"The Game"

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION:

Origin Of "The Game" ..................................................... Pg. 1
Finding The Theme ......................................................... Pg. 1
The Characters ............................................................... Pg. 10
The Point Of View .......................................................... Pg. 16
Narration ................................................................. Pg. 18
Summary Of The Plot ..................................................... Pg. 18
The Setting ................................................................. Pg. 21
The Symbols ................................................................. Pg. 23
Irony ................................................................. Pg. 27
The Theme Of "The Game" ................................................ Pg. 29

"The Game" ................................................................. Pg. 33

Reference Notes ............................................................. Pg. A
Bibliography ............................................................... Pg. B
Origin Of "The Game"

Henry James once said a writer should "write from experience and experience only." From this statement one can assume, then, that "The Game" was inspired by experience or some incident of experience. Actually, the story came from two kinds of experience: dream life and real life. The geography for the story came, for the most part, from a dream I had during the summer of 1975. Although the remembered portion of the dream consisted of only one scene in a single room, this proved to be an impetus sufficient for the creation of the rest of the geography. While dream experience was useful in creating the setting, real life experience provided the major theme. In this case, real life experience consisted of my general impressions of the state of the country at the time the story was written. So, the two kinds of experience combined together were instrumental in the creation of "The Game."

Finding The Theme

The U.S. today is experiencing a great many problems. A list of these would have to include the high crime rate, the energy crisis, inflation, and recession, among others. While casting about for a theme for the story, I came across three general reasons for many of the problems in this country today. All three are interrelated to each other, and considered together, they spell out the general theme of decadence, which has become a major theme of "The Game."

One of the reasons for the great number of problems in the
U.S. is the general lack of or, at best, the weak moral resolve of the nation as a whole. This lack of moral resolve colors the situation in the U.S. and extends into the government's handling of foreign policy throughout the world.

By moral resolve I mean the determination of the country to do what the situation calls for despite foreign or domestic criticism. Basically, weak moral resolve is, in my opinion, the inability to maintain a strong discipline and take the correct action as regards to some pressing situation.

The problem with this definition is in determining what "correct action" means. I would define "correct action" as the method for finding a solution acceptable to all sides of a problem. The only way to find an acceptable solution to a problem is to sit down and examine it from all angles. This examination would have to be as objective as possible. In a sense, this is the way foreign policy is supposed to work. A problem or goal is examined and a decision is made that ideally takes into account all sides of the situation. Each side must be compromised in terms of the other sides.

Unfortunately, in the years after WWII, the U.S. has been negligent in looking at all sides of a problem. Action taken on crises since WWII has tended to stress one side of a possible solution and, thus, has usually resulted in no solution. For example, the fall of Eastern Europe after WWII came about because of U.S. reluctance to get involved in a war with the Russians. However, because of this decision, all of the peoples of Eastern Europe fell under the sway of the Soviet Union, with Russia acquiring a vast sum of territory, and the U.S. still got involved
in a war with the Russians. Granted, this "cold war" was not a direct military confrontation which the U.S. feared at that time, but still it should be regarded as a war.

And so it would seem that because of a weak moral resolve or determination to meet and deal effectively with a threat, the U.S. completely mismanaged the Eastern Europe problem.

In the years that followed the fall of Eastern Europe, the U.S. again demonstrated little resolve in its handling of the crises in foreign affairs. For instance, in Korea we fought a war of limited determination. We decided beforehand that we were not going to fight for a victory. Fortunately for South Korea, our determination to fight at all lasted long enough to obtain a truce. But what on the surface appears to be something of a victory of American determination looks like something else when we take a closer look. The threat of war from North Korea still exists. We fought in Korea because the North Koreans made war in South Korea. So, the real heart of the problem, namely that North Korea wanted to take over South Korea, still exists. On the other hand, South Korea still exists too. So the best that can be said for the Korean situation is that we exhibited some determination, but not enough to bring a lasting solution to the basic problem.

After Korea, things really go downhill as far as American determination in foreign policy is concerned. In the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, we did nothing except stand by and watch. In the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, it is true that we made a determined stand -- for awhile. But we let the Russians pull out their missiles, which were really only symbols of defiance of
American power, without exacting a real Russian sacrifice. We did no more than blunt a Russian advance at one point; we did nothing to stop it.

In the 1960's there came the Vietnam debacle. Vietnam was probably the best example of American non-determination. In the early 1960's, we decided to save Vietnam from the threat of Communism. But in the early 1970's we gave it over. What started with the sacrifice of many American lives, the spending of great quantities of money, and numerous years of involvement ended with the Communists routing South Vietnam while we retreated, leaving behind millions of helpless people and billions of dollars in equipment. The evacuation of thousands of South Vietnamese was our only positive act in possibly the most pitiful episode in the history of this country.

After Vietnam there came, in short order, the Arab Oil Crisis. In this situation we let a group of nations tell us what to do without even making a determined stand of resistance. We meekly obeyed and paid for our meekness. The Europeans did the same thing, but they had an excuse. Their complete dependence on the Arab oil, plus their lack of sufficient force to take effective action against the Arabs, led to their policy. But the U.S. is much more self-sufficient and has more effective power to be able to take action against the Arabs. This is not to say that the U.S. should have invaded and taken over the oil fields. But instead of merely paying the prices and complaining about them, the U.S. could have searched for ways to force the Arabs to lower their prices. But instead the U.S. did nothing.

With U.S. determination melting away to seemingly nothing,
the Soviet Union took advantage to expand its influence all over the world. The U.S., with its lack of determination, has accomplished very little. Today, the U.S. has another chance in Angola to demonstrate some determination. But preliminary indications do not look too promising.

While foreign policy suffers from a lack of moral resolve, domestic policies have not been much better. American internal affairs seem to suffer from a similar lack of moral drive.

A growing number of Americans are now debating the wisdom of the space program. As with the SST and the moon shot, Americans seem to be debating whether advancement in science and technology is still a viable policy for the country. There is even a group of Americans who would like to go back to the past and, therefore, reverse the effects of advancement.

All this debate over further advancement has had the result of slowing or even halting important accomplishments in several fields. The ironic thing about this question of advancement is that the people who argue against advancement or progress do so from a vantage point perched atop earlier work. These people are saying that we should concentrate on making the best possible standard of living available today the prototype standard of living for all of the classes of people in the country. But what these people do not seem to realize is that the best standard of living today was made possible through the efforts of those before us working to advance their standard of living.

In terms of advancement, there will always be a group able to take advantage of the new possibilities first. But later these
possibilities will filter down to those not as fortunate as the first group. Thus, the fruits of progress are eventually felt by all levels of society, whether they be fortunate or not. So the move to abolish further advancement can be seen as a lack of moral drive. And a lack of drive can lead to a stagnant society. From history we can see that stagnant societies -- Egypt, Rome, and recently England -- have a habit of collapsing.

