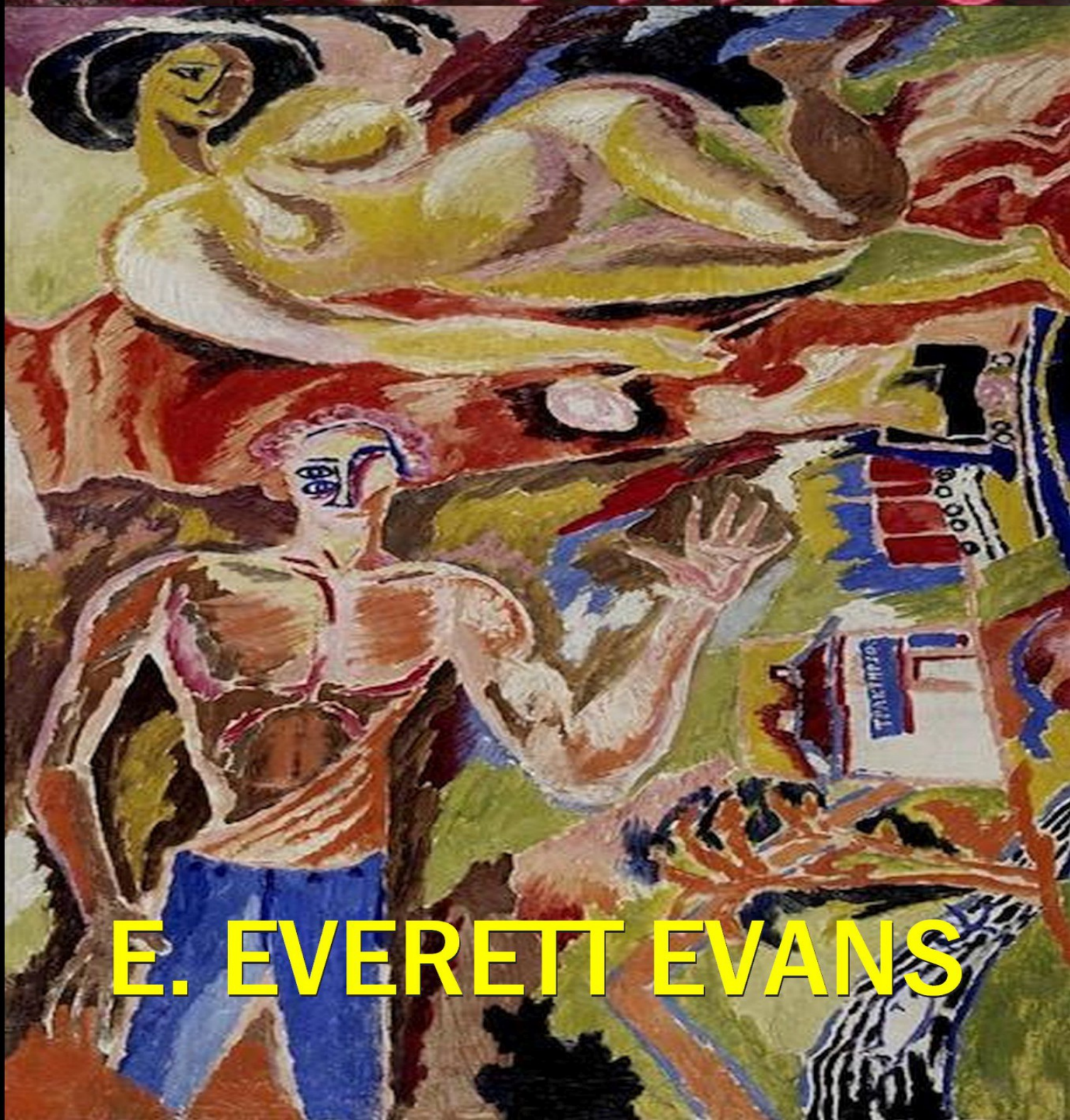


MAN OF MANY MINDS



E. EVERETT EVANS

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by **E. EVERETT EVANS**

GALAXY IN DANGER!

