

The Man Who Played to Lose

Laurence M. Janifer

The lower half of the image features a vibrant blue background with a complex, abstract pattern of bright pink geometric shapes. These shapes include various lines, triangles, squares, and a circle, some of which are solid and others that are hollow. The shapes are scattered across the area, creating a dynamic and modern aesthetic.

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**THE
MAN WHO
PLAYED TO LOSE**

By LARRY M. HARRIS

*Sometimes the very best thing you can do is to lose.
The cholera germ, for instance, asks nothing better
than that it be swallowed alive....*

Illustrated by Douglas

hen I came into the control room the Captain looked up from a set of charts at me. He stood up and gave me a salute and I returned it, not making a ceremony out of it. "Half an hour to landing, sir," he said.

That irritated me. It always irritates me. "I'm not an officer," I said. "I'm not even an enlisted man."

He nodded, too quickly. "Yes, Mr. Carboy," he said. "Sorry."

I sighed. "If you want to salute," I told him, "if it makes you *happier* to salute, you go right ahead. But don't call me 'Sir.' That would make me an officer, and I wouldn't like being an officer. I've met too many of them."

It didn't make him angry. He wasn't anything except subservient and awed and anxious to please. "Yes, Mr. Carboy," he said.

I searched in my pockets for a cigarette and found a cup of them and stuck one into my mouth. The Captain was right there with a light, so I took it from him. Then I offered him a cigarette. He thanked me as if it had been a full set of Crown Jewels.

What difference did it make whether or not he called me "Sir"? I was still God to him, and there wasn't much I could do about it.

"Did you want something, Mr. Carboy?" he asked me, puffing on the cigarette.

I nodded. "Now that we're getting close," I told him, "I want to know as much about the place as possible. I've had a full hypno, but a hypno's only as good as the facts in it, and the facts that reach Earth may be exaggerated, modified, distorted or even out of date."

"Yes, Mr. Carboy," he said eagerly. I wondered if, when he was through with the cigarette, he would keep the butt as a souvenir. He might even frame it, I told myself. After all, I'd given it to him, hadn't I? The magnificent Mr. Carboy, who almost acts like an ordinary human being, had actually given a poor, respectful spaceship Captain a cigarette.

It made me want to butt holes in the bulkheads. Not that I hadn't had time to get used to the treatment; every man in my corps gets a full dose of awe and respect from the services, from Government officials and even from the United Cabinets. The only reason we don't get it from the man in the street is that the man in the street—unless he happens to be a very special man in a very unusual street—doesn't know the corps exists. Which is a definite relief, by the way; at least, off the job, I'm no more than Ephraim Carboy, citizen.

I took a puff on my cigarette, and the Captain followed suit, very respectfully. I felt like screaming at him but I kept my voice polite. "The war's definitely over, isn't it?" I said.

He shrugged. "That depends, Mr. Carboy," he said. "The armies have surrendered, and the treaty's been signed. That happened even before we left Earth—three or four weeks ago. But whether you could say the war was over ... well, Mr Carboy, that depends."

"Guerrillas," I said.

He nodded. "Wohlen's a jungle world, mostly," he said. "Sixty per cent water, of course, but outside of that there are a few cities, two spaceports, and the rest—eighty or ninety per cent of the land area—nothing but jungle. A few roads running from city to city, but that's all."

"Of course," I said. He was being careful and accurate. I wondered what he thought I'd do if I caught him in a mistake. Make a magic pass and explode him like a bomb, probably. I took in some more smoke, wondering whether the Captain thought I had psi powers—which, of course, I didn't; no need for them

in my work—and musing sourly on how long it would take before the job was done and I was on my way back home.

Then again, I told myself, there was always the chance of getting killed. And in the mood I found myself, the idea of a peaceful, unrespectful death was very pleasant.

For a second or two, anyhow.

"The Government holds the cities," the Captain was saying, "and essential trade services—spaceports, that sort of thing. But a small band of men can last for a long time out there in the wilds."

"Living off the country," I said.

