with positive evidence that will hold up in any court! What's more, I'll do it today. A guarantee," Beardsley said

pointedly, "which I dare say you no longer have from ECAIAC."

Mandleco stood quite motionless, trying to recall something. "Now I remember! You were with New York Homicide, weren't you, before promotion to Coördinates in '60? I recall passing on your record. Top record, too, for those days."

Beardsley gestured impatiently. "How about it, sir? I know every pertinent fact of this case, plus a few of my own which haven't been tested in a dozen years. Not indexes and tubes and tapes—just facts! Fact and method! Let me apply them!"

"I'm afraid it's not as simple as that, Beardsley. There *is* ECAIAC, and public confidence must not be allowed—"

"The public be damned," Beardsley caught himself. "All right—for appearance sake you can say the solution *came* from ECAIAC. Let ECAIAC verify me later if you wish. I'm not after headlines and glory ... by heaven, sir, I'm offering you an *out*!"

Mandleco pondered that. He glanced again at the confusion across the room, and realization seemed to hit him. Quite suddenly, then, he threw back his head and roared with laughter.

"An out. And by heaven, Beardsley, I'm offering you a try! The idea appeals to me! Beardsley versus ECAIAC ... socio-archaism opposed to the *machina-ratiocinatrix*. Why, it's delicious!" He subsided to a rumble of mirth and wiped tears from his eyes. "So! Just what do you propose?"

Beardsley saw nothing amusing. "I propose first, sir, that we reach an understanding. I'm to conduct the investigation my own way, without interference?"

"You have my word! I never violate it."

"Good. Then start using your word right now. There are three persons I want placed in temporary custody; they are to be brought over here at once for questioning."

Mandleco looked appalled. "Questioning? *Here?*"

"Yes, right here. Immediately! The three I want are Mrs. Carmack—I happen to know she's still in the city. And Brook Pederson—you should reach him easily at Central News Bureau. The third—"

"Would that be Professor Losch?" Mandleco smugly asked. "Sorry, but Losch happens to be in Bermuda right now."

Beardsley said sharply: "How did you know that?"

"Why, I—I'm acquainted with Losch, you know. He was planning a vacation, and he mentioned Bermuda—"

"No. I don't mean that. *How did you know Losch was my third person?*"

Mandleco bristled a little, his face reddening as he groped for an answer. "Never mind," Beardsley waved it aside. "If Losch is in Bermuda at present we'll reach him by tele-stat right now!" He was suddenly crisp as he propelled the Minister of Justice toward Jeff Arnold's office.

Mandleco stared at this little man, wondering if it were the same person he had been talking to just minutes before. "Now see here, Beardsley—" But he was interrupted.

"I thought we had an understanding! Of course, if you'd prefer to count on ECAIAC—"

"Very well," Mandleco nodded grimly, "I gave you my word. But the instant Arnold repairs the breakdown, your little experiment is over! Do you understand that?"

Beardsley nodded. He understood very well.

"In the meantime, Beardsley, I warn you. I'll have no brow-beating of these citizens, no—what was it called—third-degreeing tactics! I understand that sort of thing used to be pretty prevalent."

Beardsley snorted, as if that were beneath comment, and closed the office door behind them. Mandleco hit him with a cagey glance. "The Logicals and the Primes, eh? I suppose you know that I happen to be one of those Primes."

Beardsley looked straight at him. "Yes, I'm aware of it. My own approach will be individualistic, of course, but I promise you won't be over-looked!"



It might have been fatal—but Beardsley had judged his man well. Mandleco took it as a challenge. He was silent as he approached the tele-stat, and he no longer seemed amused.

He put through the directive to have Mrs. Sheila Carmack and Mr. Brook Pederson brought in. "As my guests, that is," Mandleco told his operative. "*Be sure they understand that.* They are to be brought to Crime-Central, Mechanical Division, at once ... yes, I said Mechanical Division! At once means *now.*"

Beardsley nodded approval. "And now Professor Losch, please?"

Without a waste of motion, Mandleco put through to Bermuda on priority beam. While they waited he gave Beardsley a look of puzzlement and new respect. "Ah—I'm not implying that it's against protocol, of course, but I assume you've already made some investigation along lines of your own?"

"Superficial only," Beardsley said.

"I see. Well then, would you mind giving me some ... you know, just an idea of how you plan to proceed?"

Beardsley said bluntly: "Yes, I would mind."

"Oh." Mandleco frowned and persisted. "Psychologic deduction. Wasn't that your *forte*? I seem to recall—"

Beardsley grunted. "I'll tell you this much, there are implications about this case that fascinate me!"

"Oh?" Mandleco found himself a chair, sat upon it and edged forward. "I don't just quite—"

"Look. To begin with, the case is unique; so much so that your entire structure of approach is wrong. I mean top-heavy! Top-heavy with gadgetry and assumption."

"Assumption?" Mandleco bristled a little. "You of all people should know better."

Not *once* in the past dozen years has ECAIAC failed to arrive at a conclusive and pin-point solution based on correlative factors!"

Beardsley smiled thinly. "Ah, yes. But we were speaking of the *Carmack* case. I repeat, it's not only unique but untenable; it became untenable the moment you assigned ECAIAC the task of solving the murder of its own creator! That," he said grimly, "is a mistake we wouldn't have made even in '60...."



Mandleco thought that over, shook his head and frowned. It was obvious he missed the connotation. "So?" he urged.

"So look at the murder itself. The *pattern*. You'll admit it does seem odd and misplaced for these times—or hadn't you noticed?" Beardsley leaned forward sharply. "But it strikes a familiar note with me! Absolutely nothing in the way of material clues; not even the weapon; and the *modus operandi* is one I haven't seen employed in years, the old idea of the most direct and simple murder being the safest!"

"I—I guess I just don't follow you."

"I mean the *way* Carmack was struck down. Nothing cute and fancy, no frills or improvisation—just the proverbial blunt instrument, after which the killer simply walked out of there. Believe me, I know about these things. The very simplicity is the killer's protection. You can bet no trace will ever be found of that blunt instrument, and naturally he left no evidence coming or going. But then," Beardsley said obliquely, "your so-called 'Survey' men made a horrible botch of the scene. In '60 we'd have sent them back to patrolling the freeways!"

Mandleco started to protest, then closed his mouth quickly. "I see, I see."

"I can understand," Beardsley murmured, "how emphasis on basic groundwork has become minimized. So much reliance on Indexes and thalamic-imbalance and chart-sifts! It was only a matter of time until a criminal, a really *clever* one, saw through the system—and reverted." His fingers drummed the chair arm, then he looked up sharply. "And yet of all places, I'd say that Carmack's estate was *least* ideally situated for this type of murder; you know what I mean? You've been there?"

"Well, I—there have been occasions. Yes."

Beardsley nodded. "I refer to Carmack's elaborate system against invasion of his privacy. To put it bluntly, he had enemies, and his estate was designed as a refuge against those enemies; electronic barriers pitched at ultra-frequency to respond only to certain neural vibrations. Must have taken years of research to come up with that!"

Mandleco shifted impatiently. "Of course, but look here, Beardsley—"

"So it leaves me right where I started, doesn't it? And yet I know this: it was no *emotional* killing. It was all coldly planned. The killer was someone Carmack trusted enough to have in his home; they were probably having a quiet little chat together. And then precisely—on a predetermined minute—the killer rose from his chair and struck."

Mandleco lifted his heavy hands and then, as if conscious of them, let them fall limply across the desk. "But—come now, Beardsley! Psychologic deduction is all very well, but how can you possibly know that?"

Beardsley gazed calmly at the Minister of Justice. For a moment he said nothing. Mandleco seemed more alert than startled, more annoyed than either.

"That," said Beardsley softly, "I am not prepared to tell you."

Mandleco seemed about to pursue the point, but there came an interruption. Both men turned abruptly as the stat-screen gave its warning blip.

"Code C-C-Five!" came the remote voice. "Bermuda to Washington, Priority. This is Priority. C-C-Five ... your party is ready now, sir!"



It was a pool-side scene, with hotel and tropical palms against an unbelievable blue sky. Professor Emil Losch loomed on the screen; he was in swimming trunks, a small gray man who seemed hard as nails, his lean tanned body belying his years.

"Hello?" Losch peered sharply and then pulled away, almost upsetting an expensive decanter of liquor on the table beside him. He seemed to blanch as he recognized the Minister of Justice. "Mandleco!"

The latter raised a hand in greeting. "Don't be alarmed, Professor, this is not official. Just a social call."