Isolationism is the third of the major ills that afflict this country today. Within isolationism can be found elements of weak moral resolve. Isolationism has a great effect on our foreign policy. The mood of isolationist opinion that is beginning to sweep the country has virtually ruled out any kind of participation in "brushfire" wars like Vietnam. And it has led to the drawing up of what seems to be a list of "worthy" and "unworthy" countries. According to the proponents of isolationism, an "unworthy" country is one on which the U.S. should not spend any time or money. A "worthy" country is one that the U.S. should give aid to and defend in case of an attack.

The problem comes in deciding what country should be placed on which side of the list. Apparently the isolationists have not figured this one out either because they have placed virtually every country except Canada, England, France, and West Germany on the "unworthy" side. This listing means that we should be willing to relinquish the whole world to insure against participating in any kind of "brushfire" war. It can be seen that isolationism is the belief that the U.S. should stay in its own little cocoon and not have anything to do with the outside world.
Of the three problems, isolationism has probably affected U.S. policy the least. However, it can be argued that there has been a streak of isolationism running through all of U.S. history -- even when the U.S. supposedly came out of its cocoon after WWII. But the full brunt of a return to isolationism was not felt until the close of the Vietnam war.

A combination of all three of these problems points to a major theme of decadence. Moral decadence is one of the major themes of "The Game." The major theme is exhibited in the story in several ways. One is through description of the setting. We find that the inhabitants of the planet live in an old castle with gruesome objects such as torture devices. The castle itself is in bad condition because of a lack of upkeep over a long period of time.

The actions of the family members also point to the theme of moral decadence. Instead of living in the ideals of their utopian-oriented ancestors, the family members order their lives according to a social system that encourages animalistic acts. This situation is hardly the utopian way of life their ancestors sought. From the upward striving lives of their forebearers, the planet's inhabitants have declined to lives of dull sameness and with cruel day-to-day goals instead of the long-range ones of the past.

The most obvious example of moral decadence in the story is the history of the planet's inhabitants. At one time they reached a high peak in the development of a society. They achieved an almost utopian state, except for the problem of not having any-
thing to do in their lives. It was in their attempt to solve this problem that their civilization began its decline. The contrast between what the inhabitants had before the introduction of the game and afterward gives a clear example of the theme of moral decadence.

Another major theme is that of a quest for a utopia. The game itself is a good example of this theme in the story. The game developed out of the inhabitants' drive to find a perfect utopia -- in contrast to the imperfect one they had before the game. But the game did not seem to be the answer to their search, for they are still searching for new and more exotic entertainment to provide further stimulation in their "perfect" society. Therefore, the game represents a quest for utopia.

Moral choice is another theme that runs through the story. Everyone in the story is given a choice. The survivors can give up hope, or they can search for a means of escape from the planet. The members of the family (representing the population of the planet) have a choice to continue their "fun and games," or to embark on a more meaningful life. So, it can be seen that moral choice plays a definite thematic role in the story.

Aligning with the theme of moral choice is one of lack of drive. The inhabitants exhibit little drive in their lives except to find something to do. As it is, they exert themselves no more than what is necessary to find the entertainment they crave.

One of the members of the family relates to the survivors that the family relies on ideas for games gleaned from the minds of aliens as they pass by within reach of their mental powers.
Thus, even the game, which represents the only effort undertaken by the family, depends on the actions of others. With the exception of the game, the family exhibits a complete lack of drive toward any other goal.

An isolationistic theme is also present in the story. Throughout the opening of the story there is a general impression of isolationism. There appears to be only three survivors and no one else. This impression lingers on even with the appearance of the family later, for we are informed that the planet's inhabitants have chosen to remain isolated from the rest of the universe. So a theme of isolationism pervades through the entire story.

Finally, there is an indication of an overall theme of weak moral resolve present in "The Game." This is best illustrated by the failure of the game itself. The inhabitants, in formulating the basic design for the game, did not look at the good or the bad sides of the game, nor did they make a good forecast as to what form it would assume in the future. Just by doing this, they showed a weak moral resolve in appreciating long-range consequences.

But an even better example of their lack of resolve is shown by their attitude towards changing the game. Rather than transform the game into something more meaningful -- or even get rid of it entirely -- the inhabitants refuse to do anything at all. Instead, they continue the game with all of its faults in apparent defiance of showing any resolve or drive.

Concerning the "moral choice" theme, there are coming, I
think, a great many choices in the future that the U.S. will have to make. Presently, many of these choices lie below the horizon, out of sight. But we have been given a sample of some of the problems that will have to be solved in the future through the experience of the so-called "Energy Crisis." I say so-called because we actually have plenty of sources of energy and, therefore, plenty of energy. But in order to get at this energy we are going to have to make a choice. And this choice is but one of the several we will be presented with in the near future. In the energy situation, the moral choice will be whether we should develop new sources of potentially risky, yet extremely viable energy for the future, or should we turn away and hold on to our conventional sources for as long as they last. Of course, the latter decision means ultimate self-destruction.

The other choices will follow much along the same lines. We will be presented with opportunities to step into a new world. The decision will determine whether we will move into the future, or try to retain the past. This new world is one we can see developing in the laboratories, hospitals, and other centers of progress throughout the world today. But we will have to choose whether we want this world or not. It is not moving along by itself on its own little track. Its development into reality will be determined by what decisions we make now. Like the inhabitants of the planet, we have a choice, and it must be made soon.

The Characters

It must be admitted that special meanings do not perfectly
fit all the characters. Some of the characters do not match up with the meanings because of necessary "plot" considerations. But in general the characters fit the respective meanings to which they have been assigned.

Captain Thomas is an example of the "typical American male." He has good intelligence, but is definitely not a genius. He has good perception, but is sometimes guided more by impulse than perception. And finally, he is something of a hero, albeit a cautious one. The captain prefers to look things over first before rushing to the rescue. In "The Game," the captain is a representative of Middle America, or what has also been called the Silent Majority. Like the captain, these Americans have good intelligence and perception, but hardly on the order of the proportions that some other groups in America claim for themselves. In other words, middle Americans are not stupid, but they do not begin to claim they know the answers to all of our problems as some other groups of Americans do. Like the captain, middle Americans do not grasp at easy solutions to their complex problems. Because of this cautious trait, they have been accused of not comprehending what is going on in the world. But because this caution is shared among the members of the largest group in American society, this country has made fewer impulsive blunders and has been saved from a few wars. It is true that this characteristic has caused the country to move too slowly in regard to some problems. But as the captain's dilemma of finding a way off the planet is eventually resolved through slow and cautious handling, so has the country been able to handle generally its
problems well.