He nodded again. "Wohlen's nine-nines Earth normals," he said. "But you know that already."

"I know all of this," I said. "I'm just trying to update it a little, if I can."

"Oh," he said. "Oh, certainly, S ... uh ... Mr. Carboy."

I sighed and puffed on the cigarette and waited for him to go on. After all, what else was there to do?



For a wonder, the hypno had been just about accurate. That was helpful; if I'd heard some new and surprising facts from the Captain it would have thrown all the other information I had into doubt. Now I could be pretty sure of what I was getting into.

By the time we landed, the Captain was through and I was running over the main points in my head, for a last-minute check.

Wohlen, settled in the eighty-fifth year of the Explosion, had established a Parliamentary form of government, set up generally along the usual model: bicameral, elective and pretty slow. Trade relations with Earth and with the six other inhabited planets had been set up as rapidly as possible, and Wohlen had become a full member of the Comity within thirty years.

Matters had then rolled along with comparative smoothness for some time. But

some sort of explosion was inevitable—it always happens—and, very recently, that nice Parliamentary government had blown up in everybody's face.

The setup seemed to be reminiscent of something, but it was a little while before I got it: the ancient South American states, in the pre-Space days, before the United Cabinets managed to unify Earth once and for all. There'd been an election on Wohlen and the loser hadn't bowed gracefully out of the picture to set up a Loyal Opposition. Instead, he'd gone back on his hind legs, accused the winner of all sorts of horrible things—some of which, for all I knew, might even be true—and had declared Wohlen's independence of the Comity. Which meant, in effect, independence from all forms of interplanetary law.

Of course, he had no right to make a proclamation of any sort. But he'd made it, and he was going to get the right to enforce it. That was how William F. Sergeant's army was formed; Sergeant, still making proclamations, gathered a good-sized group of men and marched on the capital, New Didymus. The established government countered with an army of its own, and for eight months, neither side could gain a really decisive advantage.

Then the Government forces, rallying after a minor defeat near a place known as Andrew's Farm, defeated an attacking force, captured Sergeant and two of his top generals, and just kept going from there. The treaty was signed within eight days.

Unfortunately, some of Sergeant's supporters had been hunters and woodsmen—

Ordinarily, a guerrilla movement, if it doesn't grind to a halt of its own accord, can be stopped within a few weeks. Where a world is mostly cities, small towns, and so forth, and only a little jungle, the bands can be bottled up and destroyed. And most guerrillas aren't very experienced in their work; a small band of men lost in the woods can't do much damage.

But a small group of woodsmen, on a planet that consists mostly of jungle, is another matter. Those men knew the ground, were capable of living off the country with a minimum of effort, and knew just where to strike to tie up roads and transportation, halt essential on-planet services and, in general, raise merry hell with a planet's economy.

So the Wohlen government called Earth and the United Cabinets started hunting. Of course they came up with our corps—the troubleshooters, the unorthodox boys, the Holy Idols. And the corps fished around and came up with me.

I didn't really mind: a vacation tends to get boring after a week or two anyhow. I've got no family ties I care to keep up, and few enough close friends. Most of us are like that; I imagine it's in the nature of the job.

It was a relief to get back into action, even if it meant putting up with the kowtowing I always got.

When I stepped out onto the spaceport grounds, as a matter of fact, I was feeling pretty good. It took just ten seconds for that to change.

The President himself was waiting, as close to the pits as he could get. He was a chubby, red-faced little man, and he beamed at me as if he were Santa Claus. "Mr. Carboy," he said in a voice that needed roughage badly. "I'm so glad you're here. I'm sure you'll be able to do something about the situation."

"I'll try," I said, feeling foolish. This was no place for a conversation—especially not with the head of the Government.

"Oh, I'm sure you'll succeed," he told me brightly. "After all, Mr. Carboy, we've heard of your ... ah ... group. Oh, yes. Your fame is ... ah ... universal."

"Sure," I said. "I'll do my best. But the less I'm seen talking to you, the better."