"I want to correct that," Beardsley said bluntly as he thrust himself into range. "Professor Losch, this *is* official; furthermore, I wish to advise you that this stat is monitor-taped for both vis and audio, and the resulting record is therefore admissible in any Court of Law. Being so advised, is there any objection on your part to answering a brief series of questions pertaining to the Carmack Case? I have been duly authorized by George Mandleco, Minister of Justice," he added for the record.

Losch glanced bewilderedly from Beardsley to Mandleco, and seemed to take courage from the latter.

"Objection?" he said. "This is a bit unusual, but ... of course, I have no objection."

"Very well. I shall make a series of statements, and give you opportunity to refute them either in part or *in toto*. Professor Losch, some years ago you were engaged privately, in magnetronic cybernetic research along similar lines to those later developed by Amos Carmack. Shortly thereafter you claimed that Carmack had thwarted you, out-maneuvered you, *out-stolen* you at every turn; I believe those are pretty much your own words, as revealed by court records—"

"Correct! I repeat them now!"

"You filed against him, and litigation dragged through the courts for several years before Carmack finally won out. Shortly thereafter you disappeared; I believe you took up residence in Europe. About a year ago you returned, and was hired as Research Consultant in the laboratories of the Carmack Foundation. This is true?"



For a moment Losch avoided looking at the screen. It was obvious he was considering his answer carefully.

"It's true," he said.

Beardsley said quickly, "It is my understanding that Mr. Mandleco interceded with Carmack on your behalf—"

"I protest the last statement!" Losch's words exploded from the screen. "There was no intercession by anyone!" His head lifted defiantly. "Yes, I came back. I don't mind admitting I came crawling back. Carmack offered me the position and I accepted!"

"Quite so. And he offered you a hundred thousand a year, didn't he? Twice the salary of any other top man?"

"You think that's out of line," Losch bristled, "but he must have thought I was worth it—I think you know why! He owed me ten times as much!"

"You must have really hated Carmack," murmured Beardsley.

Mandleco thrust forward angrily, gesturing. "Losch, let me caution you not to answer that!"

"But I will answer it! Yes, I hated him, but if you think I killed the man you're wrong. Sure—I wanted to kill him—I thought about it often enough, but I hadn't the courage." Losch glared at Beardsley from the screen. "No doubt my Augment Index will bear it out," he said bitterly. "Neuro-thalamic imbalance isn't it called? Pronounced efforts at emotional suppression?"

"Close enough," Beardsley nodded, refusing to be enticed from his query. "And you were in Washington prior to and including the day of the murder. You admit this?"

"Of course, of course I admit it!" Losch sighed wearily and lifted his hands. "Why deny the obvious? I'm resigned to the fact that my Index probably makes me a prize Prime!"

"Professor Losch. As a person closely associated with the Carmack Laboratories, you must be aware of the—shall we say—elaborate precautions Carmack took to ensure his privacy?"

Losch sank back slowly, but his eyes couldn't conceal a livening interest. "I don't know what you mean."

"Then I'll tell you. I refer to the frequency barrier which Carmack installed within the past year. The 'neuro-vibe' I think he called it. That strikes a note?"

Losch said sullenly, "Perhaps! What about it?"

"Only this. Assuming the killer was a person Carmack had reason to mistrust—

or to fear—he had to solve the neuro-vibe in order to gain access. Not many persons could have done that, Losch. But *you* could have done it."

Losch came up out of his chair with a heavy, angry look. "Now see here, you—"

"Which pretty well establishes motive, means and method. You were in Washington the day of the murder! And you left for Bermuda the day following! Is that substantially correct?"

"*Totally* correct!" said Losch savagely. "Now may I ask what the hell you're going to do about it?"



Beardsley observed him for a prolonged second. "Remember it," he answered softly.

Losch opened his mouth to say more, but Beardsley lifted a palm at the screen and smiled benignly. "Well, sir, I think that about covers it. I want to thank you very much for the record, and—ah—have a nice vacation! Goodbye."

With that he clicked off abruptly.



He turned to face Mandleco, who was struggling between anger and distress as he paced away from the screen and back. He confronted Beardsley with a sad and accusing look. "Now see here, Beardsley! If I'd known your methods were ... don't you think that was all a bit high-handed?"

"What? No, not in the least. Didn't you notice?"

"Notice what?"

"Losch was an angry man, yes, indeed."

"Angry," snapped Mandleco. "Good reason!"

"No," Beardsley mused. "The *wrong* reason. Murder—at least the type we're concerned with—is a form of release, you know. A killer may commit his deed in anger, but once the thing is accomplished he never retains that anger long."

Beardsley gazed contemplatively at the screen. "You know, I admire that man. I really do. He had the convictions at least, if not the courage."

Mandleco pounced on that. "Then you think Losch is innocent?"

"I didn't say that!" Beardsley paused in a strange hesitation; his eyes had gone remote beneath the very thick glasses, and his words came slow and isolated. "But he's part of the record. Yes, it should be quite a record. In fact, I have a feeling—you know?—that this case is going to stand as a *monument* in the annals of crime...."

Mandleco stared at him, searched for the meaning there and then gave it up. *Why had he ever committed himself to this situation anyway? Did this little man really know as much as he pretended, or was he merely fumbling around in the dregs of a forgotten past?* To be sure, Beardsley was a pathetic enough figure; but the man had once been great in his field, and there was something about him even now....

There was the sudden way Beardsley had of losing his abstracted look, the eyes beneath those ridiculous lenses coming to a sharp bright focus with tiny livening flecks in the gray of the iris; and the way the change lifted his features from mediocrity to the alertness of a terrier. It was absurd, it was farcical ... and it was all very disturbing.

"You told *me*," Mandleco said testily, "that the killer was someone Carmack trusted enough to have in his home. Then you bludgeon Losch with the idea it was a person Carmack had reason to fear! It would seem to me, Beardsley—"

"No, no. I think my words to Losch were *assuming* the killer was such a person." Beardsley looked up brightly, and even through those lenses Mandleco could see the sharp focus.

"Just the same, I fail to see what's to be gained by these outlandish methods!"

Beardsley seemed genuinely surprised. "But I've gained a great deal already! And don't forget, Mrs. Carmack and Pederson should be here soon."

"*That's* a prospect I look forward to," Mandleco tried to salvage a modicum of humor and failed miserably. He extracted a cigar, clamped his teeth upon it, frowned and glanced at his watch. He strode over and peered out at the operations room.

Beardsley said innocuously, "I wouldn't count on ECAIAC just yet."

It was Beardsley's first error. He realized it instantly. The remark seemed to trigger something in Mandleco.

The Minister of Justice turned slowly, rolling the cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other. "But I may," he said. "You know, I just may! It's barely possible, Beardsley, that with some luck we'll be able to dispense with your talents!" He said it with considerable more relish than conviction, and moved for the door. "I think I'll just see how Arnold is making out!"



Arnold was making out very well, much to Mandleco's delight. No longer was there chaos and confusion. The new feed-back unit had arrived, and installation was well under way. Blueprints were spread out as a crew of techs worked feverishly at all damage areas.

"It looks promising," Arnold hurried up to greet him. "Told you I had a good crew here! Look—see this?" He indicated one of the variant-tapes being slowly reversed across the relays.

"What is it?"

"The number eight reject."

"That what caused the trouble?"

"Well ... we think so, but it's problematical. Whether it did or not, we're safe in resuming the run without any shift in the correlation total."

Mandleco stared at the number eight. "Throw it out!" he snapped.

"What—what did you say, sir?"

"I said throw it out! Get this thing to functioning!"

Arnold was aghast. "But," he gulped, "we just can't throw out data! Sure, it was about to be a reject—but everything, even rejects, contain a factor-balance! You know that, sir."

Mandleco got control of himself with an effort. "Yes—yes, of course. I know

you're right. But damn it, man, those units cost something like eighty thousand dollars! Suppose the same breakdown occurs?"

"Not a chance of it this time. We'll merely continue with a stepped-up synaptic check. Take longer for Cumulative, perhaps, but absolutely fool-proof once we —"



For a long instant Mandleco stood musing. Then he nodded brusquely. "All right. How long to get going?"

"Why, we'll be ready in forty minutes at the most. I told you I had a good crew, sir! Excuse me—" One of Arnold's techs was motioning to him. "Excuse me," Arnold said again, and hurried away to consult with the man.

