

February 6, 1977. Sir William Ballantine kept looking nervously at his watch. He couldn't understand why Carmell hadn't telephoned. That, quite specifically, had been the arrangement. He should have telephoned - and fixed the meeting - as soon as he arrived in England.

From his study window, stark against the unseasonably bright blue of the afternoon sky, Ballantine could see the gigantic listening saucer of the Jodrell Bank radio telescope.

He stared at it now, trying to stifle the conviction that something had gone dreadfully wrong. For days he'd had this premonition that somehow they had discovered what he was planning, that time was draining fast away.

It had been a mistake, a terrible mistake, to have kept the tape a secret for so long. He should have told the public, months earlier, what was really happening in space. He should have done it that day when - at NASA headquarters in America - he saw the undeniable proof..that men had achieved the impossible.

But, There again, who would have believed him? The facts were so fantastic that, despite his international standing as a radio astronomer, there would have been scepticism. Particularly if NASA denied the story - and Harry Carmell had warned him that NASA would deny it most emphatically.

Carmell had helped him. He'd been nervous about doing so but - without seeking permission from his superiors - he had helped. He'd played Ballantine's Jodrell Bank tape through one of the NASA electronic decoding circuits. And then they'd seen, just the two of them, the astounding pictures which were suddenly flowing from the unscrambled tape.

Carmell, immediately, had been terrified. "Don't yap about this - not to anybody,"he'd said. "These bastards would kill us if they knew what we've seen. Take a word of advice, friend, and destroy that damned tape..."

We have those words, exactly as they were spoken, for they made a big impression on Ballantine. Enough of an impression for him to record them in his 1976 diary.

Ballantine did not speak of what he'd seen at NASA. He tried to forget. But, of course, he couldn't forget.

On Wednesday, January 26, 1977, Ballantine got an unexpected telephone call from Carmell in America. Most of Ballantine's telephone conversations contained such a mass of technical information that he taped them for future reference. He taped this particular one and now, by permission of Lady Ballantine, we are able to present it:

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CARMELL: Did you do like I said?..Did you destroy that tape?

BALLANTINE: I haven't told anybody about it...but I've still got it safe...

CARMELL: Thank Christ! Then we can burst the whole bloody thing...

BALLANTINE: I'm sorry...what are you talking about?

CARMELL: Batch cobnsignments...that's what I'm talking about...I tell you, friend, it's incredible what these goons are doing...

BALLANTINE: Batch consignments?...I don't know what that means...

CARMELL: Stinking atrocities...that's what it means ...But I don't want to say no more, not on the wire...I'll tell you when I get to you...

BALLANTINE: You're coming to England?

CARMELL: By the first damned flight I can...I've quit NASA and I've borrowed a baby juke - box...

BALLANTINE: I don't think I caught that...

CARMELL: A juke - box...you know...a de-coder like we used last year...I've got one and I'm bringing it to England...

BALLANTINE: But what's happened?...And what are batch consignments?

CARMELL: Wait till we meet, friend, and it'll blow your mind...Jesus, I knew these bastards were evil but I never imagined...look, I'll ring you when I get to London, okay?

BALLANTINE: You expect to get here tomorrow?

CARMELL: Can't rightly say...they know I've got this baby and they're looking for me...so I gotta play it smart. I might get up through Canada and out that way...give me till...well, let's say a week Sunday...I should have made it before then...

BALLANTINE: You know, I find this very hard to credit...you really are in some danger?

CARMELL: Not some danger, friend...the worst danger possible...but I couldn't stand by and just let them do what they're doing...now, look, I gotta go...so a week Sunday at the outside, okay?

BALLANTINE: That'll be February 6...

CARMELL: Yeah...but with luck it'll be earlier...if you haven't heard from me again by February 6 - let's say by four in the afternoon - you'll know it's all screwed up...

BALLANTINE: And what does that mean?

CARMELL: That I'll be dead, friend, that's what it means.

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BALLANTINE: Good Lord!...but if that were to happen... what should I do?

CARMELL: If you give a damn about decency or human dignity...you'll go right ahead and expose the whole stinking shebang...there's a guy in Geneva who'll help you...his name is...

That was the core of the conversation. We are not printing the name mentioned at that stage by Harry Carmell for it is that of the man we now refer to as Trojan. In view of the way Trojan has helped in this investigation, his life would be in acute danger if he were in any way to be identified in this book.

So there was Ballantine in his study on February 6. It was nearly 4:45 in the afternoon. And there was still no call from Carmell.

Maybe, he thought, Carmell had been caught. Maybe he'd been caught and killed. It all bordered on being outrageously impossible but, after what he had seen at NASA, Ballantine no longer considered anything impossible.

Obviously he ought to contact the man in Switzerland. He'd promised Carmell that he would. Well, he'd more or less promised him. But even that wasn't as simple as it seemed. Carmell had given him no address or telephone number. Only a surname. And Geneva was rather a large place.

By 5:30 he was convinced that Carmell was dead. He was also convinced that there was serious danger for himself. Carmell's words kept running through his mind: "I knew these bastards were evil but I never imagined..." And now Ballantine's own imagination was churning over. They probably already knew about his tape and about what he intended doing with it..."

He took the tape from the drawer, knowing that he had to get it to somewhere safe. That was when he realized there was one friend who might be able to advise him - John Hendry, the London managing editor of an international news agency.

Kendry, to start with, had a staff reporter in Geneva - and he would almost certainly trace the man named by Carmell. Hendry would also be able to tell him the best way to break the news - for it was essential to make as big an initial impact as possible. He'd pull the whole bizarre business right into the eye of the public. He'd also force a thorough investigation into the disappearance of Harry Carmell.

He checked his watch again. Early Sunday evening. Chances were that John Hendry was still at his office. They worked odd hours in Fleet Street. It was worth trying.

He was lucky. He caught Hendry just as he was preparing to leave. Here, again with Lady Ballantine's permission, is a transcript of that telephone call:

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BALLANTINE: John?...This is William Ballantine...

HENDRY: Well. what a happy surprise! How are things a Jodrell?

BALLANTINE: I've got a problem, John...rather a serious problem...and I need your help...

HENDRY: Certainly, you know full well that any help I can give...what sort of problem?

BALLANTINE: Can I meet you this evening?

HENDRY: You in London?

BALLANTINE: I'm calling from home...but it wouldn't take me long to drive..

HENDRY: Well...I was just about wrapping up for the night...

BALLANTINE: It is important, John...and I promise you it's the biggest story you've seen this year...

HENDRY: So how can I say "no"? You want to come to the office?

BALLANTINE: I'll be with you as quickly as possible. Oh - and John - I'm also putting a package in the post to you...but I'll explain that when I see you...

HENDRY: I don't follow...why not bring it with you...?

BALLANTINE: Because I've got a feeling...a premonition if you like...that events are starting to move rather fast...and I want it safely out of my possession...

HENDRY: And that's supposed to be logic? William, what is all this about?

BALLANTINE: Just wait for me...then you'll understand everything.

The sequence of events which immediately followed the

converstaion have been described by Lady Ballantine. We met her on July 27,1977. Here is the statement she made then:

I entered the study just as my husband was replacing the receiver and I couldn't help noticing, right away, that he was in a state of agitation. This extremely self - possessed man. He never allowed himself to get flustered. He had been behaving a little strangely, a little out - of - character, for about a week - ever since he had a phone call from some man in America. He wouldn't discuss it with me - which, again, was unusual - but he seemed to be very much on edge.

However, I'd never seen him quite as he looked when I went into his study. I had the distinct feeling - and I don't think I'm dramatizing with hindsight - that he was frightened.

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I asked him what was troubling him, for it was obvious that something was, but he kept shaking his head and saying there was nothing.

He told me that he had to drive to London immediately for a meeting...

Lady Ballantine became rather distressed during this part of the statement and we waited for a while until she had composed herself. She apologize for crying and said she was anxious to continue because she wanted to assist. Our investigation, she pointed out, would have had the fullest endorsement from her husband. She went on:

He took a package from the drawer of his desk and sealed it into a large envelope which he addressed to Mr. Hendry in London. He put stamps on it and asked me to take it straight away to the post box. He said it was most urgent and, although I pointed out that there was no collection that evening, he was quite adamant that I should take it then.

He said that he would probably be back from London in the early hours of the Monday morning but, as you know, I never saw him again.

Why did Ballantine act so strangely over that tape? It would have been more logical, surely, for him to have taken it with him to London. Getting his wife to post it - so ensuring it would be delayed before reaching Hendry - seems to make little sense. We confess we do not have the answer. Unless there is one to be found in that transcript of his conversation with Hendry...

"I've got a feeling...a premonition if you like ..."That's what he said. And it could be the key. We now know that the tape would never have reached Hendry if it had gone into Ballantine's car. But then, borrowing an expression from Lady Ballantine, we do have the benefit of hindsight.

Ballantine's death, as you may recall, made all the front pages. The splash headline in one of the tabloids read FREAK SKID KILLS SCIENCE CHIEF - and that seemed to sum it up. There was no obvious explanation for his car having careered off the road on that journey to London. Ballantine

was a competent and steady driver who had travelled that route often before. He would have known about that awkward bend and about that terrible drop beyond the protective fencing.

And, even in an agitated state, he would almost certainly have approached it with caution. A freak skid. Yes, that seemed to say it all.

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Only one photograph of the crash was made available to the Press and television. A whole series were taken by agency cameraman George Green but only one was ever released. It showed part of the wreckage - and a blanket - covered shape on a stretcher.

We asked Green what was in the other pictures. Why had they been confiscated?

"I've been ordered to keep my trap shut," he said. "But I'll tell you this...you ought to ask that Professor Radwell why he lied at the inquest. Now I'm saying any more...it'd be more than my job's worth. He's the boy you want to talk to."

Professor Hubert Radwell was the pathologist who gave evidence at the Ballantine inquest. He had reported that the body had been "extensively burned". That in itself was puzzling for there had been no fire - and Radwell had not been pressed for an explanation.

We checked back on Trojan's transcript of the Policy Committee meeting - the one held only three days before Ballantine's death. And we studied the words used about Ballantine and Harry Carmell:

R SEVEN: As you say then, there is no room for question
...both of them have got to be expediencies.

A EIGHT: All agreed?...Good...I suggest a couple of hot
jobs...coroners always play them quiet...

"Hot jobs' and "extensive" burns...and coroners "always playing them quiet." And now this cryptic statement from cameraman George Green. It all had to add up to more than mere coincidence.

Professor Radwell, at first, refused to make any comment. "The Ballantine business is in the past," he said. "Nothing can be gained by raking it all up."

We formed the impression that he was under some pressure, that he had been given instructions to stay silent. And that he was uneasy about those instructions.

That impression proved right. We pressed him to specify the extent of the burning. And suddenly, to our surprise, it seemed as if he wanted to unburden himself. "It was uncanny," he said. "Quite uncanny." He paused before adding: "They told me it would cause unnecessary alarm...that there was no point in people knowing...but now I'm not sure...I've always regarded the truth as sacrosanct."

Another pause. Then, obviously having taken a big decision, he talked quickly and at length. His statement, which we will be presenting later, provides an astonishing insight into what really killed sir William Ballantine. And into what the Policy Committee mean by a hot job".

