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Nerry Nation's

BLAKES

A novel
by **TREVOR
HOYLE**



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From the latest spectacular television drama series by Terry Nation, creator of *Survivors* and other smash-hit TV successes, top British science fiction author Trevor Hoyle has written a gripping novel of deep-space action, adventure and intrigue.

The cover photograph shows the spaceship *Liberator* from the BBC-TV production of **Blake's 7** produced by David Maloney and designed by Roger Murray-Leach. *BBC Copyright photograph by Bob Komer*

DEATH GLOBE!

‘What’s that?’ Jenna enquired softly, lifting her head at a subdued yet persistent humming sound. It seemed to be coming from above their heads.

‘I don’t know,’ Blake answered, perplexed, and then all three of them saw it, floating high up near the curved ceiling.. a perfectly spherical globe which burned with a soft inner radiance. It was suspended in the air, drifting very slowly, and as they watched, fascinated, it began to pulse with a fierce radiant glow.

Jenna felt her senses start to slide. It wasn’t unpleasant at first, this vague sliding world, until the voice began to hiss in her ear:

‘... help me, Jenna, help me... they’re hurting me, Jenna, help me... please help me, Jenna...’

And then it wasn’t pleasant at all, it was grotesque and frightening as the images entered her mind and she was powerless to resist them...

Terry Nation's
Blake's Seven

Novelisation by Trevor Hoyle



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The concrete chamber was dank and bare. Caged wall lights glowed a dull red, making areas of shadowy darkness so that it seemed a place without dimensions, a lost corner of a labyrinthine basement stretching for miles beneath the city. Water dripped solemnly, like slow seconds, and there was the sour odour of dampness and decay.

Sub-Basement 43, Northern Perimeter, West-Europ Dome City.

It was a depressing hole and the last place Ravella would have chosen to be if she could have helped it. Waiting tensely in the shadows, she glanced upwards towards the stairway, the breath fluttering lightly in her nostrils. He should have been here by now. Pressing a button on her wrist chronometer she read off the luminous digital display. Supposing something had gone wrong? Perhaps he had been apprehended and their plan discovered? But if she was going to panic over a slight delay she had no right to be –

A sound made her hold her breath. She stood quite still, listening, all her senses alert. Soft footsteps on the metal stairway. She strained to see in the gloom and made out the vague shape of a figure descending cautiously, testing the silence, watchful and uncertain.

The figure paused halfway. ‘Ravella?’

She let go the air from her lungs and emerged from the shadows: a slim, dark, attractive girl in her mid-twenties wearing the one-piece acrylic coverall of the Dome Dweller. The multi-coloured flash on her sleeve identified her as an electronics technician, grade three, in the Communications Division.

Everything was all right. It was Blake.

She called softly, ‘I’m here,’ and went swiftly to meet him at the foot of the stairs. ‘Did you have any trouble?’

Blake looked nervously into the darkness. He shook his head. ‘I followed the route you gave me. Didn’t see anybody.’ He wore the same type of one-piece coverall with the shoulder flash of the Engineering Division.

‘Good.’ Ravella became decisive. ‘What about eating and drinking?’ she asked him curtly. ‘Have you managed to do without?’

‘It’s about thirty-six hours since I had anything.’

‘And how do you feel?’

Blake grinned suddenly. ‘Hungry and thirsty.’

‘Nothing else?’

‘I don’t think so...’ He didn’t seem entirely certain. ‘Though I’m not sure, I can’t describe it...’

‘More alert? More – receptive?’

She watched him, knowing the confused thoughts that must be in his head. They had certainly got to him, Ravella thought. She didn’t know his age but guessed he was in his early thirties, an imposing figure with a broad, solid torso and an unmistakably powerful set to his shoulders. His hair was thi

and wiry, and dark – the same dark brown as his eyes, which were now shadowed with uncertainty, but which – she knew – could flash with a searing fire.

Blake shook his head uncertainly. ‘Tense is a better word. Most likely the excitement of breaking the rules by coming here –’

‘It’s not that,’ Ravella said peremptorily. ‘All our food and drink is treated with suppressants. Going without anything to eat or drink for a day and a half, the effect is beginning to wear off.’

‘Oh come on,’ Blake protested. ‘You don’t believe all those stories about our food being drugged, do you? It’s one of those myths that’s been going round for centuries.’

‘It happens to be true,’ Ravella asserted quietly.

Blake raised his eyebrows, smiling gently. ‘Nonsense. If you believe –’

Ravella grasped his arm and pulled him into the shadows. There was somebody on the stairway. They waited, breathing tensely, and then Ravella relaxed her grip when she saw it was Dal. The young man came quickly down into the chamber, his keen blue eyes searching the darkness, and Ravella ran to him and they embraced. Blake stood to one side, not wishing to intrude, feeling slightly uncomfortable. He was beginning to have doubts about being here at all; there was something he couldn’t quite grasp, a vague unease that he couldn’t define...

Ravella beckoned him forward and introduced them.

‘Dal Richie. Roj Blake. Dal is with the Hydroponic Division, Level 19.’

The two men shook hands.

‘I’ve been looking forward to meeting you,’ said Dal Richie, an edge of excitement to his voice. He looked at Blake intently, his manner one of guarded respect, as if meeting somebody whose reputation had preceded him. ‘I hear you have a family on one of the outer systems.’

‘That’s right,’ Blake affirmed. ‘My parents and a brother and sister. They’re on Ziegler 5.’

‘It’s a nice planet, so I’m told.’ Dal Richie’s eyes seemed to harden momentarily. ‘A bit like Earth used to be.’

‘They seem to like it.’

‘You hear from them much?’

‘I get tape letters a couple of times a year. Ravella told me you might have some news of them.’

Dal Richie shook his head. ‘No, not me. The man we’re going to meet—’ He glanced at Ravella and then went on, ‘He was on Ziegler 5 a few months ago. He specially asked us to contact you so he could pass the message along in person.’

‘How do I get to meet him? Where is he?’

