

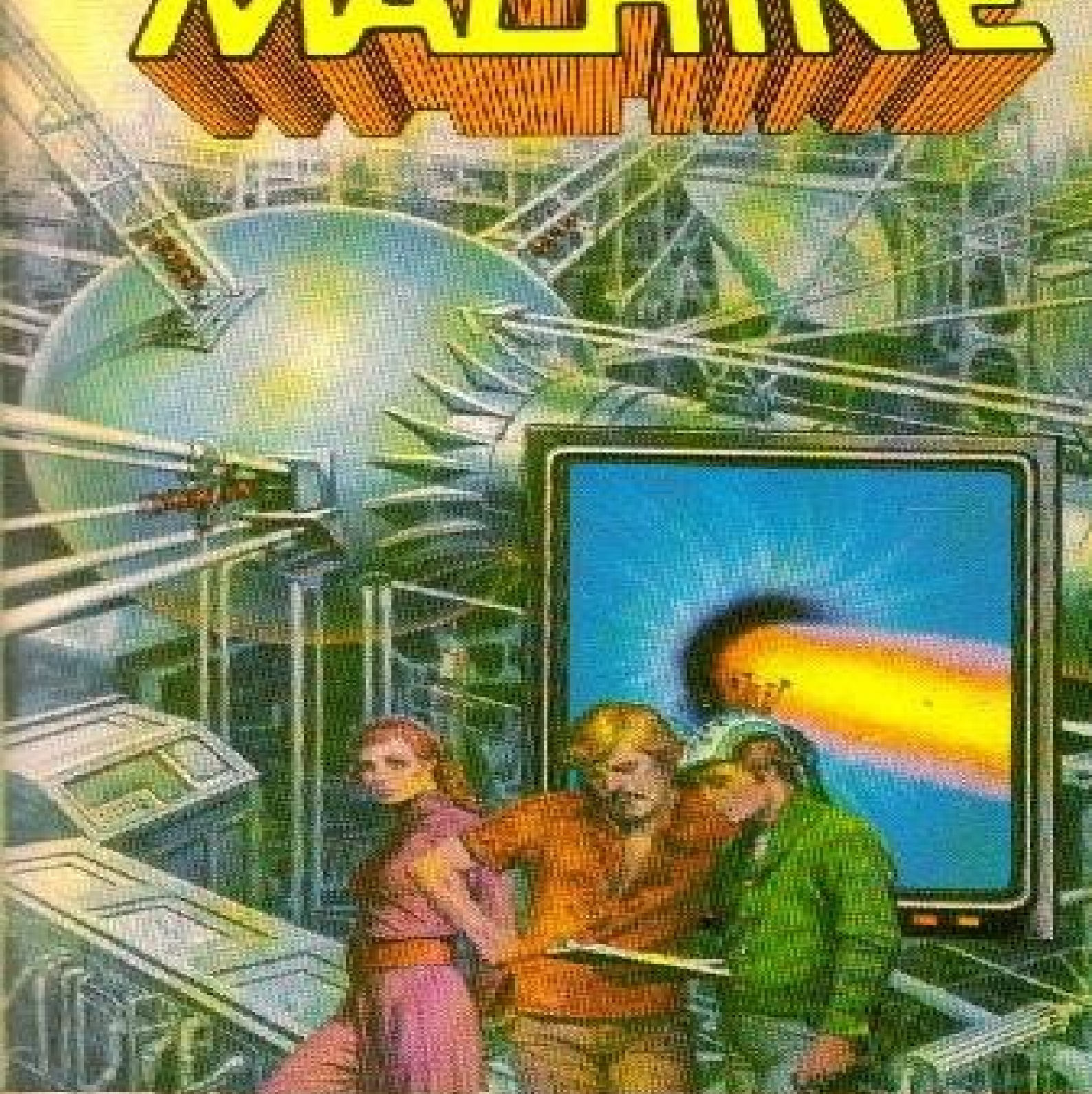
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JAMES P. HOGAN

Author of INHERIT THE STARS



THE GENESIS MACHINE



The Genesis Machine

James P. Hogan

MACHINE POLITICS

“Once the coordinates have been computed,” Clifford stated, “they can be recalled instantly. As for the weapon itself...” He scanned the faces assembled before him, then continued. “We have succeeded in transporting energy from one place to another... and we can select precisely where in space that energy will be delivered. Destructive forces of unprecedented strength can be instantaneously directed and focused on any part of Earth’s surface or beyond.”

The stares of the Defense Secretary, service chiefs, presidential aides, and defense planners seated around the conference table had frozen into wide-eyed masks of stunned incredulity. The silence, when he paused, was absolute.

“Furthermore, there is no method by which the system I am describing could be interfered with or countered. Interception is impossible. The ICBM and the orbiting bomb are as outmoded as the battering ram.”

Hughes stared aghast at Morelli as the words came home to him. “What are we getting into?” he asked. “Has Brad gone mad?”

“First I knew about this,” Morelli said, shaking his head. “I knew it was something big... but this....”

On the plane back to Boston that night, Clifford’s mood was one of grim satisfaction. Aub, for once, seemed subdued and withdrawn.

“What’s the matter?” Clifford asked him. “It’s what you’ve always said you wanted, isn’t it – unlimited government funds and resources. Why doesn’t it taste so good now?”

This is a work of fiction. All the characters and events portrayed in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to real people or incidents is purely coincidental.

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Every child is a born scientist.

This book is dedicated to DEBBIE, JANE, and TINA – the three young scientists who taught me to distinguish reality from illusion by asking always:

“Who says so?”

“Who’s he?”

and, “How does he know?”

Baen Books by JAMES P. HOGAN

Inherit the Stars

The Genesis Machine

The Gentle Giants of Ganymede

The Two Faces of Tomorrow

Thrice Upon a Time

Giants' Star

Voyage from Yesteryear

Code of the Lifemaker

The Proteus Operation

Endgame Enigma

The Mirror Maze

The Infinity Gambit

Entoverse

The Multiplex Man

Realtime Interrupt

Minds, Machines & Evolution

The Immortality Option

Paths to Otherwhere

Bug Park

Star Child

Rockets, Redheads & Revolution

Cradle of Saturn

The Legend That Was Earth

Martian Knightlife

Chapter 1

The familiar sign that marked the turnoff from the main highway leading toward Albuquerque, some thirty or so miles farther north, read:

**ADVANCED COMMUNICATIONS
RESEARCH ESTABLISHMENT
GOVERNMENT PROPERTY
ABSOLUTELY NO ADMITTANCE
TO
UNAUTHORIZED PERSONS
SHOW PASSES – 1½ MILES AHEAD**

Accompanied by the falling note of a barely audible electric whine, the Ford Cougar decelerated smoothly across the right-hand traffic lane and entered the exit slipway. Without consciously registering the bleeped warning from the driver's panel, Dr. Bradley Clifford felt the vehicle beginning to respond to his touch as it slipped from computer control to manual drive. The slipway led into a shallow bend that took him round behind a low sandy rise dotted with clumps of dried scrub and dusty desert thorn, and out of sight of the main highway.

The road ahead, rolling lazily into the hood of the Cougar, lay draped around the side of a barren rock-strewn hill like a lizard sunbathing on a stone. In the shimmering haze beyond and to the right of the hill, the rugged red-brown bastions that flanked the valley of the Rio Grande stood row behind row in their ageless, immutable ranks, fading into layers of pale grays and blues that blended eventually with the sky on the distant horizon.

