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# HARD LANDING





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# Hard Landing

Algis Budrys



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# Card of Thanks

Betty Smith and Eric Wegner, two invaluable hands

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# Disclaimer

Everything that follows is a lie.  
Especially, of course, the parts that seem real.

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# **PART OF A REPORT LATER REMOVED FROM THE AO/LGM FILE ON NEVILLE SEALMAN**

The electrocuted man was found dead on the northbound tracks of the Borrow Street station of the Chicago Transit Authority suburban line in Shoreview, Illinois.

Shoreview is a city of 80,000 located on the Lake Michigan western shore immediately north of Chicago. For our purposes here, it can be regarded simply as a place where middle-class Chicago employees sleep and do their weekend errands.

It was early March and the time was 5:50 PM ... a dark, chilled, wet evening. No witnesses to the death of the individual calling himself Neville Sealman have come forward.

Despite the occurrence on CTA property, the Shoreview Police Department took jurisdiction and investigated. (The CTA police force is strictly a peacekeeping body). Sergeant Dothan Stablits of the Shoreview PD was assigned. Before the body was moved, a representative of the CTA legal department arrived, and was extended cooperation by investigator Stablits. They went through the decedent's pockets together.

The contents supported identification of the decedent as Neville Unruh Sealman, a resident of south Shoreview. Documentation included an Illinois state driver's license and Social Security and Blue Cross cards found in his unrifled wallet, which also contained a normal amount of cash.

Social Security files later revealed the number had been issued against a falsified application. The driver's license had been properly acquired so far as procedures at the Illinois examining station were concerned. (The decedent, however, never owned a car.) Records show the applicant identified himself at the time with a certified copy of Neville Sealman's birth certificate, which seems to have been acquired through the now well-known method of searching small-town newspaper obituaries for the names of persons dead in infancy. [Neville Unruh Sealman, b. — d. 1932, Mattoon, Ill.] The decedent's thirtyish appearance was consistent with the claimed age of 43 on the license.

The body was turned over to the Cook County coroner's office and a search for next of kin was instituted. (None were ever located; no friends were found, and no one who had been acquainted with the decedent any longer than the forty-two months of his residence and employment in the Chicago area. All the decedent's acquaintances were fellow employees or neighbors.)

Investigation at Sealman's home address — an apartment four stops before the stop where the body was found — developed the information that Sealman lived alone and unvisited in a furnished one-and-one-half-room efficiency. Any clues found in the apartment all supported the Sealman identity, and none of them were older than the time of Sealman's successful application for employment

Magnussen Engineering Co.

Magnussen is a free-lance drafting shop in a Chicago loft, and the requirement for filling a job opening is the ability to demonstrate standard proficiency at the craft; a Social Security number is the only document required of a prospective employee. No further information of any kind relating to Sealman's identity was ever found. His dwelling was unusually bare of knickknacks and personality. Nothing was found to indicate that he had ever been treated by any medical or dental facility, and this proved to be a matter of some concern in the initial investigation. (See further.)

Inquiry by Dothan Stablits at Magnussen indicated Sealman had been employed there since he was reportedly moving from Oakland, Cal. On the day of his death, he had left work at 5:00 PM as usual and boarded the Shoreview Express at the elevated State Street platform of the CTA. The northbound platform is visible from the windows of his place of employment, and he was observed in this action by his employer, who also described him as a steady, hardworking individual with nervous mannerisms and a lack of sociability.

Sealman's apartment was in due course released to the building management, and the personal contents transferred to the Cook County coroner's warehouse, where they remain unclaimed. Sergeant Stablits's report accurately describes them as items of clothing and personal care products, all of which are purchasable at chain outlets in the Chicago/Shoreview vicinity. [A copy of that report is attached to this report. [Attachment 6]

Sergeant Stablits's Occurrence Report [Attachment 1] reflects a certain degree of uneasiness with the circumstances of the decedent's death.

The Borrow Street station is located in a purely residential section. The timing indicates Sealman must have ridden directly past his normal stop, but Stablits was unable to ascribe a reason for his doing so. Despite publicity in the Chicago news media and in the weekly Shoreview Talk newspaper, no one ever reported Sealman missing from an intended visit. Sergeant Stablits (now Chief Stablits of the Gouldville, Indiana, Police Department) clearly felt that this loose end impeded a satisfactory clearance of Sealman's file. But despite Sealman's insufficient bona fides, there was nothing actually inconsistent with a finding of accidental death, and no compelling reason to expend further resources and press the investigation further – for instance, out of state to Oakland. When the FBI proved to have no record of his fingerprints, his file, though not closed, was simply kept available in the event some fresh occurrence might reactivate it. No such event took place.

The CTA legal department at first took a more than routine interest in the case. The Borrow Street station dates from 1912. It is located in a deep open cut well below the level of adjacent streets and dwellings, the right-of-way north of the Chicago elevated structures having gradually gone to street level and then below. This secluded location added to the unlikelihood of finding a witness to explain Sealman's death. It's safe to say the CTA was anticipating a negligence lawsuit by heirs.

Portions of the station structure have weathered to a rickety condition, and it is scheduled to be completely rebuilt in 1981. The condition of the platform is decrepit. Half the platform lights are non-functional, and the exit stairs up to street level, cast in reinforced concrete and subject to extreme weathering action once the surface had spalled away to the included rust-prone steel, are frankly hazardous.

(The CTA operates at a loss, and is seeking some sort of public subsidy. Its trackage and equipment include property acquired from inefficient predecessor operating authorities and bankrupt private traction companies.)