‘He’s waiting for us,’ Ravella said smoothly. ‘Outside.’

Blake was shocked. He stared at her. ‘Outside...?’

‘Don’t look so worried,’ Dal Richie reassured him briskly. ‘It’s not all that bad. The air is fresh, so it smells different. It might be a bit colder, and if you’re lucky you could even feel rain.’ His youthful face lit up in a grin. ‘Ever been in rain?’

‘We’d better get started,’ Ravella interjected, consulting her digital chronometer.

‘Outside?’ Blake said worriedly. He hadn’t bargained on this.

‘Through there,’ Dal Richie said crisply, pointing to a heavy metal door set deeply into the concrete wall.

So that was the way Outside. Blake shuddered involuntarily. All of his thirty-five years had been spent inside the Dome; nobody ever ventured Outside, at least not of their own free will. Was it really worth it to have news of his family? He couldn't remember the last time he had been afraid.

He started as Dal Richie touched his arm. 'It's only fair to warn you,' the young man said, his face serious. 'Going outside the Dome is a Category Six crime. If you're caught there'll be punishment and special treatments. It'll go on your record – and that'll mean however good you are in your job you'll never get promoted to a senior echelon. You understand?'

Blake gazed at the door while he decided. He looked at the young man, saw something in his eyes that seemed to give him confidence. He nodded slowly.

'One more thing,' Ravella cautioned him in a low voice. 'Whoever you see, whatever you hear tonight, you keep silent about. If you report anything to the authorities you'll find yourself more deeply implicated than you can imagine.'

Blake looked from one to the other. 'I understand.'

Dal Richie led the way across the chamber, taking a small black instrument from his pocket. Blake watched fascinated as the young man activated the device, which emitted a low pulsing hum, and scanned the lock.

'Vibra lock-pick,' Dal Richie explained as he worked. 'Give me two minutes and it should be *Open Sesame...*'

Ravella had moved silently to the stairway. She peered upwards, frowning.

'What is it?' Blake asked in a whisper. 'Did you hear something?'

'I thought so.' She turned away, shaking her head, and came back. 'Nothing. Must have been my imagination.'

Dal Richie had completed his lock-picking activities. Now he took out a metre length of cable with a spring-loaded clamp at either end, fastened one clamp to the metal door-frame and the other to the door itself. 'If you open the door it breaks a circuit and a fault is registered on the security computer.' He flashed a brief mischievous smile at Blake. 'This keeps the circuit intact.' He straightened up. 'Ready?'

Ravella nodded, her slim body tensed and waiting. Blake was about to say something and then changed his mind. He had come this far, he would go through with it: if the girl was prepared to venture Outside, so was he.

Dal Richie slowly turned the handle and the heavy metal door opened. Cold night air swirled in and Blake took a deep steadying breath. So this was what fresh air tasted like... not as bad as he had feared. Ravella stepped through the doorway and he followed her, Dal Richie close behind, shutting the door after them.

Blake couldn't believe it: for the first time in his life he had left the protective sanctuary of the Dome. He was Outside!

As the door closed behind them the hidden watcher at the top of the stairway slid from the shadow and began silently to descend.

They had been travelling for thirty minutes or so, Blake estimated, though he had no idea of the distance they might have covered. The terrain was a mixture of thick under-growth and rock.

outcrops, and in the almost pitch blackness he had to rely on his companions' sense of direction; alone he would have been totally lost.

Dal Richie had halted and was crouched by a jumble of rock. He gestured Blake and Ravella come forward and said in a low voice:

'I'll check ahead. Watch for my signal.'

When he had gone, swallowed up in the encroaching darkness, Ravella surprised Blake by cupping her hands to drink from a small stream which trickled through the rocks. She saw his expression and invited him to try some. He hesitated – then in a hurried movement scooped up a handful and drank. It almost seemed to sting his mouth, it was so cold and sharp, and he pulled a wry face.

'Natural water,' Ravella informed him. Her face was a pale oval in the gloom, and he could see that she was grinning. 'The stuff we get in the Dome has been recycled a thousand times. It's been filtered, treated and dosed with suppressant.'

'I like it better than this,' Blake told her sourly.

Ravella knelt up and faced him abruptly; she seemed almost angry about something. 'Doesn't it bother you that you spend your life in a state of drug-induced tranquility?' she demanded. 'Do you like the idea that you've been turned into some sort of robot?'

'You don't know what you're talking about,' Blake said dismissively. 'It makes no sense. Just tell me why... why should the Administration want to doctor our food with drugs?'

Ravella clenched her fists. 'Because it's the only way they can keep control over eight hundred million people. There – in that city,' and she pointed to where the light from the Dome was reflected in the night sky. 'And do you want to know why they've been stepping up the suppressants?'

Blake watched her, his face clouded with uncertainty.

'Because the number of dissidents is growing. People like Dal and me. We've seen what's happening and we want to stop it before it goes too far.'

'Stop *what*?' Blake asked her, bewildered by her fervour. 'What more do you want? We're fed, clothed, sheltered. They look after us if we're sick. Our intellectual and emotional needs are satisfied on the Sublim-circuits.' He shook his head perplexedly. 'What more could we need?'

Ravella gazed at him. 'Don't you know?' she said softly.

Blake stared blankly into the darkness. 'I know I'm content.'

'They really cleaned your head out, didn't they?'

'What do you mean?' Blake asked sharply, snapping back to look at her.

'Don't you remember *anything* about the treatments they gave you?'

'I've had no treatments,' Blake maintained stolidly.

'It's hard to believe. I thought there'd be something left... some trace of memory.' She looked sorrowful, downcast.

Blake sighed impatiently. 'Look, I'm sorry, I just don't know what you're getting at. What is about my memory? And what are these treatments – ?'

Ravella held up her hand. Not far away a lamp had blinked: the signal they were waiting for. 'It's all clear. We can go in.'

