

No man could make the Long Haul alone and so there had to be somebody behind the bulkhead—but the enormously important question was:

WHO?

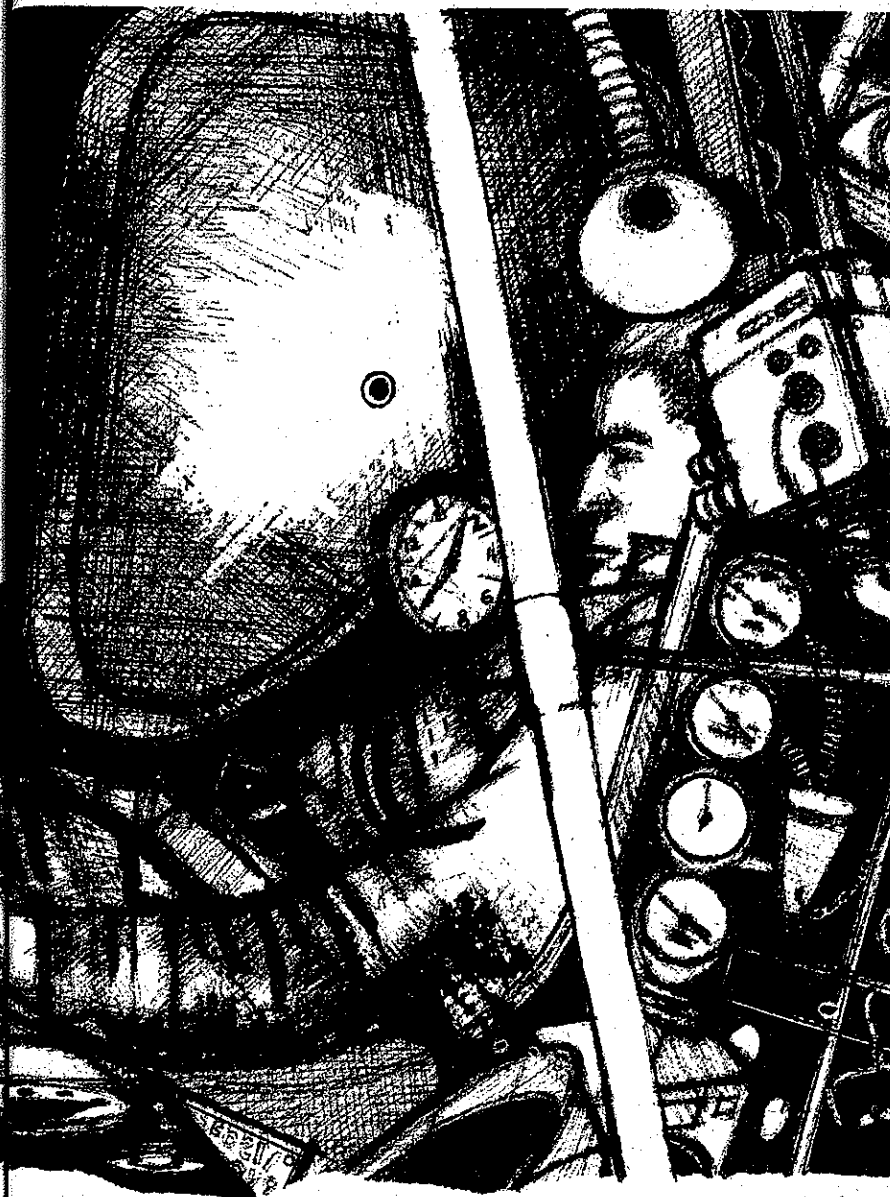
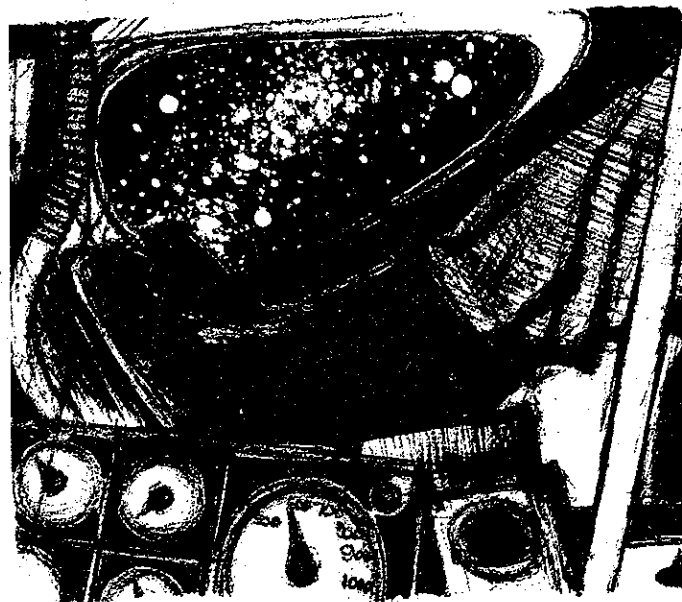
By THEODORE STURGEON

YOU just don't look through viewports very often.

It's terrifying at first, of course—all that spangled blackness and the sense of disorientation. Your guts never get used to

sustained free-fall and you feel, when you look out, that every direction is *up*, which is unnatural, or that every direction is *down*, which is sheer horror. But you don't stop looking out there be-

Illustrated by ASHMAN



cause it's terrifying. You stop because nothing ever happens out there. You've no sensation of speed.

You're not going anywhere.

After the weeks and months, there's some change, sure; but from day to day, you can't see the difference, so after a while you stop looking for any.

Naturally, that eliminates the viewports as an amusement device, which is too bad. There aren't so many things for a man to do during a Long Haul that he can afford to eliminate anything.

Getting bored with the infinities outside is only a reminder that the same could happen with your writing materials, and the music, the stereo and all the rest of it.

And it's hard to gripe, to say, "Why don't they install a such-and-such on these barrels?" because you've already got what a thousand spacemen griped about long since—many of them men with more experience, more imagination and less internal resources (that is to say, more need) than you'll ever have. Certainly more than you have now; this is your first trip and you're just making the transition from "inside looking out" to "inside looking on."

It's a small world. It *better* be a little complicated.

A LOT that has happened in worlds like these would be simple to understand, if you knew about it. Not knowing is better, though; it keeps you wondering. Some of it you can figure out, knowing as you do that a lot of men have died in these things, a lot have disappeared, ship and all, and some (but you don't know how many) have been taken out of the ships and straight to the laughing academy.

You find out fairly soon, for example, that the manual controls are automatically relayed out, and stay out of temptation until you need them to land. (Whether they'll switch in if you need them for evasive maneuvering some time, you don't know yet.) Who died—how many died—because they started playing with the manual controls? And was it because they decided to quit and go home? Or because they convinced themselves that the auto-astrogator had bugs in it? Or because they just couldn't stand all those stationary stars?

Then there's this: You're alone. You have a shipmate, but even so, you're alone. You crouch in this little cell in the nose of your ship, with the curving hull to your left and the flat wall of the midship bulkhead to your right. Because it's there, that bulkhead, you know that in previous models it wasn't. You can imagine what

happened in some (how many?) ships to make it necessary to seal you away from your shipmate.

Psychodynamics has come a long way, but you called this a world; well, reduce a world to two separate nations and see what happens. Between two confined entities, there's no mean and no median, and no real way of determining a majority. How many battered pilots have come home crazed, cooped up with the shredded bodies of their shipmates?

So that's easy to understand—you can't trust two human beings together. Not for long enough. If you don't believe it, look at the bulkhead. It's there because it has to be there.

Being a peaceable guy, it scares you a little to know how dangerous you are.