The character of Don Parks is the opposite of the captain's in many ways. Like the captain, Parks basically has intelligence and perception. But unlike the captain, Parks is a believer in quick action rather than waiting to see what the nature of the situation really is. Parks wants quick solutions rather than carefully considered ones. The segment of youthful America that believes there are solutions at hand today to long-standing problems have much in common with Parks. The trouble with the solutions these Americans put forward is that, usually, the solutions cause more problems than they solve. The additional problems come about because the original solutions were not considered well enough in the first place. And the reason this group does not think out its solutions in the first place lies in the fact that it disregards time -- this group wants action now.

Despite the troublesome solutions offered by these Americans, this group does indeed have something to offer to this country. This offering is a driving force. When combined with the caution of Middle America, the country acquires an ideal and potent combination for use in solving problems. This combination, then, consists of a cautionary force which conceives viable solutions after careful thought and a driving force which spurs the implementation of these solutions.

The character of Cindy Parks is something different from the other two major characters. She lies somewhere in the middle between the captain and Don Parks. While equipped with roughly the same intelligence and perception, she is also possessed with some
of the captain's caution combined with some of Don Park's recklessness. Cindy Parks represents the compromise between rationality and animalistic impulse. She represents the emotional Americans, the people who are not quite as cautious as the captain, nor are they as "gung-ho" as Don Parks. Instead, they form a reservoir of imagination from which the country can draw. Unfortunately, as in the story where Cindy's advice is hardly even heard by the two men, America rarely uses imaginative ideas in attempting to solve its problems.

It can be seen that the three major characters presented represent the three sections of American society. The captain is an example of the cautious, Don Parks the reckless, and Cindy the emotional.

The following characters represent much more specific and narrow groups in American society.

Eric has the greatest amount of intelligence and perception of any of the characters in the story. But he never offers any solutions to the planet's problems. Instead, he ignores the problems and concerns himself with having a good time through building a make-believe world. By taking part in this fantasy world he is neither playing the game nor solving the problems. There is a segment of American society that acts like Eric. These people care only about themselves and no one else. Examples of these people are those who flock to communes located out in the middle of nowhere. In effect, they are ignoring the problems of the real world and, instead, are constructing a make-believe world in which they, at least, can live a good life.
Granny, like Eric, knows that there are things wrong with the game. Unlike Eric, though, Granny is in a better position to improve the game. But though she has the intelligence and perception to deal with the problem, she does not. She does not handle the problem because of tradition, because the game was at least partially her idea and any statement of imperfections with it would reflect back on her and, finally, because there are some members of the family who benefit from the game. These members might by deciding to remove the game to include her as well. Many of the politicians of this country are confronted with the same problem as Granny. They can see the problems of the country and, judging by some speeches, one can say that a few have good ideas concerning solutions. But the solutions never get any further than the speeches. The concrete proposals never appear because of the politicians' respect for tradition and fear of reprisal from those who benefit from the present problem-plagued situation. So, like Granny, the politicians prefer to let well enough alone and do nothing.

Unlike the other characters who have good perception and intelligence, Ronald has little of these two qualities, and is also the best example of a character in the story who really enjoys the game. His enjoyment mainly comes about because he doesn't have to think in the game; he just has fun. Ronald represents the boisterous segment of Americans which ranges from those who are happy-go-lucky on one end to the hoodlums on the other. In one sense, these Americans are similar to those that choose to live their lives outside of society, for they do not
care about solving problems. Both groups care only about having a good time for themselves. Unlike those in the communes, however, the Ronalds prefer to have their fun and games within society itself. As Ronald is responsible for much of the cruelty present in the game, so are some of the more rowdy members of this group responsible for the cruelty and terror in our society.

Patricia is an example of senility within the family. As such, her mental powers and perception have declined. Her childlike mind is easily confused by events in the game. Therefore, she can neither recognize the problems within the game nor provide any solutions to them. Patricia represents the aged in this country who understand little of what is happening to them or to the country. However, Patricia has it better than most of the aged in this country. At least in the game Patricia is given a role to play in the planet's society. In this country, most of the aged are placed in nursing homes where they are stripped of their dignity and their choice of when and where to die.

The final character to be examined, Richard, represents another segment of highly intelligent America. Richard has near-genius intelligence and far-sighted perception. But he lacks an understanding of the real world. He knows all about theory, but cannot see its relation to reality. Richard believes that theory can be directly transferred to reality. He spends his time presenting his theories for improving the game. Richard represents the theoretical economists who occupy themselves by lecturing to anyone who will listen on what they would do to solve the economical problems of this nation if given the chance. What ultimately happens, though, when they are given their chance is that
they discover their ideas do not work in practice as well as they do in theory. Their experience indicates to the theoretical economists that the solutions to our problems lie not with theories, but with practical and workable ideas.

The Point Of View

A good definition of the point of view is given by Richard M. Eastman in A Guide To The Novel, who says that point of view is "the restriction of the reader's observation to a limited field of unconsciousness." Thus, the point of view is the angle from which the story is told. The method involved is usually utilizing the eyes, ears, and the frame of reference of one certain character or, as in some novels, bit pieces from more than one character.

This is the method that is employed in most fiction. However, some writers have used more than one (referred to as omniscient) point of view in novels now regarded as classics. For instance, Bram Stoker's Dracula is told from the point of view of several characters through extensive diaries, letters, and objective newspaper stories. Although this method does make the novel harder to read, it injects more of an aura of truth into the story whereas one point of view would make the tale seem to be merely the ravings of a single deluded man. Though Stoker's book breaks the rule of having only one point of view, his novel has sold more copies than many that have abided by the restricted point of view. So it would seem that there is more than one way to tell a story. In general, the point of view is mostly determined by the theme of the novel.
Actually, it turns out that there are many ways to use a single point of view or several points of view.

The most unlimited point of view is the omniscient point of view:

...the narrator is narrating more than what he should be able to see or sense or feel depending on the mode of narration. The story may be seen from any or all angles at will: from a godlike vantage point beyond time and place, from the center, the periphery, or from one to the other as often or rarely as he chooses.

The freedom of the author to introduce editorial comment on scenes and characters results in "a completely unlimited -- and hence difficult to control -- point of view." Because of the difficulty in controlling material, this point of view has not been chosen for "The Game."

Somewhat along the same lines but using an entirely different tack is the "camera" point of view. Within this kind of narration, the narrator acts like a detached camera. He merely describes what takes place and offers no comment of the characters or on anything. Because this point of view is too superficial, it also was not used for "The Game."

Most stories, especially short stories, are written using the point of view of one person, referred to as selective or limited omniscient point of view. With this type of narration, the story is told by one character. There are, however, several methods that can be used for having the story told from one character's point of view. One is the first person view in which the narrator is actively involved in the plot of the story. Along the
same lines but using a different angle is the first person observer method. This type of narration is the same as the one described above, with the only exception being that the narrator takes no active part in the story; he only observes the events.