She went quickly across the small clearing keeping low to the ground; Blake followed, stumbling in the darkness and cursing under his breath. What was she getting at, he wondered. There was something

odd about all this; a persistent nagging unease hovered on the edge of his mind, taunting him like an unsolved riddle. It didn't make sense, any of it, and yet...

But there wasn't time to think. He tried to keep up with her. She was younger and fitter, darting through the undergrowth like a young gazelle. Blake was confused now, not knowing what to expect but whatever he might have imagined lay ahead he was completely unprepared for the sight that was to confront him.

Pausing by a sheer rock face, Ravella deftly took his hand in hers and led him into a cavern lit by flickering torches. In the murky light he saw, conversing quietly in small groups of two or three, about twenty people who immediately fell silent the moment they entered. Blake took in several confusing impressions all at once: the strange costumes of some of the people, which appeared to be a weird mixture of synthetic materials and animal skins, patched with leather and held together by thongs. The people themselves were rough-looking and unkempt, with matted hair and long beards, and he was aware of their curious, almost suspicious scrutiny. It was like suddenly coming upon a scene from the Stone Age.

There were Dome Dwellers here too, he realised after a moment, wearing the standard-issue acrylic coverall with its identifying shoulder flash. While he was still taking it all in, trying to comprehend, a tall man with a lean intelligent face and white hair, who had been talking with Dal Richie, came across and greeted him warmly. He was about forty, Blake surmised, wearing a style of clothing he couldn't recall ever having seen before.

'Roj – good to see you! It's been a long time.'

Blake was taken aback. As they shook hands he said hesitantly, 'Nice to see you, but I...'

'I'm sorry,' the man said immediately, his expression pained. 'That was stupid of me. Of course you won't remember. Bran Foster. I would have been one of the people they blanked off.'

'Blanked off?' Blake said, frowning with sudden irritation. 'Look, will somebody tell me what this is all about? Ravella keeps dropping hints about my memory and about treatments – I've had treatments and my memory is fine. Now just what is all this?'

'I know, I know,' Bran Foster said placatingly. 'I realise it's difficult for you. And it's just as difficult for all of us who knew you before. The important thing is that you're here. It gives us a chance to explain and try and make you understand.'

'I wish you would,' Blake said grimly.

Bran Foster's attention was caught by three new arrivals. He touched Blake's arm and said, 'Excuse me for a moment. Tarrant has just arrived and I must have a word with him. I'll be right back.'

He turned away and Blake saw him shake hands with a rather serious-looking man with blond hair who was standing alone near the cavern entrance.

Who were all these people, Blake wondered. What was the purpose of this meeting, held in secret outside the Dome City? He had come here for no other reason than to receive word of his family, so just what was going on? He felt on edge and the suspicion lurked at the back of his mind that he had been tricked into coming here... but for what purpose? What did they want with him?

Turning to Dal Richie, he said, 'These primitive-looking people in animal skins – they're Outsiders, aren't they?'

Dal Richie nodded, his keen blue eyes surveying the murmuring groups in the smoky flickering

light of the torches. ‘Yes, there are quite a few of them working for our cause now.’

‘But once a person is condemned to live outside the city it’s treasonable to have any contact with him.’

‘That’s right,’ said Dal Richie calmly. He seemed un-perturbed. ‘But then, this whole meeting is treasonable. If it wasn’t so important we wouldn’t be taking the risk.’

‘I’m getting out of here,’ Blake informed him brusquely. ‘I want nothing to do with it. You simply told me I was going to meet a man who had some news about my family – that was all and nothing more. I’m not going to get mixed up in all this.’ He started to move towards the cavern entrance. ‘I’m going back.’

Dal Richie grabbed his arm. ‘Hold on a minute. You ought to hear what Foster has to say first.’

Blake shook him off. ‘I don’t want to hear,’ he told the young man with a flare of irritation. ‘I should do my duty and report everything I’ve seen to the Administration.’

Ravella observed him coolly. ‘You can’t do that,’ she said in a quiet even tone.

‘Just how do you propose to stop me?’ Blake asked, meeting her look squarely.

‘We’ve taken precautions,’ said Dal Richie, his voice bland and expressionless. ‘There are certain documents in the city. They happen to have your signature on them – forged, of course. But convincing enough to implicate you in everything we’ve been doing over the past few months. Don’t have any doubts: one word in the wrong place can make you look as guilty as any of us.’

So it was a set-up. They’d planned it all down to the last detail. Blake felt a wave of anger rise up inside him and he lost control – grabbing wildly at the young man, feeling the need to lash out in blind frustration. Ravella hung on to Blake’s arm, struggling to restrain him.

‘All right, that’s enough!’ Bran Foster’s imperative command rang out and he pulled Blake away. ‘Leave us alone for a minute,’ he instructed Dal Richie and the girl. Then, taking Blake to one side, he spoke in a low, urgent voice:

‘Now calm down. First of all listen to what I have to tell you. After that you can do whatever you want.’

Blake regarded the tall white-haired man resentfully. He took a deep steadying breath and said, ‘All right, now what is it you know about my family?’

‘I’ll come to that. There are some other things you should know first.’

‘Forget the other things!’ Blake erupted. ‘Just tell me what you know!’

Bran Foster’s eyes went hard and cold. His jaw tightened and he said brutally, ‘They’re dead. Your parents. Your brother. Your sister. All four of them are dead!’

Blake stared at him in stunned silence. The man was lying. It was another trick; more cunning deceit. He refused to believe it.

‘I’m sorry,’ Bran Foster said, his voice softening. ‘I didn’t intend you should hear it like that.’ He seemed genuinely contrite. ‘They were executed four years ago. Just after your trial.’

‘*Four years ago?*’ Blake said incredulously. ‘No, it isn’t true.’ He shook his head stubbornly. ‘I still hear from them. I had a voice tape just a few months ago. They’re fine – they can’t be dead!’

‘Listen to me,’ Bran Foster said urgently. ‘The voice tapes are all forgeries. Do you understand? They’re part of the treatment to keep your memory suppressed.’ He sighed and laid his hand on Blake’s shoulder. ‘Look, this is going to be hard for you... but I have to tell you things about yourself.’

of which you have no memory. Now just hear me out.'