"Forty minutes!" Mandleco couldn't believe it. He chortled happily, and swung about to greet Beardsley who approached at that moment. "Hear that, Beardsley? Forty minutes! Excellent man, Arnold. I'm sorry I ever doubted—"

Beardsley wasn't listening. He stared about at the miracle of reconstruction, and there was more of amazement on his face than distress. Adjusting his glasses, he gazed thoughtfully at Jeff Arnold's retreating figure.

Mandleco was saying, "Just as well your little experiment didn't go any further! Dangerous precedent ... don't know what possessed me ... you realize that in the last analysis I'll have to put my faith in ECAIAC! No bad feelings?"

"No, sir," Beardsley pronounced somberly. "No bad feelings, because I'm holding you to your word. ECAIAC hasn't solved your case and it never will."

Mandleco stood still, open-mouthed. "What's that? Nonsense! Arnold just assured me—"

"He assured you of nothing! I'm more convinced than ever now. I'm the only one who can solve this case, and I'm holding you to your word."

Mandleco seemed undecided whether to laugh or censure. His heavy fingers opened and closed aimlessly, as he stared across the room at Arnold and back at Beardsley. Finally his teeth snapped together. "Beardsley," he choked—"I warn you, if this is some sort of trickery—"

Beardsley shook his head solemnly. "You'd do well to believe me, sir. I was never more serious."

"So you're determined to go on with it! Very well, Beardsley. You have something like forty minutes, and believe me you'd better prove yourself! May I remind you"—fraught with meaning, his voice bordered on anticipation—"may I remind you, Beardsley, that already you've given sufficient cause for a complete review of your qualifications as Coördinator?"

Beardsley looked at him and smiled. "Yes, sir. And may I remind *you*, sir," he nodded toward the far door, "that your guests have arrived?"



Mrs. Carmack, Beardsley thought as he watched her, was that rare type of woman who could defy all the current conventions of style and carry it off successfully; her type of beauty was unostentatious and yet vibrant. She was dressed impeccably in black and silver, her hair was authentic honey-blond in a coronet braid, and her face possessed that pure line of profile together with the quality of translucence one sees in rare porcelain.... Sheila Carmack was thirty-five, and she paid her beauticians that many thousands annually to keep her looking fifteen years younger. Just now she seemed in buoyant good spirits as she greeted Mandleco.

Not so the young man who accompanied her. The escort was a person Beardsley had never seen before, quite handsome and quite aware of it, with an impudent world-wisdom centered about his sharp eyes. He turned immediately to Mandleco with a bluster as phony as it was towering:

"This is an outrage, sir! A damned outrage! On Sheila's behalf I deplore these tactics, and I question your right! Our entire afternoon perfectly ruined...."

"Correction, darling," purred Mrs. Carmack. "You mean our perfect afternoon entirely ruined." She turned smiling to the Minister of Justice. "You really mustn't mind Victor."

"Hello, Sheila," Mandleco greeted her wanly. "I must apologize for the inconvenience, but I assure you—"

"Oh, but this is thrilling! I mean really!" Mrs. Carmack was gazing about

ECAIAC's room with considerable more delight than suspicion, and Beardsley watching her was thinking: *Thrilling! Can she really mean it? She must surely be aware of ECAIAC's task for today—today of all days....*

He glanced uneasily down the room, and saw that Jeff Arnold was much too occupied to have noticed the newcomers. He gestured to Mandleco, who finally took the hint and escorted the visitors into the privacy of the office.

There Mandleco offered drinks, but the young man named Victor refused his, preferring to maintain his air of injured dignity. Mandleco sighed and gave an accusing look at Beardsley. "I know this is unusual," he apologized to Sheila, "but I—uh—I *am* rather hopeful that you may find it entertaining!" He gave a slight sardonic emphasis to the last word. "If you'll just bear with me until our other guest arrives."

Victor had been awaiting his chance. "Another? *Really!* We're guests, Sheila, do you hear that?" He looked at Mandleco with immense disdain, gave a pert tilt of his head and surveyed the room with a grimace of distaste. "And just how long are we to be detained in this—this—"

Beardsley's fist itched to splatter those handsome features around a little. Instead he strode forward, said bluntly: "That'll do it, sonny! Who the hell are you anyway?"

The handsome face sneered at him. "I am Victor d'Arlan! I am a good friend of Sheila's—of the family," he corrected. "We were on our way to the Concert when those—those *impertinent* men detained us. To think we must forego Perro's Fifth Color-Concerto for Sub-Chromatics in favor of *this!*"

Sheila's eyes danced with tolerant amusement. "Victor, please. This promises to be much more exciting; I'm sure Mr. Mandleco knows what he is about, and...." Wide and curious, her gaze went to Beardsley and lingered there.

Belatedly, Mandleco made introductions. "Perhaps I should explain," he gave an improvident laugh, "that Mr. Beardsley's role at the moment is—ah—a little beyond the ordinary! That is, I—" He paused miserably, and then was saved for the moment as all eyes turned toward the door.

Brook Pederson had arrived and the attention of everyone was drawn to him.



The effect was startling. The tele-columnist was a tall, dour and bushy-browed man who took a perverse sort of pride in the impression he gave of shabbiness. He slouched wordlessly into the room, hands thrust deep in the pockets of a makeshift jacket. But there was nothing shabby about the man's perceptive and analytic mind, Beardsley remembered; true, Pederson had fallen from the heights since the ECAIAC debacle, but his retirement from the limelight was more studied than sullen and could only have been his own choosing. Lately he had emerged again, and with all of his old news-sense and political acumen he was making his presence felt ... he was a man of considered but lightning mood who, when asked for an opinion invariably gave an argument.

Beardsley observed him shrewdly. From the depths of his mind came a warning,

a restless unease that took root and blossomed into turbulence. *This man will bear special watching....*

Pederson came on into the room, nodded dourly at Mandleco (no love lost there!) and remained alertly silent; for the merest instant he met Beardsley's gaze, and there was a definite challenge and something of mockery. *Damn him, thought Beardsley, he knows why he's here ... but how could he know? He's aware that he's on the tapes, too—even one of the Primes—and he doesn't give a damn!*

Mandleco finished the introductions quickly and took over. It was plain that he wanted to get through with this, but at the same time Beardsley sensed that he was no longer *quite* so sure of Jeff Arnold and ECAIAC ... above all things, Mandleco had to avoid any hint of trouble with ECAIAC.

And he managed that with an adroitness that bordered on the cunning. After some glowing comments on Beardsley's past esteemed record—with pointed emphasis on the pre-ECAIAC era—he ended with a truly inspirational touch:

"Let us just say, then, that you have been invited here in the interests of an experiment which Crime-Central has been contemplating for some time. An inquiry into—ah—certain facets of past investigatory methods. Crude as it may seem to you, certain factors may be forthcoming here—psychologic and derivational—which may later be refined, analyzed and integrated into the operational function of ECAIAC...."

Beardsley stared at Mandleco. It was altogether a neat side-step, and he almost admired him for it.

"Please understand, this is a necessary adjunct to the true development of ECAIAC. We shall have here two divergent lines of approach within parallel fields. Actually, each of you will be an important co-aide in this experiment! I would like you to cooperate fully with Mr. Beardsley's line of approach. Uh—vintage '60," he added for their amusement.

The reaction was immediate and varied. Victor d'Arlan examined his fingernails and registered aristocratic boredom. Pederson slouched up against the desk, seeming amused at Mandleco's pitch ... but he wasn't watching Mandleco. The gaze he fastened on Beardsley said plainer than words that he was quite aware of the situation.

Only Sheila Carmack seemed fascinated, as she sat a bit straighter in her chair and peered brightly across her drink. It was obvious that she, for one, was taken in.

"Why, I wouldn't have missed it for the world!" she sparkled. "Just like, you know, in those—what did they call them—*whodunits*? It's actually thrilling!"

"It's archaic!" d'Arlan sneered.

"It's heroic," said Pederson, his gaze still on the little Coördinator. "Beardsley, I hope you pull it off. I actually do. Always did think you were twice the man ECAIAC is!"

Beardsley moved forward, not smiling. "Thanks," he said. "In that case you won't mind if I begin with you."

"With *me*?" Pederson stared, then laughed suddenly and without mirth. "Skip it, Beardsley! I know your methods, and I can tell you right now it won't get you any—"

Beardsley stopped him. "Pederson," he said, "as of now we agree on just one thing. I also think I'm twice the man. The only difference is that I'm man enough to *really* believe it." He paused and watched him absorb that. "It's going to be ECAIAC or vintage '60, Pederson. Your choice!"



