



**In the Control Tower**  
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# Chapter 1

Dewforth had almost most lost the habit of looking from windows. The train which took him to the city every morning passed through a country in the terminal stages of a long war of self-destruction. Whatever had been burned, botched, poisoned or exhausted in that struggle had been filled along the right-of-way, among drifts of soot and ground-mists of sulphurous smoke and chemical flatulence, to form a long tedious mural—a parody of cloud-borne Asiatic hills, precipitous and always so close to the tracks that their tops could not be seen.

This was almost merciful, considering what had been done to the sky. When the train did not sneak between hills of slag, cinders, rubbish, garbage, dross and the bloody brown carrion of broken machinery, it shot like a bolt in the groove of an arbolest between unbroken barriers of advertising or through deep concrete troughs and roaring tunnels full of grimy light and grubby air.

There was one inconsistency in this scheme of things: Just as the train emerged from a deep valley of slag-hills and swung into a long curve, passengers on the left side had a panoramic view of the city—a frozen scene of battle between geometrical monsters, made remote and obscure by the dust of a thousand thousand merely human struggles, too small to be visible from the crusty windows of the train by the merely human eye. They had about one second in which to absorb this vision of corporate purpose. Then they were plunging into a final stretch of tunnel to the center of the city itself, where no surface was ever more than fifteen paces away and where there were no horizons at all.

Dewforth was excited by this view even though it reached him in a fragmentary and subliminal way. Day after day he told himself that he would have all his faculties at the ready before the train swung into the curve. But morning after morning he was still emerging from the stale fumes of the preceding night's beer, or he allowed himself to be hypnotized by the sound of the wheels or fascinated by the jiggling of another passenger's earlobe at that critical moment. The train had always entered the clangorous colon of the city before this resolve could crystallize in his

mind, and he was left with an impression which lay somewhere in the scale of reality between the after-image of a light bulb and the morning memory of a fever-dream. He could never have described the scene except in loose generalities about buildings of contrasting height and unemphatic color.

The single memorable feature of the panorama, looming above the rest, was not even a building. It eluded all familiar categories. It was, like the other components of the picture, rectangular; but it was a displaced rectangle. A shining thread of morning sky could be seen beneath it. It was only logical to suppose that it stood on legs of some kind—a complicated process of girders. The upper part appeared to be made of corrugated metal, but, as with the matter of the legs, it was impossible to separate what was actually seen and what was merely inferred. The only other structures Dewforth had seen which resembled it at all were water towers and shipyard cranes, but these had been mere toys compared with the thing that hovered over the center of the city.

Its purpose could not be guessed, but what disturbed Dewforth more was the fact that he could not be sure that it existed. He was a precision draftsman, more or less resigned to deteriorating eyesight, and his usual abstracted state of mind during that segment of his day had also to be considered. He hoped that someone else would mention the structure. Once—only once—a man sitting on the opposite seat had made a comment which could have applied to it. "It turned," he said, just as the tunnel swallowed the train.

Dewforth would have liked to ask the other passenger what he had meant. Had he seen the same thing? Had he seen anything at all? And what had he meant by "turned"?

But he had not asked. The other had been not merely forbidding, not merely repugnant, but alternately forbidding and repugnant—in daylight, an impeccable burgher sitting tall and righteous under a tall hat; in tunnels, a hunchbacked gargoyle picking its nose in the fickle darkness.

If Dewforth had been the only passenger on the train, or indeed the last man in the world, he could not have been more alone with his wonder. You did not ask whimsical questions of strangers nowadays. You did not ask many questions of friends. All uncertainties incubated in private darkness; they lived and grew and even put forth new appendages.

Not a building. Not a water tank. Not a crane. Perhaps it was only an illusion.

Illusion or not, it wanted a name so that it might be at least catalogued in his own mind. Therefore, on a morning since forgotten and for reasons never closely examined, he decided to call it The Control Tower.

## Chapter 2

There was an unholy Friday restlessness upon Dewforth. To make matters worse, it was the last Friday in March. Logically, perhaps, this should not have made any difference because Dewforth worked in one of a number of identical windowless rooms in a building from which all natural rhythms had been rigorously excluded. From skylights high in the ceilings of the drafting rooms came a light which had been pasteurized and was timeless. It could have been artificial.