Somewhere, somehow, the first moves have been made—the pattern is beginning to emerge. Someone—or something—is on the way to supreme power over all the planets held by Man.

And the Inter-stellar Corps is helpless to meet the threat—no normal man can hope to penetrate the conspiracy.

But—the Corps has a man who isn't normal, a man with a very strange weapon...

...his mind.

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**Thelma,
a wedding anniversary present**

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Chapter 1

Cadet George Hanlon stood stiffly at attention. But as the long, long minutes dragged on and on, he found his hands, his spine and his forehead cold with the sweat of fear. He tried manfully to keep his eyes fixed steadily on that emotionless face before him, but found it almost impossible to do so.

Tension grew and grew and grew in the room until it seemed the very walls must bulge, or the windows burst to relieve the pressure. The cadet felt he could not stand another minute of it without screaming. Why didn't that monster say something? What kind of torture was this, anyway? And why was he here in the first place? He couldn't think of a single reg he had broken—yet why else would he be called before Admiral Rogers, the dread Commandant of Cadets?

In spite of his utmost efforts to stand eye to eye with the commandant, Hanlon couldn't keep his gaze steadily on that feared visage. His eyes insisted on straying, time after time, although he always forced them back. He caught glimpses of the dozens of communicator studs and plates on the huge metal desk. He saw the bit of scenery showing through the window. He noted the pictures of great Corps heroes that adorned the walls. In fact, he had to look at anything except those boring, impassive eyes fixed so steadily on his own face. If only he could gain such perfect control of his nerves. If only he knew what this was all about!

By the big wall chronom he saw he had already been standing there at rigid attention a full five minutes. The second hand crept around again. Six minutes! It dragged slowly around once again. Seven minutes.

Then the unbearable silence was mercifully broken by the admiral's voice.

"In some ways, Mister, you're quite a stupid young man," he said. "I'm inclined to be disappointed in you."

Hanlon gave a start of surprise, and forced himself to scrutinize more

carefully that enigmatic face.

"What ... what do you mean, sir?"

The stern eyes were still boring into his. But now the cadet thought he could detect a trace of secret amusement behind them.

"Why do you torture yourself like this? You know how to find out what it's all about."

There was a sinking feeling in George Hanlon's mind. Did that mean what he was afraid it meant?

He sent out a tentative feeler of thought toward the mind behind that expressionless face. He expected to find it difficult to do, because of long disuse of the faculty. But he was amazed both at the ease with which the technique returned to him, and with the feeling of warm friendliness he found in that mind—almost like a sort of fatherly pride.

He probed a bit deeper, and was aware of assurance that he had done nothing to merit punishment. Indeed, it seemed he could catch exactly the opposite feeling.

He must have shown his relief, for the commandant's stern face relaxed into a broad smile, and he lounged back in his big chair.

"That's better. At ease, and sit down."

Slowly, disbelieving the sudden change, the astonished young cadet gingerly sank onto the front edge of a chair. He had to, his legs were suddenly rubbery.

"I ... I don't understand at all, sir."

The admiral leaned forward and spoke impressively. "Do you think, Cadet Hanlon, that we would let any man get to within weeks of graduation without knowing all about him?"

The young man's eyes widened, and his hands clutched at his knees in an effort to keep them from shaking.

"Oh, yes, we know all about you, George Spencer Newton Hanlon," and the cadet's eyes opened even wider at that name. "We know about your talent for mind-reading as a child, and how you suppressed it as you grew older and

found how it got you into trouble. We know all about your father's disgrace and disappearance; your mother's death; your running away, and your adoption by the Hanlons, whose last name you assumed."

"How ... how'd you learn all that, sir?"