It was at once a rebuff and a challenge. Pederson then straightened up slowly, a muscle in his face flinched and then he smiled—with all but his eyes. "All right," he snapped, "we'll begin with me. I'll fill you in plenty! You want to know if I saw Carmack the day of the murder? I did! The louse put through a vis call to me. *Insisted* I come out and see him—"

"Whoa, now just a minute! You wouldn't say this was a friendly visit?"

"I'll get to that!" Pederson's words came fast and clipped. "You know how I fought the ECAIAC lobby. I fought it long and hard, and when I lost it finished me with the public. But I wasn't through! I began digging up every fact I could about Carmack. Took me a few years, but worth it. Most of it smelled! Ask Professor Losch, he'll tell you—"

"I've already spoken with Losch," Beardsley said quietly. "He managed to convey his sentiments pretty thoroughly."

"Good. Then try talking to *him*," Pederson nodded venomously at *Mandleco*. "Ask Mandleco how the great Carmack managed to get those patents through... I can tell you he didn't do it alone! Oh, I've dug plenty!"

"Why, you—" Mandleco gave a snort of anger and started forward, but Beardsley managed to forestall him. He gazed sternly at the tele-columnist.

"I think we're all aware of your considerable talent for digging, Pederson. ECAIAC, too," he added pointedly, "for we already have it on the tapes."

Pederson bristled. "Sure. Sure, you have it! My past connection, my opposition to the lobby, even my digging maybe. But you don't have it all! How do you equate *hate*, Beardsley? Is *that* on your tapes?"

Beardsley could have told him that it was, indeed, on the tapes. But he only shook his head. "No," he said slowly, "we don't have it all. Not ECAIAC nor I nor any of us, and that's the eternal pity of it. But I'd like to try! The sum and the substance, Pederson ... don't you understand me? Just once before I'm through —"



It was the voice, some secret and subtle thing in the voice that reached out and gripped Pederson and bore meaning with it. He stood quite motionless, staring at Beardsley; for a split second his eyes widened, then disbelief gave way to something of comprehension, admiration.

"Beardsley," he said softly. "You fool. You utter damned fool!"

Oblivious of the others, then, he turned and began to pace. "All right. Here it is. Carmack called me out to see him. He had gotten wind of what I was up to, and offered to buy me off." Pederson laughed bitterly. "Wasn't even subtle about it! Said he liked my stuff, and would like to see me at the top again where I belonged. Said he could arrange for me to step into a top job at Central Telecast. Providing, of course, I could manage to—ah—'forget' certain little items I'd uncovered."



Pederson was doing all right. Beardsley gave him his lead.

"He actually thought it would be that simple! I refused him outright, and of course, he couldn't believe it. A man like that—We dropped all pretense, there were some bitter words—"

Beardsley said quickly, "Could you elaborate?"

"Oh, I don't remember exactly. He went venomous! I suppose there were threats. I told him he hadn't enough money *or* influence to buy what I knew, and that when I had it properly documented I intended to make a national scandal of it." Pederson halted abruptly. "You know, it occurred to me later that was a foolhardy thing to say!"

"Ah? Why is that?"

"Well, I had heard of that safeguard of his—the 'neuro-vibe'—and I suppose there were other things, too. He was a cautious man, a dangerous man. But," Pederson shrugged, "he let me into his home readily enough."

Beardsley lifted a finger. "Because he was confident he was going to buy you—wouldn't you say?"

"I suppose that's it. Maybe I was lucky to get out of there so easily! Anyway I did." Pederson stopped pacing, and his gaze bored into Beardsley's. "So now to the big question. Yes, he was alive when I left him. No, I never saw Carmack again. I went straight to my office and worked until well past midnight; by the way, I have ample proof of that—"

"Yes, I'm sure you do! What were your feelings at this point?"

"My feelings? I knew my life was in danger now! Carmack would be out to stop me. I don't mind admitting I was ... well, rather relieved, when I heard the news."

"Ah-h! And when did you hear it?"

Pederson glared, but his answer was quick. "Late the next afternoon, of course! By habit I work late hours and I sleep long." With an air of finality he threw a challenging look around. "I want to congratulate whoever did it, and I don't much care whether the answer comes from you or ECAIAC!"

Beardsley surveyed him solemnly. Pederson had little more than brushed the surface, but it was enough, it served to set the pattern; he could have sworn Pederson was aware of that. He said drily, "Thanks, Pederson. Your story is—very pat."

He turned to the others. Mandleco rather surprised him, seeming not so much disturbed as he was engrossed deep in thought; as for Mrs. Carmack, Beardsley saw that the comedy had gone out of it for her, but she tried to keep up the veneer.

"This is all most interesting!" she sparkled, placing her glass down carefully and turning to face him. "Am I to be next, Mr. Beardsley? Shall I give both the questions and the answers as Mr. Pederson did?"

"No, Mrs. Carmack. I'll do that! I took note a moment ago that you mentioned the *whodunits*. You must be familiar with them? Say as a hobby?"

It wasn't at all what she expected. She stood wide-eyed and startled.

"This is so thrilling, remember. Vintage '60! As the *whodunits* will tell you, one of the prime requisites is an accounting and proof of your whereabouts at the time of the deed! Well?"

Beardsley's voice was just edged enough to throw her into confusion. "Why, I—" she faltered. "You mean that night? I—I—"

"What, no alibi? You don't even remember? According to vintage '60 that could mean either complete innocence or extreme cunning; beware the suspect who is clever enough to be ready with no alibi!"

Beardsley saw her stiffen; there was a change across her face, a struggle beneath the eyes. "But then," he shrugged, "it has always been my conviction that *motive* rather than opportunity is the real requisite. On that basis it's plain you couldn't have killed your husband. You loved him! He was only fifty-eight, he only left you a dozen million dollars, but you loved him and you were faithful! Anyone can see that after seven weeks you're still all broken up over it!"

The veneer was gone now; Sheila Carmack's eyes were vicious pools of hate, her mouth a grimace. "Why, you—you ridiculous little monster!" Victor d'Arlan

stepped forward belligerently. "Say, now look here! This is all very—" Beardsley placed a hand on d'Arlan's chest and shoved, and the latter stumbled back with mouth agape. Pederson was gazing at Beardsley with delight and admiration, seeming to visualize this little man as material for his next tele-column. Mandleco stood transfixed, a monument of agony, twisting a fist into his palm. "Beardsley, stop it! This ridiculous farce has gone far enough! I warned you about these tactics—"

Beardsley said, "Shut up!" and Mandleco stood there with mouth opening and closing soundlessly.

"Well, Mrs. Carmack? Answer me! You loved your husband, didn't you? For the past ten minutes you've heard him maligned; I should think you'd want to protect his very good name!"

"Sheila, I must advise you against making *any* statement of whatever nature!" Mandleco strode for the tele-stat, then turned back and pointed a trembling finger at Beardsley. "This man," he choked—"this man is no longer acting in any official capacity for Crime-Central!"

With a quick step Pederson got himself between Mandleco and the tele-stat; he strolled over to the instrument and leaned against it, with a knowing look at Beardsley.

Sheila Carmack tilted her chin in defiance. "But I *wish* to answer this man. I insist on answering! Loved Amos Carmack? Love him?" Her voice rose a full octave and broke in stridence. "For the past nine years I have *hated—his—guts!*"



For a long moment the room was silent. No one moved. Beardsley's thick glasses glinted eerily as he peered around at them, from Mandleco to Sheila to Pederson and back to Mandleco.

"Well now," he said, "this is remarkable. Most remarkable! Everyone hated Carmack. Professor Losch—we know why. Pederson here—he's told us why. His wife—I think it's obvious. Who else? Surely not you, Mandleco! Carmack was a pal of yours! You backed his cause with ECAIAC, you lobbied for him, you even stole patents for him.... I wonder what persuasion he held over you to bring all that about. Or is *persuasion* too mild a word? Vintage '60 had a better

term for it!"

Slowly, through the murk of his agitation Mandleco seized a measure of control; he gazed at Beardsley out of cold incalculable eyes now hooded with dire intention. "You're really trying hard, aren't you!" he grated. "Well, make the most of it, because I guarantee *you* won't be around, not after the next Annual Basic! Do you understand that—*Mister* Coördinator?"

But Beardsley was watching Pederson now, whose face took on a sudden febrile gleam. "Blackmail ... by God, Beardsley, that's it! And I have the proof! Sure, it was Carmack I was after, but I dug out a lot more—" Pederson shot a challenging look at the Minister of Justice. "It goes back some years, but I can prove that Amos Carmack had enough on Mandleco to *finish him politically any time he chose*. You can bet your life Mandleco hated him. Enough to warrant murder!"