"Nevertheless," he said. "If we need to meet—"

"If we do," I said, "there's a set of signals in the daily papers. Your Intelligence should know all about that, Mr. President."

"Ah," he said. "Of course. Certainly. Well, Mr. Carboy, I do want to tell you how glad I am—"

"So am I," I said. "Good-by."

The trouble with the democratic process is that a group of people picked at random can elect some silly leaders. That's been happening ever since ancient Greece, I imagine, and it'll go on happening. It may not be fatal, but it's annoying.

My job, for instance, was to prop up this foolish little man. I had to work against a group of guerrillas who were even more democratic, from all I'd heard, and who seemed to have a great deal of common, ordinary brains. Of course, I wasn't doing it for the President—it was for the Comity as a whole, and it needed to be done.

But I can't honestly say that that made me feel any better about the job.

I was driven out of the city right after I'd packed up my supplies—two days' food and water in a rude knapsack, a call-radio and some other special devices I didn't think I was going to need. But, I told myself, you never know ... there was even a suicide device, just in case. I packed it away and forgot about it.

The city was an oasis in the middle of jungle, with white clean buildings and static-cleaned streets and walks. It didn't seem to have a park, but, then, it didn't need one. There was plenty of park outside.

The beautiful street became a poor one half a mile out of the city, and degenerated into a rough trail for ground vehicles soon after that. "How many people are there on this planet?" I asked my driver.

He never took his eyes from the road. "Two and a half million, last census," he said, with great respect.

That explained things, of course. As the population grew, the cities would expand and the forests would go under. It had happened on Earth, and on every settled planet. As recently as 1850, for instance, large tracts of New York City, where I make my home, were farm and forest; why, in 1960 the population was only about eight million, and they thought the place had reached its height.

Wohlen had only begun its drive to citify the planet. Give it another hundred and fifty years and the guerrillas couldn't exist, for simple lack of any place to hide and to live independently.

Unfortunately, the Government didn't have a hundred and fifty years. Judging from what I'd seen, the Government didn't have a hundred and fifty days. Rationing was in force at all the markets we'd passed on the way out, and there seemed to be a lot of cops. That's always a bad sign; it means normal processes are beginning to break down and anarchy is creeping in.

I thought about it. Three months was an outside limit. If I couldn't finish the job in three months, it might as well never be finished.

It's always nice to have a deadline, I told myself.

The car stopped at a place in the road that looked like any other place in the road. I got out, adjusted my knapsack and started away from the road, into the jungle that bordered it. The hypno I'd taken had told me there were farms scattered through the jungle, but I didn't know exactly where, and I didn't even want to find out. The knapsack was heavy, but I decided I could stand the weight.

In five minutes I was surrounded by jungle, without any quick way to tell me where the road had been. There was a trail, and maybe human beings had used it, but it was no more than a scratch in the vegetation.

That was green, like Earth's, and mostly spiny. I managed to scratch myself twice and then I learned to duck. After that the time went by slowly. I just kept walking, without much of an idea where I was going. After a couple of hours I was good and lost, which was just what I wanted. It was starting to get dark, so I took the opportunity of building a fire. I dug in my knapsack and found some food and started to cook it. I was still watching it heat up when I heard the noise behind me.

Those boys were good. He'd sneaked up through the jungle and come within a foot of me without my hearing him. I jumped up just as if I hadn't expected him and whirled around to face him.

He had his heater out and was covering me with it. I didn't reach for anything; I just watched him. He was a big man, almost as tall as I was and solidly built, with a jaw like a bulldog's and tiny, sparkling eyes. His voice was like rusted iron. "Relax," he told me. "I'm not burning you down, Mister. Not yet."

I made myself stare him down. "Who are you?" I said.

"Name don't matter," he said without moving the heater an inch. "What's important is, who are *you*? And what are you doing here?"

"James Carson's my name," I said. "I'm from Ancarta." It was a small city halfway around the planet, a nice, anonymous place to be from. "And I'm minding my own business."

"Sure," the big man said. He jerked his head and whistled, one sudden sharp note. The clearing was full of men.

