THE MOLD OF YANCY

Philip K Dick, 1955

LEON SIPLING GROANED and pushed away his work papers. In an organization of thousands he was the only employee not putting out. Probably he was the only yance-man on Callisto not doing his job. Fear, and the quick pluckings of desperation, made him reach up and wave on the audio circuit to Babson, the over-all office controller.

"Say," Sipling said hoarsely, "I think I'm stuck, Bab. How about running the gestalt through, up to my spot? Maybe I can pick up the rhythm... " He grinned weakly. "The hum of other creative minds."

After a speculative moment, Babson reached for the impulse synapsis, his massive face unsympathetic. "You holding up progress, Sip? This has to be integrated with the daily by six tonight. The schedule calls for the works to be on the vidlines during the dinner-hour stretch"

The visual side of the gestalt had already begun to form on the wall screen; Sipling turned his attention to it, grateful of a chance to escape Babson's cold glare.

The screen showed a 3-D of Yancy, the usual three quarter view, from the waist up. John Edward Yancy in his faded workshirt, sleeves rolled up, arms brown and furry. A middle-aged man in his late fifties, his face sunburned, neck slightly red, a good-natured smile on his face, squinting because he was looking into the sun. Behind Yancy was a still of his yard, his garage, his flower garden, lawn, the back of his neat little white plastic house. Yancy grinned at Sipling: a neighbor pausing in the middle of a summer day, perspiring from the heat and the exertion of mowing his lawn, about to launch into a few harmless remarks about the weather, the state of the planet, the condition of the neighborhood.

"Say," Yancy said, in the audio phones propped up on Sipling's desk. His voice was low, personal. "The darndest thing happened to my grandson Ralf, the other morning. You know how Ralf is; he's always getting to school half an hour early ... says he likes to be in his seat before anybody else."

"That eager-beaver," Joe Pines, at the next desk, cat-called.

From the screen, Yancy's voice rolled on, confident, amiable, undisturbed. "Well, Ralf saw this squirrel; it was just sitting there on the sidewalk. He stopped for a minute and watched." The look on Yancy's face was so real that Sipling almost believed him. He could, almost, see the squirrel and the tow-headed youngest grandson of the Yancy family, the familiar child of the familiar son of the planet's most familiar - and beloved - person.

"This squirrel," Yancy explained, in his homey way, "was collecting nuts. And by golly, this was just the other day, only the middle of June. And here was this little squirrel-"with his hands he indicated the size, "collecting these nuts and carrying them off for winter."

And then, the amused, anecdote-look on Yancy's face faded. A serious, thoughtful look replaced it: the meaningful-look. His blue eyes darkened (good color work). His jaw became more square, more imposing (good dummy-switch by the android crew). Yancy seemed older, more solemn and mature, more impressive. Behind him, the garden-scene had been jerked and a slightly different backdrop filtered in; Yancy now stood firmly planted in a cosmic landscape, among mountains and winds and huge old forests.

"I got to thinking," Yancy said, and his voice was deeper, slower. "There was that little squirrel. How did he know winter was coming? There he was, working away, getting prepared for it." Yancy's voice rose. "Preparing for a winter he'd never seen."

Sipling stiffened and prepared himself, it was coming. At his desk, Joe Pines grinned and yelled: "Get set!"

"That squirrel," Yancy said solemnly, "had faith. No, he never saw any sign of winter. But he knew winter was coming." The firm jaw moved; one hand came slowly up ...

And then the image stopped. It froze, immobile, silent. No words came from it; abruptly the sermon ended, in the middle of a paragraph.

"That's it," Babson said briskly, filtering the Yancy out. "Help you any?" Sipling pawed jerkily at his work papers. "No," he admitted, "actually it doesn't. But - I'll get it worked out."

"I hope so." Babson's face darkened ominously and his small mean eyes seemed to grow smaller. "What's the matter with you? Home problems?" "I'll be okay," Sipling muttered, sweating. "Thanks."

On the screen a faint impression of Yancy remained, still poised at the word coming. The rest of the gestalt was in Sipling's head: the continuing slice of words and gestures hadn't been worked out and fed to the composite.

Sipling's contribution was missing, so the entire gestalt was stopped cold in its tracks.

"Say," Joe Pines said uneasily, "I'll be glad to take over, today. Cut your desk out of the circuit and I'll cut myself in."

"Thanks," Sipling muttered, "but I'm the only one who can get this damn part. It's the central gem."

"You ought to take a rest. You've been working too hard."

"Yes," Sipling agreed, on the verge of hysteria. "I'm a little under the weather."

That was obvious: everybody in the office could see that. But only Sipling knew why. And he was fighting with all his strength to keep from screaming out the reason at the top of his lungs.

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BASIC ANALYSIS OF the political milieu at Callisto was laid out by Niplan computing apparatus at Washington, D.C.; but the final evaluations were done by human technicians. The Washington computers could ascertain that the Callisto political structure was moving toward a totalitarian make-up, but they couldn't say what that indicated. Human beings were required to class the drift as malign.