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Harry Carmell first heard the news of Ballantine's death on a radio bulletin. He heard it early in the morning on February 7 and it hardly registered.

Very little was registering with Carmell at that time. The prolonged strain of dodging out of America, of knowing he was a target for execution, had pushed him back into a habit he thought he'd kicked for ever. He was back on drugs. Hard drugs.

He was in his mid - thirties but normally looked at least ten years younger. On this particular morning, in an hotel bedroom in London's Earls Court, he was more like a sick man of sixty or more. He lay fully dressed on the covers of the unmade bed, his bleached blue eyes fixed unseeingly on a crack in the ceiling. His skin, too tight over his face, had the pallor of a shroud. And he felt as if he might once again start to vomit.

His girl, Wendy, was out getting the morning papers. He lit a cigarette, tried to will himself back to normality. But his head still seemed full of fog.

Ballantine. He could almost swear he'd heard that guy on the radio mention the name Ballantine. Or maybe it was a name very similar.

It made him remember, however, what he'd got to do. He'd got to contact Ballantine. He'd got to give him the juke - box. He checked the date on his watch and swore with quiet desperation. February 7. Jesus! That had to mean he'd been blown out of his mind for three whole days - ever since he'd said to Ballantine, he was in a panic. He'd told Ballantine, told him quite specifically, that he'd call by February 6 at the latest. And that if he didn't call by then, Ballantine could assume he was dead.

He scrambled off the bed, started fumbling through his wallet. Where the hell was that bloody number? He found it on a slip of card just as Wendy returned. He sat on his pillow to start dialling and she handed him one of the newspapers. One glance at the front page made him drop the receiver as if it was suddenly white - hot. That guy on the radio...he had heard him properly. Ballantine had already been murdered.

Fear instantly cleared his brain. "Throw your things together." He was on his feet and his tone was decisive. "We're pulling out - now."

Wendy stared at him, bewildered. "What's up?"

"I want to go on living - that's what's up." Carmell was already bundling his clothes into a leather grip. "Now come on - shift."

Twelve minutes later they'd settled their bill and were out of the hotel. And as they hurried away, he told her exactly why they were in England.

We should mention here that we are suppressing Wendy's surname at her request.

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She fears retaliation from the Policy Committee and, although we consider those fears are not justified, we have agreed to respect her wishes.

We have interviewed her on three occasions and she has explained that she thought their furtive escape through Canada was somehow connected with Carmell having broken is contract with NASA.

She had not questioned him. And she certainly had no idea his life was in danger. Not until that morning in February. He told her everything that morning, as he hustled her along the pavements of Earls Court. He told her the lot.

"They'll start scouring the hotels now," he said. "So from here on we live rough. We find ourselves a squat somewhere and we live rough."

And later, in the derelict house where they slept for the next two nights, he told her he was determined to go ahead with his plan. He was going to expose them and their atrocities. And he wasn't going to be stopped by Ballantine's death.

"Mabey I ought to go straight to the Press," he said. That's the only way to play it now..."

"But what if they don't believe you?"

"Of course they'll believe me!" It's the truth and I'll damned well make them believe me!"

"I was watching a programme on television the other night," said Wendy. "While you were...you know...asleep. I was watching a programme called Science Report..."

"So?"

"So it strikes me that a programme like that would have scientific advisers...and those advisers, dumbhead, might understand what you're talking about..."

Carmell immediately got enthusiastic. "You're damned right they would...better than any newspaper reporter...Hey, I really think you've hit it. This Science Report...what station was it on?"

"I got the impression it goes out every week...but I can't remember which station," said Wendy. "I do know it had a plug - spot in the middle so it couldn't have been the BBC..."

"I'll find it," interrupted Carmell, "And I'll give them the most sensational science report they've ever had..."

Science Report had a very successful thirteen - week trial on ITV in 1975. Ratings were food, surprisingly good for such a serious project, and Sceptre Television had little difficulty persuading the network to take a twenty - six week run in 1976.

That was tremendous for Chris Clements and his ego, for Science Today was his baby. He produced it and directed it. And he claimed, not without justification, to have originated most of its brightest ideas.

So the network's decision was a great compliment to him. It was also an enormous challenge. Keeping up that standard for twenty - six weeks in a row - it really was quite an order. Clements had no doubts, however, about his ability to meet that order. It merely got his adrenaline going.

He was a wiry little man, who looked as if he might once have been a jockey, and he had sparse dark hair which always needed combing. He always spoke fast, in urgent staccato sentences, as if his tongue were in a permanent hurry. And

he generated enthusiasm like Chris Clements.

They were going to stockpile at least a dozen programmes. That was the plan. Then they'd do the last fourteen during the run.

By the middle of December, 1975, they already had seven in the can - so they were comfortably ahead of schedule - and the production team was considering which subject to tackle next.

There were eight of them that day in Clement's office which was across the corridor behind Studio B. He'd often protest that the office was too small to hold proper meetings and also that he disliked the cooking smells which drifted up from the canteen kitchen.

His protests had done no good. They'd merely brought curt little notes from Leonard Harman - Assistant Controller of Programmes (Admin) - pointing out that space was at a premium, that Science Report didn't qualify for its own Production Office. Harman, of course, had a far bigger office. One with proper air-conditioning.

So there they were, the eight of them, in the office which was really too small. Clement's production assistant, Jean Baker, was at the desk. She usually sat at the desk during these meetings because she did most of the note-taking and the referring to files and because Clements liked to think on his feet. He paced back and forth, his hands and arms dancing expressively, as they bounced ideas around.

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The others included former ITN newscaster Simon Butler, the programme's anchor-man, and reporters Katherine White and Colin Benson. Opposite them were the scientific advisers, Professor David Cowie and Dr. Patrick Snow, and in the corner nearest the door was researcher Terry Dickson.

"Wave - power," suggested Benson. "energy from waves..."

"Been flogged to death, love," said Clements. "Didn't you watch BB-C2 either. And, reckoning it a good subject, he'd been quietly researching wave - power. He'd have to scrap that now. Clements, despite his habit of calling everybody "love", was tough. When he said no he meant no.

"Newsweek have got an intriguing piece on robot servants," said Cowie. "They're now being built, it seems, to polish the floors and even make beds..."

"Now that I like!" said Clements gleefully. "Mechanical maids! Yes, we could really have fun with that one. Jean love...put that down as a possible...we'll come back on it."

"I think it's time we took a really close look at the Brain Drain," said Butler.

Clements stopped his pacing, looked at him doubtfully. "I don't know, Simon...strikes me as a bit heavy." He cupped his chin in his right hand. "Is it really us?"

"Well if it isn't, I think it ought to be," said Butler. "We are a science programme and you consider the number of scientists who are leaving...and what it means to this country..." conceded Clements. "Maybe if we dressed it up with some good human stories..." He looked at Dickson. "How about it, Terry? Reckon you could dig up a lively selection of case -histories?"

Dickson could see his work-load growing fast. "It would take time," he said guardedly.

"Of course it would, love. Getting the right people...I

can see that. But it doesn't have to be top priority. Say we were to think of it in terms of five programmes from now...then you could plod along with it when you're not too hectic with the first four..."

It was as simple and as casual as that. None of them at that meeting had the slightest inkling that they were about to embark on the most astonishing television documentary ever produced - the one which was to explode the secrecy of Alternative 3.

Dickson knew there was only one satisfactory way to tackle this sort of problem - dozens of telephone calls. Probably scores of them, even. It was no use hoping to rely on local stringers because they never really came up with the goods. Not on this type of job.

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He'd have to call head - hunting firms and the major professional organizations...universities and research establishments. He'd get told that people didn't want to appear on the programme or he'd find that they were too damned dull to be allowed on the programme. And if he worked at it hard enough - and had a bit of luck - he'd finish up with a good varied collection. Of people who mattered and who mattered and who could talk.

He got lucky, as it happened, quite soon. One of his first telephone calls - made purely on spec - was to a complex of research laboratories. A helpful man in the Public Relations department told him that one of their solar - energy experts would soon be leaving for America. Her name was Ann Clark and she was aged 29. The P.R. man pointed out that naturally he couldn't say if Dr. Clark would agree to take part in the programme. If she did agree, however, there would be no objection from the management. He also told Dickson that Dr. Clark was "a real cracker" but quickly added that that was background information and that he did not wish to be quoted.

Ann Clark, to Dickson's relief, said she'd be pleased to appear in Science Report. In fact, she was delighted that a television company should be planning to show the disgusting conditions in which British scientists were expected to work. She was, quite obviously, a very fluent speaker.

Clements usually liked to see a photograph and a biographical breakdown of people before committing himself to putting them on his programme. He'd made that rule, years before, after bling-booking an expert on beauty aids - only to find that she looked and sounded like the worst of the Macbeth witches. He'd had to record her, of course, and they'd junked the recording after she'd left the studio. And Harman had raised hell about the waste of valuable studio time.

Now Clements played safe. He had this rule. So Dickson arranged for a Norwich news-agency to call on Ann Clark. This agency came back with the whisper that she wasn't going to America purely because of working conditions. The conditions were bad, very bad, but she'd also had some sort of romantic bust-up...

Dickson decided to forget the whisper. It only complicated matters. Clements approved the photograph. And Colin Benson, the young coloured reporter, set off with a film unit for Norwich.

Later there were suspicions that the assignment was sabotaged by somebody at Sceptre. Those suspicions could never be proved. So we can merely record that something happened to the film after it was taken back for processing - and that only a fraction of it could be used in the transmitted programme.

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At the time, however, it seemed like a routine job. Benson says: "Dr. Clark was not only extremely articulate and eager to co-operate but she had obviously also done a great deal of useful home-work on emigration. She pointed out that, apart from the frustrations facing her at the laboratory, there were many ways in which initiative and flair were being stifled in Britain.

"I remember her talking about how a man called Marcus Samuel started the Shell organization-in 1830, I think she said - as a small private company selling varnished sea-shells. Men of his caliber, she said, were now being positively discouraged in Britain - and that was another reason she was glad to be off to America.

"She was, in fact, a really good interviewee, a television natural. nd I was delighted with what we'd got in the can."

His delight died abruptly when they got back to the studios and the film was processed. Most of it - sound and vision - was completely blank. It had never happened before and there was no logical explanation for it having happened now. There had been more than forty-five minutes of interview which, after editing, would have provided about twelve minutes of screen time. All they could salvage was a fifteen-second segment.

Clements, naturally, was fuming. Sending a unit all the way to Norwich was damned expensive - and he knew how Harman would squeal about him going over budget. He quizzed Benson at length. "You're really sure that she is that good? That it's really worth going there again?"

"It was a hell of a good interview,'insisted Benson. "I say we should go back."

He telephoned Ann Clark, explained the situation, and fixed a new appointment. He takes up the story from there: "She was very sympathetic and she agreed quite willingly to see us again. But two days later, when we got to Norwich, it was all very different...

"She wasn't at her flat, where we'd arranged to meet her, but after quite a lot of trouble we did find her at another address. She looked flustered and - I don't think I was imagining this - a bit frightened. It seemed quite clear that, for some reason or another, she'd been hoping to give us the slip.

"She certainly didn't want to talk, didn't want to know at all. Later we discovered she'd even told the security people at the laboratories that we were pestering her and that they shouldn't let us in. It was just a crazy-situation.