They were all sorts, big and small, thin and fat, dressed in uniforms, cast-offs, suits, rags, anything at all. Half of them were carrying heaters. The rest had

knives, some good and some home-made. They watched me and they watched the big man. Nobody moved.

"Maybe you're a Government man," the big man said, "and have come out to catch some of Bill Sergeant's boys."

"No," I said.

He grinned at me as if he hadn't heard me. "Well," he said, "this ought to be a big enough batch for you, Mister. Want to capture us all right now and take us back to New Didymus with you?"

"You've got me wrong," I said.

Another man spoke up. He was older, in his late forties, I thought. His hair was thin and gray but his face was hard. He had a heater strapped to his side, and he wore a good uniform. "Government men don't come out one at a time, do they, Huey?" he said.

The big man shrugged. "No way to tell," he said. "Maybe Mr. Carson here's got a call-radio for the rest of his boys. Maybe they're all just waiting for us, some place nearby."

"If they're waiting," the other man said, "they'd be here by now. Besides, Huey, he don't look like a Government man."

"Think they all got tails?" Huey asked him.

I judged it was about time to put in a word. "I'm not Government," I said. "I'm from Ancarta. I'm here to help you—if you're the men I think you are."

That started some more discussion. Huey was all for labeling my offer a trick and getting rid of me then and there—after which, I suppose, he was going to clear out my mythical followers in the nearby jungle. But he was pretty well all alone; there's got to be a rotten apple in the best-picked barrel and these boys were smart. The only sensible thing to do was staring them in the face, and it didn't take them long to see it.

"We'll take you back with us," Huey's friend told me. "When we get to a safe place we can sit down and talk this out."

I wanted to insist on finishing my supper right where I was, but there's such a thing as playing a little too much for the grandstand. Instead, I was herded into

the center of the group, and we marched off into the jungle.

Only it wasn't a march; there was no attempt at order. For a while we used the trail, and then straggled off it and went single-file through masses of trees and bushes and leaves. Being in the center of the line helped a little but not enough; the spines kept coming through and I got a few more nice scratches. The trip took about half an hour, and when we stopped we were in front of a cave-mouth.

The band went inside and I went with them. There was light, battery-powered, and what seemed to be all the comforts of a small, ill-kept town jail. But it was better than the naked jungle. I was still porting my knapsack, and when we got into the cave I unstrapped it and sat down and opened it. The men watched me without making any attempt to hide the fact.

The first thing I took out was an instant-heat food can. It didn't look like a bomb, so nobody did anything. They just kept watching while I came up with my call-radio.

Huey said: "What the hell!" and came for me.

I stood up, spilling the knapsack, and got ready to stand him off; but I didn't need to, not then. Three of the others piled on him, like dogs on a bear, and held him down. Huey's friend was at my side when I turned. "How come?" he said. "Who are you planning on calling?"

"I said I wanted to help you," I told him. "I meant it."

"Of course," he said smoothly. "Why should I believe it?"

"I know the spot you're in, and I—"

He didn't give me a chance to finish. "Now, you wait a minute," he said. "And don't touch that box. We've got some talking to do."

"Such as?"

"Such as how you managed to get here from Ancarta, and why," he said. "Such as what all this talk about helping us means, and what the radio's for. Lots of talking."

I decided it was time to show some more independence. "I don't talk to people I don't know," I said.

He looked me up and down, taking his time about it. Huey had quieted down some, and our conversation was the main attraction. In the end he shrugged. "I suppose you can't do any harm, not so long as we keep an eye on that box of yours," he said. He gave me his name as if it didn't matter. "I'm Hollerith," he said. "General Rawlinson Hollerith."



I gave him the prepared story automatically; it rolled out but I wasn't thinking about it. He'd given me my first real surprise; I'd thought Hollerith had been killed at Andrew's Farm, and, as far as I knew, so did the Government. Instead, here he was, alive and kicking, doing a pretty good job of working with a guerrilla gang. I wondered who Huey would turn out to be, but it didn't seem like the time to ask.

