



**EIGHT KEYS
TO EDEN**

MARK CLIFTON

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NOVELS

Eight Keys To Eden
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NON-FICTION BOOK

Opportunity Unlimited

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* *In collaboration with Frank Riley*

** *In collaboration with Alex Apostolides*

**EIGHT KEYS
TO EDEN**

by
Mark Clifton

To

Charles Steinberg

who made writing possible for me

SEVEN DOORS TO SEVEN ROOMS OF THOUGHT

1 Accept the statement of Eminent Authority without basis, without question.

2 Disagree with the statement without basis, out of general contrariness.

3 Perhaps the statement is true, but what if it isn't? How then to account for the phenomenon?

4 How much of the statement rationalizes to suit man's purpose that he and his shall be ascendant at the center of things?

5 What if the minor should become major, the recessive dominant, the obscure prevalent?

6 What if the statement were reversible, that which is considered effect is really cause?

7 What if the natural law perceived in one field also operates unperceived in all other phases of science? What if there be only one natural law manifesting itself, as yet, to us in many facets because we cannot apperceive the whole, of which we have gained only the most elementary glimpses, with which we can cope only at the crudest level?

**And are those still other doors, yet undefined,
on down the corridor?**

1

One minute after the regular report call from the planet Eden was overdue, the communications operator summoned his supervisor. His finger hesitated over the key reluctantly, then he gritted his teeth and pressed it down. The supervisor came boiling out of his cubicle, half-running down the long aisle between the forty operators hunched over their panels.

"What is it? What is it?" he quarreled, even before he came to a stop.

"Eden's due. Overdue." The operator tried to make it laconic, but it came out sullen.

The supervisor rubbed his forehead with his knuckles and punched irritably at some buttons on an astrocalculator. An up-to-the-second star map lit up the big screen at the end of the room. He didn't expect there to be any occlusions to interfere with the communications channel. The astrophysicists didn't set up reporting schedules to include such blunders. But he had to check.

There weren't.

He heaved a sigh of exasperation. Trouble always had to come on his shift, never anybody else's.

"Lazy colonists probably neglecting to check in on time," he rationalized cynically to the operator. He rubbed his long nose and hoped the operator would agree that's all it was.

The operator looked skeptical instead.

Eden was still under the first five-year test. Five-year experimental colonists were arrogant, they were zany, they were a lot of things, some unprintable, which qualified them for being test colonizers and nothing else apparently. They were almost as much of a problem as the Extrapolators.

But they weren't lazy. They didn't forget.

"Some fool ship captain has probably messed up communications by inserting a jump band of his own." The supervisor hopefully tried out another

idea. Even to him it sounded weak. A jump band didn't last more than an instant, and no ship captain would risk his license by using the E frequency, anyway.

He looked hopefully down the long room at the bent heads of the other operators at their panels. None was signaling an emergency to draw him away from this; give him an excuse to leave in the hope the problem would have solved itself by the time he could get back to it. He chewed on a knuckle and stared angrily at the operator who was sitting back, relaxed, looking at him, waiting.

"You sure you're tuned to the right frequency for Eden?" the supervisor asked irritably. "You sure your equipment is working?"

The operator pulled a wry mouth, shrugged, and didn't bother to answer with more than a nod. He allowed a slight expression of contempt for supervisors who asked silly questions to show. He caught the surreptitious wink of the operator at the next panel, behind the supervisor's back. The disturbance was beginning to attract attention. In response to the wink he pulled the dogged expression of the unjustly nagged employee over his features.

"Well, why don't you give Eden an alert, then!" the supervisor muttered savagely. "Blast them out of their seats. Make 'em get off their—their pants out there!"

The operator showed an expression which plainly said it was about time, and reached over to press down the emergency key. He held it down. Eleven light-years away, if one had to depend upon impossibly slow three-dimensional space time, a siren which could be heard for ten miles in Eden's atmosphere should be blaring.

