

*Books by Stephen Goldin*

Polly!  
Quiet Post  
The Alien Condition (*ed.*)  
Herds  
Caravan  
Scavenger Hunt  
The Eternity Brigade  
A World Called Solitude  
Assault on the Gods  
Alien Murders  
Crossroads of the Galaxy  
Mindflight  
Mindsearch  
Trek to Madworld (*Star Trek*)  
The Last Ghost and Other Stories  
The Business of Being a Writer (*with Kathleen Sky*)

**THE PARSINA SAGA**

Shrine of the Desert Mage  
The Storyteller and the Jann  
Crystals of Air and Water  
Treachery of the Demon King

**THE REHUMANIZATION OF JADE DARCY**

(*co-authored by Mary Mason*)  
Jade Darcy and the Affair of Honor  
Jade Darcy and the Zen Pirates

**AGENTS OF ISIS**

Tsar Wars  
Treachorous Moon  
Robot Mountain  
Sanctuary Planet  
Stellar Revolution  
Purgatory Plot  
Traitors' World  
Counterfeit Stars  
Outworld Invaders  
Galactic Collapse

AND NOT  
MAKE DREAMS  
YOUR MASTER

**by**

**Stephen Goldin**

**Parsina  
PRESS**  


*And Not Make Dreams Your Master.* Copyright © 1981 by Stephen Goldin.

All Rights Reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embedded in critical articles and reviews.

Cover layout by Kitty Niclaian

First Parsina Press edition, June 2011.

ISBN: 1463513836.

EAN-13: 978-1463513832.

this book is dedicated explicitly  
(as all my books are, at least implicitly) to  
ROBERT A. HEINLEIN  
who Dreamed the Dreams for all of us....  
and to Virginia Heinlein  
for helping to make him the person he is



## **Chapter 1**

The corridor stretched to infinity. Bright tubes of fluorescence shone down on the smooth white walls and floor. A man and a woman ran down the empty hallway. Their shoes should have clattered on the shiny linoleum, but there was no sound in the eerie passage—just the blank walls rushing past. Time was against them, time was the enemy. If they didn't reach their target soon, the terrorists would destroy Los Angeles with their homemade atom bomb. But the corridor went on and on, and the man and woman ran and ran, never pausing for breath, never stopping to rest. They faced an eternity of running through the silent hall, while around them the world held its breath. They never looked at each other, and their feet glided silently over the smooth floor. They ran.

The end of the hall came suddenly. As they

turned the corner a man appeared holding a rifle. He was dressed all in black, with the terrorists' insignia of a red cobra sewn on the left shoulder. He raised his rifle slowly, ever so slowly, to shoot at the pair approaching him.

The running man quickened his pace to deal with this menace, pulling ahead of his female companion. As he did so, the guard... changed. His outline wavered and became blurry. He separated into two images of the same guard, Siamese twins holding identical rifles in menacing postures. He/they barred the way, refusing further access.

The running man stopped with impossible quickness to fight this bifurcated threat, but actually the guard seemed to be more of a threat to him/themselves than to anyone else. His/their outlines blurred still further, and jumped around the floor, literally trying to pull him/themselves together. The lights dimmed and the walls of the corridor flickered in and out of existence. The fragile thread of reality was on the verge of crumbling.

Then suddenly everything was right again. The walls steadied, the lights brightened. There was only the one guard with one rifle, determined to keep these two intruders away—and totally unaware of his personality split just moments ago.

The running man swung a fist at the guard, his arm drifting in a lazy arc toward the terrorist's face. The punch connected solidly, and the impact was like hitting a pillow. The guard's face exploded in a shower of sparks that rained like fairy dust to the ground. His headless body sagged slowly to the floor, melting into a flesh-colored puddle and then evapo-

rating altogether.

There was a slight ringing sound that only the man and woman could hear. "Come on," the man said to his companion. "There's not much time left. The bomb'll go off in five minutes."