The type of narration chosen for "The Game" is called the third-person limited omniscient point of view. The story is told as it happens to a focal character in the third person. "The Game" also involves some flashbacks, but these are told from the same person's point of view.

**Narration**

For "The Game," the character of Captain Thomas was chosen for the narrating role. Thomas was selected because he offers a less biased attitude plus greater involvement in the action than any of the other characters. It was thought that through the captain the story could be better related than through any other character.

The presentation of the story is meant to be a straightforward account. Straightforward narration was decided upon as the best method in consideration with the problems of writing science fiction.

**Summary Of The Plot**

The basic plot of "The Game" concerns a group of people stranded, after the crash of their spaceship, on an uncharted planet, who must search for a means of return. Complicating their search is the appearance of a group of the inhabitants of the planet who seem none too willing to let the survivors escape.
In between the arrival and departure of the survivors the truth is learned about the meaning of the cruel behavior of the inhabitants.

The story begins with the survivors at the crash site as they discover the bodies of forty passengers and crew. It is agreed upon by the three, Captain Thomas, Don and Cindy Parks, to leave the site and see if there might be any advanced civilization possessing rockets.

The trio begin their journey. Along the way they witness an apparent murder attempt by a thunderstorm. This is the first warning that the planet may not be what it seems to be: a close replica of Earth with the exception of the two suns. Also, the storm reminds the captain that a brush with a black hole (a space storm) was the reason for the crash of the spaceship. The storm brings to the captain's mind some doubts as to the black hole's origin.

After continuing for a day and a night the captain sees what appears to be a light beacon in the night. Again, doubts about the black hole arise; also, the question of whether it was an accident that the survivors crash-landed on this planet bothers the captain.

Believing that possibly a civilization is flashing the light, the captain first steers the group in its direction, and later explains to the others the reason why they should journey in that direction.

It turns out that the beacon comes from a ruined castle that is home to a group of inhabitants who call themselves the family. The family welcomes the survivors as if they expected them.
ny, the family's leader, hints that she may know of a way for the survivors to leave the planet. But she indicates that the survivors will have to stay awhile before they can leave.

The trio learn almost immediately at breakfast what their stay will be like. The members of the family, excluding Granny, literally act like animals at breakfast. They engage in childish games which take very cruel turns. The survivors later learn, to their dismay, that the breakfast experience was not an exception to regular life on the planet, but, on the contrary, it represented the norm.

Near the end of the story, the survivors are told the planet's history by Eric. According to him, his ancestors were obsessed with a dream to construct a utopia on the planet. He claims they succeeded, but then discovered that they were left with nothing to do. Being immortal, they had enough time to experience everything; unfortunately, for them, they did and, consequently, were left with nothing to do.

And that is why the game was created. Eric explains that the game is merely something to occupy the attention of the planet's inhabitants. That the game re-creates on a grand scale all and more of the problems the utopian seekers sought to rid the planet of seems not to bother Eric.

But it does bother Captain Thomas. First, he argues with Eric, and then with Granny over the meaningless of the game. But all that his arguments do is to convince Granny that it is time for the survivors to leave before some members of the family start to get some "bad" ideas.

The captain continues his arguing, but to no avail. At best,
he obtains a promise from Granny to think over what he has said. Then the survivors are whisked away by the mental force of the family to their original destination; on route in the almost magically repaired ship they find that all those killed in the crash have come back to life. The story closes with the captain wondering how much power the family actually possesses.

The ending does not resolve everything in the story. It does take care of the captain and his party, but does little with the planet and its inhabitants. It is my belief that there could not be an ending that resolves everything in the story without it winding up as a television prototype. In a television ending, everything is tied up neatly into one little bundle. No matter what the problems are, they can be solved -- and, usually, right before the last commercial. But it is my belief that that cannot be done here. The problems of the planet have existed for quite awhile. It would be ridiculous to assume that they could be solved by a few words from a one-time visitor. For this reason, the ending to "The Game" is left basically as an indeterminate conclusion.

The Setting

The verisimilitude of a setting in which few aspects strike the note of a common human experience is quite difficult to achieve. It is one thing...to describe a landscape, a house, a room, a street upon reading of which the average reader at once feels at home, drawing upon his own experience to see in his mind's eye just what kind of landscape, house, room or street the author intends him to see; but it is quite another to make real for such an average reader a world totally
dissimilar from anything he has ever seen or imagined.7

This quotation describes the main problems of writing science fiction and the primary difference between science fiction and other works of fiction. In science fiction it is not the plot, but rather the setting that makes the genre seem far removed from others. For example, "The Game" could be brought down to earth and fitted into the adventure genre very easily. The survivors would be marooned from a shipwreck on an uncharted island in the Pacific. The family members could be replaced by cannibals. The survivors would be appalled by the habits of the cannibals and would try to talk them into some other form of life. The chief might consider the survivors' words as he sent them away on an outrigger canoe.

The question that might be raised at this point is why write science fiction at all? An answer would follow along the lines of Lucretius' explanation for writing *On The Nature Of The Universe* in verse. Lucretius said that in order to give a child some medicine, honey is applied to the lip of the cup to lure the child into drinking the foul tasting medicine. Lucretius likened his controversial theories to the foul tasting medicine and the poetry to the honey. So, Lucretius sought to lure readers into his discourse through his beautiful poetry.

And so in the same way, the odd settings of science fiction are the honey, and the themes the medicine. If every story was written in the same genre, the limited number of truly individual plots would force a sameness in the stories. Such a monotony would ultimately drive off readership and probably a few writers
Along with the unusual aspects of science fiction there is also a need for familiarity. August Derleth points out in *Writing Fiction* that "in science fiction...some of the best effects are gained by the use of familiar settings and characters." The need for familiar things arises from the difficulty the reader experiences when trying to identify a setting the writer has created which has no relation at all to the reader's experience. Unless this difficulty is relieved in some way for the reader, he will tend to get lost in the setting and won't be able to follow the plot.

One way to help the reader along is to incorporate into the setting some familiar aspects with which the reader can identify and hold onto while being led through an otherwise strange environment. A question that comes up is this: Is it still science fiction if the odd settings are partially familiarized? Derleth says in *Writing Fiction*:

> Fantasy is not the primary interest of the writer but only the secondary one, the allegory being all important.

So, the function of science fiction is not the mere use of strange settings to shock and disorientate the reader, but to lure the reader into reading and grasping the story. For these reasons, "The Game" uses a literally out-of-this-world setting with touches of earthiness combined.