The supervisor stood and watched while he transferred the gnawing at his knuckles to his fingernails.

He waited, with apprehensive satisfaction, for some angry colonist to come through and scream at them to turn off that unprintable-phrases siren. He braced himself and worked up some choice phrases of his own to scream back at the colonist for neglecting his duty—getting Extrapolation Headquarters here on Earth all worked up over nothing. He wondered if he dared threaten to send an Extrapolator out there to check them over.

He decided the threat would have no punch. An E would pay no attention to his recommendation. He knew it, and the colonist would know it too.

He began to wonder what excuse the colonist would have.

"Just wanted to see if you home-office boys were on your toes," the insolent colonist would drawl. Probably something like that.

He hoped the right words wouldn't fail him.

But there was no response to the siren.

"Lock the key down," he told the operator. "Keep it blasting until they wake up."

He looked down the room and saw that a couple of the near operators were now frankly listening.

"Get on with your work," he said loudly. "Pay attention to what you're recording."

It was enough to cause several more heads to raise.

"Now, now, now!" he chattered to the room at large. "This is nothing to concern the rest of you. Just a delayed report, that's all. Haven't you ever heard of a delayed report before?"

He shouldn't have asked that, because of course they had. It was like asking a mountain climber if he had ever felt a taut rope over the razor edge of a precipice suddenly go slack.

"But there's nothing any of you can do," he said. He tried to cover the plaintive note by adding, "And if you louse up your own messages ..." But he had threatened them so often that there was no longer any menace.

He spent the next ten minutes hauling out the logs of Eden to see if they'd ever been tardy before. The logs covered two and a fraction years, two years and four months. The midgit-idgit scanner didn't pick up a single symbol to show that Eden had been even two seconds off schedule. The first year daily, the second year weekly, and now monthly. There wasn't a single hiccough from the machine to kick out an Extrapolator's signal to watch for anything unusual.

Eden heretofore had presented about as much of an *outré* problem as an Iowa

cornfield.

"You're really sure your equipment is working?" he asked again as he came back to stand behind the operator's chair. "They haven't answered yet."

The operator shrugged again. It was pretty obvious the colonists hadn't answered. And what should he do about it? Go out there personally and shake his finger at them—naughty, naughty?

"Well why don't you bounce a beam on the planet's surface, to see?" the supervisor grumbled. "I want to see an echo. I want to see for myself that you haven't let your equipment go sour. Or maybe there's a space hurricane between here and there. Or maybe a booster has blown. Or maybe some star has exploded and warped things. Maybe ... Well, bounce it, man. Bounce it! What are you waiting for?"

"Okay, okay!" the operator grumbled back. "I was waiting for you to give the order." He grimaced at the operator behind the supervisor. "I can't just go bouncing beams on planets if I happen to be in the mood."

"Now, now. Now, now. No insubordination, if you please," the supervisor cautioned.

Together they waited, in growing dread, for the automatic relays strung out through space to take hold, automatically calculating the route, set up the required space-jump bands. It was called instantaneous communication, but that was only relative. It took time.

The supervisor was frowning deeply now. He hated to report to the sector chief that an emergency had come up which he couldn't handle. He hated the thought of Extrapolators poking around in his department, upsetting the routines, asking questions he'd already asked. He hated the forethought of the admiration he'd see in the eyes of his operators when an E walked into the room, the eagerness with which they'd respond to questions, the thrill of merely being in the same room.

He hated the operators, in advance, for giving freely of admiration to an E that they withheld from him. He allowed himself the momentary secret luxury of hating all Extrapolators. Once upon a time, when he was a kid, he had dreamed of becoming an E. What kid hadn't? He'd gone farther than the wish. He'd tried. And had been rebuffed.

"Clinging to established scientific beliefs," the tester had told him with the inherent, inescapable superiority of a man trying to be kind to a lesser intelligence, "is like being afraid to jump off a precipice in full confidence that you'll think of something to save yourself before you hit bottom."