The woman nodded silently and turned into the cross-corridor from which the guard had come. She began running again, and the man joined her, just as the world was fading out around them....

Wayne Corrigan lay in his dimly lit cubicle, panting from the exertion. There was the moment of disorientation he always experienced when switching from Dream to reality, that instant of not knowing what was true and what was pretense; then the world solidified again, and he was "home."

*Funny how I think of this place as home*, he thought. *I'm only here a few hours every three days, playing make-believe.* And yet, there were times when all that mattered, all that was real to him, was in this small booth, and the outside world faded to insignificance.

He opened his eyes slowly to stare up at the dim whiteness of the ceiling. His scalp tingled from two dozen fiery prickings, and the sensation reminded him that there was still work to do. This was only an intermission—the last intermission of the evening. Then he'd be trapped in reality again until his next performance.

Wayne ran quickly through his post-transition routine. He flexed his fingers and toes, letting the flavor of reality seep back into them. As they came to life once more, he pulled the feeling upward through



his body, into the muscles of his legs and arms, lighting the warmth in his torso, finally reaching into his head and neck. Then the brief isometrics, to tell his body he was back in command and banish the stiffness that had stolen it while he was away in Dreamland.

It never failed to amaze him how tired his body got while it was actually lying still and peaceful on a couch. But he'd seen the studies, read the technical reports. In Dreams, the brain still sent commands to the muscles, but inhibiting factors usually kept the body from following through. Since he had to project more of his Dreams than ordinary people did, it was only natural his body suffered.

Ernie White, the engineer on duty tonight, poked his head into the cubicle.

"Is Sleeping Beauty awake yet?" he asked.

Wayne smiled, and the effort made him wince; his facial muscles were stiff, too.

"I think you want the lady next door."

"If I do, it's impolite of you to notice." White's face, black as an ebony carving, vanished from the doorway.

Groaning from the effort, Wayne rose slowly into a sitting position. His head just missed scraping the ceiling of the cubicle—which had not, after all, been built for sitting or standing in. He gingerly lifted his own private crown of thorns, the Dreamcap, off his head and set it down on the couch beside him, then edged his way over to the door.

The bright lights in the room outside made his eyes water after the dimness of the cubicle. Wayne blinked back the tears as he slid out of his cocoon

and looked over to his left, where White was helping Janet Meyers out of her own chamber. Janet was blinking against the light as badly as Wayne was, but Wayne recovered first. He took advantage of her moment of blindness to observe her in detail.

From a purely technical standpoint, Janet Meyers was not a classic beauty. She was a little too tall and her bones were a little too thick. Her face was round, and there were some barely noticeable freckles on her cheeks. Her brown hair was dry and never perfectly in place; a few strands always managed to fly away somewhere, usually across her forehead. She was well-proportioned; any man with reasonable taste would give her a long, lingering glance, although he might not turn around as she passed to give her a second.

There was nothing special about her that couldn't be found in hundreds of other women. *So why do I act like some goddamn teenage virgin when I'm around her?* Wayne wondered angrily.

She became accustomed to the light and looked over at him. Wayne quickly shifted his gaze to the clock over the door to the engineering booth, then got angry with himself for feeling guilty because he was looking at her. *Silly schoolboy games*, he thought. *I should have outgrown those years ago.*

"Any problems in there?" White asked them. "I thought I saw the dials jumping for a second."

That reminded Wayne of the horrible screw-up with the guard in the hallway.

"Just a little trouble coordinating an image," he said. "We were positioning a character differently, and he got fuzzy and jumped around a little before I

finally took control of him.”

“It was my fault,” Janet said. “He was your character, you were supposed to handle him. I should have given you full control from the moment he appeared. I just didn’t think. Sorry.”