**The Symbols**

Probably the most obvious symbol is that of the game itself. This symbol has more than one meaning. In terms of the story, it
is the story since much of the action takes place within the framework of the game. On another level, the game represents a search for utopia. And on yet another level, the game represents something of a parody of life in modern day America. Seen in this manner, all the incidents that take place within the boundaries of the game are merely exaggerations of normal everyday events. For example, the incidents at breakfast begin with an argument among the family members over who is the best dressed. It is easy to think of this kind of argument taking place in real life. An ironic touch is added into the incident in "The Game" because all of the members are dressed in the same black robes. This ironic aspect is actually both a symbol for decadence (the family members are arguing over a very insignificant point as children often do) and life in this country where, for example, in Congress, the members of the two parties will argue over the most insignificant portion of a very important bill and, thus, block its passage. In this manner, the Congress lets itself, like the members of the family, be drawn into petty matters when there are more important matters at hand.

Another symbol is that of the space travelers themselves. They represent progress or advancement. They also form the contrasting symbol for the family's decadence. In this country we also have two groups with contrasting characteristics. These groups are composed of those who want to find the solutions to today's problems using tomorrow's methods, and those who are continuing using today's methods while terrified of tomorrow. Besides the space travelers and the family serving as symbols of progress and decline, there is also another related symbol: the
two suns. The two suns represent the two choices of progress or
decline. Since they are examples of the differences between the
two groups of people (the space travelers and the family members),
it can be seen that the two suns are also symbols for the diverse
groups that encounter each other on the planet. The radiant sun
stands for the space travelers and the darkened one for the
family.

One symbol that shows up many times in the story is the color
black. Some examples are the family's black robes, the black
clouds of the storm, the castle is first seen as a black object,
and there are others. The black is a reminder of the decline
evident in the family. It represents the dark age the planet is
currently experiencing.

All of the fights in the story are symbols of decline. For
example, the breakfast fight takes place in a setting right out
of the Middle Ages. Although there is some evidence that the
Middle Ages were not as dark as they once were thought to be,
there still is that first reaction of thinking of the words "dark
age" upon reading or hearing of anything to do with the Middle
Ages. So, the symbol remains viable.

The fight between Richard and Patricia is one between a per-
son with a strong mind and one with a weak mind. However, in the
battle they both use the same tactics and much the same weapons.
Thus, this fight can be seen as another symbol of decline. In
this case the decline has brought the highly intelligent down in-
to the realm of the not so intelligent.

The battle between Ronald and Eric with the other members
of the family watching resembles that of the spectators in a Roman arena. As in the case of the Middle Ages image above, the events of the Roman arena have the reputation of being barbaric ceremonies. And so, this fight can be seen as another symbol of a dark age, or one of decadence.

The fight at the dinner table is yet another symbol of decadence as is the battle at dawn between Eric and Ronald. However, the latter battle, which resembles a joust from the Middle Ages, is also a reference to that "dark age."

Basically, the other symbols in the story merely point to the overall theme of decadence. For instance, the architecture of the castle suggests the family has an inability to concentrate on anything for a long enough time to complete it. This is an indication of weak determination. But the history of the planet's inhabitants shows anything but weak determination in their drive to create a utopia. Thus, the castle's appearance is a symbol of decline -- in this case, a decline of determination, or will power, and this is meant to be an immediate commentary on our present American scene.

There is one symbol that has little to do with decline. This symbol is isolationism. Isolationism is evident in several places in the story. Probably the most striking example of isolationism in the story is the planet itself. The planet is separated from the rest of the universe by the vast distances of space itself. Also, the inhabitants of the planet have decided to shut out the universe and live their lives in isolationism. The various families on the planet have decided to live apart from
each other and apparently there is little, if any, contact between the groups of inhabitants. So, even on the planet itself there is evidence of isolationism. A final indication of the isolationism symbol is the deserted atmosphere present in the story. This atmosphere first makes its presence known when the captain surveys the area surrounding the crash site. The landscape he sees is one of desolation. All through the story this desolation is not far from view. At the conclusion of the story the captain and the survivors are reunited with the other passengers and crewmen aboard the spaceship. But the spaceship is traveling through space, the medium that isolates the planet from the rest of the universe.

The most ironic symbol is that of the light. It is based on the star that supposedly led the three wisemen to Bethlehem at Christmas time. There is an ironic part to this symbol in that it is the light that leads the survivors into the darkness of the family's lives. As the three wisemen were guided by a star to Bethlehem, so are the three survivors guided by the light to the castle. And as the three wisemen find a little child, so do the three survivors, except they find a group of children. But where the three wisemen find the potential for advancement, the survivors find, instead, the vanguard of decline.

Irony

The main irony in the story is that of the purpose of the game itself. The game was created by the members of the almost utopian society existing previously to the game. Its original
purpose was to make the planet a true utopia. Before the adoption of the game, the planet did not have any of the problems associated with normal life. There was no crime, no illness or deaths, none of the problems of everyday life; in short, a problem-free life which is commonly held to be a utopia. The question is: What is left to occupy the minds of the utopians? These utopians decided that something resembling the game would solve their problem.

The irony occurs when one realizes that the utopians recreated all of the problems they sought to rid themselves of before the utopian society was founded. By instituting the game, the utopians are, in effect, going back to their previous type of society.

This happenstance brings about another irony. The family believes that it now lives in "the best of all possible worlds." But as we have seen, the game is a recreation of the world the inhabitants had before the introduction of their utopian dreams, a world that they believed to be flawed.

Other miscellaneous bits of irony appear throughout the story. These are usually contained in conversation, descriptions of characters, action in the story, etc. An example of one of these bits of irony is the designation of the group of inhabitants as a family. The word family usually connotes a group of people consisting of a mother and father and their children. But several members of the family on the planet are much older than the age of a child. The family members act like children and thus, live up to their connoted billing. The other particles of
irony are obvious in various phrases in the story, in the costumes of some of the characters, and in the situations which take place in the story.

Once again, the main irony is that in their search for a better utopia the inhabitants have recreated all the problems they sought to get rid of by their creation of the first utopian society.

The Theme Of "The Game"

The theme of the story is decadence. As has been shown, symbols of the theme permeate throughout the story. Also, the lesser themes of isolationism and lack of resolve appear in the story. All of these themes are reflected in present day American society. Indeed, the story is, as has been pointed out earlier, a parody of American life with the abundance of meaningless violence and the numerous activities that have no significance and are only treadmills to nowhere. American society is much the same as the "society" of the planet's inhabitants. There has, is, and will continue to be a multitude of acts of violence which serve no apparent purpose other than to shock the population of the country, or to call attention to a tiny group of revolutionaries who are out more to break heads rather than build towards a better society. Isolationism is also a definite influence on American society. Evidence of its effect can be seen by observing recent foreign policy in which Congress has refused to send any aid to pro-American groups while the Soviet Union has done everything but send in its own troops into Angola. And
finally, the third theme, lack of resolve, can be seen best in our recent disaster in Vietnam in which we grew tired of fighting the threat of Communism and left someone else holding the fort while we pulled back to our own country, to the delight of the Communists.