It might or might not have been figurative, but he had allowed himself the pleasure of wishing the tester would try it.

"To accept what Eminent Authority says as true," the tester had continued kindly, "wouldn't even qualify you for being a scientist. Although," he added hopefully, "this would not bar you from an excellent career in engineering."

It was a bitter memory of failure. For if you disbelieved what science said was true, where were you? And if it might not be true, why was it said? Even now he shuddered at the chaos he would have to face, live with. No certainties on which to stand.

He washed the memory out of his thought, and concentrated on the flashing pips that chased themselves over the operator's screen. There was nothing wrong with the equipment. Nothing wrong with the communication channels between Eden and Earth.

"Blasted colonists," the supervisor muttered. "Instead of a beam on their planet, I'd like to bounce a rock on their heads. I'll bet they've let all the sets at their end get out of order."

He knew it was a foolish statement, even if the operator's face hadn't told him so. Any emergency colonist, man or woman—and there were fifty of them on Eden—could build a communicator. That was regulation.

"You sure there haven't been any emergency calls from them?" he asked the operator with sudden suspicion. "You're not covering up some neglect in not notifying me? If you're covering up, you'd better tell me now. I'll find out. It'll all come out in the investigation, and ..."

The operator turned around and looked at him levelly. He looked him over, with open contempt, from bald head to splayed feet. Then he coolly turned his back. There was a limit to just how much a man could stand, even to hold a job at E Headquarters.

It was about time the supervisor got somebody with brains onto the job. The sector chief should be called immediately. Supervisors were supposed to have

enough brains to think of something so obvious as that. That much brains at least.

2

The first reaction of the sector chief to the dreaded words "delayed report" was a shocked negation, an illusory belief that it couldn't happen to him.

To the intense annoyance of the communications supervisor, his first act was to rush down to communications and go through all the routines for rousing the colonists the supervisor had tried. His worry was mounting so rapidly that he hardly noticed the resigned expression of the operator who knew he would have to go through all these useless motions again and again before it was all over, and somebody did something.

"Well," the chief said to the supervisor. "It's my problem now." He sighed, and unconsciously squared his shoulders.

"Yes, Chief Hayes," the supervisor agreed quickly. Perhaps too quickly, with too much relief? "Well, that is, I mean ..." his voice trailed off. After all, it was.

"You understand my check of your routines was no reflection on you or your department," Hayes said diplomatically. "It's a heavy responsibility to alert E.H.Q., pull the scientists off who knows what delicate, critical work—maybe even hope to get the attention of an E—all that. I had to make sure, you know."

"Of course, Chief Hayes," the supervisor said, and relaxed some of his resentment. "Serious matter," he chattered. "Disgrace if an E, without half trying, put his finger on our oversight. We all understand that." He tried to include the nearby operators, his boys, in his eager agreement, but they were all busy showing how intensely they had to concentrate on their work.

"That's probably all it is—an oversight," Hayes said with unconvincing reassurance; then, at the hurt look on the supervisor's face, added, "Beyond our control here, of course. Something it would take at least a scientist to

spot, something we couldn't be expected ... What I mean is, we shouldn't get alarmed until we know, for sure. And—ah—keep it confidential."

"Of course, Chief Hayes," the supervisor said in a near whisper. He looked meaningfully around at the room of operators, but did manage not to put his finger to his lips. Those who were observing out of the corners of their eyes were grateful for at least that.

On his way back to his own office Chief William Hayes reflected that the bit about keeping it confidential was on the corny side. Within fifteen minutes he'd start spreading it all over E.H.Q., himself. Every scientist, every lab assistant would know it. Every clerk, every janitor would know it. E.H.Q. would have to work full blast all night long, and some of the lesser personnel had homes down in Yellow Sands at the foot of the mountain.