Makes you a little proud, though, doesn't it?

Be proud of this, too—that they trust you to be alone so much. Sure, there is a shipmate; but by and large you're alone, and that's what's expected of you. What most people, especially Earthside people, never find out is that a man who can't be by himself is a man who knows, away down deep, that he's not good company. You could probably make it by yourself altogether . . . but you must admit you're glad you don't have to. You have access to the other side

of the bulkhead, when you need it. If you need it. It didn't take you too long to figure out you'd use it sparingly.

You have books and you have games, you have pictures and text tapes and nine different euphorics (with a watchdog dispenser, so you can never become an addict) all of which help you, when you need help, to explore yourself. But having another human mind to explore is a wonderful idea—a wonder tempered by the knowledge—oh, how smart you were to figure it out in time!—that the other mind is a last resort. If you ever use up the potentialities it holds for you, you're through, brother!

So you have endurance contests with yourself to see how long you can leave that bulkhead alone.

YOU go back over your life, the things you've done. People have written whole novels about 24 hours in a man's life. That's the way you think it all out, slowly, piece by piece; every feature of every face and the way they were used; what people did and why. Especially why. It doesn't take any time to remember what a man did, but you can spend hours in thinking about why he did it.

You live it again and it's like being a little god, knowing what's

going to happen to everyone.

When you reported to Base, there was a busload of guys with you. Now you know who would go all the way through the course and wind up out here; reliving it, you can put yourself back in the bus again and say, "That stranger across the aisle is Pegg. He isn't going to make it. He'll go home on furlough three months from now and he'll try to kill himself rather than come back. The freckled nape in the seat ahead of you belongs to the redhead Walkinok, who will throw his weight around during the first week and pay expensively for it afterward. But he'll make it."

You make friends with the shy dark guy next to you. His name is Stein and he looks like a big-brain. He's easy to talk to and smart, the kind of fellow who always goes straight to the top. And he won't last even until the first furlough; two weeks is all he can take, and you never see him again. But you remember his name. You remember everything and you go back over it and remember the memories in between the memories. Did somebody on that bus have shoes that squeaked? Back you go and hunt for it. If it happened, you'll remember it.

They say anyone can recall this way; but for you, with what

the psycho-dynamicians have done to you—or is it for you?—you can do more of this than anybody. There isn't anything that ever happened in your whole life that you can't remember. You can start at the beginning and go all the way through. You can start at the beginning and jump years in a second and go through an episode again . . . get mad again . . . fall in love again.

And when you get tired of the events themselves, you can run them off again, to find out why. Why did Stein go through those years of study and preparation, those months of competition, when all the time he didn't want to be in the Space Service? Why did Pegg conceal from himself that he wasn't fit for the Space Service?

SO you cast back, comb, compare and ponder, keeping busy. If you're careful, just remembering lasts a long time, wondering why lasts even longer; and in between times, there are the books and stereos, the auto-chess and the music . . . until you're ready to cast and comb in your memories again. But sooner or later—later, if you're especially careful—you'll get restless and your life as it was played out, and the reasons why it was played just that way, all that

gets old. You can think of no new approach to any of it and learn nothing more from it.

That's where the centerline bulkhead comes in handy. Its very shape is a friendly thing to you; the hull on your left is curved, being part of the ship's side, but the bulkhead is a flat wall. Its constant presence is a reminder that it has a function, like everything else in your world; that it is, by nature, a partition; that the existence of a partition presupposes another compartment; and that the other compartment is the size and shape of this one and designed for a similar purpose—to be a dwelling for someone.

With no sound nor sign of occupancy, the bulkhead still at-tests the life behind it, just by being there. It's a friendly flatness, a companionable feature of your world, and its company pervades all your thinking.

You know it's your last resort, but you know, too, that it's a rich one, and when at last you're driven to use it, you'll enter another kind of world, more complex and more engrossing than your own, just for the work it takes to get from place to place and the mystery of the fog between the places. It's a mind, another human mind, sharing this prison with you when at last you need sharing more than any-

thing whatever in all of space.

Who is it?

You think about that. You think a whole lot about that. Back at Base, in your last year, you and the other cadets thought about that more than anything. If they'd ever given you the shadow of a hint . . . but no; wondering about it was apparently part of your training. You knew only that on your Long Haul, you would not be alone. You had a pretty good idea that the choice of a shipmate for you would be a surprise.

You looked around you at mess, in class, in the dormitory; you lay awake at night dealing out their faces in a sort of solitaire game; and sometimes you thought about one and said, "That'd be fine. We'd get along." And sometimes you said, "That stinker? Lock me up with *him* and that bulkhead won't be tough enough. I'll kill him after the third day, so help me!"

And after they tapped you for your first Haul, this was the only thing you were scared about—who'd be your shipmate. Everything else, you thought you could handle. You knew your job inside out and backward and it wouldn't whip you. You were sharp-tuned, fine-honed, ready for anything that was under your own control. You were even confident about being alone; it

wouldn't get you. Not a chance.

Away down deep, no man believes he can be driven out of his mind, just as he cannot believe—really believe—that he will be dead. That's the kind of thing that happens to someone else.

BUT this business of a shipmate—this wasn't under your control. You didn't control who it would be and you wouldn't control the guy after blastoff. It was the only unknown and therefore the only thing that scared you.

Amendment: there was a certain amount of control. The intercom button was on your side of the bulkhead. Leave it alone and you didn't have to so much as know you had a shipmate until you were good and ready.

Being able to shut off a voice isn't control, though. You don't know what your shipmate will do. Or *be*.

In those last tight days before blastoff, there was one thing you became overwhelmingly aware of. *Esprit de corps*, they call it. You and the other graduates were hammered into a mold—and hammered some more until the resiliency was gone out of you. You were alike and you did things alike because you had grown to want to. You knew for certain that one of this tight, trustworthy little group would

be picked for you; their training and yours, their whole lives and yours, pointed toward this ship, this Haul.

Your presence on this ship summed up your training; your training culminated in your presence on the ship. Only a graduate cadet was fit to man the ship; the ship existed solely for the graduate cadet. This was something so self-evident that you never thought about it.

Not until now.

Because now, a few minutes ago, you were ready to push that button. You couldn't know if you'd broken all records for loneliness, for duration of solitary confinement, but you'd tried. You'd looked through the viewport until it ceased to mean anything. You'd read until you didn't care any more. You'd lived the almost-life of the stereos until you couldn't make believe you believed them. You'd listened to music until it didn't matter. And you'd gone over and over your life from its very beginnings until you'd completely lost perspective on it or anything and anyone in it.

You'd found that you could go back to the viewport and cycle through the whole thing again, but you'd done that, too, so often that the whole matrix of personal involvement was emptied out. Then the flatness of the

bulkhead made itself felt. In a way, it seemed to bulge toward you, crowd you against the ship's side, and you knew it was getting to be time you pushed that button and found out for sure.

Who?

PETE or Krakow or that crazy redhead Walkinok? Or Wendover (you all called him Bendover) with all those incomprehensible shaggy-dog stories? Harris? Beerbelly Flacker or Cohen the Wire-haired Terror? Or Shank (what you all called him was a shame)? Or Gindes, whose inexplicable nickname was Mickey Mouse? You'd sort of hoped it would be Gindes, not because you liked him, but more because he was the one classmate you'd never known very well. He always used to look on and keep his mouth shut. He'd be much more fun to explore than, say, old Shank, who was so predictable that you could practically talk in chorus with him.

So you've tortured yourself, just for the sake of torture, with your thumb over the intercom button, until even the torture dried out and blew away.

You pushed.