"It isn't possible," Taverner protested. "There's constant industrial traffic in and out of Callisto; except for the Ganymede syndicate they've got out-planet commerce bottled up. We'd know as soon as anything phony got started."

"How would we know?" Police Director Kellman inquired.

Taverner indicated the data-sheets, graphs and charts of figures and percentages that covered the walls of the Niplan Police offices. "It would show up in hundreds of ways. Terrorist raids, political prisons, extermination camps. We'd hear about political recanting, treason, disloyalty ... all the basic props of a dictatorship."

"Don't confuse a totalitarian society with a dictatorship," Kellman said dryly. "A totalitarian state reaches into every sphere of its citizens' lives, forms their opinions on every subject. The government can be a dictatorship, or a parliament, or an elected president, or a council of priests. That doesn't matter."

"All right," Taverner said, mollified. "I'll go. I'll take a team there and see what they're doing”

"Can you make yourselves look like Callistotes?" "What are they like?"

"I'm not sure," Kellman admitted thoughtfully, with a glance at the elaborate wall charts. "But whatever it is, they're all beginning to turn out alike”

Among its passengers the interplan commercial liner that settled down at Callisto carried Peter Taverner, his wife, and their two children. With a grimace of concern, Taverner made out the shapes of local officials waiting at the exit hatch. The passengers were going to be carefully screened; as the ramp descended, the clot of officials moved forward.

Taverner got to his feet and collected his family. "Ignore them," he told Ruth. "Our papers will get us by."

Expertly prepared documents identified him as a speculator in nonferric metals, looking for a wholesale outlet to handle his jobbing. Callisto was a clearing-point for land and mineral operations; a constant flood of wealthhungry entrepreneurs streamed back and forth, carting raw materials from the underdeveloped moons, hauling mining equipment from the inner planets.

Cautiously, Taverner arranged his topcoat over his arm. A heavyset man, in his middle thirties, he could have passed for a successful business operator. His double-breasted business suit was expensive, but conservative. His big shoes were brightly shined. All things considered, he'd probably get by. As he and his family moved toward the exit ramp, they presented a perfect and exact imitation of the out-planet business-class.

"State your business," a green-uniformed official demanded, pencil poised. I-d tabs were being checked, photographed, recorded. Brain pattern comparisons were being made: the usual routine.

"Nonferric enterprises," Taverner began, but a second official cut him abruptly off.

"You're the third cop this morning. What's biting you people on Terra?" The official eyed Taverner intently.

"We're getting more cops than ministers."

Trying to maintain his poise, Taverner answered evenly: "I'm here to take a rest. Acute alcoholism - nothing official."

"That's what your cohorts said." The official grinned humorously. "Well, what's one more Terran cop?" He slid the lockbars aside and waved Taverner and his family through. "Welcome to Callisto. Have fun - enjoy yourselves. Fastest-growing moon in the system."

"Practically a planet," Taverner commented ironically.

"Any day now." The official examined some reports. "According to our friends in your little organization, you've been pasting up wall graphs and charts about us. Are we that important?"

"Academic interest," Taverner said; if three spots had been made, then the whole team had been netted. The local authorities were obviously primed to detect infiltration ... the realization chilled him.

But they were letting him through. Were they that confident?

Things didn't look good. Peering around for a cab, he grimly prepared to undertake the business of integrating the scattered team members into a functioning whole.

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THAT EVENING, AT the Stay-Lit bar on the main street of the commercial district of town, Taverner met with his two team members. Hunched over their whiskey sours, they compared notes.

"I've been here almost twelve hours," Eckmund stated, gazing impassively at the rows of bottles in the gloomy depths of the bar. Cigar smoke hovered in the air; the automatic music box in the corner banged away metallically. "I've been walking around town, looking at things, making observations”

"Me," Dorser said, "I've been at the tape-library. Getting official myth, comparing it to Callistote reality. And talking to the scholars -educated people hanging around the scanning rooms."

Taverner sipped his drink. "Anything of interest?"

"You know the primitive rule-of-thumb test," Eckmund said wryly. "I loafed around on a slum street corner until I got in a conversation with some people waiting for a bus. I started knocking the authorities: complaining about the bus service, the sewage disposal, taxes, everything. They chimed right in. Heartily. No hesitation. And no fear."

"The legal government," Dorser commented, "is set up in the usual archaic fashion. Two-party system, one a little more conservative than the other -no fundamental difference of course. But both elect candidates at open primaries, ballots circulated to all registered voters." A spasm of amusement touched him. "This is a model democracy. I read the text books. Nothing but idealistic slogans: freedom of speech, assembly, religion - the works. Same old grammar school stuff."

The three of them were temporarily silent.

"There are jails," Taverner said slowly. "Every society has law violations." "I visited one," Eckmund said, belching. "Petty thieves, murderers, claim-jumpers, strong-arm hoods - the usual."