His work provided no refuge for his thought. It was demanding, but only mechanically so. Strictly speaking, he did not know what he was doing. No one did, apparently. He did not have the satisfaction of knowing that what he did was real. He filled large sheets of plastic with tracings of intricate, interconnected schematic hieroglyphs. But he knew that in another place a template would be laid over his work. An irregular portion like a piece of a jigsaw puzzle would be cut out of it and the rest, perhaps more than half of his work, would be destroyed.

It was even possible that all of it was destroyed.

Dewforth worked for a firm which made components. Of what, no one said, no one asked. *Components, Inc.*, the firm was called. He knew that the finished products were small, heavy and very complicated. Their names were mute combinations of letters and numbers, joined by hyphens or separated by virgules. Some said that these components performed no functions. Others said that they worked, but their operations corresponded to no known human need. It was known that some of the finished products themselves were destroyed. Some maintained that they were dissolved in vats of hydrofluoric acid. Others argued that they were encased in cement, then taken out to sea in speedboats on moonless nights and jettisoned. The favorite rumor was that the entire firm was a decoy to bewilder agents of foreign powers and pre-empt their espionage efforts. There was neither proof of this nor evidence to the contrary.

The penalty for circulating this last rumor was immediate dismissal with prejudice.

In another place, another time, Dewforth might have spread the burden of his mood by confiding in other workers, but not under the circumstances so painstakingly arranged by *Components, Inc.* in the interest of what was called *The Inter-loathing Index*, or I.I. It was an axiom of modern industry that a high I.I. meant high productivity and also tighter security. The latter was as much the measure of the importance of an industry as what it made or how much. That there was design in the egg-box compartmentation of workspaces, for example, was obvious enough. Less overt were the lengths to which Personnel had gone to discourage the exchange of information, or confidences, among employees.

Under the guise of aptitude testing, the psychologists had been able to select and organize teams consisting entirely of mutually incompatible individuals. So well had they succeeded that most workers could barely stand the sight of one another, and so were driven back upon themselves and their work. Only by practicing an almost egg-like self-containment could a draftsman or other worker hope to get through the day without open conflict and disaster.

Latent antipathies among workers were further intensified by means of the Annual Proficiency Competitions. At the conclusion of these tests all employees save two were given Proficiency Stars. Of the remaining two, one was invariably a person who had shown signs of becoming too popular among his fellows. He was given a Leadership Star, and because an affable man was usually less rather than more efficient than the rest, this made of him a lonely little air-bubble in a sea of resentment.

The second of the two workers was always discharged. Thus a dash of anxiety was added to the proceedings.

The visible manifestations of high I.I. were hectic color, a characteristic ferocity of eye and throbbing jaw-hinges. Often the jaw-hinges of an entire team would be pulsating at once, sometimes even in unison. This spectacle emanated an overwhelming feeling of earnestness and purpose. Executives were fond of pointing out this phenomenon to visiting dignitaries. "Observe their jaw-hinges," they would say.

Another factor which isolated employees from one another was the peculiarly virulent form of halitosis which afflicted all workers without exception. The company cafeteria was the source of this malady.

Thus, if Dewforth had been the only employee in that vast complex of buildings, or in the world, he could not have been restless. Add to this the fact that it had been his misfortune to win the Leadership Star in the Proficiency Competitions only three days earlier. He did not have to

trace the bitter stream of his mood any farther back than that to find the bile-source.

The object of the contest had been to draw a single line 28-5/8 inches long and 1/15,000 of an inch thick, a feat which is starkly simple in conception but only theoretically feasible. The draftsmen had spent hours preparing the surfaces of paper, straining ink through filters, honing drawing pens with emery and polishing them with rouge, drawing practice lines and scrutinizing them with powerful bench microscopes. They did Balinese finger exercises, Chinese body coordination exercises, Hindu breathing exercises and Tibetan spiritual calisthenics to dispel their incipient shakes. When the great moment came, a solemn little group of executives entered the drafting room and stood about in attitudes of grave ceremonial courtesy.

The draftsmen then drew their lines.

When it was over, the judges examined and graded the lines and the scores were announced by Mr. Shrank, the foreman. The better scores prompted little flutters of restrained applause from the executives. This moist and muted sound had reminded Dewforth of a hippopotamus venting its wind under water, and in a moment of thoughtless exhilaration he had even thought of sharing this bizarre notion with his wife. He never did so, as it happened.