Despite the nonappearance of immediate potential litigants, the CTA felt that all possible steps should be taken to exclude the possibility of the decedent's having tripped, fallen to the tracks, and contacted the third rail as the result of some structural feature of the platform. Frankly, that seemed an obvious possibility, but a history of cardiovascular disorders in Sealman, or some other cause of chronic vertigo, would have done much to brighten up the CTA's files. Almost as satisfactory would have been evidence to support a finding of probable suicide, or even of foul play. On none of these possibilities was Sergeant Stablits able to turn up anything that would help.

On finding there were no medical or dental offices located within reasonable distance of the stop, I made no further effort to locate any medical practitioner who might have had Sealman as a patient. His interest was limited to finding a reason for Sealman's presence on that platform that night, and he indicated to the CTA that if they wanted to check with every doctor in the Chicago area, they could do that on their own budget. After this time, the CTA and Shoreview PD efforts continued separately (and terminated inconclusively separately).

In this atmosphere, a number of private as well as official communications were exchanged between the CTA, the Cook County medical examiner's office, and individuals therein acting on an informal basis. As a consequence, the medical examiner's office assigned its most experienced forensic pathologist to the autopsy, and that individual proceeded with great care and attention to detail.

Soon after beginning his examination of the thoracic cavity, this pathologist – Albert Camus, M.D. – notified the medical examiner that he was encountering noteworthy anomalies. The procedure was then confidentially completed in the presence of the medical examiner, and certain administrative decisions were then made.

The findings filed were consistent with death by electrocution and no other cause, which was in fact true according to the evidence, and the CTA was so notified. At some point, it must have become increasingly clear that no legatees were in the offing, so the CTA may not have taken Dr Camus's official report as hard as it would have a few days sooner. In any event, the CTA's file has subsequently been marked inactive, and there has been no change in that status.

The medical examiner's file, however, reflects the great number of confusions raised by the pathologist's discovery of what he described as 'a high-capacity, high-pressure' cardiovascular system, as well as a number of other significant and anatomically consistent variations from the normal. [Attachment 2]

At Dr Camus's suggestion, a telephone call was placed to this office,\* with the objective of determining whether these findings were unique.

On receipt of the call here, a case officer (undersigned) was immediately allocated by the Triangulation Section, and put on the line. A request was made to the Cook County medical examiner for a second autopsy, and Dr William Henshaw, a resource of this office, was dispatched to Shoreview via commercial air transportation. [Attachment 7, Voucher of Expenses]

At the same time, an AO/LGM Notification was forwarded to our parent organization. (EXCERPTS ENDS)

NOTE: CASE OFFICER'S SIGNATURE  
ILLEGIBLE



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# AUTHOR'S NOTE ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF PATHOLOGICAL ANOMALIES

The National Register of Pathological Anomalies is federally funded and was formed in the late 1940s. It publishes bulletins to tax-supported pathological services and other interested parties. The information is restricted to describing unusual anatomical structures and functions found in the course of routine postmortem examinations.

There are a number of 'usual' anomalies, and the NRPA doesn't concern itself with them. Quite a few people have their hearts located toward the right side of the chest, or are born without a vermiform appendix. Extra fingers and toes, and anomalous genitalia, are other everyday examples. One of the earliest things a medical student learns is that the details of any given human being's internal arrangements will be roughly similar to but teasingly different from the tidy diagrams in the textbooks. This happens without impairing the individual's general function as a clearly and understandably human and essentially healthy organism. Anatomy classes dispel any notion that God works with a cookie cutter. The idea they do create is that the mechanisms of life are both subtler and more determined to proceed than most people can imagine. In many cases, these anomalies are successful enough so that they're never noted during the individual's lifetime. Since most deaths are not followed by autopsies, there are no reliable statistics on how prevalent all this might be.

What this does mean is that there are any number of individuals walking around who will respond peculiarly to conventional medical and surgical treatment, who might overcome what ought to be disabling or fatal injuries while succumbing to apparently minor accidents, or who might even be able to evade normal methods of restraint and punishment – to name a few areas of intense interest to the authorities charged with the maintenance of the public health and good order.

The NRPA publications concern themselves only with extreme cases. They also draw exact distinctions between kinds of extreme. There are what might be called man-made anomalies; defects almost certainly created by actions of various manufactured substances upon the individual's mother during her pregnancy. These, while not completely cataloged, are part of a distinct field of medical investigation that's keeping reasonable pace with the ingenuities of recreational drug use and the pyramiding effects of modern industrial chemistry. The NRPA describes apparent cases in this category when they're found, and this reason alone suffices to make its bulletins widely studied. But there is another category.

Occasionally, an autopsy will turn up organs, or even systems of organs, that are truly unique and whose function, in fact, may not be understandable to the resources of the pathologist who discovers

them. The NRPA is very quick to react positively in such cases. At once, it will give the examiner all the help and information humanly possible, and join in delving into the matter thoroughly. As a result of its reputation for this sort of help, always welcomed even by pathology departments that have been nominally well funded, the NRPA's twenty-four-hour phone number is kept very much in mind throughout all nations signatory to the cross-cooperation agreements fostered by the World Health Organization.

It should be understood that almost invariably, one mundane explanation or the other is finally found for the seeming anomaly displayed by the particular case. The NRPA's annual budget is drawn against funds made available by Congress to a parent organization. This form of second-derivative funding is common in cases where the parent organization is the Central Intelligence Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, or the National Security Agency, to name just three. It hasn't been possible for me to determine the NRPA's parent organization.