Blake felt as if his mind was spinning in a vacuum. None of this made any sense. He pressed his fingers to his temples in order to steady his confused thoughts. 'Go on,' he said between his teeth.

Bran Foster glanced round, aware of the attention that was focused on them by the other group. This was going to be difficult enough without an audience, he realised, and gestured towards a quiet part of the cavern, just inside the entrance. The two men found a place to sit among a small pile of rocks, facing one another.

Bran Foster studied his hands for a moment while he considered how best to begin. Then he took a breath. 'I've got to go back just over four years. There was a good deal of discontent with the Administration. There were several activist groups but the only one that really meant anything was led by a man called... Roj Blake.'

He smiled faintly as Blake's eyes came up to meet his. Their expression was blank and uncomprehending.

'Yes, you,' Bran Foster went on, with more emphasis. 'There were a lot of people who believed in you. You and I worked together very closely. We were outlawed and hunted but we had friends and supporters and we were really beginning to get somewhere. Then we were betrayed,' he said, his voice suddenly adopting a harsher tone. 'I still don't know who gave us away... but in the end you were captured. So were most of our followers.'

Blake had begun to experience instantaneous subliminal impressions, as if emanating from a locked corner of his mind. They were like the distorted fragments of a three-dimensional holograph flickering in a limbo of dead time – long ago and far away on the far side of an impenetrable barrier.

'The Administration could have disposed of you, had you killed,' Bran Foster's voice went on steadily, 'but that would have given the cause a martyr.'

As if in a nightmarish vision he saw hands reaching for him, huge white hairless hands, and then he was thrown violently to the ground, surrounded by grey-uniformed security guards who beat at him with black bully-sticks, their leering faces coming nearer and then receding as if in some grotesque ritual dance. The vision was frighteningly real...

'Instead they put you into intensive treatment,' Bran Foster's voice intoned. 'They erased specialised areas of your memory and implanted new ideas. They all but took you to pieces and rebuilt you. And when you were ready you broadcast a public statement.'

Now the image had changed and he was strapped to a bench. They were doing something to his head. He couldn't see what it was but he felt the cold malignant sensation of metal against his forehead and temples... and then the vision shimmered under the onslaught of blinding white pain that seemed to sear through every cell of his brain. He felt his mind slipping away into greyness and it was as if he were falling away from himself, his own anguished face slowly vanishing in a gathering cloud of grey mist...

'You said that you'd been misguided. You appealed to everybody to support the Administration and to hound out the traitors. You were very good,' Bran Foster said, his voice barely above a whisper. 'Very convincing.'

Blake shuddered and stared down at his clenched fists. His face was bathed in sweat. He moistened his lips and said quietly, 'And the others... what happened to them?'

‘To make themselves look benevolent the Administration allowed them to emigrate to the outer systems. Like your family,’ Bran Foster told the ashen man in front of him, ‘they were executed on arrival.’

Blake struggled to take it all in. There was still much he did not understand; it was as if portions of his memory had been walled off with lead shielding, like the core in a nuclear reactor, and he had only the vaguest notion of what was hidden there, locked away from his conscious perceptions.

He looked up to meet Bran Foster’s forthright gaze. ‘Why are you telling me this now?’ he asked dully.

Bran Foster leaned forward, his lean intelligent face coming alive. ‘Because we’re getting ready to move again. To take action against the Administration. If it was known that you were here with us we’d get tremendous support.’

‘I see.’

‘Will you, Roj?’ He hung on Blake’s answer. ‘Will you work with us?’

‘I don’t know...’ Blake shook his head uncertainly. ‘It’s all too fast for me. I’m not even sure I can believe everything you’ve told me.’

‘It’s true, every word of it.’

‘I’d like to think about these things for a while. Do you mind?’

Bran Foster stood up. ‘Take all the time you want. I’ll get this meeting started. We’ll talk again when we’ve finished.’ He smiled reassuringly and returned to the main area of the cavern.

Dal Richie, Ravella and Tarrant had been discussing what long-term effects the process of mental manipulation might have had on Blake. They paused as Bran Foster joined them and all four turned to observe Blake, who had risen and was standing, disconsolate and alone, at the entrance to the cavern.

Dal Richie looked questioningly at Bran Foster, whose expression was sober and withdrawn.

‘What do you think?’ the young man asked, voicing the question uppermost in all their minds.

‘I don’t know.’ Bran Foster gnawed his lower lip. ‘There’s nothing much left of the man I knew. We’ll just have to wait and see.’

They watched as Blake wandered aimlessly from the cavern, obviously plagued by doubt. It would take time – a great deal of time, Bran Foster told himself – for his old friend to pick up the pieces of his shattered past. Perhaps he would never make it. The Administration were exceedingly thorough in their methods. Especially when it was someone like Blake, who had been such a powerful and disruptive influence.

And yet he was vital to the cause – with Blake on their side they could at last begin to make real progress in their fight against the evil and corrupt forces which held sway over all their lives.

He mentally shook himself, casting aside these somewhat morose reflections, and stepped into the centre of the cavern, his voice ringing out authoritatively.

‘If you’ll all gather round we’ll get this meeting started. There are a number of important matters to be discussed.’

The Dome Dwellers and Outsiders fell silent and drew near in hushed expectancy.

Blake sat slumped on a rock, gazing upwards with dull eyes at the night sky. He had never known that the stars were so bright. Having lived his entire life within the confines of the Dome he had been used

to seeing them as an indistinct glimmer of light, a diffuse blur beyond the curving thermoplastic sheen. But they were really incredibly vivid: a magnificent glittering panorama spread across the heavens.