The road reached a high point about halfway up the shoulder of the hill, and from there wound down the other side to commence its long, shallow descent into the mouth of the valley beyond, at the far end of which was situated the sprawling complex of the Advanced Communications Research Establishment. At this time of the morning, the sun shone from the far side of the Establishment, transforming the jumble of buildings, antenna towers, and radio dishes into stark silhouettes crouching menacingly in front of the black, shadowy cliffs that marked the head of the valley. From a distance the sight always reminded Clifford of a sinister collection of gigantic mutant insects guarding the entrance to some dark and cavernous lair. The shapes seemed to symbolize the ultimate mutation of science – the harnessing of knowledge to unleash ever more potent forces of destruction upon a tormented world.

About a mile farther on and halfway down to the valley floor, he came to the checkpoint where the road passed through the outer perimeter fence of ACRE. A black Army sergeant, in shirtsleeves but armed and wearing a steel helmet, walked forward from the barrier as Clifford slowed to a halt beside a low column. Nodding his acknowledgment to the guard's perfunctory "Morning," Clifford extracted the coded card from his pass folder, inserted it into a slot in the front of the box surmounting the column, and handed the folder to the guard. Then he pressed the ball of his thumb against the glass plate located adjacent to the slot. A computer deep beneath ACRE's Administration Block scanned the data fed in at the checkpoint, checked it against the records contained in its files, and flashed the results

back to another soldier who was seated in front of a display console inside the guardhouse. The sergeant returned the pass folder to Clifford's outstretched hand, cast a cursory glance around the inside of the vehicle, then stepped back and raised his arm. The Cougar moved through and the barrier dropped into place behind.

Fifteen minutes later, Clifford arrived at his office on the third floor of the Applied Studies Department of the Mathematics & Computer Services Building. On the average, he spent probably no more than two days a week at ACRE, preferring to work at home and use his Infonet terminal, which gave him access to the Establishment's data bank and computers. On this occasion he hadn't been there for eight days, but when he checked the list of messages on his desk terminal, he found nothing that was especially pressing; all the urgent calls had already been routed on to his home number and dealt with from there.

So no unexpected panics to worry about before his eleven-o'clock meeting.

No sooner had he thought it, when the chime sounded to announce an incoming call. He sighed and tapped a button to accept.

"Clifford."

The screen showed a momentary frenzy of color, which stabilized almost immediately into the features of a thin, pale-faced individual with thinning hair and a hawkish nose. He looked mean. Clifford groaned inwardly as he recognized the expression of pained indignation. It was Wilbur Thompson, Deputy to the Deputy Financial Controller of Math-comps and self-appointed guardian of protocol, red tape, and all things subject to proper procedures.

"You might have told me." The voice, shrill with outrage, grated on Clifford's ears like a hacksaw on tungsten carbide. "There was absolutely no reason for you to keep quiet about it. I would have thought that the least somebody with my responsibilities could expect would be some kind of cooperation from you people. This kind of attitude doesn't help anybody at all."

"Told you what?"

"You know what. You requisitioned a whole list of category B equipment despite the fact that your section is way over budget on capital procurement for the quarter, and without an SP6 clearance. When I queried it, you let me go ahead and cancel without telling me you'd gotten a priority approval from Edwards. Now the whole thing's a mess and I've got everybody screaming down my throat. That's what."

"You didn't query it," Clifford corrected matter-of-factly. "You just told me I couldn't do it. Period."

"But... You let me cancel."

"You said you had no alternative. I took your word for it."

"You knew damn well there'd be an exception approval on file." Thompson's eyes were bulging if he were about to become hysterical. "Why didn't you mention the fact, or give me an access reference to it? How was I supposed to know that the project director had personally given it a priority 1 status? What are you trying to do, make me look like some kind of idiot or something?"

"You manage that okay without me."

"You listen to me, you smart-assed young bastard! Do you think this job isn't tough enough already without you playing dummy? There was no reason why I should have checked for an exception approval against that requisition. Now I'm being bawled out because the whole project's bottlenecked. What the hell made you think I'd want to check it out?"

“It’s your job,” Clifford said dryly, and cut off the screen.

He just had time to select some of the folders lying on his desk and to turn for the door, when the chime sounded again. He cursed aloud, turned back to the terminal, and pressed the *Interrogate* key to obtain a preview of the caller without closing the circuit that completed the two-way channel. As he had guessed, it was Thompson again. He looked apoplectic. Clifford released the key and sauntered out into the corridor. He collected coffee from the automat area, then proceeded on to one of the graphical presentation rooms which he had already reserved for the next two hours. Since the meeting demanded his presence at ACRE that day, he thought he might as well make the most of the opportunity presented to him.

An hour later Clifford was still sitting at the operator’s console in the darkened room, frowning with concentration as he studied the array of multidimensional tensor equations that glowed at him from the opposite wall. The room was one of several specifically built to facilitate the manipulation and display of large volumes of graphical data from ACRE’s computer complex. The wall that Clifford was looking at was, in effect, one huge display screen. In levels deep below the building, the machines busied themselves with a thousand other tasks while Clifford pondered the subtle implications contained in the patterns of symbols. At length, he turned his head slightly to direct his words at the microphone grille set into the console, but without taking his eyes off the display, and spoke slowly and clearly.

“Save current screen; name file *Delta Two*. Retain screen modules one, two, and three; erase remainder. Rotate symmetric unit ϕ -zero-seven. Quantize derivative I-vector using isospin matrix function. Accept I-coefficients from keyboard two; output on screen in normalized orthogonal format.”

He watched as the machine’s interpretation of the commands appeared on one of the small auxiliary screens built into the console, nodded his approval, then tapped a rapid series of numbers into the keyboard.

“Continue.”

The lower part of the display went blank and a few seconds later began filling again with new patterns of symbols. Clifford watched intently, his mind totally absorbed with trying to penetrate the hidden laws within which Nature had fashioned its strange inter-plays of space, time, energy and matter.

In the early 1990s, a German theoretical physicist by the name of Carl Maesanger had formulated the long-awaited mathematical theory of Unified Fields, combining into one interrelated set of equations the phenomena of the “strong” and “weak” nuclear forces, the electromagnetic force, and gravity. According to this theory, all these familiar fields could be expressed as projections into Einsteinian spacetime of a complex wave function propagating through a higher-order, six-dimensional continuum. Being German, Maesanger had chosen to call this continuum *einsechswinkelkoordinatenraumkomplex*. The rest of the world preferred simply *sk-space*, which later became shortened to just *k-space*.

Maesanger’s universe, therefore, was inhabited by *k-waves* – compound oscillations made up of components that could vibrate about any of the six axes that defined the system. Each of the six-dimensional components was termed a “resonance mode,” and the properties of a given *k-wave* function were determined by the particular combination of resonances that came together to produce it.

The four low-order modes corresponded to the dimensions of relativistic spacetime, the corresponding k-functions being perceived at the observational level simply as *extension*; they defined the structure of the empty universe. Space and time were seen not merely as providing a passive stage upon which the various particles and forces could act out their appointed roles, but as objectively quantifiable realities in their own right. No longer could empty space be thought of as simply what was left after everything tangible had been removed.

Addition of the high-order modes implied components of vibration occurring at right angles to all the coordinates of normal spacetime. Any effects that followed from these higher modes were incapable, therefore, of occupying space in the universe accessible to man's senses or instruments. They could impinge upon the observable universe only as dimensionless points, capable of interacting with each other in ways that depended on the particular k-functions involved; in other words, they appeared as the elementary particles.