The story, of course, was a good one. Naturally it wasn't proof of anything, or even susceptible of proof right then and there; it wasn't meant to be. I didn't expect them to buy it sight unseen, but I'd planned it to give me some time until I could start the next step.

James Carson, I told Hollerith, was a reasonably big wheel around Ancarta. He wasn't in sympathy with the Government, but he hadn't fought in the revolutionary armies or been active in any overt way.

"Why not?" he snapped at me.

"I was more valuable where I stood," I said. "There's a lot that can be done with paper work in the way of sabotage."

He nodded. "I see," he said. "I see what you mean."

"I worked in one of the Government departments," I said. "That enabled me to pass information on to Sergeant's men in the vicinity. It also gave me a good spot for mixing up orders and shipments."

He nodded again. "That's one of the advantages of a guerrilla outfit," he said. "The administration end really doesn't exist; we can live off the country. I should think that, over an area as large as we can range on Wohlen, we can't be wiped out."

Of course, that was only his opinion; but I wasn't easy about it. The sight of him

had shaken me quite a bit and I began to think I'd have to get rid of him. That would be unpleasant and dangerous, I told myself. But there didn't seem to be any help for it, at the moment.

"About information," he said. "You were closely watched—anyone working for the Government would have had to have been. How did you get your information out?"

I nodded toward the radio. "It's not a normal call-radio," I said, with perfect truth. "Its operation is undetectable by the normal methods. I'm not an expert, so I won't go into technical details; it's enough that the radio works."

"Then why come to us?" Hollerith said. "Aren't there guerrillas in the Ancarta vicinity for you to work with?"

I shook my head. "Only a few more or less ... ah ... disaffected minorities," I said. That was true, too. "They raised hell for a day or so, then walked in and surrendered. The guerrilla network on the entire planet, sir, is under your command."

He shook his head. "It's not my command," he said. "This is a democracy. You've met Huey ... my orderly, in the old days. But now he has as much voice as I have. Except for expert matters."

Crackpots. But I listened. Democracy was the basis of their group; every move was voted on by the entire band, wherever possible. "We're not a dictatorship," Hollerith said. "We don't intend to become one."

It was nice to hear that; it meant that, maybe, I wouldn't have to get rid of him after all. "Anyway," I said, "your men appear to be the only ones active on Sergeant's behalf."

He took it without flinching. "Then we need help," he said. "Can you provide it?"

"I can get you guns," I said. "Volunteers. Supplies."

There was a little pause.

"Who do you think you are?" Hollerith said. "God?"

I didn't tell him that, from his point of view, I was inhabiting the other half of the theological universe. Somehow, it didn't seem necessary.

The men started to arrive in a week, some of them carrying supplies and armaments for all the rest. Hollerith was beside himself with joy, and even Huey stopped looking at me with suspicion. In the meantime, I'd been living with the guerrillas, eating and sleeping with them, but I hadn't been exactly trusted. There'd been a picked group of men set to watch over me at all times, and I managed to get a little friendly with them, but not very. In case I turned out to be a louse, nobody wanted to have to shed tears over my unmarked grave.

Until the men arrived, there weren't any raids; Hollerith, very sensibly, wanted to wait for my reinforcements, and he carried most of the group with him. Huey was all for killing me and getting on with normal operations; I don't think he had any real faith in me even after the reinforcements began to arrive.

I'd made the call on my radio, in Hollerith's hearing. I'd asked for one hundred and fifty men—a force just a bit larger than the entire band Hollerith had commanded until then—three hundred heaters with ammunition and supplies to match, a couple of large guns throwing explosive shells, and some dynamite. I added the dynamite because it sounded like the sort of thing guerrillas ought to have, and Hollerith didn't seem to mind. On his instructions, I gave them a safe route to come by, assuming they started near New Didymus; actually, of course, some of my corps brothers were recruiting on other parts of the planet and the Government had been fully instructed not to hold any of them up. I won't say that President Santa Claus understood what I was doing, but he trusted me. He had faith—which was handy.

