shell game

None of them had captured or killed a single enemy! Then whom were they at war with?

By PHILIP K. DICK

Illustrated by KOSSIN

sound awoke O'Keefe instantly. He threw back his covers, slid from the cot, grabbed his B-pistol from the wall and, with his foot, smashed the alarm box. High frequency waves tripped emergency bells throughout the camp. As O'Keefe burst from his house, lights already flickered on every side.

"Where?" Fisher demanded shrilly. He appeared beside O'Keefe, still in his pajamas, grubby-faced with sleep.

"Over to the right." O'Keefe

leaped aside for a massive cannon being rolled from its underground storage-chambers. Soldiers were appearing among the night-clad figures. To the right lay the black bog of mists and obese foliage, ferns and pulpy onions, sunk in the half-liquid ooze that made up the surface of Betelgeuse II. Nocturnal phosphorescence danced and flitted over the bog, ghostly yellow lights snapped in the thick darkness.

"I figure," Horstokowski said,

"they came in close to the road, but not actually on it. There's a shoulder fifty feet on each side, where the bog has piled up. That's why our radar's silent."

An immense mechanical fusing "bug" was eating its way into the mud and shifting water of the bog, leaving behind a trail of hard, smoked surface. The vegetation and the rotting roots and dead leaves were sucked up and efficiently cleared away.

"What did you see?" Portbane asked O'Keefe.

"I didn't see anything. I was sound asleep. But I heard them." "Doing what?"

"They were getting ready to pump nerve gas into my house. I heard them unreeling the hose from portable drums and uncapping the pressure tanks. But, by God, I was out of the house before they could get the joints leak-tight!"

Daniels hurried up. "You say it's a gas attack?" He fumbled for the gas mask at his belt. "Don't stand there—get your masks on!"

"They didn't get their equipment going," Silberman said. "O'Keefe gave the alarm in time. They retreated back to the bog."

"You're sure?" Daniels demanded.

"You don't smell anything, do you?"

"No," Daniels admitted. "But the odorless type is the most deadly. And you don't know you've been gased till it's too late." He put on his gas mask, just to be sure.

A few women appeared by the rows of houses—slim, large-eyed shapes in the flickering glare of the emergency searchlights. Some children crept cautiously after them.

Silberman and Horstokowski moved over in the shadows by the heavy cannon.

"Interesting," Horstokowski said. "Third gas attack this month. Plus two tries to wire bomb terminals within the camp site. They're stepping it up."

"You have it all figured out, don't you?"

"I don't have to wait for the composite to see we're getting it heavier all the time." Horstokowski peered warily around, then pulled Silberman close. "Maybe there's a reason why the radar screen didn't react. It's supposed to get everything, even knocker-bats."

"But if they came in along the shoulder, like you said—"

"I just said that as a plant. There's somebody waving them in, setting up interference for the radar."

"You mean one of us?"

Horstokowski was intently watching Fisher through the

moist night gloom. Fisher had moved carefully to the edge of the road, where the hard surface ended and the slimy, scorched bog began. He was squatting down and rooting in the ooze.

"What's he doing?" Horstokowski demanded.

"Picking up something," Silberman said indifferently. "Why not? He's supposed to be looking around, isn't he?"

"Watch," Horstokowski warned. "When he comes back, he's going to pretend nothing happened."

PRESENTLY, Fisher returned, walking rapidly and rubbing the muck from his hands.

Horstokowski intercepted him. "What'd you find?"

"Me?" Fisher blinked. "I didn't find anything."

"Don't kid me! You were down on your hands and knees, grubbing in the bog."

"I—thought I saw something metal, that's all."

A vast inner excitement radiated through Horstokowski. He had been right.

"Come on!" he shouted. "What'd you find?"

"I thought it was a gas pipe," Fisher muttered. "But it was only a root. A big, wet root."

There was a tense silence.

"Search him," Portbane ordered. Two soldiers grabbed Fisher. Silberman and Daniels quickly searched him.

They spilled out his belt pistol, knife, emergency whistle, automatic relay checker, geiger counter, pulse tab, medical kit and identification papers. There was nothing else.