AO stands for 'anomalous organs.' Most NRPA files are headed with the AO prefix followed by a number coded to show the date the file was opened and predict when it might be closed. These files form the basis for most of the material in the bulletins, and are of unquestionable immediate value to medical specialists dealing with the results of human interactions.

A far lesser portion of the files is headed AO/LGM, in which the second set of initials in the prefix is said to represent 'less germane matters.' Access to and use of these files is restricted to the top echelons of NRPA. An AO/LGM Notification – at one time a slip printed on red paper, now an advisory preceded by a special tone signal on the NRPA's computerized communications devices, which connect to God knows where – is required the instant a new file in this category is opened. At NRPA, which is housed in a three-story red brick Georgian with a very nice little company café under the trees in the backyard, there's an office joke that LGM really stands for Little Green Men.

– A.

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# PRELUDE TO EVENTS EARLY ON A MARCH EVENING

Jack Mullica had almost stopped being annoyed with Selmon for riding the same train with him. It had now been three and a half years since he had first seen Selmon standing at the other end of the State Street northbound platform in the five-o'clock sunshine of late September.

It had been nothing like it was in the winter when the wind they called the Hawk hunted through the Loop. The people among whom the two men stood had their heads up, and did not jockey to take shelter behind each other on the elevated platform.

Their eyes met across an interval of some ten yards, and Selmon's mouth dropped open. Not until he saw the stranger's reaction did Mullica fully realize what had been naggingly familiar about him. Mullica watched a look of total defeat come over Selmon. He stood there, shorter and a little chubbier than Mullica remembered him, his head now down, his herringbone topcoat suddenly too big for him, a briefcase hanging from one hand, a Daily News from the other. He didn't even board the train. He stayed where he was, washed by low-angle sunlight and forlorn, thunderstruck, waiting at least for the next train, not looking in the window as Mullica rode by him.

But the next night he had boarded, and hadn't gotten off until just a few stops before Mullica, staring rigidly ahead and keeping his shoulders stiff. It had become a regular thing. Selmon rode many cars away from Mullica as he could. He was there almost every night Mullica was. Mullica traveled out of town fairly frequently. He assumed Selmon didn't, though at first he watched carefully behind him in airline terminals and out at motels. But Selmon never turned up anywhere else and he never made any attempt at an approach. After a while Mullica decided that was how it was going to be.

Gradually, thinking about it in the slow, schooled way he had taught himself, Mullica reached an accommodation with the situation. He assumed that Selmon had simply happened to take a job nearby and that the rest of it was natural enough; it was all coincidence, Selmon's working near Mullica and living in the same town with Mullica and his wife, Margery.

The Shoreview Express was designed to handle North Shore traffic in and out of the Loop. Once it had made all the Loop stops, picking up shoppers on the east and south sides, and management types on the west and north, it paused at the Merchandise Mart and then didn't stop again until Loyola University. It rumbled directly over the worst parts of the North Side on girdered elevated tracks, and then imperceptibly began running on a solid earthen viaduct through blue-collar, and then lower-middle-class residential neighborhoods. The farther north it ran, the more respectable its environment became and the more out of place the shabby old string of riveted iron cars appeared, until it reached the end of Chicago at Howard Street, entered Shoreview as an all-stops local, and began to loom

quaint.

Its first Shoreview stop was Elm Shore Avenue, in an area only slightly distinguishable from the red-brick northernmost part of Chicago, and this was where Selmon got off. Mullica lived in a white and yellow high rise near the Borrow Street stop, which the train reached rattling over switch points, its collector shoes arcing, flashing, and sputtering over gaps in the third rail system; at night it roared through sheets of violet fire. The train's next and last destination was in Wilmette, which was yet another municipality and where one could begin to see the prewar money living in its rows of increasingly large and acreage-enshrouded mansions all the way up the lakefront for miles. From Wilmette and beyond, they usually drove into the city in cars suitable for after-nine arrivals, or took the North Western Rail Road and smoked and played bridge.

Mullica's hours in the Chicago public relations office of one of the major automobile manufacturers were nominally nine to five. He usually got in about nine fifteen, getting back some of the three A.M.S on the road. He never saw Selmon in the morning; probably he had to be at work by eight thirty.

At night on the platform, Selmon would open his paper as soon as he was through the turnstile. He would read it at his end of the platform, holding it in front of his face. Mullica would stand just where he had stood every time since years before Selmon. Mullica opened his paper on the train, and when he was nearly finished, the sound of the wheels echoing back would tell him they were off the viaduct and beginning to run between the weed-grown cutbanks of the right-of-way in north Shoreview. He would fold his paper, get up from the warped, timeworn cane seat, and go stand in the chipped brown vestibule waiting for the uncertain brakes to drag the train to a halt. He'd get off, walk the three blocks to the condominium, greet Margery if she was home, have a drink looking out over the lake with a closed expression, and do the crossword puzzle in ink before throwing the paper out. He wished Selmon would play by the rules and move away. But Selmon wouldn't. He continued to work somewhere in the Loop at something, and to live somewhere two miles south.

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# AN OCCURRENCE EARLY ON A MARCH EVENING

Mullica never saw Selmon in Shoreview on weekends. Margery liked to go shopping in the big mall at Old Orchard and Golf Mill; Mullica had a Millionaires' Club membership, and sometimes they sit there after shopping, sipping. Sometimes then Mullica would be able to just stare over Margery's shoulder and think about any number of things. At times, he thought of Selmon. He wondered if he had a home in his home on weekends, and if he had found a wife, and, if so, how they got along. He wondered if Margery might run into her someday and if, by some coincidence, they might get friendly enough to talk about their husbands. But it seemed unlikely; Margery didn't get along with women.