There was an odd, illogical delight in the way Pederson said it—and something almost frightening the way Mandleco just stood there in cold silence, gazing at the tele-columnist with a look of boundless regret.

Beardsley said very softly, "Thanks, Pederson, but I'd suggest you save it. It's scarcely pertinent now."

"Not pertinent? But, man, I tell you I have proof! What better motive would you —"

"Motive?" Beardsley hit him with a pitying glance. "Why, I thought it was obvious. We've progressed beyond *motives* now."

Again there was an electric silence, and Beardsley let it assimilate. "I have said," he went on, "that all this is most remarkable. But you know, the *really* remarkable thing—" He paused and watched them. Mandleco continued to grind a fist into his palm; Pederson straightened attentively, and d'Arlan, sneery no longer, moved over to stand beside Sheila Carmack.

"—the really remarkable thing is this. I am now ready to state, unequivocally, that the person who killed Amos Carmack ... *didn't hate him at all*."



A thought was throbbing through the room like the seconds passing. Quick and

cumulative, almost embodied, it made transition from stunned mind to startled mind as Beardsley stood there blinking at them. Beardsley really didn't mind; they just couldn't know how subtly he worked into his themes! Taking advantage of the lull, he went over to the door and peered out into the Operations Room.

He peered long and soberly, then turned. Mandleco had found his voice first, perplexity pushing down his anger: "Beardsley, either you're bereft of your senses or—Do you mean to say," he choked—"after going to these preposterous lengths do you mean to say that no one *here*—"

"Just a moment!" To everyone's surprise it was d'Arlan who broke in. "I'm not sure what's going on here, not sure at all, but I want to make one thing quite clear. *Sheila* had no complicity in this crime! I know, because—" He hesitated, touched her gently on the arm. "Sorry, darling, I've got to say it. I know because she was with *me* that night."

Sheila was startled for a moment, then utterly scathing. "You needn't lie for me, Victor! I appreciate your sense of the dramatic, and even your motives, but I assure you they are both misplaced. I have never heard such nonsense!"

d'Arlan looked more desolate than abashed. As for Beardsley, he was only a little amused. "Well, now, this is really more than I deserve; in all my years on Homicide I wanted to experience this, but I finally put it down as a myth. The Noble Alibi!" He peered sharply. "True vintage, right out of the *whodunits*—wouldn't you agree, Mrs. Carmack?"

The answer didn't come, and Beardsley went on sternly: "And you reject his noble attempt on your behalf. That is interesting! Especially, as it occurs to me that d'Arlan's effort is just a little delayed..." He paused, gazing thoughtfully upward. "It's enough to make one wonder whether his noble effort is designed to protect you—or himself!"

d'Arlan suddenly paled, as if he had just been kicked in the stomach. He gulped heavily and tried to speak. Beardsley watched stolidly for a moment, then dismissed him with a gesture of complete disgust. "Oh, hell, never mind! I would say neither. The lady is right, sonny, you'd better watch those impulses. You just aren't the type!"



Mandleco had been hanging onto every word, grimly intent; he was sure Beardsley was getting somewhere at last. Now he straightened, and his grinding fist indicated that he'd had quite enough. Without a word, without even a deigning glance at Beardsley, he traversed the office with great purposeful strides and slammed through the outer door into ECAIAC's room—

And was back an instant later, trailing Jeff Arnold as the latter brushed past him into the office. Mandleco was saying something urgently, tugging at Arnold's arm. Arnold ignored him. His startled gaze was on the little group.

"Sheila!" He took a step forward. "Sheila, what are *you* doing here?"

"I wish you'd tell me, Jeff. I wish *someone* would explain what this is all about...."

Beardsley watched the tableau in silence. Jeff Arnold's gaze flicked to d'Arlan, who stared back with insolence, and there was no mistaking the hostility that leaped between the two.

Sheila noticed it, too, and there was an indecisive moment that mounted toward panic. Beardsley watched her churning effort to control it. She said quickly, an inflection of fear in her voice: "Mr. Beardsley, if it *really* matters—my whereabouts that night—you'll understand my reluctance to say it before! I was with Jeff. Truly! I'm sure he will tell you—"

The words were directed at Beardsley, but she was talking to Jeff Arnold. And deliberately, almost brutally, Arnold refused to accept the cue. Beardsley saw the pleading turn to apprehension in Sheila's eyes.

"But, Jeff, you remember! Surely you do! Jeff, you don't understand—you must tell them—"



Arnold looked at her for a single comprehending instant, a pitying instant, then his lips compressed tightly as he turned away.

There was finality in it. Sheila's eyes were stark and unbelieving. She stood there without motion, without a word, her mind groping in a shock of blindness.

Beardsley said gently, "It's all right, Mrs. Carmack. It's really all right. Merely an

experiment, an inquiry into comparative methods as Mandleco said. I'm truly sorry if my methods seemed harsh, but"—he shrugged—"I dare say my participation is over now."

"You're damned right you may say it, Beardsley!" Arnold's eyes raked him with venom, but he controlled himself and turned to Mandleco. "I only came to tell you, sir, that we have ECAIAC ready. We'll be reaching Cumulative very shortly now."

"Jeff ... are you *sure*?"

"Quite sure! Depend on it, there'll be no more trouble."

More than relief took hold of Mandleco; it was transformation, it was as if a spell had been snapped. He glanced once about the room, and shuddered as his gaze encountered Beardsley.

"Uh—yes. Fine!" he said. "That's fine, Jeff! Shall we proceed?" He strode through the door, pausing only to fling back scathingly: "That is, if Mr. Beardsley is quite sure it meets with *his* approval!"



ECAIAC was in finest fettle again as the tapes sped through. Circuits were activated. Codes gave meaning. Synaptic cells summed and integrated, cancelled and compared and with saucy assurance sent the findings on toward Cumulative. The murmur was soft and sustained and somehow apologetic, as if ECAIAC were quite aware that she had failed in her duty but would be just pleased to make amends *this* time.

So like a woman ... fractious, unfathomable, then fawning and attrite—with a purpose! Beardsley cocked his head and listened, his mien almost beatific. Purpose? This creature had none that could quite match his! He was convinced of it now, and he had never been more happy or self-assured.

It was Pederson who was distressed, as he paced with long nervous strides and watched the equate-panel where the mathematics were made visible in a pattern of constantly changing lights. It had meaning only for the techs, but Pederson couldn't seem to take his eyes from it. At last he came over to Beardsley and managed to steer him aside.

"Beardsley, I just don't get it! This whole thing—are you quite sure—"

Beardsley blinked at him. "Sure of what, Pederson?"

"Of what you're doing! Damn it, man, don't tell me that was all waste effort in there! Look—I know what this means, and I'm with you all the way. If only you could beat ECAIAC, I'll give it all the publicity it can bear! Who knows—"

Beardsley looked at him blankly, and Pederson gave a snort and a gesture. "All right! I guess I'm wrong. For a while there I actually thought you had it." Pederson surveyed him shrewdly. "Just the same, that bit you exploded—about the person who killed Carmack didn't hate him at all—you meant that, Beardsley!"

"That's right, I meant it."

"My choice is Jeff Arnold."

"Ah? Now why do you say that?"

"The way you built up to it, that's why. And you got your result! Sheila Carmack's in love with Arnold, and she tried to cover up for him ... sure, that's it! It's obvious! She thinks he's the killer, either thinks or knows it—"

"Ah, yes. The obvious," Beardsley said with a grimace. "But you know, I learned a long time ago that the *obvious* can be a mighty tricky thing. A dangerous thing. The forceps of the mind are greedy, and inclined to crush a little in the seizing...."

Pederson pondered that. "And you," he said slowly, "are not seizing. I take that to mean you still have an angle!"

Beardsley didn't answer at once. He glanced over at the equate-panel, at the flux of dancing lights. Mandleco was bright-eyed and attentive, chomping on the stub of a cigar, head thrust forward as he listened to some detail of Arnold's. Sheila stood miserably near by, still in a blind shock of disbelief; it was as if she had a need to be close to Arnold, and he felt it, too, but they dared not look at each other.



"Now let's suppose," said Beardsley, "just suppose that Arnold thinks *Sheila* is the killer. Eh? Let us say they *suspect each other*. Naturally, each has disclaimed any part of the deed. But the suspicion is there, that tiny seed; and suspicion, particularly where love is involved, has a habit of taking root and giving growth. Neither can be *totally* sure of the other's innocence—eh?" He paused, peering up at Pederson. "And Arnold would want to protect her from any possible consequence. Now what would be his way of doing that? The only way he knew?"

