



## **Decision**

Robinson, Frank M.

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### **About Robinson:**

Frank M. Robinson (born August 9, 1926) is an American science fiction and techno-thriller writer. Robinson was born in Chicago, Illinois. The son of a check forger, Frank started out working as a copy boy for International Service in his teens and then became an office boy for Ziff-Davis. He was drafted into the Navy for World War II, and when his tour was over went to college where he majored in physics. Then, according to his official website, he could find no work as a writer, and wound up back in the Navy to serve in Korea, where he managed to keep writing, read a lot, and was published in the magazine *Astounding*. After the Navy he went to graduate school in journalism, then worked for a Chicago-based Sunday supplement. Soon after he switched to *Science Digest*, where he worked from 1956-1959. From there, he moved into men's magazines: *Rogue* (1959-65) and *Cavalier* (1965-66). In 1969 *Playboy* asked him to take over the *Playboy Advisor* column. He remained with *Playboy* until 1973, when he left to write full time. After moving to San Francisco in the 1970s, Robinson, who is gay, was a speechwriter for gay politician Harvey Milk; he also has a small role in the film *Milk*. As of 2008, he is the author of 16 books, the editor of two others, and has penned numerous articles. Three of his novels have been made into movies. *The Power* (1956) was a supernatural science fiction and government conspiracy novel about people with superhuman skills, filmed in 1968 as *The Power*. The technothriller *The Glass Inferno* was combined with Richard Martin Stern's *The Tower* to produce the 1974 movie *The Towering Inferno*. *The Gold Crew* co-written with Thomas N. Scortia, was a tense nuclear threat thriller and was filmed as an NBC miniseries re-titled *The Fifth Missile*. Besides *The Glass Inferno* and *The Gold Crew* he collaborated on several other works with fellow author Thomas N. Scortia, including *The Prometheus Crisis*, *The Nightmare Factor* and *Blow-Out*. More recent works include *The Dark Beyond the Stars*, and an updated version of *The Power* (2000) which closely followed *Waiting* (1999), a novel with similar themes to *The Power*. His newest novel is a medical thriller about organ theft called *The Donor*.

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**Transcriber's Note:**

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The battle alarm caught him in the middle of a dream, a dream that took place in a white house in a small town in Ohio, when both he and Alice had been very young and the grown adults he now called his children had really been little more than babies.

He rolled out of his bed immediately on hearing the gong, as any good sailor would, and slipped into his pants and shoes and felt around the bulkhead for his life jacket. He slipped into it and tightened the buckles, then put on his cap with the captain's insignia.

He opened the hatch and stepped out into the passageway, blinking for a moment in the unaccustomed light and trying to shake away the remnants of his dream. Officers were boiling up the passageway and up the ladder, some eager ensigns dressed only in their shorts and their life jackets. It was more wise than funny, he thought slowly. Ships had gone down in a matter of seconds and anybody who spent precious moments looking for his pants or his wallet never got out.

Harry Davis, the Exec, a portly man in his fifties, burst out of his state-room, still trying to shake the sleep from gummy lids.

The Captain shook his head, trying to alert his mind to the point where it could make sensible evaluations, and started up the corridor.

"Any idea what it is, Harry?"

Davis shook his head. "Not unless it's what we've been expecting."

What we've been expecting. The Captain grasped the iron piping that served for railings and jogged up the ladder. Fifty miles north, lolling in the North Sea and holding maneuvers, was the *Josef Dzugashvili*, a hundred thousand tons of the finest aircraft carrier the Asiatic Combine had produced, carrying close to a hundred Mig-72's and perhaps half a dozen light bombers.

The *Josef* had been operating there for nearly a week. The *Oahu* had been detached from the Atlantic Fleet only a few days ago, to combat the possible threat. Maybe the ships were only acting as stake-outs for the politicians, the Captain thought slowly. The tinder waiting for the spark. And it wouldn't take much.

A curious pilot who might venture too close, a gunner with a nervous temperament ...

And now, maybe, this was it. It had to come some day. You couldn't turn the other cheek forever. And he, for one, was glad. He had spent almost all his life waiting for this. A chance to get even ...

Davis opened the hatch to the wheelhouse and the Captain slipped in, closing it tight behind him. It was pitch black and it took his eyes a few moments to adjust to it. When they had, he could make out the

shadowed forms of the OD, the first class quartermaster at the wheel, and the radarman hunched over the repeater, the scope a phosphorescent blur in the darkness.

The ports were open in violation of GQ—it was a hot summer night—and the slight breeze that blew off the swelling sea smelled clean and cool. It was the only kind of air for a man to breathe, the Captain mused abstractly.

He glanced sharply through the ports. There was nothing that bulked on the dark horizon, and so far as he could tell, all the stars were fixed—there were none of the tell-tale flashes of jet exhausts.

He walked over to where the OD stood by the radar scope, seemingly fascinated by the picture on it. McCandless had the watch, a young lieutenant of not more than twenty-five but one with good sense and sound judgment nonetheless. A man who wasn't prone to panic, the Captain thought.

"What's the situation, Lieutenant?"

McCandless' voice was nervous. "I'm not exactly sure, sir. Not ... yet."

A brief regret at an interrupted dream of Ohio flickered in the back of the Captain's mind.

"What do you mean, you're not sure?" His voice was a little sharper than he intended, a little more querulous than he had meant it to be. It was, he thought, the voice of an old man, annoyed at having his sleep disturbed.

*Attention Captain United States Vessel Oahu:*

*Help urgently requested. If aid not granted immediately, all is lost.*

*Constantin Simenovich,*

*Captain, People's Warship Josef Dzugashvili.*

He had a brief mental picture of a young man lying in the shambles of Berlin calling out the same words. And what had he received?

He buried the thought.

The detached viewpoint. Political systems evolved, he thought, they never remained the same. The French Revolution had spawned a thousand human monsters and the blood had run in the streets. But out of it all had come a democratic nation. And a thousand years from now, what would the Combine be? A turn of the wheel and perhaps it would be a peace-loving democracy while the United States would be the abattoir of human hopes. Who could tell? A thousand years from now the present bloodbaths and tortures and mass deaths would be history.

But if the aliens won you ran the chance of there being no history at all.

The wheelhouse was silent. The Captain could feel a dozen pairs of eyes watching him, waiting for his decision. Outside the ports, on the far horizon, there came a steady, golden pulsing.

He looked up at McCandless and Davis. McCandless was young, too inexperienced to realize that situations where today's enemies are tomorrow's friends are the order of the day and not the exception. You adjusted to it or you became bitter. Davis, the gutless bastard, had adjusted to it. He was probably already to make the switch, to go back to drinking toasts in vodka.

The detached viewpoint.

"Send up the jets," the Captain said slowly. "And send a message to the Captain of the *Josef*, telling him we'll render all the assistance that we can."

The wheelhouse broke into a flurry of activity and a moment later he could hear the sounds of the jets taking off the flight deck. He walked out on the bridge deck and leaned on the railing, staring at the horizon where the alien ship and the *Josef* were fighting it out. And where planes from the *Oahu* would shortly be helping the *Josef*.

*But I still hate them, he thought. I hate their goddamned souls!*

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