The popular notion of a particle as a tiny, smooth ball of "something" – a model that, because of its reassuring familiarity, had been tenaciously clung to for decades despite the revelations of quantum wave mechanics – was finally put to rest for good. "Solidness" was at last recognized as being totally an illusion of the macroscopic world; even the measured radius of the proton was reduced to no more than a manifestation of the spatial probability distribution of a point k-function.

When high-and low-order resonances occurred together, they resulted in a class of entities that exhibited a reluctance to alter their state of rest or steady motion as perceived in normal space, thus giving rise to the quantity called "mass." A 5-D resonance produced a small amount of mass and could interact via the electromagnetic and weaker forces. A full 6-D resonance produced a large amount of mass and added the ability to interact via the strong nuclear force as well.

The final possibility was for high-order modes to exist by themselves, without there being any component of vibration in normal spacetime at all. This yielded point-centers of interaction that offered no resistance whatsoever to motion in spacetime and therefore always moved at the maximum speed observable – the speed of light. These were the massless particles – the familiar photon and neutrino and the hypothetical graviton.

In one sweeping, all-embracing scheme, Maesanger's wave equations gave a common explanation for the bewildering morass of facts that had been catalogued by thousands of experimenters in a score of nations throughout the 1950s to the 1980s. They explained, for example, why it is that a particle that interacts strongly always interacts in all possible weaker ways as well, although the converse might not be true; clearly the 6-D resonance responsible for the strong nuclear force had, by definition, to include all possible lower modes as subsets of itself. If it didn't, it wouldn't be a 6-D resonance. This picture also explained why heavy particles always interact strongly.

Theory predicted that 5-D resonance would produce particles of small mass, unable to participate in strong interactions; existence of the electron and muon proved it. Further considerations suggested that any heavy particle ought to be capable of assuming three discrete states of electric charge, each which should be accompanied by just a small change in mass; sure enough, the proton and neutron provided prime examples.

If an interaction occurred between two resonances whose respective components on the time axis were moving in opposite directions – and there was nothing in the theory to say this couldn't happen – the two temporal waves would cancel each other to produce a new entity that had no duration in time. To the human observer they would cease to exist, producing the effect of a particle-antiparticle annihilation.

As a young graduate at CIT in the late 1990s, Bradley Clifford had shared in the excitement that had reverberated around the scientific world after publication of Maesanger's first paper. K-theory became his consuming passion, and soon uncovered his dormant talents; by the time he entered his postdoctoral years, he had already contributed significantly to the further development of several aspects of the theory. Driven by the restless, boundless energy of youth, he thrust beyond the ever widening frontier of human knowledge, and always the need to know what lay beyond the next horizon drew him onward. Those were his idyllic days; there were not enough hours in the day, days in the year, or years in a lifetime to accomplish all the things he knew he had to do.

But gradually the realities of the lesser world of lesser men closed in. The global political and economic situation continued to deteriorate and fields of pure academic research were increasingly subjected to more stringent controls and restraints. Funds that had once flowed freely dried to a trickle; vital equipment was denied; the pick of available talent was lured away by ever more tempting salaries as military and defense requirements assumed priority. Eventually, under special legislation, even the freedom of the nation's leading scientists to work where and how they chose became a luxury that could no longer be allowed.

And so he had come to ACRE, virtually as a draftee... to find more effective methods of controlling satellite-borne antimissile lasers.

But though they had commandeered his body and his brain, they could never commandeer his soul. The computers and facilities at ACRE surpassed anything he had ever dreamed of at CIT.

He could still let his mind fly free, to soar into the realm of Carl Maesanger's mysterious k-space.

It seemed to him that only minutes had passed when the reminder began flashing in the center of the wall screen, warning him that the meeting was due to commence in five minutes.

Chapter 2

Professor Richard Edwards, Principal Scientific Executive and second-in-command at ACRE, contemplated the document lying on the table in front of him. The wording on the title sheet read: *Space Rotations and Gravity Impulses*. Seated around the corner of the table to the professor's left, Walter Massey thumbed idly through his copy, making little of the pages of complex formulae. Opposite Massey, Miles Corrigan leaned back in his chair and regarded Clifford with a cool, predatory stare, making no attempt to conceal the disdain that he felt toward all scientists.

"The rules of this Establishment are perfectly clear, Dr. Clifford," Edwards began, speaking over the top of his interlaced fingers. "All scientific material produced by any person during the time he is employed at ACRE, produced in the course of his duties or otherwise, automatically qualifies as classified information. Precisely what are your grounds for requesting an exemption and permission to publish this paper?"

Clifford returned his look expressionlessly, trying hard for once not to show the irritation he felt for the whole business. He didn't like the air of an Inquisition that had pervaded the room ever since they sat down.

His reply was terse: "Purely scientific material of academic interest only. No security issues involved."

Edwards waited, apparently expecting more. After a few, dragging seconds, Massey shuffled his feet uncomfortably and cleared his throat.

Massey was Clifford's immediate boss in Mathcomps. He was every inch a practical, hard-core applications engineer, fifteen years in the Army's Technical Services Corps having left him with no great inclination toward theoretical matters. When he was assigned a task, he did it without questioning either the wisdom or the motives of his superiors, both of which he took for granted. It was best not to think about such things; that always led to trouble. He represented the end-product of the system, faithfully carrying out his side of a symbiotic existence in which he traded off individual freedom for collective security. He felt a part of ACRE and the institution that it symbolized, in the same way that he had felt a part of the Army; it provided him with the sense of belonging that he needed. He served the organization and the organization served him; it paid him, trained him, made all his major decisions for him, rapped his knuckles when he stepped out of line, and promoted him when he didn't. If he had to, he would readily die fighting to defend all that it stood for.

But Clifford didn't find him really a bad guy for all that.

Right now, Massey wasn't too happy about the way in which Clifford was handling things. He didn't give a damn whether the paper ended up being published or not, but it bothered him that somebody from his section didn't seem to be putting up a good fight to speak his case. The name of the platoon was at stake.

"What Brad means is, the subject matter of his paper relates purely to abstract theoretical concepts. There's nothing about it that could be thought of as having anything to do with national security interests." Massey glanced from Edwards to Corrigan and back again. "You might say it's kinda like a hobby... only Brad's hobby happens to involve a lot of mathematics."

"Mmm..." Edwards rubbed his thumbs against the point of his chin and considered the proposition. Abstract theoretical concepts had a habit of turning into reality with frightening speed. Even the most innocent-looking scraps of trivia could acquire immense significance when fitted together into

pattern with others. He had no idea of the things that were going on in other security-blanketed research institutions of his own country, not to mention those of the other side. Only Washington held the big picture, and if they went along with Clifford's request, it would mean getting mixed up in all the rigmarole of referring the matter back there for clearance... and Washington was never very happy over things like that. Far better if the whole thing could be killed off right at the beginning.

On the other hand, his image wouldn't benefit from too hasty a display of high-handedness... must be seen as objective and impartial.

"I have been through the paper briefly, Dr. Clifford," he said. "Before we consider your request specifically, I think it would help if you clarified some of the points that you make." He spread his hands and rested them palms-down on the table. "For example, you make some remarkable deductions concerning the nature of elementary particles and their connection with gravitational propagation... His look invited Clifford to take it from there.