“It’s not your fault,” Wayne insisted, feeling very protective. “How can they expect perfection when they change scripts on us at the last moment? We hardly had time to look it over, not much chance to rehearse—”

“It was only a little jumpiness, just for a second or two,” Janet continued. “Probably made for good comic relief, if anyone in the audience even noticed. Or if there *is* an audience, for that matter.”

“Twenty-two thousand of them, according to the computer,” White said.

Wayne scowled. Mort Schulberg wouldn’t be happy with so low a rating—but then, he was seldom happy with anything.

“And Janet just worked two days ago,” he continued in her defense. “She’s got to be worn out. It’s the sort of thing that could happen to anyone.”

“Hey, you don’t got to apologize to me,” the engineer grinned. “I just twiddle the dials, remember?”

“We’ve got ten minutes,” Janet interrupted, glancing at the clock herself. “That mistake is history, but if we want to avoid any more of them we’d better coordinate.”

She and Wayne walked into the Ready Room, where a sketch of their set had been quickly drawn up for them to study before they started.

“Corridor is twenty meters long,” she said almost mechanically. “Men stationed here, here, and here. A

metal grill gate, like the kind shops use to lock up at night, right across here, raised by a button over here. Two men past the gate. Think you can dismantle the bomb yourself?"

The question made Wayne feel suddenly insecure. Even though he was the newest Dreamer on the staff here, he did have previous experience elsewhere. He tried to cover his feelings with some lighthearted banter.

"I'll have to, won't I? Too late to change the script now. Besides, you'll have your hands full with all those guards."

"That's for sure. I'll have to ask Bill how come there's always more each time. He's turning me into a damned Amazon!"

"Maybe if you smile nicely at him he'll give you a love story next time."

"God, I hope not!" The vehemence in her voice surprised Wayne. "If there's anything I *don't* want it's a pile of sappy garbage for frustrated housewives. I'd rather fight the Mongol hordes single-handed"

She looked up and saw the strange expression on Wayne's face.

"What's the matter with you?" she asked.

Wayne looked quickly away.

"Nothing," he said. Her reaction let him know all too plainly how she was feeling about romance at the moment.

"We'd better decide who's going to handle which parts of the scene so we don't have any more confusion. I'd hate to ruin the ending."

They spent the next few minutes going over the

scene step by step, discussing which of them would be responsible for visualizing which parts and which characters. Ernie White finally came in to break the discussion up, telling them to get back into their cubicles now if they were going to start on time. As they climbed back into their separate chambers, Janet suddenly flashed Wayne a smile and a quick V-for-Victory sign. It relieved somewhat the depression that had been overtaking him, and he eased himself into his cubicle.

Sitting upright on the couch, he picked up the Dreamcap and held it for a moment in his lap, turning it over and looking at it from all sides. It wasn't much to see: two crossing arcs of plastic with a circular rim to form the framework of a skullcap, with wires leading from the back down to the floor. The quadrants of the cap were filled with an almost invisible wire mesh that came together at twenty-four node points corresponding to areas of the brain. And yet this simple device had created whole new industries, and a revolution in personal entertainment.

The first real explorations into the workings of the brain had begun decades ago. Electroencephalograms charted the course of brain waves so they could be cataloged and identified. Researchers found that different areas within the brain were responsible for different bodily functions. It was learned that portions of the brain could be stimulated externally to modify behavior—the best example being the classic experiment with rats who'd had electrodes planted in the so-called pleasure centers of their brains. These rats were willing to cross over an area of severe electrical shock just so they could press a bar

that stimulated these pleasure centers. Starving rats would not willingly cross that barrier to get food, yet otherwise healthy rats would risk almost anything for a jolt to the pleasure center.

Experiments to map the areas of the brain became ever more finely tuned, until eventually psychologists and neurologists could pinpoint with complete accuracy where most of the common functions of the brain were stored. This in itself was an enormous advance for medical science. Many crippling illnesses could be shown to be caused by dysfunctions within the relevant brain tissue; in many cases, microsurgery could correct or alleviate the condition, rescuing millions of people from debilitation.