The soldiers let him go, disappointed, and Fisher sullenly collected his things.

"No, he didn't find anything," Portbane stated. "Sorry, Fisher. We have to be careful. We have to watch all the time, as long as they're out there, plotting and conspiring against us."

Silberman and Horstokowski exchanged glances, then moved quietly away.

"I think I get it," Silberman said softly.

"Sure," Horstokowski answered. "He hid something. We'll dig up that section of bog he was poking around in. I think maybe we'll find something interesting." He hunched his shoulders combatively. "I knew somebody was working for them, here in the camp. A spy for Terra."

Silberman started. "Terra? Is that who's attacking us?"

"Of course that's who."

There was a puzzled look on Silberman's face.

"Seemed to me we're fighting somebody else."

Horstokowski was outraged.

"For instance?"

Silberman shook his head. "I don't know. I didn't think about who so much as what to do about it. I guess I just took it for granted they were aliens."

"And what do you think those Terran monkey men are?" Horstokowski challenged.

THE weekly Pattern Conference brought together the nine leaders of the camp in their reinforced underground conference chamber. Armed guards protected the entrance, which was sealed tight as soon as the last leader had been examined, checked over and finally passed.

Domgraf-Schwach, the conference chairman, sat attentively in his deep chair, one hand on the Pattern composite, the other on the switch that could instantly catapult him from the room and into a special compartment, safe from attack. Portbane was making his routine inspection of the chamber, examining each chair and desk for scanning eyes. Daniels sat with eves fixed on his geiger counter. Silberman was completely encased in an elaborate steel and plastic suit, configured with wiring, from which continual whirrings came.

"What in God's name is that suit of armor?" Domgraf-Schwach asked angrily. "Take it off so we can see you." "Nuts to you," Silberman snapped, his voice muted by his intricate hull. "I'm wearing this from now on. Last night, somebody tried to jab me with bacteria-impregnated needles."

Lanoir, who was half-dozing at his place, came alive. "Bacteria-impregnated needles?" He leaped up and hurried over to Silberman. "Let me ask you if—"

"Keep away from me!" Silberman shouted. "If you come any closer, I'll electrocute you!"

"The attempt I reported last week," Lanoir panted excitedly, "when they tried to poison the water supply with metallic salts. It occurred to me their next method would be bacterial wastes, filterable virus we couldn't detect until actual outbreak of disease." From his pocket, he yanked a bottle and shook out a handful of white capsules. One after another, he popped the capsules into his mouth.

Every man in the room was protected in some fashion. Each chose whatever apparatus conformed to his individual experience. But the totality of defense-systems was integrated in the general Pattern planning. The only man who didn't seem busy with a device was Tate. He sat pale and tense, but otherwise unoccupied. Domgraf-Schwach made a mental note—Tate's confidence-level was unusually high.



It suggested he somehow felt safe from attack.

"No talking," Domgraf-Schwach said. "Time to start."

He had been chosen as chairmanship by the turn of a wheel. There was no possibility of subversion under such a system. In an isolated, autonomous colony of sixty men and fifty women, such a random method was necessary.

"Daniels will read the week's Pattern composite," Domgraf-Schwab ordered.

"Why?" Portbane demanded bluntly. "We were the ones who put it together. We all know what's in it."

"For the same reason it's always read," Silberman answered. "So we'll know it wasn't tampered with."

"Just the summation!" Horstokowski said loudly. "I don't want to stay down here in this vault any longer than I have to."

"Afraid somebody'll fill up the passage?" Daniels jeered. "There are half a dozen emergency escape exits. You ought to know—you insisted on every one of them."

"Read the summation," Lanoir demanded.

D^{ANIELS} cleared his throat. "During the last seven days, there were eleven overt attacks in all. The main attack was on our

new class-A bridge network, which was sabotaged and wrecked. The struts were weakened and the plastic mix that served as base material was diluted, so that when the very first convoy of trucks passed over it, the whole thing collapsed."

"We know that," Portbane said gloomily.