"I did manage to grab a few words with her at the gate the next morning - although she tried to duck away when she spotted us waiting there - and I asked her what was wrong.

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"You know what she replied? She just looked at me sort

of queer and said - "I'm sorry...I can't finish the film...I'm going away."

"Then she scuttled inside and that was the last we ever saw of her."

Benson, although he did not realize it at that stage, was just starting to get enmeshed in Alternative 3...

Benson and the film team were travelling dejectedly from Norwich when Terry Dickson noticed the paragraph about Robert Patterson in the Guardian.

Dickson knew that this time he wouldn't need to worry about getting a picture and a biography for Patterson, apart from being a leading mathematician, often appeared on television as a taxation expert. He was a fluent and impressive performer.

At first Patterson seemed uncharacteristically reluctant. He had a lot to do. He wasn't sure if he could spare time for an interview. But finally Dickson persuaded him. They agreed that the unit should be at Patterson's home at 11:00 a.m. the following Tuesday.

"Let's hope we have a bit more luck than at Norwich," said Clements sourly. "I've never known such a run of disaster..."

In fact, of course, it was even worse than at Norwich. Benson got no reply when he arrived at the house in Scotland. The downstairs curtains were partially-drawn and, peeping through the gaps, he could see that the rooms were untidy. There were bits of food and dirty dishes in the kitchen and on the dining-room table...books and oddments of clothing strewn across the floors. There were six pints of milk outside the front door and the garage as empty. The whole place looked as if it had been abandoned in a hurry.

Benson checked with the neighbors. The Pattersons, he was told, had left three days earlier. They had driven off at speed on the Saturday and they had not been seen since.

Benson went to the University of St. Andrews and there he was told by the vice-chancellor that Patterson had already gone to America. He'd had to go, apparently, a little earlier than he'd originally intended.

"He told me that they wanted him more urgently than he'd realized," said the vice-chancellor. "I'm terribly sorry you've had this wasted journey...and I must say it's not like him at all...breaking an appointment like this. I can only assume that, in the rush, he completely forgot..."

They? Who were they?

The vice-chancellor shook his head apologetically. "Can't help you there either, I'm afraid. Patterson was

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rather mysterious about what he was going to do - and about exactly where he was going. Somewhere in America... that's as much as he ever said."

We have now checked with every university in America. Not one of them has any knowledge of any post having been offered to Robert Patterson. And no - one can suggest where he might possibly be.

We have also checked with the American company which Dr. Ann Clark was due to join - the one which was "in a hurry to have her".

They have confirmed that they did offer her a job at more than double her Norwich salary. They have also told us

that they received a brief letter from her - regretting that, for personal reasons, she would not be able to go to America.

Simon Butler, you may recall, explained the next step in the mystery during that television documentary. He went with a camera-crew to the car park of Number Three Terminal, Heathrow Airport, and pointed out the car which had been hired in Norwich by Ann Clark.

We quote the exact words he used in that programme: "Whatever was going on brought Ann Clark here...she had told friends that she was flying to New York. And yet there is no record of Ann Clark leaving this airport on that or any other day. The only evidence that she was here at all is her abandoned car. Beyond that - nothing."

There was another abandoned car nearby in the same park. A blue Rover. It belonged to Robert Patterson.

It was some time, however, before the television team found those cars. Months, in fact, after Benson's return and the Alternative 3 programme might never have been produced - if it hadn't been for the bizarre business of Brian Pendlebury.

By April, 1976, the Brain Drain project had been almost completed. Dickson had found another batch of interviewees and work had progressed in double-harness with work on other subjects - including a revolutionary new method for "stretching" petrol consumption and the Mechanical Maids.

Butler merely had to do a couple of final studio links and the Brain Drain would be ready for transmission.

They were, of course, baffled by the strange behaviour of Ann Clark and Robert Patterson - and there'd been some caustic memoranda from Harman about the "reckless waste of film facilities" - but they were a science programme. And runaway people were hardly their concern.

So that's how it would have been...if Chris Clements, in his local one evening, hadn't heard and oddly disturbing story from one of his neighbors...

This neighbor had relatives called Pendlebury who lived in Manchester. And it appeared that the Pendleburys' son - an electronics expert - had completely vanished in Australia.

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And, even stranger, it seemed that he's been writing to his parents for months - from an address where he was not even known.

"Brian always was a selfish little sod, only interested in what was in something for himself, but this is just plain daft, isn't it," said the neighbor. "You know, he even sent them pictures and everything but now it seems he wasn't even there..."

It certainly didn't make sense to Clements. He mulled it over that night and mentioned it the next day to Colin Benson. "Seems to be the season for disappearing boffins," he said. "Or, on the other hand, maybe he's just playing some prank on his folks."

"What if he isn't?" Benson asked suddenly.

"Well what else could it be?"

"What if there's some pattern here? What if Clark and Patterson and now this Pendlebury...what if they're all connected in some way?"

"I fail to see how they could be..."

"Let me go up to Manchester and see the parents..."

"Look, love, please...we're already a week behind schedule and we can't afford to go bouncing off at tangents..."

"Chris, I've got a feeling...don't ask me why...but I've got a feeling we're on the edge of something big here."

Clements shook his head. "We've got a show to do. I know you're still sore, Colin, over what happened in Norwich and Scotland...but nobody blamed you for those cock-ups...so do me a favor and relax."

"Harman blamed me..."

"Harman blames everybody for everything. That's the way Harman's made. And, anyway, it was me that got the kicking - not you."

"I'll go on my day off," said Benson. "And I'll pay my own damned expenses."

"Waste of time, love," said Clements. "And don't imagine I'm having the train fare swung on to my budget."

"Couldn't I put it down as entertaining contacts?"

Clements grinned. "I don't think I've ever met anybody quite as persistent as you. All right - go ahead and do a bit of entertaining."

We have presented that conversation exactly as it took place, with the help of the two men, because it emphasizes how there was nearly no further investigation...how Sceptre Television almost veered away from Alternative 3.

Benson's decision to go to Manchester was the turning-point. It culminated in Sceptre Television abandoning a thoughtfully-balanced but unspectacular programme on the Brain Drain - and replacing it with one which was to startle the world.

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Dennis Pendlebury was a milkman until his retirement in 1976. He and his wife Alice live in a terraced house in one of the shabby suburbs of Manchester. They are, as they say themselves, a very ordinary couple. They have never had much money and they made many sacrifices to get their son Brian through university.

Mrs. Pendlebury, in fact, worked as a charwoman - to help pay for extras - until Brian joined the RAF.

Benson was in their front room, the one reserved for visitors and special occasions, looking through the colored photographs which appeared to show their son in Australia.

He recorded the entire conversation, with the Pendlebury's permission, and they have agreed to us making use of the transcript in this book.

The Pendleburies were together on the sofa, facing him over the tea-cups and cakes. "So we were a bit disappointed, of course, when he stopped writing but we didn't give it too much thought at first," said Mr. Pendlebury. He re-lit his pipe, took a couple of reflective puffs. "Our Brian, he never was much of a one for writing."

"So how did you find out?" asked Benson. "I mean, about him not being there..."

"It was Mrs. Prescott over at number nine," said Pendlebury. "She was the one who found out. Her daughter Beryl emigrated out there...what would it be...five years ago now?"

"Six years," said Mrs. Pendlebury. "Seven come September."

"Well, anyway, five or six...makes no odds. Her daughter's living out there...that's what I'm saying...and Mrs. Prescott was going to visit her, see. So we said to her...why don't you look up Brian? We thought it would be a nice surprise for him. You know...someone from home. She'd know him, you see, since he was knee-high to that

table..."

"Tell the man what she said..."

"That's what I'm doing, woman...I am telling him."

There was a trace of irritation in Pendlebury's tone. His pipe had gone out again and there was a pause while he struck another match. "So she went to the address -the one on the letters and that - but the man there reckoned he'd never heard of him."

"Who was this man?" asked Benson.

"What beats me is that we wrote to him there," said Pendlebury. "And we know he had the letters because we got replies."

"This man," persisted Benson. "What did Mrs. Prescott say about him?"

"He was an American, I think she said," said Pendlebury. "I don't think she said any more than that."

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"Perhaps he was the new tenant? Perhaps your son had just moved out?"

"No, I don't think so. He'd been there for years, judging by what he said to Mrs. Prescott."

"Well, that was it, wasn't it. They said exactly the same...that they'd never heard of him."

Mr.s Pendlebury prodded him with her elbow. "Show the man the letter," she said.

"Oh yes, you've got to see the letter," said Pendlebury. "It's in the other room, mother - behind the clock on the mantelpiece." He leaned forward and lowered his voice confidentially as his wife left the room. "It's getting her down something awful," he said. "The worry of not knowing."

He offered Benson another cup of tea, which Benson refused, and poured one for himself. "We wrote to this firm to try finding out what was going on and...ah, here's their reply. You just take a look at that."

Benson accepted the letter from Mrs. Pendlebury and say from the letter - heading that it was from the Sydney office of an internationally - known electronics company. It was signed by the Personnel Director and it was addressed to Mr. Pendlebury. It read:

Thank you for your letter which has been passed to me by the Managing Director. I am afraid that you have been misinformed for I have checked our personnel records for the past five years and I have established that at no time has the company employed, nor offered employment to, anyone by the name of B. D. Pendlebury.

I can only suggest that you are confusing us with some other organization and I regret that I cannot help you further in this matter.

Benson read the letter twice and frowned thoughtfully. "And you're sure you're not confusing them with another outfit?"

"Positive," said Pendlebury. "Pass me that wallet, mother..." From the wallet he took a slip of paper bearing the name and address of the firm in Sydney. "See...there it is...in Brian's own writing."

Mrs. Prescott from number nine, a widow with a shrewd and agile mind, confirmed their story but had little to add. She picked her words carefully, obviously not wishing to hurt

the Pendleburys, but she gave Benson the impression that she'd never really approved of Brian. It was all in her tone rather than in what she actually said. Benson remembered what Clements had been told by his neighbour...about Brian Pendlebury having been a "selfish little sod"...and he

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wondered if Brian might be playing some cruel trick on his parents. Then he dismissed the thought. It was too ridiculous.

Benson borrowed the letter from the electronics company, together with the photographs, and Mrs. Prescott offered to show him a short - cut to the stop<for the station bus.

As they turned the corner she suddenly spoke with quiet vehemence: "You see...that's the thanks they get for spoiling him."

He glanced at her in surprise. "How do you mean?"

"He looks down on them, does Brian. Bit ashamed of them, if you ask me. Going to university...it gave him big ideas..."

"You surely don't think he's disappeared on purpose?"

She pursed her lips. "Not my place to say, she said. "Look...there's your bus coming...you'll have to run if you're going to catch it."

He didn't take her implied opinion at all seriously - not until months later. It seemed to him then, as the bus trundled through Manchester, that she'd merely been trying to squeeze the last ounce of drama from the situation.

He spent a long time on the train studying the photographs, particularly those taken in the open. There was one detail in them which intrigued him, which didn't seem quite right. And yet he could not be sure...

Back at the studios he sought the help of a stills photographer who was attached to the graphics department. This man made copy - negatives of the outdoor photographs and then re-printed them as large blow-ups.