It was no good. Blake wrenched his mind back to grim, inescapable reality. Sooner or later he would have to confront the enigma of his lost past. The starscape was but a temporary distraction that his mind had fastened on in the forlorn hope of pushing aside the tortured questions that were hammering in his brain. Had Foster spoken the truth? Was it actually true that the Administration had done something to his mind, erasing whole segments of memory? In one way he couldn't believe it; a persistent inner voice told him that it was nonsense; and yet while Bran Foster had talked he had received from somewhere deep in his subconscious fleeting images of terrifying events that seemed to have happened long ago – not to him, but to someone else... a stranger.

Another Roj Blake.

A faint sound on the breeze made him instantly alert. Somebody or something was moving through the undergrowth. Rising quickly to his feet, Blake strained to see in the enclosing darkness.

There it was again – a rustling of branches as if someone was creeping stealthily nearer. Swiftly and not a moment too soon, he stepped behind a jumbled pile of rock and crouched down, and in the same instant distinctly saw two shadowy figures crossing the small clearing. They came to within three metres of his hiding-place, close enough for him to see that they carried weapons of some kind.

Blake felt his throat constrict. The distinctive snub-nosed shape of the V-911 para-handgun issued only to the guards of the Security Division. He pressed himself against the rock, hardly daring to breathe.

There was a subdued bleeping sound and one of the guards unhooked a two-way communicator from his belt and thumbed a button.

'Report.'

'All units in position,' came the terse reply.

'Understood. Out.'

The guard returned the communicator to his belt and nodded slowly to his companion, as if in confirmation that everything was going according to plan.

Slowly, and with the utmost caution, Blake attempted to move deeper into the covering undergrowth. In an obscure way that he didn't understand it seemed imperative that he warn Bran Foster and the others: on the evidence before him, this seemed like a full-scale operation – and the Security Division wasn't noted for its gentle, considerate handling of Dome Dwellers who broke the rules and regulations by going Outside.

The two guards remained motionless, looking away into the darkness, their attitude suggesting that they were awaiting a signal.

Using the rock as cover, Blake edged backwards. He started to turn, crouched on all-fours, and there was an almost imperceptible sound as a dead twig snapped beneath his foot.

Blake froze, the breath locked tight in his chest.

One of the guards looked round, raising the blunt snout of his para-handgun, and advanced toward the rock. He had only to look beyond it to see Blake, exposed and helpless, without a prayer of reaching the dense covering of greenery. Discovery seemed inevitable; the guard's head loomed above him, a sheen of light reflected on the curved visor of his helmet, and his companion broke the pressing

silence.

‘There it is!’

A green light winking from across the clearing.

The guard turned away and quickly unhooked the communicator from his belt. He pressed the transmit button and uttered a brief command, a harder edge to his voice.

‘All units move in!’

They moved swiftly and silently away, gliding like ominous shadows in the direction of the cavern. Blake emerged from behind the rock. It was too late, he could do nothing. Better to return to the city while he had the chance. He started to cross the clearing but had gone no more than a few paces when something stopped him. He couldn't leave them: every instinct was urging him to do what he could to help, even at the risk of his own safety and well-being.

Bran Foster had awakened certain disturbing events in his memory, just for a short while had penetrated the grey blanket of the past, and, if for no other reason, Blake owed him something for that.

The white-haired man had an air of quiet authority. He spoke in an even, unhurried tone to the small gathering that was but one tiny fragment of a movement that was growing stronger day by day.

The group listened intently, the torchlight making shifting patterns on their serious, determined faces.

‘Settlers in many of the outer systems are demanding greater autonomy. If their voices can be unified, the Administration will have to listen. The security forces are already stretched. If our campaign of civil disobedience here on Earth is stepped up, they'll have to concentrate their forces here, and that will give the outer systems much more freedom of action.’ Bran Foster held up his right fist and clasped it firmly in his left palm. ‘Our aim is to, have at least one world declare its independence within the next two years.’

At this there was a low murmur of approval from Dome Dwellers and Outsiders alike; in this they shared a common goal.

Dal Richie stood up and the gathering quietened.

‘In the next few months we want to cause as much disruption as possible in the food manufacturing divisions. There is nothing more effective than ration cuts to cause unrest.’ He pulled a sheaf of papers from a vinyl pouch. ‘I've listed the methods by which this disruption can be implemented.’

He handed the sheets to Ravella, who helped distribute them. She could tell from their expressions that many of the people were glad that at last there was to be positive action against the Administration. This was why they had risked their lives by coming here. And if Blake would only agree to join their cause, it wouldn't be long before their efforts began to have real effect.

A curved polished surface caught her eye and she looked up, puzzled and distracted, and the blood seemed to solidify in her veins.

A line of black-helmeted security guards blocked the entrance, their para-handguns pointed unwaveringly at the assembly. It had been a very silent invasion, so much so that it was several moments before the murmur of voices fell away to an absolute stunned silence.

Before anyone could react, or do anything foolish, Bran Foster stepped quickly forward, holding out his arms in a gesture that was at once calming and conciliatory.

‘There will be no attempt to resist arrest,’ he told his silent followers. ‘No matter what the provocation there will be no resort to violence.’

He faced the leader of the force, a short bulky man with the insignia of a captain on his sleeve.

‘We claim our rights as citizens and demand that we be treated as civil prisoners.’

The captain stared at him, betraying no emotion. Then, with the most indifferent and economical movements, he pressed the button and fired a blast at point-blank range. There was an intense burst searing flame, a crackle of discharged energy, and Bran Foster was enveloped in a brilliant glowing halo of red.

Instantly he fell to the ground, the force-field dispersing round his lifeless body.

The guards moved forward in a solid line, their weapons raised and ready for firing.

Outside, Blake heard a fierce and prolonged crackling roar and saw the cavern entrance light up. He stood, transfixed with horror, as the mingled sounds of screams came to his ears, hardly believing what was taking place. Then, as the full terrible reality of it came to him he slumped to his knees and buried his head in his hands. After a while there was no other sound on the night air except for the muffled sobs he could no longer contain.

The dawn light revealed the full extent of the massacre. The security force had done its job with great expediency. Blake ventured slowly into the cavern, seeing the huddled bodies in a kind of dazed dream. He approached the corpse of Bran Foster, lying crookedly on its side, and touched the face of the dead man.