"The Corps has its ways. And that's why you're here now. Oh, all the Fifth Year Cadets will be interviewed by myself or my assistants this coming week, to determine their first assignment after graduation. But I called you in today for a very, very special reason. And your ability to read minds is part of it."

The cadet drew himself up stiffly. "I'm through with all that, sir, definitely!"

The commandant regarded him enigmatically for a moment. "Just what do you expect to do in the Corps, Mister?"

"Why, whatever I'm assigned to do, I suppose, sir. Or whatever I can do."

"And just how far will you go for the Corps?" The admiral leaned forward and eyed him critically.

"All the way, sir, of course."

"Don't you believe a Corpsman should use all his abilities in his service?" The question was barked at him.

"Certainly, sir." But his eyes showed he realized he had been trapped by that admission.

"You're one of the few persons known who have ever actually been able to read another's mind. That's important—very important—to the Corps. *It must be used!*"

Hanlon's eyes were still stormy, but he kept his lips tightly closed.

The commandant's face grew kindly again. "We know how it got you into trouble when you were a boy, because the other children resented it, and avoided or abused you for using it on them. But now it will be a great assistance to you—and to the Corps. We know you will use that talent wisely, for it has been proven time and again, by test after test, that you are scrupulously honest. You've lost your allowance several times in card games, when you could have read what cards your opponents held, and so won. You have let yourself fail on examination questions you did not know, when you

could have read the answers in your instructor's mind."

"No, not that, sir," Hanlon shook his head. "I never could read from a mind such specific information as answers to questions or to problems."

"I imagine that will come when you start using your talent maturely," Admiral Rogers shrugged indifferently. "But at the moment I want to talk very seriously about your assignment. First, however, I must have your most solemn oath never to reveal what I am about to tell you, for it is our most carefully-guarded secret."

"I swear by my mother's memory, sir, never to reveal anything I am told to keep confidential."

"Very well. I have been delegated by the High Command to ask you to join the Secret Service of the Inter-stellar Corps."

Cadet George Hanlon drew in a sharp, startled breath and half-rose from his chair. "The ... the Secret Service, sir? I didn't know there was one."

"I told you it was top secret," Admiral Rogers said impressively. "We believe no one knows anything about its existence outside of the membership of that service, and officers of the rank of Rear Admiral or above."

The young cadet sat silent, his eyes on the tips of his polished boots, as though to see reflected there the answer to this astounding new situation that had been slapped into his consciousness.

This was all so utterly unforeseen. He had dreamed of doing great deeds in the Corps, of course, but actually had never expected to be assigned to anything but routine work at first. His mind was a chaotic whirlpool of conjectures. How could he fit into such an organization? Why had he been selected? Surely, the fact that as a child he was supposed to have been a mind-reader wasn't enough ... or was it, from their standpoint?

After some time he looked up. "I don't know as I'd make a very good detective, sir."

Admiral Rogers threw back his head and laughed, breaking the tension. "I think, and so do the top men of the Secret Service, who have studied you thoroughly, that you will soon become one of its most useful members."

That was another shock, but out of it grew determination.

"Very well, sir, I'll try it."

"Good! But not 'try it,' Hanlon. Once you're in, it's for life. And there's one other thing I haven't told you yet. I couldn't, until after you had agreed to join. This may make you change your mind, which you are still at liberty to do."

The cadet's throat tightened, and he moistened his lips as he saw the admiral's face grow ominous.

"I want you to consider this very seriously," he said slowly, grimly, and Hanlon's probing mind caught the aura of importance in his manner. "Take your time, and figure carefully all the angles and connotations inherent in it, for it will not be an easy decision to make."

He paused impressively. "Here it is, cold! You'll have to be, apparently, dismissed from the Corps in disgrace. That is horribly harsh, we know," he added quickly, compassionately, as he saw the look of dismay that whitened the cadet's face. "But we have found over the years that it is the best way to make members of the SS most valuable to us. Every one of them has gone through the same thing, if that is any encouragement or consolation."