Benson was not concerned with the one which appeared to have been taken in a nightclub for that, he reasoned, could have been posed almost anywhere. In London. In Manchester even. And, anyway, it didn't contain that one off-key detail...

He waited impatiently until the blow-ups were ready. Then he saw, quite clearly, that he'd been right. In every picture - including the one of Brian Pendlebury surfing and the one of him by the Sydney Harbor Bridge - there were three birds in the sky. Those birds were identical in every picture - and so were their positions.

There was also something else, something which had not struck him before: the pattern-formations of the wispy clouds were exactly the same in each picture.

The explanation was startlingly obvious: The "Australian" snaps of Brian Pendlebury had been taken against a painted backdrop. They were, without question, "studio jobs:."

He scooped them up, raced along to Clement's office behind Studio B. "We've stumbled on one hell of a Brain Drain story here," he said. "I can't start to understand it yet but...Chris...we've just got to do some digging..."

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SECTION FIVE

This digging, as Simon Butler said on television, soon revealed an astonishing fact:

Twenty-one other people, mainly scientists and academics, had vanished in the same mysterious circumstances. They were among the 400 researched - ostensibly for an extended version of the Brain Drain program - by the Science Report team.

Some, as Butler explained, had disappeared entirely on their own. Others, like Patterson, had gone with their families. All had told neighbors or colleagues that they were going to work abroad.

However, as we have already indicated, only part of the story was presented on television. Many facts were still not known at the time of transmission. And much material which was known was censored from the program.

The principal censor was Leonard Harman, Assistant Controller of Programs (Admin), who also tried to neuter this book.

Letter dated August 9, 1977, from Leonard Harman to Messrs. Ambrose and Watkins:

I have been given to understand that you propose writing a book based on one of the Science Report programs produced by this company and that you plan to publish certain confidential memoranda concerning this program which I originated or received.

You should know that I am not prepared to sanction such publication and that I would consider it a gross invasion of my privacy.

I suggest that the book you are apparently preparing would savour of irresponsibility for, as you are undoubtedly aware, my company has now formally denied the authenticity of much of the material presented in that program.

It is to be hoped that you do not proceed with this project but, in any event, I look forward to receiving a written undertaking that no reference will be made to myself or the memoranda.

Letter dated August 12, 1977, from lawyer Edwin Greer to Leonard Harman:

I have been instructed by Mr. David Ambrose and Mr. Leslie Watkins and I refer to your letter of the 9th inst.

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My clients are cognizant of the statement made by your company following the transmission of the Alternative 3 program and, in conducting their own inquiries, they are mindful of the background to that statement.

They point out that any copies of memoranda now in their possession were supplied willingly by the persons who either received them or sent them and that they therefore feel under no obligation to give the undertaking you seek.

One of the first batches of memoranda we received related to a curious discovery made by researcher Terry Dickson in the middle of May, 1976. By that time, despite objections from Harman, the Science Report team had been enlarged and allocated its own production office. The Brain Drain program had by then been withdrawn from the series - with the intention of the investigation being presented, as it eventually was, as a one-off special.

Memo dated May 17, 1976, from Terry Dickson to Chris Clements - c.c.(for info only) to Fergus Godwin. Controller of Programs:

We have now established that relatives of at least two more of our missing people, Dr. Penelope Mortimer and Professor Michael Parsons, received letters which appeared to have come from them in Australia. In both cases the letters, which ceased after four or five months, bore the address used in the Pendlebury case.

Photographs of Dr. Mortimer and Professor Parsons, allegedly taken in Australia, show the backdrop used in the Pendlebury shots. The birds and clouds are all identical.

As you requested, I arranged for a Sydney freelance to check the address given in the letters. He reports that it is a two-bedroomed ground-floor flat near the waterfront which has now been empty for nearly a year. It was occupied, apparently, by a middle-aged American called Denton of Danton (he has been unable to verify spelling).

Neighbors say that Denton or Danton was remote and secretive. He was never known to have visitors. Our man says there are local rumors that he had connections with the CIA. Do you want him to pursue the Denton/Danton trail and do you want me to arrange still pix of the flat?

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Memo dated May 13, 1976, from Leonard Harman to Mr. Chris Clements:

A copy of Dickson's note concerning inquiries made in Australia, without my authorization, has been passed to me in the absence of the Controller of Programs.

I have already issued specific instructions that I am to be kept fully informed on all aspects of this project. Please repeat those instructions to Dickson and all other members of the Science Report team - and ensure that they are fully understood.

I am surprised to learn that, despite my earlier warnings, you are apparently still determined to waste company time and money. Let me remind you that Science Report is regarded by the Network as a serious program and that its credibility can only be damaged by this wild - goose course on which you are set.

The more I learn of this affair, the more obvious it becomes that you are losing your objectivity as an editor. Many people do disappear quite deliberately because, for personal reasons, they wish to break all contact with their pasts and make completely fresh starts. I will not tolerate this station turning that

sort of situation in an excuse for silly sensationalism.

I had assumed that you were experienced enough to recognize that you are clearly being hoaxed over this business of the photographic backgrounds. Now, I gather from Dickson's note (which, I repeat, should also have been sent to me), that you are apparently getting involved in "local rumors" - supplied by a freelance journalist we have never before used - about some man whose name you don't even know having "connections with the CIA".

Have you considered that some of your so-called mysteries might have been caused by incompetence on the part of your staff?

Did Dr. Ann Clark, for example, refuse to grant Benson a second interview because she found his manner offensive during the first one?

Did Dickson confuse the date fixed for the interview with Robert Patterson and so send an expensive unit on a fool's errand to Scotland?

These are the questions which should be occupying your attention, not some nonsense at the other end of the world. I am not prepared to sanction any further expenditure in Australia and I recommend, once again, that you resume the duties prescribed in your contract.

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Memo dated May 19, 1976, from Chris Clements to Terry Dickson:

CONFIDENTIAL. I attach a copy of a rollicking I've just had from Harman. It's self-explanatory and, for the moment, I'd like you to keep it to yourself. In future don't send carbons to anyone before checking with me.

We'd better soft-pedal for the moment on Australia.

Will you line up Mortimer and Parsons parents to be interviewed by Simon or Colin?

Please ignore that snide comment about Robert Patterson. Not worth getting upset over. And please don't mention that about Ann Clark to Colin. He sometimes gets a color-chip on his shoulder, as you know, and it isn't like that. This is just Harman being Harman.

Six days later, on May 25, Terry Dickson gave Clements the bad news. "We're not going to get any interviews with the Mortimers of the Parsons," he said. "They've changed their minds and are refusing to have anything to do with the program."

"But why?" demanded Clements. "They surely gave you a reason."

"None at all," said Dickson. "They just say they'd sooner not."

"You think they've been got at?"

Dickson shrugged, pulled a face. "That's the impression I got but proving it...that's another matter."

"They're important, love...have another go at them." Dickson did. But Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer were adamant.

So were Mr. and Mrs. Parsons. Not one of them, despite having agreed earlier, would have anything further to do with Science Report. We tried to contact them in September, 1977, but we were too late. Neighbors said they had gone to live abroad. And they had left no forwarding addresses.

This whole question of the staged photographs - and of the forged letters - was deliberately omitted from the television program. Clements admits that he now regrets havng left them out for, as he now realises, they were an intriguing feature of the Alternative 3 operation. He explains that he didn't see what significance they could possibly have - and because of pressure from Harman.

He told us: "At the time I thought Harman was nit-picking. They didn't seem important enough to merit all the aggro I was getting from him. Of course, if I'd known then what I know now..."

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We were equally baffled by those photographs and letters. We intended to mention them, just as we have, simply so that you would know all the circumstances. But as for offering any explanation...we were prepared to recognize that would not be possible. That was how it seemed until January 3, 1978, when we received an envelope from Trojan. The contents provided an unexpected insight into what they call The Smoother Plan.

Trojan's covering note explained that he had discovered the attached document - an early directive to Alternative 3 cells in various parts of the world - in an otherwise empty archives file.

In fact, he had sent a Photostat copy of the document. It was dated November 24, 1971, and it had been issued by "The Chairman, Policy Committee." It was addressed to "National Chief Executive Officers" and it read:

The recent publicity which followed the movement of Professor William Braishfield was unfortunate and potentially damaging. In order to avert and repetition, it has been agreed to adopt a new procedure in all cases where families or others are likely to provoke questions.

The procedure, to be known as The Smoother, is designed to allay fears or suspicions in the immediate post - movement period.

Department Seven will arrange for letters to be sent, in appropriate handwriting, to reassure those whose anxiety might constitute a security risk. It is usual for people to send home photographs of themselves in their new surroundings. Arrangements will therefore also be made for the dispatch of suitable photographs. These photographs will be taken immediately before embarkation.

A list of manned cover addresses will be circulated to National Chief Executive Officers by Department Seven. Officers will then allocate addresses to individual movers.

At least four addresses will be provided in each "country of destination" - so enabling Officers to "separate" any movers who may originate from the same area. There is, however, no limit to the number of movers who can be allocated to any of the addresses.

It nay prove necessary to change the addresses from time to time and Department Seven will notify Officers

of such changes.

The Smoother Plan will operate for a maximum of six months in respect of each individual, unless circumstances are exceptional, for that is considered long enough to provide a reasonable "break - off period".

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It is emphasized that, because of the administration involved, The Smoother Plan is to be activated in selected cases only. The sole criterion will be if, in the opinion of the Officer responsible, there could be a publicity risk. Most movers, certainly all those taking families, will not merit this treatment. Components of Batch Consignments, obviously, will not be considered.

Suddenly it made sense. It was clinical and cruel. But it still made sense.

The Pendleburys idolized their son. That was why they got those cheerful and gossipy letters - written by a stranger they would never meet.

Ann Clark had left no-one who would have expected letters. Friends might have been offended, perhaps, if they'd written but got no reply. But they would not have been sufficiently offended to have turned it into a great public issue.

As for Robert Patterson...well, he took his family with him.

But these people, and others like them, had apparently all gone willingly. Where had they gone? And why?

It is now clear that Brian Pendlebury deliberately took part in the conspiracy to fool his own parents. Such behavior might seem beyond any logical explanation. But we must point out, in fairness to Brian Pendlebury, that his actions must be measured against the nightmare background to Alternative 3. That background, you might feel, excuses them all. Well...almost.

Thursday, March 3, 1977. Another submarine meeting of Policy Committee. Chairman: R EIGHT.
Transcript section supplied by Trojan starts:

A TWO: Sure, Ballantine was neat enough...nobody's bitching about Ballantine...but what about Carmell?

A EIGHT: We'll find him...he's still on the loose somewhere in London...but we'll damned well find him...

R SEVEN: A man like him being allowed out of America... it was a bad, bad mistake...

A EIGHT: For Chrissake...please...don't let's start that crap again...I told you last month that our people goofed...now didn't I tell you that?

R SEVEN: Yes, but it is particularly serious when...

A EIGHT: Listen...there's no need to turn this into a Federal case. He hasn't got the tape and, as long as he hasn't got it, there's no great panic...

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R THREE: Do we have any idea at all where the tape might be?

A EIGHT: No...that's just one hell of a mystery...

we've turned Ballantine's place over but there's no sign...

R EIGHT: And it was not with him in the car when he died?

A EIGHT: No...definitely not. Our man was right there with him...