"Loss consisted of six lives and considerable equipment. Troops scoured the area for a whole day, but the saboteurs managed to escape. Shortly after this attack, it was discovered that the water supply was poisoned with metallic salts. The wells were therefore filled and new ones drilled. Now all our water passes through filter and analysis systems."

"I boil mine," Lanoir added feelingly.

"It's agreed by everyone that the frequency and severity of attacks have been stepped up." Daniels indicated the massive wall charts and graphs. "Without our bomb-proof screen and our constant detection network, we'd be overwhelmed tonight. The real question is—who are our attackers?"

"Terrans," Horstokowski said. Tate shook his head. "Terrans, hell! What would monkey men be doing out this far?"

"We're out this far, aren't we?" Lanoir retorted. "And we were Terrans once." "Never!" Fisher shouted. "Maybe we lived on Terra, but we aren't Terrans. We're a superior mutant race."

"Then who are they?" Horstokowski insisted.

"They're other survivors from the ship," Tate said.

"How do you know?" asked Silberman. "Have you ever seen them?"

"We salvaged no lifeboats, remember? They must have blasted off in them."

"If they were isolated survivors," O'Keefe objected, "they wouldn't have the equipment and weapons and machines they're using. They're a trained, integrated force. We haven't been able to defeat them or even kill any of them in five years. That certainly shows their strength."

"We haven't tried to defeat them," Fisher said. "We've only tried to defend ourselves."

A sudden tense silence fell over the nine men.

"You mean the ship," Horstokowski said.

"It'll be up out of the bog soon," Tate replied. "And then we'll have something to show them—something they'll remember."

"Good God!" Lanoir exclaimed, disgusted. "The ship's a wreck—the meteor completely smashed it. What happens when we do get it up? We can't oper-

ate it unless we can completely rebuild it."

"If the monkey men could build the thing," Portbane said, "we can repair it. We have the tools and machinery."

"And we've finally located the control cabin," O'Keefe pointed out. "I see no reason why we can't raise it."

There was an abrupt change of expression on Lanoir's face. "All right, I withdraw my objections. Let's get it up."

"What's your motive?" Daniels yelled excitedly. "You're trying to put something over on us!"

"He's planning something," Fisher furiously agreed. "Don't listen to him. Leave the damn thing down there!"

"Too late for that," O'Keefe said. "It's been rising for weeks."

"You're in with him!" Daniels screeched. "Something's being put over on us!"

THE ship was a dripping, corroded ruin. Slime poured from it as the magnetic grapples dragged it from the bog and onto the hard surface that the fusing bugs had laid down.

The bugs burned a hard track through the bog, out to the control cabin. While the lift suspended the cabin, heavy reinforced plastic beams were slid under it. Tangled weeds, matted like ancient hair, covered the globular cabin in the midday sun, the first light that had struck it in five years.

"In you go," Domgraf-Schwach said eagerly.

Portbane and Lanoir advanced over the fused surface to the moored control cabin. Their handlights flashed ominously yellow around the steaming walls and encrusted controls. Livid eels twisted and convulsed in the thick pools underfoot. The cabin was a smashed, twisted ruin. Lanoir, who was first, motioned Portbane impatiently after him.

"You look at these controls—you're the engineer."

Portbane set down his light on a sloping heap of rusted metal and sloshed through the kneedeep rubbish to the demolished control panel. It was a maze of fused, buckled machinery. He squatted down in front of it and began tearing away the pitted guard-plates.

Lanoir pushed open a supply closet and brought down metal-packed audio and video tapes. He eagerly spilled open a can of the video and held a handful of frames to the flickering light. "Here's the ship's data. Now I'll be able to prove there was no-body but us aboard."

O'Keefe appeared at the jagged doorway. "How's it coming?"

Lanoir elbowed past him and out on the support boards. He deposited a load of tape-cans and returned to the drenched cabin. "Find anything on the controls?" he asked Portbane.

"Strange," Portbane murmured.

"What's the matter?" Tate demanded. "Too badly wrecked?"

"There are lots of wires and relays. Plenty of meters and power circuits and switches. But no controls to operate them."