Young Hanlon's spirits sank to absolute nadir. "Not ... not even graduate?" he whispered, agonizedly.

"Not publicly, with your class, no. But you'll be given private graduation, for you'll still be a member of the Corps."

He was silent again to allow the young man to recover a bit, then continued in a fatherly voice. "We know it's a terrible price to ask any man to pay. It takes guts to withstand, publicly and willingly, the dishonor, the loss of friends and the good will of people who know you. It means life-long disgrace in the eyes of the public and those members of the Corps who have ever known you or will hear of you."

The blood drained from Hanlon's face, his breathing was quick and rasping. The admiral's heart went out to him in sympathy, but he had to keep on. Now, though, he tried to soften the blow.

"Yet there are rewards in honor from those who do know. There will come a deep satisfaction from the years of devoting your life and abilities to the tremendous service of maintaining peace and security for all mankind of the entire Federation of Planets. Actually, the SS does more to keep that peace

than all the rest of the Corps. So these things are, in the estimation of those who have gone through it, well worth any pain and humiliation they have to suffer."

His tone was so kind that Hanlon found a measure of comfort in the looks and attitude of the officer before him, now suddenly not a dread ogre, and martinet, but a kindly, fatherly, understanding friend.

George Hanlon sat with downcast eyes, thinking swiftly but more cogently than he had ever done before. He had come into this room still a boy despite his twenty-two years. Now, abruptly, he was roughly forced into manhood.

As such an adult, then, he quickly realized this was the crucial point in his life to date—probably in all the years to come. But to lose the respect and friendship of everyone he knew—he shuddered. To be despised, an outcast!

Yet Admiral Rogers said all the SS men had gone through it, and now felt it worth all the pain and disgrace, to be able to do the work they were doing.

He had been trained all his life, and especially in Corps school, to scan all available data for and against each problem that arose, and then make a decision quickly and intelligently.

He rose to his feet and straightened determinedly. "I'll still take it on, sir, if you and the general staff think I'm worthy and will be useful."

The admiral rose swiftly and came around the desk to grasp the cadet's hands in both of his. "I'm proud of you, my boy. It took real strength of character to make that decision. I'm sure you will never regret it, though there'll be moments when it will hurt to the pit of your soul, especially the first few days."

The cadet's eyes clouded again, and he shivered convulsively. "That part's got me in a blue funk, no fooling. Do you suppose I can take it, and not give the show away?"

Again the commandant's hearty, friendly laugh boomed out, filling the office with merriment and honest pride. "By Snyder, you will, Son, like a thoroughbred!" He went back behind that great desk, and was suddenly once more the strict disciplinarian. "Cadet Hanlon, 'ten-shun!" he barked.

The young man stood rigid.

"Raise your right hand. Do you swear before the Infinite Essence to uphold, with all your abilities, the Inter-Stellar Corps, and the laws and decisions of the Federated Planets?"

"On my honor, sir, and with God's help, I pledge allegiance to the Inter-Stellar Corps and to the people and governments of all the Federated Planets!"

Hanlon came to a punctilious salute, which Admiral Rogers returned as precisely before resuming his seat.

"Senior Lieutenant George Hanlon, at ease."

He grinned companionably at the young man's start of surprise. "Promotions are swift in the Secret Service, Hanlon. Now, go through that door. There you'll meet your immediate superior officer, who will give you instructions. And Hanlon, my sincerest personal good wishes. Safe flights, Lieutenant."

"Thank you, sir, for everything."

Chapter 2

Senior Lieutenant George Hanlon opened the designated door and stepped through into the next office. A grey-haired man, wearing the Twin Comets of a Regional Admiral, was sitting behind a desk, studying some papers. He continued sitting thus, the papers held so they hid his face, apparently so intent on his work he had not noticed anyone entering.