A TWO: So, we don't know where Carmell is and we don't know where the tape is...what's to say they aren't already together?

A EIGHT: Because he wouldn't have waited, that's what...he'd have blown it already.

R ONE: Has there been any sighting of Carmell? Or are we merely assuming that he is in London?

A EIGHT: He was in an hotel in Earls Court...he was there with a girl...our people missed him by about an hour...

R TWO: And now?

A EIGHT: Our information is that they're probably living rough and keeping on the jump...couple nights here, couple of nights there...but it's only a matter of time...

R EIGHT: Time is important...particularly with that tape still missing...perhaps we should put more operators into London...

A TWO: The guy's right...we ought to saturate the town...Jeez! With a character like Carmell at large...

A EIGHT: Okay, okay...so we'll step it up...

A THREE: We've got muscle to spare in Paris and...

A EIGHT: I said we'll step it up - all right?... so just let me handle the details...we'll get Carmell and that damned tape.

R EIGHT: I look forward to hearing of both achievements at our next meeting...Now, you have all seen the expediency report on Peterson?

R TWO: Entirely satisfactory...

A FIVE: I'm still not sure he deserved a hot job...

R FOUR: Very few men deserve to die but for some it is necessary...and Peterson was one of them...

A ONE: That's right...and, remember, people don't suffer long with a hot job...it is instantaneous...

R EIGHT: Dr. Carl Gerstein...the old man...it was agreed at the last meeting that he should be kept under surveillance...what is the news on him?

A EIGHT: No news...he's been laid up with bronchitis and, apart from his housekeeper, he's seen no - one for weeks.

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R EIGHT: So the situation, then, is unchanged...I recommend that we maintain observation on the old man...are we all agreed?...Good...Now, we have had a request from Geneva for more Batch Consignments of animals...

A SEVEN: Yeah...I,ve already got things shifting on that one...we'll be taking cattle from Kansas and Texas and ponies from Dartmoor...had a bit of a snarl-up over transport but lifts are now scheduled for the second week in July...

R EIGHT: How many beasts will be in each Batch?

We never learned the reply to that last question. That was where the transcript section ended. We have no concrete evidence of cattle disappearing in significant numbers from either Kansas or Texas during the second week of July, 1977, although there were complaints of an increase in rustling at that time.

However, we do know - because it was published in the Daily Mail on July 15 - that the pony-lift from Dartmoor ended in disaster.

That section of transcript also emphasises how close Dr. Carl Gerstein - the person mentioned merely as "the old man" in the February transcript - was unwittingly hovering near sudden death. If an Expediency order had been agreed by the Policy Committee - at either the February or the March meeting in 1977 - Simon Butler would never have been able to interview Gerstein at Cambridge. And Alternative 3 might never have been exposed.

How would Gerstein have died? Probably, like Ballantine and Professor Peterson, the aerospace expert, in what the Policy Committee call a "hot job". And, as was pointed out by the anonymous A ONE, a hot-job death is instantaneous. We have had that confirmed by pathologist Professor Hubert Radwell who gave evidence at the Ballantine inquest.

Professor Radwell, when pressed about the "extensive" burns on Ballantine's body, eventually made this statement:

It was technically accurate to describe Ballantine's body as having been extensively burned although those words embrace only part of the truth. They represented an understatement. I was requested to make that understatement in order not to promote any unnecessary public alarm.

I was conscious, of course, that there had been some degree of public hysteria following earlier reported instances of spontaneous combustion and I agreed that it would be of no benefit for all the details to be described at that hearing.

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I now regret having made that decision and I welcome this opportunity to correct the record.

Ballantine's body was not merely burned. It was reduced to little more than cinders and scorched bones. His skull had shrunk because of the intense heat to which he had been subjected and yet his clothing was hardly damaged.

There were small scorch marks on the leather cover of the steering wheel, obviously where Ballantine's hands had been gripping it at the time of the incident, but the rest of the vehicle showed no evidence of burning.

However, extensive damage was suffered by the vehicle, as the police stated at the inquest, and Ballantine's spine was severed by the engine which had been hurled backwards after breaking free.

This is the first occasion on which I have personally encountered spontaneous combustion in a human being but I have studied papers relating to twenty-three similar occurrences. The effect can be likened to that seen during the micro-wave cooking of a chicken, except, of course, that it is far more severe. The chicken flesh is roasted within seconds although the covering skin is not charred and any receptacle containing the chicken remains cold enough to be handled.

There is still no known explanation for this phenomenon.

We asked Professor Radwell if it were conceivable that spontaneous combustion could be deliberately induced. He replied: "The Americans and the Russians have certainly been experimenting along those lines, with a view to developing spontaneous combustion as a remote-controlled weapon, but the results of those experiments have been kept secret. I would consider that the possibility of them having been successful is highly unlikely..."

Highly unlikely! Almost everything connected with Alternative 3 is highly unlikely. The super-powers actively pooling scientific information - that is highly unlikely. So is the conspiracy of silence about the real achievements in space. But the terrifying truth is that it has been happening. And that it continues to happen.

On Wednesday, February 10, 1977 - three days after hearing of Ballantine's - the American, Harry Carmell, telephoned the Science Report office at Sceptre Television. Colin Benson took the call and he thought, at first, that he'd got another crank on the line. The man was being so guarded and mysterious - refusing even to give his name.

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And, particularly since the transmission of the Mechanical Maids program, there'd been a spate of crank callers.

It was strange, really, the way some viewers had reacted to the robot servants. One man had angrily accused anchor-man Simon Butler of having stolen his invention - claiming that he'd been working on an identical model for five years in his attic. Two women had wanted to know if there was a domestic agency where they could hire these maids. And an ardent trades-unionist had given a heated tirade about Sceptre encouraging "cheape, scab labour".

This peculiar American, it seemed to Benson, fitted right in the crank category - until he mentioned knowing about scientists who had disappeared. That was when Benson switched on the tape-recorder attached to the telephone. Here is the transcript of the rest of that conversation:

BENSON: Would you repeat that, please...what you said about scientists...
CARMELL: I said I know why they're vanishing...and who's behind it...
BENSON: So tell me then...why and who?
CARMELL: Not on the telephone...I can't talk on the telephone...
BENSON: Well, really, this is a bit...
CARMELL: Listen, I'm not bulling...you know what they did to Ballantine...
BENSON: Ballantine?
CARMELL: Sir William Ballantine the astronomer...
BENSON: Oh yes, I read...the car crash...
CARMELL: I met him when he came to NASA HQ in Huston... that's why he died...
BENSON: I'm sorry...this doesn't seem to be making much sense...
CARMELL: Can we meet?
BENSON: What do you mean that's why Ballantine died?

CARMELL: No more on the wire...either we meet or I go
someplace else...
BENSON: Where are you calling from?
CARMELL: Public box...about a mile north of your
studios...
BENSON: Then why not come here?
CARMELL: Too risky...you know somewhere less obvious?
BENSON: Look...Mister...er...
CARMELL: Harry. Just call me Harry.
BENSON: Fine. Now, Harry, you're not having me on, are
you?...I mean, you really were with NASA?
CARMELL: A busy street would be best...

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BENSON: All right...we'll do it your way...There's a
big street market just around the corner from the
studios...you can't possibly miss it...how's that
sound?
CARMELL: Give me a spot in this market...and how will
I know you?
BENSON: There's a post-box outside a fruiterer's
called Drages...and you won't have any trouble
identifying me. I'm wearing a dark-blue suit and
I'll be carrying a red book...and I happen to have
been born in Jamaica...

The appointment was fixed for one hour later. And if
you saw that special edition of Science Report you will
already know exactly what happened next. Simon Butler told
viewers:

What you are about to see may be considered by many
of you as unethical. However, we believe that in the
light of subsequent developments our action was
justified. A hidden camera was positioned near the
market. (Authors' Note: The camera was actually
installed in a Tourist Information Kiosk). Benson was
equipped with a miniaturized transmitter so that we
could record the conversation between them.

We should point out that we have challenged Sceptre
Television on the ethics of filming in that manner -
particularly in view of Carmells obvious anxiety for secrecy.
Clements has defended his decision by claiming that the film
would not have been transmitted if events had developed
differently. It is a matter of record, however, that
Clements and the company were subsequently reprimanded by the
Independent Broadcasting Authority.

Here, verbatim from the transcript of that controversial
piece of TV film, is the conversation which took place in the
market:

BENSON: I think you're looking for me - Colin Benson.
CARMELL: Yes...hello...thanks for coming...listen,
something I have to know: how far are you willing to
go with this thing? I mean, all the way?
BENSON: That's what I'm here for. Can you help?

CARMELL: I can help...and if you want confirmation
you'd better talk to Dr. Carl Gerstein.

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BENSON: Gerstein?
CARMELL: Carl Gerstein...he's at Cambridge. Ask him
about Alternative 3.
BENSON: You're talking in riddles, Harry...what's
Alternative 3?
CARMELL: Later...we do this my way - okay?
BENSON: Okay.
CARMELL: Let's...walk on a little, hm?
BENSON: Fine.

Viewers will recall that the sound quality was poor during this interview, particularly during the section when they were discussing Carl Gerstein and Alternative 3. There was a great deal of static interference and Benson's radio microphone was also picking up the voices of passers-by and the sounds of traffic. Most of the words, however, were quite discernible.

CARMELL: I'm sorry if I seem a little nervous - it's mainly because I am.
BENSON: Nervous of what?
CARMELL: (Brief laugh) Of contracting a fatal case of measles...you know what I mean? Like Ballantine?
BENSON: But surely that was an accident...I remember reading in the papers that there was some sort of freak skid...
CARMELL: Crap! There was no way for that to be an accident...it was what they call an Expediency and I know why it happened...and I've got to get it on record before they get to me...
BENSON: They?
CARMELL: Listen, let's just stick to me telling you what I have to tell you - okay?
BENSON: If that's how you want it...
CARMELL: Right! That's how I want it...this address, tomorrow morning, ten-thirty. Bring everything you've got - camera, tape machines, witnesses - that's the kind of protection I need. I'll have all the answers for you there...
BENSON: Hey! Hold on a minute...come back...

He grabbed at Carmell's sleeve, tried to stop him, but Carmell was too fast. He jerked his arm free, dashed through the narrow gap between two fruit stalls, and disappeared in the crowd thronging the centre of the road. Benson was

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disappointed. The whole elaborate set-up, it seemed to him then, had been a ridiculous waste of time. He looked at the scrap of paper which Carmell had pushed into his hand. On it was scrawled an address in Lambeth.

"Well, what do you think?" he said later to Clements.

"Follow through, love, of course. I'll fix for you to have a film-crew tomorrow morning."

"And what about this Gerstein character?"

"I'll talk to Simon...see if he fancies a trip to Cambridge."

So that's how it was left on the evening of February 10, 1977. Simon Butler, who had interviewed Dr. Carl Gerstein years before for Independent Television News, was to go to the university. Colin Benson was to keep the Lambeth appointment.

Both were due for surprises. Particularly Colin Benson.

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SECTION SIX

Benson arrived at the Lambeth address with a full camera crew shortly before 10:30 a.m. on February 11. It was a three-storeyed terraced house - dingy and claustrophobically gaunt - with rubbish mouldering in the narrow patch of front garden. Most of its windows, like those of its neighbors, had been boarded up but one on the first floor appeared to be screened with a dirty sheet. The garden gate had been ripped away and there were broken roof-tiles on the path leading to the front door.