In "The Game," the planet's inhabitants reached a pinnacle in the development of their society and, forgetting what raised them to their greatness, they ceased their striving and sought only to maintain their "perfect society" through halfway measures. But through utilizing these pitiful efforts in place of their monumental strivings, the inhabitants lost a portion of their view of their goal: to form a perfect society. Instead, the strivers' descendants settled for a society that was superficially perfect, but below the surface was something possibly worse than that of the previous society. In the society of before, there were few illusions as to what the state of things really was. Thus, it was easy to see where the improvements needed to be made. But with the introduction of the game, the inhabitants have become confused as to what their current society really is: a parody of the society their ancestors began with and sought to make better.

The dream of America resulted out of the minds of a comparatively small group of men who were tired of submitting to the rule of an imperial power across the sea. So, they set to striving to free their land and its people from this domination. After they did so they found that the only way to keep the country unconquered by another power would be to isolate it from the in-
trigues of European politics. So, the element of isolationism entered the realm of American history. But this isolationism extended only to European affairs as evidenced by the controlling influences of Manifest Destiny and the Monroe Doctrine. A little detour in the building of the nation came with the rising up of the slavery problem which culminated with the Civil War. After the country patched itself together, it renewed its striving to better itself. With the Spanish-American War, the country broke out of its cocoon somewhat after gaining a new status as an imperial power with the new acquisitions of land far away from the continental interior of the U.S. But it still took the first world war to begin really the process of the U.S. towards becoming a worldwide power, instead of a power only in the Western Hemisphere. After WWI, the U.S. sought to lose itself again in its own little womb, but was shocked out of seclusion by the Japanese "act of infamy." Without that stinging prod, the U.S. might have let Hitler take all of Europe with nothing more than a slight show of resistance by giving Britain aid. After WWII, the U.S. found itself in the position of the greatest power in the world. Though, accidental incidents and the misfortunes of others undoubtedly helped the U.S. attain this level, it is true that the strivings of millions of Americans were instrumental in the transformation of a tiny, insignificant, powerless nation into a pinnacle of power. However, since WWII various groups in this country have sought to de-emphasize the value of striving which is a main reason for the high achievement this country has obtained. Instead, this group has tried to introduce socialism into
our society in the hope of creating a better society and promoting more enjoyable lives for the citizens of the country. But in order to introduce this socialism, these people have tried to destroy the free enterprise system or at least tone it down to something little more than a relic of the past. Thus, these people would remove the means this country used to advance to its current high level of achievement. Besides replacing the present economic system which has amply shown its viability with one that has yet to demonstrate the like, these people, with their disdain for striving or advancement, seek to ignore the possibilities of tomorrow.

Like the inhabitants and their game, the U.S. stands at the crossroads in deciding its future destiny. On one side there is a vocal minority who, having benefitted from the fruits of the heretofore striving of our civilization, want us to advance no further. On the other side, there is another group, perhaps not so vocal as the first one, who want us to continue our advance into tomorrow. And in between there stands the large majority that will have to listen to both groups and, then, make its decision.

So, like the inhabitants of the planet, the U.S. is faced with two choices. It can either try to plot a steady course of decline and turn its back on advancement, or it can continue on the path of progress to heights seemingly unobtainable from this viewpoint. But from a look at history we know they are obtainable. The future survival of the U.S. will depend on whether the majority of Americans choose to continue the policy of advancement, and this choice must be made soon.
When Captain Thomas regained consciousness he found himself with a painful headache and numerous cuts and bruises scattered all over his body. As he struggled to his feet, he also discovered a series of sprains throughout his limbs. But his injuries seemed minor when compared to the devastation around him.

He stood at the bottom of a bowl-like valley, surrounded on all sides by steep slopes of lofty peaks as if smoothed by the course of time. Clustered around the center of this valley were the bodies of some forty crewmen and passengers of the late Poker, a ferry ship commanded by Captain Thomas. Amid the broken corpses lay the remains of the Poker itself. As Thomas surveyed the crash area, his mind returned to the time he first heard about his new job...

"It should be no problem at all for you, especially with your record," the company's personnel man had told him. "Well, after all...let's face it, it's a milk run. All you have to do is go out there -- to Fedlar -- five days a week and return. And it's not even as bad as that. I mean, well, for most of the six-hour period of the flight, all you have to do is make certain you stay on course and don't ram anything. And with that PXQ rader
unit -- we've got the latest model -- guiding the ship is a piece of cake. You just sit there and let it run itself."

Thomas had been reluctant to take the job. It meant leaving the Service, a home to him for more than twenty years. It meant quitting a life of excitement for a routine ferry run with a bunch of tourists. But it was like the company representative said when he first made his offer. He was getting old. His dark black hair was becoming tinged with spots of gray, while his face, etched as it was from his many adventures on foreign planets, now began to reveal a few wrinkles. The company man had told him it was only a matter of time before they took him off the exploration runs and gave him a desk job. Soon they'd tell him he's getting a bit old for exploring and they've got to break in some new people. You can't live forever, unless you pay a group of doctors well and they nurse you every day of your life. Or maybe use some of those new medicines that they claim will keep you young for fifty years and then reduce your aging rate for another fifty years. But they've found some bugs with those things. The body might stay young, but not the mind -- in most cases. Doesn't do any good to have the body of a twenty-year-old and the mind of a senile old man. No, that would not be the way that Martin Thomas, an enlistee in the Service twenty years before and an officer for the last four of those years, would go to his final resting place. If Martin Thomas couldn't go exploring anymore, then at least he could stay in space and work this "milk run."...

He saw himself on the bridge again. Everything was normal.
He was letting the ship "run itself" as he sat there in his command chair and watched the stars flash by on the viewing screen. Then he noticed that the stars appeared to be flying faster than before. He hadn't given any order to increase speed. His First Lieutenant confirmed his suspicions that the ship was gaining speed. Something seemed to be pulling on them, but nothing appeared on the screen. No planet or distant sun or anything with a gravitational pull that would form an invisible tug to speed up a space ship. Nothing but black space, unless... The First Lieutenant was incredulous at his suggestion. "A black hole, here? You've got to be kidding! Oh, I'll admit I don't see what's speeding us up, but c'mon on now. I've been on this run for seven years and haven't seen even a hint of one of those things. It wasn't out there last week, so it can't be out there this week. You can't tell me a black hole can pop out of nowhere."

Thomas agreed, but advised him again that something was pulling on them and since nothing appeared to be out there, a black hole was the logical answer. He also told him that it really didn't matter what was out there as long as they figured out how to stop the ship's acceleration. When he finished his speech he went over to the instruments and checked the ship's current speed. He was alarmed to see that it was near the level at which the radar system would be unable to keep up with the tracking of any in their vicinity. He called the First Lieutenant's attention to this fact and watched the incredulity disappear off of the other's face.