Hollerith was overjoyed when the reinforcements did arrive. "Now we can really begin to work," he told me. "Now we can begin to fight back in a big way. No more of this sneaking around, doing fiddling little jobs—"

He wanted to start at once. I nearly laughed in his face; it was now established that I didn't have to get rid of the man. If he'd decided to delay on the big attack ... but he hadn't.

So, of course, I helped him draw up some plans. Good ones, too; the best I could come up with.

The very best.

"The trouble," Hollerith told me sadly, a day or so later, "is going to be convincing the others. They want to do something dramatic—blowing up the planet, most likely."

I said I didn't think they planned to go that far, and, anyhow, I had an idea that might help. "You want to take the Army armaments depot near New Didymus," I said. "That would serve as a good show of strength, and weaken any reprisals while we get ready to move again."

"Of course," he said.

"Then think of all the fireworks you'll get," I said. "Bombs going off, heaters exploding, stacks of arms all going off at once—the Fourth of July, the Fourteenth, and Guy Fawkes Day, all at once, with a small touch of Armageddon for flavor. Not to mention the Chinese New Year."

"But—"

"Sell it that way," I said. "The drama. The great picture. The excitement. That, believe me, they'll buy."

He frowned while he thought it over. Then the frown turned into a grin. "By God," he said, "they might."

And they did. The conference and the election were both pretty stormy. All the new patriots were off to blow up the Government buildings one after another, even more enthusiastic than the original members. It was only natural; my instructions to the recruiters had been to pick the most violent, frothing anti-Government men they could find to send out, and that was what we got. But Hollerith gave them a talk, and the vote, when it came, was overwhelmingly in favor of his plan.

Even Huey was enthusiastic. He came up to me after the meeting and pounded me on the back; I suppose it was meant for friendship, though it felt more like sabotage. "Hey, I thought you were no good," he said. "I thought you were ... oh, you know, some kid of a spy."

"I know," I said.

"Well, Mister," he said, "believe me, I was wrong." He pounded some more. I tried to look as if I liked it or, anyway, as if I could put up with it. "You're O.K., Mister," he said. "You're O.K."

Some day, I told myself, I was going to get Huey all to myself, away in a dark alley somewhere. There didn't seem to be much chance of keeping the promise, but I made it to myself anyway, and moved away.

The meeting had set the attack for three days ahead, which was a moral victory for Hollerith; the men were all for making it in the next five minutes. But he said he needed time—it's a good thing, I told myself, that he didn't say what he needed it for. Because in a few hours, right after sunrise the next morning, training started and Hollerith had his hands full of trouble.

The new men didn't see the sense in it. "Hell," one of them complained, "all we got to do is go up and toss a bomb into the place. We don't like all this fooling around first."

The "fooling around" involved jungle training—how to walk quietly, how to avoid getting slashed by a vine, and so forth. It also involved forming two separate attack groups for Hollerith's plans. That meant drilling the groups to move separately, and drilling each group to stay together.

And there were other details: how to fire a heater from the third rank without incinerating a comrade in the front rank; signal-spotting, in case of emergency and sudden changes of plan; the use of dynamite, its care and feeding; picking targets—and so forth and so forth. Hollerith's three days seemed pretty short when you thought about what they had to cover.

But the new men didn't like it. They wanted action. "That's what we signed on for," they said. "Not all this drill. Hell, we ain't an army—we're guerrillas."

The older hands, and the more sensible members of the band, tried their best to talk the new men into line. Some of the officers tried ordering them into line.

But the talk was ignored. And as for the officers—well, the old United States Civil War tried a democratic army for a while, on both sides. Unfortunately, electing your officers is not an efficient way to run things. The most popular man makes the best officer about as often as the most popular man makes the best criminal-law judge. Or engineer, for that matter. War's not a democratic business.

This one, however, seemed to be. Mass election of officers was one of the rules, along with the voting on staff decisions. The new men out-numbered the older hands. New officers were elected—and that stopped the orders.