He saw the idea take hold. Pederson was staring at the equate-panel with an odd look of excitement.

"Total reject," he gasped. "By God, if he should try *that*—to equate her from Logical into reject—" He gestured helplessly. "No, it isn't possible. Those tapes are coded! There's no way of tampering—" Pederson stopped abruptly, as a great light dawned. "Wait a minute, though. It needn't be the tapes! One thing I've always wondered—*would* it be possible to negate a given factor beyond all reach of empirical coördinates? You know, through operational technique or setup—"

Beardsley peered at him. "I'd say anything was possible," he urged, "given time and incentive."

Pederson bobbed his head in facile agreement. "By God, you're right! For example, I've always thought there wasn't sufficient control on Cumulative! You can bet your life Arnold would know ... results at that point *could* be juggled a little, say if the extrapolations were just—"

The forceps, the forceps of the mind. Already Pederson was reaching out to seize and to crush; the man was a fool after all! Beardsley felt a burgeoning disgust, but there was something more, a throbbing, chest-filling sensation that he strove to hold rigidly in leash. He said quickly: "Come to think of it, Arnold did mention that he was here most of last night, working on setup."

He watched Pederson absorb that, too; he saw the excitement grow. "Beardsley, if you are *sure*—if you could prove that Arnold managed a thing like that—"

They were interrupted by the sudden quiet that engulfed the room. It was so total as to be frightening. CUMULATIVE—CUMULATIVE—CUMULATIVE. For half-a-minute all operation ceased, as the words flashed bright across the panel.

But the techs had been waiting. It was a mere respite. Swiftly, they checked their

respective units against Cumulative Code, and at the end of thirty seconds every light went green for total clearance as ECAIAC's deep-throated power resumed.



Beardsley had been waiting too. "Cumulative!" he breathed. He let his breath out slowly, and made a sweeping gesture that seemed to encompass all the latent delight, all the unleashed joy of his being.

He was aware of Pederson again, a voice in panic: "Beardsley! Don't you know what it means? If there's been an imbalance, it has passed through! It will reach final equate!"

"That's right, it's entirely in ECAIAC's lap. You wouldn't want to deprive her of the chance, now would you?"

"But—but what are you going to *do*?"

"Me? I'm going to watch. I'm going to watch one of the epic events of our time —" For a moment Beardsley was solemn, almost shocked, as a thought struck him. "In a way it will be sad. Yes, it will! ECAIAC is about to lose her first case."

Now that was strange. Why should he have said such a thing? *Why ... now that the game was over which had had to be played, and he felt the bitter-sweet surge of victory that lay throbbing at his grasp!* About to lose her first case....

He shrugged in remote annoyance and strode away from Pederson. It would be fast now! Already the rejects were falling, the irrelevants, as ECAIAC with blithe unconcern brought the final equate toward conclusion. He observed Jeff Arnold, standing silent and alert but so devoid of all emotion that somehow it wasn't real ... and Mandleco, half crouched, teeth gnawing away at the cigar, his heavy face rapacious and eager as he awaited the final tape; that was all that mattered now; the MATHEMATICS would register, CODE would add synaptic approval, and proof indisputable would be on that tape in clean translated print—the name of Carmack's killer.

Indisputable? Bowing his head, Beardsley smiled, and listened to the smooth rhythmic control. Nothing sinister now! No snapping malevolence! All those other times ... his unreasoning panic, the askance remarks from Arnold, the

humiliation ... the very thought of it now was gibing and obscene. How could he ever have been caught up in such a thrall of terror?

It wasn't terror he felt now. Something.... His smile turned to a giggle as he felt a sudden compelling impulse to pat ECAIAC on the head!

Now how would one do THAT? Never mind. Never mind, never mind, never again are you going to snap at *me*, Ekky. We were introduced, remember? We're really great friends now.

For a moment Beardsley was suspended in astonishment, aware that he had almost crooned the thought. He glanced around in embarrassment—

Pederson was watching him. Pederson was at his side again, perplexed and frowning. "Beardsley—this business of Sheila and Arnold. It wouldn't happen that way, it couldn't! There's another answer, there's *got* to be—"

Beardsley stood unmoving, oblivious. Almost, he seemed suspended in another dimension; almost, he caught the quivering of a mind but could not separate it from the sudden tremor that rose in his own....

He couldn't avoid it. It came unbidden, it battered through his reason, it towered there and blotted out his thoughts until all that was left was a tremulous regret, an attrite compassion.

About to lose her first case ... *but one loses! And one survives it, you know, one survives it! For twelve years now....*

More than a tremor now. More than compassion now. A sense of betrayal almost, illogical and nameless and yet palpable as the scent of fear. There was a pulse of red darkness in Beardsley's brain as all the mental and emotional equations of his being sang a sharp alarm. For subtly, ever so subtly ECAIAC's deep-throated tone had changed ... nothing like those other times, rather it was a halting stutter of puzzlement, erratic and querulous, with overtones of immediacy as if some formless presence were on the verge of unleashing.

Beardsley looked down at his hands, and they were trembling. He could not stop the trembling. A tightness took him about the heart, and behind his eyes that pulse of red darkness presaged the beginning of a violent headache.

Even the others noticed it now, something amiss. Jeff Arnold especially. He looked up in quick alarm at the equate-panel where the mathematics seemed to have gone a little fitful, a little frantic, with stuttery lapses in progression as if ECAIAC were unable or unwilling to confront.

The flux of pattern dimmed, then hesitated; blanked out and heroically began anew.

It happened suddenly, then. It happened as the techs came crowding around. There came a quivering, a sort of shudder, and ECAIAC subsided with a final weary gasp. It was for all the world as if she were saying, "This is it, boys. I've had it!"

But it was there, it was there! All at once every symbol was constant, static and livid upon the screen, enhanced by the words EQUATE—COMPLETE—EQUATE—COMPLETE. In that moment every tech in the room must have felt a touch of pride.

A click, a whirr, and it was done. The fateful tape ejected.

Both Mandleco and Arnold leaped for it, but Arnold was there first. He ripped the tape clear and then paused, hand outflung, as if he could not resist this final bit of drama.

"Well? Well, Arnold?" Mandleco was hopping ludicrously about in an agony of impatience.

Arnold nodded. He brought the tape to his scrutiny. His mouth opened, then shut again as a shudder seized him. Once more he read it, a look of wild disbelief on his face ... he staggered, and seemed about to cry or go hysterical or both.

Mandleco gave a snort as he pounced, recovered the tape and with blunt assurance read the words aloud:

"SOLUTION : UNTENABLE : SOLUTION : UNTENABLE : SUB-CIRCUIT REFERRAL : ELLERY SHERLOCK : SUB-CIRCUIT REFERRAL: ELLERY SHERLOCK—"

He sounded like a well-grooved parrot. Mandleco turned east, then south, then

south-by-east, like a compass on a binge; he looked as if he wanted to roar, but his voice came out as a frantic bleat: "Why, this is crazy! Goddam it, it's crazy! Do you realize what this will—" He confronted Arnold wildly. "What the hell does it MEAN, I say! Untenable? And who the hell is *Ellery Sherlock...!*"

He got no response; Jeff Arnold was oblivious to the moment, a man utterly defeated, beyond solace or action or answer ... but already a few of his techs were huddled about the panel, consulting, viewing the Equate Constant and frantically taking notes. Mandleco shoved his way through them. "I demand to know the meaning of this!" he yelped.



It was Sheila Carmack who answered, her voice on the high edge of hysteria. "*Meaning?* I think it might mean," she said, "that ECAIAC has also had a recent indulgence for the *whodunits*. But with a smattering of confusion, wouldn't you say? Or would you say a distortion of the detectival? Perhaps a disenchantment," she murmured ... this was too absurd, too delicious. "Ellery Sherlock!" she choked, and the thought of it seemed to break her up.

In the general hysteria they paid no heed to Raoul Beardsley. He had regained his composure, and far down in his eyes something leaped into rapt expression; he adjusted his glasses and peered around cautiously, beaming. He beamed at them all, and had to suppress an inane glee....

Not glee as he observed Pederson, who stood there scowling into space as though at some incredible absurdity. Suddenly Pederson straightened, and there was something strangely different ... his gaze as it met Beardsley's was neither shocked nor accusing but held an expression of boundless sadness.