You found out, first of all, that the intercom apparently had its own amplifier, energized when you held the button down, and that it took forever—well, three

or four seconds, anyway—to warm up. First nothing, then a carrier, then the beginning of a signal; then, at last, the voice of your shipmate, rushing up to full volume, as loud and as clear as if the bulkhead did not exist. And you get off that button as if it had turned into a needle; and you're backed against the outboard bulkhead, deep in shock, physically in silence, but with that voice going on and on and on unbelievably in your unbelieving brain.

It was crying.

It wept wearily, as though you had tuned in toward the end of a long session of wild and lonesome grief. It cried quietly, exhaustedly, without hope. And it cried in a voice that was joltingly wrong for this place—a light, high voice, nearly a contralto. It was wrong, altogether wrong.

The wild ideas come first: *Stowaway?*

You almost laugh. For days before blastoff, you were drugged and immersed in high-frequency fields; hypnotized, worked and reworked mentally and physically. You were passively fed and passively instructed.

You don't know now and you may never know all they did to you. But you can be sure it was done inside six concentric rings of "security" of one kind and another, and you can be sure that

your shipmate got the same. What it amounted to was concentrated *attention* from a mob of specialists, every sleeping and waking second from the time you beered it up at the class farewell dinner to the time the accelerator tug lifted your ship and carried it screaming up and outward. Nobody was in this ship but those who belonged in it; that you can absolutely bank on.

Mad idea, the second. For a while, you don't even dare think it, but with that kind of voice, that crying, you have to think of something. So you do and you're scared, scared in a way you've never imagined before, and to a degree you didn't think was possible. *There's a girl in there!*

YOU run those wordless syllables, those tired sobs, through your mind again, seeking for vocalizations as separated from the breathy, painful gasping that accompanied them. And you don't know. You just can't be certain.

So punch the button again. Listen some more.

Or ask.

But you can't. The crazy idea might be true and you couldn't stand that. They couldn't—they just couldn't—put a girl on these ships with you and then stow her behind the bulkhead.

Then you have an instant fantasy about that. You kneel

(bumping your skull on the cover) and feel frantically around the bulkhead, where it meets deck-plates, nose compartment, overhead, after-bulkhead; and all around your fingers ride the bead of a weld. You sit back, sweating a little and half-laughing at yourself. Scratch off one fantasy; there'll be no sliding partitions into any harems this trip.

You stop laughing and think, "They couldn't be that *cruel!*" You're on a test run, sure, and it isn't the ship that's being tested. You know that and you accept it. But tests, tests . . . must you throw a glass vase on a brick sidewalk to find out if it's brittle? You see one of your own hands going up and out to check for a panel, a joint again. You sneer at it, at your own hand, and watch it stop in embarrassment.

Well, say they weren't that cruel. Whom did they put in there?

Not Walkinok. Not Shank. Not Harris or Cohen or any cadet. A cadet wouldn't lie there and cry like that, like a child, a school-girl—a baby.

Some stranger, then.

Now the anger comes, shouldering out all the fear. They wouldn't! This ship is everything a cadet was born for—no, made for. That tight leash that bound you with the others, all your

thinking, an easy thing you all shared and never had to think about—that was a thing that didn't admit strangers.

Aside from that—beyond that—this wasn't a matter of desecrated *esprit*; it was a matter of moral justice. Nobody but a cadet *deserves* a ship! What did you give your life to and what for? Why did you give up marriage, and freedom, and all the wonderful trivialities called "fun" that made most human lives worth living? Why did you hold still for Base routines and the hazing you got from the upper classmen?

Just to have some stranger, someone who wasn't even a cadet, wander in without training, shaping, conditioning, experience . . . and get on your ship?

NO, it has to be a cadet. It couldn't be anything else. Even a cadet who could break down and cry—that's a more acceptable idea than its being a woman or a stranger.

You're still angry, but now it's the kind of anger that goads you, not the kind that stops you. You push the button. You hear the carrier, then the beginnings of something else . . . Breathing. Difficult, broken breathing, the sound of someone too tired to cry any more, even when crying has changed nothing and there

are still more tears to come. "What the hell are you bawling about?" you yell.

The breathing goes on and on. Finally it stops for a moment and then a long, whispery, shuddery sigh.

"Hey!" you shout. "Hey—you in there!"

But there is no answer. The breathing is fainter, more regular. Whoever it is is going to sleep.

You press even harder on the button, as if that would do any good, and you yell again, this time not even "Hey!" but a blunter, angrier syllable. You can think only that your shipmate chooses—*chooses*, by God!—not to answer you.

You're breathing hard now, but your shipmate isn't. You hold your breath and listen. You hear the deep, quiet inhalations, and then a small catch, and a little sigh, the ghost of half a sob.

"Hey!"

Nothing.

You let the button go and in the sharp silence that replaces the carrier's faint hum, the same wordless syllable builds and builds inside you until it bursts free again. You can tell from the feel of your throat and the ringing in your ears that it's been a long, long time since you used your voice.

You're angry and you're hurt

from these insults to yourself and to your Service. And you know what? You feel good. Some of the stereos you have are pretty nice; they take you right into battle, into the arms of beautiful women, into danger, and from time to time you could get angry at someone in them. You could—but you haven't for a long time now. You haven't laughed or been angry ever since . . . since . . . well, you can't even remember when. You'd forgotten how and you'd forgotten just when it was you forgot. And now look. The heart's going, the sweat . . .

This is fine.

Push the button again, take another little sip of anger. It's been aging; it's vintage stuff. Go ahead.

You do, and up comes the carrier.

"Please," begs the voice. "Please, please . . . say something else."

YOUR tongue is paralyzed and you choke, suddenly, when you swallow wrong. You cough violently, let go the button and pound yourself on the chest. For a moment, you're in bad shape. Coughing makes your thinking go in spurts, and your thinking is bouncing up and down on the idea that, until now, you didn't really believe there was anyone in there at all. You get your wind

and push the button again.

The voice asks, "Are you all right? Can I do anything?"

You become certain of something else: that isn't a voice you recognize. If you ever heard it before, you certainly don't remember it. Then the content of it hits you. *Can I do anything?* You get mad again.

"Yeah," you growl. "Hand me a glass of water." You don't have your thumb on the button, so you just say what pops into your mind. You shake yourself like a wet bird dog, take a deep breath, and lean on the control again.

Before you can open your mouth, you're in a hailstorm of hysterical laughter. "Glass of water . . . uh-uh-uh . . . that's good . . . you don't know what this means," says the voice, suddenly sober and plaintive. "I've waited so long. I've listened to your music and the sound from your stereos. You never talk, you never say anything at all. I never even heard you cough before."

Part of your mind reacts to that: *That's unnatural, not even to cough, or laugh aloud, or hum. Must be a conditioning.* But most of it explodes at this stranger, this—intruder, talking away like that without a word of explanation, of apology . . . talking as if that voice of all voices had a right to be there.

"I was beginning to think you

were deaf and dumb. Or maybe even that you weren't there at all. That was the thing that scared me the most."

"Shut up," you hiss, with all the fury, all the deadly warning you can command.

"I knew they wouldn't," the voice continues happily. "They'd never put anyone out here by himself. That would be too—" It stops abruptly as you release the button.

"My God!" you think. "The dam has boist! That character'll chunter along like that for the duration!"

You press the button quickly, hear "—all alone out here, you get scared to look out the viewp—" and you cut off again.

THAT stuff like an invisible mist you see melting away is all the conjecture, those great half-formed plans of shipping out with Walkinok or the Wire-haired Terror.