The areas that interested psychologists the most, though, were those controlling the higher brain functions: learning, retention, recall, thought processes, imagination, and so forth. Many neurologists had already suspected that some forms of schizophrenia were caused, not by emotional childhood traumas, but by simple chemical imbalances within the brain. Using the accumulating body of knowledge about the brain's mechanisms, they proved that these imbalances literally caused patients to perceive the world differently from other people, thus accounting for their different behavior. As a sidelight to this research, they also discovered how "normal" people perceived the universe.

To the great surprise of many, this turned out to be remarkably simple to chart. Except for those people with physical disorders—which were now easily identifiable—everyone stored the same kinds of images in the same places within their brains. By stim-

ulating the same spot in two different people, it was possible to conjure identical images within their minds. At first, these experiments could only be done by the old-fashioned method of surgically implanting electrodes within the brain itself—but shortly thereafter, a method was found to stimulate these areas using electromagnetic waves instead of electrodes. The new method had obvious advantages: it could be applied externally, so there was no need of surgery, and it could be guided by computer with pinpoint accuracy to the desired location within the brain, leaving all the areas around that site unaffected. A helmet—the direct forebear of the Dreamcap—was designed for the subject to wear. By stimulating the correct sites within the subject’s brain, it was possible to produce an exact series of images in his mind, controlled by an outside influence.

At first, knowledge of the new techniques was limited to neurological specialists, and the applications were primarily in the field of psychotherapy. By scanning the output of a brain, analysts could visualize what their patients were actually seeing. For those patients suffering from delusions and physical misperceptions, the therapist could then substitute more correct images for the false ones. It was literally possible to change the way a person thought by altering the way he perceived reality.

But the implications of this discovery were too broad to be left in the laboratory. In totalitarian countries around the world, the Dreamcap quickly became the primary instrument of brainwashing and thought-control. If a dissident wouldn’t cooperate with his government, the ruling powers could im-

prison him in a mental institution—a cover the old Soviet Union and other dictatorships had used for many years—and impress their own thoughts into his mind. If the dissident's mind accepted the new perceptions as its own, the person was pronounced "cured" and released into society. If the dissident's mind refused to accept the new perceptions, his tormentors would keep at him, continually bombarding his brain with new images until his mind could no longer determine what was an outside influence and what was its own thought. The prisoner was then quite certifiably crazy, which justified his continued imprisonment. In either case, his ability to stand against the government's power was effectively crushed.

Such uses of the technique were banned as utterly abhorrent throughout the free world, although there were persistent rumors that the CIA and other intelligence organizations did maintain their own brainwashing "clinics." But free enterprise was not about to let such a powerful tool go undeveloped—not when there were potentially billions of dollars to be made.

It was frequently pointed out that the average person spent roughly a third of his life asleep. Aside from the fact that sleep allowed the body to rid itself of the day's accumulation of poisons, and that the normal mind had a definite need to dream, sleep had little to recommend it. It was a colossal time-waster. People's sleeping hours were a vast, untapped resource waiting to be developed and exploited. The Dreamcap offered an ideal way to do this.

One way was through education. Although noth-



ing could supplant the traditional teacher-student learning experience in school, the Dreamcaps were a godsend to the field of adult education. People who worked hard at a job all day could still find time, while they slept, to learn a second language or catch up on the latest theories of organic gardening. “News magazines” of sleep could keep the citizenry informed through articles dealing with world conditions. The most popular use by far, though, was in the entertainment industry. After dealing with mundane problems during the day, most people were happy to put such cares behind them and lose themselves in a world of fantasy. The Dream broadcast industry provided the ultimate in escapist entertainment.