An emotion rose up inside him, a cold and deadly sense of purpose that seemed to burn steadily like a hard flame; with an almost savage movement he stood up and looked for one last time at the dreadful scene, then turned abruptly on his heel and left the cavern.

He now knew, without the slightest doubt, what had to be done. He was filled with a fierce resolve that quickened his pace as he returned to the Dome City.

Arriving at the outer door he was relieved to find it still unlocked. It was fortunate that the security forces hadn’t checked the basement during the night. Slipping cautiously inside, he moved swiftly across the darkened area to the stairway, and was about to ascend when everything was flooded with harsh, brilliant light.

His hand gripping the rail, Blake looked at the row of guards lining the walls of the chamber. Slowly he raised his head and gazed up at the squat figure of the captain, standing above him, a pair of handgun clamped in his hairy fist. This time there was no escape.

‘Can he break through the memory blocks, Dr Havant?’

Ven Glynd, his eyes fixed on the scanner-screen, spoke over his shoulder to the man seated on the other side of the desk. The screen showed a tiny windowless cell, with blank white walls, a chair, a bed, and little else to relieve its drab anonymity. The man seated on the chair was hunched forward, his fingers pressed over his eyes as if in an anguish of remembering.

‘Possible but unlikely,’ said Dr Havant stiffly. He was a rather stern-looking man in his forties, not much given to smiling. ‘We don’t eradicate memory, we simply make it inaccessible. In a normal healthy mind the barriers are impenetrable. But should he suffer anything like a nervous breakdown where all the mental circuitry malfunctions, then he might, as it were, find a route into his past.’

Glynd turned away from the screen; he was sleek and well-groomed and even his immaculately tailored coverall couldn’t disguise his corpulent frame. The flash on his shoulder identified him as a high-ranking member of the Justice Department. He nodded slowly, his eyes narrowed - and scheming. ‘I see. That might prove a problem.’

‘Can he not simply be eliminated?’ Havant enquired.

‘No.’ This spoken quietly but with emphasis by Alta Morag, a young, attractive, yet rather cool woman who sat alongside Dr Havant. ‘For many people he still symbolises opposition to the Administration.’

‘Is that true?’

Ven Glynd nodded. ‘We’ve done psych readings on cross-sections of the community. They show a fairly high percentage of people, particularly the younger ones, who believe that Blake’s trial was a show-piece and that his statements were rigged.’ He shrugged slightly. ‘Which of course is true.’

‘His death could be used by the dissidents,’ Alta Morag added. ‘They need a hero and, alive or dead, Blake could be it.’

‘Difficult...’ Dr Havant mused, examining his manicured fingernails. He went on in a thoughtful tone, ‘I suppose my department could induce a disease... something rapidly progressive. Terminal. Would his natural death help?’

‘I don’t think so,’ Ven Glynd said doubtfully. ‘It could still arouse sympathy.’

Alta Morag agreed. ‘Ideally what we need is something to discredit him that will result in a deportation order. If he could be committed to Cygnus Alpha...’

She pursed her lips together, pondering this, and then a slow cunning smile began to form on her beautiful face. She said softly, ‘I think I’m on to something. Doctor, am I right in thinking that you can not only eliminate memory, but that you can also create experiences and implant them in subjects so that they will believe they really happened?’

‘Of course. In fact, creating an illusion of reality is quite simple.’

‘Good.’ Alta Morag looked triumphantly at Glynd. ‘Then I think we can totally destroy him.’

credibility and get him sentenced.’ She rose at once and went towards the main door of the office.

‘Would you come with me, Doctor? I’ll explain what I have in mind.’

Havant followed her. ‘Of course.’

Alta Morag paused at the door. ‘I’ll report back as soon as we’ve done a feasibility check,’ she told the large sleek man behind the desk.

‘All right. As quick as you can. We have to bring charges within the next twenty-four hours.’

Ven Glynd waited until the door had closed and then crossed to an inner door, opening it to admit someone who had been waiting in the next room.

‘They’ve gone.’ Glynd moved to the desk. ‘Did you hear all that?’

The man came slowly and purposefully into the room, his soft cloth shoes making no sound on the deep pile of the carpet. He sat down and made himself comfortable. ‘Yes, I heard.’

‘Satisfied?’

‘No.’ This in a deceptively soft tone that concealed an underlying strain of vehement feeling. ‘I can identify me. My whole operation is at risk while he’s alive. I’ll be satisfied only when that risk is eliminated.’

Ven Glynd glanced at the screen. The man in the cell was in the same position, still attempting to fill the gaps in his shattered memory.

A key turned in the lock and the door opened to reveal a fresh-faced young man who entered cheerfully, carrying a briefcase. ‘I’ll call you when I’m ready to leave,’ he told the warder, and held out his hand to Blake, who was regarding him blankly, wondering who the devil he could be.

‘How do you do? I’m Tel Varon,’ the young man informed him briskly. He pointed to his shoulder in a flash. ‘Justice Department. I’ve been assigned to defend you.’

‘I won’t need a defence. I’m going to plead guilty.’

Tel Varon looked pained. ‘Come now, I’m sure we don’t need to go that far. Certainly the evidence against you is –’ he coughed ‘ – strong, but –’

‘I just want the opportunity to make a statement in open court. I want to be certain that those responsible for the massacre are brought to trial.’

The young man regarded him in a puzzled fashion. ‘I’m sorry...?’

‘It was murder,’ Blake said grimly. ‘I grant that the meeting was an illegal assembly, and that the people involved were members of an Anti-Administration group. But there can be no justification for their slaughter.’

Tel Varon had listened to this with growing bewilderment.

‘Look, er, I’m afraid we’re at cross purposes somewhere. There’s nothing in the charges against you about illegal assembly.’ He shook his head emphatically. ‘No, no, nothing like that. You’re not being prosecuted under the political code... it’s a straightforward criminal action.’