You were going to review your courses, remember? Slow and easy—take a week on spatial ballistics or spectroscopy. Think it all through for a day between sentences. Or laugh over the time you and the Shank got tanked up at the canteen and pretended you were going to tie up the C.O. and jet him off with Colonel Provost, the head PD man, for a shipmate. The General would get

all the psychodynamics he needed. The General was always talking psychodynamics, Provost was always doing psychodynamics.

Well, it seemed funny at the time, anyway. It wasn't so much the beer. It was knowing the General and knowing Colonel Provost that made it funny. How funny would it be with a stranger?

They give you someone to talk to. They give you someone you haven't anything to talk to about! That idea of putting a girl behind the bulkhead, now, that was a horrible idea. It was torture. Well, so's this. Maybe worse.

A thought keeps knocking and you finally back off and let it in. Something to do with the button. You push it and you can hear your shipmate. You release it and . . . shut off the intercom?

No, by the Lord, you don't! When you were coughing, you were off that button. *Can I do anything?*

Now what the hell kind of business is this? (And that detached part of your mind reaches hungrily for the pulses of fury: ah, it feels good!) Do you mean to sit there and tell me (you rage silently at the PD men who designed this ship) that even if I don't push that button, my shipmate can hear everything



that goes on with me? The intercom's open on the other side all the time, open on this side only when I push the button—is that it?

You turn and glare out the viewport, staring down the cold, distant eye of infinity, and *Where the hell*, you storm silently, *is my privacy?*

This won't do. It won't do at all. You figured right from the start that you and your shipmate would be pretty equal, but on a ship, even a little two-passenger can like this, someone's got to be in command. Given that the other compartment has the same stereos, the same dispensers, the same food and water and everything else, and the only difference between these living quarters is that button—who's privileged? Me, because I get to push the button? Or my shipmate, who gets to listen in on me when I so much as cough?

"I know!" you think suddenly. "That's a PD operative in there! A psychodynamics specialist assigned to observe me!"

YOU almost laugh out loud; relief washes over you. PD work is naturally hush-hush. You'll never know how many hours during your course you were under hypnosis. It was even rumored around that some guys had cerebral surgery done by the

PD boys and never knew it. The boys had to work in secret for the same reason you don't stir your coffee with an ink-stick—PD is one field where the tools must leave no mark.

Well, fine, fine. At last this shipmate makes some sense: at last you've got an answer you can accept. This ship, this trip, is of and for a cadet—but it's PD business. The only non-cadet who'd conceivably be aboard would have to be a PD tech.

So you grin and reach for the button. Then, remembering the way it works, that the intercom's open from your side when you're off the button, you draw your hand back, face the bulkhead, and say easily, "Okay, PD, I'm on to you. How'm I doing?" You wonder how many cadets tumble to the trick this soon. You push the button and wait for the answer.

The answer is "Huh?" in a mixture of shyness and mystification.

You let go the button and laugh. "No sense stringing it out, Lieutenant." (This is clever. Most PD techs are looeys; one or two are master sergeants. Right or not, you haven't hurt his feelings.) "I know you're a PD man."

There's a silence from the other side. Then: "What's a PD man?"

You get a little sore. "Now see here, Lieutenant, you don't have to play any more of these psych games."

"Gosh, I'm no lieutenant. I—"

You cut him off quickly. "Sergeant, then."

"You got me all wrong," says that damnable high voice.

"Well, you're PD, anyway."

"I'm afraid I'm not."

You can't take much more of this. "Then what the hell are you?"

A silence. And as it beats by, that anger and that fear of torture begin to mount, hand in hand.

"Well?" you roar.

"Well," says the voice, and you can practically see it shuffle its feet, "I'm not anything. I'm fifteen years old . . ."

You drag out your senior-class snap; there's a way of talking to fourth and third classmen that makes 'em jump. "Mister, you give an account of yourself, but now. What's your name?"

"Skampi."

"Skampi? What the hell kind of a name is that?"

"It's what they call me."

Did you detect a whisper of defiance there? "Sir!"

The defiance disappears instantly. "It's what they call me . . . sir."

"And what are you doing on my ship, mister?"

A FRIGHTENED gulp. "I—I'm sorry—uh—sir. They put me on."

"They?"

"At the Base . . . sir," he amended quickly.

"You were on the Base just how long, mister?" That "mister" can be a lead-shot whiplash if you do it right. It was sure being done right.

"I don't know, sir." You have the feeling the punk's going to burst into tears again. "They took me to a big laboratory and there were a lot of sort of booths with machines in them. They asked me all kinds of questions about did I want to be a space-man. Well, I did. I always did, ever since I was a kid. So, after a while, they put me on a table and gave me a shot and when I woke up, I was here."

"Who gave you a shot? What was his name?"

"I never . . . I didn't find out, sir." A pause. "A big man. Old. He had gray hair, very short, and green eyes."

Provost, by God. This is PD business, all right, but from where you sit, it's monkey business.

"You know any spatial ballistics?"

"No, sir. Some day, I—"

"Astrogation?"

"Only what I picked up myself. But I'll—"

"Gravity mechanics? Differentials? Strength of materials? Light-metal fission? Relativity?"

"I—"

"Well? Well? Speak up, mister!"

"I heard of them, sir."

"I heard of them, sir!" you mimic savagely. "Do you know what this ship is for?"

"Oh, yes, sir! Everybody knows that. This is the Long Haul. When you come back from this, you get your commission and they give you a starship!" And if the voice had shuffled its feet once, now its eyes shone.

"You figure to get a starship, mister?"

"Well, I—I—"

"You think they give commissions to Boy Scouts just because the Boy Scout wants to go to space awful bad?"

No answer.

You jeer, "Have you got the slightest idea how much training a cadet has to go through, how much he has to learn?"

"Well, no, but I guess I will."

"Sir!"

"Sir. They put me aboard, all those officers who asked me the questions and everything. It must be all right. Hey!" he says excitedly, all the crushed timidity disappearing, to be replaced by a bubbling enthusiasm. "I know! We have all this time . . . maybe you're supposed to teach me as-

trogradation and relativity and all that."

Your jaw drops at the sheer childishness of it. And then something really ugly drifts up and smothers everything else.

FOR some reason, your mind flashes back to the bus, the day you got to Base. You can remember back easily to all the faces you worked with, those who made it and those who didn't. But your class had thirty-eight cadets in it and that bus must have held fifty. What happened to the rest? You'd always assumed they went into other sections—ground crew, computer men, maintenance. Suppose they'd been sorted out, examined for some special trait or talent that only the PD men knew about? Suppose they were loaded right aboard ships, each with a graduate cadet?

And why?

Suppose these punks, green-horns, Boy Scouts, *children*—suppose they were the ones slated for a commission? Suppose guys like you, thinking all this while you were the cream of the crop, and the top cream off that—suppose all along you'd tested out as second-grade material. Suppose you were the one who did the sweating and cramming and took the hazing and the demerits and the lousy mess-hall

food, not to command a starship, not to get a commission, but just to be a private tutor to a boy genius who wanted to go to space *awful* bad?

This wouldn't make sense anywhere else but in the starship service. It barely made sense there, but look:

A starship commander might make two trips in his whole career, that's all. Eighteen years each round trip, with his passengers in coldpacks and a cargo of serums, refractories, machine tools and food concentrate for the xenologists and mineralogists who were crazy enough to work out there.

Training the commander for such a ship was easy, as far as operating knowledge was concerned, though there was a powerful lot of it. But training him to stay conscious, awake and aware—and alone—for all those years was something else again. Few men like that were born; they had to be made.

Most of your recluses, your hermits, all through history, have been guys who had things drastically wrong with them. There couldn't be anything wrong with a starship commander. He had to be captain and deck crew, and know his black-hole as well (though most of the drive machinery down there was automatic) and stay alert—stay *sane*

—in a black, mad, weightless emptiness God never made him for.

