

The Last Night

ICM

INTERNATIONAL CREATIVE MANAGEMENT, INC.

THE LAST NIGHT

A STORY BY NORMAN MAILER



TARG EDITIONS NEW YORK 1984

Norman April '84

- (15) Change in Pres + his wife's death
- (16) The ride home
- (17) The Russian tunnel + the Premier
- (18) Pres + Premier + ~~is~~ wrapped
- (19) The Big Showdown
- (20) The President's London speech
- (21) Return and arrest
- (22) (Week work) - Pres. watching events from his cell.
- (23) Anderson Starns explains his speech
- (24) The national week
- (25) The President's speech
- (26) Elections + Premier
- (27) Firing of rocket
- (28) The people left on earth
- (29) The last Presidential speech
- (30) The explosion, the scream, the space ship.

Sequence

- (A) The documentary run-down
- (B) A speech by the President
- (C) A scene from the documentary
- (D) Two parts. - Pres w second group.
- (E) Approaching the end of the documentary
- (F) End of documentary
- (G) Scene w Premier + President (who fault in Vietnam?)
- (H) Second conference
- (I) Suggestion of tunnel 10 miles long (confessions of pres. aide.)
- (J) More news broadcasts
- (K) The secret list and the firing
- (L) The President's grant speech
- (M) The aftermath - a series of scenes

NOTE TO THE READER

BVIOUSLY a movie must be based on a novel, a story, a play, or an original idea. I suppose it could even derive from a poem. 'Let's do *The Wasteland*,' said a character of mine named Collie Munshin. The novel may be as much as a thousand pages long, the play a hundred, the story ten, the original idea might be stated in a paragraph. Yet each in its turn must be converted into an art form (a low art form) called a treatment. The treatment usually runs anywhere from twenty to a hundred pages in length. It is a bed of Procrustes. Long stories have their limbs lopped off. Too brief tales are stretched. The idea is to present for the attention of a producer, a director, or a script reader, in readable but modest form, the line of story, the gallery of characters, the pith and gist of your tale.

But one's duty is to do this without much attempt at style and no attempt at high style. The language must be functional, even cliché, and since one's writing prepares the ground for a movie script, too much introspection in the characters is not encouraged. 'Joey was thinking for the first time that Alice was maybe in love with him' is barely acceptable. An actor on contract could probably manage to register that emotion in a closeup. Whereas,

... the little phrase, as soon as it struck his ear, had the power to liberate in him the room that was needed to contain it; the proportions of Swann's soul were altered; a margin was left for a form of enjoyment which corresponded no more than his

love for Odette to any external object, and yet was not, like his enjoyment of that love, purely individual, but assumed for him an objective reality superior to that of other concrete things,

would bake the clay of a producer's face a little closer to stone. A producer is interested in the meat and bone of a story. His question as he reads a treatment is whether he should go on to assign a writer to do a screenplay of this story with specific dialogue and most specific situations added, or whether he should ask for another treatment with new characters and plot, or whether indeed he should write off the loss and quit right now. So a treatment bears the same relation to a finished screenplay as the model for a wind tunnel does to the airplane. Since a treatment is functional, any excellence must be unobtrusive. In fact, a good director (George Stevens) once told me that good writing in a treatment was a form of cheating because it introduced emotional effects through language which he might not as a director be able to repeat on film.

So, thus modestly, I present here a treatment of a movie. It is based on an original idea. It is a short treatment. Only a few of the scenes are indicated. As an example of the art of the treatment, it is not characteristic, for it is written in somewhat formal prose, but it may have the virtue of suggesting a motion picture to your imagination.

Best wishes. See you in the morning after this last night. — N.M.

WE'RE going to describe a movie which will take place twenty years from now, forty years from now, or is it one hundred years from now? One cannot locate the date to a certainty. The world has gone on just about the way we all expected it would go on. It has had large and dramatic confrontations by heads of state, cold wars galore, economic crises resolved and unresolved, good investment, bad investment, decent management and a witch's bag full of other complexities much too numerous ever to bring into a movie. The result has been a catastrophe which all of us have dreaded, all of us expected, and none of us has been able to forestall. The world in twenty or forty years—let us say it is thirty-six—has come to the point where without an atomic war, without even a hard or furious shooting war, it has given birth nonetheless to a fearful condition. The world has succeeded in poisoning itself. It is no longer fit to inhabit. The prevalent condition is fallout radiation, anomalous crops, monstrous babies who grow eyes in their navels and die screaming with hatred at the age of six weeks, plastics which emit cancerous fumes, buildings which collapse like camphor flakes, weather which is excruciatingly psychological because it is always too hot or too cold. Governments fall with the regularity of pendulums. The earth is doomed. The number of atom bombs detonated by the Americans, Russians, English, French, the Algerians, Africans, the Israelis and the Chinese, not to mention the Turks, Hindus and Yugoslavians, have so poisoned existence that even the apples on the trees turn malignant in the stomach. Life is being burned out by a bleak fire within, a plague upon the secrets of our existence which stultifies the air. People who govern the nations have come to a