"No political prisoners?"

"No." Eckmund raised his voice. "We might as well discuss this at the top of our lungs. Nobody cares - the authorities don't care."

"Probably after we're gone they'll clap a few thousand people into prison," Dorser murmured thoughtfully.

"My God," Eckmund retorted, "people can leave Callisto any time they want. If you're operating a police state you have to keep your borders shut. And these borders are wide open. People pour in and out"

"Maybe it's a chemical in the drinking water," Dorser suggested.

"How the hell can they have a totalitarian society without terrorism?" Eckmund demanded rhetorically. "I'll swear to it -there are no thoughtcontrol cops here. There is absolutely no fear."

"Somehow, pressure is being exerted," Taverner persisted.

"Not by cops," Dorser said emphatically. "Not by force and brutality. Not by illegal arrest and imprisonment and forced labor."

"If this were a police state," Eckmund said thoughtfully, "there'd be some kind of resistance movement. Some sort of `subversive' group trying to overthrow the authorities. But in this society you're free to complain; you can buy time on the TV and radio stations, you can buy space in the newspapers - anything you want." He shrugged. "So how can there be a clandestine resistance movement? It's silly."

"Nevertheless," Taverner said, "these people are living in a one-party society with a party line, with an official ideology. They show the effects of a carefully controlled totalitarian state. They're guinea pigs -whether they realize it or not."

"Wouldn't they realize it?"

Baffled, Taverner shook his head. "I would have thought so. There must be some mechanism we don't understand."

"It's all open. We can look everything over."

"We must be looking for the wrong thing." Idly, Taverner gazed at the television screen above the bar. The nude girlie song-and-dance routine had ended; now the features of a man faded into view. A genial, round-faced man in his fifties, with guileless blue eyes, an almost childish twitch to his lips, a fringe of brown hair playing around his slightly prominent ears.

"Friends," the TV image rumbled, "it's good to be with you again, tonight. I thought I might have a little chat with you."

"A commercial," Dorser said, signaling the bartending machine for another drink.

"Who is that?" Taverner asked curiously.

"That kindly-looking geezer?" Eckmund examined his notes. "A sort of popular commentator. Name of Yancy."

"Is he part of the government?"

"Not that I know of. A kind of home-spun philosopher. I picked up a biography of him on a magazine stand." Eckmund passed the gaily-colored pamphlet to his boss. "Totally ordinary man, as far as I can see. Used to be a soldier; in the Mars Jupiter War he distinguished himself-battlefield commission. Rose to the rank of major." He shrugged indifferently. "A sort of talking almanac. Pithy sayings on every topic. Wise old saws: how to cure a chest cold. What the trouble is back on Terra."

Taverner examined the booklet. "Yes, I saw his picture around."

"Very popular figures. Loved by the masses. Man of the people - speaks for them. When I was buying cigarettes I noticed he endorses one particular brand. Very popular brand, now; just about driven the others off the market. Same with beer. The Scotch in this glass is probably the brand Yancy endorses. The same with tennis balls. Only he doesn't play tennis - he plays croquet. All the time, every weekend." Accepting his fresh drink Eckmund finished, "So now everybody plays croquet."

"How can croquet be a planet-wide sport?" Taverner demanded.

"This isn't a planet," Dorser put in. "It's a pipsqueak moon."

"Not according to Yancy," Eckmund said. "We're supposed to think of Callisto as a planet."

"How?" Taverner asked.

"Spiritually, it's a planet. Yancy likes people to take a spiritual view of matters. He's strong on God and honesty in government and being hardworking and clean-cut. Warmed-over truisms."

The expression on Taverner's face hardened. "Interesting," he murmured. "I'll have to drop by and meet him."

"Why? He's the dullest, most mediocre man you could dream up." "Maybe," Taverner answered, "that's why I'm interested."

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BABSON, HUGE AND menacing, met Taverner at the entrance of the Yancy Building. "Of course you can meet Mr. Yancy. But he's a busy man - it'll take a while to squeeze in an appointment. Everybody wants to meet Mr. Yancy."

Taverner was unimpressed. "How long do I have to wait?"

As they crossed the main lobby to the elevators, Babson made a computation. "Oh, say four months."

"Four months!"

"John Yancy is just about the most popular man alive"

"Around here, maybe," Taverner commented angrily, as they entered the packed elevator. "I never heard of him before. If he's got so much on the ball, why isn't he piped all around Niplan?"

"Actually," Babson admitted, in a hoarse, confidential whisper, "I can't imagine what people see in Yancy. As far as I'm concerned he's just a big bag of wind. But people around here enjoy him. After all, Callisto is - provincial. Yancy appeals to a certain type of rural mind - to people who like their world simple. I'm afraid Terra would be too sophisticated for Yancy."

"Have you tried?"

"Not yet," Babson said. Reflectively, he added: "Maybe later."