"You know, you might be right after all. I don't know of
anything else that would get us going at this speed. Nothing on the charts would exert that kind of a pull over the distance. You want the engines in full reverse?" he asked him.

"No, if we did that, when we snapped out of this thing's hold, we'd dump everybody on this ship," Thomas replied. "No, I think you'd better give me half power. With that we should slow to a stop or near there and then we'll go full and try to ease our way out of its gravitational pull. I just hope we're not too near to it already."

They had applied half power then, but it had no effect, for their rate of speed increased without abatement. The First Lieutenant began to sweat profusely and his voice started to tremble.

"It isn't working! We've got to apply more power. We should have applied full power in the first place. But you were too damned busy worrying about the comfort of those tourists back there."

Thomas ordered full power to soothe both the First Lieutenant and his own fears. But everybody on the bridge could see the uselessness of the manoeuvre as the invisible black hole continued to pull them inexorably toward certain death. The First Lieutenant was the first to break under the tension as he began to rant and rave before he collapsed on the floor weeping as a small child. But that was not to be Martin Thomas' way of facing his impending yet unknown death. Not "Ice-Cool Thomas" who had broken all the rules concerning remaining calm in a dangerous situation. If he was going to die, then it would be with his head held up. But as he looked around he noticed that most of those on the bridge were following the First Lieutenant's example and were
cowering in fear. Only a few followed the example of their captain.

As he began to feel the first effects of the black hole on his body, it was then that he first saw the planet. It seemed to appear out of nowhere. But he didn't care where it came from; it was there and that was enough. He called to the First Lieutenant his discovery, but the other man's mind had long since snapped and he lay sprawled on the floor with foam bubbling out of his mouth. Thomas would have to do it himself. He tried to jump out of his chair and reach the controls to aim them toward the planet in the hope that the planet's gravity, the ship's power, and the distance from the black hole would form a combination which would enable the ship to break free of its menace. When and if that happened, there would be quite an after shock, but now would be no time to worry about the comfort of the passengers. The progress he made was slow. Every time he took a step it took all of his willpower to force himself to take another. Slowly and painfully he crossed the bridge and reached the console. Then, as he grabbed the switches, the black hole's force increased and it became a monumental effort for him to hang onto the vital switch and pull it down. He watched with dazed eyes as the side rockets added their power to the battle. Barely yet perceptibly the ship veered toward the planet. In Thomas' last moment of consciousness, he saw the ship change its course from one of a miss to a head-on collision...

He was standing now over Don and Cindy Parks, two newlyweds who were on their honeymoon trip. With a shock he realized that
there was a faint flutter pulsating within their chests. He
crouched down and laid his head on Cindy's chest. Yes, he could
hear a heartbeat, though it was only the hint of one. He glanced
over at Don and clearly saw the young man's chest heave up and
down. Thomas looked back at Cindy and swiftly began to work to
bring her to consciousness. When her breathing became much
easier, he went over to Don and began the same process.

Still it was more than an hour later before the two young
people were able to stand up on their own. Don, a tall, well-
built youth with wavy, brown hair, found that miraculously he
had suffered no injury aside from some cuts and bruises. Cindy,
shorter than Don with long, black hair, found herself in much
the same situation. The loose tourist clothes, which they both
wore, had survived the crash with little more damage than a few
tears. Thomas reflected that the three of them had been very
lucky.

"What do we do now?" Don asked as he looked around the crash
site.

Thomas looked too, this time taking a much closer look. He
realized that what on first glance looked like a carbon copy of
Earth, the planet on which they stood was really a near-twin, but
with one visible difference. He noticed that not one but two suns
provided the illumination of the planet. The two suns, though,
had completely different characteristics. One burned brightly
almost directly overhead, while the other hung low near the
horizon and shone with only a dim light, somewhat gray in color.

The captain surveyed the forty some bodies and the multi-
tude of pieces of wreckage strewn in a circle around the crash area.

"Well, kids, here's what we're going to have to do. First, in case you haven't noticed already, the ship is at present rather inoperable, so we're going to have to find some other means of getting off this planet. Now, in the old movies the first thing we would do is to bury all these bodies, but real life is not like the movies. So we're going to check and see what supplies we've got, and then we'll just start walking and see if we can find some signs of civilization which will be the tricky part. I have no idea where this civilization is, if there is any. So, I guess we'll just pick a direction and head that way."

"You've got it all planned out, don't you?" Don commented.

"No, no I wouldn't say that at all. What I'm saying, or what I'm presenting is the most logical course of action. Unless you want to sit here and watch the suns set and see whether they set in the same place or in opposite directions or something."

"What I think we ought to do, Captain, is sit here and wait for the rescue ship rather than running around all over this planet looking for people," said Don.

"Look, kid, I've been in some tough situations before, and I think I have a better idea of what--." 

"Don't call me kid!" Don advanced threateningly, "You think I'm wet behind the ears, don't you? Well, I'm enough of a man to analyze the situation and come up with the rational point that if we go out in the middle of nowhere and get lost, then when the rescue ship comes, nobody will be here to tell them where
we are. See, captain?" he folded his arms with a self-satisfied smile.

"Let me clear up something right away," said Thomas. "There isn't going to be any rescue ship. This planet isn't even on our charts. How the hell do you think they're going to find us?" he asked in exasperation.

"Well, we found the planet didn't we?" answered Don.

"Not really," Thomas replied. "It just popped out of nowhere. I guess you could say it found us rather than we found it."

"Yes, but we still have a better chance of being rescued if we stay here," said Don. "Besides, there may not be anything on this planet."

"That's true," Thomas agreed, "but then again, there just might. The only way we're going to find out is if we look. Of course, if you're afraid of what's out there, then you can stay here and wait for the cavalry to drop out of the sky."

"I am not a coward," exclaimed Don, "and if you think so, then we'll have it out right here."

"If you want to show me you're not chicken, then proof it by helping me search for this planet's civilization, if there is one," said Thomas.

"Oh, no," said Don, "you're not going to get me this way. I've made my decision and I'm going to keep it."

"And what about your wife," they both looked at Cindy, "you want her to sit here and die because you're afraid to see what's over those hills? You've got to think of her too."

"I am considering her," replied Don.
"Don," Cindy spoke her first words, "maybe it would be best to follow the captain's plan. After all, he does have more experience, so he probably knows better what to do than you or I. Let's do it his way."

"Okay," Don said, "we'll try it your way, but only for a day. If we don't find anything tomorrow at this time, then we're coming back here to wait for the rescue ship."

"Well, I can't promise that we'll find anything in a day," said Thomas. "But if this is the only thing that will get you out of this hole, then I guess we'll have to do it," he said in a resigned voice. He was willing to agree to anything at this point.