Hollerith was about two-thirds of the way out of his mind when the three days

were up and the attack time came around. When night fell, the atmosphere around the cave was as tense as it could get without turning into actual lightning. It was a warm, still night; the single moon was quarter-full but it shed a lot more light than Earth's moon; we blacked ourselves and Hollerith went over the plans. We were still divided into two groups—ragged groups, but groups. The first wave was to come around on the depot from the left, attacking in full force with all armaments and some of that dynamite. When things were getting toward a peak in that direction, the second force was to come in from the right and set off its own fireworks. Result (Hollerith hoped): demolition, confusion, catastrophe.

It was a good plan. Hollerith obviously wasn't sure of his own men any more—and neither would I have been, in his spot. But he had the advantage of surprise and superior arms; he was clearly hoping that would overbalance the lack of discipline, training and order in his force. Besides, there was nothing else he could do; he was outvoted, all the way down the line.



I set out, with hardly a qualm, along with the second attack group. We were under the command of a shy, tall man with spectacles who didn't look like much, he'd been a trapper before the war, though, and was one of the original guerrillas, for a wonder, and that meant he was probably a hell of a lot tougher and more knowledgeable than he seemed. Setting traps for Wohlen's animals, for instance, was emphatically not a job for the puny or the frightened. The first group was under Huey's command.

Hollerith stayed with a small group of his own as a "reserve"; actually, he wanted to oversee the battle, and the men were perfectly willing to let him, having gotten one idea into their democratic heads: Hollerith was too valuable a man for the guerrillas to lose.

But I wasn't, of course. I'd done my bit; I'd gotten the volunteers. Now I could go and die for glory like the rest of them.



The trouble was, I couldn't see any way out. I marched in the dimness with the rest, and we managed to make surprisingly little noise. Wohlen's animals were

active and stirring, anyhow, and that helped.

At last the depot showed up in the moonlight with the city some distance behind it. There was a wire fence, and a sentry, immediately in view behind him were square blocky buildings in a clearing. Beyond that there was another fence, then some more jungle, and then the city. Fifty yards from the fence, in the last screen of trees, we stopped and waited.

The first group was off to the other side of the fence, and I couldn't see or hear them. The wait seemed to go on for hours; perhaps a minute and a half passed. Then the first heater went off.

The sentry whirled and fired without really thinking. There wasn't any way for him to tell what he was shooting at. More heaters went off from the jungle, and then they started to come in. There was a lot of noise.

The boys were yelling, swarming over the wire fence and through it, firing heaters wildly. There were lights in the buildings, now, and a picked group of men came out of one of them, swinging in single file; the heaters chopped them to pieces before they had much of a chance. A tower light went on and then the really big guns got going.

The guerrillas started to get it, then. The big boys from the armaments tower charred holes in their line, and the noise got worse; men were screaming and cursing and dying and the heaters were still going off. I tore my eyes away and looked at the leader of our group. He was poised on the balls of his feet, leaning forward; he stayed that way, his head nodding very slowly up and down, for a full second. Then he shouted and lifted an arm and we followed him, a screaming mob heading down into hell.

The big guns were swiveled the other way and for a couple of seconds we had no trouble. Our boys weren't playing with heaters too much; instead, the dynamite started to fly. Light the fuse, pick it up, heave—and then stand back and watch. Fireworks. Excitement. Well, it was what they wanted, wasn't it?

There was an explosion as a small bundle landed inside the fence, in a courtyard. Then another one, the flashes lighting up faces and bodies in motion. I found myself screaming with the rest of them.

Then the big one went off.

One of the dynamite bundles had hit the right spot. Ammunition went off with a

dull boom that shook the ground, and the light was too bright to look into. I went flat and so did the others; I wondered about solid shells exploding and going wild, but there weren't any. The light faded, and then it began to grow again.

I put my head up and saw flames. Then I got up and saw the others rising, too. I turned tail for the jungle. Some of them followed me, along with some of the first group; order was lost entirely and we were no more than pieces of a shrieking, delirious, victorious mob. I headed back for the base.