While Taverner was pondering the meaning of the big man's words, the elevator ceased climbing. The two of them stepped off into a luxurious, carpeted hall, illuminated by recessed lights. Babson pushed open a door, and they entered a large, active office.

Inside, a screening of a recent Yancy gestalt was in progress. A group of yance-men watched it silently, faces alert and critical. The gestalt showed Yancy sitting at his old-fashioned oak desk, in his study. It was obvious that he had been working on some philosophical thoughts: spread out over the desk were books and papers. On Yancy's face was a thoughtful expression; he sat with his hand against his forehead, features screwed up into a solemn study of concentration.

"This is for next Sunday morning," Babson explained.

Yancy's lips moved, and he spoke. "Friends," he began, in his deep, personal, friendly, man-to-man voice, "I've been sitting here at my desk - well, about the way you're sitting around your living rooms." A switch in camera work occurred; it showed the open door of Yancy's study. In the living room was the familiar figure of Yancy's sweet-faced middle-aged homey wife; she was sitting on the comfortable sofa, primly sewing. On the floor their grandson Ralf played the familiar game of jacks. The family dog snoozed in the corner.

One of the watching yance-men made a note on his pad. Taverner glanced at him curiously, baffled.

"Of course, I was in there with them," Yancy continued, smiling briefly. "I was reading the funnies to Ralf. He was sitting on my knee." The background faded, and a momentary phantom scene of Yancy sitting with his grandson on his knee floated into being. Then the desk and the book-lined study returned. "I'm mighty grateful for my family," Yancy revealed. "In these times of stress, it's my family that I turn to, as my pillar of strength." Another notation was made by a watching yance-man.

"Sitting here, in my study, this wonderful Sunday morning," Yancy rumbled on, "I realize how lucky we are to be alive, and to have this lovely planet, and the fine cities and houses, all the things God has given us to enjoy. But we've got to be careful. We've got to make sure we don't lose these things."

A change had come over Yancy. It seemed to Taverner that the image was subtly altering. It wasn't the same man; the good humor was gone. This was an older man, and larger. A firm-eyed father, speaking to his children.

"My friends," Yancy intoned, "there are forces that could weaken this planet. Everything we've built up for our loved ones, for our children, could be taken away from us overnight. We must learn to be vigilant. We must protect our liberties, our possessions, our way of life. If we become divided, and fall to bickering among each other, we will be easy prey for our enemies. We must work together, my friends.

"That's what I've been thinking about this Sunday morning. Cooperation. Teamwork. We've got to be secure, and to be secure, we must be one united people. That's the key, my friends, the key to a more abundant life." Pointing out the window at the lawn and garden, Yancy said: "You know, I was... "

The voice trailed off. The image froze. Full room lights came on, and the watching yance-men moved into muttering activity.

"Fine," one of them said. "So far, at least. But where's the rest?" "Sipling, again," another answered. "His slice still hasn't come through. What's wrong with that guy?"

Scowling, Babson detached himself. "Pardon me," he said to Taverner.

"I'll have to excuse myself-technical matters. You're free to look around, if you care to. Help yourself to any of the literature - anything you want."

"Thanks," Taverner said uncertainly. He was confused; everything seemed harmless, even trivial. But something basic was wrong.

Suspiciously, he began to prowl.

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IT WAS OBVIOUS that John Yancy had pontificated on every known subject. A Yancy opinion on every conceivable topic was available... modern art, or garlic in cooking, or the use of intoxicating beverages, or eating meat, or socialism, or war, or education, or open-front dresses on women, or high taxes, or atheism, or divorce, or patriotism -every shade and nuance of opinion possible.

Was there any subject that Yancy hadn't expressed himself on?

Taverner examined the voluminous tapes that lined the walls of the offices. Yancy's utterances had run into billions of tape feet... could one man have an opinion on everything in the universe?

Choosing a tape at random, he found himself being addressed on the topic of table manners.

"You know," the miniature Yancy began, his voice tinny in Taverner's ears, "at dinner the other night I happened to notice how my grandson Ralf was cutting his steak." Yancy grinned at the viewer, as an image of the six-year-old boy sawing grimly away floated briefly into sight. "Well, I got to thinking, there was Ralf working away at that steak, not having any luck with it. And it seemed to me-"

Taverner snapped the tape off and returned it to the slot. Yancy had definite opinions on everything ... or mere they so definite?

A strange suspicion was growing in him. On some topics, yes. On minor issues, Yancy had exact rules, specific maxims drawn from mankind's rich storehouse of folklore. But major philosophical and political issues were something else again.

Getting out one of the many tapes listed under War, Taverner ran it through at random.

"... I'm against war," Yancy pronounced angrily. "And I ought to know; I've done my share of fighting..."

There followed a montage of battle scenes: the Jupiter-Mars War in which Yancy had distinguished himself by his bravery, his concern for his comrades, his hatred of the enemy, his variety of proper emotions.