And then it was early March, forty-two months since Selmon had turned up. Mullica stood on the platform, his hands deep in his pockets. It was a cold, raw day. He watched Selmon stubbornly unfolding his paper against the wind, and clutching it open as he began to read. Then, just as their train began to pull into the station, Selmon saw something in the paper that made him turn his face toward Mullica in the twilight in a white blur of dismay, his mouth a dark open oval, and Mullica thought for a minute Selmon had felt a vessel exploding in his brain.

The train pulled up and Mullica stepped aboard. He moved down the aisle and took a seat next to the window. He looked out at Selmon's spot as the train passed by it, thinking he might see Selmon lying there huddled in a crowd, but he wasn't there.

Mullica put his zipcase across his knees and opened his paper, sitting there reading from front to back as he always did, while the train crossed the river toward the Merchandise Mart. He stopped to look eastward along the river, as he always did, year round, enjoying the changing light of the season on the buildings and the water and horizon. The riverfront buildings were just turning into boxes of nested light, their upper story glass still reflecting the last streaks of dying pink from the sunset, and the stars were beginning to appear in the purplish black sky above the lake.

Page two had the story:

## Not-So-Ancient Astronauts? 'THING' IN JERSEY SWAMP IS SAUCER, EXPERT SAYS

PHILADELPHIA, MARCH 9 (AP) – Swamp-draining crews in New Jersey may have found a spaceship, declared scientist Allen Wolverton today.

Authorities on the spot immediately denied that old bog land being readied for a housing development held anything mysterious.

Local authorities agreed a domed, metal object, fifty feet across, was dragged from the soil being reclaimed from Atlantic coastal marshes. They quickly pointed out, however, that there is a long history of people living in the swamps, described as the last rural area remaining on the

Eastern Seaboard between Boston and Virginia.

The area was populated and prosperous in Colonial times, the center of a thriving 'bog iron' mining industry. Local experts were quick to point to this as the likely source of the object, citing it as some sort of machinery or a storage bin.

'There was whole towns and stagecoach stops back in there once,' said Henry Stemmler, operator of a nearby crossroads grocery store. 'Big wagon freight yards and everything. There's all kinds of old stuff down in the bogs.'

Dissenting is Wolverton, a lecturer at Philadelphia's Franklin Planetarium. 'Our earth is only one of thousands of inhabitable planets,' he declared. 'Statistically, the galaxy must hold other intelligent races. It would be unreasonable to suppose at least one of them isn't visiting us and surreptitiously observing our progress toward either an enlightened civilization of peace and love or total self-destruction.'

There was a blurred two-column wire photo of two men standing in some underbrush, staring at a curved shape protruding from the ground. There were no clearly defined features, and the object's outline was broken by blending into the angular forms of a dredge in the background. It might have been anything – the lid of a large silo, part of an underground oil tank, or the work of a retoucher's brush. In fact, the paper's picture editor had obviously decided the wire photo would reproduce badly and had his artist do some outlining and filling. So the result was a considerable percentage away from reality.

Mullica read the other stories on the page, and on the next page, and turned it.

It was night when the train reached Borrow Street – full dark, with only a few working bulbs chipped old white enamel lamps to light the winter-soaked, rotting old wooden platform.

It's all going to hell, Mullica thought. No one maintains anything that isn't absolutely vital, but the fare keeps going up and up.

No one manned the station except during morning rush hour on the southbound side. The cements steps from the northbound platform up to the frontage street were a forty-foot gravel slide with broken reinforcing bars protruding through it rustily to offer the best footholds.

Mullica began to move toward the exit gates in the middle of the platform, lining up with the others who'd gotten off. They were all head-down, huddling against the wind, concentrating their minds on getting through the revolving metal combs of the gate and picking their way up the incline. And that was because he had not quite put it all out of his mind, and his skin was tight under the hairs of his body. He had the feeling to turn his head. When he did, he saw Selmon still standing where he had gotten off, his paper half-raised toward Mullica, his apparition coming and going in the passing window lights. The train went on. Mullica could see he was about to call out a name nobody knew.

Mullica stopped, and the small crowd flowed around him inattentively. He walked back to Selmon. 'They'll find us!' Selmon blurted. 'They'll trace us down!'

Mullica looked at him carefully. Then he said 'How will they do that?' picking and arranging the words with care, the language blocky on his tongue. He watched Selmon breathe spasmodically, his mouth quivering. He saw that Selmon was years younger than he – though they were the same age and soft. And yet there was advanced deterioration in him. It was in the shoulders and the set of the head, and very much in the eyes, as well. Selmon clutched at his arm as they stood alone on the platform. Selmon's hand moved more rapidly than one would expect, but slowly for one of their kind.

of people, and uncertainly.

‘Arvan, it’s bound to happen,’ Selmon insisted to him. ‘They – they have evidence.’ He pushed the paper forward. Mullica ignored it.

‘No, Selmon,’ he said as calmly as he could. ‘They won’t know what to do with it. There’s nothing they can learn from it. The engines melted themselves, and we destroyed the instruments before we left it, remember?’

‘But they have the hull, Arvan! Real metal you can touch; hit with a hammer. A real piece of evidence. How can they ignore that?’

‘Come on. Their investigators constantly lie to their own populace and file their secrets away. They systematically ridicule anyone who wants to look for us, and they defame them.’ Mullica was trying to think of how to deal with this all. He wanted Selmon to cross over to the deserted southbound platform and go home to his wife. Mullica wanted to go home; even to have a drink with Margery, and then sit in his den reading the specification sheets on the new product. It was some twenty-five years since he’d been a navigator.