Benson hurried up the steps, followed by the technicians, and rapped on the door. No reply. He tried again, harder. Still no response. The house appeared to be

deserted. He shouted and started pummelling with both fists. Then there was a girl's voice from inside: Who is it?

"My name's Benson. Colin Benson."

On the other side of the shabby door, in the darkness of the hall, Wendy was frightened. She still didn't know exactly who they were or what they wanted but she did know that they could arrive at any time. And that they were likely to hurt Harry. She bit her bottom lip, regretting now that she'd betrayed her presence. "Who?" he asked.

Benson shook his head in frustration. There was no number on the house. He stepped back along the path to double-check the numbers on either side, returned to the door. "This is 88, isn't it?"

"Who did you say you are?" Wendy's American accent, now more obvious, was the confirmation Benson needed.

"Colin Benson," he repeated. "I'm here with a television film unit."

Wendy, as she has since told us, was still suspicious. Still fearful. And, with the way things were that morning, she wasn't thinking too clearly. Maybe this was a trick. Harry had said they used all sorts of tricks. "How ca I be sure of that?" There was a tremble in her voice. "What program are you with?"

"Science Report...we were asked to come by a man called Harry."

A short. silence. Then the sound of heavy bolts being drawn back. The door was opened just a couple of inches.

Wendy, her hair unkept and her eyes wide with anxiety, stared at Benson and then at the camera and the sound equipment. She seemed to be having difficulty making up her mind. "So you really are the telly," she said.

This, Benson decided, was getting stupid. "Can we come in and see him?" he said. "He did invite us."

Wendy shrugged with indifference. "If you really want to." She pulled the door wide open. "But you won't get much out of him," she said. "Not this morning."

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They followed her through the mildewed hall and up a flight of naked stairs. Ancient paper decorated with roses was peeling away from the walls and the whole place smelled of dirt and of damp. Wendy stopped, suddenly remembering, at the landing and she shouted down to the soundman who was the last in: "Bolt the door after you...we've got to keep it bolted." And she waited, watching, while he did so.

"You know, this really is a waste of time," she said quietly to Benson ... "Maybe it would be better, after all, if you just turned around right now and left."

"He asked me to be here - so I'm here."

She shrugged again. "As you like."

There were three doors leading off the landing. She opened the one at the front of the house. And there, in the room with the sheet-covered window, Benson saw Harry Carmell.

He didn't recognize Carmell, not at first, for what he saw was a haggard and vacant-eyed creature. It was shivering convulsively and its teeth were chattering and it was clutching a matted blanket to its naked shoulders - and it seemed impossible that this could be the man he'd met, only the day before, in the market.

But it was Carmell. It really was. He was hunched defensively, with his knees up to his chest, on an old sofa - the only bit of furniture in the room - and he was blinking rapidly as if trying to see more clearly.

Benson stepped forward tentatively. "Harry?"

Carmell pressed himself back harder against the sofa. He'd stopped blinking now and was staring with mistrust and bewilderment. "Who are you?" Even his voice was different. Like that of an old, old man.

"You remember me...Colin Benson."

Wendy tried to help. "It's all right, Harry...he's with the telly..."

Suddenly, horrifyingly, Carmell gave a howl of despairing terror. "It's them!" he yelled. "They've bloody tricked you and now they've found me..."

"What's he talking about?" demanded Benson. "What is the matter with him?"

Wendy ignored him and hurried across to kneel by the sofa and cradle Carmell. "Now, Harry..."she said soothingly. "It's quite all right...and there's nothing to be frightened of." She glanced up at Benson, jerked her head towards the door. "You'd better go."

"Is he on acid or something?"

"Just get out of here, will you!"

"But maybe we should get a doctor..."

That was when Carmell, in an unexpected burst of mystical violence, flung Wendy aside and came hurtling off the sofa. "So come on then, you bastards!" he yelled. "Come and kill me!" He waved his arms wildly

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and the blanket slipped to the bare boards. Now they could see that he was wearing no clothes apart from his socks.

Suddenly he was very still - half-crouched like an ape just a few feet in front of Benson. His fingers, rigid as metal rods, were spread wide and his hands were raised to the level of his hips. Now there was defiance smouldering in his eyes. "But Harry Carmell don't die that easy." His voice - contrasting disconcertingly with his grotesque appearance - now sounded normal. Just as Benson had heard it in the market. "Harry Carmell's a fighter...and he'll bloody take you too." As he spoke, he took one pace backwards to steady his balance and then, with an horrendous battle-scream, he sprang at Benson. Benson ducked, tried to dodge, but Carmell's nails raked down his face - narrowly missing his eyes - to make deep and symmetric furrows in the flesh of both cheeks.

The film technicians, wedged behind Benson in the doorway, were unable to help and Benson, now as terrified as Carmell had been, was lashing out wildly in an attempt to beat off the attack. One of his blows crunched sickeningly in Carmell's nose and suddenly the fight was over.

Blood spouted from Carmell's nose. He moaned, clutched his face with both hands and collapsed in surrender to the floor. He lay there with his face pressed hard against the dirty boards. And suddenly his puny naked body was racked with great juddering sobs.

Benson moved backwards, unsteadily, to the landing where the cameraman grabbed his arm to support him. "I'm sorry," he said to Wendy. "I didn't expect..."

"I told you to go." She was now again kneeling by Carmell, gently wiping his face with a handkerchief. "Now for God's sake just leave us!"

They reported to Clements as soon as they got back to the studios and it was Clements who decided to notify the police. "We can't possibly leave him there like that", he said. "Sounds to me as if he needs hospital treatment."

There was, however, no sign of Carmell or Wendy by the

time the police got to the house. Wendy had gone out almost immediately after the TV team had left. We know that because she has told us.

She had gone out to buy antiseptic and a bandage from a nearby shop. When she returned, there was no Harry. There are reasons to suspect that he became a hot-job victim but we have been unable to find any proof. So we can merely record that Harry Carmell has never been seen since.

There were three of them - Clements, Benson and Dickson - clustered around one of the little editing machines in the Film Department. They were watching, yet again, the uncut film shot in the market.

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"That's the spot!" said Clements. "Go back on that!"

The technician sitting in front of them touched the rewind key and there were high-pitched Donald Duck noises from the sound-track as the film raced in reverse.

A flip on another key and the pictures stopped whirling in a backwards blur. Now there was silence and on the midget screen there was a frozen show of Benson and Carmell.

"Right, love, shift it."

The tiny black-and-white figures immediately became animated, walking away from the postbox in the background, and their voices could be heard. Benson was talking about Ballantine:

BENSON: But surely that was an accident...I remember reading in the papers that there was some sort of freak skid...

CARMELL: Crap! There was no way for that to be an accident...it was that the call an Expediency and I know why it happened...and I've got to get it on record before they get to me...

"Okay...kill it there," said Clements. The technician stopped the film, switched off the machine. "Well?" asked Clements. "What do you reckon?"

Dickson shook his head doubtfully. "Acid-head," he said. "Obviously he'd read about Ballantine in the papers and he was living out some fantasy..."

"I'm inclined to agree," said Clements. "I'm not sure we should waste any more time on him. Colin?"

The marks on Benson's cheeks were now scarring over. He rubbed them thoughtfully. "Remember what he said about vanishing scientists. So maybe you're right...maybe he is an acid-head...but it's a hell of a coincidence, isn't it...the way his fantasies spilled over into our work. Did Ballantine go to America like Harry said?"

"Yes, he did visit NASA but that was also in the papers," said Dickson. "I checked the cutts."

Benson looked at him sharply. "There! Aren't you missing the obvious? You know because you checked the cutts. What're you saying? That this acid-head also checked the cutts? Or was it that he really knew?"

Clements stood up, glancing at his watch. "So what do you want to do, Colin?"

"Maybe talk to Lady Ballantine?"

"You can't go troubling her, man. It's the funeral today."

"So I'll be discreet," said Benson. "And I'll wait till tomorrow."

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Friday, February 12, 1977. Lady Ballantine was composed and hospitable when Benson arrived by appointment at 3:30 p.m. She told him virtually what she later told us on July 27. And he was particularly interested in the large envelope which Ballantine had insisted on her posting. Did she know what it contained?

"I just can't imagine," she said. "I know it was a package that he took out of his desk but I have no idea what was in the package."

Did he give any explanation for having it posted to London - although he was driving to London that same evening?

"That's what puzzled me most of all," said Lady Ballantine. "Particularly when I discovered later it was addressed to the man he was planning to meet."

"I'm sorry," said Benson. "I don't follow..."

"The envelope...it was addressed to a journalist called John Hendry. He and William - they'd been friends for years. Well...late, very late, on Friday I got a call from Mr. Hendry. He was still in his office waiting for William and, well, you know the rest..."

"Have you spoken to Hendry since? Asked him about the package?"

"He rang again on Saturday...with his condolences...but I was far too upset to think about packages or anything like that..."

Four hours later Benson was in Hendry's office in Fleet Street.

"A premonition - that's the word he used," said Hendry. "Events were starting to move fast and he had a premonition - that's exactly what he said. Extra-ordinary, isn't it...when you think what happened."

"The package," persisted Benson. "What was in the package?"

Hendry got up from his desk, crossed to a table by the window, took a spool of tape from a drawer. "Just this," he said. "No message, no nothing."

"But what's on it?"

"That's the oddest part of all. Not a damned thing as far as we can make out."

"You've played it right through?"

"Sure...we tried everything but there's nothing there. You know what I think? I think he sent the wrong one by mistake."

"That hardly sounds likely, does it," said Benson. "A man like Ballantine - surely he'd be meticulously careful."

Hendry went back to his desk, threw the tape on the desk, lit a cigar. "Normally, yes...but, as I told you, he wasn't himself on Friday. His voice on the telephone - I hardly recognized it. He was all strung-up and excited and -

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I hate to say this because he was a friend of mine - but he was talking the most incredible rubbish. Maybe he'd been over-working or something - who knows - but I got the impression that he'd really flipped. And you know something? That could explain the accident. If his driving was half as

wild as his words...well, it's hardly surprising, is it?"

Benson picked up the tape. "Could I borrow this?"

Hendry drew deeply on his cigar, making the end glow fiercely. "Don't want to be personal," he said. "But those marks on your face...how did you get them?"

Benson fingered his cheeks, grinned ruefully. "It's all right, they're not tribal marking," he said jokingly. "I had to interview rather a rough character. I don't think he liked my questions."

Hendry returned the grin. He'd been a reporter in Fleet Street during the "heavy-mob" days - before the place had got so sedately respectable - and his nose was slightly lop-sided. "It happens," he said laconically. "Why do you want the tape?"

"We've got some pretty sophisticated equipment at the studios. Maybe we can trace something on it."

"No harm in you trying," said Hendry. "But I'll want it back afterwards and if you find anything interesting I'll expect to be told right away."

There was nothing on the tape. Or, at least, there seemed to be nothing.

It was played in its virgin state, you may recall, in that television documentary. And, as Simon Butler pointed out then, it apparently held only "the ceaseless noise of space - not much different from countless other tapes in the archives of radio astronomy."