These would be calling their husbands and wives, telling them not to fix dinner, not to worry if they didn't come home all night. No matter how guarded, the news would leak out, the word spread, and the newscast reporters would pick it up for the delectation of the public. Eden colony cut off from communication. Nobody knows ... Wonder ... Fear ... Delicious ... Exciting....

Or was this the kind of thinking that had kept him from qualifying as an E? What was it the examiner had asked? "Mr. Hayes, why do you feel it is all right for you to view, to read, to know—but that others should be protected from seeing, reading, knowing? What are these sterling qualities you have that make it all right for you to censor what would not be right for others?"

He abruptly brought his mind back to the present. Perhaps he'd first better prepare a news statement before he did anything else, something noncommittal, reassuring. No point in getting the populace stirred up.

As he sat down behind his desk, a big man in a brown suit, natural iron-gray hair, a calm and administrative face, he began to realize that for the next twenty-four hours, at least, he would be in the spotlight. Well, he'd give a good account of himself. Demonstrate that he had an executive capacity beyond the needs of his present job. More than a mere requisition signer, interoffice memo initialer.

For one thing the scientists would give him trouble. If he had been deeply

hurt that they thought he couldn't open up his mind enough to become an E, what about scientists whose limits were reached still farther along? He must remember to keep his temper, use persuasion, maybe kid them a little. The blasted experts were almost as bad as E's—worse, in a way, because the E didn't have to remind anybody of his dignity, or how important the work was he was doing.

But then, you never asked an E to drop what he was doing, and listen. You never asked an E to do anything. He either noticed and was interested, or he didn't notice, or wasn't interested.

But nobody ever told an E that he must apply himself to a problem. Once a man became a full-fledged Extrapolator he was outside all law, all frameworks, all duty, all social mores. That was the essence of E science, that any requirement outside of his own making didn't exist. It had to be that way. That kind of mind could not tolerate barriers, but spent itself constantly in destroying them. Erect barriers of triviality, and it would waste its substance upon trivial matters. The only answer was to remove all possible barriers for the E, lest immersion in something trivial prevent that mind from seeking out a barrier to knowledge, a problem of significance.

But the scientists! Hayes sighed. If only the scientists wouldn't keep thinking they were cut from the same cloth as the E. They had to have restrictions, organization imposed upon them. Yes indeed!

They'd grumble at being taken away from their work to assemble a review of all the known facts about Eden—a dead issue as far as their own work was concerned, for Eden had been assayed and filed away as solved. They'd moan and groan about having to drag up the facts that had been analyzed and settled long ago.

He saw himself compared with the producer of a show, and theatrical performers didn't come any more temperamental than scientists. He'd be hearing about how much of their time he'd wasted for months to come. Every time any administrator asked why they hadn't produced whatever it was they were working on, it would be because Chief Hayes had interrupted them at the most crucial moment and they'd had to begin all over again.

Oh, they'd drag their heels, all right, and he'd have to remind them, tactfully, that their prime duty was to serve the Extrapolators; that they were employed

here only because someday, in some co-ordinate system, somebody might be able to supply a key fact that some E might want to know.

They'd ask him, slyly, what guarantee he had that any E would be listening if they did produce a review of the Eden complex, knowing he could give no such guarantee.

They'd drag their heels because, deep down, they carried a basic resentment against the E—because, experts though they were, each of them, somewhere along the line, had learned the bitter limits in his mind that prevented him from going on to become an E.

They'd drag their heels because the E's, each blasted one of them, would regard the absolutely true facts proved beyond question by science with an attitude of skepticism, temporarily accepting the uncontestably immutable as only provisionary, and probably quite wrong.

Oh, they'd grumble, and they'd drag their heels at first; but they would get into it. They'd get into it, not because the sector chief had babied them along, kidded them, coaxed them, but because, as surely as his name was Bill Hayes, some unprintable E would ask a question for which they had no answer. Or even worse, some question that made no sense, but left the scientist feeling that perhaps it should have!