"But," Yancy continued staunchly, "I feel a planet must be strong. We must not surrender ourselves meekly ... weakness invites attack and fosters aggression. By being weak we promote war. We must gird ourselves and protect those we love. With all my heart and soul I'm against useless wars; but I say again, as I've said

many times before, a man must come forward and fight a just war. He must not shrink from his responsibility. War is a terrible thing. But sometimes we must... "

As he restored the tape, Taverner wondered just what the hell Yancy had said. What were his views on war? They took up a hundred separate reels of tape; Yancy was always ready to hold forth on such vital and grandiose subjects as War, the Planet, God, Taxation. But did he say anything?

A cold chill crawled up Taverner's spine. On specific -and trivial - items there were absolute opinions: dogs are better than cats, grapefruit is too sour without a dash of sugar, it's good to get up early in the morning, too much drinking is bad. But on big topics ... an empty vacuum, filled with the vacant roll of high-sounding phrases. A public that agreed with Yancy on war and taxes and God and planet agreed with absolutely nothing. And with everything.

On topics of importance, they had no opinion at all. They only thought they had an opinion.

Rapidly, Taverner scanned tapes on various major subjects. It was the same all down the line. With one sentence Yancy gave; with the next he took away. The total effect was a neat cancellation, a skillful negation. But the viewer was left with the illusion of having consumed a rich and varied intellectual feast. It was amazing. And it was professional: the ends were tied up too slickly to be mere accident.

Nobody was as harmless and vapid as John Edward Yancy. He was just too damn good to be true.

Sweating, Taverner left the main reference room and poked his way toward the rear offices, where busy yance-men worked away at their desks and assembly tables. Activity whirred on all sides. The expression on the faces around him was benign, harmless, almost bored. The same friendly, trivial expression that Yancy himself displayed.

Harmless - and in its harmlessness, diabolical. And there wasn't a damn thing he could do. If people liked to listen to John Edward Yancy, if they wanted to model themselves after him -what could the Niplan Police do about it?

What crime was being committed?

No wonder Babson didn't care if the police prowled around. No wonder the authorities had freely admitted them. There weren't any political jails of labor gangs or concentration camps ... there didn't have to be.

Torture chambers and extermination camps were needed only when persuasion failed. And persuasion was working perfectly. A police state, rule by terror, came about when the totalitarian apparatus began to break down. The earlier totalitarian societies had been incomplete; the authorities hadn't really gotten into every sphere of life. But techniques of communication had improved.

The first really successful totalitarian state was being realized before his eyes: harmless and trivial, it emerged. And the last stage - nightmarish, but perfectly logical - was when all the newborn boys were happily and voluntarily named John Edward.

Why not? They already lived, acted, and thought like John Edward. And there was Mrs. Margaret Ellen Yancy, for the women. She had her full range of opinions, too; she had her kitchen, her taste in clothes, her little recipes and advice, for all the women to imitate.

There were even Yancy children for the youth of the planet to imitate. The authorities hadn't overlooked anything.

Babson strolled over, a genial expression on his face. "How's it going, officer?" he chuckled wetly, putting his hand on Taverner's shoulder.

"Fine," Taverner managed to answer; he evaded the hand.

"You like our little establishment?" There was genuine pride in Babson's thick voice. "We do a good job. An artistic job-we have real standards of excellence."

Shaking with helpless anger, Taverner plunged out of the office and into the hall. The elevator took too long; furiously, he turned toward the stairs. He had to get out of the Yancy Building; he had to get away.

From the shadows of the hall a man appeared, face pale and taut. "Wait. Can - I talk to you?"

Taverner pushed past him. "What do you want?"

"You're from the Terran Niplan Police? I-" The man's Adam's apple bobbed. "I work here. My name's Sipling, Leon Sipling. I have to do something- I can't stand it anymore."

"Nothing can be done," Taverner told him. "If they want to be like Yancy - "

"But there isn't any Yancy," Sipling broke in, his thin face twitching spasmodically. "We made him up... we invented him." Taverner halted. "You what?"

"I've decided." Voice quavering excitedly, Sipling rushed on: "I'm going to do something -and I know exactly what." Catching hold of Taverner's sleeve he grated: "You've got to help me. I can stop all this, but I can't do it alone."

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IN LEON SIPLING'S attractive, well-furnished living room, the two of them sat drinking coffee and watching their children scramble around on the floor, playing games. Sipling's wife and Ruth Taverner were in the kitchen, drying the dishes.

"Yancy is a synthesis," Sipling explained. "A sort of composite person. No such individual actually exists. We drew on basic prototypes from sociological records; we based the gestalt on various typical persons. So it's true to life. But we stripped off what we didn't want, and intensified what we did want."

Broodingly, he added: "There could be a Yancy. There are a lot of Yancy-like people. In fact, that's the problem."

"You deliberately set out with the idea of remolding people along Yancy's line?" Taverner inquired.