Why had he ever told his wife about that wretched Leadership Star? Her laughter persisted through his dreams, or through his dream. He only had one. In this dream she was always a massive machine which ingested songbirds between steel rollers and stamped them into pipe-flange gaskets at a rate of one hundred and twenty per minute.

And the prize-winning line he had drawn—it revealed its true nature in the perspective of days. There was no mistaking what it was. It was The Abyss. It could widen and it could engulf. How much light would a Leadership Star cast in that bottomless inkiness?

Acute restless had the effect of sending Dewforth frequently to the lavatory, not so much for physiological reasons as because there was no other place to go and he had to go somewhere when the white walls of the drafting room threatened to crush him. He went as often as he thought he could without attracting the attention of Mr. Shrank or eliciting ponderous jocosities from the other workers. After several visits, however, he did begin to question himself. What drew him to that bleak refuge again and again? He was not aware of bladder irritation. He had no infantile obsession about such facilities. Was he driven by an aggregation

of petty forces, each too small to make sense by itself? Or was there one reason hiding behind a cloud of small rationalizations? There was a difference in the air in the lavatory, and in the sound—the undifferentiated background sound which came from nowhere. Nowhere?

It came through a window.

He had been staring at a window—probably the only one in the building—and it had failed to register on his mind at the time because he had not expected it to be there. It was not part of the habitual pattern. He had seen a window. He had, moreover, looked through a window. What had he seen? He thought about this, and at the same time he thought about being sick—administratively sick. He succeeded in working up a palpable fever and a windy yawning beneath the diaphragm. Before taking any action he would have to confirm what he had seen through the window of the lavatory.

On his last trip to the lavatory he climbed up onto the slippery washbasin and looked through the high window. His position there would be impossible to explain, of course, if anyone should come in. He was past caring about that. The unpasteurized air made him a little drunk and the sound—the immense distant sighing groan like a giant's whisper—filled his brain. It made him want to expand to meet it somehow.

Only one immense skeleton foot was visible, but there was no question about exactly what it was.

No conventional structure would curve upward in that way. There was no point of reference by which to determine how far away it was, and the air was blue with haze, giving everything an appearance of remoteness and of unreality. He had never seen the city from that angle before, but if what he saw was what he thought it was, how could it have been so close without his knowing about it before this time? It was a thing which belonged to vast distances—spatial distances and other kinds of distance as well. Now it was close, or he was closer to it than he had ever imagined he would be in his life.

It was accessible.

Dewforth left at half past three when the somnolence of afternoon was heaviest on the heads of the other draftsmen. He did not speak to Mr. Shrank about it. He did not clear with Miss Plock in the dispensary, nor with Mr. Fert in Personnel, nor with Miss Yurt in Wage Readjustment, nor with Miss Bort in Sick Leave Subdivision, nor with Miss Vibe in Special Problems, nor with Mr. Pfister in Sick Claims, nor with Miss Grope in Employee Grievances, nor with Miss Rupnick in Company Grievances, nor with Miss Guggward in Allowance Reductions, nor with Mr.

Droon in Privilege Curtailment, nor with Miss Tremulo in Psychological Counseling, nor with Dr. Schreck in Spiritual Aid Subdiv.

He did not even trouble to see Miss Nosemilker who kept the time book.

He just left.

# Chapter 3

"Nobody goes up there," said the hulking oyster-eyed man in the burlap overcoat.

The bum's eyes cleared long enough for him to peer into Dewforth's eyes in order to see if his madness was worth sharing, then they filmed over again as he decided that it was not.

Dewforth crowded past him and walked on. He was making real progress. He had at last found someone who acknowledged that there was something up there above eye-level. The others—old lost children, figures of scab and grime—had been unaware of anything but inner cavities of craving and fear above the sidewalk firmament of trodden gum disks, sputum stars and the ends of twice-smoked cigarettes.

He could not have lost sight of the Control Tower. He had never realized what streets were. Before that time he had known a single well policed block between the station and his place of work. He still thought of streets as more or less open strips along which people moved, north or south, east or west, purposefully from Point A to Point B with perhaps one right-angle turn, two at the most, pausing only to tip hats or look into shop windows. Now it developed that streets were sewers, battlegrounds, lairs, abattoirs, cesspools, lazarettes, midways of deformity and brawling markets where nightmares and spirochetes were sold.