Lanoir hurried over. "There must be!"

"For repairs, you have to remove all these plates—practically dismantle the works to even see them. Nobody could sit here and control the ship. There's nothing but a smooth, sealed shell."

"Maybe this wasn't the control cabin," Fisher offered.

"This is the steering mechanism—no doubt about that." Portbane pulled out a heap of charred wiring. "But all this was self-contained. They're robot controls. Automatic."

They looked at each other. "Then we were prisoners," Tate said, dazed.

"Whose?" Fisher asked baf-fledly.

"The Terrans!" Lanoir said.
"I don't get it," Fisher muttered vaguely. "We planned the whole flight—didn't we? We broke out of Ganymede and got away."

"Get the tapes going," Port-

bane said to Lanoir. "Let's see what's in them."

Daniels snapped the vidtage scanner off and raised the light.

"Well," he said, "you saw for yourselves this was a hospital ship. It carried no crew. It was directed from a central guidebeam at Jupiter. The beam carried it from the Sol System here, where, because of a mechanical error, a meteor penetrated the protection screen and the ship crashed."

"And if it hadn't crashed?"

Domgraf-Schwach asked faintly.

"Then we would have been taken to the main hospital at Fomalhaut IV."

"Play the last tape again," Tate urged.

The wall-speaker spluttered and then said smoothly: "The distinction between paranoids and paranoiac syndromes in other psychotic personality disorders must be borne in mind when dealing with these patients. The paranoid retains his general personality structure unimpaired. Outside of the region of his complex, he is logical, rational, even brilliant. He can be talked to—he can discuss himself—he is aware of his surroundings.

"The paranoid differs from other psychotics in that he remains actively oriented to the outside world. He differs from socalled normal personality types in that he has a set of fixed ideas, false postulates from which he has relentlessly constructed an elaborate system of beliefs, logical and consistent with these false postulates."

Shakily, Daniels interrupted the tape. "These tapes were for the hospital authorities on Fomalhaut IV. Locked in a supply closet in the control cabin. The control cabin itself was sealed off from the rest of the ship. None of us was able to enter it."

"The paranoid is totally rigid," the calm voice of the Terran doctor continued. "His fixed ideas cannot be shaken. They dominate his life. He logically weaves all events, all persons, all chance remarks and happenings, into his system. He is convinced the world is plotting against himthat he is a person of unusual importance and ability against whom endless machinations are directed. To thwart these plots, the paranoid goes to infinite lengths to protect himself. He repeatedly vidtages the authorities. constantly moves from place to place and, in the dangerous final phases, may even become-"

Silberman snapped it off savagely and the chamber was silent. The nine leaders of the camp sat unmoving in their places.

"We're a bunch of nuts," Tate

said finally. "A shipload of psychos who got wrecked by a chance meteor."

"Don't kid yourself," Horstokowski snapped. "There wasn't anything chance about that meteor."

Fisher giggled hysterically. "More paranoid talk. Good God, all these attacks—hallucinations—all in our minds!"

L ANOIR poked vaguely at the piles of tape. "What are we to believe? Are there any attackers?"

"We've been defending ourselves against them for five years!" Portbane retorted. "Isn't that proof enough?"

"Have you ever seen them?" Fisher asked slyly.

"We're up against the best agents in the Galaxy. Terran shock troops and military spies, carefully trained in subversion and sabotage. They're too clever to show themselves."

"They wrecked the bridgesystem," O'Keefe said. "It's true we didn't see them, but the bridge is sure as hell in ruins."

"Maybe it was badly built," Fisher pointed out. "Maybe it just collapsed."

"Things don't 'just collapse'! There's a reason for all these things that have been happening."

"Like what?" Tate demanded. "Weekly poison gas attacks,"

Portbane said. "Metallic wastes in the water supply, to name only two."

"And bacteriological crystals," Daniels added.

"Maybe none of these things exist," Lanoir argued. "But how are we to prove it? If we're all insane, how would we know?"

"There are over a hundred of us," Domgraf-Schwach said. "We've all experienced these attacks. Isn't that proof enough?"