GIVE him more books and pictures, games and music than even he would have time for and you'd still not be sure he'd stay sane unless he had some very special inner resources.

These (and one other thing) were what a cadet was screened for and what he was trained in. PD packed him full of technical knowledge, psyched him to a fare-thee-well, and when they figured he was machine-finished and carrying a high gloss, they sealed him in a space can and threw it out for the Long Haul.

The course was pre-set, and it might last 14 months, and it might last three years, and after a guy got back (if he got back), he would be fit to take out a starship or he would not. As for the shipmate—well, you'd always assumed that PD was looking for a way to shake down two guys at once so they could be together on a starship.

Maybe, some day, the ships would carry eight, ten at once, and at last natural human gregariousness would have a chance to compete with the pall of black distances. So far, though, psychic disorientation had made everything that was latently mean and murderous in a man explode

into action. Putting more than a single human being on those boats to nurse them through was just asking for slaughter. And shipwreck.

The other thing required of you besides technical ability and these inner resources is—youth. You're only twenty-two, so full of high-intensity training that, as Walkinok once said, you feel your brain convolutions are blown out smooth like a full bladder. And you've compacted this knowledge, coded it, used it. You're so full of it that it's bound to ooze out onto anyone around you.

You're twenty-two and you're sealed up in a can with a thirsty-headed fifteen-year-old who knows nothing, but wants to go to the stars *awful* bad. And you can forget how stupid he seems to be, too, because you can bet your bulging cortex that the kid has such an enormous I.Q. that he can afford to act stupid and cry.

What a dirty, rotten, lousy deal to put you through all this just to shave seven years off the age of a starship commander! Next thing you know, they'd put a diapered baby in with a work-weary sucker of a fine-honed cadet and get three star trips out of him instead of two!

And what's to become of you? After you've done your generous

stint of tutoring, they pin a discharge emblem on your tunic and say, "Well done, Cadet. Now go raise Brussels sprouts." And you stand at attention and salute the downy-cheeked squirt in all the gold braid and watch him ride the gantry crane to the control cabin you've aimed at and sweated for ever since you were weaned!

You sprawl there in that living space, so small that you can't stand up in it, and you look at that bland belly of a bulkhead with its smooth, round navel of a button, and you think, "Well, there's a lot of guts back of that." You heave a deep breath, while still the detached part of your mind looks on. Now it's saying wonderingly, "Aren't you the guy who was scared because nothing could get him excited any more?" And you speak and your voice comes out sounding quite different from anything you've ever heard from anyone before. Maybe you've never been this mad before.

"Who told you to say that?"

YOU push the button and listen.

"Say what—uh—sir?"

"About me teaching you. Anybody at Base?"

He seems to be thinking. "Why, no, sir. I just thought it would be a good idea."

You don't say anything. You just hold the button down.

He says diffidently, "Sort of pass the time?" When you still don't say anything, he adds wistfully, "I'd try. I'd try awful hard."

You let go the button and growl, "I just bet you would. You just thought it up all your own little self, huh?"

"Well, yes."

"You're a bright boy. You're a real, smart, ambitious little louse!"

You push the button real quick, but all you get is an astonished silence.

You say, real composed, almost gentle, "That 'louse,' now, that's not just a figure of speech, little boy. I mean that. I mean you're a crummy little crawler looking to suck blood after somebody else has done all the work. You know what you do? You just make like you're all alone in this can. You don't talk to me and you don't listen to me and I'll do you a favor—I'll forget all about you, too. I'm not going to bat your eyeballs together just yet, but don't call me generous, little boy—never that. It's just that I can't reach in there just now."

"No!" That boy can make a real piteous noise when he wants to. "No, no! Wait—please!"

"Well?"

"I don't under—I mean I'm sorry, Cadet. I'm honest-to-Pete sorry. I never meant—"

But you cut him off. You lie back and close your eyes. You're thrumming with fury right down to your toenails.

This, says your internal observer, is all right. This is living.

SO the weeks pass, and so do more weeks. You shoot a star and make some notes, and wait a while and shoot it again, and pretty soon you have enough data to fool around with. You get your stylus and block, and the point darts around the way you want it to, and those old figures sit up and lie down and rush around just the way you want them to. You laugh when you do it; wouldn't Junior just love to learn some of these tricks?

Anyway, you figure you're just past the cusp perihelion of your parabola and you're starting back. You know how far you've come and when you'll get back. You laugh again. The sound of your voice reminds you he can hear you, so you crawl over to the bulkhead and push the button.

"Cadet," he says. "Please, Cadet. Please." His voice is hoarse and weak; the syllables come out as if they're meaningless from repetition. He's probably been lying in there for weeks bleating

"Cadet—please—cadet—please" every time you clicked the stylus against your teeth or set the quadrant on your Sun gun.

You spend a lot of time looking out the viewport, but you get sick of that and turn to the euphorics. You see a lot of stereo shows. You are always aware of the button in the bulkhead, but you ignore it. You read. You get a lot of use out of the octant; it seems you take a lot more bearings than you have to. And when at last the button starts to be intrusive, you make a real effort and leave it alone; you figure out something else to do instead.

You take a careful survey of your instruments to figure which one you need least, and finally decide on the airspeed indicator. You've spent plenty of time in a mockup and you know you can compute your airspeed when you return to Earth by the hull-temperature plus your ground-rise radar.

You dismount the instrument and take it apart and get the diamond bearing. You go through the games locker and the equipment chest until you put together a nickel rod and a coil, and you hook on to your short-range radio where the oscillations suit you. You cement the diamond to the tip of the rod, shove the rod through the long axis of the coil. You turn on the

juice and feel (rather than hear) the rod humming softly.

"The phenomenon, dear pupil," you say, but silently, "is magnetostriction, whereby the nickel rod contracts slightly in the magnetic field. And since the field is in oscillation, that diamond on the tip is vibrating like crazy."

You get your stylus and, after careful consideration, decide on a triangle with round corners, just big enough to shove an arm through comfortably; the three corners would make peep-holes.

ALL the while, you have quick fantasies about it. You'll knock the triangular piece out of the bulkhead and stick your face in the hole and say "Surprise!" and he'll be cowering there, wondering what goes on. And you'll say, "Shake and let bygones be." And he'll jump over, all eager, and you'll take his hand and drag it through the hole and put your back against the bulkhead and pull till his shoulder dislocates.

He's gasping, "Cadet, please," until you get tired of amusing yourself and haul the wrist around and sink your teeth in it. Then he starts to bleed, and you just hold him there while "Cadet-please" gets fainter and fainter, and you explain to him all about

differential equations and mass-ratios.

And as you're thinking about this, you're going round and round the blunted triangle with your vibrating diamond. The bulkhead is thick as hell and tough—it's hull-metal; imagine that, for an inboard bulkhead!—but that's all right. You've got plenty of time. And bit by bit, your scored line goes deeper.

Every once in a while, you take a breather. It occurs to you to wonder what you'll say when you're grappled in and the Colonel sees that hole in the bulkhead. You try not to wonder about this, but you do all the same, a whole lot. You run it over in your mind and sometimes the Colonel says, "Good, Cadet. That's real resourcefulness, the kind I like to see." But other times it doesn't quite come out that way, especially with the kid dead on one side of the bulkhead and his blood all over the place on the other side.

So maybe you won't kill him. You'll just scare him. Have fun with him.