In all previous entertainment media, the medium itself came between the storyteller and the audience—the printed page in the case of books, or a screen in the case of movies and TV. The audience had to rely on the artificial images the storyteller provided and translate those images into personal symbols within the mind. In Dreams, all that had radically changed. The images were supplied directly into the viewer’s brain, and the viewer felt as though he were actually undergoing the experiences. He could spend his night actually *being* a spy, or a detective, or the greatest swordsman in seventeenth century France, then wake up in the morning with full memory of what had happened. He could go out and face the new day with a feeling of having been greater than he was, of having lived through an adventure without any personal risk.

Wayne Corrigan was an important part of the

new entertainment industry, one of the select few people with imaginations vivid enough to be Dreamers. He and Janet Meyers and the other Dreamers projected the images that sleepers at home picked up on their own Dreamcaps. He created a role and broadcast it through his headset. His images were amplified and transmitted across wires to homes throughout Los Angeles, where they were impressed by Dreamcaps into the minds of his audience, allowing them to live the adventure along with him. In turn, each home Dreamcap sent a signal back to the studio when it was tuned in, allowing the studio to monitor its precise ratings and bill its customers accordingly.

One of the earliest problems discovered was one of sex role identification. Most men wanted to identify with male roles in Dreams, and most women wanted female roles. (There was an aberrant minority that seemed to prefer “cross-gender identification,” but the major broadcasters ignored them.) In some cases, it was possible for a given adventure to star a genderless protagonist who appealed to both sexes, but those stories were more limited in scope, and not nearly as popular as the ones with full identification.

One solution to the problem was the “Masterdream.” In this sort, the Dreamer created not one, but a number of different roles for various members of the audience to identify with, as they chose. The Masterdreamer would then move these characters through his Dream world to fit the story he was telling. Since he could create both male and female roles simultaneously, anyone could tune in to such a

Dream without upset.

The Masterdreamers were a rare breed, though. They had to be able to visualize an entire world all at once, and to keep individual characters moving through it simultaneously without confusion. The Masterdreamer ran his entire stage, and moved people through it like puppets. It was a difficult art to master, and the staff here at Dramatic Dreams had only one Masterdreamer—a genius named Vince Rondel.

The more common solution was to have separate Dreams for men and women. Usually such Dreams would be totally separated from one another, although in an emergency—such as frequently happened at a small company like Dramatic Dreams with a tiny staff of writers and performers—the two roles could work together within the same Dream world. That was what was happening tonight: Wayne and Janet were portraying a team of government agents working together on the same case. The men in the audience received Wayne's impressions, identified with him, and thought of Janet merely as another important character; for the women in the audience, it was the other way around.

For most Dreamers, this kind of Dream was easier to maintain than a Masterdream, because there was a straight one-to-one relationship between Dreamer and viewer. The viewer saw only what the Dreamer saw, and the Dreamer needn't worry about maintaining portions of the world that were not in the present scene.

The disadvantage was that when two Dreamers were operating in the same Dream, accidents could

occur—such as the guard in the corridor. Wayne and Janet had each been visualizing him differently, and as a result the image became fuzzy and jumped around until Janet relinquished control of him to Wayne. Since both Dreamers had an equal ability to affect the action within the Dream, coordination between them was essential.

Wayne was very grateful that Dreams did not run straight through. Research had shown that Dreams were most effective when broken into fourteen-minute acts, with fourteen-minute breaks between them. Dreaming was such an intense experience that the body needed time to relax from one session before entering another. The scenario writers had learned to gauge the length of their scenes accordingly, and Dreamers universally considered the intermissions a blessing. It gave them time to recover from the previous scene, stretch their muscles, remind themselves what they were doing, discuss technical problems with the engineer on duty, and—in the case of two or more auxiliary Dreamers working in tandem—it gave them the chance to go over their mistakes and improve their coordination.