(A)

modest and simple conclusion. The mistakes of the past have condemned the future. There is no time left to discuss mankind's guilt. No one is innocent of the charge that all have blighted the rose. In fact, the last President to be elected in the United States has come to office precisely by making this the center of his plank: that no one is innocent. The political reactions have been exceptional. Earlier in the century the most fundamental political notion was that guilt could be laid always at the door of one nation and one nation only. Now a man had been elected to one of the two most powerful offices in the world on the premise that the profound illness of mankind was the fault of all, and this victory had prepared the world for cooperative action. (B)

Shortly after the election of this last of the American Presidents, the cold war was finally ended. Russia and America were ready to collaborate, as were Algeria and France, China, England, Western Europe, India and Africa. The fact had finally been faced. Man had succeeded in so polluting the atmosphere that he was doomed to expire himself. Not one in fifty of the most responsible government scientists would now admit that there were more than twenty years left to life. It was calculated that three-quarters of the living population would be gone in five years from the various diseases of fallout. It was further calculated that of the one-quarter remaining women and men, another three-quarters would be dead in the two following years. What a perspective—three-quarters of the people dead in five years, another three-quarters lost in two, one in sixteen left after seven years to watch the slow extinction of the rest. In the face of this fact, led by a President who was exceptional, who was (B)

not only the last but perhaps the greatest of America's leaders, the people of the world had come together to stare into the grim alternatives of their fate. All men and women who continued to live on earth would expire. Five hundred thousand at least could survive if they were moved to Mars, perhaps even as many as one million people could be saved, together with various animals, vegetables, minerals and transportable plants. For the rocketeers had made fine advances. Their arts and sciences had developed enormously. They had managed to establish a company of astronauts on Mars. Nearly one thousand had perished earlier on the Moon, but on Mars over a hundred had managed to live; they had succeeded in building a camp out of native vegetation found on the surface. Dwellings had been fabricated from it and, in triumph, a vehicle constructed entirely from materials found on Mars had been sent back to earth, where men and women received it with extravagant hope.

No space here, or for that matter in the movie, to talk of the endless and difficult negotiations which had gone on. The movie could begin perhaps with the ratification of the most astounding piece of legislation ever to be passed in any country. In this case the piece of legislation had been passed by every nation in the world. It was a covenant which declared that every citizen in each nation was going to devote himself to sending a fleet of rocket ships to Mars. This effort would be herculean. It would demand that the heart of each nation's economy be turned over completely to building and equipping ships, selecting the people, training them, and having the moral fortitude to bid them goodbye. In a sense, this universal operation would be equivalent to the evacuation of Dunkirk but

with one exception: three-quarters of the British Expeditionary Force was removed safely from the beach. In this case, the world could hope to send up to Mars no more than one million of its people, conceivably less.

It was calculated that the operation must be accomplished in eighteen months—the spread of plague dictated this haste, for half of the remaining members of mankind might be dead in this time and it was felt that to wait too long would be tantamount to populating the ships with human beings too sick, too weak, too plague-ridden to meet the rigors of life on Mars.

It was indeed a heroic piece of legislation, for the people on earth had had the vision to see that all of them were doomed, and so the majority had consented to accept a minority from within themselves to go out further across space and continue the species. Of course, those who were left would make some further effort to build new rocket ships and follow the wave of the first million pioneers, but the chances of this were unlikely. Not only would the resources of the world be used at an unprecedented rate to build a fleet of ten thousand rocket ships capable of carrying one hundred persons each out so far as Mars, but, in fact, as everyone knew, the earth would be stripped of its most exceptional people, its most brilliant technicians, artists, scientists, athletes and executives, plus their families. Those who were left could hardly hope to form a nucleus or a new cadre brilliant enough to repeat the effort. Besides, it was calculated that the ravages of the plague would already be extreme by the time the fleet departed. The heroism of this legislation resided therefore in the fact that man was capable of regarding his fate and determining to do something exceptional about it.