‘Arvan, what are we going to do? How can you ignore this?’ Selmon wouldn’t let go of Mullica’s forearm, and his grip was epileptically tight. He peered up into Mullica’s face. ‘You’re old, Arvan,’ he accused. ‘You look like one of them. That haircut. Those clothes. All mod. A middle-aged macho. You’re becoming like them!’

‘I live among ... them.’

‘I should have spoken to you years ago!’

‘You shouldn’t be speaking to me at all. Why are you here? There’s the entire United States. There’s the whole world, if you can find your way across a border. A whole world, just a handful of us, and you stay here!’

Selmon shook his head. ‘I was in Oakland for a long time. Then I bumped into Hanig on a street in San Francisco. He told me to go away, too.’

‘He spoke to you?’ Mullica asked sharply.

‘He had to. He – he wanted me out of there. He’d been in the area less time than I had, but he had a business, and a family, and I was alone.’

‘A family.’

‘He married a widow with children and a store – a fish store. So I agreed to leave. He gave me some money, and I came to Chicago.’

Well, if navigators could write public relations copy, copilots could sell fish. What did engineering officers do to make their way in this world? Mullica wondered, but Selmon gave him no opportunity to ask.

‘Hanig had seen Captain Ravashan. In passing. He didn’t think Ravashan saw him. In Denver. That was why he left there and came to San Francisco. And then I came to Chicago, and almost the first week, I saw you. I – I think we’re too much alike when we react to this world. We wander toward the same places, and move in the same ways.’

‘Does anyone know where the chaplain is?’ Mullica asked quickly.

‘Chaplain Joro?’ Selmon asked. He and Mullica looked into each other’s eyes. ‘No, I don’t think there’s much doubt,’ and for a moment there was a bond of complete understanding between the two of them. Mullica nodded. For over a quarter of a century, he saw, Selmon as well as he had reflected on the matter. It had seemed to him for a long time that there were only four of them now.

Selmon looked up at him in weariness. 'It's no use, Arvan. I—' He hung his head. 'I have a good job. It doesn't pay much but I don't need much, and it's secure. So I decided to stay. You never asked me to leave.' There were tears in his eyes. 'I'm very tired, Arvan,' he whispered, and Mullica saw the guilt in him, waiting to be punished.

But there was no telling whether any engineering officer could have solved the problem with the engines. Mullica had never thought much of Selmon, but Ditlo Ravashan never questioned his abilities in front of the rest of them, and there hadn't been any backbiting after the crash.

'This isn't anything, Selmon. There'll be a flurry, but it'll blow over. Somebody'll write another one of those books – that planetarium lecturer, probably – and everyone with any common sense will laugh at it.'

'But they've never had evidence before!' He was almost beating at Mullica with his newspaper, waving his free arm. 'Now they do!'

'How do you know what they have or haven't had? They must have. They have enough films, and enough unexplained things in their history. They must have other pieces of crashed or jettisoned equipment, too. They just don't know how to deal with them. And they won't know how to deal with this, either.'

'Arvan! An intact hull, and instruments obviously destroyed after the landing! A ship buried in a swamp. Buried, Arvan – not driven into the ground. And five empty crew seats behind an open hatch.'

'A hull full of mud. If they ever shovel it all out, it'll be weeks ... and all those weeks, the bureaucracy will be working on everyone to forget it.'

'Arvan, I don't understand you! Don't you care?'

'Care? I was a navigator in the stars.'

'And what are you now?'

'What are you, Selmon?' Mullica pushed him away, but Selmon still clung to his arm. The other man staggered on the platform.

'Arvan, we have to plan. We have to find the others and plan together,' he begged, weeping.

'Four of us together,' Mullica said, saying the number aloud for the first time, hearing his voice harsh and disgusted, aching deeper in his throat than he had become accustomed to speaking. 'So they can have us all – a complete operating crew. An engineer, a navigator who knows the courses, a pilot and a copilot/life systems man. To go with the hull and their industrial capacity. You want us to get together, so they can find us and break out uncontrolled in our domains.'

Four men with similarly odd configurations of their wrists and ankles. Four men with similar skin texture. Four men with high blood pressure and a normal body temperature of 100; with hundreds of idiosyncrasies in cell structure, blood typing, and, most certainly, chromosome structure. Four such men in a room, secretly discussing something vital in a language no one spoke.

'Arvan!'

'Goddamn it, Selmon, let go of me!' Mullica shouted in English. 'Fuck off!'

Selmon jerked backward. He stared as if Mullica had slashed his throat, and as he stepped backward he pushed Mullica away, pushing himself back. His mouth was open again.

Hopeless, hopeless, Mullica thought, trying to regain his balance so he could reach for Selmon, watching Selmon's wounded eyes, his newspaper fanning open ridiculously, stepping back with one heel on thin air.

He hit the tracks with a gasping outcry. Mullica jumped forward and looked down. Selmon's



sprawled over the rails, his paper scattered over the ties, in the greasy mud and the creosote-stained ballast, looking up at Mullica with the wind knocked out of him. The distant lights and violent sputtering of the next train were coming up the track from the previous station. Mullica squatted down to reach for him, holding out his hand. Selmon fumbled to push himself up, staring at Mullica. Neither spoke. Groping for something firm to grasp, Selmon put his hand on the third rail.

The flash and the gunlike crack threw Mullica down flat on the platform, nearly blind. But I think he will still be able to see him anytime, Mullica thought in his native language as he threw himself up on his feet and ran, ran faster than anyone had ever seen Jack Mullica run, caroming through the exit gate and up the weathered steps, realizing he had never at any time let go of his zipcase, and thinking, No, we are three.