But Hanlon instinctively knew better, and stood stiffly at attention, awaiting the other's pleasure. Soon the man lowered the papers ... and Hanlon gasped, "Da...". His mouth snapped shut, and his eyes became swiftly hostile at remembrance of the hate he had carried all these years on account of this man. He wanted to stalk out, but ingrained discipline chained him to the spot. His voice, though, was very cold when he spoke. "Senior Lieutenant George Hanlon reporting, sir."

The big man was a startling older edition of the newly-appointed lieutenant, only grey where the latter was blond, assured from long, bitter experience where the other was as yet untried. Now he rose to his feet, acknowledging the salute.

"At ease. I can imagine your surprise at seeing me," and if there was a hurt look on his face at sight of that implacable hatred in his son's eyes and demeanor, he could not be blamed. "However, I think your experience of the past hour might have prepared you for sight of me in uniform. Yes," as he saw the sudden surprise in the young man's eyes, "that was the reason for my apparent disgrace. I hope you will forgive me, now that you know why it was necessary."

"Of course," stiffly punctilious, "only," his eyes were still hard and stormy, "was it important enough to break mother's heart?"

The older man's voice grew soft and shook with genuine emotion. "You and everyone had to believe that, Spence, all these years. I've been prayerfully

waiting for the day when I could explain to you. I can assure you, Son," with all the sincerity his voice could carry, "that she did not die of a broken ..."

"I know bet ..."

"You do not know better!" his father interrupted sternly. "Please wait until I finish explaining. No, Spence," his voice was still, emphatic but softer now, almost pleading. "She knew and approved. Your mother was one of Earth's greatest heroines."

Hanlon was still standing stiffly, but now his eyes clouded with mixed emotions, of which doubt predominated. His mind touched that of his father, and he seemed to read truth there. But could he believe this now ... after all those dreadful years?

"Actually," his father was continuing, "your mother had become a victim of multiple sclerosis. When we knew she had less than two months to live, I talked to her, with the Corps' permission, about my going into Secret Service work. With her death so near, it could be done convincingly. Believing you would understand some day, and approve, she agreed. I'm terribly sorry for all you've had to suffer during the intervening years. Again I beg forgiveness."

As his father talked, Hanlon's eyes and heart gradually lost their hardness, and at the end he ran forward and grasped the other's hands.

"Oh, Dad, I'm so sorry. I've hated hating you. If it hadn't been for the long talks Pa and Ma Hanlon had with me, I don't believe I would ever have gone into the cadet school."

The older man hugged his son hungrily.

"Believe me, Spence, it wasn't easy for me, either. But I didn't actually desert you, even though it had to seem so. I know everywhere you've been, everything you've done. You've been watched over constantly. I engineered your adoption by the Hanlons—he was a retired Corpsman, you know—and I've paid your expenses. You see, I happen to love my son very much."

"And I loved my Dad so, too. That's why it hurt ... say, now I can change my name back, can't I? The Hanlons both died since I started cadet school, you know."

"Well ... no, for the time being I think not. You're well known as 'Hanlon' now, and you'd better leave it that way, for now, at least. However, you'll find need of an alias from time to time in this new job—you can use it then. I certainly will be proud to have you wearing my name again."

But both men were shying away from all this frank expression of their emotion, and Hanlon dropped back a pace.

"How does it happen I've never seen you around the buildings or grounds here?"

"No one ever sees me in uniform, except in this or some other Base office on special occasions. Outside, I'm always disguised. When I come into a Reservation I'm a bearded janitor or something. You'll soon learn about disguising, yourself."

Then he became all business, and his face sobered as he went back to his desk.

"Sit there, Lieutenant. There's a lot to tell you, and you are to pay strict attention and get it all in this one interview, for there can't be another at this time. It would attract too much attention for you to be called here more than this once."

He smiled again, with a warm, fatherly pride. "First, let me congratulate you, officially on your decision, and to welcome you sincerely into the Secret Service."