Now the President of the United States, as indicated earlier, was an unusual man. It was a situation right for a dictator, but he was perhaps not only the most brilliant but the most democratic of American presidents. And one of the reasons the separate nations of the world had been able to agree on this legislation, and the Americans in particular had voted for it, was that the President had succeeded in engaging the imagination of the world's citizens with his project, much as Churchill had brought an incandescence to the morale of the English by the famous speech where he told them he could offer them nothing but blood, sweat, toil and tears. So this President had spared no detail in bringing the citizens of America face to face with the doom of their condition. There were still one hundred million people alive in America. Of that number, one hundred thousand would voyage to Mars. One person in a thousand then could hope to go. Yet there were no riots in the streets. The reason was curious but simple. The President had promised to stay behind and make every effort to train and rally new technicians for the construction of a second fleet. This decision to remain behind had come from many motives: he had recognized the political impossibility of leaving himself—there was moreover sufficient selflessness in the man to make such a course tasteless to him—and, what was also to the point, his wife, whom he loved, was now incurably sick. It had been agreed that the first of the criteria for selection to the fleet was good physical condition, or at least some reasonable suggestion of health, since everyone on earth was now ill in varying degree.

In the first six months after the worldwide ratification of what had already become known as the Legis-

*visit
her bed
after the
speech.*

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lation For A Fleet, an atmosphere of cooperation, indeed almost of Christian sanctity and good will, came over the earth. Never before in the memory of anyone living had so many people seemed in so good a mood. There was physical suffering everywhere—as has been mentioned, nearly everyone was ill, usually of distressing internal diseases—but the pain now possessed a certain logic, for at least one-half the working force of the world was engaged directly or indirectly in the construction of the Fleet or the preparations surrounding it. Those who were to travel to Mars had a profound sense of mission, of duty and humility. Those who knew they would be left behind felt for the first time in years a sensation of moral weightlessness which was recognized finally as the absence of guilt. Man was at peace with himself. He could even feel hope, because it was, after all, not known to a certainty that those who were left behind must inevitably perish. Some still believed in the possibility of new medical discoveries which could save them. Others devoted themselves to their President's vow that the construction of the second fleet would begin upon the departure of the first. And, with it all, there was in nearly everyone a sense of personal abnegation, of cooperation, of identification with the community.

It was part of the President's political wisdom that the people who were chosen for the American Fleet had also been selected geographically. Every town of ten thousand inhabitants had ten heroes to make the trip. Not a county of five thousand people scattered over ten thousand square miles of ranches was without its five men, women, and children, all ready. And, of course, for each person chosen there were another ten ready to back them up in case the first man turned ill,

or the second, or the third. Behind these ten were one hundred, directly involved in the development, training and morale of each voyager and his ten substitutes. So participation in the flight reached into all the corners of the country, and rare was the family which had nothing to do with it. Historians, writing wistfully about the end of history, had come to the conclusion that man was never so close to finding his soul as in this period when it was generally agreed he was soon to lose his body.

Now, calculate what a blow it was to morality, to courage, and the heart of mankind when it was discovered that life on Mars was not supportable, that the company of a hundred who had been camping on its surface had begun to die, and that their disease was similar to the plague which had begun to visit everyone on earth, but was more virulent in its symptoms and more rapid in its results. The scientific news was overwhelming. Fallout and radiation had poisoned not only the earth but the entire solar system. There was no escape for man to any of the planets. The first solar voyagers to have journeyed so far away as Jupiter had sent back the same tragic news. Belts of radiation incalculably fierce in their intensity now surrounded all the planets.

The President was, of course, the first to receive this news and, in coordination with agreements already arrived at, communicated it to the Premier of the Soviet Union. The two men were already firm friends. They had succeeded, two and a half years before, in forming an alliance to end the Cold War, and by thus acting in concert had encouraged the world to pass the Legislation For A Fleet. Now the Premier informed the President that he had heard the bad news himself: ten

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of the one hundred men on Mars were, after all, Russians. The two leaders met immediately in Paris for a conference which was brief and critical in its effect. The President was for declaring the news immediately. He had an intimation that to conceal such an apocalyptic fact might invite an unnameable disaster. The Premier of Russia begged him to wait a week at least before announcing this fact. His most cogent argument was that the scientists were entitled to a week to explore the remote possibility of some other solution.

'What other could there possibly be?' asked the President.

'How can I know?' answered the Premier. 'Perhaps we shall find a way to drive a tunnel into the center of the earth in order to burn all impurities out of ourselves.'