"I can't precisely say what the idea is, at top level. I was an ad writer for a mouth wash company. The Callisto authorities hired me and outlined what they wanted me to do. I've had to guess as to the purpose of the project"

"By authorities, you mean the governing council?"

Sipling laughed sharply. "I mean the trading syndicates that own this moon: lock, stock, and barrel. But we're not supposed to call it a moon. It's a planet." His lips twitched bitterly. "Apparently, the authorities have a big program built up. It involves absorbing their trade rivals on Ganymede - when that's done, they'll have the out-planets sewed up tight."

"They can't get at Ganymede without open war," Taverner protested. "The Medean companies have their own population behind them." And then it dawned. "I see," he said softly. "They'd actually start a war. It would be worth a war, to them."

"You're damn right it would. And to start a war, they have to get the public lined up. Actually, the people here have nothing to gain. A war would wipe out all the small operators - it would concentrate power in fewer hands - and they're few enough already. To get the eighty million people here behind the war, they need an indifferent, sheep-like public. And they're getting that. When this Yancy campaign is finished, the people here on Callisto will accept anything. Yancy does all their thinking for them. He tells them how to wear their

hair. What games to play. He tells the jokes the men repeat in their back rooms. His wife whips up the meal they all have for dinner. All over this little world - millions of duplicates of Yancy's day. Whatever he does, whatever he believes. We've been conditioning the public for eleven straight years. The important thing is the unvarying monotony of it. A whole generation is growing up looking to Yancy for an answer to everything."

"It's a big business, then," Taverner observed. "This project of creating and maintaining Yancy."

"Thousands of people are involved in just writing the material. You only saw the first stage - and it goes into every city. Tapes, films, books, magazines, posters, pamphlets, dramatic visual and audio shows, plants in the newspapers, sound trucks, kids' comic strips, word-of-mouth report, elaborate ads ... the works. A steady stream of Yancy." Picking up a magazine from the coffee table he indicated the lead article. " `How is John Yancy's Heart?' Raises the question of what would we do without Yancy? Next week, an article on Yancy's stomach." Acidly, Sipling finished: "We know a million approaches. We turn it out of every pore. We're called yance-men; it's a new art-form."

"How do you - the corps, feel about Yancy?"

"He's a big sack of hot air."

"None of you is convinced?"

"Even Babson has to laugh. And Babson is at the top; after him come the boys who sign the checks. God, if we ever started believing in Yancy ... if we got started thinking that trash meant something-" An expression of acute agony settled over Sipling's face. "That's it. That's why I can't stand it"

"Why?" Taverner asked, deeply curious. His throat-mike was taking it all in, relaying it back to the home office at Washington. "I'm interested in finding out why you broke away."

Sipling bent down and called his son. "Mike, stop playing and come on over here." To Taverner he explained: "Mike's nine years old. Yancy's been around as long as he's been alive."

Mike came dully over. "Yes, sir?"

"What kind of marks do you get in school?" his father asked.

The boy's chest stuck out proudly; he was a clear-eyed little miniature of Leon Sipling. "All A's and B's."

"He's a smart kid," Sipling said to Taverner. "Good in arithmetic, geography, history, all that stuff." Turning to the boy he said: "I'm going to ask you some questions; I want this gentleman to hear your answers. Okay?"

"Yes, sir," the boy said obediently.

His thin face grim, Sipling said to his son: "I want to know what you think about war. You've been told about war in school; you know about all the famous wars in history. Right?"

"Yes, sir. We learned about the American Revolution, and the First Global War, and then the Second Global War, and then the First Hydrogen War, and the War between the colonists on Mars and Jupiter."

"To the schools," Sipling explained tightly to Taverner, "we distribute Yancy material - educational subsidies in packet form. Yancy takes children through history, explains the meaning of it all. Yancy explains natural science. Yancy explains good posture and astronomy and every other thing in the universe. But I never thought my own son ... " His voice trailed off unhappily, then picked up life. "So you know all about war. Okay, what do you think of war?"

Promptly, the boy answered: "War is bad. War is the most terrible thing there is. It almost destroyed mankind."

Eying his son intently, Sipling demanded: "Did anybody tell you to say that?"

The boy faltered uncertainly. "No, sir."

"You really believe those things?"

"Yes, sir. It's true, isn't it? Isn't war bad?"

Sipling nodded. "War is bad. But what about just wars?"

Without hesitation the boy answered: "We have to fight just wars, of course”

"Why?"

"Well, we have to protect our way of life."

"Why?"

Again, there was no hesitation in the boy's reedy answer. "We can't let them walk over us, sir. That would encourage aggressive war. We can't permit a world of brute power. We have to have a world of-" He searched for the exact word. "A world of law."