Maybe he'll talk, too. Maybe this entire Long Haul was set up by PD just to find out if you'd cooperate with your shipmate, try to teach him what you know, at any cost. And you know, if you thought more of the Service than you do about your own

dirty career in it, that's just what you'd do. Maybe if you did that, they'd give you a starship, you and the kid both.

So, anyway, this cutting job is long and slow and suits you fine; no matter what you think, you go on with it, just because you started. When it's finished you'll know what to do.

Funny that the result of this trip was going to be the same as some of those you'd heard whispered about, where a ship came in with one guy dead and the other . . .

But that was the difference. To do a thing like that, those guys must have been space-happy. You're doing it, sure, but for different reasons. You're no raving looney. You're slow-and-steady, doing a job, knowing exactly why.

Or you will, when the time comes.

You're real happy this whole time.

Then all that changes.

JUST why, you can't know. You turned in and you slept, and all of a sudden you're wide awake. You're thinking about some lab work you did. It was a demonstration of eddy-current effects.

There was a copper disk as thick as your arm and a meter in diameter, swinging from a rope

in the center of the gymnasium. You hauled it up to the high ceiling at the far end and turned it loose. There was a big electromagnet set up in the middle of the place, and as the disk reached the bottom of its long swing, it passed between the poles of the magnet, going like hell. You threw the switch and the disk stopped dead right where it was and rang like a big gong, though nothing had touched it.

Then you remember the sixty zillion measurements you'd taken off a synchro-cosmotron so huge that it took you four minutes at a fast walk to get from one end to the other.

You remember the mockups, the hours and hours of hi-G, no-G; one instrument out, another, all of 'em, some of 'em; simulated meteorites on collision orbit; manual landing techniques—until your brains were in your hands and the seat of your pants, and you did the right things with them without thinking. Exhausted, you still did it right. Even doped up.

You remember the trips into town with Harris and Flacker and the others. Something happened to you every time you so much as walked down a street with those guys. It was a thing you'd never told anyone. Part of it was something that happened between the townspeople and

your group. Part of it was between your group and yourself. It all added up to being a little different and a little better . . . but not in a cocky way. In a way that made you grateful to the long, heavy bulk of a starship and what such ships are for.

You sit up in your bunk, with that mixed-up; wide-awake feeling, reaching for something you can't quite understand, some one simple thing that would sum up the huge equipment, the thousands of measurements, the hours of cramming and the suspense of examinations; the seat-of-the-pants skills and the pride in town . . .

And now you see what it is.

That kid in there, he could have an I.Q. of nine goddam hundred and never learn how to put down a ship with all his instruments out and the gyros on manual. Not by somebody telling him over an intercom when he's never even sat in a G-seat. He might memorize twelve thousand slightly varying measurements off a linear accelerator, but he wouldn't gain that certain important thing you get when you make those measurements yourself. You could describe the way the copper disk rang when the eddy current stopped it, but he would have to see it happen before it did to him all the things it did to you.

YOU still don't know who that kid is or why he's here, but you can bet on one thing—he isn't here to pick your brains and take your job. You don't have to like him and you can be mad he's aboard instead of Harris or Walky; but get that junk out of your head right now about him being a menace to you. Goddle-mighty Godfrey, where did that poisonous little crumb in your brain come from? Since when are you subject to fear and jealousy and insecurity? Since when do you have to guard yourself against your own imagination?

Come the hell off it, Cadet. You're not that good a teacher; he's not that much of a monster.

Monster! Did you hear him cry that time?

You feel twenty pounds lighter (which is odd, seeing that you're still in free-fall) and as if you'd just washed your face. "Hey, Krampi!"

You go push the button and wait. Then you hear a sharp inhalation through nostrils. A sniff . . . no, you won't call it that.

"Skampi, sir," he corrects you timidly.

"Okay, whatever you say. And knock off that 'sir.'"

"Yes, sir. I mean yes."

"What were you crying about?"

"When, s—?"

"Okay," you break in gently.

"You don't have to talk about it."

"No. I wasn't trying to deny it. I . . . cried twice. I'm sorry you heard me. You must think . . ."

"I don't think," you say sincerely. "Not enough."

He thinks that over and apparently drops it. "I cried right after blastoff."

"Scared?"

"No . . . yes, I was, but that wasn't why. I just . . ."

"Take your time telling me. Time is what we got nothing else but of."

"It was just that I—I'd always wanted to be in space. I thought about it in the daytime and dreamed about it at night. And all of a sudden, there it was, happening to me for real. I . . . thought I ought to say something and I opened my mouth to do it and all of a sudden I was crying. I couldn't help it. I guess I— Crazy, I guess."

"I wouldn't say so. You can hear talk and see pictures and get yourself all ready, but there's nothing like doing it. I know."

"You, you're used to it."

HE seems to want to say something else; you hold the button down. Finally, with difficulty, he asks, "You're big, aren't you? I mean you're . . . you know. Big."

"Well, yes."

"I wish I was. I wish I was good for . . . well, something."

"Everybody push you around?"

"Mm."

"Listen," you say. "You take a human being and put him down next to a starship. They're not the same size and they're not the same shape, and one of 'em's pretty insignificant. But you can say that *this* built *this*, not the other way around."

"Y-e-eah." It is a whisper.

"Well, you're that human being, that self-same one. Ever think of that?"

"No."

"Neither did I, till now," you admit rapidly. "It's the truth, though."

He says, "I wish I was a cadet."

"Where do you come from, kid?"

"Masolo. It's no place. Jerk town. I like big places with big things going on. Like the Base."

"Awful lot of people charging around."

"Yeah," he says. "I don't like crowds much, but the Base—it's worth it."

You sit and look at the bulkhead. It's companionable, suddenly, and sort of changed, as if it had just grown warm, or quilted. You get a splinter of light off the bright metal where you've

scored it. You think it's down pretty deep. A man could stand up to it and knock that piece out with a maul, if a man could stand up, if he had a maul.

You say, very fast, as if you're afraid something's going to stop you, "Ever do anything you were really ashamed of? I did when I talked to you the way I did. I shouldn't've done it like that . . . I don't know what got into me. Yes, I do and I'll tell you. I was afraid you were a boy genius planted on me to strip my brains and take my command. I got scared."

It all comes out like that. You feel much better and at the same time you're glad Walkinok or Shank aren't around to hear you spout like that.

THE kid's very quiet for a while. Then he says, "One time my mother sent me to the market and something was a special, I forget what. But anyway I had forty cents change and I forgot about it. I found it in my pants in school next day and bought a starship magazine with it and never told her. I used to get every issue that way after that. She never missed the money. Or maybe she did and didn't say anything. We were pretty hard up."

You understand that the kid is trying to give you something,

because you apologized to him. You don't say anything more about that. Right here, a wonder starts to grow. You don't know what it is, but you know that standoff-and-watch part of your mind is working on it.

You say, "Where is this Masolo?"

"Upstate. Not far from Base. Ever since I was a baby, the axitugs were shaking the house when they took off. There's a big tree outside the house and all the leaves shiver—with the tugs, you know. I used to climb out a limb and get on the roof and lie down on my back. Sometimes you could see the starships orbiting. Just after the Sun goes down, sometimes you can . . ." He swallows; you can hear it plainly. "I used to put out my hand. It was like a firefly up there."

"Some firefly," you say.

"Yeah. Some firefly, all right."

Inside you, the wonder is turning to a large and luminous astonishment. It's still inexpressible, so you leave it alone.

The kid is saying, "I was with two other fellows out by the high school one time. I was just a kid—eleven, I think. Well, some gorillas from the high school chased us. We ran and they caught up with us. The other kids started to fight them. I got over to one side and, when I had a chance, I ran. I ran all

the way home. I wish I'd stayed there with those other two kids.