The city had not less than three dimensions. He had not been fully prepared for the implications of this, either. Existence in three dimensions does not necessarily mean three-dimensional vision. The sky was not visible through the maze of girders, stairways and catwalks overhead. Dewforth tried to orient himself by the direction of shadows, but this was misleading. It was the heart of the shadow district, and the play of shadows was the order of things. The rules were the rules of phantoms. Flesh lived there in subjection. Long miscegenation with shadow had made phantoms of them all and endowed all shadows with the menace of the real. Everything was equivocal as hell.

Dewforth wandered in a cavern without walls. He saw bulky overcoats with defeated hats or defeated heads; long-legged dwarfs in black

leather jackets; willowy chorus-boys with platinum ringlets, waiting in their niches for the gift of violence; scuttling trolls with horse-blanket jackets and alpine hats; deposed patriarchs under the small shelter of black derbies, hiding from persecution behind the Spanish moss of consolidated beards; headless things and thingless heads, importuning, threatening, watching or just standing there, those that were able.

In his search for a way out of the darkness, he was obliged to turn back time and again. If gangs of shadows fought with knives at the end of a street which had at first looked promising, what business had shadows cursing or screaming or bleeding? If the madman who enjoined the mob to fight in the service of nothingness was only a mouse dancing on a summit of garbage, why did they cheer? At the end of still another street, a mass rape may not have been in progress; the participants may not have waited sullenly in a long line; a macrocephalic gnome in a plaid suit may not actually have moved up and down the line selling tickets at a reduced rate and explaining that the outrage had been in progress since the preceding Christmas Eve: but why was the unreality so consistent?

And if no one was in fact being ravaged, why did everyone look as though they had been?

All these spectacles tested Dewforth's courage, but they dimmed his resolve not at all. At last he found a deserted street. He followed it and he was rewarded with encouraging signs. There was more birdlime underfoot, and the inhuman yammering of the streets was replaced with echoing silence, and that silence was invaded by the sound—the voice of the colossus, remote and terrible.

Dewforth asked directions again, this time of a pear-shaped figure which may or may not have had legs and which sat in the mouth of an iron cave and smoked what appeared to be a twist of hemp. "Where... ." Dewforth began.

"Nobody goes up there," the hemp-smoker answered without looking up at him.

"Where do they come down, then," asked Dewforth, trying a new approach but with little hope. There was a long pause. The pear-shaped man didn't have arms either, Dewforth noticed. Hands, but no arms.

"Well now, some got it, some ain't," he said.

"How's that?" asked Dewforth. The pear blew out a cloud of smoke, sulphurous, with viscous strings through it. "I knowed a guy caught it from a drinking glass once."

This dialogue might have gone on much longer if Dewforth had not just then noticed that his noninformer was sitting on the bottom step of a long, dark stairway which led up and up into a jungle of lacy girders and shadows above them.

He did not bother kicking the pear-shaped man. He stepped over him and ran up the stairs two at a time. His footsteps rang on the iron stairs and carried through the structure. It sounded like the bells of a sunken cathedral ringing in the tide.

On the second level there was more light and more air. It was colder. There were loiterers on the second level too, but these were far from menacing. They clung to things and pressed themselves against things, and they stared with unfocused eyes at something which had been there before but was not there now. These men seemed to be wearing greasy fezzes and dark, baggy long underwear with buttons and vestigial lapels. As he approached them, Dewforth saw that the fezzes were actually felt hats with the brims atrophied or rotted away, and the funereal long-johns were the weatherbeaten remains of those suits which are designed for Young Men On The Way Up. As though by tacit agreement of long standing, these men did not look directly at Dewforth as he passed, nor he at them.

There was no difficulty about finding a stairway to the next level, but there was a rusty chain across the entrance.

Dewforth's foot caught in this chain as he stepped over it, and it shattered like a chain of stale pretzels. There were no more people beyond the second level—none that could be seen.

He soon lost count of levels. Stairs became narrower and more heavily encrusted with birdlime and rust as he ascended. In some places there were long sweeping ramps which led to blind sacs or reached out unsupported into space, and he was forced to retrace his steps. At no time did he look down, even when it was possible. There were usually high barriers along the platforms and ramps. These were covered with layers of old advertising posters which peeled and were torn by the wind, revealing still more ancient posters underneath. They seemed to have grown there by themselves like lichen. It seemed entirely reasonable to Dewforth that the writing on the older posters underneath was runic or demotic and the faces were ochre-stained skulls, but his impulse was to hurry past and not study them too closely.