That was the E brand of thinking which gave everybody trouble—and without which man could never have gone on creeping outward and outward among the stars. Every new planet, or subplanet, or sun or blasted asteroid seemed to call for some revision of known laws. Sometimes an entirely new co-ordinate system had to be resolved. Oh, science was easy, a veritable snap, while man crawled around on the muddy bottom of his ocean of air and concluded that throughout all the universe things must conform to his then notion of what they must be. As ignorant as a damned halibut must be of the works and thoughts of man.

And often the E was unable to resolve the co-ordinate system—which was simply a euphemistic way of saying that he didn't come back. And without him, man could go no farther. An E, therefore, was the rarest and most valuable piece of property in the universe. Whatever else man might be, he will go to any lengths to protect the value of his property.

All right, Bill, perhaps a part of that is true. But give the scientists their full due. They'd work with a will once they grew aware of the need of it, because they were just as concerned as anybody else with what might have happened to those colonists.

But first they would argue.

His secretary interrupted his thought by coming in from her own office. She had an inch-thick stack of midgit-idgit cards in her hand.

"Here's that batch of scientists who worked on the original Eden survey," she said.

"So many?" Hayes asked ruefully. "Maybe I'd better send an all-points bulletin."

"You're the boss," she said easily. "But if I know scientists, they don't read bulletins."

"Yeah, sure," he agreed. "You made sure this is everybody? Nobody is slighted? They'll scream like stuck pigs when I ask them, but they'll be even worse if I slight anybody by not asking."

"Double checked with Personnel's own midgit-idgit," she replied. "The machine says if anybody is left out, it's not its fault, that it would only be because we stupid humans forgot to inform it in the first place."

"Sometimes I think that machine complains more than people do," he answered. "Certainly it is a lot more insolent."

"Gets more work done, though," she said comfortably. "You want anything more?"

"Not right now."

"Buzz if you do. The idgit is working out the supply list for that new exploration ship, and it wants service, too," she reminded him. "It's worse than you are," she added.

He looked up at her familiarity with a twinkle.

"It can't fire you," he said softly.

"Oh?" she asked. "You think not? Just let me feed it a few wrong data and watch what happens to your li'l ol' lovin' secretary." She winked at him,

laughed, and went back to her office.

Sector Chief Hayes sighed, and pulled the stack of cards toward him. First he must sort them out according to protocol because his diplomacy wouldn't be worth the breath used in it if he called the wrong man first. At a glance he saw that the idgit had already sorted them correctly according to status.

"If you're so smart," he muttered to the absent machine, "why didn't you call them too?"

He picked up the first card, and dialed the man's intercom number. It would be like opening the lid of Pandora's box....

At that instant the red light of the E intercom flashed on. Hayes dropped the ordinary key back into its slot, and pushed the E key to open. He did not recognize the voice that came through.

"How soon," the voice asked, "will we be able to get into this Eden matter?"

"I'm setting it up now," he said quickly. "By tomorrow morning, surely. That is, if we haven't solved it ourselves. Something minor that wouldn't require an E."

"Morning will be fine. Two, possibly three Seniors will be available."

The red light flashed off, showing the connection had been broken. He sat back in his chair, suddenly conscious that his forehead was wet with sweat, that his shirt was sticking to his body. Not conscious that he was grinning joyfully.

Now let those pesty scientists challenge him with the question of whether any E's would be listening to their review. Two of 'em. Maybe three. Besides, of course, all the Juniors, the apprentices, the students.

He dialed the first scientist again. But this time he didn't mind it being Pandora's box. It was a terrible thing for a man to realize he could never be an E. The scientists had to take it out on somebody. He understood.

"Hello, Dr. Mille," he said cordially in answer to a gruff grunt. "This is Bill Hayes, of Sector Administration."

"All right! All right!" the voice answered testily. "What is it now?"