"They got the tar kicked out of them and I guess it hurt, but I guess it stopped hurting after some teacher came along and broke up the fight. But I hurt every time I think about running away like that. Boy, did those two give me a razzing when they saw me next day! Boy! So what I wanted to ask you, you don't think a kid who would run away like that could be a cadet."

He ends it like that, flat. No question.

YOU think about it. You've been in some fine brawls as a cadet. You're in a bar and someone cracks wise, and your blood bubbles up, and you wade in, feeling giant-size. But maybe that's just because of the business of belonging.

You say carefully, "I think if I was in a fight, I'd rather have a guy on my side who knew what being scared felt like. Then it would be like having two guys on my side, instead of one. One of the guys wouldn't care if he got hurt and the other guy would never want to be hurt that way again. I think a fellow like that would be a pretty good cadet."

"Well, yeah," says the kid, in that funny whisper.

Now the inner astonishment

bursts into sight and you recognize what it is about this kid.

At first, you were scared of him, but even when that went away, you didn't like him. There was no question of liking him or not liking him; he was a different species that you couldn't have anything to do with.

And the more you talked with him, the more you began to feel that you didn't have to set yourself apart from him, that he had a whole lot you didn't have—and that you could use it. The way he talked, honest and unabashed; you don't know how to do that. You nearly choked to death apologizing to him.

It suddenly is very important to get along with this kid. It isn't because the kid is important. It's because if you can get along with somebody so weak, so wet behind the ears, and yet in his peculiar way so rich, why, you can get along with anybody, even your own lousy self.

And you realize that this thing of getting along with him has extension after extension. Somehow, if you can find more ways to get along with this kid, if you can see more things the way he sees them with no intolerance and no altitude, you'll tap something in yourself that's been dried up a long time now.

You find all this pretty amazing, and you settle down and talk

to the kid. You don't eke it out. You know he'll last all the way back to Base and have plenty left over. You know, too, that by the time you get there, this kid will know a cadet can also be a louse. You can give him that much.

The way you treated him, he was hurt. But you know? He wasn't mad. He doesn't think he's good enough to get mad at a cadet. He thinks a cadet rates what he does just by being a cadet.

Well, you are going to fix that.

THE time goes by and the time comes; the acceleration tug reaches out and grabs you high above Earth, so, after all that manual-control drill, you don't have a thing to do but sit there and ride it down.

The tug hovers over the compound right near the administration building, which disappears in a cloud of yellow dust. You sink down and down in the dust cloud until you think they must be lowering you into a hole in the ground. Then, at last, there's a slight thump and an inhuman amount of racket as the tug blasts away free.

After that, there's only the faint whisper of the air circulator, the settling dust, and a profoundly unpleasant feeling in calves and chest as the blood gets

used to circulating in a 1-G environment.

"Now don't you forget, Skampi," you say. You find it difficult to talk; you've got a wide grin plastered across your face and you can't cast it adrift. "Just as soon as they're through with you, you come looking for me, hear? I'll buy you a soda."

You lean back in your G-chair and hold the bulkhead button.

"I can drink beer," he says manfully.

"We'll compromise. We'll make your soda with beer. Listen, kid. I can't promise, but I know they're fooling with the idea of a two-man crew for starships. How'd you like to go with me—one trip, anyhow? Of course, you'll have to be conditioned six ways from the middle, double-time, and it'll be real rough. But—what do you say?"

And you know? He doesn't say anything!

He laughs, though.

NOW here comes Colonel Provost, the *big* big brass of Psychodynamics, and a young M.P. That's all the welcoming committee you'll get. The compound's walled and locked, and no windows look out on it. They must have unloaded some pretty sorry objects from these space cans from time to time.

They open the hatch from the



outside and you immediately start coughing like hell. Your eyes say the dust has settled, but your lungs say no. By the time you have your eyes wiped, the M.P. is inside and squatting on the deck, cross-legged.

He says cheerfully, "Hi, kay-dee. This here's a stun gun and if you so much as squint at me or the Colonel, you get flaked out like a heaving-line."

"Don't worry about me," you say from behind that silly grin. "I got no quarrel with anybody and I like it here. Good morning, Colonel."

"Look out for this one," said the M.P. "Likes it here. He's sick."

"Shut up, wheelhead," says the Colonel cheerfully. He has his gray crewcut and barrel torso shoved into the hatch and it's real crowded in that little cabin. "Well, Cadet, how are we?"

"We're fine," you say. The M.P. cocks his head a little to one side and gets bright-eyed. He thinks you're sassing the C.O., but you're not. When you say "we," you mean you and your shipmate.

"Anything special happen?"

The answer to that is a big fat yes, but it would take forever to tell. It's all recorded, anyway; PD doesn't miss a trick. But that's from then till now, and done with. You're concerned with

from now on. "Colonel, I want to talk to you right now. It's about my shipmate."

The Colonel leans a little further in and slaps the M.P.'s gun hand. He's in front of the guy, so you can't see his face. "Beat it, wheelhead."

The M.P. clears out. You stagger up out of the G-seat and climb through the hatch. The Colonel catches your arm as you stagger. After a long time in free-fall, your knees won't lock as you walk; you have to stiffen each one as your weight comes on it, and you have to concentrate. So you concentrate, but that doesn't stop you from talking. You skim over the whole business, from your long solo to being reduced to meeting your shipmate, and the hassel you had with yourself over that, and then this thing that happened with the kid—weeks and weeks of it, and you've only just begun.

"You can pick 'em, sir," you pant as you lurch along. "Do you always use a little know-nothing kid? Where do you find 'em? Does it always work out this well?"

"We get a commander out of every Long Haul," he says.

"Say, that's great, sir!"

"We don't have very many ships," he says, just as cheerfully.

"Oh," you say.

SUDDENLY you stop. "Wait, sir! What about Skampi? He's still locked in on his side of the bulkhead."

"You first," says the Colonel. You go on into the PD lab. "Up you go."

You look at the big chair with its straps and electrodes and big metal hood.

"You know, they used chairs like these in the French Revolution," you say, showing off. You're just busting with friendliness today. You never felt like this. You sit in the big chair. "Look, sir, I want to get started on a project right away. This kid, now—I tell you, he's got a lot on the ball. He's spaceman right to the marrow bones. He comes from right around here, that little place up the pike, Masolo. He got shook out of his bassinet by the axi-tugs. He spent his childhood lying on his back on the roof looking for the starships in orbit. He's—"

"You talk all the time," the Colonel breaks in mildly. "Sum up, will you? You made out with your shipmate. You think you could do it again in a starship. That it?"

"Think we can try it? Hey, really? Look, can I be the one to tell him, Colonel?"

"Close your mouth and sit still."

Those are orders. You sit still.

The Colonel gets you strapped in and connected up. He puts his hand on the switch.

"Where did you say you came from?"

You didn't say, and you don't, because the hood swings down and you're surrounded by a sudden dissonant chord of audio at tremendous amplitude. If you had been allowed to say, though, you wouldn't have known.

The Colonel doesn't even give you time to be surprised at this. You sink into blackness.

IT gets light again. You have no idea how much time has passed, but it must be plenty, because the sunlight from outside is a different color and slants a different way through the venetian blinds. On a bench nearby is a stack of minicans with your case number painted on each one—that'd be the tape record of your Long Haul. There's some stuff in there you're not proud of, but you wouldn't swap the whole story for anything.

"Hello, Colonel," you say with your tongue thick.

"You with us again? Good." He looks at an enlarged film-strip and back at you. He shows you. It's a picture of the bulkhead with the triangular score in it. "Magneto-striction vibrator, with a diamond bearing for a drill bit, hm? Not bad. You guys

scare me. I'd have sworn that bulkhead couldn't be cut and that there was nothing in the ship that could cut it. You must've been real eager."