Clifford sighed. At the best of times he detested lengthy dissertations; the feeling that he was pressing an already lost cause only made it worse. But there was no way out.

"All the known particles of physics," he began, "can be described in terms of Maesanger's k -functions. Every particle is a combination of high-order and low-order k -resonances. Theory suggests that it's possible for an entity to exist purely in the high-order domain, without any physical attributes in the dimensions of the observable universe. It couldn't be detected by any known experimental technique."

"This isn't part of Maesanger's original theory," Edwards checked.

"No. It's new."

"This is your own contribution?"

"Yes."

"I see. Carry on." Edwards scribbled a brief note on his pad.

"I've termed such an unobservable entity a 'hi-particle,' and the domain that it exists in, 'hi-space' – the unobservable subset of k -space. The remaining portion of k -space – the spacetime that we perceive – is then termed 'lo-space.'

"Interactions are possible between hi-particles. Most of them result in new hi-particles. Some classes of interaction, however, can produce complete k -functions as end-products – that is, combining hi-and lo-order resonances that are observable. In other words, you'd be able to detect them in normal space." Clifford paused and waited for a response. It came from Massey.

"You mean that as far as anybody can tell, first there's no particle there – just nothing at all – then suddenly – *poof!* – there is."

Clifford nodded. "Exactly so."

"Mmm... I see. Spontaneous creation of matter... in our universe anyway. Interesting." Edwards began stroking his chin again and nodded to Clifford to continue.

"Since all conventional particles can be thought of as extending into hi-space, they can interact with hi-particles too. When they do, the result can be one of two things.

"First off, the interaction products can include k -resonances – in other words, particles that are observable. What you'd see would be the observable part of the k -particle that was there to begin with and then the observable part of the k -products that came later. What you wouldn't see is the pure hi-particle that caused the change to take place."

Massey was beginning to look intrigued. He raised a hand to stop Clifford from racing ahead and went further for the moment.

“Just a sec, Brad, let’s get this straight. A k-particle is something that has bits you can see and bits you can’t. Right?”

“Right.”

“All the particles that we know are k-particles.”

“Right.”

“But you figure there are things that nobody can see at all... these things you’ve called ‘h-particles.’”

“Right.”

“And two hi’s can come together to make a k, and since you can see k’s, you’d see a particle suddenly pop outa nowhere. Is that right?”

“Right.”

“Okay...” Massey inclined his head and collected his thoughts for a moment. “Now – in idiomatic language – just go over that last bit again, willya?” He wasn’t being deliberately sarcastic; it was just his way of speaking.

“A hi can interact with a k to produce another k, or maybe several k’s. When that happens, what you see is a sudden change taking place in an observable particle, without any apparent cause.”

“A spontaneous event,” Edwards commented, nodding slowly. “An explanation for the decay of radioactive nuclei and the like, perhaps.”

Clifford began warming slightly. Maybe he wasn’t wasting his time after all.

“Precisely so,” he replied. “The statistics that come out of it fit perfectly with the observed frequencies of quantum mechanical tunneling effects, energy-level transitions of the electron, and the whole list of other probabilistic phenomena at the atomistic scale. It gives us a common explanation for all of them. They’re not inexplicable any more; they only look that way in low-order spacetime.”

“Mmm...” Edwards looked down again at the paper lying in front of him. The administrator in him still wanted to put a swift end to the whole business, but the scientist in him was becoming intrigued. If only this discussion could have taken place at some other time, a time free of the dictates of harsh realities. He looked up at Clifford and noted for the first time the pleading earnestness burning from those bright, youthful eyes. Clifford could be no more than in his mid to late twenties – the age at which Newton and Einstein had been at their peak. This generation would have much to answer for when the day finally came to count the cost of it all.

“You said that there is a second possible way in which hi-and k-particles can interact.”

“Yes,” Clifford confirmed. “They can also interact to produce hi-order entities only.” He looked at Massey. “That means that a hi plus a k can make just hi’s. You’d see the k to start with, then suddenly you wouldn’t see anything at all.”

“Spontaneous particle extinction,” Edwards supplied.

“I’ll be damned,” said Massey.

“The two effects of creation and extinction are symmetrical,” Clifford offered. “In loose terms you could say that a particle exists only for a finite time in the observable universe. It appears out of nowhere, persists for a while, then either vanishes, or decays into other particles, which eventually vanish anyway. The length of time that any one particle will exist is indeterminate, but the statistics

average for large numbers of them can be calculated accurately. For some, such as those involved in familiar high-energy decay processes, lifetimes can be very short; for radioactive decays, seconds to millions of years; for the so-called stable particles, like the proton and electron, billions of years.”

“You mean the stable particles aren’t truly stable at all?” Edwards raised his eyebrows in surprise. “Not permanently?”

“Right.”

Silence reigned for a short while as the room digested the flow of information. Edwards looked pensive. Miles Corrigan continued to remain silent, but his sharp eyes missed nothing. He smoothed a wrinkle in his expensively tailored suit and glanced at his watch, giving the impression of being bored and impatient. Massey spoke next.

“You see, like I said, it’s all pure academic stuff. Harmless.” He shrugged and showed his empty palms. “Maybe this once there’s no reason for us not to have Washington check it out. I vote we clear it.”

“Maybe isn’t good enough, Walt,” Edwards cautioned. “We have to be sure. For one thing, I need to be certain of the scientific accuracy of it all first. Wouldn’t do to go wasting Washington’s time with a theory that turned out to be only half worked out; that wouldn’t do ACRE’s image any good at all. There are a couple of points that bother me already.”

Massey retreated abruptly.

“Sure – whatever you say. It was just a thought.”

Clifford noted with no surprise that Massey had been simply testing to see which way the wind was blowing. He would go along with whatever the other two decided.

“Dr. Clifford,” Edwards resumed. “You state that even the stable particles possess only a finite duration in normal spacetime.”

“Yes.”

“You’ve proved it... rigorously...?”

“Yes.”

“I see...” A pause. “But tell me, how do you reconcile that statement with some of the fundamental laws of physics, some of which have stood unchallenged for decades or even for centuries? It is well known, is it not, that decay of the proton would violate the law of conservation of baryon number, decay of the electron would violate conservation of charge. And what about the conservation laws of mass-energy and momentum, for example? What happens to those if stable particles are simply allowed to appear and vanish?”

Clifford recognized the tone. The professor’s attitude was negative. He was out to uncover the flaws – anything that would justify going no further for the present and sending Clifford back to the drawing board. The mildly challenging note was calculated to invoke an emotive response, thus carrying the whole discussion from the purely rational level to the irrational and opening the way for a choice of counterproductive continuations.

Clifford was on his guard. “Violation of many conservation laws is well known already. Although the strong nuclear interactions do obey all the laws listed, electromagnetic interactions do not conserve isotopic spin. Furthermore, the weak nuclear interactions don’t conserve strangeness, nor do they conserve charge or parity discretely but only as a combined product of C and P. As a general principle, the stronger the force, the greater the number of laws it has to obey. This has been known

an experimental fact for a long time. In recent years we've known that it follows automatically from Maesanger wave functions. Each conservation principle is related to a particular order of resonance. Since stronger interactions involve more orders, they obey more conservation laws. As you reduce the number of orders involved, you lose the necessity to obey the laws that go with the higher orders.