Under Thomas' guidance, they collected as many usable items and supplies as they could find and would need for the trip ahead. Then they crammed them into makeshift backpacks they fabricated out of material from the wreckage. When they had finished with their preparations, Thomas let Don select the direction in which they would travel. Don looked around them, but everywhere the picture was the same: high hills surrounded them in every direction. Finally, Don settled on a random choice and their trek began.

According to their reckoning of the planet's time, their journey began around midday, based on the relative position of the bright sun. As time passed, the bright sun continued to move overhead, while the dark one remained in its location near the horizon.

By mid-afternoon, they had climbed only about halfway up the
crater's slope. Their climb had been made more difficult by the presence of long, ivy-like grass which seemed alive as it constantly twisted itself around their ankles. It seemed to Thomas that each step was even more difficult than the last one.

Finally as the bright sun began to dip low near the horizon on one side of the sky while the dark sun kept its position, the little band reached the top of the crater, and were confronted by a broad plain which seemed to stretch forever in every direction. But as they pushed their weary bodies forward, the bright sun dropped below the horizon and twilight set in instantaneously. With the setting of the bright sun, the dark one lost some of its own brilliance. Even so, it continued to shine in its apparently fixed position in the sky, casting only an eerie aura in the sky now. Nowhere in his many adventures had Thomas seen such a sight.

The setting of the bright sun sapped the strength of the three. Thomas sounded out the opinions of the other two and found they agreed with his idea; they would stop where they were and spend the night. The captain disliked this wide open location, but his body needed rest and food. After a hasty supper, all three laid out crude beds and fell asleep as soon as they got into them.

The heat on his back from the rays of the morning sun woke Thomas. After waking the other two, he made breakfast which they ate silently. Then they loaded their packs on their now raw backs and continued their arduous and painful journey.

Thomas and the others reached the edge of the plain around
noon. At that time a brief argument ensued between Thomas
and Don about turning back according to the agreement. But Tho-
mas reminded Don about the struggle they had had climbing the
slope and suggested he would be throwing away his effort for
nothing if he returned to the crash site. Reluctantly, Don
agreed, and after a short pause for lunch the trio continued on-
ward.

The travelers stopped to scan the land below the edge of
the plain before starting their descent. Thomas saw a long, nar-
row valley with a dusty road weaving around in the middle of it.
On the road, heading away from them, was a Cinderella-like car-
riage pulled by a black horse. Despite the long distance, Tho-
mas could see four passengers inside dressed in black robes.

In the distance far ahead of the carriage a threatening
thunderstorm manifested itself. Rugged, dark clouds rested on
a foundation made up of numerous streaks of lightning mixed with
a thick curtain of rain. The storm advanced in the direction of
the carriage at a startling rate of speed.

As Thomas watched, the driver spurred the horse on faster.
But after a short time he seemed to have thought the better of it
for the carriage stopped and the driver got out. Carefully, but
with haste, he led the horse forward and backward several times
until the carriage was completely turned around. Then the driver
thrust himself aboard and whipped the horse into a fast run.

For a short time it appeared that the harassed vehicle might
win the race. The storm, though, moved with incredible swiftness
and caught the carriage as it passed a stretch of the road almost
directly in front of the survivors' eyes. While the three ran and threw their faces to the ground, powerful lightning bolts carted everywhere in the vicinity of the carriage. A steady downpour accompanied by strong gusts of wind drenched everything beneath the black clouds. The slope on which the space travelers sheltered themselves was quickly transformed into a slily mud bath.

Just when it seemed to Thomas that the three of them would be blown off the slope, the storm abruptly ceased. The two suns appeared from behind the clouds as the clouds themselves completely vanished. The trio stood up and stared at the muddy messes they had each become. Down below in the valley the passengers of the carriage dismounted and looked into the sky with relief etched onto their faces. But when they noticed the three survivors on the slope above, the passengers' relief disappeared and was replaced with fear as they again glanced at the sky.

The suns had once again disappeared and the clouds were back with vengeance. An unceasing assault with an endless number of lightning bolts made it impossible for the passengers to escape their doom this time. As the trio put their faces to the ground again one of the bolts found its target. Thomas observed that a number of small wisps of smoke combined with the smell of something burning was all that was left of the carriage and its passengers.

It took some minutes to shake the mud off himself before Thomas entertained any thoughts of taking a closer look at the disaster below. Then, as he led the others down the slope, he noticed that the suns were shining again and that the clouds had
disappeared.

The location of the recent tragedy revealed nothing to show that anything had ever happened. Even the vast quantity of water from the rain had vanished. It was hard for the survivors to believe that they had witnessed the deaths of some unidentified aliens on this spot only moments before.

"Well, at least we know that there is life on this planet," said Thomas breaking the silence. "Those people came from somewhere. And I think we're also faced with the rather unpleasant possibility that the weather on this planet either has intelligence or is controlled by someone. Either way, there's something of a mean streak involved."

"Are we going to continue trying to find a civilization?" asked Cindy.

"Don't see why not," answered Thomas.

"Yes, but what if another storm comes along and attacks us?" said Cindy.

"That's just the chance we'll have to take," replied Thomas.

"I think we ought to go back," said Don.

"Why, are you afraid of a little thunderstorm?" said Thomas.

"Now look, I've about had it with your air of superiority. Just because you think you're Mr. Hero and you're about to rescue the survivors of your crashed ship -- and it was your ship that crashed -- doesn't mean you have to act like you know all the answers," retorted Don.

"I'm going to say this one last time, kid, and I suggest you listen closely and get this through your thick head. First--."
The captain found himself the target of an assault by Don before he could finish his speech. With a deftness learned from years of combat duty on far-off planets, he easily turned aside Don's attack and pinned his arms behind him. Then, he continued in a calm voice what he had to say.

"First, we have only a limited supply of food and water. If we were to stay at the crash site, we would spend our time waiting for a rescue ship -- a ship, by the way, that if it does come, will arrive long after our bodies have begun to decay into the ground. While we would be sitting there, we would probably have the tendency to eat more than if we were doing something. Since there would be nothing to do but watch the sky, it would take much willpower to avoid eating as a means of passing time. I have not noticed a great deal of willpower from this group, especially from one person who is currently paying for the lack of his.

"Second, we now have ample evidence that there is some life -- intelligent life -- on this planet and so it seems much more logical to seek out this life rather than wait in futility for rescue that may never come. Thus, I think it is better for us to die, if we have to, trying to free ourselves rather than slink out of this life by waiting for others to help us. Basically, we don't have much chance of being rescued, either by waiting for a ship or going about it ourselves. However, I would rather go out struggling. It is much more logical to die my way. Also it is more fit for a human being to go out in a fighting fashion."

"How can you talk about a logical method of dying?" asked