Wayne took a deep breath and let it out slowly as he settled the Dreamcap on his head. Twenty-two thousand people were tuned in to this Dream, from what Ernie White had said. That wasn't very many, not in a city the size of Los Angeles. Granted he was a new talent on a small local station, and it took time to build up a decent following. But Janet was a better Dreamer than he was, he knew that; she was one of the established artists at Dramatic Dreams, with a following of her own. Her presence in this one

should have brought in a lot of women to bolster his ratings, maybe introduce a few new people to his style. Instead, he seemed to be dragging her down to his level.

*Damn it, I know I'm good!* he thought resentfully. *I may not be another Vince Rondel, but I know I can do better than this. How in hell can I break out of this slump?*

A blue light flashed in the ceiling, his thirty second cue. Wayne lay back on his couch, wriggled himself into a comfortable position, and began the self-hypnosis routine all Dreamers learned to get them into a trance state for better projection. He forced his mind to shed all extraneous thoughts. Above all else, he was a professional. He had a story to tell. He did not take his own problems and prejudices into the Dream with him; that was the surest way to get himself fired. As long as he was Dreaming, it didn't matter to him whether there was one person or a million on the other end of the line. Ratings were only a problem in real life; to any dedicated Dreamer, the Dreams themselves were all that mattered.

## **Chapter 2**

The cubicle faded out in his mind, to be slowly replaced by the corridor he'd left at the end of the last act. Janet was at his side again, and both were running a desperate race against time. He reminded himself—and the viewers—that he and Janet were a team of skilled government agents on the trail of urban terrorists. The terrorists' philosophy was deliberately vague—Dramatic Dreams didn't want itself left open to charges of using Dreams to propagandize against anyone's cherished beliefs—but they were generally in favor of killing innocent people and tearing down all the established values that everyone else held dear.

Wayne and Janet had learned, from a terrorist they'd captured and questioned, that the gang had built a homemade atomic bomb, and were prepared to detonate it here in Los Angeles unless their im-

possible demands were met. There was no time to call the police or the bomb squad; this job had to be done *now*, and Wayne and Janet were the only people in position to save millions of lives.

The terrorists, though, were not going to give up without a fight. They'd stationed a suicide squad of their own people here in the corridor to guard their engine of destruction. These men knew they'd die if the bomb went off, and were prepared to sacrifice their lives for their cause. They'd be demons in the struggle to protect their bomb; they had nothing else to live for, and would hold nothing back.

As Wayne and Janet burst into the cross corridor where the bomb had been placed, they quickly eyed the situation. Twenty meters of danger separated them from their target. The moment they came into view, the three men guarding the corridor came instantly alert. Their guns were already drawn and held at the ready for just such a contingency; in a reflex gesture they fired quickly at the government agents.

Wayne could feel the heated air as the laser beam from one guard's gun sizzled scant millimeters by his cheek and burned a small hole in the plaster of the wall. Using the momentum of his run as a push-off, he dove forward onto his stomach. His own gun was in his hands, and as he slid to a halt on the smooth floor, he braced his elbows on the ground, took quick but careful aim, and fired. The guard who'd shot at him screamed in pain as the searing blast from Wayne's pistol vaporized tissue in his right shoulder.

Behind Wayne, Janet was also in action. She'd been one pace behind him as they entered the hall;

the shot at him had given her enough warning. She rolled sideways, ending up in a kneeling position with her left side firmly against the wall. Her gun, too, was in her hand and burning down the enemy.

Taking advantage of her covering fire, Wayne slithered snakelike twelve meters down the corridor to the button controlling the metal gate that barred his way to the end of the passage. Laser blasts were hitting all around him, but he ignored them; his sole concentration was on that button.

For dramatic effect, Wayne slowed down his time sense just a little bit. Like everything else in this Dream, the flow of time was controlled by the Dreamers. Wayne could stretch a moment out to eternity to make everything happen in slow motion, or compress any number of events into a single instant. Elongating the time flow here was an artistic effect to build suspense in the audience by making his progress seem slower and by increasing the threat from the guards' lasers. Every man out there identifying with him in this Dream would be straining to reach that fateful button, yet fighting through the molasses Wayne imposed. He had, of course, discussed the time flow variation with Janet, and she was slowing down her own time sense, too; otherwise her motions would be a quick blur to Wayne, and to all the men seeing things through his eyes.