"What I'm saying here..." he gestured toward the paper "is that the same pattern holds true right on through to the weakest force of all – gravity. When you get down to the level of the gravitation interaction – determined by lo-order resonances only – you lose more of the conservation laws that come with the hi-orders. In fact, as it turns out, you lose all of them."

"I see," said Edwards. "But if that's so, why hasn't anybody ever found out about it? Why haven't centuries of experiments revealed it? On the contrary, they would appear to demonstrate the reverse of what you're saying."

Clifford knew fully that Edwards was not that naive. The possibility that conservation principles might not be universal was something that scientists had speculated about for a long time. But forcing somebody to adopt a defensive posture was always a first step toward weakening his case. Nevertheless, Clifford had no option but to go along with it.

"Because, as I mentioned earlier, the so-called stable particles have extremely long average lifetimes. Matter is created and extinguished at an infinitesimally small rate – on the everyday scale anyway; it would be utterly immeasurable by any laboratory experiment. For matter at ordinary density, it works out at about one extinction per ten billion particles present per year. No experiment ever devised could detect anything like that. You could only detect it on the cosmological scale – and nobody has performed experiments with whole galaxies yet."

"Mmm..." Edwards paused to collect his thoughts. Massey sensed that things could go either way and opted to stay out.

Clifford decided to move ahead. "All interactions can be represented as rotations in k-space. This accounts for the symmetries of quantum mechanics and the family-number conservation laws. In fact, all the conservation laws come out as simply different projections of one basic set of k-conservation relationships.

"Every rotation results in a redistribution of energy about the various k-axes, which we see as forces of one kind or another. The particular set of rotations that correspond to transitions of a particle between hi-space and normal space – events of creation and extinction – produces an expanding wave front in k-space that projects as a gravitational pulse. In other words, every particle creation or extinction generates a pulse of gravity."

There were no questions at that point, so Clifford continued. "A particle can appear spontaneously anywhere in the universe with equal probability. When it does, it will emanate a minute gravity pulse. The figures indicate something like one particle creation in a volume of millions of cubic meters per year; utterly immeasurable – that's why nobody has ever found out about it.

"On the other hand, a particle can vanish only from where it already is – obviously. So, when large numbers of particles are concentrated together, you will get a larger number of extinctions over a given period of time. Thus you'll get a higher rate of production of gravity pulses. The more particles there are and the more closely they're packed together, the greater the total additive effect of all the pulses. That's why you get a gravity field around large masses of matter; it isn't a statistical phenomenon at all – just the additive effect of a large number of gravity quanta. It appears 'smooth' only at the macroscopic level.

“Gravity isn’t something that’s simply associated with mass per se; it’s just that mass defines volume of space inside which a large number of extinctions can happen. It’s the extinctions that produce the gravity.”

“I thought you said the creations do so, too,” Massey queried.

“They do, but their contribution is negligible. As I said, creations take place all through the universe with equal probability anywhere – inside a piece of matter or way outside the galaxy. In a region occupied by matter, the effect due to extinctions would dominate overwhelmingly.”

“Mmm...” Edwards frowned at his knuckles while considering another angle.

“That suggests that mass ought to decay away to nothing. Why doesn’t it?”

“It does. Again, the numbers we’re talking about are much too small to be measurable on the small scale or over short time periods. As an example, a gram of water contains about ten to the power of twenty-three atoms. If those atoms vanished at the rate of three million every second, it would take about ten billion years for all traces of the original gram to disappear. Is it any wonder the decay has never been detected experimentally? Is it any wonder that the gravity field of a planet appears smooth? We have no way of even detecting the gravity due to one gram of water, let alone measuring to see if it’s quantized. You could only detect it at the cosmological level. At that level, totally dominated by gravity, conservation laws that hold good in laboratories might well break down. Certainly we have no experimental data to say they don’t.”

“That means all the bodies in the universe ought to decay away to nothing in time,” Edwards pointed out. “They’ve had plenty of time, but there still seem to be plenty of them around.”

“Maybe they do decay away to nothing,” Clifford said. “Don’t forget that spontaneous creation is going on all the time all over the universe as well. That’s an awful lot of volume and it implies an awful lot of creation.”

“You mean a continuous process in which new bodies are formed out of interstellar matter by the known sequences of galactic and planetary evolution; the newly created particles provide a source to replenish the interstellar matter in turn.”

“Could be,” Clifford agreed.

At last Edwards had drawn Clifford into an area in which he was unable to give definite answers. He pressed the advantage.

“But surely that requires some resurrection of the Continuous Creation Theory of cosmology. As we all know, that notion has been defunct for many years. The overwhelming weight of evidence unquestionably favors the Big Bang.”

Clifford spread his arms wide in an attitude of helplessness.

“I know that. All I can say is, the mathematics works. I’m not an astronomer or a cosmologist. I’m not even an experimental scientist. I’m a theoretician. I don’t know how conclusive the evidence for the Big Bang is, or if there are alternative explanations for some parts. That’s why I need to publish this paper. I need to attract the attention of specialists in other areas.”

The string of admissions gave Edwards the moment he was looking for, a moment of weakness that could be exploited. It was time to move in the hatchet man. He half-turned toward Corrigan.

“What do you have to say, Miles?”

Miles Corrigan’s official title at ACRE was that of Liaison Director, a euphemism for watchdog. Aloof from the hierarchy of line managers who reported to Edwards, Corrigan took his orders directly

from the Technical Coordination Bureau in Washington, an office of the Pentagon that provided a rationalizing interface between the Defense Department and the various centers of government-directed scientific research. Through the Bureau, the activities of practically all the nation's scientists were controlled and coordinated, both among themselves and with the activities of the other allies of the Western Democracies. The payer of pipers was firmly calling the tune.

Corrigan's job was to make sure that the right things got done and got done on time; that was the publicized part anyway. The unpublicized part involved simply maintaining a political presence – a constant reminder that whatever things went on in the day-to-day world of ACRE, they were always part of and subordinate to the grand design of loftier and more distant architects. His brief was to watch for, track down, and exorcise “counterproductive influences,” which meant wrong attitudes, uninformed opinions, and anything else of that nature that threatened to affect adversely or undermine the smooth attainment of the Establishment's assigned objectives. Corrigan could track a subversive rumor back to its source with all the skill and tenacity of an epidemiologist tracing an outbreak of typhoid to its prime carrier. To avoid any witch hunts, it was safer just to say the kind of things you were supposed to say, or at best, not to say the kind of things you weren't. The scientists at ACRE called him the Commissar.

By temperament and background he was well qualified for the job. After walking through a first class honors degree in law at Harvard, he had set up a lucrative practice in Washington, specializing in defending the cases of errant politicians – at which he had demonstrated a prodigious skill. In the course of a few years he had incurred the lifelong indebtedness of a long list of fixers and string pullers – the only kind of friends that meant anything on his scale of values – and their tokens of gratitude soon added up to a permanent end to all of life's potential financial problems.

He married the daughter of a senator who had made his first million in a series of clandestine arms deals that had involved the offloading of whole ship-loads of substandard ammunition on unsuspecting recipients in Burma and Malaysia – or so it was said. The allegations of the senator's involvement were never proved after becoming bogged down over a legal technicality. Miles Corrigan had seen to that.

Through the influence of his father-in-law and the goodwill of a number of friends with the right contacts, he entered government service at the right level to further his ambitions. His assignment to ACRE represented the final stage of his grooming before he made his debut on the international political scene. He had made it while still in his prime and was all set to fly high.