Hanlon bowed in acknowledgement, then sat down and leaned forward attentively. "I'll try to get it all, sir."

"First, the matter of your dismissal. It will come some time within the next few days, but even I won't know ahead of time when or how it will happen. Some SS man unknown on Terra will be called in to attend to it. But when it does come you will recognize it almost instantly, and you must play it up big. Don't let on in any way that you suspect or know it is anything but genuine. You must impress on your fellow students, and upon everyone else you know or later come to know, that it was real, and that it has soured you for all time on the Corps, and on all law and order and government."

The young man nodded, but said nothing, for his throat was clogged and his spirits quailing at thought of that public disgrace. He had been so proud here

... how could he possibly stand giving it all up? Maybe he was a fool ever to have agreed.

But the admiral was continuing. He shoved a sheaf of bills across the desk. "Here's a thousand credits. Use them to buy your civilian clothes and kit after your dismissal. Buy a few shares of some stock, too—the amount or value doesn't matter. Get a small insurance policy. Yes," seeing his son's questioning look, "there's a reason.

"After you get your clothing and things and have discarded your uniform, go rent a hotel room, then go to the Inter-Stellar bank and rent a safety deposit box. That's one of the first things you do in each city on any planet to which you may be sent on assignment. Now, here are two keys that fit box number 1044 in all the I-S banks. They are special master keys of our own designing. Box 1044 is used because of its nearness to those private booths, in the universal set-up all I-S banks use. That box is our means of confidential communication.

"After you get into the vault ostensibly to get into your own box, use these to open box 1044. There's a little electronic gadget in each box 1044. When you want immediate service on anything you put into the box, press the red button on the mechanism. Go back a few hours later and it will have been attended to. So now, when you get into the bank, put a note there listing your hotel room number and also your new deposit key number. Come back in a couple of hours and you'll find a key that will have your box number stamped on it, but which will open both boxes. Then leave your old key and one of these in 1044, and carry the other and the new one."

"Oh, I see. The stock and insurance policy in my own box are decoys, eh?"

"Right. You put all your reports in box 1044, and get your orders there. We all use 1044, so just sort through the envelopes for any with your name on them. The same key also locks the sound-proof and spy-ray-proof cubicle in the vault, so no one, not even another SS man, can interrupt you unless you want to let them in."

"My own box for decoy; 1044 for service matters; key fits both boxes and cubicles; red button for quick service. Yes, sir."

"When you get to a new city or planet, put your local address there as soon as

feasible. That's your one sure contact. Also, in each box you'll find quite a lot of money at all times. You take what you need for expenses and get your salary that way. If your job calls for more than is in the box at any time, leave a request and press the red button. More will be brought immediately."

"That's quite a trust, sir," Hanlon gulped. "I hope I'll always use it wisely."

His father nodded and smiled. "You will, Spence. We wouldn't have asked you to join us if we weren't sure. As your father, I'm mighty proud to have you for a son. As Assistant Chief of the SS, I feel sure you'll be a credit to us.

"Now," all business again, "a sleep instructor and some reels of the language and other information about Simonides Four will be delivered to your hotel room. Simonides Four is your first assignment. There's something fishy going on there we haven't been able to find out about, but we think you can get us some good leads.

"Don't try to handle it alone—just get us information. And, son, use your talent for reading minds. I heard over the intercom all you said to Rogers, and while that wasn't the only reason you were asked into the SS, believe me, it will be tremendously important in your work with us—it'll help us where no other agent can get to first check station. And I have a feeling, too, that you'll develop both that and many other mental abilities once your mind starts to hit the ball. You'll find in this work every single talent and ability you can develop will be useful and needed."

"Yes," Hanlon nodded slowly, "I'm beginning to realize that. I'll practice a lot."

"As for money, don't be niggardly—spend what you like and always carry quite a bit with you for emergencies. Live well, although not extravagantly unless the occasion of your work demands it. Not to save money, but to remain as inconspicuous as possible."