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# TRANSCRIBED CONVERSATION; ALBERT CAMUS; WILLIAM HENSHAW:

CAMUS: You've seen one of these before, haven't you?

HENSHAW: Prob'ly. You know, I can never get used to how cold it gets in these places.

CAMUS: Rather have it cold than hot. Look, if you're going to let me assist you in the first place, talk to me, will you?

HENSHAW: I can talk some. And you can watch anythin' you can see. Can't at all limit you from thinking.

CAMUS: I can see you know exactly what to look for.

HENSHAW: What you see is somebody who knows what to expect. What to look for may be somethin' else again.

CAMUS: Well-made point, Doctor.

HENSHAW: Reach me that thing over there, will you?

CAMUS: You know, if I saw him on the street, I wouldn't think twice. But now look at that.

HENSHAW: You'd figure that jaw came from a malocclusion, right? And that skin color – just like a normal Caucasian maybe a little toward the extreme with his oxygen metabolism, right? But no, you take some of them scrapin's and stick 'em under a microscope, and—

CAMUS: Yes, I've done that.

HENSHAW: Figured. That's why I let you stay. Might as well. Here – you see that wrist? What do you figure that to be?

CAMUS: A thick wrist. I never would look at it.

HENSHAW: Yeah. But let's just flap this back a little, and—

CAMUS: Holy cats! Right. There's your proximal row. You

HENSHAW: see that bone? That's what he's got instead of a navicular. Great blood supply, too. First of all, he can't break it anywhere near as readily as people do. Second, if it breaks, it heals nice and slick. But how does he break it? Look at all those cushions in the cartilaginous structure. And let me tell you something else – all the joints are engineered like that. These people don't get arthritis, they don't get sprains, they maybe once in a blue moon get breaks. It's like those teeth: never seen a dentist's drill. This is a healthy, healthy guy.

CAMUS: And it all still fits inside a normal shape, more or less.

HENSHAW: Fits exactly. He's the normal shape for what he is.

CAMUS: What is he? You know, down in South America lots of millions of years ago, they had things that were shaped almost exactly like

HENSHAW: camels, but they weren't mammals, they were marsupials, and their skeletons weren't

put together like camel skeletons. I went to that museum they have down there in Guayaquil and looked at some of those bones; looked stranger than anything we've got lying here in front of us today. But once the musculature was on the bone, and the hide was on the muscles, if you saw that thing walk out from behind a rock at you, it was a camel. They had tigers like that, too. Things evolve to fit needs in the ecology. Life needed camels in the high-altitude deserts, and the camels needed tigers to prey on them. Time passed, they went away. Now down there they got llamas and guanacos and jaguars and if some marsupial medico had to take 'em apart, wouldn't he be surprised.

CAMUS: This guy is a mammal.

HENSHAW: Well, yeah. You put him in a raincoat and boots, he can stand a short-arm check with everybody else in the platoon, no doubtin' that.

CAMUS: What's next, Doctor?

HENSHAW: No sense goin' any further here. He checks out for type. And I've got my tissue and blood samples to take back to my lab, so I'd better get goin'. Somebody'll be around to pick him up in a couple of hours. They'll give you a receipt for him. I don't think you'll get any grieving relatives. If anybody does come around and ask for him, stall and call the hotline. You'll get quick relief.

CAMUS: I have to have the coroner's okay before I can give him to you.

HENSHAW: No problem. I brought a letter with me.

CAMUS: Now what?

HENSHAW: How do you mean? What do I have to sign? What sort of

CAMUS: oath do I swear?

HENSHAW: Hell, you're not going to mess up. You've got yourself a nice position here, lots of contacts with the local politics; family, property ... all that good shit.

CAMUS: I suppose so. You, wouldn't happen to have an opening in your department?

HENSHAW: My department?

CAMUS: Wherever you really come from.

HENSHAW: I really come from the NRPA, and I'm all the medical talent they need. This doesn't come up every day, you know. Besides, they wouldn't consider you qualified. Sorry.

CAMUS: I don't believe I've read any of your papers, Doctor. Or run into you at pathology convention seminars. Where'd you get your training?

HENSHAW: Iowa. University of Iowa School of Veterinary Medicine, Doctor.

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# LATER EVENTS ON A MARCH NIGHT

It was a nice condominium apartment: four and one-half rooms high enough up, with gold, avocado and persimmon carpeting, French provincial furnishings from John M. Smythe, a patio balcony with sliding glass doors, swag lamps, and a Tandberg Dolby cassette system which he switched on automatically for warmth. Barbra Streisand sang 'I'll Tell the Man in the Street.'

Margery wasn't home. Mullica got some ice in a rocks glass, picked up the scotch decanter, and sat in the living room with the lights down. He sipped and looked out through the glass doors and past the wrought-iron balcony railing, at the lake. Below his line of sight were the tops of the as yet unbudded famous elms of Shoreview. Far down the lake shore curving out to his extreme right were the tall lighted embrasures of the Gold Coast high rises in Chicago.

He took a deep breath. What will happen? he thought. Let's put it together. He began systematically reviewing the events on the Borrow Street platform. Then he pictured a detective in his trenchcoat kneeling beside the facedown body in the headlight from the stopped five-fifty train. He put dialogue in the detective's head to indicate what the detective might make of what there was to see. He listened critically. The ice cubes were cold against his upper lip.