Behind me the ammunition depot burned brightly. The raid was over.

It had been an unqualified success, of course. The guerrillas had done the best job of their careers.

So far.



Hollerith was back to the cave before me. Put it down to a short-cut, or just more practice in the jungle. When I came in he looked terrible, about a hundred and twelve years old and shrunken. But my appearance seemed to rouse him a little. He gestured and the others in the cave—three or four of them—went out. One stood at the entrance.

There was a silence. Hollerith grimaced at me. "You're working for the Government," he said. It wasn't a question.

I shook my head. "I—"

"Keep it," he said. "James Carson from Ancarta is a cover identity, that's all. I tell you, I *know*."

He didn't look ready to pull a heater. I waited a second. The silence got louder. Then I said: "All right. How do you know?"

The grimace again, twisted and half-humorous. "Why, because you got me recruits," he said. "Because you got me armaments. Because you helped me."

"Doesn't make sense," I said.

"Doesn't it?" He turned away from me for a second. When he turned back he looked more like General Rawlinson Hollerith, and less like a corpse. "You got

me fanatics, men who hated the Government."

"Well?"

"They don't think straight," he said. "There isn't room in their minds for any more than that hatred. And they're democratic, just like the rest of us. They vote."

"You set that up," I said. "I had nothing to do with it."

He nodded. "I know," he said. "There are places where democracy just doesn't work. Like an armed force. As long as most of the members think alike, you're all right. But when a new factor comes into the picture—why, nobody knows what he's voting for. It becomes a matter of personal preference—which is no way to run a war."

"All right," I said. "But I got you the men and their arms—"

"Sure you did," he said. "You got me everything I needed—to hang myself with." He raised a hand. "I'm not saying you worked against me. You didn't have to."

"I got you everything you wanted," I said.

"Sure," he said. "Did you ever hear of jujitsu?"

"I—"

"You used my strength against me," he said. "You got me what I wanted—and did it in such a way that it would ruin me."

"But the attack was a success," I said.

He shook his head. "How many men are going to come back?" he said. "Fifty? Sixty? How many of them are going to get lost out there, return to the city, try to go up against New Didymus with a heater and nothing else? How many of them have had all the excitement they want? Those are going to head for home. A success—"

He paused. I waited.

"There was a general in Greece in the ancient days," he said. "A general named Pyrrhus. He won a battle once, and lost most of his men doing it. 'For my part,' he said, 'another victory like this and we are undone.' That's the kind of success

we had."

Hollerith had brains. "A Pyrrhic victory," I said.

"And you know all about it," he said. "You planned it this way."

I shrugged. "By doing what you wanted done," I said.

He nodded, very slowly.

"What now?" I said quietly.

He acted, for a second, as if he didn't hear me. Then he spoke. "Now," he said, "we go back. Democracy—it's a limited tool, like anything else. No tool is so good that it can be used in every case, on every problem. We were wrong. We'd better admit it and go back."

"But your men—"

"The good ones know the truth now," he said, "just as I do. The others ... there's nothing else they can do, without me and without the rest of the force."

I took a deep breath. It was all over.

"And now," he said suddenly, "I want you to tell me just who you are."

"I—"

"Not James Carson," he said. "And not from Ancarta. Not even from Wohlen."

"How do you know?" I said.

"Nobody on this planet," he said, "would do this job in just this way. I'm familiar enough with the top men to be sure of that. You're from the Comity."

"That's right," I said.

"But ... who are you? What force? What army?"

"No army," I said. "You might call me a teacher; my corps is made up of teachers. We give lessons—where lessons are needed."

"A teacher," he said quietly. A long time passed. "Well," he asked, "do I pass the course?"

"You pass," I told him. "You pass—with high marks, General."

I was off-planet within twenty-four hours. Not that Santa Claus didn't want me to stay longer, when I told him what had happened. Hell, he wanted to throw a banquet and sixteen speeches in my honor. I was a holy Idol all over again. I was superhuman.

I was glad to get away. What makes them think a man's special, just because he uses his brain once in a while?

THE END

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