The President was adamant. The tragic condition of the world today was precisely the product, he declared, of ten thousand little abuses of power, ten thousand moments in history when the leaders had decided that the news they held was too unpleasant or too paralyzing for the masses to bear. A new era in history, a heroic if tragic era, had begun precisely because the political leaders of the world now invited the citizens into their confidence. The President and the Premier were at an impasse. The only possible compromise was to wait another twenty-four hours and invite the leaders of Europe, Asia, South America and Africa to an overnight conference which would determine the fate of the news.

The second conference affected the history of everything which was to follow, because all the nations were determined to keep the new and disastrous news

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a secret. The President's most trusted technical adviser, Anderson Stevens, argued that the general despair would be too great and would paralyze the best efforts of his own men to find another solution. The President and Stevens were old friends. They had come to power together. It was Stevens who had been responsible for some of the most critical scientific discoveries and advances in the rocketry of the last ten years. The Legislation For A Fleet had come, to a great extent, out of his work. He was known as the President's greatest single friend, his most trusted adviser. If he now disagreed with the President at this international conference, the President was obliged to listen to him. Anderson Stevens argued that while the solar system was now poisoned and uninhabitable, it might still be possible to travel to some other part of our galaxy and transfer human life to a more hospitable star. For several days, scientists discussed the possibilities. It was admitted that no fuel or system of booster propulsion was sufficiently powerful to take a rocket ship beyond the solar system. Not even by connecting to booster rockets already in orbit. But then it was also argued that no supreme attempt had yet been made and if the best scientific minds on earth applied themselves to this problem the intellectual results were unforeseeable. In the meantime, absolute silence was to be observed. The program to construct the Martian Fleet was to continue as if nothing had happened. The President acceded to this majority decision of the other leaders, but informed them that he would hold the silence for no more than another week.

By the end of the week, Anderson Stevens returned with an exceptional suggestion: a tunnel ten miles long was to be constructed in all haste in Siberia or the

I American desert. Pitched at an angle, so that its entrance was on the surface and its base a mile below the earth, the tunnel would act like the muzzle of a rifle and fire the rocket as if it were a shell. Calculated properly, taking advantage of the earth's rotation about its own axis and the greater speed of its rotation about the sun, it was estimated that the rocket ship might then possess sufficient escape velocity to quit the gravitational pull of the sun and so move out to the stars. Since some of the rocket ships were already close to completion and could be adapted quickly to the new scheme, the decision was taken to fire a trial shot in three months, with a picked crew of international experts. If the ship succeeded in escaping the pull of the sun, its crew could then explore out to the nearest stars and send back the essential information necessary for the others who would follow.

Again the question of secrecy was debated. Now Stevens argued that it would be equally irresponsible to give people hope if none would later exist. So, suffering his deepest misgivings, the President consented to a period of silence for three months while the tunnel was completed. In this period, the character of his administration began to change. Hundreds and then thousands of men were keeping two great secrets: the impossibility of life on Mars, and the construction of the giant cannon which would fire an exploratory ship to the stars. So an atmosphere of secrecy and evasion began to circle about the capital, and the mood of the nation was affected. There were rumors everywhere; few of them were accurate. People whispered that the Russians were no longer in cooperation with us, but engaged in a contest to see who could get first to Mars. It was said that the climate of Mars had driven the

colonists mad, that the spaceships being built would not hold together because the parts were weakened by atomic radiation. It was then rumored—for the existence of the tunnel could not be hidden altogether—that the government was planning to construct an entire state beneath the surface of the earth, in which people could live free of radiation and fallout. For the first time in three or four years, the rates of the sociological diseases—crime, delinquency, divorce and addiction—began to increase.

The day for the secret test arrived. The rocket was fired. It left the earth's atmosphere at a rate greater than any projectile had yet traveled, a rate so great that the first fear of the scientists was substantiated. The metal out of which the rocket was made, the finest, most heat-resistant alloy yet devised by metallurgists, was still insufficient to withstand the heat of its velocity. As it rose through the air, with the dignitaries of fifty countries gathered to watch its departure, it burst out of the earth, its metal skin glowing with the incandescence of a welding torch, traced a path of incredible velocity across the night sky, so fast it looked like a bolt of lightning reversed, leaping vividly from the earth into the melancholy night, and burned itself out thirty miles up in the air, burned itself out as completely as a dead meteor. No metal existed which could withstand the heat of the excessive friction created by the extreme velocity necessary to blast a ship through the atmosphere and out beyond the gravitational attractions of the sun and its planets. On the other hand, a rocket ship which rose slowly through the earth's atmosphere and so did not overheat could not then generate enough power to overcome the pull of the sun. It seemed now conclusive

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that man was trapped within his solar system.