At that stage in the program Butler told viewers: "What it meant...what the vital information was that Sir William Ballantine had deciphered out of this apparently random cacophony...was something we would have to wait much longer to find out."

They discovered later that the waiting time would have been far shorter if Harry Carmell had not been drugged out of his mind on that February morning in Lambeth. For Carmell, of course, had he de-coder - the one he'd stolen from NASA.

But they were steadily making progress. While Benson was in that derelict house, being attacked by the crazed Carmell, Butler was trying to fix an appointment with an old man at Cambridge - an old man who would eventually steer them closer to the astonishing truth about Alternative 3.

Dr. Carl Gerstein's housekeeper was possessively protective over him. She'd been bullying him for years over his pipe-smoking. It was a filthy and disgusting habit, in her opinion, and it was certainly bad for him with his weak chest.

There'd been a told-you-so tone in her voice when he developed a severe bout of bronchitis at the end of January, 1977. All she'd said about that pipe, she felt, was now vindicated. Maybe this time he'd listen and throw the dirty thing away. But Gerstein, of course, had no intention of throwing away his pipe. It was part of him.

She had her way, however, about visitors. There were to be none, absolutely none, until he was completely fit. He needed absolute rest - that's what the doctor had said - and she was going to make sure he got it. She refused to even allow him downstairs to speak on the telephone. "It's

draughty in that hall and if you need to speak on the phone you can do it through me," she said. "You're staying up here in the warm."

That was why, on February 11, Butler found himself having to deal with her. She'd seen Butler often on television and she had a soft spot for him. But it wasn't soft enough for her to relax the rules.

"Not this month," she said. "Out of the question."

"How about next month?" asked Butler. "Isn't he expected to be better by then?"

We should mention here that Butler was later horrified when we showed him the relevant part of Trojan's transcript - dealing with Gerstein - of the Policy Committee meeting held on March 3, 1977:

A EIGHT: No news...he's been laid up with bronchitis housekeeper, he's seen no-one for weeks...

R EIGHT: So the situation, then, is unchanged...I recommend that we maintain observation on the old man...

Butler would have acted very differently if he had known that Gerstein was under surveillance. But he did not know and he persisted: "It really is very important...I wouldn't dream of troubling him if it were not..."

She relented, said she would go upstairs and check with the doctor. Soon she was back on the line. "I can only make a provisional arrangement, Mr. Butler," she said. "It'll have to depend on how he's feeling."

"What date do you suggest?"

"It's not me suggesting - it's Dr. Gerstein. He says he's quite looking forward to meeting you again." She was determined to keep things in proper perspective. "March the fourth, about two o'clock - would that be suitable?"

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Butler checked his desk diary. Tuesday, March 4, was completely clear. "Thank you," he said. "Unless I hear to the contrary, I'll be there then."

The investigation, although they still did not realize it, was soon to take an astonishing turn.

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SECTION SEVEN

That interview, which was filmed, took place as planned on March 4, 1977, and it was an important feature of the program transmitted on June 20. Here is how Simon Butler, in a voice-over link, introduced it to viewers:

Gerstein's theories, when he first put them forward over twenty years ago, had been almost universally dismissed. He was called an alarmist and a pessimist. Events proved him, on the contrary, to be something of an optimist.

By the late Sixties the earth was already so trapped within an envelope of its own pollution that heat was having increasing difficulty in escaping.

Ten years earlier than Gerstein's prediction, the notorious "greenhouse" effect - due to the eight-fold increase in the carbon dioxide levels last summer - had become a reality, threatening to double the average global temperature.

Gerstein's chest was still not clear at the time of that interview. He was still wheezing. And he was still smoking his pipe. "This mysterious Harry of yours..."he said. "I don't think I can place him."

"he was very specific about you," said Butler. "He told us to ask you about something called Alternative 3."

Gerstein stared down at his desk, pulled thoughtfully on his pipe. "Did he now..."he said slowly. "That was a rather curious thing for him to do."

"This Alternative 3 - you know what it means?"

"Let me show you something," said Gerstein. He rummaged through the bottom drawer of the desk, pulled out a buff folder, turned over half a dozen pages of typescript. "The

Americans, when it comes to public statements, have a remarkable talent for soft-peddalling the truth," he said. "Read that...it's a CIA report."

Butler took the folder, read the passage which had been ringed around in red:

In the poor and powerless areas, population would have to drop to levels that could be supported. Food subsidies and external aid, however generous the donors might be, would be inadequate. Unless or until the

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climate improved and agricultural techniques changed sufficiently, population levels now projected for the Less Developed Countries could not be reached. The population "problem" would have solved itself in the most unpleasant fashion.

"What does this mean?" asked Butler. "unless or until the climate improved..."

"That's it! said Gerstein. "That's the key phrase! And that report, let me tell you, is about four years old. What it means is that at that time the Americans were prepared to reveal just a smidgeon of the truth. Not all the truth, of course, for that would be too frightening. But you can take it from me that they knew the whole truth. I told them. Back in 1957 - at the conference in Huntsville, Alabama - I explained it all to them. That's why they started gibing serious thought to the three alternatives."

"And what exactly did you tell them?" asked Butler.

"I told them that we were killing this planet." Gerstein was stopped by a fit of coughing which shook his whole body, made his eyes water. He apologized. "Through all the centuries man thought of the atmosphere surrounding us as being so vast that it could never possibly be damaged," he said. "So we've gone on abusing it and polluting it...and now it's too late."

He shook his head sadly. "We've created a greenhouse around this world of ours...a greenhouse made of carbon dioxide. Short-wave radiation from the sun passes straight through it, just as in any garden greenhouse, but it absorbs and holds the heat emitted from the surface of the earth.

"You know how much carbon dioxide we've thrown up there in the last hundred years? More than 360 billion tons! And once it's up there it stays there - and it's being added to every year.

"Human lemmings! That's what we are! Do you realize that we're even helping to destroy our world by trying to smell nice? No...I assure you...I'm perfectly serious. Those aerosol sprays that people use - they alone are still squirting nearly half a million metric tons of fluorocarbons into the atmosphere every year."

He delved in the desk again, produced another folder. "A British Royal Commission on environmental pollution was shocked by the sheer volume of this filth. Listen to what they said in their report." He opened the folder, thumbed over a few pages and began reading:

"If the worst fears about the extent of damage by fluorocarbons to the ozone layer were realised, and if

no means of combating this threat could be devised, the consequences to mankind and, indeed, to most of life on Earth could be calamitous."

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He snapped the folder shut, dropped it contemptuously on the desk. "There!" he said. "That's their word -calamitous! And that report, I should point out, was written by people who probably weren't aware of the full seriousness of the situation. They almost certainly still don't know of the need for one of the three alternatives.

"Yet people go on using these things...to clean their ovens and spray their hair...to kill flies and smells and pains in the back. Good God, we've even got spray-on instant snack food! We're conveniencing ourselves to death, Mr. Butler, that's what we're doing - and now it's all become irretrievably lethal.

"Some belated attempts have been made, of course, to scratch at the problem. Last year, for example, the United States Food and Drug Administration banned fluorocarbons from American aerosol sprays - and that, I can tell you,, was a devil of a jolt for an industry with a \$9,000 million turnover in America alone.

"But other countries, including Britain - which, by the way, is Europe's principal producer of aerosols - decided not to follow the American initiative. Close your eyes to the dangers and pretend tthey don't exist - that seems to be the line. You see...there are jobs at stake...about 10,000 in Britain alone...and there's also big money. still, not that it makes any difference any longer. It's so late now that it's all become completely academic."

Gerstein was seized by another bout of coughing. He looked accusingly at his pipe which had gone out. And he re-lit it. "You hear people talking glibly about the concrete jungle, Mr. Butler. What they should be talking about is the concrete storage heater. That's what we're turning this world into - a gigantic storage heater. Concrete...asphalt roads...brick buildings...they're all retaining the heat and they're helping .o ferment the disaster.

"Then there's all that waste heat from industry, power stations, cars and central-heating systems. Do you realise that New York city generates seven imes more heat than it gets from the rays of the sun? That, Mr. Butler, is a fact. And you just imagine that sort of heat - from all over the world - being trapped in our great atmospheric greenhouse!"

"Yes," said Butler. "But this Alternative 3..."

Gerstein ignored the interruption, got up from the desk, walked to the study window. He stood there, hands clasped behind his back, contemplating the wide expanse of neat lawn. "I'll tell you what's going to happen," he said. "This world's going to get hootter and hotter until it gets like Venus. I can't tell you when this will finally happen...not to the nearest hundred years...but I can assure you that it will happen.

"When that time comes the North Pole and the South Pole will be as hot as the tropics are today. And as for the rest of the world...well, it won't be able to support any life apart from insects and cold-blooded creatures like lizards."

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He turned to fact Butler, gestured over his shoulder. "All that out there, all that greenery and beauty, will be a burnt wilderness.

"There won't be any people at all then, not in countries like this. There'll probably still be survivors at the Poles but then it won't be long before they're also killed by the

heat - and that will be that."

He sat down, looked somberly at Butler. "So, as you can see, that CIA report you're holding - with that stuff about the climate possibly improving - is just so much public - relations twaddle."

He sighed resignedly, took the file from Butler, replaced it in the drawer. "That, I suppose, is the technique. They make a big display of showing part of the truth - which is precisely what they did in that report - to make people believe they're being shown the whole truth."

"But you mentioned three alternatives," said Butler. "You said they considered them at the Huntsville conference..."

"That was a long time ago," said Gerstein evasively. "Twenty years ago. And it was all very theoretical..."

"I realize that some of the discussions at Huntsville were held in secret and so, naturally, I can understand your reluctance," said Butler. "But this is clearly a matter of immense public concern and, as you say, Huntsville was a long time ago. So wouldn't it be possible for you to say..."

Gerstein held up a hand to stop him. "Alternative 1 and Alternative 2 were quite crazy," he said. "They're not worth even talking about..."

"I'd still like to know about them," said Butler. "Couldn't you give me just a brief outline?"

Gerstein was silent, thinking, for a while. Eventually he shrugged. "Well...they were abandoned so I suppose it can do no harm," he said. "The basic idea of Alternative 1 was rather like throwing a few stones at a conventional greenhouse - making holes in the glass to let the heat escape. The suggestion was that a series of strategically - positioned nuclear devices should be detonated high in the atmosphere - to punch holes in that envelope of carbon dioxide. Then we'd have chimneys in the sky, if you like. That would have eased the immediate problem and then, as a follow-up program, there would have had to be a dramatic reappraisal of the way life is lived on this earth.

"Men would have had to start living more primitively to prevent another build-up. For example, there'd have had to be international agreements, stringently enforced, to make all motor vehicles illegal - except for the most essential purposed.

"You could almost draw up your own list of things which would have to be sacrificed to stop carbon dioxide being pumped into the air in such quantities.

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"Then there would have to be a great co-ordinated effort to give the world back its lungs - by getting rid of every unnecessary bit of concrete and by seeding vast tracts with plants and trees which could absorb the gas.

"That, in essence, was Alternative 1..."

"Well, I can see it would be an incredibly complex project..." said Butler. "But it would seem to make sense...if the situation is as desperate as you say..."