Blake frowned. ‘Criminal?’ He said curiously, ‘Look, just what are the charges?’

Tel Varon delved into his briefcase. ‘I have them right here,’ he said, producing a sheet of paper. He scanned it briefly. ‘There are a number of counts. Assault on a minor. Lewd and indecent behaviour. Attempting to corrupt minors and –’

Blake snatched the paper from him. ‘Let me see that.’ He read it disbelievingly, with growing

agitation. 'This is disgusting – all involving children. None of this is true!'

The young man nodded knowingly, yet his eyes sought to look away. 'Of course not,' he murmured 'of course not. That's why you alarmed me when you said you'd plead guilty –'

'Not to this!' Blake protested. 'Not to these charges!'

'They're the only ones that have been brought against you. And, I must tell you frankly –' he coughed nervously once again '– well, the evidence against you is, er, very damaging.'

'If there is any evidence, then it's been faked,' Blake told him hotly.

'Well... I think that might be quite hard to prove. I've had the opportunity of talking to the children – that is, the prosecution witnesses – and they, well they do seem very certain of their facts.'

Blake nodded slowly. He was beginning to see. It was a set-up.

'Yes,' he said. 'Yes, I'm sure that briefing will have been perfect...'

'If I may, I'd like to outline how I think we should conduct our case –'

Blake cut him short. 'What's the point? They've set me up beautifully.'

'There is a possible approach,' Tel Varon said, determined to do his job properly. 'If we could cite your record... your breakdown after your involvement with those, er, illegal political groups; what was it – four years ago now? The remorse that you felt. The guilt you carried has placed you under an enormous strain. We can submit that these assaults... these aberrations... were carried out whilst you were mentally unbalanced.'

Blake turned on him. His expression was contorted with anger but his voice was deadly calm. 'I plead guilty and offer no defence.'

Tel Varon held up his hand. 'That might prove foolhardy. These are grave charges and without extenuating circumstances you might face deportation. A mental institution would be better than spending the rest of your life on Cygnus Alpha.'

'You will plead guilty and offer no defence.' Blake's face was a grim, determined mask. 'Is that understood?'

Tel Varon heaved a sigh and nodded reluctantly. He tucked his briefcase under his arm and rapped on the door. He thought for a moment and then offered his final piece of advice. 'You're taking a very serious course. Won't you reconsider?'

Blake shook his head stubbornly. 'The Administration is out to get me. And as far as I can see they've won. If I plead diminished responsibility, then I'm branded as mentally unstable. Even if you could prove me totally innocent, the charges have been made. The mud will stick. For a lot of people I'll always be a child molester.' A sour smile twisted his features. 'I've got to hand it to them: they've done a brilliant job.'

The cell door opened, and Tel Varon, after a moment's hesitation, shrugged and quickly went out.

Blake began to pace the cramped cell, hemmed in by the walls, the bed, the single upright chair. He knew that every minute of the day and night he was being observed by the camera mounted high in one corner, its glinting wide-angle lens covering every square centimetre of the tiny space. A spasm of fury shook him, and in a sudden release of helpless frustration he picked up the chair and swung it at the impersonal, all-seeing eye.

The courtroom was austere, almost classical in its simplicity. Like all the rooms in the Dome City,

had no windows to mar its bland uniformity. The dominant feature was a computer console against one wall, standing silent and inactive as the officials of the court busied themselves in preparation for the trial.

Wearing the ribbon of the legal representative of the accused, Tel Varon sorted through his papers, occasionally glancing towards Alta Morag, who wore the ribbon of the prosecution team; she stood quietly conversing with Ven Glynd, the pair of them exuding an air of smug confidence.

There was a slight stirring of interest among the observers seated at the rear of the courtroom. Blake, accompanied by a guard, appeared at a side door and was brought forward to join his advocate.

‘Good morning,’ Tel Varon greeted him. He noted a change of mood in his client, which was confirmed when Blake said:

‘I’ve had a chance to think things through. It’s vital that I have an opportunity to make a statement to the court.’

Tel Varon appraised him doubtfully. ‘That’s up to the Arbiter. It’s not usual,’ he added cautiously.

‘You must try. Look, there’s no way I can prove my innocence, is there?’

‘You’ve given me no chance to try,’ Tel Varon reproached him.

‘If I had, could you have changed things?’ Blake demanded with a touch of sarcasm.

Tel Varon agreed that it was doubtful under the circumstances.

‘You know as well as I do,’ Blake went on, ‘that we’re just going through formalities. But I swear to you that I’m innocent. The charges are totally fabricated.’

‘Yes, quite.’ Tel Varon wasn’t able to keep the lack of conviction out of his voice. ‘I have spoken to the children, thoroughly checked their statements. They were all verified by lie-detector.’ He looked searchingly at Blake. ‘That puts them beyond dispute.’

‘I’m sure it does. The Administration has gone to an enormous amount of trouble. By setting up false charges they’ve even put themselves at risk. There must be a number of people involved who know the truth. The more who know, the greater the risk.’ Blake said softly, ‘Now why? Why would they take that chance?’

‘There’s no possible reason that I can think of,’ said the young man, choosing not to meet Blake’s eye.

‘I know you’ve heard the evidence, but just for the moment believe that I’m innocent. Believe that.’

‘Well...’

‘At first I thought they wanted to silence me because I was a witness to the murder of some twenty people. The only witness.’

‘If they’re as ruthless as you suggest, then why don’t they simply eliminate you?’

‘I couldn’t understand that either,’ Blake said, lowering his voice. ‘It took a long time. Then I began to see it. Apparently I was something of a political figure – I’ve no memory of it myself, I’m only reporting what I’ve heard.’

Almost despite himself, Tel Varon felt a vague flicker of interest. He said, ‘It’s true that you had considerable following, but then you publicly denounced the whole movement and pledged support to the Administration. I think there are still people who secretly believe you were coerced into that statement –’

‘That’s exactly it!’ Blake said, his voice now imbued with a quiet urgency. ‘My death would have

reinforced those doubts. The same would have been true if I'd been charged with being at a proscribed political meeting. So instead, they trump up vile charges – vile enough to discredit me forever.'