He took the cue, sensing a turkey being set up for the kill. When he spoke, his voice was icy and menacing, like the hiss of a cobra measuring its distance. “I'm not interested in k-spaces, hi-spaces, or any of the other buzz-phrases. If all this boils down to saying that you've got something that serves the national interest, then tell us about it. If you haven't, then why are you wasting our time?”

He confronted Clifford with the sneering, unblinking stare that had destroyed innumerable confused and hostile witnesses. His eyes were mocking, inviting the scientist to court disaster if he dared; at the same time they were insistent, demanding an immediate reply. He caught Clifford completely unprepared.

“But... that's not the point. This is...” Clifford was surprised to hear himself stumbling for the right word. Even as he spoke he realized he was on the wrong foot and walking straight into the trap, but it was too late. “We're talking about fundamental knowl —”

“Will it help us kill Commies?” Corrigan cut him short.

“No, but...”

“Will it help stop Commies from killing us?”

“No... I don't know... Maybe, someday...”

“Then why are you fooling around with it? How much time and resources has all this stuff taken up? What effect has all this had on the work you're paid to be doing? Massey describes it as a hobby but I don't believe it's quite as simple as that. I've checked the amount of computer usage you've logged over the past six months and I've checked the current status of the projects you're supposed to be working on. They're all way behind schedule. So, where's all the computer time going?”

“I don't suppose Einstein had the A-bomb in mind when he developed special relativity,” Clifford retorted, ducking the feint and walking straight into the uppercut.

“Einstein!” Corrigan repeated the word for the benefit of the jury. “He's telling us he's another Einstein. Is that right, Dr. Clifford – you consider yourself to be on a par with Einstein?”

“I didn't say anything of the kind, and you damn well know I didn't.” Clifford had recovered sufficiently to return Corrigan's look with a glare that could only be described as murderous. He knew that he was being drawn on to Corrigan's home ground. Somehow he didn't really care much anymore.

“You're saying that we ought to allow you to dabble around with anything that takes your fancy and at whatever expense, simply in case you happen to hit upon something useful. Is that how we're supposed to preserve the security of the West? Doesn't the concept of organized professional objectivity mean anything to you people? How long do we have to protect you and the freedom that you're always talking about before you wake up to reality?”

Edwards stared uncomfortably at the table, having joined Massey in abdication. It was all up to Corrigan now.

“This isn't some kind of philosopher's utopia where anybody is owed the right to any living life he chooses,” Corrigan continued. “It's a dog-eat-dog jungle; the strong survive and the weak go to the wall. To stay strong we have to get our priorities straight. Your priorities are all screwed up. Now you're asking us to follow suit and compound the offense by approving it.”

He took a long, deep breath for effect. “No way. There's no way I'm going to tell Professor Edwards to give a carte blanche for even more time-wasting and misuse of funds and resources.”

Actually, Corrigan couldn't tell Edwards to do anything. His use of the word was deliberate, however, serving as a gentle reminder of his own power, if not authority, at ACRE. Edwards didn't argue the point. He knew that Corrigan's reports back to the Bureau would have a lot to do with whether he ever moved on to become chief at ACRE or something similar, or whether he ended up running a backwater missile test range on the northern coast of Baffin Island.

When the victim has been battered to a pulp and stripped of every shred of dignity, he becomes highly suggestible and will respond eagerly to even a slight gesture of friendship. Prison guards have been well versed in the technique throughout history. And Corrigan understood psychology well; he knew what made people tick all right.

His tone softened a fraction. “Everyone's out of step except you, Dr. Clifford. We're all a team here, trying to do a good job. Why make it difficult? Once you make the effort to fit in, you might find that life's not really that bad.

“Don't you feel you owe it to this country and all it stands for – the way of life we all believe in? Isn't it worth a few sacrifices to protect all that? Right now half the world out there is sitting around

waiting for us to ease up for just one second so they can blow us all off the face of this planet. Are you just going to sit there and let it happen? Do you want them to come walking in here without having to lift a finger?" Corrigan finished on a note that oozed all-in-it-togetherness. "Or are you gonna join the team, do your share, and help us go out there and zap those bastards?"

Clifford had turned white. Corrigan and his propaganda epitomized everything abhorrent in the world that was going insane. And now he was expecting to enlist Clifford in the ranks of the brainwashed millions who had toiled and bled and died believing that line ever since the world began. There would always be Corrigan's to ride on the backs of the masses – for as long as there were willing backs to carry them. Clifford's voice fell to a whisper as he fought to control the anger that boiled inside, churning his stomach and bubbling up into the back of his throat like waves of nausea.

"I'm not interested in zapping anybody, mister... not for you or for whatever you represent. Your system put me here; don't you tell me I'm screwed up now because I don't belong. Don't you tell me I owe anything to your system to help straighten out its mess. Save your garbage for the morons. Without waiting for a reply he got up and strode toward the door. Edwards and Massey remained silent, staring fixedly at the table. If Brad was flushing himself down the tubes, they weren't going to get caught in any of the backslashes.

Clifford, still shaking when he slammed the door of his office behind him five minutes later, began hammering a brief code into the keyboard of the desk terminal. At least he had tried the official channel. The outcome hadn't really been a surprise; that was why he had already prepared a long file in the data bank, ready for immediate transmission.

A woman's face appeared on the screen. "Message Center. Can I help you?"

"I need an immediate outgoing channel. The destination code is 090909-73785-21318."

"Triple-09 prefix is extraterrestrial, sir – for the lunar bases."

"I know."

"I'm sorry, but those channels need special authorization from grade 5 or over. Do you have a clearance reference?"

All the frustrations of the last half-hour boiled over. "Listen, damn it, and store this on file. This is absolutely top priority. I take full responsibility. I don't care if you need clearance from the President, the Pope, or God Almighty himself. GET ME THAT DAMN CHANNEL!"

Chapter 3

“... Proxima Centauri, 4.3 light-years away from us, has at least three planets of significant size, the largest of them having a mass of 0.0018 times that of the sun and an orbital period of 137 years. Slightly farther away, at 6.0 light-years, Barnard’s Star again has at least three planetary companions, B1, B2, and B3, of masses 0.0011, 0.0008, and 0.0003, periods 26, 12, and 14.3 years respectively; we strongly suspect others as well. Beyond these systems, the stars Lalande 2115A, 61Cygni, and Krug 60A, to name just three, also possess planets that have been positively observed and whose major properties have been accurately measured. In fact, more than thirty planets of stars other than our own sun are known to exist within a radius of twenty light-years from us.”

Professor Heinrich Zimmermann pointed out the last item on the list and then turned away from the three-dimensional model of the local regions of the galaxy to look directly into the camera. The camera trolley rolled noiselessly forward to close in on his tall, immaculately dressed figure, dignified by a lean, angular build and a crown of silvery hair.

“Thus some of our work here at the Joliot-Curie Observatories on Lunar Farside has added immensely to our knowledge of the Sun’s neighboring planetary systems. If these statistics are extrapolated to cover the whole galaxy, they indicate the existence of billions of planets. If only one in every thousand were to be similar to Earth in temperature and surface chemistry, we are still left with millions of worlds on which life as we know it could emerge. Furthermore, as you saw earlier, the emergence of life is not, as was once supposed, a billion-to-one freak occurrence; as the experiments of such scientists as Okoyaku and Skovensen have shown, it is virtually a certainty once the right conditions are established.” He stepped aside to allow a zoom-in for a close-up of the model while he delivered his final words. “I will leave you to draw your own conclusions as to the implications of these statements. Despite the exciting things that we have seen in this program, it could be that the real excitement is yet to come.”