The President declared that the people must finally be informed, and in an historic address he did so inform them of the futility of going to Mars and of the impossibility of escape in any other way. There was nothing left for man, he declared, but to prepare himself for his end, to recognize that his soul might have a life beyond his death and so might communicate the best of himself to the stars. There was thus the opportunity to die well, in dignity, with grace, and the hope that the spirit might prove more miraculous and mighty than the wonders man had extracted from matter. It was a great speech. Commentators declared it was perhaps the greatest speech ever delivered by a political leader. It suffered from one irrevocable flaw: it had been delivered three months too late. The ultimate reaction was cynical. 'If all that is left to us is our spirit,' commented a German newspaper, 'why then did the President deny us three useful months in which to begin to develop it?' L

Like the leaden-green airless evening before an electrical storm, an atmosphere of depression, bitterness, wildness, violence and madness rose from the echoes of this speech. Productivity began to founder. People refused to work. Teachers taught in classrooms which were empty and left the schools themselves. Windows began to be broken everywhere, a most minor activity, but it took on accelerated proportions, as if many found a huge satisfaction in throwing rocks through windows much as though they would proclaim that this was what the city would look like when they were gone. Funerals began to take on a bizarre attraction. Since ten to twenty times as many people were dying each day as had died even five M

years before, funeral processions took up much of the traffic, and many of the people who were idle enjoyed marching through the streets in front of and behind the limousines. The effect was sometimes medieval, for impromptu carnivals began to set themselves up on the road to the cemetery. There were speeches in Congress to impeach the President and, as might conventionally be expected, some of the particular advisers who had counseled him to keep silence were now most forward in their condemnation of his act.

The President himself seemed to be going through an exceptional experience. That speech in which he had suggested to mankind that its best hope was to cultivate its spirit before it died seemed to have had the most profound effect upon him. His appearance had begun to alter: his hair was subtly longer, his face more gaunt, his eyes feverish. He had always been unorthodox as a President, but now his clothing was often rumpled and he would appear unexpectedly to address meetings or to say a few words on television. His resemblance to Lincoln, which had in the beginning been slight, now became more pronounced. The wits were quick to suggest that he spent hours each day with a makeup expert. In the midst of this, the President's wife died, and in great pain. They had been close for twenty years. Over the last month, he had encouraged her not to take any drugs to dull the pain. The pain was meaningful, he informed her. The choice might be one of suffering now in the present or later in eternity. In anguish she expired. On her deathbed she seared him with a cruel confession. It was that no matter how she had loved him for twenty years, she had always felt there was a part of him never to be trusted, a part which was implacable, in-

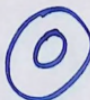
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human and ruthless. 'You would destroy the world for a principle,' she told him as she died. 'There is something diabolical about you.'

On the return from her funeral, people came out to stand silently in tribute. It was the first spontaneous sign of respect paid to him in some months, and riding alone in the rear of an open limousine, he wept. Yet, before the ride was over, someone in the crowd threw a stone through the windshield. In his mind, as he rode, was the face of his wife, saying to him some months before, 'I tell you, people cannot bear suffering. I know that I cannot. You will force me to destroy a part of your heart if you do not let me have the drugs.'

That night the chief of America's Intelligence Service came to see the President. The Russians were engaged in a curious act. They were building a tunnel in Siberia, a tunnel even larger than the American one, and at an impossible angle; it went almost directly into the earth and then took a jog at right angles to itself. The President put through a call to Moscow to speak to the Premier. The Premier told the President that he had already made preparations to see him. There was a matter of the most extreme importance to be discussed: the Russians had found a way to get a rocket ship out of the solar system.

So, the two men met in London in a secret conference. Alone in a room, the Premier explained the new project and his peculiar position. Slowly, insidiously, he had been losing control in his country, just as the President had become progressively more powerless in America. Against the Premier's wishes, some atomic and rocket scientists had come together on a fearsome scheme which the Army was now supporting. It had



been calculated that if an ordinary rocket ship, of the sort which belonged to the Martian Fleet, were fired out from the earth, it would be possible to blast it into the furthest reaches of our own galaxy, provided—and this was most important—a planet were exploded at the proper moment. It would be like the impetus a breaking wave could give a surfboard rider. With proper timing the force released by blowing up the planet would more than counteract the gravitational pull of the sun. Moreover, the rocket ship could be a great distance away from the planet at the moment it was exploded, and so the metal of its skin would not have to undergo any excessive heat.