Finally Wayne reached the button. He pressed it and, obediently, the metal gate slowly rolled up into the ceiling. As it did so, Wayne returned the time flow to normal speed. The way now seemed clear for him to get at the bomb. But just as the wave of triumph washed through him, he was struck in the



right calf by a laser beam from one guard's pistol.

This was a very tricky effect, and Wayne had been flattered when the station management agreed to let him do it. Throughout the industry there were very strict regulations against inflicting pain through Dreams. A sensation like that could have traumatic effects on someone lying peacefully at home in bed. There had been several successful lawsuits against Dreamers when the industry was just starting up, with the plaintiffs claiming mental and physical impairments because of such traumas. The result was that Dreamers walked on eggshells, approaching the subject of stress in Dreams with extreme caution.

When Wayne ran in a Dream, he never got winded; when he performed strenuous feats, he never got tired, never strained a muscle; and now, when the script called for him to be wounded, he could not suffer any real pain. He'd be fired immediately if he let anything like that go across the wires.

Instead, he had to handle the wound on an intellectual level. Instead of transmitting the searing agony that a real laser burn would cause, he had to send the cool, rational thought that his leg had been hit by enemy fire and that he was experiencing pain. His leg could not bear his full weight and he'd show all the aftereffects of the wound. The only ingredient missing would be the pain itself. To carry off the maneuver successfully was one mark of an expert, and Wayne was glad to have a chance to show off his abilities.

He screamed out in his "pain" just as Janet's laser snuffed out that one remaining guard. But

Wayne could not let himself be slowed down. There were only minutes left before that bomb was due to explode—and he, not Janet, was the demolitions expert. With the gate now up, there seemed nothing to stop him from reaching his goal. He couldn't stand up with his leg in this condition but, with the strength born of desperation, he began pulling himself along the ground by his elbows to reach the end of the corridor.

Two more guards seemed to appear out of nowhere on the other side of the gate. They'd remained hidden until now, hoping their comrades outside could handle this threat without giving away their own position. They were the last line of defense, and they were undoubtedly the best men the terrorists had.

Wayne could hear Janet behind him muttering muffled curses as her laser ran out of charge, but she refused to give up. With an accuracy that would make a major league pitcher jealous, she hurled her weapon straight at the gun hand of one of the remaining terrorists. Now it was her turn to slow down the time sense; the gun wafted in slow motion through the air toward its target. Would the guard have time to fire before it hit? No—for at the last possible moment Janet accelerated time once more. Her pistol hit the guard's with sufficient force to knock it out of his hand and across the room.

The other guard had his gun out too, but so did Wayne. Janet's diversionary throw had given him enough time to get a bead on the second guard. He fired, but at that same instant the guard moved slightly, and Wayne's shot only grazed the man's

hand. Although the guard was not taken out of the fight, the pain was enough to make him drop his weapon and shake his hand to rid it of the stinging sensation. It was all right for the *guard* to feel pain in this Dream; he was only a shadow figure created by Wayne and Janet, and there would be no viewers at home identifying with his feelings.

Wayne readied his pistol for another shot, only to discover that it, too, was out of charge. Disgusted, he chucked it aside and resumed his crawl down the hallway. Eight meters and two suicide-bent guards stood between him and the bomb. All he could do was crawl and hope that Janet could take care of his antagonists.

The guard who'd had his gun knocked away by Janet's accurate throw looked around to retrieve his weapon, but couldn't spot it in his first hasty scan of the hall. Realizing it was more important to stop Wayne on his mission, the terrorist abandoned his search and moved toward the crawling agent. At this point, Janet came to the rescue once more. Her exquisite body—modified in this Dream to make it more sensual than it was in reality, and propelled by legs ever so slightly stronger than could be expected of a human being in real life—leaped through the air, tackling the husky guard and knocking him to the ground. As she hit, she swung her legs sideways to trip up the other guard, who'd also started to move toward Wayne.