At last he found a long steep ladder running up the outside of one of the legs of the Control Tower. Only huge slowly circling birds and low-

flying clouds came between him and the underside of the control house at the top of the structure. Before beginning the climb he admonished himself not to look down and not to ponder what he was doing. In order to keep climbing, however, he had to keep admonishing himself, thereby only reminding himself to look down and to ponder, to the detriment of his equilibrium and confidence. Was it vertigo, or did the ladder or the Tower itself sway in the singing wind? Who was to say that the earth itself did not heave like fermenting mash? Was any object inherently more solid than any other object? What was "stability"?

When he looked down at the city he could not pick out the building in which he had worked. There was nothing in any feature of the landscape. Nothing. If his position, clinging to a girder high above the city, made no sense, it did not make less sense than the position of a man, or a Dewforth, sitting in a blind cell among thousands of other blind cells down there, drawing tiny lines. Nothing bound him to the drafting room nor even to the Dewforth of the drafting room—not so much as a spider web or a shaft of light. The light pointed to itself. The wind got under his shirt and chilled his navel, a poignant reminder of disconnectedness.

An eagle glided close and screamed at him. It was like the laughter of his wife. He resumed his climb, looking down no more.

The last few yards of the climb were the worst. Some bolts holding the ladder in place were shapeless little masses of rust. The eleventh rung from the top broke under his weight, and for the last ten steps he had to lighten his body by means of a technique of autosuggestion and will-projection which he invented on the spot, demonstrating what could be done under pressure of extreme necessity. He could see above his head a tiny balcony not more than a yard square, at which the ladder terminated. The floor of this balcony appeared to be made of long, weather-beaten cigars which reason told him were badly corroded iron bars. Reason also told him that there would be a door there.

He could not see a door through the skeleton floor of the balcony, but the idea that there would not be a door there was, under the circumstances, insupportable. There would be a door, he told himself as he made his way upwards by means of levitation and the most tentative of steps. It would probably have an inhospitable sign on it—NO TRESPASSING, AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY, DANGER or perhaps HIGH VOLTAGE. It might prove to be locked. If so, he would pound on it until some one opened it, he decided.

There was even an outside possibility that no one would be inside. He had never considered that possibility before that time. He decided that it was not time to consider it now.

When Dewforth heaved himself up onto the small projecting platform he felt the ladder give under his feet. It was not just another rung. He saw the entire ladder go curling away into the emptiness like a huge broken spring. Then he lay on the platform face down with his eyes closed, fingers clutching the sill of the door, for a long time.

New sounds invaded his personal darkness as he lay there. He heard bells, buzzers, klaxons, whistles and slamming relays. There were voices from loudspeakers—imperious and hopeless, angry and feeble, impassioned and monotonous, arrogant and anguished—in a synthetic language made up of odd phonemes long since discarded from a thousand other languages. When he looked up he saw no door but only a rectangle of darkness with erratic flashes of colored light.

Having no choice, he entered on his hands and knees.

## Chapter 4

Dewforth wandered in a labyrinth of control panels which reached almost to the ceiling, but did not entirely shut out the light. This light was like skimmed milk diffused in shadow. He reasoned that it came from windows, but when he tried to remember whether the control cab had windows he could not be sure. He had no visual image of windows seen from the outside, but he had supposed that such an edifice would hardly be blind. Somewhere beyond this maze of control panels, he also reasoned, there must be an area like the bridge of an enormous ship where the clamor of the bells, buzzers, klaxons and whistles and the silent warnings and importunings of dials, gauges, colored lights, ticker-tapes which spewed from metal mouths, the palsied styles which scribbled on creeping scrolls, were somehow collated and made meaningful, where the yammering loudspeakers could be answered, and where the operators could look out and down and see what they were doing.

Where were the operators?