So Pederson knew. At last the poor fellow had found that other answer... Beardsley had been expecting it. He could almost sense the man's thoughts going to and fro, like a shuttle, weaving all the facts into fabric....

And Pederson's voice, ineffably sad now, regretful now: "So I was right the first time. The tapes. It was the tapes. But even without that I ought to have known! The answer was there, you handed it to us, but it was like looking straight into the sun—"

He paused. Did he expect Beardsley to say something? Beardsley looked up at

him and blinked.

"*Motives*," Pederson said accusingly. "There was your theme from the first! You were relentless, you pursued it to perfection, you laid our motives bare and you beat them raw, each and every one. Oh, I grant you it was masterful! It was the Beardsley of old! You managed to keep us off balance every moment—" He wet his lips. "What was it, Beardsley? A compulsion, some grotesque need to squeeze us all down to microscopic size first? Oh, you enjoyed doing that! I watched you. You enjoyed it in a way that—" He shook his head, glanced sorrowfully at the equate-panel. "And this ... was it all for this? An achievement—an absurdity. Ellery Sherlock!" he said with a shudder. "In Heaven's name, WHY? You didn't really expect to carry it off? No, don't answer! It's not important now—"

Beardsley shrugged in remote annoyance. Must the man use such puerile methods?

"Not important," Pederson repeated, and stood caught in a startled wonderment. "Because you see, Beardsley, I just happen to remember something from the *whodunits*! That surprises you? So long ago, I can't quite recall who said it; but it was a rather good exposition of logic, something to the effect that when you've exhausted the possible, all the possible—that which remains—*no matter how impossible it may seem*—must be the truth!"

His head lifted; his gaze bored into Beardsley's and his voice was tight with meaning. "And I'd say we have come full circle, wouldn't you? You will have to admit, you did a *real good job of eliminating!*"

Beardsley managed to smile, even as his mind jarred a little. Even as he met Pederson's gaze and saw the compassion there, the acceptance there, the understanding and boundless regret. For a split second something leaped unspoken between them, as if doors in both their minds had opened and closed again.

He turned away wordlessly. Close as Pederson had come, even he was an irrelevance now. *But ECAIAC didn't* know. Poor Ekky! Her first real failure, a fiasco—she really deserved a better fate. Beardsley's heart went out to her, as he observed Arnold in his defeat and Mandleco in his frustration and the huddle of

techs in their futile efforts.

Suddenly then—"Code!" he heard one of them say, gesturing excitedly. "Post-subjective synapse!" another tech yelled, and there was a sudden scurry of activity about the screen. Without warning or appreciable reason those symbols had begun to shift ... wild and elusive, ghost patterns without semblance or sense, but so unmistakable that even Jeff Arnold was jarred alert; Arnold stared, then suddenly was white as chalk as he ploughed into the midst of his techs.

Beardsley stood frozen, a fatuous smile about his lips; there was only silence now, a silence that had a pulse in it—the beating of his heart. Seconds only ... suddenly there was another pulse, from another heart. ECAIAC wasn't quite finished! Unerring and resolute the sound came up, slowly at first and then faster, gathering strength into a steady drone as if every synapse were dredging, dredging deep into the sensitized structure ... and even before the panel attained flux again, a tech was waving his notes and yelling, "It's true! Post-subjective synapse! Unbelievable ... Jeff, we now have a Constant!"

But ECAIAC was telling them that. The sound went on, and on, wild and lone and constant, ascending to the confines of the room, transcending the confines of reason. It was crescendo incarnate; it was purpose gone rife; it was human and more than human, with all the fears and hopes and hates, as it attained a high-pitched scream with wailing overtones such as even Arnold had never heard. There was sentience in it, there was awareness in it, there was fury in it and who could say if there was grief...? There might have been.

Only Beardsley knew. He felt suddenly packed in ice, from his lips to the pit of his belly; he revolved slowly away, took a few steps and caught the edge of the panel. His whole body began to shake uncontrollably and his lips moved in a soundless whisper that seemed to say, "No, no ... don't you understand? ... we're friends now!"

But no one heard; no one would have understood. Arnold handled the tape as it came looping out. The words fell slowly at first, then faster and faster in constant repeat: CANCEL LAST EQUATE—SOLUTION TENABLE—CANCEL LAST EQUATE—SOLUTION TENABLE—

Another word came, a single word. Arnold stiffened. One of the techs was so indiscreet as to exclaim: "*Murderer?* Where did it pick up that word! 'Final Equate' is proper...."

A space, a whirr, and the rest of it came in a clicking rush against the high-pitched scream: MURDERER—RAOUL BEARDSLEY—MURDERER—RAOUL BEARDSLEY—MURDERER—RAOUL—MURDERER—MURDERER—incessant, untiring.

There was no trial. Trial presupposes a modicum of doubt, and Beardsley dispelled that readily enough. Once more the pathetic figure, it was as if he were impelled by a dull and pitiless logic; he waived all defense; his confession to the murder of Amos Carmack was straightforward and factual, unvarying to the point of boredom, insistent with repetition—and in the socio-legal aspect there was the rub! Whether it was true psychic shock or mere cunning, there seemed to be a blind spot in Beardsley's responses, a stumbling reticence to elaborative detail that left the Citizen's Disposition Council with a problem on its hands baffling as it was unprecedented. Judicially they were safe. There would not even be need of null-censor. But actually, the problem here was of far more vital consequence than murder and indeed more frightening; it had to do with Beardsley vs. ECAIAC, the encompassing *modus operendi* and all the implications of that grotesque denouement.

At whatever cost, *these things had to be answered.*

Oh, there was amusement, too. The fact that Minister-of-Justice Mandleco had begged off, far from gracefully, and retired to the isolation of his ten-thousand-acre Alaskan ranch (for an unspecified time) had brought snickers from those in the know.

The Chief-Counselor of Disposition looked as if he'd like to retire, too. For the third time in as many days he took his place in the Private Sessions chamber, glanced at Beardsley with shuddering disbelief and then bent his head in pontifical guise as he leafed through his notes; it wasn't as if he were unversed in the matter by now, but who was there to question if his lips moved fretfully across the words "Ellery Sherlock?" He was thinking: *yesterday wasted—covert regression, myself included—no more of that!* And with that bolstering thought he brought his head up sharply.

COUNSELOR: Our task for today—(*voice quavering, he saved it from the upper registers*). Our task for today is to get at the aggregate pattern. And I assure you, gentlemen, we are going to do that! Now. Mr. Pederson, if you please....

PEDERSON: Yes, sir?

COUNSELOR: I see that Mr. Beardsley made certain statements to you, and to you alone, immediately after the—uh—ECAIAC incident—

PEDERSON: You saw that three days ago! Must we go through it again?

COUNSELOR: We must and we shall! Due to the unnatural tenor of the case, it is the opinion of the Council that these things must be fixed and adjudged if we are to make a correct Disposition.

PEDERSON: (*warily*): Yes, sir. Well, the fact is he seemed to want to confide in me. Nothing strange in that! He realized he had lost, poor guy, and he—

COUNSELOR: Mr. Pederson! No diversions, please. We'd simply like to hear from your own lips what Beardsley told you. (Glances at his notes.) Is it true that he said—his sole motive in this affair was to prove he could conduct an investigation as efficiently as ECAIAC—*or any damned machine?*

PEDERSON: (*hesitant, with a glance at Beardsley who sat remote and vacuous*): Yes. He told me that.

COUNSELOR: Even to the point of committing a murder to prove it? And his entire subsequent action was predicated upon that? We have extensive reports here—from Mrs. Carmack, from Mandleco, from Jeff Arnold and yourself. It is difficult to see how such a basically integrated and well-functioning personality as Raoul Beardsley—

PEDERSON: (*angrily*): No. What you fail to see is the facade! What man has stronger reason than the man who has lost his reason? It is the only outlet for aggression, a devious fulfillment, it brings psychological satisfactions which cannot be obtained in any other way—call it the self-destructive impulse if you will. I doubt if Beardsley rationalized this—but he had come to his moment, his time of assertion, his way of making fools of us all ... and my complete opinion, sir, is that his actions from beginning to end were both a triumph and an inspiration!

COUNSELOR: (*smugly*): Thank you, Mr. Pederson. These are the insights you had not revealed before. (*Turns to member at far end of table.*) Dr. Deobler. As psychologist assigned to Disposition Council, may I ask if there is an area of concurrence?