"A myth can be picked up by a whole society, believed and taught to the next generation. Gods, fairies, witches—believing a thing doesn't make it true. For centuries, Terrans believed the Earth was flat."

"If all foot-rulers grow to thirteen inches," Fisher asked, "how would anybody know? One of them would have to stay twelve inches long, a non-variable, a constant. We're a bunch of inaccurate rulers, each thirteen inches long. We need one nonparanoid for comparison."

"Or maybe this is all part of their strategy," Siberman said. "Maybe they rigged up that control cabin and planted those tapes there."

"This ought to be no different from trying to test any belief," Portbane explained. "What's the characteristic of a scientific test?"

"It can be duplicated," Fisher said promptly. "Look, we're go-

ing around in circles. We're trying to measure ourselves. You can't take your ruler, either twelve inches or thirteen inches long, and ask it to measure itself. No instrument can test its own accuracy."

"Wrong," Portbane answered calmly. "I can put together a valid, objective test."

"There's no such test!" Tate shouted excitedly.

"There sure as hell is. And inside of a week, I'll have it set up."

"GAS!" the soldier shouted. On all sides, sirens wailed into life. Women and children scrambled for their masks. Heavy-duty cannon rumbled up from subsurface chambers and took up positions. Along the perimeter of the bog, the fusing bugs were searing away a ribbon of muck. Searchlights played out into the fern-thick darkness.

Portbane snapped off the cock of the steel tank and signaled the workmen. The tank was rolled quickly away from the sea of mud and seared weeds.

"All right," Portbane gasped. "Get it below."

He emerged in the subsurface chamber as the cylinder was being rolled into position.

"That cylinder," Portbane said, "should contain hydrocyanic vapor. It's a sampling made at the site of the attack."

"This is useless," Fisher complained. "They're attacking and here we stand!"

Portbane signaled the workmen and they began laying out the test apparatus. "There will be two samples, precipitates of different vapors, each clearly marked and labeled A and B. One comes from the cylinder filled at the scene of the attack. The other is condensed from air taken out of this room."

"Suppose we describe both as negative?" Silberman asked worriedly. "Won't that throw your test off?"

"Then we'll take more tests. After a couple of months, if we still haven't got anything but negative findings, then the attack hypothesis is destroyed."

"We may see both as positive," Tate said, perplexed.

"In that case, we're dead right now. If we see both samples as positive, I think the case for the paranoid hypothesis has been proved."

After a moment, Domgraf-Schwach reluctantly agreed. "One is the control. If we maintain that it isn't possible to get a control sample that is free of hydrocyanic acid . . ."

"Pretty damn slick," O'Keefe admitted. "You start from the one known factor—our own existence. We can't very well doubt that."

"Here are all the choices,"

Portbane said. "Both positive means we're psychotic. Both negative means either the attack was a false alarm or there are no attackers. One positive and one negative would indicate there are real attackers, that we're fully sane and rational." He glanced around at the camp leads. "But we'll all have to agree which sample is which."

"Our reactions will be recorded secretly?" Tate asked.

"Tabulated and punched by the mechanical eye. Tallied by machinery. Each of us will make an individual discrimination."

A FTER a pause, Fisher said, "I'll try it." He came forward, leaned over the colorimeter and studied the two samples intently. He alternated them for a time and then firmly grabbed the check-stylus.

"You're sure?" Domgraf-Schwach asked. "You really know which is the negative control sample?"

"I know." Fisher noted his findings on the punch sheet and moved away.

"I'm next," Tate said, impatiently pushing up. "Let's get this over with."

One by one, the men examined the two samples, recorded their findings, and then moved off to stand waiting uneasily.

"All right," Portbane said

finally. "I'm the last one." He peered down briefly, scribbled his results, then pushed the equipment away. "Give me the readings," he told the workmen by the scanner.

A moment later, the findings were flashed up for everyone to see.

Fisher	Α
Tate	Α
O'Keefe	В
Horstokowski	\mathbf{B}
Silberman	B
Daniels	\mathbf{B}
Portbane	A
Domgraf-Schwach	B
Lanoir	Α

"I'll be damned," Silberman said softly. "As simple as that. We're paranoids."