'But which planet could we use?' asked the President.

The two men looked at one another. The communication passed silently from one's mind to the other. It was obvious. With the techniques available to them there was only one planet: the earth.

That was what the Russian tunnel was for. A tunnel going deep into the earth, loaded with fissionable material, and exploded by a radio wave sent out from a rocket ship already one million miles away. The detonation of the earth would hurl the rocket ship like a pebble across a chasm of space.

'Well,' says the President, after a long pause, 'it may be possible for the Fleet to take a trip after all.'

'No,' the Premier assured him, 'not the Fleet.' For the earth would be detonated by an atomic chain reaction which would spew radioactive material across one hundred million miles of the heavens. The alloy vuranel was the only alloy that could protect a rocket ship against the electronic hurricane which would follow the explosion. There was on earth enough

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vuranel to create a satisfactory shield for only one ship. 'Not a million men, women, and children, but a hundred, a hundred people and a few animals will take the trip to a star.'

'Who will go?' asked the President.

'Some of your people,' answers the Premier, 'some of mine. You and me.'

'I won't go,' says the President.

'Of course you will,' says the Premier. 'Because if you don't go, I don't go, and we've been through too much already. You see, my dear friend, you're the only equal I have on earth. It would be much too depressing to move through those idiotic stars without you.'

But the President is overcome by the proportions of the adventure. 'You mean we will blow up the entire world in order that a hundred people have some small chance—one chance in five, one chance in ten, one chance in a hundred, or less—to reach some star and live upon it. The odds are too brutal. The cost is incalculable.'

'We lose nothing but a few years,' says the Premier. 'We'll all be dead anyway.'

'No,' says the President, 'it's not the same. We don't know what we destroy. It may be that after life ceases on earth, life will generate itself again, if only we leave the earth alone. To destroy it is monstrous. We may destroy the spirit of something far larger than ourselves.'

The Premier taps him on the shoulder. 'Look, my friend, do you believe that God is found in a cockroach? I don't. God is found inside you, and inside me. When all of us are gone, God is also gone.'

'I don't know if I believe that,' answers the President.

Well, the Premier tells him, religious discussion has always fascinated him, but politics are more pressing. The question is whether they are at liberty to discuss this matter on its moral merits alone. The tunnel in Siberia had been built without his permission. It might interest the President to know that a tunnel equally secret is being constructed near the site of the old Arizona tunnel. There were Russian technicians working on that, just as American technicians had been working in Siberia. The sad political fact is that the technicians had acquired enormous political force, and if it were a question of a showdown tomorrow, it is quite likely they could seize power in the Soviet Union and in America as well.

'You, sir,' says the Premier, 'have been searching your soul for the last year in order to discover reasons for still governing. I have been studying Machiavelli because I have found, to my amusement, that when all else is gone, when life is gone, when the promise of future life is gone, and the meaning of power, then what remains for one is the game. I want the game to go on. I do not want to lose power in my country. I do not want you to lose it in yours. I want, if necessary, to take the game clear up into the stars. You deserve to be on that rocket ship, and I deserve to be on it. It is possible we have given as much as anyone alive to brooding over the problems of mankind in these last few years. It is your right and my right to look for a continuation of the species. Perhaps it is even our duty.'

'No,' says the President. 'They're holding a gun to our heads. One cannot speak of the pleasures of the game or of honor or of duty when there is no choice.'

He will not consent to destroying the earth unless

(R) the people of earth choose that course, with a full knowledge of the consequences. What is he going to do, asks the Premier. He is going to tell the world, says the President. There must be a general worldwide election to determine the decision.

'Your own people will arrest you first,' says the Premier. He then discloses that the concept of exploding the earth to boost the power of the rocket had been Anderson Stevens' idea.

The President picks up the phone and makes a call to his press chief. He tells him to prepare the television networks for an address he will deliver that night. The press chief asks him the subject. The President tells him he will discuss it upon his return. The press chief says that the network cannot be cleared unless the President informs him now of the subject. It will be a religious address, says the President.

'The networks may not give us the time,' says the press chief. 'Frankly, sir, they are not certain which audiences share your spiritual fire.'

The President hangs up. 'You are right,' he tells the Premier. 'They will not let me make the speech. I have to make it here in London. Will you stand beside me?'

'No, my friend,' says the Russian, 'I will not. They will put you in jail for making that speech, and you will have need of me on the outside to liberate your skin.'