“Okay. Cut it there.” The floor director’s voice sounded from the wall of darkness behind the audience lights. “That was fine. Take a short break, but be ready for another take of the first part of sequence in five minutes. Harry and Mike, don’t go rushing off anywhere – I need to talk to you for a second.”

The lights dimmed and a hubbub of voices broke out on all sides. The floor around Zimmermann was transformed into an arena of bustling technicians. He paused to allow his eyes to readjust to the comparative gloom of normal lighting, acknowledged the thanks from the film team, and moved away from all the activity to stand by one of the dome’s viewing ports. While he dabbed his forehead lightly with a pocket handkerchief, he stared silently out at the harsh, bleak landscape of the lunar surface.

Beyond the litter of assorted engineering and latticework that marked the environs of the observatory complex and base, the soft, rolling dunes of ash-gray dust lay seared beneath the direct rays of lunar noon, pitted here and there by the ink-black shadow of the occasional crag or boulder. Above the featureless horizon, a million blazing jewels lay scattered on a carpet of velvet infinity. The Joliot-Curie was without exception the loneliest center of human habitation in the universe. Herd shielded by the body of the Moon itself from Earth’s incessant outpouring of electronic caterwauling, gigantic radio dishes listened for the whisperings that brought the secrets of the cosmos; unhampered by any atmosphere and all but free of the weight-induced distortions that had crippled their Earth-bound predecessors, enormous optical telescopes probed the very limits of the observable universe. The Joliot-Curie observatory complex was distant; it was isolated, but it was free – a surviving outpost of unfettered science where the pursuit of knowledge constituted its own ends.

A shadow from behind him darkened the wall by the side of the viewing port. Zimmermann turned to find Gus Craymer standing there; Craymer was Assistant Producer of *Exploding Horizons* – the documentary they were making. Craymer peered past the professor to take in the scene from the outside and pulled a face.

“How come you guys don’t go nuts in this place?” he asked. Zimmermann followed his gaze, and then turned back smiling faintly.

“Oh, you would be surprised, Mr. Craymer. The solitude and peace can be quite stimulating. It really depends on what you see when you look out there. Remember the rhyme about the two men at the prison bars? I wonder sometimes that you don’t all go nuts on Earth.”

“You see stars, huh,” Craymer grinned. “Literally.” He indicated the far side of the room with a nod of his head. “There’s coffee going over there if you’d like some.” Zimmermann folded the handkerchief and replaced it in his breast pocket.

“Thank you, no. I’ll enjoy some in comfort when we have completely finished. How near the end are we?”

Craymer consulted the typed schedule that he was holding.

“Well, there’s some outside shooting to be done now that the Sun’s at the right angle... some close-ups of instruments to go with the commentary we recorded yesterday. Lemme see now, where are your parts...? Here we are – there’s only one more shot that involves you and that’s coming up right now. That’ll be a retake of the beginning of sequence 5... the one where you talk about radiation from black holes.”

“Ah, yes. Very good.”

Craymer closed the folder and turned to look out across the floor with Zimmermann.

“I guess you’ll be glad to get back to your work without this bedlam going on all the time,” he said. “You’ve been very patient and cooperative while we’ve been here. I’d like you to know that all the people on the team appreciate it.”

“Quite the contrary, Mr. Craymer,” Zimmermann replied. “It has been my pleasure. The public has paid for everything here, including my salary; they have a right to be kept informed of what we are doing and why. Besides, anything that popularizes the true nature of science is worth a little time and trouble, don’t you think?”

Craymer smiled ruefully as he recalled the problems that they had encountered with pet bureaucrats in Washington six months before, when they had tried to put a documentary together on spacecraft navigation and propulsion systems. In the end they’d had to abandon the project, since what was left after the censoring wouldn’t have made a lesson fit for elementary-school students.

“I wish more people thought that way these days,” he said. “They’re all going paranoid back home.”

“I can well imagine,” Zimmermann replied, moving aside to make room for a technician who was positioning a spotlight according to directions being shouted from across the room.

As they began threading their way toward the area where the next shooting sequence would take place, Craymer asked: “How long have you been up here now?”

“Oh, eighteen months or more, I suppose... although I do visit Earth from time to time. It may sound strange but I really miss very little. My work is here and, as I said a moment ago, the environment is stimulating. We have no interruptions and are largely left free of interference of any

kind.”

“Must be nice to be able to do your own thing,” Craymer agreed. “You steer clear of all the sordid political stuff then, huh?”

“Yes, I suppose we do... but it has not always been so. I have held a number of government scientific positions, over several years... in Germany you understand, before the formation of U. Europe. However...” Zimmermann sighed, “when it became apparent that official support would be progressively restricted to activities of the kind in which neither my conscience nor my interests made me wish to participate, I resigned and joined the International Scientific Foundation. It is completely autonomous, you see, being funded entirely from private and voluntary sources.”

“Yeah, I know. I’m surprised the USE government didn’t try and make things difficult... or maybe you don’t push around easy?”

Zimmermann smiled and scratched an eyebrow.

“I think it was more a question of persuading them that neither I nor my particular kind of knowledge would have been of very much use to them,” he said.

Craymer reflected that the more he saw of life, the more he became convinced that the quality of modesty was the preserve solely of the truly great men that he happened to meet. The amplified voice of the floor director boomed around the room, curtailing their conversation.

“All right, everybody. In your places for the sequence 5 retake now. This will be the last one today. Let’s make it good.” The murmuring died away and the arc lights came on to flood a backdrop set up against one wall. To the right of the backdrop, banks of instrument panels and consoles carried a colorful array of blinking lights and display screens. Zimmermann moved forward from the jumble of cameras, microphone booms, chairs, and figures, to stand in the semicircle of light in front of the consoles. A short distance to his right, Martin Borel, compere of the documentary, took his position in front of the backdrop.

The floor director’s voice came again. “Mart – this time, start moving to your left as soon as you say ‘... the most perplexing phenomena known to man.’ Take it at the same speed as last time – the way the professor will appear on camera just as you introduce him. Okay?”

“Sure thing,” Borel acknowledged.

“Professor?”

“Yes?”

“When you refer to the equipment behind you for the first time, do you think you could move back for about five seconds so that we can pan in on it, please? Then close back in with Mart and resume the dialogue.”

“Certainly.”

“Thank you. Okay – roll it.” Borel straightened up and assumed a posture with his hands high, near his shoulders. The clapperboard echoed. “Action.”

“The black hole,” Borel began, speaking in the firm, resonant tones of the professional. “Strange regions of space where matter and energy are lost forever without trace, and time itself stands still. We have traced the history of black holes through from early speculations all the way to the confirmed realities of the present day. Scientists can now draw for us an incredible picture of the bewildering laws of an unfamiliar physics, that dominate these mysterious bodies. But despite all this new knowledge, unexpected riddles continue to emerge. The black hole is still, and will continue for a long

time to be, one of the most perplexing phenomena known to man.”

Borel began walking slowly across the front of the backdrop toward Zimmermann.

“To give you an idea of the kinds of riddle that investigators into black-hole physics are meeting today, let me introduce Professor Heinrich Zimmermann of ISF, Director of Joliot-Curie and perhaps one of the most distinguished physical astronomers of our time.