"I wanted to kill him. You know that now," you say happily.

"You damn near did."

"Aw, now, Colonel! I wouldn't have gone through with it."

"Come on," he says, opening the buckles.

"Where, sir?"

"To your space can. Wouldn't you like to have a look at it from the outside?"

"Cadets aren't permitted—"

"You qualify," says the old man shortly.

So out you go to the compound. The can still stands where it was landed.

"Where's Skampi?" you ask worriedly.

The Colonel just passes you an odd look and walks on. You follow him up to the can. "Here, around the front."

You walk around to the bow and look up at it. It's just the shape it ought to be from the way it looked from inside, except that it looks a little like a picture of a whale caught winking at you.

Winking?

One-eyed!

"Do you mean to tell me you had that kid in a blind compart-

ment, without so much as a viewport?" you rage.

The Colonel pushes you. "Sit down. Over there. On the hatch. You returning heroes and your manic moods . . . sit down!"

You sit on the edge of the open hatch.

"Sometimes they fall over when I explain," he says gruffly. "Now what was bothering you?"

"Locking that kid up in a dark—"

"There isn't a kid. There isn't a dark cabin. There's no viewport on that side of the can. It's a hydrazine tank."

"But I—but we—but the—"

"Where do you come from?"

"Masolo, but what's that to—"

"What did your mother and all the kids call you when you were a space-struck teenager?"

"Scampy. They all—Scampy?"

"That's right," he says bluntly.

ROCKED, you cover your face. "By God! I can remember now, thinking back in detail over my whole life—it started in the bus that day I passed the entrance exams. What is it? Please, *what is it?*"

"Well, if you want me to get technical, they call it Dell's hypothesis. It was formulated way back in the middle of the 20th century by Dudley Dell, which was one of the pseudonyms of a

magazine editor. As I remember it, he later became a lay analyst and—"

"Please, Colonel!" You're in trouble.

"Okay, okay," he says soothingly. "Well, up to that time, psychiatry had been banging its head against a stone wall—usually banging up the patient in the process. Those early therapists knew that childish feelings and motivations were interfering with adult efficiency and happiness. When a man would slam out of his house and do a lousy day's work after a fight with his wife, the doctor would tell him, 'You're acting as if you were a child rejected by its mother,' and this was—"

"Colonel, sir, are you going to please tell me what the hell's with me?"

"I am," he answers calmly. "This, as I was beginning to explain, was all wrong because the 'as if' concept kept the patient from distinguishing his adult feelings and motivations from those of the child within him—a very viable, hard-fighting, but frightened and confused kid it was, too. And smart. Smart enough, at any rate, to see rejection for just what it was. And if it went far enough, the doctor would say hopelessly, 'Mm-hmm, schizophrenia,' thereby scaring the liverwurst out of the patient.

Dell stopped all that wreckage."

"Dell stopped all that," you repeat, suffering.

"It was a little thing, that hypothesis of his—little like $E = MC^2$ or Newton's apple—but, oh, my, what happened!"

"Oh, my," you agree. "What happened?"

"Dell began directing therapy to the infantile segment, treating it as a living, thinking, feeling organism. It responded so excellently that it changed the face of psychoanalysis. Now in your case—you're not going to interrupt?"

YOU shake your head blankly but obediently.

"Good. In your case, an extension of Dell's hypothesis was used. The sum total of your life up until you took your entrance examinations to this Base was arrested at the age of 15. A hypnotic barrier was erected so that you could have no access to any of this. You—all of you cadets—literally start a new life here, with no ties whatever to an earlier one. Your technical education very deliberately has no reference factors to anything but itself. You learn quickly because your minds are uncluttered. You never miss your past because we're careful never to reactivate it.

"When this approach was first tried, the subjects were gradu-

ated with memories only of their training. Well, it didn't work. Childhood conditioning is too important to the entire human being to be wiped out without diminishing the subject in just about every emotional way. So we developed this new system. That's what we used on you.

"But we discovered a peculiar thing. Even in untrained adults—as opposed to the sharp division of pre- and post-entrance you have here—even untrained adults suffer to greater or lesser degree from internal strife between childhood and adult interpretations and convictions. An exaggerated example would be a child's implicit belief in Santa Claus and the Easter bunny, existing at one and the same time with the adult's realization that these are only legends. The inner child—the child within the adult—still exists, according to Dell and to all tests since, and will fight like the very devil for survival, beliefs and all . . . especially one whose beliefs and natural feelings and reactions had been made grounds for punishment or ridicule.

"The schism between you and Scampy was extreme; you were, in effect, born on different planets. To be a complete human being, you had to be integrated. But to be integrated successfully, you and Scampy had to learn

how to get along together. For Scampy, this was not difficult—you, even in injustice and cruelty, were a real live hero-image. But the adult you had a stonier path. Somewhere within yourself, though, you somehow found an element of tolerance and empathy, and used it to bridge the gap.

"I may say," added the Colonel severely, "that it takes a particularly fine kind of person to negotiate this difficult merger. But I also have to say that it's always completed."

"Always?" you ask, astonished.

"In every single case. I know there are all sorts of rumors about psychotics being taken out of the space cans—the M.P.s standing by when we open them reinforce the rumors, but that's only precautionary in case it ever happens. It hasn't yet and I doubt if it will."

REMEMBERING those stories and thinking about your own taste of private hell, you protest, "But I almost went nuts, Colonel!"

"Not a chance," he says. "That was the value of Dell's hypothesis—by being able to contact the child within you (and it exists in every adult, if you're wondering), you could make friends with him. Stop frowning! What else could you do with such an

eager, friendly, admiring kid? And that admiration is important—because he has such confidence in you, you will, too. And that confidence lets him relax so you can take over situations you've been trained to handle and he hasn't.

"Well, that's what Dell discovered was the cause of emotional difficulty, which he substituted for the ancient and useless 'neurosis' and 'psychosis' labels. When the child within is contacted and reassured, as you did on this trip, he can leave the controls to the adult. And, as I said, it always happens. The child feels secure because it's liked and because it trusts the adult self and is trusted. The adult self also feels liked and trusted. Well, what else could that produce but a person at peace with himself?"

"But he *talked* to me! Don't tell me you've secretly invented a telepathic converter with band-pass filters!"

"Of course not. How are your thoughts expressed to you? As abstract symbols? As wordless cerebration? No. You literally *talk* to yourself, but *subvocally*. You have a subminiature transmitter placed surgically in your pharynx. The button on your bulkhead activated it. There had to be a button, you see; we couldn't have the two of you speaking at the same time, which

is what persons in the same room invariably do. You can't subvocalize and talk simultaneously. It would have tipped you off. Hence the button."

"I can't get used to it," you complain. "I can't! I practically saw the boy! Listen, Colonel—can I keep my built-in transmitter and have the same rig on my starship?"

He smiles, although you think it hurts his face. "You really want it left as is?"

"He's a great kid."

"Very well—Commander. Dismissed." He marches away.

YOU look after him, shaking your head. Then you duck into the space can. You stare at the bulkhead and at the button and at the scoring on the plate where you came *that* close to filling your cabin with your hydrazine supply. You shudder.

"Hey," you call softly. "Scampy!"

You push the button. You hear the carrier. Then, "I'm thirsty," says Scampy.

You cut out of there and go down to the rec area and into the short-order bar.

"A beer," you say. "And put a lump of vanilla ice cream in it. And two straws."

"You crazy?" asks the man.

"No," you say. "Oh, no!"

—THEODORE STURGEON