"It was crazy," said Gerstein curtly. "Knocking holes in a garden greenhouse is one thing. Doing the same with Earth's atmosphere is a very different proposition. Oh, they could do it all right...they've got the technology to do it, all right...they've got the technology to do it, but what they haven't got is the technology to patch up the holes after they've made them..."

"I'm sorry...I don't quite follow..."

"The ozone layer!" said Gerstein impatiently. "Don't you

see? It would mean punching great gaps in the ozone layer and it's that layer, as you must know, which screens us from the full effects of the ultra-violet rays from the sun.

"Without the protection of that ozone layer, Mr. Butler, we'd be bombarded with far more radiation and that would immediately bring all sorts of horrors - such as an increase in the incidence of skin cancers.

"No, there were too many hazards involved. alternative 1 was rightly rejected."

"And Alternative 2?"

Gerstein was having more trouble with his pipe. Re-lighting it was a major job which required all his attention. It made him cough and splutter but, after using three matches, he won. And, once again, he was contentedly wreathed in smoke. "Can you imagine yourself living like a troglodyte, Mr. Butler?"

It was obviously a rhetorical question. Butler waited, knowing he was not expected to reply.

"Alternative 2, in my view, was even crazier than Alternative 1," continued Gerstein. "I recognize, of course, that there is enough atmosphere locked in the soil to support life but...no, this was the most unrealistic of all the alternatives."

"Troglodyte," prompted Butler. "Why troglodyte?"

"There is good reason to believe that this world was once more civilized and far more scientifically advanced than it is today," said Gerstein. "Our really distant ancestors, living millennia before what we call Pre-historic Man, had progressed far beyond our present stage of knowledge.

"Then, it is argued, there was some cataclysmic disaster - maybe one comparable with that facing us now - and these highly-sophisticated people built completely new civilizations deep beneath the surface of the earth..."

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"But," said Butler, "I don't see how..."

"Please!" Gerstein was in no mood to be interrupted.

"There is evidence, quite considerable evidence, to suggest that there were once whole cities - linked by an elaborate complex of tunnels - far below the surface. Remains of them have been found under many parts of the world. Under South America...China...Russia...oh, all over the place. And in this subterranean world, so it is said, there is a green luminescence which replaces the sun as a source of energy - and which makes it possible for crops to be grown.

"So they evacuated down there and very likely thrived for some time..."

"Then what?" asked Butler.

Gerstein shrugged. "After all this time...who can tell? Maybe there's historical truth in the Biblical story of the great Flood. Maybe the disaster which drove them there in the first place was followed by the Flood - and they were all trapped and drowned down there. Maybe that's how their civilization ended..."

He paused, sucked reflectively on his pipe. "And it could follow that the people we think of as Prehistoric Men were merely the descendants of a handful of survivors - the real children of Noah, if you accept the Bible version - who had to start from scratch in a world which had been utterly devastated. Is that why they took so naturally - instinctively, if you like - to living in caves? Then the agonizingly slow process of rebuilding the world started all over again until now we find ourselves in a similar

position..."

"So Alternative 2, then, would involve transporting everybody down into the bowels of the earth?"

"Not everybody," said Gerstein. "That would be hopelessly impracticable. There'd be selected people, people chosen for their special skills or talents, people who'd be regarded as vital to the future of the human race.

"There were, I have to tell you, many people at Huntsville in favor of Alternative 2. They pointed out that there would never be another flood, not with the entire planer drying up, so it would not all end as it apparently did once before."

He took the pipe from his mouth and pointed its stem at Butler. "You know...there was one very prominent man - died a couple of years ago now - who even put forward a plan for using ordinary people...superfluous people, he called them...as slave labor.

"It was quite startling, the way he had it all worked out. These gangs of slaves, who'd do all the heavy work down there, would be treated - either surgically or chemically - so that they would just complacently accept their new roles. They'd be rounded up, as he put it, in Batch Consignments. Yes, that was the expression he used - Batch Consignments..."

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Butler shook his head in disbelief. "But that's unthinkable...quite inhuman. And, anyway, as operation on that scale...it could be mounted only with the closest co-operation between the super-powers. America and Russia would have to pool their resources and scientific know-how and that in itself, surely, would be out of the question..."

"Allies are united by the need to fight a common enemy or to combat a universal danger," said Gerstein. "Think of the Second World War. Britain, America, Russia - they were all partners in the mutual struggle for survival. It didn't seem so strange then, did it, that they should co-operate. And this present threat, Mr. Butler, is far greater than the world was facing then..."

"Is the technology available to do all this?" asked Butler.

"Technology, yes. Cash would obviously be the problem. Countless billions of pounds would be needed but, in extremity, it could be raised."

"In that case, why did you consider Alternative 2 to be the most unrealistic of them all?"

"Because, at best, it would be no more than a stop-gap solution. As I told you...the carbon dioxide, once it's up there, stays there. We're trapped inside the great greenhouse and it will be only a matter of time before the effects permeate down into the earth. Things down there, really deep down, will eventually wither and start to smoulder."

He paused, gave a brief humorless laugh. "Maybe our legends and superstitions about Hades - with the demonic stoker down there in the bowels of blackness - are merely unconscious visions of the future. How about that for a thought?"

He stared hard at Butler and, getting no reply, he continued: "The situation, you see, isn't just irretrievable - it has now reached the stage where it can do nothing but deteriorate. That was why Alternative 2, in my opinion, was ridiculous."

Outside the study window there were the bird noises of early Spring. Butler looked over Gerstein's shoulder and saw

an old woman sedately walking her dog around the perimeter of the lawn.

Out there it was so peaceful, so normal. And that made their conversation all the more bizzare. Here, in this book-lined and sunlit room, they were talking about Armageddon. They were talking about it in measured and cultivated tones as if it were no more than a matter of academic interest. It was hard, very hard, to grasp that the subject really was the approaching end of the world.

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This was the strangest interview Butler had ever conducted. But, as a professional, he pushed ahead with his questions.

"And Alternative 3?"

Gerstein shook his head. "I don't know..."he said.

"Maybe I've been too indiscreet already. I've been out of touch with things for rather a long time now and it's hardly my place to talk about Alternative 3. They may have abandoned it for all I know...decided that it simply couldn't be done. You'd have to talk to someone connected with the Space Program because the truth is that I just don't know..."

"Well, give me a pointer..."persisted Butler.

"I'll give you a sherry," said Gerstein. And that was where the interview ended.

During the following months public fear continued to mount over the weather - and over the effect it was likely to have on the future of the world. On August 28, 1977, the Sunday Telegraph carried a major article headlined: WEATHER MEN AT A LOSS. It was written by a member of the newspaper's "Close-Up" investigative team and it said;

What is happening to the British weather? That seemingly innocuous question has suddenly become a major subject for research.

Even the meteorologists are cautiously echoing the man in the street's opinion that something distinctly odd has been affecting our climate to give us the extremes of the past two years...Many countries have experienced strange weather phenomena over the same period. Mr. Edwin P. Weigel of the United States Weather Bureau in Washington told me:

"We don't know what's hit us. California and other western states have had two years of drought which have smashed all-time records. Water is being rationed in some parts..."

There are several shades of opinion on how ominous it all is and there is only a very shaky consensus on how unusual such extremities really are...

The official attitude, however, was still guarded. Experts who knew the real truth were anxious not to provoke mass panic. Kevin Miles of the Meteorological Office's 40-strong climatic research team at Bracknell, Berkshire, was quoted in this Sunday Telegraph article as saying: "We must agree that what we have been experiencing is unusual. Reports from all over the world have confirmed our own picture of increased variability. But we have learned not to over-react to what might be seen as odd in several small

parts of the globe."

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Mr. Miles went on to admit that he and his team would "dearly love to understand what has been going on recently".

So, on orders from the highest level, the charade was maintained - with weathermen on both sides of the Atlantic insisting that they still did not know the truth, that they were still investigating the disturbing mystery.

The Sunday Telegraph article continued:

The Bracknell meteorologists are enlarging their research program to investigate every hypotheses that might give a correlation with the fluctuating weather. Oceans, clouds, land forms and the Earth's surface are all being scanned with the help of one of the world's fastest computers.

While such sophistication is being perfected, the American experts are flying as many scientific kites as their British counterparts. The Washington bureau is currently looking at possible effects of volcanic eruptions and changes in the movements of the sun. "Some of it comes excitingly close, some is clutching at straws," said Mr. Weigel.

Amateur weather-watchers, who blame everything from Concorde to the atom bomb for the climatic unrest, will not be appeased by the promise of more and better research.

Those "amateurs" certainly would not have been appeased if they had been told the full story. They would have been terrified.

"Talk to someone connected with the Space Program." That's what Gerstein had suggested. But it wasn't easy to follow his advice. Not when real information was needed.

Of course, there were people at NASA who were prepared to talk to Sceptre Television. But they were the public-relations specialists, the glib front-men, who could be charming and convincing. And who could say a great deal without saying anything.

Clements knew that he had to get more. Far more. The project, by this time, had become almost an obsession with him. He was determined, somehow, to find someone who really knew about this Alternative 3 - and who would be prepared to explain it.

"We'll obviously bet nothing out of anybody still with NASA." he said to Terry Dickson. "They'd be too scared of losing their jobs and I can't say I blame them. So see if you can track down someone who's already quit. One of the

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moon-walkers, perhaps. They may know something or they may have seen something.

"One or two of them, from what I gather, are rather bitter about the way they've been treated. I was reading - in the Daily Express, I believe it was - about Buzz Aldrin complaining that he'd been used as a travelling salesman. Try to get hold of him or one of the others. At the very

least, they might point us in the right direction..."

Dickson rubbed his chin, pulled a rueful face. "And how do I start doing that?" he demanded. "I don't know where any of them are these days..."

"I don't ask you how to point the cameras, love...you're the researcher..."

"Yes, but..."

"And make it a priority job, Terry."

"It'll cost," persisted Dickson. "I'll have to hire someone in America and that could cost real money. Harman's not going to like it. Remember what he said about Australia..."

"Never mind about Harman." Clements was being crisply executive. "You do your job and leave Harman to me." He grinned suddenly and added: "Anyway, he's a busy man and I don't think we ought to trouble him with such small details."

A freelance journalist in America was commissioned by Dickson. Three former astronauts refused to co-operate. A fourth said he would need time to consider his position. That fourth man was Bob Grodin.

The American freelance also supplied Dickson with a tape containing a conversation which had taken place between Grodin - during his first moon walk - and Mission Control. Here is the transcript of the relevant section:

GRODIN: Hey, Houston...d'you hear; this constant bleep we have here now?

MISSION CONTROL: Affirmative. We have it.

GRODIN: What is it? D'you have some explanation for that?

MISSION CONTROL: We have none. can you see anything? Can you tell us what you see?

GRODIN: Oh boy, it's really...really something super-fantastic here. You couldn't ever imagine this...

MISSION CONTROL: O.K....could you take a look out over that flat area there? Do you see anything beyond?

GRODIN: There's a kind of a ridge with a pretty spectacular...oh my God! What is that there? That's all I want to know! What the hell is that?

MISSION CONTROL: Roger. Interesting. Go Tango...immediately...go Tango...

GRODIN: There's a kind of a light now...

MISSION CONTROL: (hurriedly): Roger. We got it, we've marked it. Lose a little communication, huh? Bravo Tango...Bravo Tango...select Jezebel, Jezebel...