His obvious sincerity began to awaken doubts in Tel Varon's mind. The young advocate sensed that perhaps there was more to this than he had supposed.

'If it were true,' he said slowly, 'well, you must realise the implication of what you are saying: it would mean there's corruption at the very highest level of the Administration –'

He was interrupted by a low beeping sound which attracted the attention of everyone in the courtroom. The murmur of voices died away.

The clerk of the court rose to his feet. 'Now be silent,' he intoned solemnly. 'By the authority of the Administration this tribunal is now in session.'

Tel Varon and Alta Morag stepped forward to stand at the central desk, and a moment later the Arbiter entered through a side door and took his place, nodding to the clerk to start the proceedings.

'The Arbiter will permit submissions,' the clerk announced.

Returning to their respective desks, Tel Varon and Alta Morag each picked up a large canister of computer tape and placed them before the Arbiter, then withdrew to their appointed positions.

'Let the accused be brought forward,' the Arbiter instructed, and Blake was led to a dais, which he mounted and faced the court. His face was pale yet composed.

The Arbiter leaned forward, pressing the tips of his fingers together. He waited a moment, and then said, 'Have you, the accused, been made aware of the charges that are laid against you, and do you fully understand the nature and gravity of those charges?'

Blake's voice was quiet and firm in the hushed courtroom. 'Yes.'

'Who speaks for the Administration?'

Alta Morag gave a slight bow. 'I.'

'Who speaks for the accused?'

Tel Varon did the same. 'I.'

'Are you both satisfied that the evidence used in preparing the prosecution tape was fairly obtained and that all statements were certified as true and accurate by lie-detector?'

'I am,' Alta Morag asserted confidently.

Tel Varon glanced towards Blake. 'I am,' he said after a momentary hesitation.

'Is the accused satisfied that his defence has been fully and fairly prepared?' the Arbiter enquired in his clipped emotionless tone.

'The charges against me are totally false. I am not guilty, therefore I offer no defence.'

'Your guilt or innocence is what we are here to determine,' said the Arbiter imperturbably. 'If there are no further submissions the case will be examined.'

He reached out his hand to receive one of the canisters from the clerk, and held it up in full view.

'Let it be seen that the evidence for the prosecution is sealed and approved by the defence,' and saying broke the heavy seal and took out the reel of tape, which he handed to Alta Morag. Then he held aloft the second canister, and in the same flat voice, 'Let it be seen that the evidence for the defence is sealed and approved by the prosecution.'

Breaking the seal, he gave the tape to Tel Varon, who together with Alta Morag approached the computer on the far side of the room. The clerk took the two reels of tape and fitted them on

adjacent spindles, and the two legal representatives returned to their positions before the central desk.

The clerk waited, his finger hovering over the button, and it was as if, just for a moment, the courtroom was held suspended in a kind of breathless limbo.

Then the Arbiter pronounced, 'Let the matter be assessed and may justice prevail.'

The button was pressed, the reels spun, multi-coloured lights began to flash in sequence, and the subdued hum of electronic circuitry softly invaded the silence. Varon's tape was the first to finish and it was some time before the prosecution reel finally spun to a stop.

Everyone waited, their eyes fixed on the computer, and then as if suddenly coming alive the automatic typewriter began a rapid staccato chattering, the broad ribbon of paper jerking rapidly from the slot. The clerk waited impassively, and when the machine had finished tore off the printout and brought it to the Arbiter, who held it in both hands like a scroll and studied it for several moments.

He raised his head and stared directly at Blake. Then he spoke, his voice devoid of all emotion and expression:

'The accused has been found guilty on all charges. His crimes have been accorded a Category Nine rating and as such are adjudged most grave. In sentencing you, the Justice Machine has taken into account your past record, your service to the State and your loyalty to the Administration. None of these have mitigated in your favour. It is then the sentence of this tribunal that you be taken from this place to an area of close confinement. From there you will be transported to the Penal Colony on the planet Cygnus Alpha where you will remain for the rest of your natural life. This matter is ended.'

The Arbiter placed the printout on the desk and rose to his feet.

'I would like to speak,' Blake said, quietly yet distinctly.

'There can be no more said regarding this case,' the Arbiter informed him imperiously. 'The evidence has been assessed and judgement made.'

'But the evidence is false... the charges are false!'

'There was no proof of falsification of evidence in your defence tape,' said the Arbiter, preparing to move away.

Blake's voice thickened with anger and mounting desperation.

'Because I have no evidence! My only proof is my innocence!'

'If you have any complaint against the conduct of this tribunal, it must be directed through your counsel. That is all.'

The Arbiter turned away, his duty fulfilled, but before he had moved a couple of paces Blake had leapt forward, cleared the desk, and wrenched at his arm.

'Listen to me! You've got to listen to me!'

The entire courtroom had been stunned by this sudden and dramatic gesture, but in seconds it seemed that everyone had converged on Blake, hands clawing at him from every direction, and with absolutely ruthless efficiency the guards overpowered him and held him fast. One of them slipped a small pistol-like device from his holster, the gleaming point of a hypodermic needle protruding from the blunt snout, and pressed it against Blake's upper arm.

The high-concentration suppressant acted almost instantaneously and Blake felt his strength drain away, his legs buckling beneath him, so that he fell in an untidy heap, his vision fading as the drug affected the primary nerve-centres of the brain.

He was surrounded by legs, which seemed to rise to enormous heights, like trees in a forest, and his mind seized on odd inconsequential details: the scuff-marks on the floor, the frayed seam of his coverall, the soft cloth shoes.

Darkness closed in around him, and at the far end of what seemed a long black tunnel he could see a face staring down at him, a face he had seen somewhere before. Hazily, he struggled to remember and then he knew.

It was the man with blond hair.

The bright circle of light flickered and dimmed and he was floating in the infinite blackness of outer space.

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