"You cluck!" Tate shouted at Horstokowski. "It was A, not B! How the hell could you get it wrong?"

"B was as bright as a searchlight!" Domgraf-Schwach answered furiously. "A was completely colorless!"

O'Keefe pushed forward. "Which was it, Portbane? Which was the positive sample?"

"I don't know," Portbane confessed. "How could any of us be sure?"

THE buzzer on Domgraf-Schwach's desk clicked and he snapped on the vidscreen.

The face of a soldier-operator appeared. "The attack's over, sir. We drove them away."

Domgraf-Schwach smiled ironically. "Catch any of them?"

"No, sir. They slipped back into the bog. I think we hit a couple, though. We'll go out tomorrow and try to find the corpses."

"You think you'll find them?"
"Well, the bog usually swallows them up. But maybe this time—"

"All right," Domgraf-Schwach interrupted. "If this turns out to be an exception, let me know." He broke the circuit.

"Now what?" Daniels inquired icily.

"There's no point in continuing work on the ship," O'Keefe said. "Why waste our time bombing empty bogs?"

"I suggest we keep working on the ship," Tate contradicted. "Why?" O'Keefe asked.

"So we can head for Fomalhaut and give ourselves up to the hospital station."

Silberman stared at him incredulously. "Turn ourselves in? Why not stay here? We're not harming anybody."

"No, not yet. It's the future I'm thinking of, centuries from now."

"We'll be dead."

"Those of us in this room, sure, but what about our descendents?" "He's right," Lanoir conceded. "Eventually our descendants will fill this whole solar system. Sooner or later, our ships might spread over the Galaxy." He tried to smile, but his muscles would not respond. "The tapes point out how tenacious paranoids are. They cling fanatically to their fixed beliefs. If our descendants expand into Terran regions, there'll be a fight and we might win because we're more one-track. We would never deviate."

"Fanatics," Daniels whispered.
"We'll have to keep this information from the rest of the camp," O'Keefe said.

"Absolutely," Fisher agreed. "We'll have to keep them thinking the ship is for H-bomb attacks. Otherwise, we'll have one hell of a situation on our hands."

They began moving numbly toward the sealed door.

"Wait a minute," Domgraf-Schwach said urgently. "The two workmen." He started back, while some of them went out into the corridor, the rest back toward their seats.

And then it happened.

SILBERMAN fired first. Fisher screamed as half of him vanished in swirling particles of radioactive ash. Silberman dropped to his one knee and fired up at Tate. Tate leaped back and

brought out his own B-pistol. Daniels stepped from the path of Lanoir's beam. It missed him and struck the first row of seats.

Lanoir calmly crept along the wall through the billowing clouds of smoke. A figure loomed ahead; he raised his gun and fired. The figure fell to one side and fired back. Lanoir staggered and collapsed like a deflated balloon and Silberman hurried on.

At his desk, Domgraf-Schwach was groping wildly for his escape button. His fingers touched it, but as he depressed the stud, a blast from Portbane's pistol removed the top of his head. The lifeless corpse stood momentarily, then was whisked to "safety" by the intricate apparatus beneath the desk.

"This way!" Portbane shouted, above the sizzle of the B-blasts. "Come on, Tate!"

Various beams were turned in his direction. Half the chamber burst apart and thundered down, disintegrating into rubble and flaming debris. He and Tate scrambled for one of the emergency exits. Behind them, the others hurried, firing savagely.

Horstokowski found the exit and slid past the jammed lock. He fired as the two figures raced up the passage ahead of him. One of them stumbled, but the other grabbed at him and they hobbled off together. Daniels was

a better shot. As Tate and Portbane emerged on the surface, one of Daniels' blasts undercut the taller of the two.

Portbane continued running a little way, and then silently pitched face-forward against the side of a plastic house, a gloomy square of opaque blackness against the night sky.

"Where'd they go?" Silberman demanded hoarsely, as he appeared at the mouth of the passage. His right arm had been torn away by Lanoir's blast. The stump was seared hard.