Wearily, half to himself, Sipling commented: "I wrote those meaningless, contradictory words myself, eight years ago." Pulling himself together with a violent effort he asked: "So war is bad. But we have to fight just wars. Well, maybe this -planet, Callisto, will get into a war with ... let's pick Ganymede, at random." He was unable to keep the harsh irony from his voice. "Just at random. Now, we're at war with Ganymede. Is it a just war? Or only a war?"

This time, there was no answer. The boy's smooth face was screwed up in a bewildered, struggling frown.

"No answer?" Sipling inquired icily.

"Why, uh," the boy faltered. "I mean... " He glanced up hopefully. "When the time comes won't somebody say?"

"Sure," Sipling choked. "Somebody will say. Maybe even Mr. Yancy." Relief flooded the boy's face. "Yes, sir. Mr. Yancy will say." He retreated back toward the other children. "Can I go now?"

As the boy scampered back to his game, Sipling turned miserably to Taverner. "You know what game they're playing? It's called Hippo-Hoppo. Guess whose grandson just loves it. Guess who invented the game."

There was silence.

"What do you suggest?" Taverner asked. "You said you thought something could be done."

A cold expression appeared on Sipling's face, a flash of deeply-felt cunning. "I know the project ... I know how it can be pried apart. But somebody has to stand with a gun at the head of the authorities. In nine years I've come to see the essential key to the Yancy character ... the key to the new type of person we're growing, here. It's simple. It's the element that makes that person malleable enough to be led around."

"I'll bite," Taverner said patiently, hoping the line to Washington was good and clear.

"All Yancy's beliefs are insipid. The key is thinness. Every part of his ideology is diluted: nothing excessive. We've come as close as possible to no beliefs ... you've noticed that. Wherever possible we've cancelled attitudes out, left the person apolitical. Without a viewpoint."

"Sure," Taverner agreed. "But with the illusion of a viewpoint."

"All aspects of personality have to be controlled; we want the total person. So a specific attitude has to exist for each concrete question. In every respect, our rule is: Yancy believes the least troublesome possibility. The most shallow. The simple, effortless view, the view that fails to go deep enough to stir any real thought."

Taverner got the drift. "Good solid lulling views." Excitedly he hurried on, "But if an extreme original view got in, one that took real effort to work out, something that was hard to live... "

"Yancy plays croquet. So everybody fools around with a mallet." Sipling's eyes gleamed. "But suppose Yancy had a preference for- Kriegspiel." "For what?"

"Chess played on two boards. Each player has his own board, with a complete set of men. He never sees the other board. A moderator sees both; he tells each player when he's taken a piece, or lost a piece, or moved into an occupied square, or made an impossible move, or checked, or is in check himself."

"I see," Taverner said quickly. "Each player tries to infer his opponent's location on the board. He plays blind. Lord, it would take every mental faculty possible"

"The Prussians taught their officers military strategy that way. It's more than a game: it's a cosmic wrestling match. What if Yancy sat down in the evening with his wife and grandson, and played a nice lively six-hour game of Kriegspiel? Suppose his favorite books -instead of being western gun-toting anachronisms - were Greek tragedy? Suppose his favorite piece of music was Bach's Art of the Fugue, not My Old Kentucky Home?"

"I'm beginning to get the picture," Taverner said, as calmly as possible. "I think we can help."

* * *

BABSON SQUEAKED ONCE. "But this is - illegal!"

"Absolutely," Taverner acknowledged. "That's why we're here." He waved the squad of Niplan secret-servicemen into the offices of the Yancy Building, ignoring the stunned workers sitting bolt-upright at their desks. Into his throat-mike he said, "How's it coming with the big-shots?"

"Medium," Kellman's faint voice came, strengthened by the relay system between Callisto and Earth. "Some slipped out of bounds to their various holdings, of course. But the majority never thought we'd taken action."

"You can't!" Babson bleated, his great face hanging down in wattles of white dough. "What have we done? What law-"

"I think," Taverner interrupted, "we can get you on purely commercial grounds alone. You've used the name Yancy to endorse various manufactured products. There's no such person. That's a violation of statutes governing ethical presentation of advertising."

Babson's mouth closed with a snap, then slid feebly open. "No - such - person? But everybody knows John Yancy. Why, he's-" Stammering, gesturing, he finished, "He's everywhere."

Suddenly a wretched little pistol appeared in his pulpy hand; he was waving it wildly as Dorser stepped up and quietly knocked it skidding across the floor. Babson collapsed into fumbling hysterics.

Disgusted, Dorser clamped handgrapples around him. "Act like a man," he ordered. But there was no response; Babson was too far gone to hear him.

Satisfied, Taverner plunged off, past the knot of stunned officials and workers, into the inner offices of the project. Nodding curtly, Taverner made his way up to the desk where Leon Sipling sat surrounded by his work.

The first of the altered gestalts was already flickering through the scanner. Together, the two men stood watching it.

"Well?" Taverner said, when it was done. "You're the judge."

"I believe it'll do," Sipling answered nervously. "I hope we don't stir up too much ... it's taken eleven years to build it up; we want to tear it down by degrees."