(S) The President makes the address in London to the citizens of the world. He explains the alternatives, outlines his doubts, discusses the fact that there are technicians ready to seize power, determined to commit themselves to the terrestrial explosion. No one but the people of the earth, by democratic procedure, have the right to make this decision, he declares, and

recommends that as a first step the people march on the tunnel sites and hold them. He concludes his address by saying he is flying immediately back to Washington and will be there within two hours.

The message has been delivered on the network devoted to international television. It reaches a modest percentage of all listeners in the world. But in America, from the President's point of view the program took place at an unfortunate time, for it was the early hours of the morning. When he lands in Washington at dawn, he is met by his Cabinet and a platoon of M.P.s, who arrest him. Television in America is devoted that morning to the announcement that the President has had a psychotic breakdown and is at present under observation by psychiatrists.

For a week, the atmosphere is unbearable. A small percentage of the people in America have listened to the President's speech. Many more have heard him in other countries. Political tensions are acute, and increase when the Premier of the Soviet Union announces in reply to a question from a reporter that in his opinion the President of the United States is perfectly sane. Committees of citizens form everywhere to demand an open investigation of the charges against the President. It becomes a rallying cry that the President be shown to the public. A condition close to civil war exists in America.

At this point, the President is paid a visit by Anderson Stevens, the scientist in charge of the rocket program, the man who has lately done more than any other to lead the Cabinet against the President. Now they have a conversation behind the barred windows of the hospital room where the President is imprisoned. Anderson Stevens tells the President that the first tun-

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nel which had been built for the star shot was, from his point of view, a ruse. He had never expected that rocket ship, which was fired like a bullet, to escape from the earth's atmosphere without burning to a cinder. All of his experience had told him it would be destroyed. But he had advanced the program for that shot because he wished to test something else—the tunnel. It had been essential to discover how deeply one could dig into the crust of the earth before the heat became insupportable for an atomic bomb. In effect, the tunnel had been dug as a test to determine the feasibility of detonating the earth. And so that shot which had burned up a rocket ship had been, from Stevens' point of view, a success, because he had learned that the tunnel could be dug deep enough to enable a superior hydrogen bomb to set off a chain reaction in the fiery core of the earth. The fact that one hundred rocketeers and astronauts, men who had been his friends for decades, had died in an experiment he had known to be all but hopeless was an indication of how serious he was about the earth bomb shot. The President must not think for a moment that Stevens would hesitate to keep him in captivity, man the ship himself, and blow up the earth.

Why, then, asks the President, does Stevens bother to speak to him? Because, answers Stevens, he wants the President to command the ship. Why? Because in some way the fate of the ship might be affected by the emotions of everybody on earth at the moment the earth was exploded. This sounded like madness to some of his scientific colleagues, but to him it was feasible that if life had a spirit and all life ceased to exist at the same moment, then that spirit, at the instant of death, might have a force of liberation or

deterrence which could be felt as a physical force across the heavens.

'You mean,' says the President, 'that even in the ruthless circuits of your heart there is terror, a moral terror, at the consequences of your act. And it is me you wish to bear the moral consequences of that act, and not you.'

'You are the only man great enough, sir,' says Anderson Stevens, bowing his head.

'But I think the act is wrong,' says the President.

'I know it is right,' says Stevens. 'I spent a thousand days and a thousand nights living with the terror that I might be wrong, and still believe I am right. There is something in me which knows that two things are true—that we have destroyed this earth not only because we were not worthy of it, but because it may have been too cruel for us. I tell you, we do not know. Man may have been mismated with earth. In some fantastic way, perhaps we voyaged here some millions of years ago and fell into a stupidity equal to the apes. That I don't know. But I do know, if I know anything at all, because my mind imprisoned in each and every one of my cells tells me so, that we must go on, that we as men are different from the earth, we are visitors upon it. We cannot suffer ourselves to sit here and be extinguished, not when the beauty which first gave speech to our tongues commands us to go out and find another world, another earth, where we may strive, where we may win, where we may find the right to live again. For that dream I will kill everyone on earth. I will kill my children. In fact I must, for they will not accompany me on the trip. And you,' he says to the President, 'you must accompany us. You must help to make this trip. For we as men may finally

achieve greatness if we survive this, the most profound of our perils.'

'I do not trust myself,' said the President. 'I do not know if my motive is good. Too many men go to their death with a hatred deep beyond words, wishing with their last breath that they could find the power to destroy God. I do not know—I may be one of those men.'

'You have no choice,' says Anderson Stevens. 'There are people trying to liberate you now. I shall be here to shoot you myself before they succeed. Unless you agree to command the ship.'

'Why should I agree?' says the President. "Shoot me now.'