DEOBLER (*bored, but deigns to lift a hand*): Save for the rhetorics at the very end, you have my official concurrence; it is obvious in every aspect; this was a devious fulfillment of the self-destructive impulse.

COUNSELOR: Thank you, sir! It will be so noted. And now—(*Makes a pretense of scanning his brief.*) Now we come to an area of vital interest—an area demanding our most urgent attention, inasmuch as it gives indication of threatening our basic fundamental of cybernetic detection; believe me, I cannot place enough emphasis here; I refer, of course, to Mr. Beardsley's process of manipulation of ECAIAC, and this strange business of "Ellery Sherlock." (*Pause.*) Mr. Jeff Arnold, if you please. I believe you were to be ready with some observations today?

ARNOLD: Yes, sir. But more than observation, I am glad to report. We have *solved* the "Ellery Sherlock" equate.

COUNSELOR: This is wonderful! Will you proceed, sir?

ARNOLD: A strange thing ... and yet so simple! We began by resurrecting a huge number of "Summaries"; we dredged into Dead File for at least three years back, re-ran them under a synapse intensifier. It's all there, you know, every minute particle of every case that has gone through ECAIAC; almost subliminal, some of it, but—

COUNSELOR: One moment, sir. This reference to "synapse." Could you—ah—clarify?

ARNOLD: Why, a synapse is the primary adjunct to memory! The human brain has billions of them, neuronically linked—sort of pathways that get grooved deeper and deeper with constant repetition of thought, until after a while they become completely permanent, retentive and self-functioning. ECAIAC is similarly equipped—not to the degree of the human brain, as yet, but amazingly.

COUNSELOR (*dazed*): Ah—yes. Please continue, sir.

ARNOLD: As I said, we revived a number of the old cases. And what we discovered, was that Beardsley—for years past, mind you—had been utilizing his capacity as Chief of Coördinates to introduce extraneous material to ECAIAC *via* the tapes! In each and every case that came before him! Oh, you can believe me, he was clever, he went about it by slow and subtle degrees! And the substance of this material, sir—(*Pauses, gulps and shakes his head, unable*

to go on.)

COUNSELOR: Please control yourself, sir! The substance of this extraneous material?

ARNOLD (*again gulps*): De-detective fiction!

COUNSELOR (*leans forward sharply*): Do I understand you correctly, Mr. Arnold? You did say *detective fiction*?

ARNOLD: Of two types. Ellery Queen and Sherlock Holmes—I presume it was Beardsley's random choice. But there was nothing random about his purpose! Don't you see, don't you see, it all fits! It explains the trouble we were having in recent months in getting total synaptic clearance! (*His voice borders on the frantic.*) I remember, now, I even mentioned this to Beardsley—and oh, the smug way he took it. He knew, damn him, he knew! He was getting there, he was reaching the synaptic, a bit of fiction here and a bit there, ECAIAC was being conditioned, unable to distinguish the real from the unreal—

COUNSELOR: Mr. Arnold! If you please, sir! (*Waits for Arnold to subside.*) I can appreciate how this discovery distresses you, both—ah—personally and in your official capacity, but be assured that your findings will be of inestimable value to future security. In fact (*smiles slightly*) Council has not been idle in its own pursuit of Mr. Beardsley's vagaries! (*Rises, removes a small screen to reveal a towering pile of tomes.*) And now, Mr. Beardsley. I must really ask you to cooperate; I believe you fully capable. Are these your books?

BEARDSLEY (*adjusts his glasses, smiles at his books*): Yes.

COUNSELOR: And these charts, these graphs that we found plastered to every wall of your home. Obviously they are also yours.

BEARDSLEY (*adjusts his glasses, smiles at his graphs*): Yes.

COUNSELOR: Thank you, Mr. Beardsley. That's fine. And, Mr. Beardsley, what did you use them for? These books, these graphs?

BEARDSLEY (*groping, bewildered*): I—I—

COUNSELOR (*sees the futility of it*): Gentlemen, I believe we can proceed on the grounds of self-evidence. Let me read you a few titles from these books. "The Cybernetic Principle: Advanced Theory" ... "The Synapse in Function" ... and

here we have "Synaptics: Pattern and Flux." There are more, many more in similar vein. (*Turns abruptly.*) Mr. Arnold. I'm sure you are familiar with most of these volumes. On the basis of the content, would you say that you could duplicate Beardsley's feat?

ARNOLD (*aghast*): No! I would not presume to say that, sir.

COUNSELOR (*frowns; it was not the answer he wanted*): Very well, then. Dr. Trstensky ... would you come forward, please? Dr. Trstensky ... you are head of the Department of Advanced Cybernetics at Cal Tech. You have had opportunity to study these graphs and charts in minutest detail—

TRSTENSKY: Oh, yes-s. Fascinating!

COUNSELOR: I put the question: would it be possible for you to duplicate the grotesque feat that Beardsley performed on ECAIAC?

TRSTENSKY: Yes-s, possibly. No, I will say definitely. You mean, of course, cold, from the beginning? Yes-s ... but it would take me approximately three-to-four years.

COUNSELOR: Yes, Mr. Beardsley? What is it? You would like to make a pertinent statement?

BEARDSLEY (*abashed*): Oh. It—I only wanted to say it took me longer. Four-to-five years.

COUNSELOR (*wearily—just waits for laughter to subside*): Gentlemen, I think we may safely wrap it up now. Our function here is Disposition. Our choice is two-fold. One: the subject is sane, in which case he will pay the supreme penalty for murder which he has freely admitted. Or two: he is obviously insane, in which case he will be subjected to Psychic Probe as provided by law, thus restoring a measure of normalcy sufficient to place him again in society—restricted, of course—

DR. DOEBLER: Sir, one moment, if you please! I simply do not understand your language, and even less can I condone your haste! *Safely* wrap it up, you said. What do you mean by that? Safe for whom? And "obviously" insane—was that a slip of the tongue, sir, or are you trying to force an issue here?

COUNSELOR (*coldly*): I must remind you that we already have competent reports on subject's status. Add to that the facts presented here; they are overwhelming;

the man's own admission and attitude are substantiation. It is my considered opinion, and I'm sure the opinion of Council, that the man is insane. Subjection to Psychic Probe will restore him to—

DOEBLER: Oh, yes, the Psychic Probe. I have no quarrel there. *But suppose you were wrong?* Have you ever considered the effects of Probe on the *sane* mind? Have you ever seen it? Once I saw it, only once. It is worse than disaster—it is horrible—it results in a sort of psychic tearing that heals and then tears and then heals in continuous perpetuation. It—is indescribable. It is sub-human. Compared to that, death or even insanity is a blessed relief. Now, gentlemen, listen! I implore you not to be in error! True, it was my opinion that Beardsley acted in fulfillment of the self-destructive impulse, but the man is *sane*—*sane*, I tell you, and entitled to a humanitarian death! My professional judgment—

COUNSELOR (*again coldly, glancing around*): Is welcome, but does not bear final weight, sir.



Silence closed down like a pall. Doebler's plea by its very impassioned nature had gotten through. It was a moment of embarrassment and indecision in which each man weighed his conscience, and found it wanting ... in which every member of Council looked to his neighbor for solution or solace, and finding neither, turned back to himself, aghast.

Only one person looked to the true source and saw the solution as it would be, as it had to be. Pederson. Heartsick with the knowing, he observed Raoul Beardsley and remembered! This funny little man ... this ridiculous man ... this proud man who had seized his fate and shoved it through because it had to be done, because he obeyed the dictates, because he had reached his Time of Assertion. Oh, Pederson remembered! And most of all he remembered Beardsley there at the last, in that final moment when ECAIAC had reached the wailing heights of sentience and grief ... and how could he ever forget Beardsley's soundless whisper that seemed to say, "*No, no ... don't you understand? ... we're friends now!*"

Pederson remembered. He remembered, and looking up saw that Council had reached equitable agreement, and his heart was sick and his soul was sick as he realized this was final, there could be no appeal. For the last time he looked upon

Beardsley's face and saw that the man was fully cognizant.... Beardsley also knew.... Deobler had been right. Pederson turned his face away.

COUNSELOR: Now we are agreed, gentlemen? (*waits for general approval.*) Be it pronounced, then. Inasmuch as there exists a general area of doubt as to Disposition; and inasmuch as it is agreed that further deliberation would be prolonged and pointless; and inasmuch as our faith in the ultimate function of ECAIAC remains inestimable, despite recent vagaries which shall never occur again: be it therefore resolved, that the problem pending shall be taped in all its detail and submitted to ECAIAC for Final Disposition.

THE END



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