The noise was deafening. Unlike the noise of machinery in a factory it was not homogeneous. Each sound was intended to attract attention and to evoke a certain response, but what response and from whom? Long levers projecting from the steel deck wagged back and forth spastically like the legs of monstrous insects struggling on their backs. Several times Dewforth was temporarily blinded by an explosion of blue light as a fuse blew or something short-circuited among the rows of knife-switches and rheostats on the panels. One would never really get used to the sporadic sound or to the lights. There was no knowable pattern about them—about what they did or said. When he closed his eyes and tried to compose himself the words *Out of Control* flashed red against the back of his eyelids, but he told himself that this was foolish. How was one to adjudge a situation to be *Out of Control* when one did not know what constituted control, over what, or by whom? Furthermore, he rebuked himself, if the panels—never mind how many or how forbidding—with their lights, bells, buzzers, switches, relays, dials, gauges, styles, tapes,

pointers, rheostats and buttons had any meaning, and in fact if the Tower itself had any meaning at all, that meaning was *Control*. How arrogant it had been of him to imagine, even briefly, that because he—a green intruder in that high place—had not immediately comprehended what it was all about, the situation must be out of control. *Absurd!*

There were hundreds—perhaps thousands—of little labels attached to the control panels, presumably indicating the functions of the buttons, switches and other controls. Dewforth leaned close and studied these, but found only mute combinations of letters and numbers, joined by hyphens or separated by virgules... . They made him feel somewhat more fragile, more round-shouldered and colder, but he resisted despair. It was getting a little darker, though. The skimmed-milk light above him was taking on a bluish tint. He had no way of knowing how long he had wandered among the control panels. His time-sense had always been dependent upon clocks and bells—and upon the arrivals and departures of trains.

It was a sound which finally led Dewforth out of the maze of control panels.

It was not a louder sound, not more emphatic, imperative or clear than the others; it was formless, feeble and ineffably pathetic. It was its utter incongruity which reached Dewforth through the robotic clamor, and which touched him ... a mewling, as of a kitten trapped in a closet.

It came, as he discovered, from The Operator.

He was quite alone among his levers, wheels, switches, buttons, cranks, gauges, lights, bells, buzzers, horns, ticker-tapes, creeping scrolls, barking loudspeakers and cryptic dials. Dewforth saw him sharply silhouetted against a long window through which bluish-gray light poured but through which nothing could be clearly seen from where he stood. The Operator sat on a high, one-legged stool. His head was drawn into his shoulders, which were crumpled things of birdlike bones. His head was bald on top but the fringe was long and wild. He had big simian ears set at right angles to his head and the light shone through them, not pink but yellowish. There was an aureole of fine hairs about them which gave them the appearance of angel's wings. With enlarged hands at the ends of almost fleshless arms he clutched at the knobs of rheostats and the cranks of transformers, hesitantly, spasmodically, and without ever quite reaching anything. Each time he withdrew his hands quickly as though he had been on the point of touching something very hot. His

arms might have been elongated by a lifetime of such aborted movement.

Just as Dewforth began to wonder how his sudden appearance there would affect the old man, feeble and distraught as he already was, the Operator whirled on his stool and stared at Dewforth with eyes so round, so huge and so terrified that the rest of his face was not noticeable at all.

He shouted something that sounded like "*Huzzah!*" but almost certainly was not, then stiffened, then fell to the steel deck with no more fuss than a bag of corn-husks would have made, and died.

One would think that a windowed control cab or wheelhouse atop the loftiest structure in a city, or in an entire landscape, would afford a man an Olympian view of the world below, and of its people and their activities.

Dewforth must have believed this at one time, but he found that it was not so. The entire lower portion of the windows was covered with thin pages of typescript, mostly yellowed, dusty and curled at the edges—orders, instructions, directives, memoranda, all *Urgent, For Immediate Action, Important, Priority, On No Account, or At All Costs.*

The texts of these orders, instructions, directives or memoranda consisted of mute combinations of letters and numbers, joined by hyphens or separated by virgules.

Through the upper portion of the windows Dewforth could just make out the horizon and a narrow strip of darkening sky, which were silent and which demanded nothing of him. Amid the continuing clamor of all the signal devices, he tried to recapture the last utterance of the Operator—the former Operator.

"*Huzzah!*" was out of the question. "*Who's there?*" or "*Who's that?*" were more likely, but, as he thought of it, weren't "*Whose what?*", "*What's where?*", "*Where's what?*" or even "*Who's where?*" just as likely?

Of these possible last words, "*Who's where?*" echoed most persistently in his memory.

Dewforth might have torn away the pages of meaningless orders and looked down upon lights as darkness fell, but he did not.

Opaque as they were in form and content alike, there was something reassuringly familiar in the lines of inane symbols. And they were all that stood between him and the approaching tidal wave of night, and beyond the night, the winter with its storms.

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