“Professor, the receiver that we saw outside is collecting radiation from the vicinity of a black hole in space. Down here you are analyzing the information that the computers have extracted from that radiation. Could you summarize for us, please, what you are finding and what new questions you are being forced to ask?”

By now Zimmermann had been through this routine three times.

“The receiver is at this moment trained on a binary system known as Cygnus X-1,” he replied. “A binary system is one in which two stars are formed very close to one another and orbit about a common center of mass under their mutual gravitational coupling. Most binary systems comprise two ordinary stars, each of which conforms to one of the standard classifications. Some binaries, however, contain only one normal, visible star, the second body being invisible. The so-called dark companion emits no light but can be detected by its gravitational influence on the visible star. In many cases, these are known to be neutron stars as described earlier in the program. In a number of confirmed instances, however, collapse of the companion body has continued beyond the point at which a neutron star is formed, which results in the condition of ultimate degeneracy of matter – a black hole. Cygnus X-1 is an example of precisely this.”

“In other words, you have an ordinary star and a black hole orbiting each other as a stable system,” Borel interjected.

“That is so. However, the system is not quite permanently stable. You see, the gravitational attraction of the black hole is strong enough for it to draw off gaseous material from the surface of the star. The system thus comprises three parts essentially: the visible star, the black hole, and a filament of stellar material that flows out of the former into the latter, connecting them rather like an umbilical cord. The filament spirals around the black hole as the particles contained in it acquire energy and accelerate down the gravitational gradient. In a somewhat simplified way, you might picture it as bathwater spiraling down into the drain.” He paused, allowing Borel to pose the next question.

“But straightforward as this might sound, it is producing results that you are having difficulty explaining. Isn’t that so?”

“Very true,” Zimmermann agreed. “You see, the matter that is being drawn off of the visible star is extremely hot and therefore in a highly ionized state. In other words, it is made up of strongly charged particles. Now, charged particles in motion give rise to electromagnetic radiation. Our calculations predict that a characteristic spectrum of broad-band radiation, extending up into the x-ray frequencies, should be observable as a halo around the black hole. Indeed, we do observe radiation of the general nature that we would expect. Precise analysis of the spectrum and energy distribution, however, reveals a pattern that is not at all in accordance with theory.”

Zimmermann moved to one side and gestured toward the instrumentation panels behind them. “The equipment that you see here is being used for this kind of investigation. From here we can monitor and control the receiving equipment, direct the computers, and observe what they are doing.

“Many years of observations and measurements have enabled us to determine the characteristics of several black-hole binaries with sufficient accuracy for us to compute precisely a mathematical

model that should give us the pattern of radiation that each should produce.” He moved forward to indicate one of the monitor screens on the console. “In fact, this is a picture of the theoretical distribution pattern computed for Cygnus X-1.” The screen showed a wavy green line, annotated with captions and symbols; it rose and fell in a series of peaks, valleys, and plateaus, like a cross-sectional view of a mountain range.

“This is what we should expect to see. But when we analyze the data actually received from Cygnus X1...” he touched a button to conjure up a second, red curve, “we see that there is a significant discrepancy.” The screen confirmed his words. The red curve was of a different shape and largely displaced above the green curve; only in one or two places did the green rise high enough for the two to nearly touch.

“Both curves are to the same scale and plotted from the same origin,” Zimmermann commented. “If our model were correct, they would be approximately the same. It means that the amount of radiation actually measured is much greater than that which can be accounted for by theory.”

“Actual measurement shows more radiation than predicted,” Borel repeated. “Where does this excess radiation come from?”

“That, of course, is what intrigues us,” Zimmermann replied. “You see, there are only three objects in the vicinity – the star, the filament, and the black hole. We are quite confident that we know enough about the physics of ordinary matter – as exemplified by the star and the filament – to exclude them as possible sources. That leaves only the black hole itself. But how can a black hole produce radiation? That is the problem confronting us. You see, all our theories of physics, based on general relativity, tell us that nothing – matter, energy, radiation, information, or any kind of influence – can escape from a black hole. So how can the black hole be responsible for the extra energy that we detect as radiation? But there is nothing else there for it to come from.

“The answer to this question could have very far-reaching consequences.” The camera pulled back for a close-up. “Let us ask the question: What happens to matter when it falls into a black hole? We know that it disappears completely from the universe of which we have any knowledge. Logically, one must conclude that it exists thereafter either in some other part of our own universe or in some entirely different universe. There would appear to be no other possibility. If you reflect for a moment on the implications of what I have just said, you will realize why it is that we get excited at the discovery of what could turn out to be a process operating in the reverse direction. Something that contemporary theory declares impossible is being observed to happen. Behind it, we see hints of a whole new realm of physical phenomena and laws, of which we must at present admit an almost total ignorance. And yet we have strong reasons to suspect that within this mysterious realm, things that we consider to be impossible could turn out to be commonplace.”

Borel waited a few seconds to allow the professor’s words time to take effect.

“I find this absolutely fascinating, and I’m sure the viewers do too,” he finally said. “There are one or two questions about what you’ve said that I’d like to come back to in a moment. But before we do that, for the benefit of the more technically minded among those watching, I wonder if you would describe in a little more detail the exact function of each of the pieces of equipment that you have assembled behind us here.”

“Okay. Cut.” The director’s voice called again. “That was good. We’ll splice the rest of take 2 out from there to complete that sequence. That’s all for today, everybody. I’d like all the people who are involved in tomorrow’s outside shooting to stay on for a schedule update. Everyone else is free to enjoy the J-C nightlife. Thanks. See you all at dinner.”

The arc lights went out and Zimmermann spent a few minutes discussing technical details with the direction team. Then he left the room, traced his way through to the door that gave access to one of the interdome connecting tubes, and followed the tube through to Maindome, which stood adjacent. From there he descended by elevator to emerge four levels below ground in the corridor that led to his office suite. His secretary was watering the plants in the outer office when he entered.

“Hi,” she greeted with a freckled grin over her shoulder. “All through?”

“Hello, Marianne. Yes. I must confess I’m not terribly sorry either.” He looked at what she was doing. “My goodness, look at the size of those plants already. I’m sure that even your fingers can’t handle that green. It must be the gravity.” Casting a casual eye over the notes and papers on her desk, he inquired, “Anything interesting?” She turned and creased her face into a frown of concentration.

“Mellows called and said that the replacement photomultiplier has been fitted in C dome – he said you’d know what it was all about. Pierre’s come down with a bug and is in sickbay; he won’t be able to make the meeting tomorrow.”

“Oh, dear. Nothing serious, I hope.”

“I don’t think so. I think it was something he ate. Doc said he looked distinctly hydroponic.”

“Uh huh.”

“And there was this long message that came in, addressed to you by name... from a Dr. Clifford from some place in New Mexico.”

“Clifford...? Clifford...?” Zimmermann shook his head slowly. “Who is he?”

“Oh.” Marianne looked surprised. “I assumed you knew him. I took a hard copy of it... here.” She lifted a thick wad of pages out of a tray and passed them across. “Came in about an hour or more ago.”

Zimmermann ruffled curiously through the sheets of mathematical equations and formulae, then turned back to the top sheet to study the heading.

“Dr. Bradley Clifford,” he read aloud. “No. I’m sure I have never heard of him. I’ll take it though and have a look at it later. In the meantime, would you get Sam Carson at Tycho on the screen for me please. I’d like to check the schedule for incoming flights from Earth.”

“Will do,” she replied as the professor disappeared through the door into the inner office.

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