"I got one of them." Daniels and O'Keefe approached the inert figure warily. "It's Portbane. That leaves Tate. We got three of the four. Not bad, on such short notice."

"Tate's damn smart," Silberman panted. "I think he suspected."

He scanned the darkness around them. Soldiers, returning from the gas attack, came hurrying up. Searchlights rumbled toward the scene of the shooting. Off in the distance, sirens wailed.

"Which way did he go?" Daniels asked.

"Over toward the bog."

O'KEEFE moved cautiously along the narrow street. The others came slowly behind.

"You were the first to realize,"

Horstokowski said to Silberman. "For a while, I believed the test. Then I realized we were being tricked—the four of them were plotting in unison."

"I didn't expect four of them," Silberman admitted. "I knew there was at least one Terran spy among us. But Lanoir . . . "

"I always knew Lanoir was a Terran agent," O'Keefe declared flatly. "I wasn't surprised at the test results. They gave themselves away by faking their findings."

Silberman waved over a group of soldiers. "Have Tate picked up and brought here. He's somewhere at the periphery of the camp."

The soldiers hurried away, dazed and muttering. Alarm bells dinned shrilly on all sides. Figures scampered back and forth. Like a disturbed ant colony, the whole camp was alive with excitement.

"In other words," Daniels said, "the four of them really saw the same as we. They saw B as the positive sample, but they put down A instead."

"They knew we'd put down B," O'Keefe said, "since B was the positive sample taken from the attack site. All they had to do was record the opposite. The results seemed to substantiate Lanoir's paranoid theory, which was why Portbane set up the test in the first place. It was

planned a long time ago—part of their overall job."

"Lanoir dug up the tapes in the first place!" Daniels exclaimed. "Fisher and he planted them down in the ruins of the ship. Portbane got us to accept his testing device."

"What were they trying to do?" Silberman asked suddenly. "Why were they trying to convince us we're paranoids?"

"Isn't it obvious?" O'Keefe replied. "They wanted us to turn ourselves in. The Terran monkey men naturally are trying to choke off the race that's going to supplant them. We won't surrender, of course. The four of them were clever—they almost had me convinced. When the results flashed up five to four, I had a momentary doubt. But then I realized what an intricate strategy they had worked out."

Horstokowski examined his Bpistol. "I'd like to get hold of Tate and wring the whole story from him, the whole damn account of their planning, so we'd have it in black and white."

"You're still not convinced?" Daniels inquired.

"Of course. But I'd like to hear him admit it."

"I doubt if we'll see Tate again," O'Keefe said. "He must have reached the Terran lines by now. He's probably sitting in a big inter-system military transport, giving his story to goldbraid Terran officials. I'll bet they're moving up heavy guns and shock troops while we stand here."

"We'd better get busy," Daniels said sharply. "We'll repair the ship and load it with H-bombs. After we wipe out their bases here, we'll carry the war to them. A few raids on the Sol System ought to teach them to leave us alone."

Horstokowski grinned. "It'll be an uphill fight—we're alone against a whole galaxy. But I think we'll take care of them. One of us is worth a million Terran monkey men."

TATE lay trembling in the dark tangle of weeds. Dripping black stalks of nocturnal vegetables clutched and stirred around him. Poisonous night insects slithered across the surface of the fetid bog.

He was covered with slime. His clothing was torn and ripped. Somewhere along the way, he had lost his B-pistol. His right shoulder ached; he could hardly move his arm. Bones broken, probably. He was too numb and dazed to care. He lay face-down in the sticky muck and closed his eyes.

He didn't have a chance. Nobody survived in the bogs. He feebly smashed an insect oozing across his neck. It squirmed in his hand and then, reluctantly, died. For a long time, its dead legs kicked.

The probing stalk of a stinging snail began tracing webs across Tate's inert body. As the sticky pressure of the snail crept heavily onto him, he heard the first faint far-off sounds of the camp going into action. For a time, it meant nothing to him. Then he understood—and shuddered miserably, helplessly.

The first phase of the big offensive against Earth was already moving into high gear.

-PHILIP K. DICK