"Once the first crack is made, it should start swaying." Taverner moved toward the door. "Will you be all right on your own?"

Sipling glanced at Eckmund who lounged at the end of the office, eyes fixed on the uneasily working yance-men. "I suppose so. Where are you going?"

"I want to watch this as it's released. I want to be around when the public gets its first look at it." At the door, Taverner lingered. "It's going to be a big job for you, putting out the gestalt on your own. You may not get much help, for a while."

Sipling indicated his co-workers; they were already beginning to pick up their tempo where they had left off. "They'll stay on the job," he disagreed. "As long as they get full salaries."

Taverner walked thoughtfully across the hall to the elevator. A moment later he was on his way downstairs.

At a nearby street corner, a group of people had collected around a public vid-screen. Anticipating the late-afternoon TV cast of John Edward Yancy.

The gestalt began in the regular way. There was no doubt about it: when Sipling wanted to, he could put together a good slice. And in this case he had done practically the whole pie.

In rolled-up shirt sleeves and dirt-stained trousers, Yancy crouched in his garden, a trowel in one hand, straw hat pulled down over his eyes, grinning into the warm glare of the sun. It was so real that Taverner could hardly believe no such person existed. But he had watched Sipling's sub-crews laboriously and expertly constructing the thing from the ground up.

"Afternoon," Yancy rumbled genially. He wiped perspiration from his steaming, florid face and got stiffly to his feet. "Man," he admitted, "it's a hot day." He indicated a flat of primroses. "I was setting them out. Quite a job."

So far so good. The crowd watched impassively, taking their ideological nourishment without particular resistance. All over the moon, in every house, schoolroom, office, on each street corner, the same gestalt was showing. And it would be shown again.

"Yes," Yancy repeated, "it's really hot. Too hot for those primroses - they like shade" A fast pan-up showed he had carefully planted his primroses in the shadows at the base of his garage. "On the other hand," Yancy continued, in his smooth, good-natured, over-the-back-fence conversational voice, "my dahlias need lots of sun."

The camera leaped to show the dahlias blooming frantically in the blazing sunlight.

Throwing himself down in a striped lawnchair, Yancy removed his straw hat and wiped his brow with a pocket handkerchief. "So," he continued genially, "if anybody asked me which is better, shade or sun, I'd have to reply it depends on whether you're a primrose or a dahlia." He grinned his famous guileless boyish grin into the cameras. "I guess I must be a primrose - I've had all the sun I can stand for today."

The audience was taking it in without complaint. An inauspicious beginning, but it was going to have long-term consequences. And Yancy was starting to develop them right now.

His genial grin faded. That familiar look, that awaited serious frown showing that deep thoughts were coming, faded into place. Yancy was going to hold forth: wisdom was on the way. But it was nothing ever uttered by him before.

"You know," Yancy said slowly, seriously, "that makes a person do some thinking." Automatically, he reached for his glass of gin and tonic - a glass which up until now would have contained beer. And the magazine beside it wasn't Dog Stories Monthly; it was The Journal of Psychological Review. The alteration of peripheral props would sink in subliminally; right now, all conscious attention was riveted on Yancy's words.

"It occurs to me," Yancy orated, as if the wisdom were fresh and brand-new, arriving just now, "that some people might maintain that, say, sunlight is good and shade is bad. But that's down-right silly. Sunlight is good for roses and dahlias, but it would darn well finish off my fuchsias."

The camera showed his ubiquitous prize fuchsias.

"Maybe you know people like that. They just don't understand that-" And as was his custom, Yancy drew on folklore to make his point. "That one man's meat," he stated profoundly, "is another man's poison. Like for instance, for breakfast I like a couple of eggs done sunny-side up, maybe a few stewed prunes, and a piece of toast. But Margaret, she prefers a bowl of cereal. And Ralf, he won't take either. He likes flapjacks. And the fellow down the street, the one with the big front lawn, he likes a kidney pie and a bottle of stout."

Taverner winced. Well, they would have to feel their way along. But still the audience stood absorbing it, word after word. The first feeble stirrings of a radical idea: that each person had a different set of values, a unique style of life. That each person might believe, enjoy, and approve of different things.

It would take time, as Sipling said. The massive library of tapes would have to be replaced; injunctions built up in each area would have to be broken down. A new type of thinking was being introduced, starting with a trite observation about primroses. When a nine-year-old-boy wanted to find out if a war was just or unjust, he would have to inquire into his own mind. There would be no ready answer from Yancy; a gestalt was already being prepared on that, showing that every war had been called just by some, unjust by others.

There was one gestalt Taverner wished he could see. But it wouldn't be around for a long time; it would have to wait. Yancy was going to change his taste in art, slowly but steadily. One of these days, the public would learn that Yancy no longer enjoyed pastoral calendar scenes.

That now he preferred the art of that fifteenth century Dutch master of macabre and diabolical horror, Hieronymus Bosch.