Wayne didn't have much opportunity to watch the fight that went on to his right; he was too busy concentrating on reaching the bomb before it could explode. Having read the script, he knew exactly

what was happening: Janet was having a fight on her hands, though the outcome was inescapable. The women identifying with her would have an exciting time before she finally subdued her two opponents. In the meantime, he had an atom bomb to disarm.

He kept the time sense nice and easy; there was no point to rushing the matter, and a little added suspense shouldn't hurt anybody. He kept careful tabs on Janet's progress out of the corner of one eye; this was her big scene, and he had no right to ruin it by arriving at the bomb too early, before she'd finished beating up her terrorists.

His timing was perfect; he reached his goal just as the last guard slumped to the floor unconscious. Janet was not even breathing hard.

Looking over at him, she asked, "How much time?"

Wayne looked at the timer on the side of the casing. "Three minutes," he replied. With exaggerated caution he leaned himself against the wall, pulled his miniaturized tool kit out of his pocket and began his work.

Calmly, refusing to allow himself to hurry, he unscrewed the four bolts holding the timer in place. Then slowly, ever so slowly, he pulled the timing device itself out of the bomb casing and set it gently down on the floor beside him. He let a few beads of perspiration gather on his forehead as an artistic touch, and he wiped his sweaty hands on his pants. The timer said two minutes.

There was a multicolored tangle of wires connecting the timer to the bomb itself—such a maze of them that it would surely confuse a layman, al-

though Wayne instilled in his viewers the confidence that he knew what he was doing. “I have to disconnect these in a particular sequence,” he told Janet—thereby informing the audience as well. “If I make any mistake, the bomb will go off immediately.” He made a big point to study the order of the wires for several long seconds. “Here goes nothing,” he said at last.

Pulling an electrodriver out of his small kit, he set about unfastening certain of the wires from the body of the timer. As he looked down at his hands, his fingers became longer and nimbler—another artistic effect, to make the hands seem more skilled. He separated the last of the wires from the timer with a minute to go, yet the bomb was still armed. He looked at it for a disbelieving moment, then said, “They must have an auxiliary on it.”

Time was precious now. He made the ticking sounds from the bomb louder, so loud they nearly echoed in the narrow hallway. Quickly he scanned the surface of the bomb, looking for the second fuse. “They’d have put it somewhere within easy reach,” he told his partner. “They’d want to turn it off themselves if we’d met their demands. It’s just a question of... ah, there it is.” He pointed to a small nodule on one side of the bomb.

Forty seconds. The timer was attached by only one screw. Taking his electrodriver once more in hand, he undid the fastening. Twenty seconds. Carefully he used his long, narrow fingers to pry the timer off its mooring and examine it. There was only one set of wires.

Ten seconds. There was no time to be dainty.

Wayne put down his electrodriver and took out his wire cutters. With two deft motions, the pair of wires was severed. The loud ticking came to a crashing stop with five seconds before detonation.

He slumped against the wall, breathing a deep sigh of relief. Janet sat down beside him, her own relief evident on her face. Reaching her arms around him, she kissed him lightly on the lips; the look in her eyes promised richer rewards to follow.

Then she stood up and helped him to his feet. He put his arm around her shoulders and leaned on her so he wouldn't have to put a strain on his "wounded" leg. The position forced his body into close proximity to hers, and he allowed his viewers—and himself—to enjoy that feeling.

"Let's see what the Chief says *now* about our being able to handle an explosive situation," Janet smiled, referring back to a line at the beginning of the Dream. Wayne smiled along with her as they hobbled together down the corridor.

Around them, the walls began fading to blackness. The Dream was over; it was time to return to real life.