"The Service has it all thought out, hasn't it?" Admiration shone in the young lieutenant's eyes.

"They've had a lot of years for it, Spence. Now, there's another means of contact, for cases of emergency. Get word to, or an interview with, any officer of the rank of Rear Admiral or above. The words 'Andromeda Seven' are the passwords to let him know who and what you are. Once you've made

that contact, commandeer anything or any service needed to assist your work."

"I understand, sir." Hanlon strained to review all this new knowledge quickly. Then, "I'm sure I have it all. Get civilian kit; hotel room; stocks and insurance; deposit boxes—my own and 1044; sleep-learn Simonidean; 'Andromeda Seven'."

"Correct. Now, you'll be interested in a little of the background of the Secret Service. It was John Snyder himself who organized it, shortly after the formation of the Snyder Patrol. He realized almost at once that such an unknown, undercover echelon would be a must. There's usually not more than two hundred of us. New members are taken in only as replacements, or when some Corpsman with a special ability, such as your mind-reading, is discovered.

"We work anywhere throughout space when there's a need, but there are usually one or two of us on each planet of the Federation at all times. When not on any special assignment we keep busy on some planet not our original home, checking the background of cadets or especially-appointed government workers, guarding VIP's, and such other vital matters. But whatever we are, or whatever we are doing, we *are* the Corps!

"We are mighty proud of the fact that no SS man has ever betrayed his trust, even to save his life. Our work is dangerous in the extreme, but without exception we are all men with high mental ability—quick-thinking, clever, and unusually adept at getting out of scrapes." He grimaced mirthlessly. "We learn that last mighty quick in this business ... if we last.

"And to all of us, our dangerous, unadvertised, publicly unrecognized work is personally highly satisfying. We know we are the guardians of the peace of the Federation, even though we get no hero-worship from the populace who don't know we exist."

Hanlon nodded slowly, thoughtfully. "One thing puzzles me, Dad. You and Admiral Rogers both spoke about how secret all this is, yet I was given the chance to back out after I knew about it."

His father grinned. "Several have, over the years. They underwent treatment to erase that knowledge from their mind." He stood up and came around the

desk to where his son had also risen. "I may not see you again before you leave, Spence ... George, I mean," he smiled ruefully, then brightened. "But the best of luck, son, and keep in mind that you have the honor of the finest body of men in the Universe in your keeping, and always try to be worthy of the trust."

"I will, sir," gravely. "It seems almost too much responsibility for a cub like me, and I'm scared. But I'll do my best."

"Take it easy at first. Don't try too much, and don't put yourself in any more danger than you have to until you learn the ropes, which you will, faster than you may now think. On this assignment, all we ask is that you try to get us some leads we can work on."

"Right! I don't want to conk out too soon, now. I've got a lot of living I want to do first, especially now I've got my dad back again. I sure hope we manage to see each other fairly often."

"Oh, we undoubtedly will, except when one or the other of us is on a long job. We'll meet—somewhere—quite often."

"About this assignment of mine, Dad. Can you give me any dope on it?"

"You'll get what any of us know, from the reels, and the latest development from the box when you're ready to start out. Oh, yes, I almost forgot. The paper we use is a digestible plastic, so make a meal off all orders and confidential communications you receive. The box always contains a supply for your reports or requests for specific information or assistance."

"Saves money on feed bills, eh?"

His father grinned appreciatively, then sobered. "Make sure you understand each step you take first, and don't try to run until you know how to crawl. Well, safe flights, Spence."

"Safe flights to you, too, Dad, always. And I want you to know I'm so glad to have all those horrible misunderstandings and hates cleared away."

"I missed my boy, too. But 'vast rewards', you know."

With mixed sensations of high elation and worried fear, the swiftly-maturing young Corpsman walked slowly through the beautiful park that surrounded the great stainless-steel skyscraper that housed the cadets during their training