'No,' says Stevens, 'you will agree, because I will make one critical concession to you. I do it not from choice, but from desperation. My dreams tell me we are doomed unless you command us. So I will let you give the people their one last opportunity. I will let you speak to the n. I will put my power behind you, so that they may vote.'

'No,' says the President, 'not yet. Because if such an election were lost, if the people said, "Let us stay here and die together, and leave the earth to mend itself, without the sound of human speech or our machines," then you would betray me. I know it. You would betray everyone. Some night, in some desert, a rocket ship would be fired up into the sky, and twenty hours later, deep in some secret tunnel, all of us would be awakened by the last explosion of them all. No, I will wait for the people to free me first. Of necessity, my first act will be to imprison you.'

After this interview between Stevens and the President, the ruling coalition of Cabinet officers and technicians refused, of course, to let the people see the

President. The response was a virtually spontaneous trek of Americans by airplane, helicopter, automobile, by animal, by motorcycle, and on foot, toward the tunnel site the President had named. The Army was quickly deployed to prevent them, but the soldiers refused to protect the approaches to the tunnel. They also asked for the right to see the President. The Cabinet capitulated. The President was presented on television. He announced that the only justification for the star ship was a worldwide general election.

The most brilliant, anguished, closely debated election in the history of the world now took place. For two months, argument licked like flame at the problem. In a last crucial speech the night before the election, the President declared that it was the words of a man now in prison, Anderson Stevens, which convinced him how he would vote. For he, the President, had indeed come to believe that man rising out of the fiery grave of earth, out of the loss of his past, his history, and his roots, might finally achieve the greatness and the goodness expected of him precisely because he had survived this, the last and the most excruciating of his trials. 'If even a few of us manage to live, our seed will be changed forever by the self-sacrifice of those left behind, the nobility, the courage and the loss engraved on our memory of that earth-doomed man who was our ancestor and who offered us life. Man may become human at last.' The President concluded his speech by announcing that if the people considered him deserving of the honor, he would be the first to enter the ship, he would take upon himself the act of pressing the button which would blow up the earth.

The answer to this speech was a solemn vote taken

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in favour of destroying the world, and giving the spaceship its opportunity to reach the stars.

The beginning of the last sequence in the movie might show the President and the Premier saying goodbye. The Premier has discovered he is now hopelessly ill, and so will stay behind.

The Premier smiles as he says goodbye. 'You see, I am really too fat for a brand-new game. It is you fanatics who always take the longest trips.'

One hundred men and women file into the ship behind the President. The rocket is fired and rises slowly, monumentally. Soon it is out of sight. In the navigation tower within the rocket the President stares back at earth. It is seen on a color television screen, magnified enormously. The hours go by and the time is approaching for the explosion. The radio which will send out the wave of detonation is warmed up. Over it the President speaks to the people who are left behind on earth. All work has of course ceased, and people waiting through the last few hours collect, many of them, in public places, listening to the President's voice on loudspeakers. Others hear it on radios in their homes, or sprawled on the grass in city parks. People listen in cars on country crossroads, at the beach, watching the surf break. Quietly, a few still buy tickets for their children on the pony rides. One or two old scholars sit by themselves at desks in the public library, reading books. Some drink in bars. Others sit quietly on the edge of pavements, their feet in the street. One man takes his shoes off. The mood is not too different from the mood of a big city late at night when the weather is warm. There is the same air of expectation, of quiet, brooding concentration.

'Pray for us,' says the President to them, speaking

(2-3) into his microphone on that rocket ship one million miles away. 'Pray for us. Pray that our purpose is good and not evil. Pray that we are true and not false. Pray that it is part of our mission to bring the life we know to other stars.' And in his ears he hears the voice of his wife, saying through her pain, 'You will end by destroying everything.'

'Forgive me, all of you,' says the President. 'May I be an honest man and not first deluded physician to the Devil.' Then he presses the button.

The earth detonates into the dark spaces. A flame leaps across the solar system. A scream of anguish, jubilation, desperation, terror, ecstasy, vaults across the heavens. The tortured heart of the earth has finally found its voice. We have a glimpse of the spaceship, a silver minnow of light, streaming into the oceans of mystery, and the darkness beyond.

(2-4) 1962

Get medicine ~~toilet~~ on the way

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herbals

the rest

espru

Boyle

W. H. Wells

[Handwritten signature]

~~Druckerei & Buchbinderei~~
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Result

$\nabla \text{bad } 9.9$

Plaster

Letter

dry materials

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Woolly to spin