The detective saw that Selmon had been electrocuted. He saw nothing to show that the dead man had been the victim of an assault. So it was clearly something that had happened by itself, an accident or suicide, and there was no need for an autopsy. Now the detective went through the dead man's pockets. If he'd done that to Jack Mullica, he wouldn't have found any connection to any abandoned bog iron works.

Selmon's identity wouldn't be particularly thin. He'd have a Social Security card so he could work and probably a driver's license. He surely had a checking account, and it was practically impossible to convert checks into spot cash without a driver's license, even if you never drove.

Now the detective moved to Selmon's apartment. Again, there'd be nothing of any significance. Unless Selmon still had parts of his first-aid kit and was stupid enough to store them where he lived. But after more than twenty-five years, what would he have left, no matter how healthy he looked? No, it wouldn't be the presence of anything that bothered the detective. It would be absence. No military service records, no school diplomas.

Would that matter so much? It was just a routine investigation into a casual accident. What the hell. Still, they might get curious and push it some.

Barbra Streisand sang 'Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?' Mullica refilled his glass.

If they were curious, how long would curiosity persist? Selmon hadn't been shot, or robbed, or hit behind the ear. All he was, really, was one of what had to be thousands of perfectly settled-down citizens who had chopped themselves free of something in their pasts that might make them unemployable. It seemed to Mullica that in a society where a high school marijuana bust or a college

Red affiliation could haunt you to your grave, a lot of that had to be going on. Once you had figured way of getting a set of papers in a new name – crime novels were full of ways that worked – you rare had to stand up to a real bedrock investigation. Ordinarily they didn't check your identity; just your identity's credit.

The wife. Selmon's wife. Would he have talked to her? Would he have told this woman he was Engineering Officer Selmon, and that Navigator Arvan lived right up the tracks?

Well, did Margery have any inkling that Engineering Officer Selmon was riding the train with Navigator Arvan? And if she did, could she put a face to either name? No – Mullica shook his head. It was Jack Mullica that Margery knew dangerous things about.

Barbra Streisand sang 'Soon It's Gonna Rain.'

Mullica swallowed, and the cold, sweet scotch made his palate tingle. He refilled his glass.

Out beyond the elms and the floodlit, strut-supported balls of the Lindheimer Observatory on the Northwestern University lakefront campus were stars whose names he did not know in constellations he had never learned. From where Arvan sat now, he could see that the Shieldmaiden was as lanky as a Vogue model and the Howler's paws were awkwardly placed. All of those stars blazing in the night sky there had names and catalog numbers in the local astronomy tables, but he had never learned them except for the little bits that everyone knew. He knew the Big Dipper, and he knew how to find what they called Polaris. But let the locals come and wring him for how to find the places of his folk. They ever became aware enough to do that, let them also learn to translate.

Jack Mullica felt that he looked out into the night sky only at controlled times.

Who said there was even a Mrs Selmon? Would a married Selmon have moved so easily from Oakland just like that? Oh, hell, he'd even said he was alone in Oakland, hadn't he, and the Selmon trying to make himself invisible on Loop CTA platforms didn't seem the type to go courting around here.

Funny how the mind had registered that and yet not registered it. Face it, it was only because Mullica was married, of all unlikely things, that he had put his mind on that track. He couldn't imagine how one of them could get married except under the most extraordinary circumstances. It was funny the tricks your mind could play ... Oh, shit! Eikmo was married, too! – Eikmo and his fish-store lady – Mullica, what the hell good does your mind do you? But the important thing was they were probably in the clear – Navigator Arvan, and Hanig Eikmo, and Ditlo Ravashan, all three. Ravashan he thought, would be in the clear in a cage full of tigers.

Barbra Streisand sang 'Happy Days Are Here Again.'

Still, he thought briefly of taking a personal ad in the Denver and San Francisco papers. 'O Selmon RIP Chicagoland. All O.K. Dword Arvan.' Something like that.

But when he thought about it some more, his lips and the tip of his nose pleasantly numb, it became clear that he was playing with his mind again. All he was trying to do was give the poor bastard an obituary notice, and none of them could have that.

He could point a high-frequency antenna upward and broadcast the news; all he had to do was go to Radio Shack and buy the hardware, with a promise to apply for the FCC license. And then if that happened to be somebody along the line of transmission, it might be one of his people who heard it instead of a Methane-Breather or a local in the local 'space program' monitoring a local satellite.

No, it was going to happen to each of them, in its own time, silently far from home and in a land of coolblooded foreigners.

Poor clumsy bastard. Engineering trades graduate, exploration volunteer, parents living at la report, farm boy, originally – didn't like shoveling manure, one would guess, and turned his mind ways of getting out of it. If you weren't in one of the academies, the only way to make officer stat and then have some hope of getting up the promotion ladder was to go the route they'd all gone. An the bonus pay made a difference. But you didn't have much to talk about in letters home from th slick, modern metropolitan training center to the rural little outpost of your birth. Still, the paren were there at the graduation ceremony. Stolid folk with callused hands, their eyes wet and alive in th lights from the podium where you came up in your brand-new dress reds and held out your hand f the certificate. And now he was an accident among people who couldn't ship the body home.

Well, have another scotch alcohol, Jack Mullica, he said to himself, and turned up the light besid his chair.

Margery came home about eight o'clock. She was a good-looking, slim, long-legged frosted brunet just past forty but didn't look it, pointy-breasted, and she seemed a little flushed and swollen-lippe She found Mullica sitting in the den with glossy photographs of a car model line spread on his des beside the rocks glass.

'Hello. Did you eat?' she asked.

'I thawed something. You?'

'I'll make a hamburger, I guess. See the paper?'

'Read it on the train.'

'They found something in the bog near where you first turned up.'

'I saw that.' He looked at her and let his smile widen crazily. 'It's a piece of flying saucer, all righ For you see, darling, as I slip off this outer skin, you will know that you have come to love a bein from another Solar System.'

She snorted. 'Oh, God.' She came forward and tousled his hair. 'I do love you, you know,' she sai fondly. 'I really do.' She raised an eyebrow, then looked at the pictures on his desk and the blank pie of paper in his typewriter. 'Will you be up late?'

He nodded. 'Detroit's having a rash of midyear models. Low-displacement engines, stick shifts, hig rear-axle ratios. Arab-fighter product. Won't carry luggage, won't climb a hill, but we'll talk ga mileage. Detroit wants all the stops out with the local press; I've got to flange up some release cop here, and start planning a junket out to a test track. Be in bed about midnight, I guess.'

'All right. I'll watch TV for a while and go to sleep.'

'Fine.'

She stayed in the doorway for a moment. 'When will the press conference be?'

'Soon. Has to be, if it's going to do any good for the summer. Do it up at Lake Geneva, probably Playboy Hotel.' He looked down at his hands. 'Be gone four, five days. Finish up on a Friday.' H waited.

She said: 'I asked because Sally and I were talking about going out to Arizona to that ranch she tall about. If you were going to be out of town anyway, that would be—'

'A good time for it. Right. I'll let you know as soon as we have firm dates.'

She'd look good in tight jeans and a western shirt. Not as good as she'd have looked in her twentie but there was a limit to how soon promotional copywriting could lead a man's wife into the habits of affluence. And it was immaterial how she might look in a Playboy Hotel room on a Friday night with good week's work under your belt. 'Good night. See you in the morning,' he said.

‘Night.’ When she turned to go, he could see that her petticoat was twisted under her tailored black skirt, and the eyelet at the top of her zipper was unhooked at her neck. Her gleaming hair almost hid that.

He had met Margery’s only woman friend, Sally. She was all right – a steady-eyed keypunch pool supervisor with a four-martini voice – and she was the type who always returned favors. Sally had a lot of contacts, a busy social schedule, and a life plan that wasn’t anything Margery couldn’t cover for her with a few alibi phone calls to Sally’s various fiancés and good friends.

He went back to culling together specifications and making notes on a scratch pad. After a while, he turned to his typewriter and wrote, ‘Sporty but thrifty, the exciting new mid-year XF-1000 GT features the proven inline 240 C.I.D. six-cylinder Milemiser engine with ...’

With what? With the simple fuel-saving carburetor and the uneven mixture distribution in the intake manifold, or with the space-age solid-state ignition that was the only thing that let the engine run at all with all those emission controls fucking over the power curve? He frowned and decided to list the electronics ahead of the single barrel; after a tongueful like Milemiser you wanted to come back fast with something sexy.

He went on with his work. He concentrated on being the best there was in Chicago. In his trade, the name of Jack Mullica meant something.

‘Designed to take the Chicagoland family to even the most far-flung summer destination with a minimum of fuel cost, the XF-1000 GT’s comfort features sacrifice nothing ...’

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# THE RATIONALE\*

We don't retrieve people. It's a good policy. You have to assume the down vehicle was being tracked. If another one now goes in after it, you're liable to lose both. There are things that happen to delay the locals – your grounding field disables their spark-gap engine ignition systems and often knocks out utility power. But if you then go ahead and lay a lot of additional technology on the locals to hold them back beyond that, that could escalate on you.

Once you've gotten that tough, you might as well start in with your armed landing parties, your bridgeheads, garrisons, embassies or armies of occupation or both, and the next thing you know, the Methane-Breathers want Jupiter, to 'maintain the balance of power.' And for what? What's the power?

These people have nothing for us except potential. Someday, yes, they're going to be valuable, and that's why the Methane-Breathers keep hanging around, too, refilling their air tanks in the petroleum swamps at night and making funny lights when they're not careful. This is going to be a highly civilized manufacturing center someday, with factories all over the asteroid belt and on some of the bigger natural satellites, like the Moon, that'll have really significant installations. There'll be freighters and businessmen coming and going. Once you start getting that kind of traffic, you almost have to have a dockyard and maybe an actual military base – the Moon would be good for that, too, to keep a little order. There's always maintenance and repair work to be done, and there's always contraband to check for.

I keep thinking how cannabis will grow almost anywhere; one shipload of seed could make you a fortune in half a dozen places I can think of, and I don't even have a criminal mind. But the minute that kind of thing starts, you're into a commerce-regulating and immigration service kind of thing, and that's armed vehicles and men. That disturbs the Methane-Breathers, and it would disturb me if they were them. It's too easy to call a battleship just a coast guard cutter, and a regiment an inspection team. And there you go again; next thing, you've got two fleets eyeball to eyeball. And that stinks; any time you get the career armed services faced off, you're going to get actions in aid of prestige. That produces debris.

And that's apart from the fact that if the locals get on to you and resent you, you're into a big thing with them. A slug thrower may not kill you as elegantly as a laser, but it will kill you, and these locals also have lasers. And fission and fusion and demonstrated willingness.

Then there's the fact that the tactical position of a planet-sited military force fighting off an attempted landing from space is both hopeless and unbeatable. They can't do much to you while you're aloft, but the moment you start landing they can lob all sorts of stuff at you from too many places to suppress. If you keep coming, they throw more. Pretty soon, what you're trying to land on can't be lived in. It's no good to them anymore, either, but that scores no points for you.

The same sort of thing applies if you try to destroy their military resources beforehand. At about the



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